

*Reading and Re-reading Indigenous Australian literature: Kim Scott's  
Benang*

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**Abstract:** This article is interested in issues of reading and interpreting Indigenous Australian literature with reference to the role played by language in shaping identities throughout novels written by Australian Indigenous writers. In particular, the analysis will focus on excerpts from Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart* (1999). The article's linguistic analysis will be based on the tenets of functionalist approaches and partnership theory. The novel's biographical background further contextualises the analysis of traumatic past experiences and their role in the formation of an "Indigenous identity".

**Key words:** Australian Indigenous Literature; Kim Scott; Systemic Functional Grammar; Transitivity; Appraisal Theory; Partnership Theory.

**Re-reading Kim Scott's *Benang***

With regard to new empirical approaches to text reading, the Appraisal Theory of language (Martin, 2000; Martin and Rose, 2003; Martin and White, 2005) is gaining ground not only in the analysis of media and news production, but also in the field of academic and fictional writing.<sup>1</sup> This analytical framework can serve several purposes, which range from appraising emotions to affirming and reinforcing the author's position within a specific/given discourse. In this particular case, I will focus on those aspects of the theory that can be productively used to investigate the re-construction/negotiation of identities. Certainly, fictional characters lend themselves to insightful interpretations of an author's intentions, thus assigning linguistic structures a prominent role in expressing thoughts and emotions. Starting from Kim Scott's winner of the 2000 Miles Franklin Literary Award, I will explore some of the linguistic strategies adopted in portraying the characters' feelings as described in his novel *Benang. From the heart*. Apart from Appraisal theory, I will also draw on the Hallidayan notion of Transitivity (Systemic Functional Linguistics)<sup>2</sup> (Halliday, 1994) and the grammar of Modality as theorized by Simpson (1993). The findings will be subsequently discussed in the light of Postcolonial Studies (Said, 2003 [1978]; Bhabha, 1994) and Partnership Theory (Eisler 1987).<sup>3</sup>

My reflections will generate further questions relating to the creation of a new literature, which imposes itself as a "counter-history"<sup>4</sup> in that it reverses canonical ways of writing about Indigenous issues.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, it is important to note that Fanon's call for

intellectual action (1990), which was meant to be taken up by marginal voices,<sup>6</sup> has been actively answered by Indigenous writers and poets, such as Scott and many others.

Before delving into analysis of the novel, I will briefly go through Appraisal theory by outlining its structure. The Appraisal System was created by functional linguists in order to provide analytical means to study patterns of evaluation both in written and oral discourse. It is constituted by three main sub-systems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. The first system is quite a productive tool when working with semantic resources which help to convey feelings, judgments and appreciations (either positive or negative), whereas Engagement deals with the way writers/speakers position themselves and their level of agreement or disagreement with respect to previous stances. Graduation operates throughout the first two systems and is concerned with ways of up-scaling or down-scaling what is being said. The present article is mainly based on the first two systems and the analysis is integrated with some reflections on modality, indexing the attitudinal characteristics of the language used; that is to say the writer's/speaker's stance towards the truthfulness of what is being expressed in a sentence.

As mentioned above, it is possible to further subdivide the system of Attitude into three sub-categories: Affect, Judgment and Appreciation. Affect is concerned with all those linguistic resources which help convey either positive or negative feelings; Judgment occurs when someone's behaviour is appraised; and Appreciation is related to assessments of objects. By employing these three categories of Attitude and giving insights into the Engagement system, I endeavour to highlight the different stages of the protagonist's emotional journey. Furthermore, fictional characters can be represented through their actions as well as their mental, verbal and relational processes. For this reason the Transitivity model, jointly with instances of modalization,<sup>7</sup> may help analyse how fictional characters can embody certain stereo- and proto-prototypes, as well as reveal power relations and latent ideologies nested into the narrative fabric.

