

Of Windows and Mirrors

Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Tribe* series, transformative fan cultures and Aboriginal epistemologies.

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Indigenous people lived through the end of the world, but we did not end. We survived by holding on to our cultures, our kin, and our sense of what was right in a world gone terribly wrong (Kwaymullina, 'Edges' 29).

Young Adult Australian post-apocalyptic speculative fiction carries with it a number of expectations and tropes: that characters will exist in a dystopian, ruined landscape; that a lone teenager will rise up and rebel against institutionalised structures of repressive power; and that these youths will carry hope for the future in a destroyed world. In her trilogy *The Tribe* Ambelin Kwaymullina (of the Palyku People of the Pilbara region of Western Australia) approaches the speculative fiction genre through transformative narratives that engage with, and demonstrate, Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing. In grounding this post-apocalyptic speculative young adult series in Aboriginal Australian epistemologies, Kwaymullina challenges preconceived and often narrow mainstream ideas of what Aboriginal cultures and literature offer the reader, and simultaneously subverts the conventions of the genre. *The Tribe* trilogy reimagines the genre to reflect an intersectional space of listening and hearing voices, stories, and knowledges that transcend a binary understanding of the organic and technological, the mainstream and the margins. Here the landscape is not ruined, but is rather imagined as a vibrant, thriving space of survival. The single teenage leader of the rebellion draws on the support of her community, and her connections

to all beings in the world are pivotal to her ability to make change. While the teenagers lead the rebellion—alongside supportive adults—it is the underlying Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing that guide and feed the themes of hope, survival, and connections, for the future. Through this process, Kwaymullina allows readers to interact with the novel's ideologies on a number of levels as they become complicit in shaping and reshaping meaning. Kwaymullina finds organic intersections between the natural and technological in the series; these same connections extend to the readers' online engagement with the series. Focusing on children with special abilities who are considered 'Illegals' and treated as such, the novels have given rise to a mob of passionate and vocal cyber-voices that challenge dominant hegemonic perceptions of Aboriginal technology, epistemology and connections to land. In this paper, we argue that Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* (2012) and *The Disappearance of Ember Crow* (2013) from the *Tribe* series, and her use of Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing, demonstrates significant transformative power, allowing readers to become active agents of change in intersubjective dialogues that create new opportunities for an expanded understanding of Aboriginal Australia, where technology is in dialogue with nature.

Cart and Jenkins (qtd. in Epstein) stress the importance of readers being able to access representations of themselves in the texts they read, while emphasising the necessity of reading different voices, cultures, and beliefs from their own. Kwaymullina, in an interview, concurs:

Imagine a world where no mirror ever shows you your own reflection. You search in vain for a glimpse of your face, your eyes, your existence. Instead you are met again and again with blank glass that shows a world without you in it. There are images enough, of other people, of faces and voices and peoples unlike your own. But never of you, never of your face and what it reveals about your hopes and dreams and fears. It is as if you make no impact on the world and have no importance to it. And it leaves you feeling lost. Bewildered. Alone [...] They deserve, in times of trouble, to hold in their hands the story that will tell them, *you are not alone* (Binks np).

Kwaymullina highlights the very human, very personal impact felt by a lack of diversity in YA literature, a visceral loss of identity and connection. Her comments reflect the central theme of the final novel in *The Tribe* series, *The Foretelling of Georgie Spider*, the importance of connections.

'I closed my eyes, and imagined a world. A world of connections, where everyone understood that the difference between good and bad was the difference between the people who valued those connections and those who didn't' (Kwaymullina, *Georgie Spider* 418). Kwaymullina's work engages readers as both window and mirror text, an exploration of imbued Indigenous epistememes, validated and validating simultaneously.

