

“Keep Every Story Live”: Natalie Harkin’s Archival Poetics

Kate Fagan

What are literary archives and what kinds of places do they inhabit? Why do archives continue to exert such a powerful pull on our writing imaginations? What stories do they hold, hide or preserve? Today, I want to talk about ways that some contemporary Australian poets are building relationships with imagined futures by revisiting a matrix of “pasts” suggested by archives – whether those archives are understood as historical or personal, material or conceptual, distantly social or presently embodied. To apprehend what is possible in our different futures, we need to have lively conversations with our different cultural pasts.

This is especially significant in Australia, where public discourse remains unreconciled about the ongoing consequences of European colonialism, and where Aboriginal cultural sovereignty is largely unrecognised in mainstream narratives. Eminent Waanyi author Alexis Wright links archival literatures to storytelling traditions and matrilineal relationships within her own family. She attributes to her grandmother’s influence the gifts of listening and imagination, identifying both as essential to literature: “She was our memory. She was what not forgetting was all about. It was through her that I learnt to imagine. Imagine what had been stolen from us [...] I learnt to imagine the things that were never explained to me – the haunting memories of the impossible and frightening silence of family members”. Creative writing for Alexis Wright is a way of reimagining historical silences in specifically Aboriginal cultural terms, joined indivisibly to ancestral places and maternal legacies. She figures writing as a place that “combines all stories, all realities from the ancient to the new”:

In all of my fictional writing I want to conjure up my homeland. I want to explore the gift of our true inheritances by disallowing memories of times past to sink into oblivion [...] All times are important to us. No time has ended and all worlds are possible [...] The world I try to inhabit in my writing is like looking at the ancestral tracks spanning our traditional country which, if I look at the land, combines all stories, all realities from the ancient to the new, and makes it one – like all the strands in a long rope.

This suggests powerful ways of thinking about the potential value of archives for creative practice. Both literally and more abstractly, an archive is a relational entity in which “[a]ll times are important”, “[n]o time has ended and all worlds are possible”. Archives are networks that trouble linear versions of time while expressing collective modes of being and knowing. Material archives imply a kind of ontological commons. They are shared repositories of culture, trans-historical miscellanies that can be personalised momentarily in individual visits and re-readings. They suggest a vital dialogue among different pasts and potential futures, sounded out in a continuing present of repeated readings.

Archives however can enfranchise versions of the “past” that are highly selective. Narungga author and artist Natalie Harkin warns that archives can uphold fictions of “linear modes of history-making which claim the ability to recover the past objectively, wholly and completely via the archive”. But their compositional logic always resists such completion, or makes it provisional at best. By speaking forward to infinite futures, archives upset the idea of an

“objective” historical record. In this, they offer a striking conceptual model for trans-temporal ways of being that “keep every story live”, to cite the words of Yankunytjatjara poet Ali Cobby Eckermann – a phrase that resonates with Alexis Wright’s reminder (above) that, within Aboriginal cultures, *all times are important and no time has ended*.

The term “archival poetics” is crucial to the ongoing work of Natalie Harkin. In an essay called “The Poetics of (Re)Mapping Archives: Memory in the Blood”, Harkin depicts a cluster of South Australian Aboriginal State Archives as instruments of “surveillance” that have anchored and reproduced colonialism across generations in Australia. Despite the evident pain of re-entering institutions that have helped to effect and catalogue the dispossession of Aboriginal people and cultures, Harkin finds within Australian colonial archives a web of resistant stories that can enable healing:

[W]e can choose to live beyond the genealogical scarring inflicted by colonisation. To do so, we need to be present in sites that disrupt colonial narratives beyond the old disciplines of knowledge production, and this includes the archives.

Harkin often collages directly quoted material from state archives into her poems and artworks. For the remainder of this talk, I want to consider Harkin’s indexical book of poems *Dirty Words* (2015), alongside several related texts. I hope to reconceptualise archives beyond their role as a material or figurative location or collection – I want, rather, to read *the archive* as an allegorical and poetic method, following cues from Harkin’s intertwined work in poetry, scholarship and visual arts.

Dirty Words employs an array of aesthetic and poetic techniques to invoke Aboriginal voices and experiences, many gleaned from archival research. One of Harkin’s core strategies is to unpick and rework narrative threads from “official” documents to recuperate or reinvent stories that often are made invisible, including those involving Aboriginal women and girls. Over half of the poems in *Dirty Words* begin with epigraphs sampled from documentary archives of Australian news media and parliamentary reports. Others look back to state colonial records and reportage, generating what Yugambeh writer Ellen van Neerven identifies as a form of “erasure poetry” in which political documents are metaphorically censored and reassembled – in Harkin’s case, to overturn the historic erasure of Aboriginal voices within colonial archives. Harkin deploys techniques of weaving and assemblage to break open an assortment of historical and contemporary archives, and to blend colonial fragments with reflections on current realities in ways that abandon “linear modes of history-making”, as she describes the logic of state archives. Flexible, open-ended poetic forms allow Harkin to move adeptly among past and present narratives as a way to “creatively re-map events and landscapes [and] piece together fragmented lives”.