Since the transitivity grammar of a text can create a specific world view, the processes employed by the author can reflect a particular mindset, thus realizing specific value positions and belief systems. I will explore what kind of processes are more frequently used in the creation and negotiation of identities and in what way 'peripheral voices' are portrayed by Indigenous writers. The use of certain processes instead of others can be read as the author's intention to transmit a specific image that can be further approached through the lenses of the Partnership Theory (see Eisler 1987). With its comprehensive perspective on human relationships, the Partnership model stems from a postcolonial aspiration to move away from a tradition grounded on Imperialism and male-dominated values.

### ***Benang: a journey through anger***

"I do not wish this to be a story of me – other than in the healing – but of before me"  
(Scott, 1999:10).

With these words Harley introduces the reader into his world; a reality made of traumatic relationships with the male members of his family, a personal history marked by insecurities and a troubled perception of his own identity. This "emotional burden" leads to a negotiation of his own persona, as part of the re-discovery of his Indigenous

roots. The Nyoongar community, where the story is set, incessantly increases Harley's thirst for knowledge and strengthens his desire to free himself from a predetermined plan in history, and its imperialistic legacy. As Fanon (1990) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argue: "imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages" (Smith, 1999: 28). Indigenous peoples have experienced an ongoing sense of fragmentation caused by the forced removal from their own culture and land. In fact, not only did the imperialistic/colonial mentality impact upon those who experienced it directly, but it is still working through new generations, in their social relations, their ways of conceiving their identity, feeling and interacting with the world. Harley's efforts to challenge local history can be read therefore as an attempt to fight the imperialistic paradigm or, as Simon Gikandi (2004: 113) points out, as a way of: "deconstructing existing traditions of Western thought and culture".

The narrative can be divided into two parts: the first section is built on the development of negative feelings: "anxiety, anger and betrayal" (Scott, 1999: 9), which play a crucial role in the development of the story and of the main character's personality. In the second part, the reader experiences a more relaxed atmosphere, which is supported by indexes of positive feelings, reflected in Harley's newly acquired self-awareness and self-mastery:

I surprised myself, not only with my attempt to be balanced (which is so important when you're up in the air, and – after all – I was always fair), but also with my recollection of my Grandad's references. (Scott, 1999: 183).

As the story unfolds, the above three negative emotional states permeate the fictional accounts of Harley's life and establish a recurrent theme in that they engender a complex semantic world of correlated emotions. The narrative rhythm is thus influenced and characterized by a general negative overtone. Lexical items and adjectives related to negative feelings are often presented either in pairs or triplets so as to convey a sensation of overwhelming pressure, for example: "dry, hostile" (Scott, 1999: 28); "anger, resistance" (Scott, 1999: 29); "impoverished, weakened, reduced" (Scott, 1999: 31). All these instances of negative Affect as a quality (realized through modifiers of participants, such as epithets, attributes, adverbs and so on), as a process (either mental or behavioural) and as a comment (realized via modal adjuncts), characterize Harley's language in the early stages of the story. While the story develops, the narration focuses more on other characters, without forgetting, however, to inform the reader about Harley's emotional states and inner changes, which are reflected in the protagonist's words: "I kept telling myself that I had been given another chance, and that I too had to seize every opportunity. The way it was I had nothing." (Scott, 1999: 145).

Before acquiring a better understanding of himself, Harley is drawn into the deepest recesses of his past. The "journey" is not devoid of any painful memories, nor traumatic past experiences; nevertheless it is necessary to heal the wound. For him to elaborate his personal trauma, it means to be able to name emotions, recognize present behaviours linked to his past life and retrace every step he has taken so far. In so doing, Harley undertakes the healing process by sharing the relationships and personal experiences which affected him:

I want to stress that **I'm not proud** of my behaviour, but nor can I deny that I was very **angry**. **Angry** with my grandfather, his rigour, his scientific method, his opportunism, his lust. And so **I am reluctant** to begin with my grandfather, **as if** all I can do is react to him and his plans, as if I have nothing else.

