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That Seed Sets Time Ablaze: Vegetal Temporality in Judith Wright's Botanical Poetics

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Abstract: The time of vegetal life itself—denoted as *plant-time* in this article, following the work of Michael Marder—is essential to human-plant relations. Conceptualized as a multi-dimensional plexity, vegetal temporality embodies the endemic land-based seasons, rhythms, cycles, and timescales of flora in conjunction with human patterns. The contemporary poet Judith Wright invoked a time-space continuum throughout her writing as a means to convey the primordial character of Australian plants while resisting the imposition of a colonialist schema of time. Wright's bold textualization of vegetal temporality embodies her commitment to fostering botanical ethics and locally-grounded activism on behalf of Aboriginal people and the Australian environment.

Among green shades and flowering ghosts,
the remembrances of love,
inventions of the holy unwearying seed,
bright falling fountains made of time, that bore
through time the holy seed that knew no time—
—from “The Two Fires” (Wright 1992, 20, ll. 1–5)

INTRODUCTION

A vital dimension of human-plant relations is *plant-time*—a term I will use, following Michael Marder (2013, 95), to denote the temporalities that govern vegetal life and lives, differentiating plant being from its human and zoo-

logical counterparts. As Marder observes, “vegetal time passes in qualitatively distinct modes and rhythms” (2013, 107), resisting measurement in anthropo-equivalent terms. In the light of the temporal otherness of vegetality, humans strive to imagine plants across vast biopaleontological scales (for instance, as living Gondwanan relics or fossils), through myriad events that corporeally trace the rhythms of our co-constituted lives (seeding, flowering, fruiting), and with the aid of technological interventions (consider, as a prime example, time-lapse photography) that supply lenses into their time topographies. Rather than a monolithic singularity—sequentially proceeding from a distant past to a perceptible present to an unknown future—time can be conceptualized as an interwoven, multidimensional *plexity* (Wood 2003). Vegetal being punctuates time’s passage, instantiating temporality through material-semiotic processes of bringing forth and dying back. Yet, plants also have their own temporal modality: plant-time.

Continually more, globalized society relies on adopting, scripting, appropriating, and engineering vegetal time in service to Enlightenment-fashioned ideals of progress. From greenhouse cultivation and quick-ripening hormones to genetically modified seeds and biotech crops, human technologies alter plant temporalities in a physical manner, reducing the place-specific complexity of vegetal time to a global homogeneity. In contrast, a more nuanced and dialogical approach to plant-time—one which eschews impulses toward anthropocentrism and metaphorization—would seek the fruits of attending critically to “the time of the plants themselves” (Marder 2013, 94). In further distinguishing between the conscription of vegetal temporality for human ends and the sympathetic embracing of plant-time as an multi-faceted plexity, I look toward the botanical inclinations of Australian writer and activist Judith Wright (1915–2000). Wright is arguably the most widely-read Australian poet of the twentieth century (Mead 2006). To be sure, critics have observed Wright’s preoccupation with time (Griffiths 2006; Harrison 2000; McMahon 2007). Yet, notwithstanding her recognition as an ecological writer (Zeller 2000; Hutchings 2007; Brady 2007) and her pronounced influence on the history of Australian environmental activism (Mulligan and Hill 2001, 73), Wright’s identification with plants and poeticization of Queensland flora have received surprisingly nominal attention. As a consequence, this discussion centers on plant-time in Wright’s *time-plexity* (Siewers 2011, 109) as well as in her envisaging of the Queensland environment through a framework steeped in the temporal nuances of plants. I will demonstrate that the time-space continuum of Wright’s plexity encodes the particularities of the Australian landmass. On the whole, Wright’s botanical poems evoke the primordial character of Australian species—some of the oldest on earth (Crisp and Cook 2013). As evident in her poetry, Wright’s time-plexity emerges in moments of encounter with Queensland flora and in a manner distinct from human, animal, and geological timescales. For the poet,

vegetal temporality is a lyrical stimulus for countering the marginalization of endemic forms of time—including the time of Indigenous seasons—in the Australian cultural landscape.

VEGETAL TEMPORALITY: FROM CHRONOS TO KAIROS

In response to the “elusive time of plants” (Marder 2013, 98)—their propensity to defy ready alignment with human timescales—societies from diverse traditions around the world have endeavored to arrest or reformulate plant-time (see, for example, Cumo 2016, 57–71). Through technological, chemical, horticultural, and other interventions, people manipulate the chthonic rhythms of vegetal nature, rendering plant-time more decipherable and serviceable to consciousness. An illustrative example is time-lapse photography, characteristically focusing on laboratory- or greenhouse-grown flowering plants since its inception in the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries (Williamson 2015, 74–80). As plant physiologist Anthony Trewavas comments, “time-lapse photography has enabled the speeding up of plant movements, bringing them into a time frame familiar to us” (2014, 13). The nature documentaries *The Private Life of Plants* (BBC 1995), *Plants* (BBC 2009), and *Kingdom of Plants* (Williams 2012), narrated by David Attenborough, epitomize the contemporary use of three-dimensional time-lapse film techniques for transliterating plant temporality to the human lexicon. Condensing the stages of flowering into one seamless filmic sweep fosters a sense of enthrallment with widely distributed temporal incidents in the plant world, which would otherwise take days, months, or even years to unfold fully to perception. In the opening moments of *Plants*, Attenborough historicizes the botanical kingdom in dramatic terms, as possessing a “family tree stretching back nearly half a billion years” (BBC 2009). A high-profile example, the famously long-lived bristlecone pine (*Pinus longaeva*) has endured “thousands of years to reach this size” and has witnessed “empires rise and fall—kings, queens, and presidents come and go” (BBC 2009).

The use of time-lapse in Attenborough's documentaries represents an evolution of the historical reformulation of plant-time through imagistic technologies. In the mid to late nineteenth century, Charles and Francis Darwin employed optical instruments to visualize the stages in the life of a plant (Williamson 2015, 78). In the 1890s, time-lapse studies of plant growth were carried out in Paris at the Marey Institute with a purpose-built camera designed by chronophotography innovator Lucien Bull (Williamson 2015, 77–78). Later, Percy Smith's eight-minute-long *The Birth of a Flower* (1910) became one of the earliest films to coalesce the opening of hyacinth, crocus, snowdrop, narcissi, anemone, and other commonplace blossoms into short time-lapsed cinematographic segments (Dixon 2011, 32–33). Visually poetic and musically accompanied, the footage incorporates minimalistic backgrounds to avoid distracting

viewers from the operative sequentiality of blooming, removed from its organic, ecological context. Yet the reductionistic emphasis on reproductive anatomies evident in *The Birth of a Flower* reinscribes Londa Schiebinger's assertion that the "scientization" of botany coincided with the ardent "sexualization" of plants" enshrined in the Linnaean prioritization of stigmas, styles, ovaries, and other flowering parts (Schiebinger 2004, 12). What is more, the films of Smith and Attenborough replicate the *anth(r)ocentric* de-contextualization of the flower pictorialized on an empty background, which is also characteristic of historical permutations of botanical art (Saunders 1995, 15). Hence, transposing plant-time from a living biological milieu to a two- or three-dimensional representation has required the reconfiguration of vegetal embodiment in space and, in particular, the isolation of the flower from both its habitat and the wholeness of its own pulsating body.

