CHAPTER II
AN AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE
(THE POETRY OF JUDITH WRIGHT)


Judith Wright’s fame largely rests on eleven collections of verse published over a period of four decades beginning with two outstanding volumes. Wright's first book of poems, The Moving Image (1946) celebrated the New England table land of her childhood, her "blood's country . . . full of old stories that still go walking in my sleep" (South of My Days). This mystical quality of her relationship with the land never leaves her. Ever mindful of the European world "we have lost and left behind," this new but ancient land is full of questions and tricks: "Where do the roads lead? It is not where we expected" (Country Town). Land and story are woven together: the remittance man, bullock driver, stockman, bushranger, returned soldier, idler, half-caste girl, metho drinker, and old Dan whose "seventy years of stories he clutches round his bones."

In the opinion of her biographer, Veronica Brady, Wright's way of writing about the landscape transformed the tradition of Australian writing (The Australian, 27th June). Another poet and critic, Kevin Hart, says that
her poems taught him how to see the country for what it is and its people for who they are. He adds, "whether we know it or not, we all live inside her poems" *(Sydney Morning Herald, 29th June)*. Her landscapes are not those of green, fertile England. Nor is this land to be tamed. The tree-frog and dingo, rainforest and seacoast, stark cliffs and eroded hills, bushfire and flood, dust and drought, wind and rain, flame-tree and cicadas, gum tree and cyclone all exhibit a peculiarly Australian sense of mystery and power quite at odds with the presuppositions of European settlers. It is a different kind of beauty—and a different kind of terror.

Judith Wright's second anthology *Woman to Man* (1949) is better known for the freshness of her approach in examining until-then taboo subjects of sexual desire and especially women's sexuality. Such economical though passionate poems as *Woman to Child* and *Woman to Man*, apart from confounding thousands of adolescents in their final school-year examination papers, provided a new language for exploring the sacredness of sexual union, pregnancy and birth. Even these poems, considered by many among the best of modern Australian poetry, demonstrate an earthiness at once sparse and tender.

Judith Wright’s poetry has created a phase of exploration into the amendments that Australian poetry has consistently carried out. As is mentioned in the first chapter, many of the Australian writers came to terms with the reality of the physical and psychological invasion of Aboriginal
Australia. Judith Wright has transformed this theme of invasion and violation in environmental and humanistic terms. She has presented guilt investigation and symbolic expiation as historical in nature. Love and fear often come together in Wright's poetry. So too do love and guilt. This is especially evident when she engages with the issue of European 'invasion': "I know that we are justified only by love, / but oppressed by arrogant guilt, have room for none." The ambiguity extends further when she confirms the lesson admitted by cultural anthropologists: the conquerors become the conquered!

**THE MOVING IMAGE**

*The Moving Image* was Judith’s first volume of poetry. As a poet she made her debut in 1946 with *The Moving Image*, in which she showed her technical excellence free from the burden of fashionable trends. The volume is not only a celebration of the pioneering spirit shadowed by this parallel and tainted history. *The Moving Image* was selected book of the month by the Australian book society. The poems have a lyrical and unforced beauty. Most of the poems were written in wartime. The experience of the war years strongly affected the world view of many Aborigines. The horror that the war has created has strongly influenced the sensibilities of the poets. Moved by the war situation, Wright gave a voice in her poetry to these sensibilities. Shirley Walker in *The Poetry of Judith Wright: A Search For Unity* (1980) offering the best and comprehensive analysis on Wright’s poetry says that *Moving Image* is one of her most impressive achievements.
The poem presents the passing of the enormous time to which
the nature is a witness. It presents the failure of the heart and the mind of
man in assessing those ‘enormous years’. Predicting the future she promises
that she would go along with the star and clock bearing the destruction on this
earth. She confirms that she is the maker of time and fear and found ‘love’s
whole eternity’. The poem refers to the endless destruction that the war
creates. The destruction blows only the dust and makes the world evil:

But there is no end to this breaking –

One Smashed, another mocks from your enemy’s eyes-

Put that out there’s a world in every skull

(Judith Wright Collected Poems.4)

Nothing is left after the destruction and the killing of the people. Only God
could save the world. Judith presents the Aborigine as the only one who
could save the world from the destruction and in whom the wisdom and the
life coalesce:

All the lives that met in him and made

The tiny world of his life, his passion, his skill

Shone from his eyes each as a separate star.

(Judith Wright Collected Poems. 5)

She is of the view that the trace of the civilization is found in Aborigine as he
is the first man of ‘every sound and motion forgotten and remembered’. But
the whole world remains ignorant of the First man’s (Tom Bedlam) presence: ‘the cry of Tom of Bedlam naked under the Sun”.

**Bora Ring**

Bora ring is a poem reflecting on the colonization of the black people’s land. It is about the Aboriginal culture and how it has been lost. It is a lament for the lost culture of original inhabitants (nomadic Aboriginal tribes).

The line length, long-short-short-long repeated in each verse, point to a possible dance beat. The same dance that no longer takes place perhaps? The words tell the sorrow of vanishing traditions that are not being replaced. Perhaps the rider is of a generation that can still remember the original vitality and that makes it all the more sad. A vacuum is replacing the loss of customs and rituals that once defined who the people were. A lament, a sorrowed song, the soul's deep cry for the land and its people, could have just as easily been written for the tribes and land of the American Indian.

The textual integrity of this amazing poem is held up so well by the aboriginal theme. There is use of compound words to emphasize the imagery. The Aborigine, like our American Indians shared a common fate with the European settlers, where both of their cultures were so destroyed. This poem has simplicity. Judith Wright committed herself to the plight of the Aborigine in Australia. She spent a huge portion of her life attempting to bring into focus for better understanding of just how Aborigines were treated at the time.
of colonization and beyond. The first stanza is mostly poignant as it speaks of the tribal dances verbally and visually:

   The Song is gone; the dance
       is secret with the dancers in the earth,
       The ritual useless and the tribal story
       lost in an alien tale.

This says that there is nothing left of their heritage and although Wright is not aboriginal she feels remorse towards their culture and the ordeals they faced. Judith Wright’s poems are a window to look at the different aspects of New England. Many Australians still think of Australia’s traditional aborigines as hunter-gatherers living in an unchanging landscape, although there is growing recognition of their social and spiritual life. In fact, within the limits set by their tools and available food supplies they were also sophisticated builders. The Bora rings of England and southeastern Queens land are examples of this aspect. These earthen rings of eastern New South Wales and southeastern Queens land are significant ritual structures and are probably unique in the world as hunter-gatherer constructions of known function, which constitute notable monuments in the landscape.

**Description of the Bora rings**

   The earthen rings known as the “Bora” are usually part of a complex of two or three rings, linked by a path or paths. They were used in “Man-making” ceremonies, that is, male initiation ceremonies. The large ring in the
complex was usually part of a relative public ceremony, with women looking on. The smaller ring was the site of the major initiation rite for initiated man. The purpose of the third ring is not as well documented as the other two. It has been suggested that these are women’s rings, but it is not clear that this was always the case. Bora sites were often associated with carved trees.