But even if that were true, is it such a bad thing, to begin with **anger** and **resistance**? (Scott, 1999: 29) (My emphasis)

In the above excerpt, authorial Affect,<sup>8</sup> expressed through the use of the first person pronoun, functions as a pole of attraction for inscribed negative Affect, which is directed at Harley's grandfather (Ernest Solomon Scat). The language used is rich in emotional assessments; in this way the subjectivity of the writer has an entirely personalised and individualised mode of evaluation. Through such "authorial Affect" the writer gives the communicative process the go-ahead in order to get the reader involved in the storytelling. From the perspective of the linguistics of evaluation, the narration is aligned with an emotional state of rage. The adversative clause in thematic position, foregrounded by the counter connective "but", displays the narrator's uncertainty about opening up a dialogic space filtered through feelings of anger and resistance. In particular, what captures the reader's attention is the conjunction "and so" which is put in a prominent position so as to stress the natural consequences of what the narrator is affirming.

To an attentive reader though, this connective ("and so") represents a disjunctive element with regard to the proposition it introduces. The negative type of Affect associated with the realm of In/security,<sup>9</sup> engenders a sense of self reflection; as a result, it diminishes the importance played by Ern's role. To exorcise one's past and fears means to deprive things of their importance, to the extent therefore that the use of repetition here has the power to affirm and recognise the source of every problem. Scott's creative process of writing is further reinforced through the use of repetition and by a systematic appeal to his readership, which might be read as a therapeutic process of "deliverance". This relationship with the reader engenders a sense of mutual understanding, which helps him overcome the "emotional burden" inherited by his traumatic family's history. The boulomaic expression of desire, encapsulated in the modal verb "want",<sup>10</sup> highlights therefore Harley's will to tackle the thorny issue of the relationship with his grandfather, thus leaving space for further discussion.

Harley's feelings are here represented as opposed to Ern's, in particular when talking about Ern's breeding project: "For Ernest, it (his eugenic plan: the idea to create the "first white man born") was a rationalisation of his desire. It was a challenge. . .Whereas for me it was contrition, it was anger." (Scott, 1999: 32). There is a balance which shifts from the positive to the negative pole. The use of grammatical metaphors, namely nominalised processes, such as: "a rationalisation of his desire" and lexical items ("contrition", "anger"), instead of material and mental processes, contribute to creating an idea of passive acceptance or, at least, temporary absence of action.

Australia's colonial logic is well represented throughout the novel by Ernest Solomon Scat, the narrator's grandfather, whose racial project of creating the first white man is an echo of A. O. Neville's (chief protector of the Aborigines in Western Australia from 1915 to 1940) desire to assimilate Aboriginal people into the "White" population. The

bond between the two characters is further reinforced by an alleged family relationship. Scott's protagonist, who is also the leading voice in the narration, is presented to the reader as the "first white man born" (Scott, 1999: 10), thus pointing to the thorny issues of Australian colonialism and Aboriginal dispossession. Race, genetics and skin colour are dragged into the story to constitute the core aspect of "Otherness" (See Said 2003 [1978]), the root of every discriminatory discourse, primarily of intolerance, thus mimicking Australia's colonial past and present. In the country's history, not only have physical traits along with cultural differences inspired a racist mentality, but so has the creation of negatively connoted linguistic expressions.

Needless to say, the protagonist's grandfather, Ern, is the main target of Harley's emotions: anger, resistance, pride. He externalizes his feelings by saying that he is: "angry with my grandfather" (Scott, 1999: 43). As research in Trauma Studies has shown (Atkinson, 2002; Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1992), if a sense of connection with caring people is not assured during a person's childhood, the outcome will result in a fragmentation of the self, also linked to dysfunctional behaviour. Nevertheless, in spite of Harley's recognition of his grandfather as the perpetrator of trauma and the source of his distress, later examples will illustrate how Harley is capable of a deep understanding, that eventually generates forgiveness. Towards the end of the novel we read: "Perhaps it was this sort of detached interest; that *of the scientist, with his trained mind and keen desire*" (Scott, 1999: 413).