In impressing *chronos* upon vegetal rhythms, such visualizations appear to dismiss the potentialities of plant-time, approaching it instead as a technical problem to be overcome. However, to engage eco-poetically and dialogically with plant-time, in a manner that resists the totalizing effects of human constructions—as I will argue Judith Wright does in her poetry—is to interface with the potentiality of heterogeneous temporal modes. In Aristotelian thought, two terms discern between distinct yet imbricated facets of time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* reflects a conception of time as a grid, as a measurable phenomenon with a quantifiable duration, rate, length, or age (Smith 1969, 1). Theorized as *chronos*, time encompasses and—even more—corresponds ordinally to the sequential procession of day to night, spring to winter, youth to old age, or flower to seed, making possible the logos of temporal designations such as *before* and *after*. In contrast, *kairos* foregrounds the qualitative, non-sequential character of time and the impregnation of events with meaning and *timeliness*. *Kairos* sensibility is latent in the expression *the right time*, the gerund *timing*, and the descriptors *too soon* and *too late*. Michael Northcott interprets *kairos* as special "moments in time which herald great or sudden change, or the need for change, in the flow of events and the passage of history" (2015, 107). As *kairos*, time signifies evental knots or constellations, the aptness of seasonal occurrences, or the rarity of opportunities that might not present again to everyday perception (Smith 1969, 1). Nonetheless, despite their differing orientations, *chronos* and *kairos* are neither utterly distinct nor diametrically polarized. Just as quantitative time does not belong solely to the domain of the (objective) physical sciences, qualitative time is not exclusive to the (subjective) narratives of the humanities and creative arts. Instead, "*kairos* presupposes *chronos*" (Smith 1969, 2).

As a result of this way of thinking, botanical events cannot be approached reductionistically in terms of one mode of time or the other, but rather as the intermixing of temporalities. By way of their evolutionary constitution, some

plant species disrupt the *chronos* of annualism and biennialism for the *kairos* of unscripted perennialism at the far margins of human awareness. An illustrative case is the endangered South American bromeliad, *Puya raimondii*, known as the Queen of the Andes, which typically blooms after an 80 to 100-year life cycle. The bromeliad yields a spectacular twelve- to eighteen-foot spike composed of fifteen to twenty thousand flowers (Sgorbati et al. 2004, 222). In 1990, a puya on show at the University of California Botanical Garden astonished scientists and the public by blossoming a *mere* twenty-four years after being planted as a seed. The precocious puya became the first documented member of its species to flower in a cultivated setting outside of its high-elevation native habitat in Bolivia and Peru (Targeted News Service 2014). The puya flowering instantiates vegetal *kairos* in both its ecocultural rarity (as an event that might not be repeated in our lifetimes) and its constellatory alignment (as a *timely* convergence of temporally distributed factors, from pollination and freedom from predation to favorable climatic conditions and regular horticultural care). As a relatively unforeseen floristic happening, the puya bloom eschewed characterization vis-à-vis *chronos* ordinality. On the contrary, the puya demonstrates *kairos* inhering within *chronos* (and vice versa) in the interdigitation of human and vegetal temporal resonances.

ABORIGINAL DREAMINGS: PLANTS, TIME, SEASONS, AND BIOCULTURAL RHYTHMS

To appreciate the implications of Wright's engagement with plant-time, it is essential to consider Australian influences—particularly Aboriginal time and endemic models of seasonality—on her poetry. Her rendering of plant-time as plexity—as a confluence of myriad, widely dispersed factors—embodies Aboriginal time as one of the foundations of her poetics. The following discussion, however, does not set out to align Aboriginal time neatly with plant-time but rather to recognize the intricate overlays and intersections between the temporalities of plants and people in the Australian context. Bioregional configurations of seasons—the containers of time—have persisted for more than 50,000 years in parts of Oceania (Clarke 2009; Entwisle 2014; Prober, O'Connor, and Walsh 2011; Rolston 1905). At the point of European settlement in 1788, an estimated 315,000 people from 250 nations occupied Australia (Entwisle 2014). Each group retained a distinct language as well as place-specific conceptions of time and the seasons. Wright would have been acquainted with Indigenous perspectives on time—to some extent—through her long-term friendship with poet-activist Oodgeroo Noonuccal, whose father Edward Ruska was of the Noonuccal group of the Quandamooka people of North Stradbroke Island, Queensland (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 93–94). In traditional Aboriginal world-views, vegetal lives can neither be separated from human lives and societies nor

relegated exclusively to the domains of science (botany) or aesthetics (art). In fact, plants and people have nurtured one another synergetically over immense time-scales through sustainable, land-based practices. For instance, fire-stick farming makes use of mosaic patterns of low-intensity burning to change the composition of the vegetation judiciously for the benefit of plants, animals, humans, and other beings (Hallam 1975; Wilman 2015). For this reason, Aboriginal time reflects the endemic rhythms of land not as a commodity but as *country*—a multi-dimensional signifier encompassing “people, animals, plants, Dreamings; underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water, and air,” as well as the sea, shoreline, and sky (Rose 1996, 8).

Mike Donaldson (1996) regards the temporal order of Aboriginal societies as premised upon an integrative conception of time spanning country, spirit, cosmic transactions, and supernatural beings. More specifically, his position counters the spurious assertion that Indigenous modes of time—enciphering the particularities of ecological regions, including the rhythms of plants—ceased with British colonization and the introduction of the mathematical, universalized schema of time still dominating capitalist societies today. Over the course of an astonishing 2500 generations, the Dreamtime (or Dreaming) of Aboriginal culture has sustained relations between spiritual Ancestors—often in the form of animals, birds, reptiles, and plants—and living communities of people (Clarke 2009, 80). The Dreaming reflects a metaphysics of wholeness contingent upon the cadences of all that exists (relations and communities) and all that has existed (predecessors and ancestral beings). At the risk of generalization, given the diversity of cultural groups within Australia, Aboriginal consciousness can be said to formulate time vis-à-vis seasonal cyclicity, human movements, and ancestral beings. By no measure eradicated from the Australian landmass, this primordial expression of time flourishes from region to region—from coast to coast—as a form of “counter-hegemonic” temporality (Donaldson 1996, 203). The counter-hegemonic facet of Aboriginal time, articulated by Donaldson, intersects with Michael Marder’s construal of vegetal time as a “locus of resistance” (2013, 103) and plant-time itself as a plexity of elements distributed across cultures, worldviews, geographies, epochs, and species. Correspondingly, in his theorization of Aboriginal temporality, Warren TenHouten (2005, x) avers that the distinction between linear (chronos) and cyclical (kairos) time is instructive, to be sure, but there are subjective encounters with “primordial temporality” that resist both categories. In TenHouten’s analysis, these non-categorical modes of time consciousness engage “episodic-futural” temporality propelled by what he calls the “knife-edged present” and the “immediate-participatory” dimension of experience (2005, x).