In “The Poetics of (Re)Mapping Archives”, Harkin cites philosopher Jacques Derrida’s much-circulate description of “archive fever” as “a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement”. The condition of such a search for origins, writes feminist historian Caroline Steedman, “is its impossibility”. Archive fever is partly literal for Natalie Harkin. Her work in state archives was driven initially by a yearning to uncover

Responsibilities to “honour, remember and retell” the stories of “our grandmothers, great-grandmothers and their grandmothers before them” are a vital and recurrent theme in much contemporary writing by Aboriginal women. By weaving an archive of her grandmother’s stories into her poetry, Harkin builds new, counter-colonial “institutions of memory”, an idea she attributes to Jackie Huggins. “Literary practice and the arts offer a space to interrogate the racialised-archive and its role in forming national consciousness and identity,” writes Harkin. Her poetic architectures of remembering are place-based, shared and trans-temporal. “My intimate relationships and experiences of self are interdependent and nonlinear”, she reflects. “Collective memories, histories and connections to country extend beyond my immediate family and, through a kind of temporal rupturing, beyond the present”.

Alexis Wright uses similar language to describe her own grandmother’s role as a family matriarch who embodies and “combines all stories”. Perhaps, then, we might read bodies as archives in which “secrets” can be “pinned tucked hidden”, and in which stories might “flicker-float with the sun”. In her archival practices, Natalie Harkin refuses colonial silences and cultural forgetting, while unambiguously linking a decolonising project of writing to a poetics of matrilineal care – or what Wright describes as “the gift of our true inheritances”. Harkin’s poetry echoes Wright’s call for an Aboriginal cultural sovereignty inseparable from country and place, where no single narrative dominates, and in which “the stories of all the times of this country” might co-exist and be acknowledged justly – an archive past, present and yet to emerge – “like all the strands in a long rope”.

“让每个故事都生生不息”：娜塔莉·哈金（Natalie Harkin）的档案库诗学

文学档案库是什么？它们都设在哪里？为什么档案库仍旧如此深刻地影响作家的想象力？档案库存放、隐藏和保存什么故事？今天我想要谈的是一些当代澳大利亚诗人如何通过重新审视档案库提供的历史记录去建立与未来之间的联系。这些档案库或许是历史档案，或许是个人记忆，或许是保存史料的档案室，或许是储存观点和回忆的档案库，或许是与世隔绝，又或许是随处可见。为了想象我们各自的未来中可能会出现的情况，我们首先需要积极交流讨论我们不同的文化历史。

这一点在澳大利亚尤其重要，因为社会大众对于欧洲殖民主义导致的后果至今仍无共识，而澳大利亚原住民文化主权在主流叙述中也甚少获得公开承认。著名的万义族作家艾莉克思·莱特（Alexis Wright）将档案文学与她的家族中口述故事和母系传统联系起来。莱特表示，她的外婆是个敏於聆听、想象力丰富的人。这两个特质都是文学作品中不可或缺的元素；也正因如此，她的外婆能有如此强大的影响力。莱特说，“外婆就是我们的记忆体。她的记忆力实在惊人。她帮助我学会怎样想象。想象我们被人窃取了什么[...] 我学会想象从没有人向我解释的事——想象家人无法开口、他们那种令人害怕的沉默。”创意写作是艾莉克思·莱特用澳大利亚原住民独特的方式重新想象历史的沉默，这种想象方式是跟先祖的土地和母系文化的传承密不可分的。她将文学创作视为“结合自古至今所有故事、所有现实”的空间：

我在我写的所有故事中都注入我对故土的想象。我不让往事的记忆逐渐消逝，我希望通过想象去探索我们宝贵的文化传承真谛 [...] 历史上的任何一段时间对我们来说都非常重要。时间持续不断，无穷无尽，所有的世界都是可能的 [...] 我在我的作品中描述的世界就像观看祖先在这片故土上留下的痕迹。而当我仔细留意这片土地，我看出它结合了自古至今所有的故事、所有的现实；这片土地将一切都合而为一，如同一条多股合成的绳索。