When referring to Ernest, the prose tends to rely on an invoked attitudinal lexis and a less direct approach, thus leaving space for more than one interpretation. The epistemic modal adjunct (Simpson, 1993) "perhaps", at the beginning of the sentence, foregrounds the authorial voice as asserting that his position is just one amongst many, thus creating a dialogic space for envisaging other possibilities. From such a dialogistic perspective--which stems from a heteroglossic background (Bakhtin, 1981) the writer is operating within the Engagement system, under the sub-category of Entertain (see Martin and White, 2005); this means that other presuppositions are also allowed. The utterance is organized in a way to give the impression of a benevolent comment; the use of "sort of" evokes a state of indeterminacy due to the intrinsic nature of this type of lexicogrammatical resource. The result is a toning-down of related meanings. By saying "trained mind and keen desire" an evaluation has been inscribed through "keen" as an instance of positive Appreciation, and "trained" as an index of positive Judgement (encoding values of Capacity—Social Esteem) (Martin and White, 2005: 53).

### **A male His-story**

In a novel built on the male figure, where the "creation process" and all the values attached to it are subverted by a counter-logic, which sees men replacing women in giving birth and positions androcentric power at the heart of the narrative, the outcome cannot but be dependent upon strong, masculine feelings (Eisler, 1987), where a partnership approach is far from being reached. The female presence is drastically reduced to a mere appearance; even that of Harley's mother: "It may be that a reader is wondering about my own mother, especially in such a story of men, with silent women flitting in the background" (Scott, 1999: 398). The male figure fills those spaces left empty by the absence of a significant feminine presence, thus reversing any "natural logic": "After all, what do you need a woman for anyway?" (86) Men replace the

mother-figure by holding the generative power of procreation: “my grandfather intended to be my creator” (Scott, 1999: 32); “I was his product.” (Scott, 1999: 435).

The loss of caring, maternal principles, both on a global scale and in this story, may inspire a reconfiguration of personal interactions based on complicated relationships and negative feelings (Pearson, 1991). It is noteworthy that the only “healing power” undergone by the protagonist in the process of transformation comes from the two feminine characters with whom he establishes an intimate relationship. In fact, Harley acknowledges that: “The women and I ... This is no romance, it is not romantic love I speak. Negotiation, perhaps. We had shared experience, came to learn together. We shared responsibilities.” (Scott, 1999: 450). Scott assigns positive values to the feminine world here, where the type of feelings described are grounded in a more egalitarian culture; one based on sharing and mutual nurturing rather than possession. It is only through the constructive relationship with the two women that Harley can finally express his true nature and be fully accepted by his community. This encounter helps him to merge his masculinity, sometimes associated with dominant behaviour (Eisler, 1987), with the feminine sphere, thus counter-balancing the emotions of dis/satisfaction he sometimes feels: “The two of them helped me grow from my bitter and isolated self; let me reconcile myself to what it means to be so strangely uplifted” (Scott, 1999: 450). When the two halves rejoin, positive and negative, masculine and feminine, a sense of peace springs forth from within Harley and the protagonist cannot but feel “at peace and as if belonging” (Scott, 1999: 451). As we can see, Harley’s mindset is reflected through a selection of ideational meanings<sup>11</sup> inscribing an initial state of negative Appreciation—“bitter and isolated”—soon replaced by a positive evaluation articulated through invoked positive attitudinal lexis: “let me reconcile myself”.

A close reading of the author’s stylistic choices, which are corroborated by Harley’s language, allows the reader to better understand this change. A great part of the story is permeated by a highly modalized language, especially when reflecting on Harley’s relationship with his grandfather, as can be read in the following excerpt:

It was still his story, his language, his notes and rough drafts, his clear diagrams and slippery fractions which had uplifted and diminished me.

