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Sovereignty, place and possibility in Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*

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Submission for Masters of Research

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Sovereignty, Place and Possibility in Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*.

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Abstract

This exegesis is prefaced with an introduction to finding the "real" site of remote Aboriginal communities within *The Swan Book*. An examination of the literature identifies the contextual and conceptual depth of the novel and the critical challenges it raises. Michel Foucault's related concepts of power and heterotopia, the utopian community and heterotopic sites of deviation and resistance are surveyed in order to establish how sovereignty is exercised in postcolonial Australia. The possibility of ethical relations of power raised within *The Swan Book* are then considered.

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"Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* is hypnotic and disturbing...a very unusual book...This is definitely one of the books Sir Francis Bacon would recommend that we chew and digest.", A Bookish Type. International Praise for *The Swan Book*: "It is a bitter, lovely, and tragic book; and not only the author but also the publisher should be commended.", Australian Book Review. The events in *The Swan Book* take place in the future around the time of Australia's third centenary. The world has been fundamentally altered by climate change and many things have changed - towns have been closed, cities have been boarded up and communities have been abandoned. The world has been ravaged by floods, droughts, fires and blizzards. The swan book other books by alexis wright plains of promise grog war croire en L'incroyable le pacte de serpent take power (as editor) carpentaria alexis wright. The swan book. Other books by alexis wright. Plains of promise. Grog war. But this is no place for ghosts that don't belong here, and the virus barks continuously, as though he was some kind of watchdog barking, Oooba, booblah, booblah! The old woman's ghost is as spooked as a frightened cat in flight by the virus's sick laughter carrying across the charred landscape. It frightens the living daylights out of her, although she still manages to say, I know who you are, before swiftly backing off across the landscape until she disappears over the horizon. Read unlimited* books and audiobooks on the web, iPad, iPhone and Android. In this multilayered novel, winner of the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal, Wright toys with the edges of the world we live in and "deftly highlights the racial and cultural politics facing Australia's indigenous people in a story that defies genre. It is a challenging and heartbreaking story that illuminates the culture and struggles of an often overlooked people" (Publishers Weekly). Alexis Wright's third novel *The Swan Book* is the saddest love story I have ever read. But not for the reasons you might imagine. In August 2008, as part of her Oodgeroo Noonuccal Lecture, Wright said: 'Oodgeroo absolutely understood the power of belief in the fight for sovereignty over this land – that if you could succeed in keeping the basic architecture of how you think, then you owned the freedom of your mind, that unimpeded space to store hope and feed your ability to survive.' *The Swan Book* constructs this architecture of the mind – and, as with a mind, it operates in many dimensions simultaneously. It teems with songs, stories, images and fragments of culture from across the planet. The novel opens with an arrest