Issues on Employment and Environment in Les A. Murray’s Poem “Cockspur Bush”

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Abstract


Kata kunci: padang rumput, hewan ternak, pakan, dan lahan pekerjaan

For at least a hundred years white Australian have found easier to talk accurately about each other than about the strange continent they had seized. Different types of forests, even rainforests, mangrove estuaries, and open savannah were often seen and called as just ‘bush’, country that was featureless and even meaningless. Most of Australia was the vast semi-desert surface that showed little sign of being put there for human use (Haynes, 1998: 38). Australian did not yet have words for many things they found in the vast continent. They had no body of traditional knowledge, such as the Aborigines had, about the country. They had no myths or beliefs to help them make sense of the country. They all too often saw everything as just “bush”. The word then produces various compound words: bush ballad dealing with

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aspects of life in the Australian bush; bush breakfast: a rough breakfast while camping in the bush; bush house: a rough shelter in the bush; bushman: a pioneer; bushranger: one able to look after for himself in a rough country, a criminal who hid in the bush; bush tucker: food as eaten by one living in or off the bush; cattle-bush: any of various Australian trees or shrubs on which cattle may feed in drought period; and so on (Webby, 2000: 240).

Bush in ‘Cockspur Bush’ (Murray, 1992) is geographically a stretch of land covered with bushy cockspur, a species of *Echinochloa crusgalli* widespread in warm temperate regions of Australia. The grass has leaves and occupies a large area of land covered with its fully grown leaves for animals to graze. Feeding factories process the grass: stemming, multiplying, nesting and raising in various packing forms and sizes for animal husbandry to supply in their farming. Various kinds of birds, a small insect of ant family that lives in highly organized groups, field mice and small reptiles take part during the period of growing season of the grass. Birds of different size, a native grass-finch of Australia that is small in size together with the goldfinch and greenfinch that have been introduced into Australia, a native ground-thrush of moderate in size and the European song-thrush which has been introduced into Australia and the native long-toed bird, including horned and crested screamer, all get advantages of the availability of the cockspur bush in an area of ground covered with that short grass (Matthews, 2001: xi-xv).

Birds are usually common birds such as finches, thrushes and screamers that take an advantage over the cockspur bush. Mice and lizards also have the benefit of the cockspur bush that their tooth decay remains stuck on sharp pointed parts of the grass. The fact of being equal in rights and advantages over the grass continually maintain among these living creatures. Subsequent events confirm that the butcher bird comes after the mice’s and the lizards’ share in the grass advantage suggested by the teeth decay of both creatures.

Murray’s love of his physical surroundings such as the rolling countryside with its forest and animals inspires much of his best poetry. His ‘Cockspur Bush’ demonstrates his full affection for the landscape covered by annual grass that grows seasonally (Bourke, 1992: 7-8). Lines of the poem remark on how this kind of grass grows and treated for various purposes by the surrounding living creatures and the feeding-processing factories. The factories have changed the grass into vine woven and multiplied packing. Cockspur bush actually lives throughout the year either in its seasonal period when it occupies...
and covers a large area that turns the country landscape delightful to look at or when it becomes precious business commodity for animal husbandry in the farming.

**Objective of the Study**

The study is aimed at (1) showing Murray’s full affection for the landscape of a lush green countryside that covered in healthy grass that grows seasonally, (2) how this kind of grass grows and how it is treated for various purposes by the surrounding living creatures and by feeding-processing plants, and (3) revealing the multiple benefits of this grass that creates various-levels of employment starting from ownership of the grass field, cutting and gathering, supplying feed factories and marketing feed products, and maintaining good preservation of environment.

**Methodology**

A work of literature is a text that has something extraordinary about the language in which it is framed. Its language possesses features which are part of literary meaning in which Cummings (1983: 63) sees them that due to familiarity of the language and being so intent on the meaning the features convey, they become transparent to meaning. The factors that create meaning are grouped based on systemic description. The level of from— the conventions of lexical meaning and grammatical patterning, and the level of context— the relationship of certain kind of language to certain kinds of situations are a tradition of systemic description.