I wanted more.

I dare say he was all the time thinking, When and how will I appear in this history? Hoping. Worrying.

Oh, I promised I would get to him.

I did not continue the readings.

It may have been a desire to transform myself, or even self-hatred, which suggested

I slash and cut words into my own skin. But I soon

turned to my grandfather’s flash. I wanted to mark him, to show my resentment at how his words had shaped me. (Scott, 1999: 37)

The above passage is highly significant in that it conveys Harley’s initial state of mind. The first sentence opens up with a relational process, which positions the protagonist within a passive role. The possessive “his” is obsessively repeated in the sequence of nominal clauses which are positioned according to a paratactic order. Harley accurately

avoids mentioning his grandfather's name; however it is evoked by the repetition of linguistic elements which recall him. Furthermore, the adjunct "still", in the Appraisal system, has mostly a counter-expectational value, in that it projects some sort of expectation onto the readership, who are compelled to share the writer's belief system.

The image of a powerless character is underlined by Harley's being, in Halliday's terms, the medium of material processes carried out by inanimate things; in this case objects. The "notes and rough drafts", the "diagrams and slippery fractions" become the agents of material processes, thus uplifting and diminishing the protagonist's deeds. Quite against the reader's expectations, a reversal of agency occurs when Harley places himself in a prominent position by expressing a feeling of desire, conveyed via boulomaic modality: "I wanted more" and "I wanted to mark him". Epistemic modality is a productive grammatical device used in fiction to represent the author's point of view. Here it is expressed through the proposition "It may have been" and functions as an index of confidence about the truthfulness of what is being said. Again we find signs of Affect inscribed in the verbs "Hoping" and "Worrying"<sup>12</sup> where neither the emoter (the person who feels), nor the trigger of the emotion are disclosed. However, we can easily figure out who the emoter is: Harley.

However, towards the end of the book, we have a glimpse of positivity, which breaks away from the initial tense atmosphere. The language becomes richer in positive evaluation and we also witness a different use of first person pronouns. Whereas the first part of the narrative is characterised by a predominant use of the first person singular pronoun "I", the last part shifts from *I* to *We*. The first person plural pronoun, in its inclusive mode<sup>13</sup> stands for Harley and the Nyoongar community: "We thought it strange, but possible, that we might reach more of you this way" and "We gather our strength in this way. From the heart of all of us. ... I am not alone. ... We are still here, Benang." (Scott, 1999: 495; my emphasis).

At this point, in recognising the all-embracing nature of the human existence, Harley's personal "transformation" has reached its climax. He is finally ready to rejoin his people, to find his real identity beyond racial constraints: "I am no white man." (Scott, 1999: 494) he declares and, once more, he lets his readers share in his new self, his own personal story: "I have written this story wanting to embrace all of you, and it is the best I can do in this language we share." (Scott, 1999: 495).

### **Benang and the representation of identities through language**

"language is at one and the same time the tool, the contents and the form of human thought, and every act of knowledge is only possible through the medium of language." (Riley, 2007:8-9)

The above thesis was suggested by Herder (1772), breaking away from the previous tradition based on an idea of language as deriving from thought. By advancing this new vision of knowledge, he ushered in new modes of studying culture and traditions, thus influencing successive anthropologists, ethnographers and linguists, and paving the way to a different approach to Indigenous cultures. Such a vision of language engenders a reflection on the loss of many Indigenous languages in Australia due to the acquisition of English as the language of the coloniser.

Since language is a powerful means of empowering and developing one's culture, it is vital to Indigenous Australian writers to spread their meanings and reach a great audience through written texts. The most direct way to do this is by using the dominant language, that is to say: Australian English. This process of linguistic appropriation often entails the acquisition of new identities. Literature has therefore acquired an important role in the negotiation of "Indigenous identities", especially in the revitalization and rediscovery of forgotten traditions. As Smith (1999: 97) points out: "We know what it is like to have our identities regulated by laws and our languages and customs removed from our lives ... the greater project is about recentring indigenous identities on a larger scale."