The average size of a large ring is about 25-30m across, and a small ring 10-12m. However, there is a wide range of variation. The earth is mounded up to a height of 25-50cms. Usually there is a path, often to the southwest from the large ring, connecting the small ring. The poem depicts the picture of the Bora ring now alone in the landscape:

Only the grass stands up
To mark the dancing-ring: the apple-gums
Posture and mime a past corroboree,
Murmur a broken chant.
The hunter is gone; the spear
Is splintered underground; the painted bodies
A dream the world breathed sleeping and forgot.
The nomad feet are still.
The rider halts, feeling that the ghosts are still present.
Only the rider’s heart
Halts at a sightless shadow, an unsaid word
That fastens in the blood the ancient curse,
The fear as old as Cain.

The poem has a European perspective with the vanished aboriginal past. The poem brings in the reminiscences of the past. At the time Judith wrote this poem, there were almost certainly New England aborigines alive who had passed through the traditional initiations at one of the Bora sites. Further, the knowledge of the sites and their continuance has continued to pass on.

Bora ring is a lament for the lost culture of the original inhabitants. The utter desolation of a lost culture, lost rights is emphasized visually and emphatically. It depicts perfectly the European invasion of Australia. It shows how the tradition and stories are gone, how the hunting and the rituals are gone and ‘lost in an alien tale’, the Europeans being the aliens. It also describes that it seemed as if the traditions of Aborigines were ‘breathed sleeping and forgot’.

**REMITTANCE MAN**

Judith Wright writes poems presenting her perspective of life. Her poems are subjective and convey universal theme, which men and women can understand and relate to. In Wright's poem, ‘Remittance Man’, the universality of the poem is brought out through the events, which occur, and the themes, which are conveyed. The themes of ‘Remittance Man’ include the lives of individual nomads, cycle of life, and contrasting of the old world to the new world. These universal themes are conveyed through the tone and poetic techniques, Wright has incorporated in the poem. In the poem
Remittance Man, the theme of lives of individual nomads is conveyed through the spendthrift, and the tone of the poem. Wright displays a sympathetic tone in ‘Remittance Man’, as it is clear from the last stanza of the poem, "closed its magnificence . . . polished by diligent ants". This line has a lot of emotions incorporated within, and from her selection of words, she is able to produce a glimmer of hope for the remittance man in his after life. Wright has metaphorically implied his sins are cleansed, when the ants are carefully polishing his bones, and he will finally rest in peace. In ‘Remittance Man’, the spendthrift lives an individual life, and has easily forgotten his past and "took to the life" he presently lived in Australia. He was a wanderer and did what ever pleased himself as there was no constraint in his life. His life in England is visually depicted, in the structure of the poem, where the first stanza is relatively short, as he had lived a constrained life in England and his memories of England are diminishing. In contrast to stanza 2, there are more lines as it shows the spendthrift has lived most of his life in Australia, and that he has assimilated into the bush life. His days are also long and boring, as illustrated in the long stanza 2. His death occurs in stanza 3, and the stanza is relatively the same length as stanza 1 which in turn produces an insight of the cycle of life, the spendthrift has. Throughout her poetry, Judith Wright repeatedly revisits the common theme of Australia, its people and its past and what it means to be Australian. She commonly relates to the old traditional style of Australia's history and its landscape that is
widely recognized for its harsh, rugged traits. This theme of the 'Australian aspect' is clearly evident in 'Remittance man'. Social issues are displayed in many poets’ work and their beliefs on these issues are exposed intentionally through the use of various techniques. Judith Wright conveyed her view on social issues in most of her poems, and built her argument by using a variety of poetic techniques, which position the reader to comprehend her beliefs. By developing a socially critical perspective through her poems, Wright’s view of the world’s social issues is presented to the reader in a way that forces them to ponder on the aspects of society mentioned. “Remittance Man” is a poem through which Wrights beliefs on pregnancy, the relationship between man and wife, and social dissatisfaction due to context are examined. Poetic techniques or devices such as rhythm, figurative language and rhyme all position the reader not only to be aware of the social issue, but also to understand it, often through Wright’s perspective.

In her poem "Remittance Man", Judith Wright focuses on the theme of living up to society's unwritten code of conduct within England's 19th century culture. She suggests that within a society so socially divided, there remains the idle rich who are obligated to abide by the incessant need for social etiquette expected of their station. She compares this English lifestyle to a carefree Australian society.

Wright's powerful use of imagery in painting the landscapes of Australia and England, contrast in extremes showing Australia as having a
more comfortable, slow-paced society, described in '...red blowing dust of roads where the teams go slow.' She compares the Australian life to the English, confined and unvarying, especially demonstrated in the upper classes that have the benefit of 'pheasant shooting'. While these contrasts are based on the landscapes of the two countries, Wright's distinctions allow readers to empathize with the Remittance Man and the dramatic change in lifestyle he experiences. She explores the impinging factor of the environment on the human being. She proposes its influence in reviving positive and negative memories.

The poem sympathizes with those whose personalities cannot conform or assimilate into their cultural context, for example the Remittance Man whose 'spendthrift' nature is improper for a man of his status. The need to please and live up to society's expectations is a human condition emphasized throughout Wright's poem.

In reference to Judith Wright's poetry as being of a unique and distinctive style, in particular, Wright is well known for her use of two subjects, that being the 'Australian aspect' where in her work she commonly relates to the old traditional style of Australia's history and the 'harsh landscape' that is well known as an Australian trait. 'The Remittance Man' is a perfect example of this particular style. Whilst all of Wright's poetry has its own way of giving the lasting impression of these two aspects. The poem 'Remittance Man' stands out clearly as one of Wright's most qualified
examples of the Australian style. Even in the opening lines of this poem there is the subtle indication of that impression that Wright so strongly feels for Australia and the people,

‘The spendthrift, disinherited and graceless’ this English outcast i.e. The Remittance Man, has no real class or presence of a respectable character, yet these three dishonorable words refer directly to that almost traditional idea of what the Australian man was in the past. Once it is established that this Remittance Man is not wanted in England he happily retreats to the shores of Australia and finds self-contentment with this almost opposite lifestyle where he feels that no judgement is put on him and the absence of more restrictions. The main idea of this poem is the constant comparison between the cold, formal aspect of England to the harsh, laid-back way of Australia, which is still a commonly perceived way that is seen today. In the first stanza the line:

‘backtracks in the summer haze’
gives the instant idea of the Australian landscape that shows Wright’s direct idea of what she distinguishes this as. This is just the first in a numerous amount of lines that account for the typical view of Australia. There is also a strong sense that Australia is favored and compared to that of England and not just by the Remittance Man. Though England seems to have no real qualities in this poem there is also subtle criticism to the refined English culture that Australians ironically are renowned to be the complete opposite
in manner and in the social etiquette. However once the English aspect is left behind The Remittance Man abandons his old life and is released from the formal ties he hated so much.

The ‘blind-drunk sprees’ were in the past and the’ track to escape to nowhere’ was everything that Australia could offer him. Yet Wright still cleverly intervenes with his memories of shame that presented the English ‘pale stalk of a wench’ which was replaced by ‘black Mary’s eyes’ the indication of an Aboriginal. The constant contrast of the two opposites is referred to throughout the entire poem showing the powerful idea that Wright is putting to her readers. The images of the landscape are also one of Wright’s strong passions that she often refers to, particularly the Australian landscape. All of Wright’s Australian poems reflect the heritage and nature of Australia; there is also the use of the past to show the traditional role of what the country is well known for. In particular the strong conflicting nature of England and Australia show the ironic twist that history shows that Australia was where all the convicts were deported to from England. However in the Remittance Man’s mind this was his ticket to paradise. The rugged beauty of the Australian environment is where the Remittance Man finally lays to rest:

That harsh biblical country of the scapegoat. (11)

Though the Remittance Man found his happiness and self-satisfaction this was not seen by those of his family, in particular, ‘the Squire’ his brother feels a vague sense of care for his brother. He feels as if he has led a
shameful and wasted life. This ending for the poem leaves the reader in a neutral state of mind where there is an unpredictability of happiness. From a different perspective, it should be questioned that this Remittance Man was a failure and never subjected to anything. However, the elucidation of the Remittance Man is the only significant aspect of the poem.