Epstein (111) places YA and children's literature into two categories: window texts (where readers see into a different perspective or experience than their own), and mirror texts (where readers may see characters and stories reflective of their own lives). Kwaymullina uses first person narration with focalisation in *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* through Ashala, who acts as a vessel for the reader to experience both window and mirror insights into Aboriginal ways of knowing. Ashala immediately introduces the reader to internalised and naturalised connections to ancestors and the land. Her later discovery of her cultural heritage through Grandfather Serpent offers dual meaning to Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers, filling the mode of the window and mirror text simultaneously, allowing the reader to cross between the two freely. By framing Ashala's engagement with Aboriginal knowledges as an ongoing journey of self-discovery, the reader is allowed to cross between window and mirror frameworks as they directly experience Ashala's own growing understandings.

Kwaymullina's first two novels in *The Tribe* series, *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* and *The Disappearance of Ember Crow*, allow their audience to engage with them in a virtual space to create new modes of understanding. The environmental foundation to Kwaymullina's *Tribe* series' future setting means that it can best be described as post-apocalyptic speculative fiction. While dystopian fiction often features strong moral messages around ecological or environmental protection, presenting uninhabitable worlds, where humans have destroyed the Earth, and the Earth has now become their enemy, Kwaymullina's texts produce a world that is only partially dystopian. She subverts the themes of dystopian fiction with her subtle exploration and employment of Aboriginal knowledges. Her writing moves beyond dualistic conceptions of human/non-human, culture/nature and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal to a more complex, hopeful and transformative space that engenders new forms of cross-cultural dialogue.

Kwaymullina subverts the conventional post-apocalyptic speculative YA narrative through the underlying Aboriginal Australian epistememes that shape the ideologies of the series. She engages standard tropes—the dystopian wasteland, the conflict between technology and nature, the

single hero, the conflict between teenager as rebel and adult as gatekeeper of power—but is able to unsettle and repurpose them. The ongoing endurance and vitality of *Country* depicts survival and harmony with those who attempt to understand and respect it. Technology and nature are not in oppositional disharmony, but can merge into hybridised forms that complement each other. In acknowledging Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing as having strong intersections with technology, the text and reader shift away from a unilateral and static understanding of its epistemologies. In contrast to the more familiar isolated, solitary figure of resistance, Ashala's rebellion is centred on connections, and the Tribe and her extended community prove vital to her ability to realise and enact this connectedness in the final novel. The Tribe form alliances with adults who possess significant social and political power, and who share their vision for the future. This subversion can have a heightened impact for the reader if they are familiar with the genre, which in turn is made possible, and has its foundation in, Aboriginal Australian epistemes.

Set hundreds of years in the future, after the 'Reckoning' has destroyed the world as we know it, the earth has formed one solid land mass surrounded by water. The narrative never specifies Australia as a place, nor any other existing country or continent. The 'Reckoning' is a holy judgment on humanity resulting from humanity's abuse of the environment (*Ashala Wolf* 12). To restore 'Balance', the new world developed 'Accords', for instance the Benign Technology Accords to prevent the development of harmful technology, and the Citizenship Accords that are meant to stop 'Illegals' from disrupting the Balance (*Ashala Wolf* 33). The female protagonist is an Illegal (a person with special powers who is discriminated against in this new society) and the leader of the Tribe of the Firstwood, who fights for the inclusion of people like her as part of the Balance.

Ashala's Aboriginal Australian descent is signified by her relationship with *Country* and Grandfather Serpent, one of the creators of her people. 'There weren't any Illegals back then. Except there were different peoples, different 'races'... After the end of the old world, when there were so few humans left, everyone stopped worrying about things like that' (*Ashala Wolf* 122–3). It is not her dark skin or her heritage that Ashala is fighting against, restricted or judged by; rather it is her ability to sleepwalk that is deemed illegal. This status as an 'illegal' is reminiscent of colonialist attitudes and policies affecting the traditional custodians of Australia and reflective of on-going debates in Australia about the arrival of 'Others'. A reader who is familiar with the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, can draw many parallels between the treatment of the Illegals and the