Scott, like many other Indigenous writers, cannot completely avoid "Western contamination"; nevertheless he makes judicious use of language, trying to create a personal narrative which diverts from tradition. The linguistic choices exploited in *Benang* take on the dominant language to shake the readers' expectations to their foundations. Scott never flings an accusation at the Anglo-Establishment, but he cleverly tries to appeal a wider readership by demonstrating that he has mastery over the "colonizers' language". Standard English is declined into many different forms so as to fulfil Scott's stylistic aspirations, as well as a more practical purpose: the narration shifts from the formal English of documents and official letters to everyday language. The characters' thoughts are expressed via colloquial language, sometimes reflected through incorrect spelling, such as, for instance: "He was gunna retire" (Scott, 1999: 442), "Looks like him, unna?" (Scott, 1999: 450). This mood is further enhanced by dint of interjections, embedded clauses, coarse language and a frequent change in narrator, which may create a sense of displacement in the reader. Scott challenges his white readership to abandon preconceptions and empathise with the characters. Accordingly, the attentive reader is charged with the task of making connections and revealing secret patterns behind every story.

A connection with the reader is continuously sought throughout the narrative and established at the very end of it: "I have written this story ... in this language we share. (Scott, 1999: 495). This statement has a double reading in that it represents the protagonist's point of view and, at the same time, it expresses the author's biographical attempt to open up a dialogue with the other side of Australia. Scott endeavours to pass on a different perspective of history; one which is not based either on a romantic view of the Indigenous condition, nor on an approach rooted in a feeling of pity, but on a conscious reflection about a reality which is often omitted from mainstream historical accounts. From this perspective, I would say that the use of evaluative language, in particular, linguistic structures imbued with instances of Affect, constitutes a useful strategy to articulate the writer's emotions and align his stances with the readers', thus reducing the distance between addresser and addressee.

It is of crucial importance for Indigenous writers to disclose elements of their knowledge by merging Aboriginal discursive forms of storytelling with established Western literary genres and mainstream language. In this case, language can be a useful weapon in the revitalization of oral narration. As psychologists like Jerome Bruner (1990) and anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss (1967) point out, storytelling is one of the tenets of our society, whether we are talking about either small or large groups, such as tribes and nations. Aboriginal literature makes great use of oral patterns to convey its

core ideas; as a consequence, the re-telling of Myth finds one of its main *raisons d'être* in establishing and maintaining a stable position within literary discourse. Smith (1999) stresses once more how storytelling can be used by writers to revive an oral tradition which is disappearing; she also remarks on the importance of telling stories as a means of handing down to new generations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples a set of values and beliefs belonging to different Indigenous communities.

With regard to explicit linguistic references to Indigenous idioms, the writer chooses to confine intrusions from Indigenous words to specific domains, for instance when Harley, at the beginning of the story says: "The Nyoongar name for that harbour is Merrytch. Meaning dew, or dewdrop" (Scott, 1999: 22), or when, at the end, he invites the readership: "Call me one of whatever you will of these; Wadjari, Kwetjman, Mirning ... Ngandju, Nunga, Nyungar, Noongar, Nyungah, Nyoongar." (Scott, 1999: 455), or when explaining the meaning of the book's title: "Father's name: Wonyin, Winnery. Her name: Pinyan, Benang." (Scott, 1999: 464). Furthermore, he specifies that: "None of these make sense to me now, although there is a Nyoongar word, sometimes spelt, benang, which means tomorrow. Banang is tomorrow." (Scott, 1999: 464). The function of these words is mainly descriptive, in that they are used with particular reference to places, Indigenous sites and people's names. However, Scott's choice to limit linguistic interference from further contaminations with Aboriginal traditions can be seen as a post-structuralist aim to denaturalize Western discourses.