*The Trains*

Most of the poems of Wright were written during the time of World War II. 'The Trains' written during the Second World War II, took the threat of the war in the Pacific as her subject. The main theme was the poet's awareness of time, death, and evil on a universal scale. It is particularly a descriptive poem that uses many codes and conventions of the genre. Wright says that the train journey ‘has a new tang to it-a sense of belonging’.

One of the conventions of poetry like this is the use of lots of similes and metaphors. For example, old men's sleep is "shattered like glass," the whistle of the train is a "wild summoning cry." The train itself is a "tiger." These devices are used to show us that the condition of the people during war is miserable. Even the train, as a simple transport, is a tiger, ruining old folk's sleep. The train in the poetry is carrying arms: a large symbol of war. So war, through the use of the train, is with them "past and future, troubling the children's sleep, laying a reeking trail across our dream[s]..." When the whistle of the train pierces their hearts they recall the panic of war, the "old
panic riot," and war through the ages: "blood's red thread still binds us fast in history."

The poem uses many different codes, some of them are old-fashioned. For example, “the trains pass... with a sound like thunder." If you had never heard a steam engine before then the phrase may have no meaning. In a few generations, that code will no longer apply. The "wild summoning cry, their animal cry" of a steam engine whistle is another code that will vanish. Today, it is the electric powered bass horn, and the whine of the alternator, not the high pitched 'animal' shriek and the rush of the cylinders of the golden days of steam. One code, which will never vanish, however, is that of "blood’s red thread... in history." That code will probably signal war forever.

The rhyme scheme used in "The Trains" is very interesting, if one is even used at all! In the first two stanzas, the first and fourth lines rhyme. In the third and last Stanza  the first and third lines rhyme. It is hard to tell if a rhyme scheme was used deliberately, or if the words that fit just happen to rhyme. If not, the use of the irregular flow of words brings the poem analogous to that of thought: which fits in with the idea of a poet's musings.

Another convention of the genre that is used in this poem is onomatopoeia. This occurs in war poetry to a large extent due to the many loud noises associated with war like explosives, guns, motors, planes, etc. Two examples of Onomatopoeia the train's sound: "like thunder" and the train's whistle: "wild [and] summoning." The poem departs from the genre a
bit here: they are not exactly onomatopoeia; they are more like 'metaphor/simile sounds.' It is not really spelling the sounds, but describing them. This creates the interesting effect of comparison.

In conclusion, through the use of codes and conventions, you can look deeper into the poem and get an idea of the context. The poet works forward from their life, and writes a poem, and if we work backwards from the poem we can see some of the world of the poet.

*Bullocky*

Bullocky is a written art form. It describes in fascinating tactile images and metaphors the eventual death. Bullocky is another poem, which can depict the Australian landscape. In this poem, all stanzas are in the past tense except the final one in which she changes to the present.

The poem depicts the final lonely days of Bullocky. Years of naught but bulls for company, the only voice being his own as he cries out into the nothingness, waiting for a response, and left wanting. Finally his loneliness breeds demented fantasies; his eyes and ears play tricks, yet he does not resist it. His hallucinations, his fiends and angels, are his only company. So he surrenders to insanity, and for that fleeting moment before death he experiences peace. He is sung into the long awaited death by the cattle-bells. After that we read of the Bullocky being discovered, many years later, in the vineyard. "The Prophet Moses feeds the grape, and fruitful is the Promised Land." The Bullocky is at rest in the soil of the Promised Land (Australia).
He is where he is meant to be, feeding the grapes, as part of life and Earth as he ever was.

Judith Wright, whose pastorolist family established itself in northern New South Wales and southern Queensland, felt compelled to withdraw her early poem ‘Bullocky’ from the anthologies of poetry used in schools because she believed it was being misinterpreted as an uncomplicated affirmation of the pioneering spirit — an interpretation, she noted, that overlooked the fact that the old man in the poem is a ‘mild religious maniac’, who is described as being in thrall to a ‘mad apocalyptic dream.’ ‘Bullocky’ is not an absolute rejection of the pioneering narrative, but the ‘tone of the last two verses’, said Wright, ‘which I had seen as a gently affectionate send-up of the Vision, was missed — they became a hyperbolic celebration of it’. Furthermore, the poem only addresses one aspect of the story. Other poems, Wright felt, were ‘necessary to a proper view of “Bullocky”.

*The Surfer*

Judith Wright conveys her appreciation of the Australian beach in “The Surfer”. There is effective imagery throughout this poem. Wright invites the reader to look at their subjects in particular ways. ‘The surfer’ is a strapping and influential limerick. Judith Wright does this by capturing the awesome feel and strength in the atmosphere and mood of the poem by including ‘joy and exuberance’. It is about the beauty of the sea as it ‘crouches on sand’. There’s a poignant verse in this poem. The poem is a celebration of the sheer
exhilaration of those who take to the sea. Arguably Australia's greatest poet, Judith Wright, was another persistent fighter ... and the picture she drew of a powerful surfer at one with the sea. ‘The Surfer’ expresses many ideas on challenge.

This poem is also quite blunt but at the same time it is also quite joyful by showing the emotion of great happiness. Also the character is high in spirits showing exuberance. ‘The Surfer’ invites the reader to look at the subject in the poem in particular ways. There is a joyful and heartening side to this poem but it ends on a tragic note. This poem expresses the idea of life, what dangers might come upon it. The author throughout the poem intentionally avoids the idea of ‘death’.

*The Company of Lovers*

‘The Company of Lovers’ was written during World War II and it captures the feel of the time. This poem makes a juxtaposition of two essential forces of major impact upon human existence, the effects of love and those of death. Within the poem it can be noted that the two stanzas reflect each of the certain themes. The first, a universal description of love and the ambitions two lovers might have, whilst the second a reflection of how quick all may soon be lost through the loneliness of death.

Wright is renowned for her use language, and many of her poems contain paradoxes in which the reader is confronted with a phrase completely unrealizable, but effective in portraying the nature of the poem. “The
Company Of Lovers” itself opens with the use of a paradox “…We meet and part now…” instills an image of simultaneous unity and depart, evoking in a sense of temporary cohesion that may soon be lost. This may represent a changing nature of ‘lovers’ and perhaps such a quick meeting and farewell represents the promiscuous nature of some who class themselves as ‘lovers.’

Nonetheless, a different approach is taken as the first stanza introduces ‘the lost company’ which could quite well represent lost ideals or values that once offered what was a company of lovers, which has now become short-term relationships. This emphasis goes on to describe, with passion, the joining of ‘hands together in the night’ of those “who sought many things, throw all away for this one thing, one only” – love.