historical (but continuing) discrimination against Aboriginal Australians. For example, the Chief Administrator in the novels is named Neville Rose, resembling the name of AO Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1915 to 1940 (Haebich and Reece). The 'Illegal' characters are 'othered' and discriminated against (unless they are 'Exempted'), which further parallels the treatment of Aboriginal Australians, who could historically also be exempted from their Aboriginal identity, for example by marrying a white Australian) (Castle and Hagan). Aboriginal Australians continue to fight for real recognition in the Australian constitution—a fight that has been ongoing since the 1967 Referendum where non-Aboriginal Australians voted to finally include Aboriginal Australians in the census. However, historical awareness is not essential to understand the story, as the narrative engages the reader with an understanding of discrimination that does not rely on racial, ethnic, or gender stereotypes and representations. Instead, characters are 'othered' due to their special abilities, such as sleepwalking, sharing memories, and flying.

Kwaymullina's texts present elements of an Aboriginal Australian worldview without once using the Western word 'Aborigine', therefore avoiding an implied assumption of the norm (i.e. the 'non-Aborigine'). It is precisely because the Aboriginal worldview does not need to be named in the text that it signals the potential for transformative change in the reader, whether they identify the similarity with Aboriginal experiences in Australia or not. However, what makes Kwaymullina's texts so powerful is that she introduces Aboriginal ontological concepts subtly, and uses metaphor to help non-Aboriginal readers engage dialogically with the agency of the world around them, or at the very least with the idea that the world around them has agency. For example, in response to Neville Rose's statement that he does not need to know his story, Ashala wonders:

Maybe he didn't realise how important it was to understand your own story [...] 'Ember says everyone has a tale they tell themselves about who they are. And, if your tale is true, then you see yourself clearly, like looking into still water. But if it's not, then it's more like the water's all rippled, so you can't see yourself at all.' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 143).

Embedded in this clear reflection is the ability to see the interconnectedness of all things, human and non-human: to be able to place ourselves in the bigger picture of the awesomeness of the Earth and the cosmos. It is not only human beings that possess story and a voice but all of nature and its non-human entities. While post-colonialism has been concerned with making space for historically marginalised First

Nations, emerging ecological lenses acknowledge an inter-species ethic. Rather than assuming or reinforcing a hyper-separation between mind/body, nature/culture and human/non-human, ecological philosophers and ‘warriors’ such as Val Plumwood recognise the kinship between all things, which in turn ‘opens the door to a world in which we can begin to negotiate life membership of an ecological community of kindred beings’ (121). This has clear parallels to the world that Kwaymullina has created in *The Tribe* series.

Thus, Kwaymullina’s texts do not engage with an idea of Australia as (at) the end of the world because it is the land itself that matters and not the imagined nation state transplanted onto it. When Ashala first meets Grandfather Serpent, he explains to her that his ‘kind’:

took many forms [...] When the great chaos began, I was sleeping deep in underground water. My resting place broke apart and I was cast out into the end of everything. I journeyed for a long time, gathering all the scraps of life that I could find [...] I brought them here. Then I sang, reminding life of its shapes, strength, and its many transformations. Until life remembered its nature, and grew [...] I made things grow here (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 123).

The narrative allows the reader to engage with an epistemological worldview of earth and place that hasn’t been shaped and presented via colonial or Western paradigms and lenses. This worldview is derived from Aboriginal epistemology without having to set it up as ‘Aboriginal’ (a colonial term used to name, label and control). The narratives present this epistemological paradigm that has emerged from Ashala and her tribe’s dwelling place alongside the recognition that there may be other worldviews and creator spirits of the earth elsewhere.

Post-apocalyptic fiction often springs from the concerns of contemporary reality, a reflection of concerns heightened to a plausible extreme (Kennon 40). Through the development of the protagonists as active participants in shaping or reshaping their world and their place in it, the post-apocalyptic world can be reimagined as a potential future or opportunity, not simply for its heedful warnings, whether they be ecologically grounded or political, but for the culminating triumph of the teenage protagonists as they discover and utilise their own transformative socio-political power. The young adult’s journey within a typical post-apocalyptic novel may reflect a hopeful future in and outside the text, as they traverse diverse worlds and work towards changing the mistakes of society’s past.