Scott's approach is projected into the text not only in what his characters say, but also in what it is evoked or implied throughout the text. As Michel Pecheux (1982) suggests, when talking about the many forms of the "unthought", discourses can be shaped and characterized either by what is implicit or unsaid. In fact, as Martin and White (2005) affirm, lexical metaphors, together with non-core vocabulary, can create an effect of intensification of the feelings described by the writer. Readers are thus asked to take up an active role in broadening their views and in adopting new ways of reading Indigenous stories.

Besides the role played by language in shaping identities, the novel is characterized by a meta-narrative structure contaminated by the main narrator's continuous reflections on his writing process, as in: "I appreciate your concern, and that you remain with this shifty, snaking narrative. I am grateful; more grateful than you know, believe me." (Scott, 1999: 22), "I could not concentrate on any sort of story, no narrative," (Scott, 1999: 147), or in: "But once again I digress. The mind of a child. No sticking power. Some atavistic fault, I hear someone say, in the character of the narrator." (Scott, 1999: 459). As we have seen earlier, with regards to the narrator's reflection on language, the novel presents a keen interest in the evocative power attached to words. Scott plays with the mechanisms within language and, in some cases, he introduces his characters through what they say: "and no sooner he had regained some fluency to his speech than he uttered those words, trying to manipulate me once again, grabbing at power whichever way he could." (Scott, 1999: 30).

Words also have the power to keep Harley well anchored to reality, in contrast to the inconsistency of his fluctuations: "Desperately I tried to get some words flowing through my head." (Scott, 1999: 147), "How heavy I was with words" (Scott, 1999: 159). The same words are charged with human qualities and acquire an agentive role:

“His words cut deep. I had inherited his language, the voices of others, his stories.”  
(Scott, 1999: 183).

### **Concluding remarks**

The analysis I have carried out is not quantitative; nevertheless it endeavours to give insights into writing mechanisms. The Appraisal System, together with a glimpse into the grammar of transitivity and modality, helps disentangle the “emotional net” within which the story develops. The most salient moments in the narrative are those filtered through mental processes, namely those aiming at questioning the protagonist’s identity and what it means to be Indigenous in contemporary society. In addition, certain types of transitivity, especially when developed in conjunction with a positively-shaded modality, can engender irony as a strategic narrative technique.

Emotions are tightly connected to indicators of Affect, which can be either covert or overt. There is a correspondence between what is being told and the style adopted to describe it. The many stories are accompanied by a heteroglossia of voices (Bakhtin, 1981), meaning the coexistence of a plurality of linguistic varieties within a linguistic code. In his journey to the roots of Harley’s ancestry, the reader is instructed by the many narrative voices which alternate and skip from the narrator’s voice to the characters’, from a first person narrative mode to a third person omniscient narration and back again, in a circular motion.

By drawing upon resources of Affect, often mediated by the narrator’s voice, a highly modalized language and prominent mental and relational processes<sup>14</sup> ascribed to the protagonist’s sphere of action, Scott aims to create a dialogic relationship with readers, in a way to guide them through Harley’s journey. All those linguistic devices, such as a recurring use of mental processes, the use of deixis which directly addresses the audience (“you”) and colloquial language, cooperate in the creation of a familiar atmosphere. Once communication is established, the author and the narrator become the same person, thus disclosing the real purpose of this and many other Indigenous stories: “that we might reach more of you this way” (Scott, 1999: 495); where “we” stands for Aboriginal peoples and “you” for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population of Australia.

Starting from the quite established assumption that readers can construct and attach new meaning to texts (see Eco, 1979, 2002), as a reader, I would advance an interpretation of the text as a metaphor for Australia’s Colonial History. Harley’s transformation and his journey can be seen as reflecting the macro events revolving around Australia’s colonization and its aftermath. A history of violence, loss, but also hope and a will to bridge the gap. From a state of confusion, anger and sense of displacement to the realization that healing implies forgiveness and a strong will to change pre-existing power relations.