The poem lineation with its repetitive personal pronoun “I”, passive verb phrases and economic issues embedded in them demonstrates Murray’s particular expression and interest in strong support for the Australian government policy— the force on an elite and marginal activities to generate economic and symbolic wealth for significant contribution to national prosperity (Bennett, 2001:2). The lineation shows how seemingly insignificant details of language, but when analyzed systematically they are organized in such a way that the whole patterns of meaning depend on them.

Data sources of the study come from Murray’s poem “Cockspur Bush” that consists of 16 lines. Its language modifies normative structures and contextually contains distinctive linguistic features. It is not in customary linguistic ways and needs rereading to linguistically explore its textual patterns to find out what may have missed. Widdowson (1992: 17) remarks that the missed thing is
peculiarly significant and well-worth restructuring in order to present the poem’s present-time nationwide impression.

**Result and Discussion**

The first six lines of ‘Cockspur Bush’ have a sentence configuration that consists of two simple sentences (two similar subjects) in the first line (1) subsequently followed by one compound and complex in the next lines (2-6) such as follows:

I am lived. I am died.  
I was two-leafed three times, and grazed,  
but then I was stemmed and multiplied,  
sharp-thorned and caned, nested and raised,  
earth-salt by sun-sugar.

... ………………………... I was innerly sung  
by thrushes who need fear no eyed skin thing.

The first line (1) that consists of two simple sentences proclaims the subject complements ‘lived’ and ‘died’ are related to both subjects the ‘I’. The two sentences show Murray’s style in paratactic of placing together sentences, clauses and phrases without a conjunctive word; seen in ellipsis and lack of conjunctions. The two subjects ‘I’ can be combined to allow ellipsis of the second subject and verb be (I am lived and died). It is surprisingly the next compound sentence (lines 2-5) there are four conjunctions ‘and’ and one ‘but’ that expresses a contrast in the unexpectedness of what is said in the second conjoin in view of the content of the first conjoin. The probable line arrangement can be as of the following:

I am lived and died.  
(I live seasonal, during a particular season and disappear when it is off-season. I come on alternate seasons)

The next two sentences, lines 2 to 5 and lines 5 to 6, can be reconstructed in customary way as of the following:

‘I was two-leafed three times, and grazed,’  
(Having been planted or naturally growing, I grow myself with stems and with narrow green leaves each time two leaves grow for three
times during harvesting period and then farm animals are ready to graze)

but then I was stemmed and multiplied, 3
sharp-thorned and caned, nested and raised, 4
earth-salt by sun-sugar. ........ 5

much needed for feeding farm animals especially cows)

........ I was innerly sung 5

by thrushes who need no eyed skin thing. 6
(Thrushes of native Australian birds, take part to consume my fresh green leaves with their skills of selecting delicious parts of my leaves and now they are full up)

In the last line (16 ) the conjunction ‘and’ was used to restate its alternate season and yet it was in its new form of appearance, in multiplied and baled, ‘I am lived and died in, vine woven, multiplied.’

Lines 2 to 6 have a very specific form of active-passive correspondence. Line 2 ‘I was two-leafed three times, and grazed’ consists of two passives, ‘I was two-leafed three times’ and ‘(I was) grazed’. Both passives exemplify the most common type which has no expressed agent (agent-less passive) leave the subject of the active counterpart undetermined. The passive form of line 2 ‘I was two-leafed three times’ means that the ‘I’ (the grass) was grown up by the soil on which it was planted or it naturally grows. The following clause in lines 3-5
‘but then I was stemmed and multiplied, / sharp-thorned and caned, nested and raised, / earth-salt by sun sugar.’