**NIGGER’S LEAP, NEW ENGLAND**

The poem is an attempt to achieve striking narration about the horrors of the past period. ‘Night’ symbolizes the significance of the dark period of history, when Aboriginals were killed. ‘The night is beat with the cloud of boats against the sheer limelit granite head’ connotes the invasion of the whites over Aboriginals. The killing of the Aboriginals and their fall is exemplified: ‘Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff’. After the period of complete victimization and destruction Wright calls for synthesis. She provokes guilt investigation and pleads the whites to learn the significance of life from Aboriginals: ‘Now must we measure our days by nights, our tropics by their
poles, love by its end and all our speech by silence’. In a serious self introspection and examination Wright questions violence perpetrated on Aboriginals: ‘Did we not know their blood channeled our rivers, and the black dust our crops ate was their dust?’ She proclaims that all men are one at the end of human history. For the velocity of destruction and colonization that whites brought in Wright says that never the Aboriginal children will dance like the shadows of saplings in the wind. It is the Night that reminds us of the colonial history that sunk many of the islands when they were in their pristine glory. The poem evinces that Wright was completely aware of the earlier modes of culture dispossessed by the whites. She registers her strong emotional repentance for the murders committed by the whites. She considers her brought up in New South Wales as the most fortunate thing and considers this as ‘New England’. She addresses ‘Australia’ in a old fashioned way as ‘New England’ with an underlined realization of brutality executed on Aboriginals. The poem is appreciated for its fluster and alliterative imagery:

    Be dark, O lonely air.

    Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull

    that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff

    and then were silent, waiting for the flies

    (Judith Wright Collected Poems.15)

Wright tries her best in retrieving the memory of the massacre of the Aboriginals and places it in the larger sphere the human history of
victimization. She expands the post conquest Aboriginal history to embrace the entire humanity. G.A Brennan in his article ‘The Aborigine in the Works of Judith Wright’ observes: “this reminds us that the cry of the falling Aboriginal is not only the cry of his passing culture, but of ours too. His death and the death of his people are an ominous reminder of our own ephemerality” (Westerly, no. 4, December 1972.48). It is pertinent to observe that Wright attempts to develop historical conscience and she accords the scenes with an atrocity to be clearly retold in terms of perpetrators and victims. On the lines of Wordsworth, Wright enters into an active relationship with the nature and Aboriginals of Australia and succeeds in dramatizing her yearnings and energies. She gets connected with fellow New-Englanders and includes Aborigines as fellow humans. But sees the power of darkness as something ominous ‘that tided up the cliffs’. She cautions the whites that if Japanese becomes the next conquerors of Australia, whites have to serve the similar fate of Aboriginals. Here, Wright’s ironical perspective reminds that of W.H. Auden who with his ambivalence relished the tide of history.

**HALF-CASTE GIRL**

The poem depicts the tragedy of little Josie. It deals with the ‘Half Caste Girl’ dead and buried but restless. The girl is presented as a moral agent. Wright proposes new recognition and synthesis which can liberate the Aboriginals. This is obvious in the lines:
So she is restless still under her rootwarm cover,

hearing the noise of living,

forgetting the pain of dying (19)

The attempts of Half Caste Girl are universal. She climbs the hills that belong to none. Once, she was proclaimed as the representative of Natives. But now she sings the songs of women and the eternal song of love and dying as a representative of humanity. She becomes a moral agent thrusting her heart against the world’s stone. She uses her love but fails to bring down the wall built with cunningness of the people. But Wright ensures that the seeds of activism are here and they await the invasion of pressures from outside. It is obvious that contemporary Australia insists on an activist’s stance. In 1982 Judith Wright stated that the little girl in the poem is based upon a person still alive. But the poem is accused of unrealism by many of the Aboriginal activists.

**Woman to Man**

Judith Wright's second anthology *Woman to Man* (1949) is better known for the freshness of her approach in examining until-then taboo subjects. When it was published it caused sensation as it is powerful and educational even today. She introduces a distinctly female perspective. Judith Wright wrote poems that range from the intense lyrical sexuality of 'Woman to Man' to the passionate poems as *Woman to child*. She provided a
new language for exploring the sacredness of sexual union, pregnancy and birth.

The poem introduces the image of developing embryo within the womb of the author. The first three stanzas convey the wonder involved in the creation of the new life. The fertilized egg cell builds the body silently and swiftly. The eyeless labourer’ wonders about the body of the new person. The author is in confusion about the utility of the new person. Whether the body is for ‘resurrection’ or for ‘birth’ is not known to the author. The word ‘resurrection’ implies death first and life after. The first stanza foresees the future. The symbolism employed justifies the meaning. The second section of the poem extends the image of the embryo. The author emphasizes the namelessness of the child. The embryo has not yet developed as a child. The intimacy with the embryo fails to justify the relationship. They share the joy, love and wonder of the creation. The unborn child is part of victimizing game. The author is unsure of the future existence of the embryo but ensures that the baby will be intelligent in their lovemaking. The third section presents the development of the child. The strength, the flesh and the crystals are shaped by man’s arm, the women’s breast and by the mixture of others. The wild tree reflects in the growth of the arteries and veins of the embryo. From the undifferentiated mass of cells into a human being the intricacy of the folded rose in the form of miracle is found. Section four brings in the emotions and unfurls the minds of new parents. It
captures the dramatic change of mood. The image of violence and enclosure is clouded by the blindness and darkness. ‘The Blind head butting at the dark’ connotes the emergence of the baby into the world. Though the passage of emergence is dark, the child sees the blaze of the night along the blade. As the umbilical cord is cut, the blade severs the ties. The pain and shock in birth and life await for the child. Thus the birth of the child is dangerous and deadly. ‘The resurrection’ in the first stanza acquires significance in conveying that to create new life one has to risk death.

The poem is profoundly a moving poem. It deeply affects the people. It conceptualizes the feelings of carrying a child. It gives us a world of conflicting emotions that form the expectant mother’s mind. Wright creates a clinical and detached effect and reminds that poetry speaks to the world within us.

Camphor Laurel

Wright’s anthologies are sprinkled with celebrations of trees. We find poems on the camphor laurel, cedars, the wattle and the wattle-tree, the eucalyptus, the flame-tree, the pepperina, the orange-tree, the scribbly-gum, and gum-trees among others. It ought to be noted that Wright’s use of the definite article in these poems’ titles both points to the particular genus and to the tree as an emotive symbol. To describe and empathize with gums, cedars or flame-trees is powerful poetry but to turn them into objects of admiration
or symbols of permanence was meant to remind her readers of the wealth and precariousness of our natural inheritance.

The tree becomes an abiding image for the nation’s productivity. That comes with a warning in the poem. ‘Camphor Laurel’ sets up an opposition between the foolishness of the late-arriving humans and the simple but persistent life of the old camphor laurel tree.

Under the house the roots go deep,
down, down, while the sleepers sleep;
splitting the rock where the house is set,
cracking the paved and broken street,
Old Tim turns and old Sam groans,
"God be good to my breaking bones";
and in the slack of tireless night
the tree breathes honey and moonlight.

Despite its apparent passivity and unmoving silence, the life and scent of the tree critiques the gross and random evils of an uncaring society, which rejects the now-rendered obsolescent weak and the old with a rigid exclusivity. In fact, the tree gives off "honey and moonlight” just as it was meant to do. It is a symbol of permanence, sweetness and native honesty compared with man's short-term foolish, facile and unethical ways. Here again, Wright dramatizes the tussle of man against Nature, for even the stationary tree has its logic against the foolish revelry and willful injustice of Australia’s environmental
neglect. People of insight may then learn these lessons from Nature to feel their spiritual roots growing deep, deeper into simplicity.