这个观点主张档案库对创作具有巨大的潜在价值。从字面和抽象的角度来说，档案库是一个描述性实体，对其来说“历史上的任何一段时间 [...] 都非常重要。时间持续不断，无穷无尽，所有的世界都是可能的。”档案库是一种信息网络，它在颠覆线性时间观念的同时，提供了集体存在的经验和记忆。实际的档案库意味着一群人的共存共荣。实际的档案库是供大家使用的文化数据库，储存横跨历史的各种信息。每当人去到档案库再次提取和阅读档案时，都能在当下将提取的档案内容与自身想结合。档案库意味着过去的历史能与未来的事态发展进行重要的交流与对话，通过在现今反复提取和阅读历史记录而让历史与未来彼此交流与互动。

档案库能赋予精挑细选后的特定“历史片段”强大的力量。纳伦卡族作家与艺术家娜塔莉·哈金（Natalie Harkin）就提出了警告，她表示档案库能强化“线性历史的叙述，从而大大削弱人通过档案库以客观、完整、全面地发掘往事的能力。”但是档案库创作的逻辑与上述的情况并不兼容，往往仅能初步而非全面的发掘历史。档案库通过与无限的未来交流对话而颠覆了“客观”历史记录这个概念。档案库在这方面为跨越时间的生活方式提供了强大的概念模型，按照彦库尼贾贾拉族的诗人阿里·科比·艾克门（Ali Cobby Eckermann）的说法，这种跨越时间的生活方式能“让每个故事都生生不息”——他的这句话正好附和了艾莉克思·莱特上述的提醒；她说在澳大利亚原住民文化中，“历史上的任何一段时间都是非常重要的，”而且“时间持续不断，无穷无尽。”

“档案库诗学”对娜塔莉·哈金的创作来说非常关键。哈金在〈档案库（再）绘制的诗学：血的记忆〉一文中表示，西澳的州立原住民档案库成了“监控”的工具；数十年间，它将殖民主义巩固及散播至更多的澳大利亚人。身为原住民，要踏进曾经掠夺澳大利亚原住民文化的历史记录机构非常不容易，想到这点往往让原住民人士感到痛心疾首。但哈金发现在澳大利亚殖民历史档案库中，仍保存着能帮助原住民疗伤的感人反抗事迹记录：

我们可以选择不再让殖民主义加诸的历史伤痕影响我们的生活。如果要做到这点，我们就需要到颠覆传统殖民主义叙述的地方，包括档案库在内。

哈金经常将从州立档案室中取得的资料在她的诗和艺术作品中直接引述使用。在接下来的演讲中，我打算谈谈哈金指标性的诗集《污言秽语》(*Dirty Words*, 2015) 以及几篇相关的文章。我希望将档案库重新塑造成不仅是实际或比喻意义上的收藏地点，我还希望根据哈金的诗歌、学术观点和视觉艺术中的线索，将“档案库”理解为一种比喻和诗学创作的方式。

诗集《污言秽语》用了多种美学与诗学的技巧呈现原住民的心声与经历，其中许多原住民的心声与经历都是取自档案库的。哈金的核心策略之一是从“官方”文献中挑选、分析、重组某些叙述，进而恢复或重新塑造原本低调不起眼的故事，包括与原住民妇女和孩童有关的故事。诗集《污言秽语》中超过半数的诗的题词都截取自澳大利亚新闻媒体与议会报告等文献资料内容。诗集中的其他诗歌则取材自州殖民历史期间的官方报导及文献记录，以这种方式创作出宇甘培族作家爱伦·范妮芬 (Ellen van Neerven) 口中的“消痕诗歌”。在这种形式的诗歌中，政治文献在比喻的意义上来说被审查、删改和重组。哈金用“消痕诗歌”推翻了过去殖民历史资料库对原住民心声的抹煞与消音。哈金采用了穿插与重组等技巧，开启了各种历史和当代档案库。她表示，自己使用州立档案库背后的逻辑，是要将殖民时期的历史片段与当今现实情况的反思加以结合，以求突破和摆脱“线性的历史叙述方式”。灵活、开放的诗歌形态容许哈金轻易地穿梭在历史与先进的叙述之中，“以这种富于创意的方法重述历史事件、再次绘制土地、重新修复破碎的人生。