The prevailing Western perspective sees time as generally linear in character and calculable precisely as units of days, years, centuries, and millennia. In scientific thought, time commenced at the Big Bang—an estimated fourteen

billion years ago—and is expected to progress to a terminal point somewhere in the future. As a consequence, scientific discourse refers to climatic, geological, and evolutionary forms of time, depending on the scales and elements in question. In distinction to linear time, for the Nyoongar, the Aboriginal people of the southwest corner of Western Australia, “the past is always present” in that the spiritual resonances of the past pervade all temporal possibilities (Robertson et al. 2016, 43). The anthropologist William Stanner (1979) used the intriguing neologism “everywhen” to denote the omnipresence of the past and inherence of the future within the Dreaming. Indeed, the past and future are neither distant concepts nor abstract denominations, but latent within the present, suggesting parallels between Aboriginal time and a *kairos*-inflected outlook. Moreover, in the Nyoongar language, there is no equivalent word for *time* that captures the abstract connotations of the English signifier (Robertson, Stasiuk, Nannup, and Hopper 2016, 43). What is more, Stanner (1979) described the perception of time among hunter-gatherer groups as cyclical and lacking abstraction. Instead, in traditional life, a sense of time arises in correspondence to the movements of the sun, moon, tides, animals, reptiles, insects, plants, humans, and the six seasons, or, in other words, via the “immediate-participatory” aspects of experience (TenHouten 2005, x).

Neither displaced nor expunged by comparatively recent colonialist constructions of time, Aboriginal temporality marks an exceptional capacity to evolve as part of an Australian plexity intergrading scientific precepts with traditional knowledge. For instance, the *Nyetting*—referring to “the cold, dark time” and “ancestral times” in Nyoongar—bears a likeness to the Ice Age of the early Permian geologic period of about 300 million years ago (Robertson et al. 2016, 43). Arguably the oldest extant temporal sense of humanity, the time of Aboriginal people, exemplified in this instance by Nyoongar culture, is a time-plexity coalescing a broad range of ancient elements—ecological, seasonal, cultural, ancestral, bodily—with the dominant time paradigms of scientific thought and capitalist societies. Crucially for my focus on Wright's poetics, Nyoongar temporality—thriving in areas of country or *boodja* today—dialogically traces the time(s) of native plants. Decisions, movements, ceremonies, festivals, gatherings, and the seasons themselves (as fluid demarcations of time) are determined in correspondence to, and in conversation with, the *timeliness*—the “knife-edged present” (TenHouten 2005, x)—of the flowering, fruiting, seeding, root-bearing, and other episodes related to flora and botanical communities (Rusack et al. 2011). For the Quandamooka, the Aboriginal people of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) where Wright collaborated in her later years with Oodgeroo Noonuccal on projects of environmental and social activism, time encompasses and integrates “knowledge of sky, land and waters, plants, animals and people, past and present. Shared memories construct *con-*



tinuities between past, present, and future, and between the specific and general [emphasis added]" (Harward-Nalder and Grenfell 2011, 496).

Seasonal calendars—otherwise known in the anthropological literature as Aboriginal, indigenous, bush, land-based, or endemic calendars—draw on environmental cues, rather than fixed numerical positions, to designate changes within and between seasons, and to encode the progression of time (Clarke 2009, 94). According to the Australian ethnobotanist Philip Clarke (2009, 95), in traditional Aboriginal societies, “different seasons are identified or signalled by distinct animal, vegetation, mythic and totemic associations, climatic events and patterns, and varied by intermittent landscape firings and floods.” Across Australia, land-based seasons vary—according to cultural groups and natural environments—from two to seven per annual cycle. Most indigenous calendars have more than four divisions, but some have only two or three seasons, the timing and length of which fluctuate annually. For example, the Wik people of western Cape York Peninsula in northern Queensland divide the year into five seasons, each related to food procurement and necessitating particular community responsibilities (Mémott 2007, 158). The Nyoongar of Western Australia recognize the six seasons of *birak*, *bunuru*, *djeran*, *makuru*, *djilba*, and *kambarang*, each designated by an ever-shifting mosaic of ecological and climatic factors. For example, the luminous golden blossom of the endemic West Australian Christmas Tree (*Nuytsia floribunda*) visually signals the beginning of the hot and dry first summer, or *birak* (Ryan 2015).

Furthermore, Clarke (2011, 55) notes the significance of “calendar trees” and “calendar plants”—species that herald the passage of time and the cyclical progression of the endemic seasons by virtue of their flowering, fruiting, and other ecological transactions. The *timeliness* of the plants, accordingly, becomes *the right time* for activities. Particular plants offer bush calendars for monitoring seasonal progressions and for portending cultural transactions. In the early 1900s, the Bigambul people of the Northern Tablelands and Border Rivers area, straddling the boundary between northern New South Wales and southern Queensland, were observed to reckon the seasons according to the flowering of trees; for instance, the Bigambul season *yerrabinda* is named after *yerra*, a tree species that blooms during September (Clarke 2009, 99). In the Brisbane area of southern Queensland, waterlily blossoms signify the optimum time for harvesting river mussels, while the ripening of wild passionfruit correlates to the highest amount of nourishing adipose in carpet snakes (Clarke 2011, 55). For the Lardil people of the Gulf of Carpentaria, between Queensland and the Northern Territory, the screw palm (*Pandanus spiralis*) is a calendar tree marking seasonal cadences through its ripened red nuts that coincide with the first influx of *dulnhu* fish (Clarke 2011, 55). Furthermore, among the Kuku Yalanji people of the rainforests of Far North Queensland, the ripening of black beans (*Castanospermum australe*) points to the appropriate time for catching wild fowl

(Clarke 2011, 55). Aboriginal seasonalities exemplify Marder's contention that "living at the rhythm of the seasons means respecting the time of plants and, along with them, successively opening oneself to various elements" (Irigaray and Marder 2016, 144).

Influenced by the endemic seasons—each appropriate to its respective cultural group and ecological region—botanist Tim Entwistle (2014) has proposed a decolonization of Australian time through a more botanically-nuanced, five-season model. The seasons of *sprinter*, *sprummer*, summer, autumn, and winter would replace the colonial four-season paradigm and the codification of time it has enforced since British settlement. Rather than based upon fixed numerical reference points, Entwistle's schema encodes the behaviors of both native and introduced plants over the course of the year; in other words, he seeks to reformulate seasonality—the container of time—vis-à-vis the lesser scripted time(s) of flora. Spanning August and September, *sprinter* would coincide with the proliferation of flowers, especially those of wattles (*Acacia* spp.), throughout Australia. A short season, *sprummer*, would intervene between *sprinter* and summer, indicating weather variability and a second wave of blooms. Between December and March, Entwistle's summer would correspond to the emergence of hot-weather plants. The cooling temperatures of autumn—approximately April to May—would involve a different set of taxa, including camellias and certain orchids, blossoming after the intensely hot and dry summer. Finally, a winter of two months would signify the physiological changes plants undergo during cold weather in preparation for *sprinter* and another annual cycle (Entwistle 2014, 43–46).