is the second sentence of the compound sentence located in lines 2 to 5 connected by ‘but’ that expresses a contrast. The contrast is that the ‘I’ or the grass is not anymore in its original existence. It does not have anymore fresh grass, but it has been cut, stemmed, multiplied, caned, nested and raised. Farm animals cannot find fresh grass in the lawns because of its season expires. Viewing from several adjectival phrases in the form of past participles, the lines suggest most of grass harvest is for feeding factory sites and for farm animals to graze has almost no more to go. The next sentence either in lines 5 or 6 ‘I was innerly sung / by thrushes who need fear no eyed skin thing.’ is a complex sentence
which gives a particular treatment of ‘thrushes’, any of Australian native ground thrushes (birds), using a relative pronoun ‘who’ instead of non-personal relative pronoun ‘which’. It suggests that Murray shows his great love of a lush green and rolling landscape with animals around, the native Australian belongings. Lines 1 to 6 form a sentence configuration: a couple of compound sentences followed by a complex one.

The passive clauses in the poem are all mixed variety of passives. Line 15 ‘Inches in, baby seed screamers get supplied’, is pseudo-passive that is usually with linking verbs such as ‘get’, ‘become’ or ‘feel’. Lines 1, 2 (not completely), 7 and 16 (partly) are semi passives. Lines 3 and 5 are central passives which have a direct active-passive relation. The difference between the two lines (3 and 5) is that line 3 has a personal whereas line 5 a non-personal agent. The ‘I’ occupies all passive subjects from line 1 to last line 16 with similar passive patterns as of the following:

I am lived. I am died. 1
I was two-leafed three times, … 2
… I was stemmed and multiplied, 3
… I was innerly sung 5
… I am given … 16
I am lived and died in, …

The peculiar style of Murray’s expressions in active-passive correspondence that almost occupy the whole of ‘Cockspur Bush’ is his use of various grades of passive. It starts from central or true passives as the following example of line 2:

(a) I was two-leafed three times, and (b) (I was) grazed,

(a) ‘I was two-leafed three times,’ has a non-personal agent that means the ‘I’ was actually grown by the soil or itself, given two leaves in three times subsequently during its season.

(b) ‘grazed’ by farm animals and other living creatures from the surroundings such as various kinds of birds, mouse, lizard and ant. The grass is useful for all community members around.

The tense of the clauses is past stating the events must have taken place in the past, with a certain period of time between its completion.
and the present moment or the writer must have in mind a definite time at which the events or states happened. The verb ‘was’ refers to a state and therefore ‘I was two-leafed three times’ is the state past. Whereas the verb ‘grazed’ is a dynamic verb that identifies a single event. In one line, Murray used the past tense in different meanings: the event past of ‘was’ refers to a state and ‘grazed’ refers to a single definite event in the past.

The contrast of the clauses of line 2 is in lines 3-5 connected by ‘but’ that refers to the absence of the ‘I’ or the grass in its respective areas because of off-season. The past participle of the main verbs ‘stemmed’, ‘multiplied’, ‘sharp-thorned’, ‘caned’, ‘nested’, and ‘raised’ all refer to a single definite event in the past. The absence of the grass in its ordinary lawns appears in different forms as the above past participles confirm. The passive subject ‘I’ or the grass was processed in various forms for feed purposes which are available through feed marketing networks. The active objects that process the grass into business commodities are either man or machines. The active-passive correspondence of Murray’s passives highlights the significance of preserving the natural world in which trees, rivers, animals, bush and birds exist. He confirms commercial exploitations of the natural world, but preservation of keeping it in good condition remains the key point of contemporary continent-country Australia (Bennett and Carter, 2001 : 4).