The credentials of Judith Wright as an environmentalist are praiseworthy. Wright’s focus on the helplessness of man about the destruction of the trees and symbolism of the individual tree in her poetry evoke theological reflections for eco-environmental atmosphere. The power and presence of a great tree is a valuable insight and a force for admiration. Like humans the tree is rooted and grounded in time and evolutionary continuity. To Wright the tree offers many resonances, patterns, processes and purpose of life. Greg Smith in his article ‘We are turned into a Great Tree: Judith Wright’s strange word about trees’ says that Trees are significant parts of the mindscape of the poet as they endure weather, erosion, drought and they are given fixed places in the landscape. They are perceived as faithful to the needs of human conditions. Human beings have to emulate the persistence and endurance from the trees. The tree enhances the lives of the people by interacting with earth, bird, air and life and it also reconciles and unifies the lives of the people. Wright conveys the same essence of life in other poems: ‘Rainforest’, ‘The Wattle tree’, ‘Eroded Hills’, ‘Old House’, ‘Two Dreamtimes’, ‘For a Pastoralist Family’. Wright says that the celebration of the lives of silent trees is a profound reflection of human life.

Night after Bushfire
Judith Wright’s ‘Night after bushfire’, which describes the deathly stillness of the burnt area. Thirteen-year-old Sophie is grounded for six months after a bushfire was ... Wright's narrative style is her own brand of magical realism. This poem describes the deathly stillness of a burnt area, a landscape of ‘charcoal and moonlight’.

The poem begins with the absence of silence even on the moon and the time is considered an alien. The warmness of the Sun at the high noon is the faint dust of fear. The Bush fire brings death and chares the bone. One stares at the sockets black with flame. Men who glance the destruction must leave his humanity and identity. The destruction of the fire and the brutality threatens the soul and makes them to look long for the souls that wear the chains of the day. Because every soul is lost in this landscape of charcoal and moonlight.

**Dream**

Judith Wright had a dream for Australia, that is, that Australians as a whole would identify with the pioneering spirit. She considers Australia as the landscape of the dream work of imperialism. Travelling in the night time is an obscure tide. Travelling in a strange night she finds the barrenness of the land and is caught by the silence of the land. She is of the view that who ever travels ‘must move fed by love’. Travelling symbolized with colonialism could leave only destruction from head to heart. ‘The Towering Tree of blood’ conveys the ecological destruction and Wright addresses it typically
‘O Dying tree’. The poet wishes to travel taking the lead from the road of blood. Wright says that it is a dream that she made out of her triple dream. The journey of the poet continues ‘to find the unsought rose’. The poet is of the view that out of silence, silence grows. Wright says that she is devoured by the silence of the night.

**Eli Eli**

The poem is Christian in character and brings in many biblical references and connotations. The title of the poem evokes the cavalry atmosphere of pathos. The title is taken from Mathew 27:46: “Eli, Eli lama Sabachtani? which means ‘My God, My God, Why has thou Forsaken me?’. From this Wright enumerates the paradoxes in the failure of Christ’s death. She explores the cosmic dimensions of Christ’s death. She provides an interior voice to acute pain and pathos in life. Wright conveys Soldiers, elders, women and children drowning in the river was the cross of pain to Jesus Christ. Knowing their death and inability to save them is the real wound than the wounds inflicted on his body. The poem brings in the interior anguish of the central character voiced in muted soliloquy. It throws a challenge to the consciousness of the readers. The world fails to understand the death of Christ and terribly fails to understand the salvation and its relevance. The poem brings in the theological aspects of salvation and the failure of humanity. But the redemption takes place only through ignorance,
neglect, fear or apathy. These things make the people mindlessly selfish. Wright decries the mindless selfishness in a secular society:

To hold out love and know they would not take it,
to hold out faith and know they dared not take it-
the invisible wand, and none would see or take it,
all he could give, and there was none to take it-
thus they betrayed him, not with the tongue’s betrayal.

(Judith Wright Poems.45).

As the Divine savior of the world Jesus Christ remained powerless knowing the fate of the people. Wright says as a man Christ is limited to time and place of the cross. Challenging the dependency of the people, Wright from an Anthropological perspective says that the 20th century humans are masters of their destiny and they actively save themselves: “they themselves could save them” (45). Wright avers the catholic doctrine that salvation is automatic. One must do good work besides going along with current religious or political times. Wright infers that the humanity must respond to divinity irrespective of time and place. The salvation won through religion has to find co relation with the details of regular life. Wrights ends the poem with line: “he knew there was no river” (45).

The Killer

"The Killer" begins with a fall into a creek. A snake is seen and fear is felt. She tries to kill it: "O beat him into the ground/O strike him till he dies."
The snake is black and red and as he dies, "His icy glance turns outward."
However the snake-killer soon realizes that her enemy is not the snake but
fear itself.

The images used by Judith Wright clearly portray a snake and its death.
Her poem has seven four line stanzas with the second and fourth lines
rhyming. It is interesting to note that the fourth stanza does not rhyme. In this
stanza, the snake dies, which is the turning point in the story. After the snake
dies, "the killer" is actually the person who is afraid. This poem has two
similes in the first stanza: to describe the day "clear as fire" and the birds' song, "frail as glass." Alliteration is used as in "lips to the live water" in verse 2. However it is the poet's use of adjectives throughout which really makes
the images realistic. Judith Wright's treatment of the subject matter is serious
in this poem. This poem encourages readers to think differently about life. It
is the fear that becomes the problem, not the snake. She shows that it is the
fear in our minds that must be overcome and not things in the outside world.

**THE GATEWAY**

In 1953, Judith Wright published her third anthology, *The Gateway*, in
which she developed her own poetic perspective on Australia. The poems
collected in this work create several kinds of images about a gateway
symbolizing the moment and place that every existence changes. The poet
constructs a tense panorama of many scenes; the austere drought and flood in
Australia, the death of the creatures and human beings, some legends and
myth about death and rebirth, and human spiritual resurrection through love. The influence of European poets is seen in the way she incorporates metaphysical devices in her poems, the use of which creates both ambivalent feelings and ambiguous attitudes towards contrastive themes and ideas. Death-in-life versus life-in-death taking place in the Australian wilderness makes her insight deeper, and terror versus relief in our human feelings pervades in the poems' lines. The difficult adventures and toilsome colonization by immigrants left their offspring fruits of their harvest contrasts with the lives of aboriginals who were sacrificed by the whites' colonization but who can still recount the legends that have continued to provide power enough to survive. These patterns of life echo throughout Judith Wright's poetry.

Eroded Hills

In this poem, written in 1950, she described the de-forested scenery of the New England area of New South Wales where she grew up.

These hills my father's father stripped and beggars to the winter wind they
crouch like shoulders naked and whipped humbled, abandoned, out of mind...
when the last leaf and bird go, let my thoughts stand like trees. Here. Judith Wright wishes that her thoughts could stand like trees

Eroded Hills) (81).
**Birds**

‘Birds’ is both a celebration of Judith Wright as a writer and as a passionate environmentalist. The birds form the central imagination of the poet. Wright speaks about the simple lives of the birds. The communication and interaction of the birds with the birds is simple. Beleagured by the attitudes of the people and the bloody situation, if people can go to the forest they can experience the melting of the past, present and future. They can derive solace from the languages available in the forest. The poet confirms that they can fuse passions into one clear stone and learn the simplicities of life from the birds:

> Then I could fuse my passions into one clear stone  
> And be simple to my self as the bird is to the bird. (86).