In *The Tribe* series, young adults fend for themselves. The imbalance of power between adult and child, or adult and teenager, as outlined by Rose, and Cadden, is explicitly represented in Kwaymullina's story. When Ashala is first captured by Chief Administrator Neville Rose, she 'opened her mouth to tell him that the kids I knew could think for themselves better than most adults could, and then decided against it. I didn't want to confirm there were no adults in the Tribe' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 27). Later, fellow Tribe member Ember tells Ashala:

There's a word [...] to describe people who believe so fervently that Illegals are a threat to the Balance that they can do the kinds of appalling things to us Neville is supposed to have done.' 'There're two words', I said. 'Nasty. Bastards.' She smiled and shook her head. 'No. Mad.' Her strange eyes—one brown and one blue—grew shadowed. 'It's even a *necessary* insanity, for a society like ours. They couldn't keep the detention system going without it. (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 37).

In efforts to battle this insanity, the young Tribe warriors must fight discriminatory and disempowering structures, systems, and beliefs, with regular affirmations of survival: 'I live! We live! We survive!' In a world that is fast depleting the earth's natural resources, where materialism, capitalism and economic rationalism uphold a single worldview that separates humanity from the natural world, and humans from each other, where wasteful consumption and 'third world' poverty increase on a daily basis, notions of what is sane and insane must surely need to shift. In Australia the statistics that describe the conditions and experiences of Aboriginal Australia—infant mortality rates, cardiovascular diseases, youth suicide, low unemployment, incarceration rates—are seen as an 'Aboriginal problem', not as symptoms of a larger societal fault, an indication that Western industrial nations have gone insane, or at the very least find themselves in an ideological stranglehold that prevents them from addressing such faults. As Meyer argues, 'do you see that when we understand larger systems that are working, we begin to understand more of what's happening within and around ourselves. And because of that knowing, we are singing our own liberation' (61).

Literature, especially children's and YA literature, exposes and produces social and cultural ideological meanings. Throughout Kwaymullina's texts, an insight into dominant society's power over marginalised groups is revealed without the reader needing to have an awareness of colonial and Aboriginal Australian histories. Challenging dominant discourses is a central theme of *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* without once having

to rely on notions of race or Aboriginality/non-Aboriginality. Within post-apocalyptic speculative YA fiction, adolescents hold the potential to reshape the future of their societies, to imagine a utopian world of belonging, acceptance and equality. Through the inclusion and validation of Indigenous epistemes, these themes can be emulated beyond the text amongst an active and diverse audience. As popular cultural resources, Kwaymullina's works provide references that reinforce Aboriginal identities, belongings, and a sense of validity in oppositional epistemes.

Teenagers, the primary target audience of YA literature, find themselves in a situation where they have inherited a world that appears to be out of kilter, at the same time that they are trying to come to terms with their own identities. In this context, literature can provide powerful windows and mirrors to engage with, often in much more active and direct ways than were available in the past. According to Johnston, 'there is a new topography, as well as new ontologies, new pulses of reading power, and different literary and aesthetic ways of exploring the endless striations of inner and outer tabernacles of spirit.' (97) In Kwaymullina's text, the earth is the central tabernacle of spirit, and young warriors fight for the right to live and hope. This new topography now includes the voices of readers of YA literature in ways that challenge the traditional boundaries of identity, literary reception and critique, and locate pleasure in reading as an Aboriginal cultural pursuit. This is clear in the discussions in online communities that surround the texts- all discuss Aboriginal connections, and view the texts as an empowering and informative exploration of ancient knowledge, as well as an affirmative representation of an Indigenous protagonist. *Goodreads* user and columnist for *Kill Your Darlings*, Danielle Binks, under the name 'Alphareader', writes

My appreciation of the novel's Indigenous ties goes deeper than merely having an Aboriginal protagonist. It's something that is at the very heart of the novel—indeed, just as Ashala has a connection to the land, so too does this story [in] being a unique Dystopian [story] with a focus on environmental disaster and mankind's fault in killing the world some 300 years ago with greed and negligence. (30 August 2012)

Even more succinctly, user Kirsti ('Melbourne on my mind') writes 'HURRAH FOR A DYSTOPIAN SERIES WITH AN INDIGENOUS PROTAGONIST!!' (7 August 2016). Thus, readers are clearly able to recognise and celebrate the embedded Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing, and indeed acknowledge them as a shaping force for the series and its ideologies. A productive space is thereby created, in

which Aboriginal connections are acknowledged as diverse, rather than narrowly defined.