The passives that Murray chooses in the poem seem so simple that the passive verbs of ordinary dynamic verbs are just listed subsequently and use only one passive subject (I) :
I was stemmed and multiplied, sharp-thorned and caned, nested and raised, earth-salt by sun-sugar.

in conventional passive construction will be as follows:

(I was stemmed and multiplied. My sharp thorns and hard canes were removed. Then I was nested and transported. Finally, I was mixed with traditional-made salt)

In an ordinary passive sentence, it is rarely to put the passive subject and then followed by a list of passive verbs (stemmed, multiplied, sharp-thorned, caned, nested, raised) and the sentence terminates. The passive subject (‘I’) becomes the centre of the treatment performed by the passive verbs. stemmed, multiplied, sharp-thorned, caned, nested and raised. Man and man-made equipments treat the (‘I’) as they like,
without any complaint raised by the passive subject. The (‘I’) even reiterates its existence both in its presence in its ordinary lawns and its absence in the respective areas as the last line (16) states:

‘I am lived and died in, vine woven, multiplied.’ 16

in conventional sentence:

(I come on alternate seasons. I can come now in different forms with fabric or a carpet made of the stems and a large number of this kind or I am in my seasonal and off season have been modified in vine woven and multiplied.)

Murray has the capacity to express his idea in ordinary sentences with a slight modification of ordinary grammatical structures. One passive subject (‘I’) followed by a series of passive verbs that have altered the profile of the passive subject (‘I’) into various forms accordingly. The change of form of the ‘I’ creates unusual, significant and multiple economic development of wealth of a country leading to the increase of national prosperity. His passive constructions in the poem deviates any passive gradient (central or true, semi and pseudo passives) as in the line 4 ‘(I was) sharp-thorned and caned’. The sentence construction of ‘Cockspur Bush’ relies heavily on the ‘I’ and its role as a passive subject across the lines.

‘Cockspur Bush’ is a poem that proves Murray’s concern and interest in his living surroundings and the landscape (Bennett, 1998: 271). Creatures of game, mammalian and reptilian species are fully involved in taking advantages of the presence of cockspur bush during its living season. The pronoun ‘I’ and the possessive pronoun ‘my’ refer to the grass which becomes the central figure which never complains of whatever treatments it obtains. It always becomes the passive subjects related to the treatments.

The grass is a prominent figure whose presence and absence does not make any difference to its availability in respective fields during its season. Factories, suppliers and feed stores distribute the processed grass at any time all the year. The poem even relates this business item to welfare of the country and nation in which the present Australian government consistently promote the country economic growth. Murray’s aesthetic quality of idea (Cathcart, 1993:547-548) is aiming at reminding the nation of maintaining good preservation of environment and fields of grass for multiple and valuable uses: original state of surroundings, wide areas for water absorption during
rainy season to keep abundant amount of water for cities and industries and available employment sources.

**Conclusion**

The redundancy of passive subjects ‘I’ has a particular artistic value and the reiterated parts demonstrate the dominant figure that has been beneficial to the surroundings. The treatments the ‘I’ has received do not prevent it from being away; it never stops providing feed with its available different form and shape for the living creatures around. Cockspur Bush presents almost the same background as in other Murray’s works, mainly natural world around to prove the spirit country he always stands for. His aesthetic qualities of idea have been embedded in the linguistic features of the work that proclaim the economic and symbolic wealth in perfect management of the existing natural world, the environment. In terms of employment and national gross domestic product, the multiple-level relationship of business activities dealing with cockspur for high value feed are in line with contemporary Australian government policy to generate and contribute to national prosperity.

**References**


**Appendix**

**Cockspur Bush**

1. I am lived. I am died.
2. I was two-leafed three times, and grazed,
3. but then I was stemmed and multiplied,
4. sharp-thorned and caned, nested and raised,
5. earth-salt by sun-sugar. I was innerly sung
6. by thrushes who need fear no eyed skin thing.
7. Finched, ant-run, flowered, I am given the years
8. in now few berries, now more of sling
9. out over directions of luscious dung.
10. Of water crankshaft, of gases the gears
11. my shape is cattle-pruned to a crown spread sprung
above the starve-gut instinct to make prairies

of everywhere. My thorns are stuck with caries

of mice and rank lizards by the butcher bird.

Inches in, baby-seed screamers get supplied.

I am lived and died in, vine woven, multiplied