**Train Journey**

This poem brings to the fore Wright’s perspective of the harsh yet vulnerable landscape of Australia. This poem might have been the outcome of her imagination as Judith travelled through out the Armidale landscape and her increasing sense of belongingness to that country.

As Wright looked out onto the drought-stricken landscape on that train journey towards Armidale through the foothills of the Moonbis in 1942, Wright says she became “sharply aware of it as 'my country’”. This is again reminded in the passage in her poem “Train Journey”, published in *The Gateway* in 1953, where she writes, “I looked and saw under the moon's cold
sheet/ your delicate dry breasts, country that built my heart”. A male poet could not have written with such tenderness of the harsh yet fragile Australian landscape. Far from needing to “transcend her womanliness”, Judith Wright brought to Australian poetry a vision and understanding of her country and its peoples that is unique, one enriched by her woman’s perspective.

**Old House**

The poem expresses regret for the lost opportunity and a call to rectify the wrongs of the past with a more enlightened attitude. For the poet, “my great-great-great-grandfather heard them with one part of his mind” (line 20). He had the blinkered view, the limited invaders and settler’s view in seeing the land as his sole possession as one of the dominators. Now as a member of that same New England family, the poet expresses her regret that the New England Aborigines’ rights were so trampled upon and their lives wasted. In making reparations for past injustices, she urges, Australians too can still obtain a salvation of sorts.

Within her pastoralist family, Judith Wright had a dream for Australia, that is, that Australians as a whole would identify with the pioneering spirit of the early pioneers and their love of the land so they would care for it in the present. We also find many references to transcendence and salvation. We also find that poetic tropes and metaphors can ignite faith by imaging
humanity's perennial longing for regeneration, rejuvenation, transfiguration and salvation.

**Drought Year**

‘Drought Year’ is among Wright’s most distinctively Australian poems because of its use of plants, animals, and sites specific to Australia. As such, the poem serves as an excellent introduction to modern poetry. The poem’s narrator finds herself witness to a drought in the Australian outback, a witnessing that becomes a warning, one repeatedly punctuated by the cries of dingoes, wild dogs indigenous to Australia. Wright represents the drought as nature, powerful and intimidating, a nature to be avoided. At the same time, the animals and plants subject to the drought represent another side of nature: nature as victim—except, that is, the poem’s wagtail, an Australian bird taking advantage of the drought’s killing fields by pecking out the eyes in a ‘seething skull’. While Wright’s drought is, in no uncertain terms, a hellish matter, the multiple kinds of nature she portrays (frightful drought, tormented animals, opportunistic wagtail) render nature too complex to easily sum up. This is most likely the reason Wright selected the dingoes’ enigmatic cries as the poem’s recurrent and eerie motif.

**THE TWO FIRES**

**Searchlight Practice**

This poem is very simplistic in its approach and it speaks of the things occurring in nature. The person sitting alone on a peaceful night
contemplating the realities and beauties of nature. Sometimes everything seems so simple when the nature is at peace with itself. We can learn a lot of things from nature, like being peaceful and to be self-reliant and be able to throw the burden on the Earth for bearing us:

To let the Earth bear us

Like a flower or a stone

Every living being would want to be considered a flower and no one a stone. At sometime or the other everyone wishes to enjoy peace in life by letting all the burdens pass away.

**Nameless Flower**

This poem is about a ‘nameless flower’, which has got no biological identification. The flower discussed in this poem is so pure and so full of its own beauty.

Three white petals float

above the Green

The colour contrast is beautiful to be present in a single flower as it is very rare to see this combination. The poet tries to give a name to the flower but finally she fails in doing so as she cannot give a fitting name to the flower and justify its beauty.

The poet's ability to set “a word upon a word” which allows for evanescent, nameless events and things – in this case, a botanically unidentified white flower – becomes meaningful:
Flakes that drop at the flight of a bird and have no name,

I'll set a word upon a word to be your home.

Many of her best poems are, like ‘Nameless Flower’, deeply intimate, yet at the same time seem to proceed from a place in the mind, which is not subjective and, indeed, is even impersonal. Experience goes hand in hand with the way that this seemingly impersonal requirement is borne by language and by an awareness of the limited place of human consciousness in the wider world – is handled and brought to fruition. Such understanding is not a matter of intention but of immersion.

**Landscapes**

This is a poem about landscapes and the various things that are hidden underneath the ground. The life that is present in the landscape rejuvenates the landscape and keeps it alive. It is said through this poem that the people really come to know the nature of the land that they are living in only once they are dead because then they become a vital part of it:

To look at landscapes loved by the newly dead

Is to move into the dark and out again. (141).

**The Cup**

The poet says that the usual cup, which is hung over the sink, is not really dead because it comes alive every time some person comes to fill it and have a drought. To overcome the troubles in life we have to let the silence
travel in our heart and brain by every track of nerve and vein, so that we are no longer in trouble and we find peace.

**Request to a year**

The gift that the poet proposes to ask of the year is the attitude that the ‘poet’s great-great-grandmother possessed.’ This grandmother had eight children and she took up the hobby of painting pictures only once they were all grown up. Once when she was painting sitting on the banks of a riverbed, she suddenly saw that her second son was almost on the verge of falling in to a waterfall. The boy’s sister was trying to pull her brother out of the water and she herself was almost in trouble as her heavy frocks acted as a barrier for the rescue. The grandmother resignedly sketched this scene. The poet asks that if it is possible for the year to think of trying to provide her with an attitude just like her grandmother.

*Request to a year* is not part of her much-feted scenic nationalistic canon. Deceptively casual, it demonstrates her craft; the discipline, wit, grace of expression and, above all, her gift with images.

It is a way of reflecting what her life must have felt like; surrounded by disasters and horrors and unable to directly contain, confront or control them. It places you there on the spot; watching your child drift away on an ice floe. What do you do? Shriek ... run up and down—all very understandable—but it won’t solve the problem. The common understanding of this poem centers on its heartlessness.
The mother in the poem has let the boy go exploring, to find himself and the world, and when he gets into trouble she's too far away to do anything except give him “life through art”, so to speak. The essence is, an artist—or anyone else for that matter—cannot give way to self-indulgent helplessness.

**At Cooloolah**

In At Cooloolah (1955), Wright recalls her grandfather "beckoned by a ghost - / a black accoutered warrior ... /who sank into bare plain, as now into time past" and cold history halts her enjoyment: Love and fear often come together in Wright's poetry. So too do love and guilt. This is especially evident when she engages with the issue of European 'invasion': "I know that we are justified only by love, / but oppressed by arrogant guilt, have room for none." The ambiguity extends further when she confirms the lesson admitted by cultural anthropologists: the conquerors become the conquered!

Those dark-skinned people who once named Cooloolah knew that no land is lost or won by wars,

for earth is spirit: the invader's feet will tangle in nets there and his blood be thinned by fears. *(At Cooloolah)*

This poem from *The Two Fires* (1955) deals with black-white relationships from a new angle.

**BIRDS**
The poems in Judith Wright’s volume *Birds* have long been recognized as among the best-loved poems written in Australia. Many people have grown up with the beguiling rhythms of ’Black Cockatoos’, or the jauntiness of ’The Wagtail’.