ACROSS TIME-SCALES: VEGETAL TEMPORALITY AS PLEXITY

In Western cultural traditions outside of the Australian context, there are myriad temporalities of relevance to characterizing plant life and botanical environments as time-plex. Mara Miller refers to scientific, objective, subjective, and historical modes of time, especially applicable to cultivated garden landscapes (2010, 178). Codified by scientists and social institutions, scientific time according to Miller is largely objective, directional, and uniform (2010, 180). With its obvious adherence to a *chronos* orientation, scientific time is essential to quantifying, for instance, the days until germination or the minimum number of sunlight hours necessary for fruiting. In a similar way, objective time is the shared experience of time within a family, community, or social group, structured by regularly occurring events, such as holidays or rituals. Objective time overlaps with historical time, or time as demarcated by historical occurrences. In contrast to these modes, subjective time refers to "time as it *feels* to us [*italics in original*]" and varies between individuals, unlike objective time (Miller 2010, 182).

Significantly, these different temporal modes intersect with the time of vegetal nature in a garden setting through what Miller terms the “internal calendar” of plants, echoing the Aboriginal notion of a calendar tree (2010, 186). Alfred Siewers denotes the temporal intersection and knottiness adumbrated in Miller’s typology through the neologism *time-plexity*, denoting the entwining of *chronos* and *kairos*—of human and other-than-human modes of time. Time-plexity marks the co-passage of beings through instances of timing, timeliness, and timelessness, toward the potential for non-time (Siewers 2011, 109). In his analysis of non-Augustinian patristics (the study of the works of early Christian theologians), Siewers identifies the prevalence of at least four temporal modes posited by early authors: human, non-human natural, created eternal (that of angels), and the non-time of uncreated natural divinities (Siewers 2011, 109). Building on philosopher Evan Thompson’s research into neurophenomenology, Siewers goes on to suggest that eco-poetic narratives underscore the intricacies of time-plex human encounters with nature by upsetting reductionistic concepts of time and predeterminations of its relationship to space.

In consonance with Smith’s claim that “*kairos* presupposes *chronos*,” Siewers asserts that the intellect’s disposition toward ordering perception quantitatively is always already counterbalanced by multi-dimensional entwinings of *chronos* *logos* and *kairos* indeterminacy (Siewers 2009, 53–54). Siewer’s conceptualization of time also extends phenomenologist David Wood’s articulation of the plexity—or interwoven nature—of temporal scales that he identifies as foundational to human experience (2003, 213–217). A central feature of phenomenology, in dynamic interconnection to space, time makes possible the articulation of relationalities between beings and “a connectedness that transcends the moment” (Wood 2003, 213). To this end, Wood outlines four strands of an eco-phenomenology, also of relevance to theorizing Wright’s poeticization of the lives of plants: the invisibility of time; the celebration of finitude; the synchronization of rhythms; and the disruption and dissolution of temporal horizons (2003, 214). Wood begins by examining what he understands as the invisible features of time as a continuum. This first aspect of time-plexity involves engagement with time based on a recognition of “the true temporal extendedness of the object” and in which a “moment [of perception] would capture something importantly nonmomentary” (Wood 2003, 214). Presenting an arboreal example of engagement, Wood further elaborates that “the life of the tree, the living tree, the tree of which we glimpse only a limb here, a trunk there, or views from various angles, this temporally extended persisting, growing tree, is *invisible* [emphasis added]” (2003, 214–15). Indeed, apprehending “the living tree” as a manifestation of the invisible within the visible necessitates “synthetic” attention that coalesces temporally distributed events within a perceptual instance, or whole (Wood 2003, 215). To appreciate time as a wellspring of connectedness and transformation is to orient consciousness

to the potentialities inhering within the unseen: "There is an invisible in the heart of the visible to the extent that the essential temporal articulatedness of things is not itself obviously presented in their immediate temporary appearance" (Wood 2003, 215).

The second aspect of Wood's model of time-plexity, the celebration of finitude, involves the heightening of the infinite within the finite—a mode of time in which a "connectedness between individual events generates a kind of depth to every moment through which its very singularity is heightened" (Wood 2003, 216). The third aspect, the synchronization of rhythms, underscores the primacy of relational fields in which temporal pulses "interact, interpenetrate, interfere with one another, become locally coordinated and so on" (Wood 2003, 216). Here, the periodicity of time and harmonization of the rhythms of beings, organisms, elements, and things confer advantages to ecosystems and their human and more-than-human constituents. Indeed, the coordination of temporal events has been an influential factor in the evolution of organisms through dynamic states of equilibrium, including exchanges of mutualism and antagonism. As an example of rhythmic synchronization, the biotic interactions of the cycad are illustrative. Cycads are prominent vegetal subjects in Judith Wright's poetics and among the oldest and most threatened plants on earth. Having existed for more than 280 million years, before the emergence of dinosaurs, cycads attained their greatest diversity and extent during the Triassic and Jurassic periods. They are now regarded by naturalists and popular commentators as living, prehistoric fossils. Over vast scales of time, cycads and myriad insect species—especially microlepidoptera or micromoths—have developed elaborate pollination mutualisms moderated by the production of cycad sugars (Marler and Lindström 2015).

While ensuring the longevity of plant and insect species in coordinated states, the harmonization of rhythms between cycads and pollinators, conversely, amplifies the danger of co-extinctions in the present Anthropocene scenario of accelerated biodiversity loss (Marler and Lindström 2015, 3). As a departure from this kind of synchronization, Wood's fourth aspect—the dissolution of temporal wholeness—points to discontinuities and upsurges in time, beyond the invisible within the visible or temporal alignments. As *physis* (the Greek term for nature, epitomized in the particular movements of vegetal life upward, downward, inward, outward), time is an irruptive phenomenon in which *any* conception of it eschews and confounds *any* conception that *can* be postulated (Wood 2003, 217). Although the time-plexities of natural phenomena—including plants—remain shielded largely from ordinary perception (*elusive*, in Marder's terms), eco-phenomenological attention can disclose the existence of heterogeneous temporalities, such as *chronos*, *kairos*, objective, subjective, scientific, historical, and plant modes of time.

For Marder, reformulating the Western metaphysical tradition with regard to vegetal life, botanical events mark the passage of time and the temporalization of human awareness through material-semiotic processes of “germination and growth, flourishing, dehiscence, blossoming, coming to fruition, and finally fermentation and decay” (Marder 2013, 94). However, a conception of time as announced by vegetal events—of plant being in service to human temporality—risks dismissing “the time of the plants themselves,” defined as the endemic seasons, rhythms, pulsations, and scales of vegetal nature (Marder 2013, 94). In his analysis of the philosophies of Aristotle, Heidegger, and Hegel, Marder identifies three interpretations of plant-time, which he calls “vegetal hetero-temporality” (95), the “‘bad infinity’ of growth” (107), and the “iterability of expression” (112). In particular, hetero-temporality aligns with Wood’s eco-phenomenological tenet of the invisible within the visible. Widely disseminated loci of time(s) inhere within the present/presence of vegetal materiality: “a mature plant, which has not yet developed by means of the qualitative articulations of growth, is the seed as its own not yet actualized potentiality [emphasis in original]” (Marder 2013, 97). In his discussion of the first interpretation, Marder echoes Wood’s invocation of invisibility and visibility but in parallel terms of potentiality and actualization so as to underscore the “futural modality of time (the not-yet) that resides in every present instant” (Marder 2013, 99). In distinction to rhythmic synchronization among beings, disjunctions and misalignments between the pulsations of plants and humans resonate with Wood’s fourth principle of the dissolution of temporal wholeness. As stated by Marder, plant resonances are “often imperceptible to a conscious human observer” because divergent temporalities always govern different beings occupying one physical space (2013, 103).