### **Notes**

1. The use of Appraisal is concerned with the way speakers become involved in the creation of an ideological and intersubjective dialogic position with listeners by appraising events and engaging or disengaging with previous stances. For a detailed description of the Appraisal System, see Martin and White (2005).

2. “Transitivity” is a fundamental and powerful semantic concept in Halliday’s grammar and is part of the ideational function of language. It is also an important tool in the analysis of representations in discourse. Generally speaking, Transitivity refers to how meanings are represented in the clause and shows how speakers encode their mental picture of reality in language; furthermore, it is a useful means of displaying the speaker’s experience of the world. From a linguistic perspective, transitivity is concerned with meanings and functions of syntactic elements within a proposition. The representations attested through the transitivity model normally signal hidden ideologies, bias and manipulation in discourse. It is important to note that the Transitivity System is made up of the Transitivity and the Ergative Model. In this paper I will refer mainly to the Transitivity model, which is characterized by different processes: material processes (or processes of doing), behavioural processes (in-between mental and material processes), verbal processes (or processes of saying), relational processes (or processes of being), mental processes (or processing of sensing) and existential processes (in-between relational and material processes). Systemic Functional Linguistics identifies three main functions in language: ideational; interpersonal; textual.

3. The Partnership model has been developed by Riane Eisler in America. It is based on the idea that a more egalitarian society should replace patriarchal ones. One of her most popular books is *The Chalice and The Blade*, where a new approach to history is encouraged.

4. By “counter-history” I refer to that notion of history which gained recognition thanks to Postcolonial and Poststructuralist studies. It involves the inversion of motifs from established traditions for ideological purposes.

5. By using the all-embracing adjective “Indigenous”, I refer to Torres Strait Islanders and all the many different Indigenous communities in Australia.

6. The expression “marginal voices”, and the variant “peripheral voices” draws on Spivak’s notion of the “subaltern”, thus identifying Indigenous peoples as within the subaltern class, in the lower strata of society.

7. Modalization refers to Modality. In this paper I draw from Simpson (1993) and his idea of the Modal System as constituted by: deontic modality (expresses commitment); epistemic modality (expresses the level of truthfulness of a an assertion); boulomaic modality (expresses desire).

8. “Affect” is part of the Attitude System within the Appraisal theory of language. The sub-category of Affect is concerned with evaluation connected to emotions. It can be further subdivided into: dis/inclination; un/happiness; dis/satisfaction; in/security.

9. The sub-category of “In-security” within Affect is further divided into: Insecurity (Disquiet and Surprise) and Security (Confidence and Trust).

10. “Boulomaic modality” can be paraphrased as it is “hoped/desired/feared/regretted that”. “Want” is part of the boulomaic modality (see also Simpson 1993: 47-8). It

ranges from not-wanting through not-opposing to wanting. In the present paper I will use the notion as used in Simpson (1993).

11. Ideational resources are related to the construction of experiences (Halliday, 1994).

12. According to the Appraisal Theory, verbs like “hoping” and “worrying” carry an emotional connotation; the former can be considered as a possible sign of non-authorial positive affect, whereas the latter can be read as a sign of non-authorial negative affect.

13. The notion of “inclusive we” can acquire multiple meanings according to its mode of employment. It is interesting to note the ideological use of “inclusive and exclusive we” in Fairclough (2001 [1989]). For an objective description of this grammatical notion see Biber et al., 1999: 329.

14. Halliday’s mental processes indicate a mental activity, which involves senses and feelings when verbs are transitive. Relational states express processes of “being”, where the “process” takes the form of a relation between two participants, or between a participant and an attribute. Relational states express those processes of being, where a relationship between two participants, or an entity and an attribute is likely to take place. (Halliday, 1994)

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