Judith Wright’s poems on birds are probably the most important contribution she made to Poetry. Her many birds demonstrate ethical relevance to her era, as creatures in their own right demonstrating nature’s amazing resilience and directionality. For birds do demonstrate an enviable logic in building their habitats and brooding young with an almost anthropological feeling and longing for life.

The thirty poems in *Birds* record many and various emotions: wonder, enchantment, embarrassment, insight, and at times irony. Wright finds delight when she relates to the natural species in their natural behaviors and their simple conformity with life’s directionality,

**The Peacock**

This poem is about a beautiful peacock locked up in a dirty cage by the aldermen. The poet says that the blue and the copper colours of the feathers of the peacock are loosing their luster because of age and for the reason of being confined to a small place.

In “Peacock,” she is critical of the absent aldermen who deny dignity to the ever-beautiful peacock in its dirty cage. Despite being trapped there for the idle entertainment of human eyes, ever-resistant and Phoenix-like, nature
rises above it all, as she muses: “Love clothes him still, in spite of all”. Her anthropomorphism was not just idle whimsy or heavy-handed ethical mandating. Her overall purpose was to whet a social conscience about the natural environment.

**Winter Kestrel**

The Kestrel cries out to the Sun to come out of his hiding and provide him with some light to hunt, so that the bird can satiate its hunger. The bird also promises a share of the blood of the prey it will be able to catch, to the Sun, if it is successful in its mission.

The Poem 'Winter Kestrel' explores the life of birds and fundamental issues of human frailty. In this poem we can also see Wright’s responsiveness to the natural world.

**Egrets**

This poem describes the scene of a serene pool and the presence of thirty egrets wading through it. The setting for the poem is a quiet evening, when there was no activity around except for the Egrets moving in the water. The poet had her fill of the scene and the description of the white Egret birds against the background of a dark pool is wonderful.

Judith Wright was a long-term advocate for the Aboriginal people of Australia. She was also very aware of the country and its splendours. This is where she is at this moment in time as she writes about the Egrets. The water is jet-black due partially to the vegetation growing around and in it, the depth
of the water plays some part here too. The Egrets are a beautiful bird; their white feathers in stark contrast to the colour of the water. There is no reference here to Aboriginal people but to the beauties of natures to be preserved, admired and respected.

By using one's own imagination it's easy to see the sight of these beautiful birds and to feel the peace that Judith Wright felt at this moment. The beauty of nature is shown through this poem. Wright did love Australian landscapes but she says herself that her poetry cannot be read in isolation to the context of Australian society and this poem is one that goes further then simply talking about the role of Australian flora and fauna in Australian identity. This poem is a metaphor in both the inferential and the literal meaning of the words, yet there is the inferential meaning being allotted more interesting to analyze. It is easier to show by working backwards. The poem is an example of white Australian society and the journey by some to reflect on the history of the nation in relation to the Aboriginal past, and the ignorant attitudes of other members of a predominantly white society. The symbolism "quiet evening" sets the mood of the poem. From this line the solitude, peace and simplicity in both the surrounding landscape as well as the mindset of the persona. Line two "I saw a pool, jet black and mirror still" this line is filled with symbolism needed to be unravelled in order for the reading to be understood. ‘Pool’ has the direct connotation of water as a symbol of cleansing. "Jet black" has two meanings. The black not only symbolizes
Aboriginality but also depth, the amplitude of Aboriginal history. Line 3 must be taken in as a whole. It is a metaphor within itself with the paperbacks symbolizing the majority of white society. The final lines of this verse reveal the 30 egrets, symbolic of the whites that are willing to reflect, as they are wading through the pool of reflection in a peaceful and composed mindset. This poem foregrounds themes of aboriginal identity, white ethnocentric views as well as the liberation of rejecting white supremacy and embracing another culture.

**Magpies**

The poet says in this poem that at first glance the Magpies are full of Grace, but once they find food their grace is replaced by their greed taking over them. The poet feels that the Magpies cannot be compared with any other living beings on this Earth because they sing songs with full of grace and dignity which no other being can exhibit.

‘Their Greed is brief; their joy is long’

This poem holds a lot of meaning in it and it speaks more about the good qualities of the Magpie in contrast to the human beings who have little joy and more greed.

**The Koel**

The life of this bird is portrayed creatively in this poem. The season of spring and this bird are inseparable as Koel makes this season more appealing. The poet feels that the birds voice is its only positive characteristic
as it sings with its heart’s content. This bird has got many troubles in life. It is a rebel, migrant bird and many people hate it. Although it is an Outcast the Koel seems to be telling an endless tale with its songs.

_Dove--- Love_

More graphically, the conventionally sacred doves (who incidentally were Noah’s messengers of salvation Gen 8:11) provide an ironic revelation in the little known biological fact that doves in captivity eat flesh. This fearful paradox reveals the taboo that suburban man of conventional eye and manicured claw shares the same terrible secret of their dog-eat-dog existence if pushed to it. Cannibal like, the seemingly innocent dove cooing becomes the dinner bell to evoke her perceptive observation:

The doves play

on one repetitive note that plucks the raw helpless nerve their soft, “I do. I do.

I could eat you.

_Migrant Swift_

Wright’s sympathetic eye for tragedy also appears to great effect when coming upon the “wreckage” of a migrant swift in its death throes. Having braved thousands of miles without food and in the wastage of its own body weight, it had apparently fallen to the earth with a snapped wing exhausted and cut out of life just as it was within sight of its rightful Eden:

He trusted all to air . . .
air’s creatures fed him.

once fallen, there’s no saving . . . [In this wreckage his]

head still strove to rise

and turn towards the lost impossible spring.

Wright found the migrant swift was a strong image of paradise lost, for falling short of its destiny through sheer exhaustion and misadventure. In “Migrant Swift,” her acute nostalgia for “the lost impossible spring” is a cameo of tenderness and empathy. In an era when she felt traditional values were being needlessly discarded, nature’s amazing resilience and directionality offer ready models for human happiness because it is the natural pattern.

In this call to be mindful of the land, Wright invokes the value of sympathy for the battler in the bird who has finally lost what it struggled to attain. Wright used this simple event to prophetic effect, imaging by this negative event the true spring of fulfillment, survival to reproduce that is the clear directionality of this bird’s life.

*Silver Terns*

Wright found nature’s modesty eminently well demonstrated in bird life. In “Silver Terns”, only the most observant will notice that their hunting is efficient and hygienic:

you would not guess the blood unless you saw it,

that the waves washed from feather and from scale
Five Senses

This poem speaks about the life ‘within’ life. When a woman carries a child there is something very complicated that goes on inside her. The shapes, the stillness, the moving—a rhythm happens inside. There is no interruption for this happening as it goes on for a long time. Finally there are sounds— and as in everything else the events follow a specific pattern. The something is what makes seeming sense out of all the events that happen to us in a lifetime. Like the adage, "with age comes wisdom", this poem implies that a pattern and weaving are taking place within us, and that slowly, as the weaving (like the forming of a lily) takes shape, things start to reveal themselves, to make sense, to be comprehended a bit better. Lines 19 and 20 (to me) seem to justify the fact that we are not in control of our overall dance in life; Fate? Destiny? The five senses are ours, just like "free choice" is ours. But there is another force that goes beyond choice...The idea of this exercise is to deconstruct the given order so that the words can come at you in another way—or through "other five senses". I'll have a go at looking at the meaning. Judith Wright seems to be saying that her 5 senses (sight, touch, taste, hearing seem to gather all she sees inside her and mix themselves into a complete whole that she can see. Judith does not really understand what has happened ‘follows beyond my knowing’ but she knows the wonder of this mixture as it turns her senses into an artful world of beauty.
The lake

The lake is described in its full detail in this poem. The water in the lake reflects all the things that it catches and there is absolutely no difference what that object might be- it can be a cloud, leaf or anything else. The water reflects day and night in its full beauty. The poet says that she wants to cast a net over the lake- what she means is she is trying to take in the beauty of everything that the lake is reflecting and yet there is sufficient left to admire. The poet says that if we look at the lake deeply we can definitely feel as if it is looking back at us.