As a consequence of the variations between the cadences of plants, animals, humans, and others, a temporal split—such as seeing a puya bromeliad again for the first time after a period spent away—perceptually accentuates the progression of time traced in the growth or decay of leaves, flowers, stems, trunks, roots, and so on. Accordingly, vegetal hetero-temporality positions the plant corpus centrally as “a loose alliance of multiple temporalities of growth” (Marder 2013, 104). Whereas a portion of a plant might flower and sprout toward greater self-actualization reflected in its spatial increase, another part might equally dehisce or rot, returning that segment of the plant body to an invisibility impregnated with re-emergent potential the following season or year. Although in consonance with the patterns and timings of certain genera, angiosperms will invariably flower, fruit, and seed; rather than a loss, the absence of a flower or other property entails a transfer of energy, resources, and movement from vital actualization to latent potentiality governed by seasonal return. Vegetal modularity—the distinct capacity of a plant to shed parts of its body without dying or diminishing in overall wellbeing—reflects the inter-

braided modes of materialization and withdrawal that inhere within moments of plant being.

Marder's second facet of plant-time—the “bad infinity” of growth—evokes the potentially limitless processions of spatial increase, efflorescence, seeding, and so on peculiar to vegetal life (2013, 107). In Marder's reading of Western metaphysics, plant fecundity has been conceptualized as monstrous, immoderate, indeterminate, and lacking both appropriate limits, as well as a precise beginning and end (2013, 107–111). The reckless limitlessness of growth entails an expulsion of plant life from temporal convention, as vegetal being is figured as wholly consumed with self-nourishment and unchecked proliferation. By implication, a monstrous plant does not have the nuanced mode of being necessary for intelligent perception. Marder asserts that this second dimension of plant-time underlies, for instance, the treatment of plants as inexhaustible reserves. The third and final dimension—the iterability of expression—underscores how “the cyclical time of nature (the changing of the seasons, the alternation of day and night) intersects with the cycles of vegetal growth (the budding and shedding of foliage, the opening and closing of a flower)” (Marder 2013, 113). Plant temporality affirms cycles and repetition as the essential features of all pulsating life, epitomized in Marder's view by the leaf as “an ephemeral register for the inscription of vegetal time as the time of repetition” (2013, 114).

In conjunction with theorizations of *chronos*, *kairos*, and other temporal modes, the phyto-phenomenological frameworks of Marder, Wood, and Siewers underscore the plexity of the time of the plants themselves. A term leveraged from cognitive linguistics, *plexity* denotes a conceptual category based upon states of articulation between multiple elements (Evans and Green 2006, 519). Poeticizing the “elusive time of plants” (Marder 2013, 98)—as Wright does—requires orienting the writer lyrically across other-than-human timescales. One becomes enmeshed in the fabric of vegetal timescales and hetero-temporality. An expansion of imagination takes shape at the intersection of time elements. Glimpses arise of the shifting, poetic phenomena of vegetal presencing—as the invisible imbricated within the visible, as actualization latent within potentiality, and of flower within seed. Wright's work eschews the reduction of plant-time and resists the imposition of human time figuration. Instead, she strives through her ecopoetics to attend responsively and dialogically to the time of plants—to render time as a function of her commitment to environmental consciousness, ethics, activism, and stewardship. For this reason, the relationship between time and plants in Wright's poetics illustrates Marder's interpretation of vegetal time as a “locus of resistance” (2013, 103) that counters the capitalist paradigm and rejects the conversion of plant otherness into sameness.

WRIGHT'S PREOCCUPATION WITH TIME: AUSTRALIAN CONTEXTS

Well before Timothy Entwistle's instigation of a new Australian seasonal regime based upon flowering cycles, Wright had already spurred a parallel process of time decolonization. By virtue of its lyrical insinuations of time-plexity and vegetal hetero-temporality, Wright's vegetally-attentive verse counters the prevalence of mathematized, capitalistic time as an approach to understanding and appropriating vegetal nature. In its place, the poet embraces time as a plexity constituted—to a considerable extent—by the temporal modes of Aboriginal life in concurrence with the time of Australian plants themselves. Poems, such as "The Cycads" (Wright 1963, 37), narrate the remarkable evolutionary longevity of Australian taxa, demanding of the writer a compositional purview that transcends the relatively contracted time-scale from which human consciousness normally operates. Indeed, many early naturalists considered Australia "a habitat for living fossils," as a domain where species, which went extinct elsewhere in the world long ago, could persist because of the remoteness and harsh climate of the country (Stafford 1990, 81). This primordial nature of vegetal life—notably the widespread Proteaceae (protea) family, including banksias, dryandras, hakeas, and grevilleas—figures appreciably into Wright's eco-poetics and her conception of time.

The age of Australian plants can be construed doubly in terms of individuals and genera. For instance, Wollemi pine (*Wollemi nobilis*) specimens are known to have lifespans from 500 to 1000 years. The origin of the species itself is estimated to lie in the Late Cretaceous (Turonian) age, 89.8 to 93.9 million years ago (see, for example, Woodford 2012). In 1994, the highly-publicized discovery of the first Wollemi pine, merely 100 miles from Sydney, provided the third known, extant genus (in addition to *Araucaria* spp. and *Agathis* spp.) of the prehistoric Araucariaceae family of conifers (Macphailm and Carpenter 2014). Citing as illustrative the Araucariaceae (araucaria, from the Triassic period, 252 to 201 million years ago, or Ma) and Cycadaceae (cycads, from the Permian, 298 to 252 Ma) families, nineteenth-century British botanist Richard Owen argued that Australia reveals "a picture of an ancient condition of the earth's surface, which has been superseded in our hemisphere by other strata and a higher type of Mammalian organization" (Owen 1846, 69). The Gondwanan origin of native species is the outcome of complex long-term interactions between climate, soils, symbionts, and the isolation of the Australian landmass (Crisp and Cook 2013, 304).