在〈档案库（再）绘制的诗学：血的记忆〉一文中，哈金引述哲学家雅克·德里达 (Jacques Derrida) 对“档案库狂热”做所的著名描述：“一种对档案库怀有强迫性、重复性、以及强烈渴望的感觉；一种无法压抑的欲望，一心想要追溯起源；希望回到最初最原始起点的强烈愿望与情怀。”女权主义历史家卡洛琳·史蒂曼 (Caroline Steedman) 表示，这种对最初起点的追求，其条件就是“这么做完全不可能。”档案库狂热对娜塔莉·哈金来说有一部分是实际的。最初推使她去州立档案库寻找资料的原因是希望找到跟她的祖母有关的记录。她的祖母跟无数澳大利亚原住民妇女一样，在19世纪和20世纪期间被当局强行跟自己的母亲和家人拆散，然后被安置在非原住民家庭帮佣。哈金在南澳Link-Up组织的协助下从南澳州政府原住民档案处以及南澳博物馆取得了她祖母的档案报告。她在〈档案库（再）绘制〉一文中回忆自己第一次去州立档案库的情况：“档案库内部监控极为严密，有如幽闭恐惧一般。我们需要透透气，需要喝口茶，于是打开了办公室的门想呼吸一下外面的空气。祖母的档案记录如此厚重，有关祖母个人的档案材料非常巨量，实在惊人。”政府对哈金的祖母日常生活中琐碎的事居然有如此详细的记录，这点让她感到非常震惊。然而，她在祖母的档案记录中搜寻祖母生活片段的同时，却也发现档案中有许多“空白、无记录的沉默。”她用玛琳·曼诺夫 (Marlene Manoff) 对档案库狂热的精辟描述解释自己去档案库查考时面临的矛盾，“我们对档案库材料紧抓不放，希望以此接触永远都无法真正知晓的过去。”

诗集《污言秽语》收录的诗〈家 佣〉是一个鲜明的例子。哈金在诗中重述殖民时期的文献记录，将她的祖母叙述为一个小女孩。哈金汇集了取自多个档案库和史料文献出处的内容，包括在1913年“南澳政府就原住民举行的皇家调查委员会”听证时的证词记录；《公报》

“在1924年成立的《澳洲妇女明镜杂志》中刊载的种族歧视文章；一份于1928年澳大利亚原住民进步协会出版的报告；政府对哈金的祖母保留的官方档案；以及较近期由碧加拉/比利谷巴居拉族作家洁琪·霍金斯（Jackie Huggins）在1994年首次出版的艺术作品《白围裙·黑手》。该项展览公开承认“失窃的一代”原住民妇女和女孩在那段期间被迫跟家人分离、之后又被迫成为佣人的经历。哈金在〈家 佣〉一诗中引述殖民地时期的文献采用了强烈的同化主义措辞：“强制性有系统地 按需要 安置她们”，“她们很懒惰”，“杜松子酒总不离手”。在这些权力齿轮和历史控制中，哈金往往在档案资料样本之间寻获了原住民反抗强权的零星记录。哈金的开放作风让她能聆听以及纪念原住民的奋斗与母系关系。哈金仔细分解诗的史料出处，这些内容于是在各个片段之间浮现出来：“父母 过多地插手干预”，“她很爱/ 自己的族人/ 满心期待/ 回家。”画底线的句子充满悲伤、亲情、与故土的感情，这些感情丰富的描述与诗中其他地方引述的殖民地时期的文献所提及的原住民人性形成了强烈的反差。哈金在〈家 佣〉结尾感人的歌词中将她的祖母想象成一个被窃的孩子：

挂起来 收起来 藏起来
他们窃窃私语 进入了阴暗处
随阳光闪烁
挂了起来
在微风中飘荡
一种规律的
悲哀

当代澳大利亚原住民女性的写作中经常出现一个重要主题：“尊崇、追忆、讲述”“我们的祖母、曾祖母以及她们的祖母”的故事；这些女性作家将其视为己任。通过在诗中穿插她的祖母的档案记录故事，哈金挑战殖民政权“官方版本的记忆”。她将这个想法归功于洁琪·霍金斯。哈金写道，“文学与艺术提供了一个平台，让人能仔细检视种族主义化档案库以及它对一个国家的身份定位起到的作用。”她的回忆诗学设计以地点为主，是共享和跨越时空的。她表示，“我跟我的至亲以及我自己的经验都是相互依赖和非线性的。集体的记忆、历史和与这篇土地的感情已经不再是我家人的事情而已了；通过时空的交错，这也不再是现今当下的事情而已。”

艾莉克思·莱特使用类似的语言描述她祖母身为女性族长在家中的角色，她本身已经体现了而且也“结合了所有的故事。”也许我们也能将个别的人视为档案库，“秘密”可以“挂起来收起来 藏起来”，故事可以在他们里面“随阳光闪烁。”哈金在她的档案库工作中拒绝接受殖民时期的沉默和对原住民文化的遗忘，她明确具体地将去殖民化写作计划与母系和母性的诗学彼此联系起来——或者说，正如艾莉克思·莱特自己说的，“我们宝贵的文化传承真谛”哈金的诗响应了莱特的呼吁，应该要有与这片土地和地方密不可分的澳大利亚原住民文化主权，在这里，没有任何叙述能支配其他，而且“这片土地所有历史阶段的所有故事”都能共生共荣，并得到应得的认可——档案库中的过去、现在、未知的未来“如同一条多股合成的绳索。”