Contemporary Young Adult (YA) literature includes a vast array of genres and subgenres, as well as discourses of difference and multiple voices (from different genders, races, classes and ethnic spaces), thereby deploying heteroglossia—the use of multiple forms of speaking and knowing within one language (Bakhtin). At the same time, young adult readers have developed online communities to share their ideas and feelings towards texts in an open, supportive forum where they can be heard (Hellekson and Busse 13). Within these digital ‘imaging communities’ (Levy 125), fandoms are expanding in terms of both critical and creative content (Jenkins). These emerging voices challenge and resist the established discursive norms of hegemonic culture on their own terms.

The fan cultures around Kwaymullina’s texts add another layer of voices full of potential, hope, and change that contribute to challenging the ways in which Western anglo-centric discourses have (mis)represented, and even denied, the validity of Aboriginal ways of knowing. Their responses to the world the author has created subvert traditional, western attempts to define and categorise Aboriginal knowledges. For example, one user called Skip, on the book review and fan website *Goodreads*, writes, ‘Ambelin Kwaymullina is a breakout author, an Australian aboriginal [sic] writer and illustrator, who is part of the Palyku people of Western Australia... Ashala herself is a idealistic indigenous protagonist, including themes such as living in harmony and tranquility, with respect for all living creatures, and sympatico with the land’ (9 August 2015). Responses such as Skip’s demonstrate an unprecedented global access to Aboriginal knowledge and representation, one which can continue to expand and affirm Aboriginal knowledges by Aboriginal voices—and be accessed and understood, and even contributed to by a wide range of voices.

Furthermore, there is an increasingly direct involvement on the part of authors like Kwaymullina, who use blogging as part of both fan engagement and writerly practice. Authors answer questions, promote their books, and sometimes even change future projects to reflect their readers’ preferences and desires (Green), pointing towards more diversity and new voices (Czochor; Kwaymullina, ‘Edges’). As Kwaymullina herself acknowledges, ‘to the media, especially the mainstream and literary media: I’m afraid you’re largely being outdone by bloggers on these issues’ (Kwaymullina, ‘Edges’). A US-based campaign called ‘We Need Diverse Books’ has encouraged participants to finish the sentence ‘We need diverse books because...’ (mostly via *Twitter*) to publicise a need, desire,

and reason for more diverse voices (*We Need Diverse Books*) in literature. The organisation ‘promote[s] literature that reflects and honours the lives of all young people.’ Kwaymullina has completed the prompt as follows: ‘We need diverse books because a lack of diversity is a failure of our humanity. Literature without diversity presents a false image of what it is to be human. It masks—and therefore contributes to—the continuation of existing inequities, and it widens the gulfs of understanding that are already swallowing our compassion for each other’ (Kwaymullina, ‘We need diverse’ np).

Kwaymullina places a lack of diversity and visibility as an ongoing trauma that silences marginalised communities, and distances readers of all backgrounds from bridging gaps in representation, knowledge, and human connection. Her response acknowledges the human impact of a lack of diversity—the erosion of empathy and increased distancing that delineates the *us* and the *them*. Fan cultures, and the reciprocal nature of their communication, potentially deepen understanding and even appreciation of diversity, when such diversity is embedded in the literary texts themselves. These online spaces where fan cultures exist create an intimate community that can encourage opportunities to explore genres through alternative ways of knowing, and through exposing the reader to new and old perspectives. It provides them a space to ask and learn more from authentic voices, further dismantling western repression or revision of Aboriginal Australian stories, representations, and knowledges. It has the hallmarks of a grassroots campaign, forging connections between the reader, publisher, author, and larger literary community, and exposing the vocal need and desire for diverse texts.