Wright's time-plexity enfolds Aboriginal temporalities and the time of plants, accentuating the primeval character and particular biotic rhythms of individuals and species through the seasons. Critic Elizabeth McMahon (2007) intimates this lyrically-mediated enfolding of time in her analysis of "the temporality of composition" in Wright's work. For McMahon (2007, 15), time is a

theme, preoccupation, and problematic with which Wright engages throughout her career. Her “temporal overlaying or patterning” intermeshes heterogeneous modes of time. Elements of historical time, the mythologized (chronos) time of nationhood, the cyclical (kairos) time of nature, and the experiential time of human generations, for instance, graft with the knife-edged immediacy of the time-conscious writer’s compositional present (2007, 16–17). McMahon’s articulation of temporal plurality—of time as constituted by manifold cultural and environmental aspects—evokes the idea of time-plexity as the coalescing of broadly dispersed elements typically held as oppositional and irreconcilable. Invoking Julia Kristeva’s (1986) three temporalities model of cyclical, monumental, and historical time, McMahon concludes that Wright’s poetic corpus is “full of the present, full of the time of composition rather than [a sense of] realised completeness” (2007, 22). As a time-plexity—a splicing of human and other-than-human temporal elements—her writing enunciates “the complex relation of past and present to present and future readers” (McMahon 2007, 25). Moreover, the influence of Wright’s understanding of Australian history—as the inherence of the past in present, of natural within cultural *histories*—in her dedication to environmental and social justice has been the focus of historians such as Tom Griffiths (2006). Notwithstanding different emphases, these observers agree that time consciousness is a formative dimension of Wright’s politics and writing.

Yet, unlike McMahon (2007) who suggests that Wright’s preoccupation with temporal layering and patterning aligns her with the modernist poetics of figures such as T. S. Eliot, I contend that the poet’s focus on the plexity of time corresponds to her affinities with Aboriginal worldviews, her interest in the rhythms of native plants, and her broader desire to disenchant the Anglo-centric jingoism underlying Australia’s deeply troubled colonial inheritance. Wright’s article “The Battle of the Biosphere” (1969) coincided with the rise of the Australian green movement and crystallizes the ecological themes she explores later in her work. The essay “Learning to Look” from Wright’s prose collection *Born of the Conquerors* (1991) supplies a pithy synopsis of the evolution of Australian flora since Gondwana, followed by an appeal for conservation based upon recognition of the inimitability of vegetal nature in Australia. She appeals to the reader’s senses: “Next time you see a moss or a lichened rock, try to stretch your mind around its past” (Wright 1991, 97). For Wright, the re-habitation of learning to see the land anew necessitates actively reorienting one’s temporal disposition—“stretching your mind”—in order to glimpse plant-time and the profundity of evolutionary history. In this part of the world, commonplace encounters with flora render the enormous scale of plant-time more accessible: “You can grow in your garden tree ferns whose ancestry lies in those times [the Ice Age of the Late Carboniferous period]” (Wright 1991, 97). Like Richard Owen in the nineteenth century and subsequent commentators,

the poet acknowledges the land's primordiality by figuring the vegetation as an extant relic—a living fossil—of a distant era: “The northern rainforests of Queensland today contain many living species of the earliest flowering plants” (1991, 97–98). However, Wright's appeal for sympathetic approaches to vegetal nature construes the beingness of Australian flora respectfully as primordial but not primitive and unaesthetic in the disparaging sense deployed by some colonial-era writers (see, for example, the comments of botanist John Lindley in Ryan 2012, 87–109).

For the poet, the metanarrative of the native vegetation as ancient should be cause for more attuned consciousness as a means to disempower the injudiciousness of the past and progress anew toward an environmentally- and botanically-just future: “But now it is time to change. Walk into a forest of eucalypts and wattles (Australian plants both) and look again. Are these forests and plants and insects and birds and mammals yours to destroy?” (Wright 1991, 98). Notwithstanding the prominent botanical themes of Wright's politics and writing—her “two fires,” in critic Philip Mead's terms (2006) and “double tree” in Zeller's (2000)—this kind of sustained engagement with the temporality of vegetal life has not been significantly emphasized in studies of her bioregional eco-poetics (Brady 2007, Harris 2009, Hutchings 2007, Zeller 2000), community environmental activism (Kinsella 2010, 160; Mulligan and Hill 2001, 73), and human rights advocacy (Brady 1998). Sue King-Smith does characterize one of the “spectres of the past” in Wright's work as the “indigenous landscape that existed prior to British occupation, with a substantial number of indigenous species of flora and fauna now extinct” (King-Smith 2007, 117–118). Katie Holmes (2005) has also written about the role of gardening in the poet's life and writing, commenting that “the cultivation of her peas and lettuce gave her as much joy as her bottlebrush, native jasmine, and mint bush.” Holmes reminds us that cultivated plants were as important to the botanophilic poet as the non-domesticated species existing before European colonization. Along with a love of the plants, animals, birds, waterways, and rock formations of *country*—in the Aboriginal sense of home rather than nation—gardening facilitated Wright's perceptive awareness of vegetal cadences.

POETIC VEGETAL TEMPORALITY: STRETCHING ONE'S MIND AROUND TIME

Integral to Wright's mediation of vegetal temporality is a time-space continuum encompassing the natural world of the northern New South Wales and southern Queensland border region where she lived. Her first collection, *The Moving Image* (1946), heralds—in the titular poem—the preoccupation with time that characterizes her writing as a whole. In a tenor of direct appeal evocative of her essay “Learning to Look”—published forty-five years later—Wright implores

her audience to engage the plexity of time through corporeal apprehension. As a many-sided phenomenon, time “speaks” through physical sensations, not merely in audible signatures. In linking temporality to breathing, the poet therein implies the vital, mediating presence of vegetal life in human relations to being and time: “Listen then. Out of the mouth of time / comes the inchoate sound, the inaudible sound / only heard in the silence of our breathing / when the heart stops and the listening nerve is tense” (Wright 1946, 4, pt 3, ll. 10–13). In particular, Wright poeticizes Heidegger’s idea of *call* as being-called by language, as waiting, attending, and reaching out to something through language (Hanly 2013, 248). In such terms, listening involves receptive embodied presence in the world—presence animated by the autonomic act of respiring and its inextricable evolutionary relation to vegetal nature. Although the botanical registers of *The Moving Image* are largely tacit and tangential to themes of colonial inheritance and Indigenous dispossession, the poem “The Hawthorn Hedge” alludes to a time-plexity weighted toward the domain of manicured, ornamental plant-scapes. Through its spatial accretion, the hawthorn temporalizes awareness but, at the same time, unsettles chronos as ordinal, quantifiable time: “How long ago she planted the hawthorn hedge—/ she forgets how long ago” (Wright 1946, 22, ll. 1–2). Resonant in this context is Wood’s (2003, 17) dissolution of time-wholeness, foregrounding the importance of disjunctures and slippages within temporal consciousness. As Marder (2013, 103) also claims pertinently, even when plants and people dwell in the same physical space, vegetal time can remain indiscernible and elusive.

