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comparison of the poetics of Lionel Fogarty and Aimé
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**‘EXPERIMENTS IN EXILE’: A ficto-critical comparison
of the poetics of Lionel Fogarty and Aimé Césaire**

Murri poet, Lionel Fogarty, is pacing around in his kitchen in Queensland watching the frenzy of hands of his twenty grandchildren and all his other family kinship grandchildren before he slips down a hatch and falls into the Atlantic Ocean. Little black tadpoles swim up and down his spine...washing around in the vortex of history he’s fallen into – *10 million slaves on a humiliated earth, a humiliated sea*...the water sweeps away the ripe stains of the sun...a *cop-face-cock-chafe* missionary passes by – he sees him as a crumbling statue falling through the water...along with Turner who oars through the typhoon with a paintbrush. Shackled slaves sing in the ballast of a zong: *god gave noah the rainbow sign / no more water, the fire next time*...thrown as ‘cargo’, washing around in the frenzy of the water – an emulsion of strangled murmuring...gargling, gargling...strange wounds, suffering in song. He wakes up on a New World beach. He coughs up fingernails and hair. A cut-out tongue is rolled in sand. The sun’s as hot as dynamite. Fogarty has reached Fort-de-France – the capital of Martinique. Aimé Césaire stands there on the shorelines and reads a section from his emancipatory prose-poem, *Notebook of a Return to my Native Land*:

Words? As we handle quarters of the world, as we marry delirious continents, as we break down steaming doors, words, oh yes, words! but words of fresh blood, words which are tidal waves and erysipelas and malarias and lavas and bush-fires, blazes of flesh, and blazes of cities (Césaire 1939, p. 99).

In the same way that Fogarty and Césaire employ literary montage – using pieces of Indigenous language, bits of African languages and the decolonising dance of the dismantling languages in-between – I wish to create an imaginary alliance between Fogarty and Césaire to create solidarity and a celebratory performance of exile. As an outsider to these obscure texts, it is appropriate to discuss these works in literary abstraction – to fall into the slipstream, modality and cadence with which these poets explore their relation and consequently create their own authorial authorship and power. I wish to entangle these two surrealist writers to create a kaleidoscopic sovereignty of a Black avant-garde. As the Ghanaian theorist, Ayi Kwei Armah, stated in his book, *Fragments*: “The larger meaning ... has shattered into a thousand and one useless pieces” (280). Let us dissolve the armour and the armature of the historical and the canonical into a swamp. Swim in the lake of exquisite doggerel. Awake demented. Wipe the grease off our hands and try and swallow the debris of this poetry.

In *Poetic Intention* (1997); Édouard Glissant contends that one’s identity is at once broken and fragile:

"the more the other resists in [sic] his thickness or [sic] his fluidity (without being limited to it), the more [sic] his reality becomes expressive, and the more fecund the relation ... To live the relation may very well be to measure its convincing fragility"

(Glissant 1997, pp.18-19).

When people have an accident, they need to go to sleep to survive. Sleep can mean survival, but eventually there needs to be the awakening. What happens when the crushed wake up? What happens when the oppressed have a tongue again?

Cesaire pulls Fogarty’s body off of the shore. Tussled and flayed, Fogarty chokes the salt and the sand out of his throat and proceeds to read his poem ‘Zone Caught Me At A Stand Still’ — taken from his collection of poems, *Yoogum Yoogum*, which he published at the age of 24.

Madness reveal madness
 living tortures
 asylum pays well
 Triumph opening cobwebs
 cleaning the darkness
 murderous swears museum
 die young, but fair beneath ribs
 corpses scarred dungeons.
 Sections restored widely beaten river of passing
 piranhas tribe
 the python sang survival methods
 when fragments fear answers.
 Dull gold eternal so-called legendary beings
 pursuing unhitched cemeteries
 frightened and misty
 your horrified emptiness.
 Disaster
 someone lost
 blazes a beam
 fades back
 a hasty torch
 fever
 blackfella, fresh.
 enraged and enslave you will.
 Curse.
 Auctioned fertile lands
 scream for trips to home
 spoliated parents read pieces
 vanished.
 replies angry.
 Beware a maniac closer
 conquering vibrations of centuries
 notify all human beings
 all human beings
 (gasp) aaaaahhhhhh ... dying ...
 magic came my madness
 mad madness
 nest lay eggs
 eggs give seeds
 hungry science take seeds

 we come alive
 Where am I?
 (Fogarty 1982, p. 20)

To will himself into existence, Fogarty is accumulating a multiplicity of fragments, and therefore a multiplicity of meaning. Fogarty is tumbling through what are at times downtrodden and nonsensical chunks of words to unmask what he sees as a 'stupidity' in the English language. These stumbled and stuttered sentences make for sated senses. A new reading is demanded by the profundity of the colour and matter in this writing. Aboard this surrealist adventure, Fogarty 'cleans the darkness' and slips in and out of the oblivion. Creating from within the slippages of his abject transcendence, Fogarty shifts ideas of darkness into a healing brightness. As he wrings and mangles the colonial tongue, he maps out and sheds light on the hallucinatory and ephemeral nature of his writing process. As language and culture disintegrate into each other – so does the poet – and it is in this moment of transcendence that the poet and the text become truly alive.

In an interview, Fogarty reflects on his process:

I am mosaic in reading, I nitpick readings. I often read back to front, similar to Chinese. I like reading national Indigenous papers, which also gives me my international flavour of understanding of how to read, even to speak, the new changes of literacy. I also feel that the science of the Dreamtime stories are mappings of philosophy, that are continually in present day, and gives me broader understanding of native titles and law in its existence today (Fogarty, 2011).

Fogarty and Césaire, downtown, Fort-de-France. The sun hangs in the vaguely remote horizon. Césaire points to a bag of bones and skin half-slumped in a blackened corner. The monstrous oaf rears its head – it's Christopher Columbus: hundreds and hundreds of years old – he's got chicken-pox for eyes; toenails for teeth; his lips are

With all their strength the sun and the moon collide
the stars like overripe witnesses
like a litter of grey mice

fear nothing prepare your high waters
which so neatly remove the bank of mirrors

they have put mud over my eyes
and I see I see terribly I see
of all the mountains of all the islands
nothing left save the few rotted teeth
of the impenitent saliva of the sea

(Césaire 1948, p.169)

Fogarty emerges from the trapdoor in the floor. He plants a kiss on his son Jabreeni's head – Jabreeni walks around with it all afternoon. He looks into his room to see his poem, *Tired of Writing* (1982), splashed across the wallpaper in white-out:

A long time since I picked up a pen
Again.
And I had to pick ability in writing
Some call it poetry
I see it as putting something
from nothing, that's my practice.
Carrying targets of beauty and living
first tongue, painless are my words.
We foresee sterile crippled shadows
healing are answers.
Midnight whitened muscles that
frosted a country's autumn.
My mind in time
is what rhymes.
Now I'm of sometime
Long tomorrows will make summer sooner.
Sometimes me write bad
just to be glad.
Little we read
dead seeds may be reeds of lifelessness.
So I wrote.
But will you remote, note
Space took a pace
Rat race
whata play, ace
Just in fine line
Our true times
Are never true.

Sometimes I don't think.

To write I have to use
a medium
that is not mine.
If I don't succeed, bear with me.
I see words beyond any acceptable meaning
And this is how I express my dreaming
(Fogarty 1982, p.1).

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