As Jenkins argues, ‘far from demanding conformity, th[is] new knowledge culture is enlivened by multiple ways of knowing [...] The dynamic, collective, and reciprocal nature of these exchanges undermines traditional forms of expertise’ (Jenkins 160). Fans become active participants in the creative process, in forums where their voices are valued, in turn validating the world that is being created. Thus, many fans/ reviewers, even those with only a passing knowledge of Aboriginal history and beliefs, make a connection to Aboriginal ontological concepts through the narrative. Furthermore, online fan communities offer the opportunity to continue pursuing this knowledge as it extends beyond the text, as readers share their interpretations of the Aboriginal epistemes that guide the text’s ideologies.

The intersection between the post-apocalyptic speculative *Tribe* series and the online fan culture provides an interesting reflection on themes within the texts. Traditionally, (eco) dystopian fiction creates a dichotomy

between technology and the environment, where the former is ultimately represented as alien, sterile and dehumanizing, and the latter as an ally—wild and beautiful—which offers sanctuary and proves to be the utopia within the dystopian world. Drawing from Aboriginal ways of knowing, where consciousness is attributed to all creative forces and everything in creation, the texts reinforce the underpinning interconnectedness of all inhabitants of a place, or ‘an ecological community of kindred beings’ (Plumwood 121). Kwaymullina’s texts explore these motifs through a post-apocalyptic world, allowing the reader to engage with Aboriginal understandings about Country and metaphysical dimensions. For example, an intersubjective dialogue between Christianity and Aboriginal knowledges recurs throughout the series through Ashala’s relationship with her partner, Connor, who is regularly described as an ‘angel’ (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 11, 67, 256), and who represents the Christian voice. The character of Hoffman, a creator figure who literally wrote the history of the ‘Reckoning’, and created the ‘aings’ or cyborgs, allows for an exploration of an artificially created religion or belief system. The conflation of the technological and artificial structure of beliefs is heightened in *The Disappearance of Ember Crow*, yet is still valued as legitimate in its own right, through the depiction of the cyborg Ember who displays clear human and moral qualities. Embedded within the narrative is the appreciation of non-human agency being as integral to the interconnected web of all life as human agency.

In providing this knowledge outside mainstream didactic teachings, or without a primary focus on colonial Australia, Kwaymullina creates potential for expanded understandings of Australia, as an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal space and place, one that allows for intersubjective dialogues between multiple belief systems outside a dominant singularity. That readers engage directly with technology in order to shape their discussions and understandings of an eco-dystopian (or post-apocalyptic speculative) series adds another layer of depth and pleasure to the novels. The Internet provides another space and a voice for many, regardless of their status outside the cyber sphere. Fan communities have dissected, gained knowledge, and ultimately promoted Kwaymullina’s novels through further discussion and recommendations, and thus gained an alternate knowledge to that of the mainstream. As ‘Alphareader’ on *Goodreads* puts it: ‘*The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* is proof-positive that the post-apocalyptic genre is still a fascinating one, but only if you have as good a story to tell as Kwaymullina does with *Ashala Wolf*’ (30 August 2012)

The Disappearance of Ember Crow takes the interrelating connections between the natural world and the technological world further, merging