The entreaty to “stretch” one’s consciousness around plant-time is evident more palpably in “The Cycads,” first featured in Wright’s second collection *Woman to Man* (1949). The poem evokes the Carboniferous beginnings of cycads and the materialization of time-plexity in the bodily habitus of their seeds, roots, and foliage. The term *cycad* refers to a group of spermatophytes (seed plants) originating in the Carboniferous or early Permian periods—approximately 280 million years ago—and reaching their greatest profusion and diversity during the Mesozoic (Walters, Osborne, and Decker 2004, 3). In all likelihood, Wright is referring to *Macrozamia* (or *zamia*), a cycad genus comprising about forty species of which thirty-seven are endemic to Queensland (Forster 2004, 85). In *The Living Cycads* (1919), the first comprehensive account of the iconic plant group, the American botanist Charles Joseph Chamberlain characterized cycads as “the surviving remnants of a line reaching back through the Mesozoic into the Paleozoic” and also as fern-like or palm-like species of “great antiquity” (Chamberlain 1919, ix, 3). In his travels to Queensland, the botanist observed that, even after a prolonged drought of eight months, cycads appeared “fresh and vigorous, with dark-green leaves and a wonderful display of cones” (Chamberlain 1919, 29). The large female cones of *zamia* species, such as *burrawang* (*M. communis*), turn noticeably bright red or yellow

when ripe. *Zamia* nuts themselves bear divergent cultural histories, on the one hand, as a fatal or near-fatal toxin to early Australian settlers and livestock and, on the other, as a nutritious starch for Aboriginal people. Chamberlain (1919, 29) noted a paralytic affliction that pastoralists named “rickets.” Cattle dragged their rear legs, displaying “a peculiar gait” and later starving to death. Numerous explorers—including Willem de Vlamingh in 1696, George Grey in 1839, and John McDouall Stuart in 1864—suffered from the ill consequences of ingesting unprocessed cycad nuts, a condition widely called *zamia staggers* for its pronounced neurotoxic effects (Carr and Carr 1981, 17). Despite the injurious properties, Aboriginal cultures throughout Australia developed efficient detoxifying processes—roasting, soaking, fermenting, or a combination of techniques—to transmute the poisonous raw nut into a staple carbohydrate (Clarke 2011, 89–91).

In its lyricity, “The Cycads” coalesces these multifarious historical nodes of *zamia* in the first line, “Their smooth dark flames flicker at time’s own root” (Wright 1963, 37, l. 1). The flickering flames—the stiff dark-green foliage rasping in the wind, the deep-red nuts cast in stippled light, or the grafted quality of both anatomical effects—signify visually the depth of *zamia* ancestry, or what the poet calls the “strata of first birth” (1963, 37, l. 4). Wright paints an affective portrait of sullen “antique cycads . . . cursed by age” and isolated among “the complicated birds and flowers” of more recent evolutionary epochs (1963, 37, ll. 5, 7, 11). Unlike the impetuous avians that “cry in air one moment, and are gone,” the *zamia* lean collectively—obdurate as phytological stones—toward the “countless suns” of time beyond the grasp of human temporal comprehension (1963, 37, ll. 15, 16). Prefiguring her much-later injunction to “stretch your mind” across the temporal topographies of moss and lichen (Wright 1991, 97), the poet deploys an imperative verb connoting possession and insisting the reader “take their [the cycads’] cold seed and set it in the mind” (1963, 37, l. 17). The allusion to “cold seed” marks a tacit invocation of the bifurcated pastoral history of *zamia* nuts as a declared poisonous species targeted for eradication throughout Queensland—an Australia-wide twentieth-century biopolitical campaign cited briefly by Chamberlain in his morphological assessment of “living” (as opposed to fossilized) Australian cycads (1919, 29). Contrastingly, the *zamia* seed Wright has in mind—and, indeed, advocates *being in mind*—is the nutritive blood-red-glistening nut consumed by Aboriginal people for millennia. Thus, Wright’s seed is material-semiosis: an actual, presencing *zamia* organ not reducible to linguistic turns yet—at the same time—presenting a poetic substrate for detoxifying the dangerous residues of colonial inheritance. The attempt to expel *zamia*-time from country overlapped with the broader historical campaign to supplant Aboriginal temporality with Anglo-European conventions (see, for example, Broome 2010, 57–80). Nonetheless, both forms survived the respective genocidal campaigns and are thriving today. The dis-

quisition on time concludes with the lengthening zamia roots penetrating the depth of plant temporality, coaxing one to “the unthinkable, unfathomed edge / beyond which man remembers only sleep” (Wright 1963, 37, ll. 20–21). As an evolutionary modality, plant-time is not confined to the vegetal domain. Instead, it is encoded in human consciousness and awakened through a process of imaginative, phenomenological stretching across the time-scales of the primordial cycads.

The titular poem of the collection *The Two Fires* (1955) re-invokes the potent material-semiosis of the seed, presenting an extraordinary elemental meditation on plant-time at the unfathomed edge of human being. Narrated as a creation story involving ghosts, death, love, rock, water, and, of course, fire, “The Two Fires” represents Wright’s time-attentiveness as a preoccupation and problematic. The “inventions of the holy unwearying seed” are “bright falling fountains made of time, that bore / through time the holy seed that knew no time—” (Wright 1992, 20, ll. 3–5). Vegetal presence—signified by the burning blossoms of poiesis, of falling across, with, and into the plexity of time—vibrates in the dialogical relation between the seed and all that which it yields. “For time has caught on fire, and you too burn: / leaf, stem, branch, calyx and the bright corolla / are now the insubstantial wavering fire / in which love dies” (Wright 1992, 20, ll. 8–11). In figuring the time of the plants themselves—of leaf and bright corolla—as fire, which grants genesis to the world but also consumes it, Wright summons the cyclical burning practices of Aboriginal cultures. At the same time, she elegizes the loss of the sacred interconnection between fire, time, seasonality, and flora since colonial occupation of Australia:

And walking here among the dying centuries—
the centuries of moss, of fern, of cycad,
of the towering tree—the centuries of the flower—
I pause where water falls from the face of the rock.
My father rock, do you forget the kingdom of the fire?
(Wright 1992, 20, ll. 30–34)

Time-plexity, for Wright, interweaves the temporalities of Aboriginal people, plants, geological elements, water, and the *timeliness* of seasons. Firing modified the landscape, encouraging desirable flora, such as edible yams (*Dioscorea* spp.), while suppressing the proliferation of undergrowth species that impeded bipedal travel (Gammage 2011, Hallam 1975, Portenga et al. 2016, Wilman 2015). Lower-temperature, seasonally-responsive fires also diminished the potential for higher-intensity conflagrations. Indigenous people recognized *burn time* as an optimal juncture, during which firing would result in the most advantageous effects (Clarke 2011, 60–71). For them, as Bill Gammage observes in *The Biggest Estate on Earth* (2011, 164), “fire was a life study. Seasons vary, rain

is erratic, plants have life cycles, fire has long and short term effects, people differ on what to favour.” Yet, when the proper ecological circumstances occur—when the timing becomes *right*—the millennia-old cycle of fire resumes, re-enacting a landscape narrative of ancient derivation and affording a glimpse into the plants’ time-plexity: “And now, set free by the climate of man’s hate, / that seed sets time ablaze” (Wright 1992, 20, ll. 40–41).

As with “The Two Fires” and “The Cycads,” Wright’s poem “Phaius Orchid,” first appearing in the collection *The Gateway* (1953), contemplates the extent of botanical temporalities—in this instance, materialized by the ephemerally flowering swamp orchid—within the primordial landscape. Also known as the swamp lily, lesser swamp orchid, and southern swamp orchid, the phaius orchid (*Phaius australis*) is one of three orchid species of this kind found in Australia. The genus nomination *phaius* derives from Greek term *phaios* for “dusky” or “swarthy,” a reference to the dark-brownish blossoms, the largest borne by any Australian orchid species (Clements 2013, 73). Inhabiting threatened coastal paperbark (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*) swamps, the phaius orchid is vital to the traditional botanical knowledge of the Aboriginal people of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland (McElroy 2011). Its wetland habitat is denoted early in the poem in the phrases “brackish sand” and “sand’s poverty, water’s sour” (Wright 1963, 71, ll. 1, 7). Unlike the cycad and other living relics of Carboniferous origin, however, the orchid is younger in its evolutionary constitution. In fact, the Orchidaceae family dates back to the Late Cretaceous, a relatively mere 100 million years ago. The temporal rhythms of the phaius, nevertheless, elude the poet—its multi-faceted flower, rusting with time’s entropic insistence, an “image I hold / and cannot understand” (1963, 71, ll. 9–10). Questions persist in the narrative. Is the telos of the intricate yet short-lived flower “to garland time—/ eternity’s cold tool / that severs with its blade / the gift as soon as made” (Wright 1963, 71, ll. 13–16)? Notwithstanding a tone of hesitant reserve throughout (unlike the more transcendently expansive “The Two Fires”), Wright’s discourse concludes by intimating a surrendering of herself to time. She embraces—as an emergent quality of vegetal nature—time-plexity, which transgresses the chronos consciousness of settler history: “Here like the plant I weave / your dying garlands, time” (1963, 71, ll. 19–20).

Instances from Wright’s oeuvre reveal the enactment of time-plexity within the structure of her poems. The consideration of temporal poesis takes the reader beyond the poet’s representation of time to the articulation—and, indeed, bending—of time within her text. Rather than the forward march of chronos, the outcome is the weaving of temporality recursively onto itself. A classic illustration of the former is James Thomson’s long four-part poem *The Seasons* (1793), beginning with the spring, then moving sequentially through the summer and autumn, and concluding with the winter. Thomson’s progressive arrangement of temporal consciousness parallels the idea of spring—es-

pecially in the northern hemisphere—as the season of birth and winter as the season of decline and death. Yet, in “The Cedars,” Wright’s concern with the possibility of “return”—of cyclical, kairos-inflected time—is apparent at the structural level. Inverting the traditional order by beginning instead with winter (indeed, a period of intense growth and flowering for some Australian species), the poem’s first stanza alludes to the robust constitution of plants during cold season desiccation and dormancy: “The dried body of winter is hard to kill. . . . By the sunken pool / the sullen Sodom-apple grips his scarlet fruit” (Wright, 1963, 60, ll. 1, 5–6). In the second stanza, the narration proceeds to spring—the “returner, knocker at the iron gate” (l. 7)—but collapses the unidirectional procession of Thomson’s poem for a concept of time as a knot, as kairos inhering within chronos. “Locked in our mourning, in our sluggish age, / we stand and think of past springs, of deceits not yet forgotten” (ll. 9–10). The reflective “we” signifies multispecies collectivity: human and plant time are inextricably linked. “The Cedars” also constructs temporality as the state of being-called-by-time. Time’s subjects, however, respond to the call differently in congruence with their bodies, in relation to their percipience, and as part of their broader environments: “Do not ask us to answer again as then we answered” (l. 13). In this example, Wright textualizes Wood’s fourth ecophenomenological principle of the disruption and dissolution of temporal horizons.

CONCLUSION: TAKING YOUR (PLANT) TIME

In their spatial articulations—Michael Marder (2013) has argued—plants confer to human beings the temporalization of awareness. As this article has set out to show, flora is integral to time conception and apprehension. One of the ways in which humans become conscious of the progressions and dislocations of time is through the material-semiosis of plants: seeding, flowering, fruiting, rooting, proliferating, receding, coming into being, passing away, and flourishing within their dying. By multi-dimensionalizing temporality, an approach to plant-time (as plexity) refuses the homogenization of vegetal otherness. In the entwining of Western, Indigenous, and ecological modalities, the explosion of everlasting flowers in the Australian Outback, for instance, comes to signify not only the present immediacy of spring but also bygone seasons and those times (and episodes of *timeliness*) that lie ahead. The future inheres with the present—within the past. On the other side of the world, desiccated maple leaves drift to the ground in the American northeast, embodying the autumn while materializing time’s inexorable movement, the inevitability of senescence, and the seasonal enunciation of arboreal being. Hence, to posit vegetal temporality in restrictive terms, as merely an ordinal signifier of forward movement—of the passage of the days, months, years, seasons, and epochs that organize humanity’s past, present, and future—is to risk banishing plant-time to the pe-

riphery of consciousness and, therein, more broadly negating the potential of human-plant relations. As an alternative to appropriating vegetal rhythms or expunging botanical temporality altogether from cultural domains, there is a more dialogical way of being, which Wright intimates poetically. This demands learning to exist relationally to the time of plants through the challenging—perhaps life-long—practice of stretching one’s mind across their temporal terrains. Through a time-space continuum referent to a particular biogeographical region, the poet invites us to take our (plant) time.

The verse of Judith Wright offers a provocative stimulus—of ongoing contemporary relevance—for inspiring such an expansion, of attuning oneself to the timely pulsations of vegetal nature through spirited listening and looking. Wright’s poetry lays bare the capacity of poetic language to mediate plant-time and its myriad articulations with human temporalities. Yet, rather than “translating” vegetal temporality and hence risking the appropriation of plant-time, Wright instead attempts to investigate patiently, render sensitively, and enact lyrically the elusive time of the plants themselves. In her narration of the plexity of plant-time, Wright facilitates readers’ consciousness of vegetal rhythms and brings the specific temporalities of the ancient Australian flora to the fore. Indeed, her representation and enactment of plant-time augment the embodied apprehension of vegetal nature through the seasons. Thus, her poetry underscores the synergistic relation between mediation (reading about plants) and immediacy (experiencing the nonhuman world directly through the senses) in building awareness of the botanical realm. In contemplating, questioning, and surrendering to plant-time, Wright also contributes to the decolonization of Australian temporality in a manner intersecting, for instance, with Tim Entwisle’s call for a botanically-inflected, five-season regime. Her lyricism prompts readers’ awareness of the formidable time topographies of ferns, cycads, orchids, and other Australian plant taxa. She reminds us that these species are the living, breathing portals to the outermost precipice of time as we know it, “beyond which man remembers only sleep” (Wright 1963, 37, ll. 20–21). While poeticizing evolutionary extent—for instance, the primordial nature of the cycads by virtue of their species’ distant Carboniferous origin—Wright also examines the closer-at-hand temporal rhythms and dispositions of plants in the “knife-edged” depth of the compositional moment and the “immediate-participatory” (TenHouten 2005, x) dimension of her environmental consciousness, as delineated by “Phaius Orchid” in particular. Wright’s textualization of plant-time embodies a commitment to botanical ethics and locally-grounded activism on behalf of Aboriginal Australian people and the Queensland environment, which she indeed pursued fervently throughout her life. In the final analysis, her attention to plants can be understood as a locus of resistance to the appropriation of time and for its bold synchronization of the poet, the text, and the cadences of vegetal life itself.

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