elements of science fiction and technology with the natural, myth, and human, while still exploring Aboriginal beliefs. Significantly, Tribe member Ember and her brother Nicky can be read as symbolic of the creation of this particular online culture. The characters themselves are hybrids of the technological and organic, and, significantly, are intended to carry on humanity. These hybrids create a new, positive force as they come together and allow for new ways of thinking and imagining. For example, the acquired understanding of Aboriginal knowledges by a predominantly non-Aboriginal audience occurs in a cyber space that is entirely removed from the natural world, and as a new, technologically infused system, is itself contrasted with the organic nature of Aboriginal cultures. Nicky in particular comes to symbolise this. He is first featured in *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* as entirely symbolic of the technological and unnatural, as an invasive form of technology that infiltrates Ashala's mind to seek out her memories. Ashala's interactions with the 'machine' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 1) demonstrate her ingrained naturalised connection to the land and her culture. She recognises in the alien, invasive machine a 'dog-spirit' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 339), changing it into a living creature that represents its true form. In *The Disappearance of Ember Crow*, it is re-built by Ember, reinforcing this positive connection between the organic and technological, and symbolizing the idea that 'nothing ever truly ends, only transforms' (Kwaymullina, *Ember Crow* 141). Nicky and Ember act as a symbol of the formation of an online culture by merging elements of the technological and natural world to create a new, positive force. This mimics the readers' online engagement with the technological and Aboriginal content to create a positive and powerful 'organic' space that allows readers to begin a discussion and form a new, more in-depth, understanding of Aboriginal knowledges that goes well beyond pre-conceived ideas about what is Aboriginal and what is not. Again, this offers readers windows and mirrors that are not static but can be influenced and actively engaged with.

Within *The Tribe* series, memory and stories are a central component of identity. In *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*, Ashala's memories are pivotal to her identity, relationships, and safety: the novel centres around her enemies' attempts to extract them to mine their information. The stories of Ashala's ancestors, in particular her grandfather, are fundamental to her identity and understanding of the world; they carry thousands of years of knowledge and Aboriginal heritage. Kennon argues that within dystopian (or post-apocalyptic) novels, storytelling can be a form of bonding and create a sense of community, as well as an individual connection of forming identity and creating contextual

connections to past histories and stories. Kwaymullina extends this theme with the inclusion of Dreaming stories and the integration of Aboriginal knowledges and beliefs, where Ashala demonstrates a deep, enlightening and transformative connection to the land and her people. This connection allows the character to overcome the obstacles of her dystopian world while fighting for a new future where all voices are valid.

YA post-apocalyptic novels often feature an overarching allegorical message to tell a story that reacts to contemporary societal issues, but Kwaymullina's texts expand on this allegorisation of the present in a vital way. She indirectly provides knowledge on the past, present and future of her people, encouraging readers to see a new world - not just a fictional post-apocalyptic one, but one that has been sustained for more than 40,000 years. This clearly aligns with Aboriginal world views that do not recognise clear separation of past, present and future. As such, time is depicted in the series as non-linear, while events and memories are not separated but rather occur simultaneously. With regards to difference and diversity, anthropological and scientific knowledges have been built on hierarchical notions of who is human (or 'the norm') and who is Other. As cyborgs, Ember and her brothers and sisters face major issues due to the public's perception of them as inhuman, and one of them is destroyed for this. In her revelation of her non-organic status to Ashala, Ember's primary concern is rejection based on the inauthentic - that she will be judged as inhuman and insincere, a 'machine... a collection of circuits' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 320). Ashala, arguably the most contextually organic character, claims Ember as human, or 'real'. 'You were always real. You were always human. I didn't change that. I just helped you to see it.' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 306).

In conclusion, it is widely accepted that post-apocalyptic (or dystopian) fiction contains messages for contemporary society, and shows what could happen, often containing environmental messages by showing a destroyed world that needs human help if it is to heal. Kwaymullina subverts this trope. Humans still destroy the world, with technology and development taking their toll on the natural world, but here the Earth has adapted and healed on its own, as an active and connected agent in the process. The hybridisation of human, non-human and technological forms is socially transformative, offering a re-envisioned relationship between humans and earth, between readers and primary texts and between a multiplicity of different voices in cyberspace, questioning and challenging dominant norms and expectations. Kwaymullina's texts allow readers access to alternative epistemologies and literary

experiences and via online communities, a multiplicity of voices can now be heard speaking about *The Tribe* series, accessing and engaging with the windows and mirrors that the texts provide, and being transformed in the process. As the author puts it herself: 'The way we use our voices is one of the processes by which we create the future' (Kwaymullina, *Reflecting*).

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