For my daughter

The poet feels that once the children are grown, they leave their mother’s side and find their own. They have to learn the worldly way, in turn to be accepted by the world. As a mother, the poet asks her daughter what she expects from her mother now that she is completely grown up. The mother cannot think of a world without the daughter as a key part of it but still must learn to spend her days and try to make her own world because this is what the daughter wants from her. Love is the strong emotion that keeps pulling the mother towards her daughter and the poet here compares this emotion to a lion. The poet says that unless this emotion is tamed it is difficult for a mother to exist sanely. This emotion can only be tamed but cannot be killed completely. The mother is portrayed as the ‘giver’ and the daughter as that of a ‘taker’ in this poem.
The Diver

This poem speaks of a diver’s act of diving into the pool. At first he pauses on the tower, then draws in the breath and dives with a lot of courage. Each time a diver dives into a pool he needs a lot of courage, as with a small mistake he will be dead. Once the diver marks his curve in the water he emerges from it and has to do the whole act again. This speaks of the challenges a person faces in life from birth to death and how each one should be faced with the same hope, attention and care as the first one. Judith Wright's imagery is expressed with that strong simple language and subtle passion which has earned her an international reputation.

The Other Half

A Child with A dead Animal

When a person witness’s death there is an automatic emotion of feeling sad and lamenting. We realize the shortness, the temporary thing that life is only when we witness death. In a moment death changes a living creature into a ‘thing’ and it is forsaken to become one with the earth. This realization makes the person sadder. The glimpse of death is not which one can erase easily from one’s memory. It finds its way into the innermost cores of one’s being to be alive there forever.

To Another Housewife

In Judith Wright's poem, ‘To Another Housewife’, change occurs as the fundamental motif. The composer has harnessed a variety of language
techniques to promote these changes. "To Another Housewife" is a dramatic monologue that talks about the changes in the values and responsibilities of a girl as she matures into adulthood. Judith Wright has written this to highlight the fact that many people are in this situation.

Wright uses contrast and juxtaposition to outline this change in values when the girl who had at one time despised seeing death ("with tomahawk and knife we hacked/ at flyblown tatters of old meat") has come to associate with it daily ("these hands with love and blood imbrued"). Both cases symbolize violence.

**Homecoming**

“Homecoming” is about bringing the dead soldiers home from the Vietnam War. This poem is about a male surfer who finds his love and happiness in the ocean – the ocean is his second home. Personification is also used throughout this verse when the jets are described as “noble” and onomatopoeia is used with the word “whining. “Homecoming” is about the sorrow and emptiness that becomes a part of War.

**Eve To Her Daughters**

This Poem Reflect Feminist thought and is written with women’s words. We think that the “Daughters” all are women that have lived and died, and will live and die. We interpret it as if it’s Eve who is telling how Adam became after they had been dismissed from the Garden of Eden. He wants to make Earth easier to live in, which means that he invents cars, escalators and
other things. But Adam in this Poem is not Adam, it is men. Judith Wright writes that, “Perhaps the whole secret is that nothing exists but our faults.”

**Alive**

This is a poem, which conveys the message that in any life form what matters is not size but form (the inner thing). The poet says that even a single drop of water, when seen under a microscope has life in it. The throbbing, striving life when seen through the living eyes of a person seems to be sending the message that in any life form what usually matters is not the size, because even a single cell contains a lot of life in it, but what really is inside the cell is real energy ready to burst, which is the base for many theorems. That ‘inner thing’ is really important for any person to possess.

**Picture**

This poem is about how two different people perceive the different things that nature has on hold. The younger person in the poem when trying to paint a picture of a landscape gives it all the different bright hues in turn making it youthful. The same landscape when seen through the eyes of a more mellowed person is quite different. Being mature, the person is more close to reality and in turn can also perceive the picture as it once used to be.

‘In what he paints, I see the Earth I once used to know’ the poet means that the way she sees nature is very different from what other people see it (especially the younger ones).

**Black/white**
This poem takes a philosophical turn right from the beginning. The poet seems to be saying that right from the time we are born we play with both sides of life (i.e.) life and death. Sometimes even in life we experience death. The poet uses the words ‘Pro-biotics’ and ‘Anti-biotics’

This shows that there is a very thin line existing between life and death.

Envv

Wright calls envy every artist’s inescapable sin. She says this because only an artist can really know the value or creativity of the other artist’s work. Especially, Wright says through her poem, when an artist (a poet) compares his/her work with her contemporary writer’s work, then they can really experience this feeling to its fullest extent. But Wright says that one can fulfill all that he wanted to be only after they’re dead. The most unimaginable things can be fulfilled here. The poet says that a person reaches heaven or hell through what they’ve been mostly after their entire lives. She says…

“Lightest power of what we’ve been”

Growing-point

The poet here compares the growing-point of a small sapling to the real growth of a person (maturity). Just as a sapling gathers strength and pushes itself to grow and slowly attains enough strength, form, completion and bears
fruit later on, just so a person also should not set limits to reach heights he deserves to reach. The poet seems to be saying that a person can learn a lot of lessons from looking into the life of a tree to aid his own growth as a complete person.

_Tightropes_

This poem is about how every person should have focus on what he is doing. In the beginning of the poem, the poet says that cultivating a habit of having focus on the ultimate goals is the best possible thing for a person. By the time the poem comes to the end, the realization is different. The poet going through different phases in life comes to the conclusion that taking one step at a time is far better than visualizing the whole goal and striving towards it. The inbuilt spirit, which is formed by taking tiny, measured steps towards the final goal; helps a person reach his destiny.

Evaluating the themes of all these poems, it is very much pertinent to assess the personality of Judith Wright to understand the creation of Aboriginal identity in her poetry. As an activist, poet and prophet Judith Wright has become almost part of the fabric of Australia. She has succeeded in dispelling the European perspectives to understand the strange beauty and landscape of Australia. She has tried in making the readers understand the splendour of nature and the terror of colonial history of Australia. Combining the mystical and political, she has acknowledged, celebrated and redeemed
the lives of Australians. She pleaded the Australians to hear the spirit of the land and the Aboriginals to realize just and humane future.

As a poet Judith Wright is guided by the mission and duty to the society. She has firmly believed that the truth in the society resides in the imagination. She believed in the possibilities for potential existence and considered these things as vital in the evolution of the society to which every poet has to subscribe. Judith Wright in the article “Meaning, Value, And Poetry” observes: “The Poet may, as himself a vital creative force, serve these possibilities and even help to shape and deliver them; but since they are of the nature of growth and change, he cannot lay down any blueprints for achieving them, or impose on them any already-existent form… His hope must then lie not in society but rather in humanity, and in those human possibilities that ‘society’ is often organized to exclude” (Meanjin Quarterly. No.113. vol. 27. 1968. p. 244). Guided by these objectives she remained committed to the world of possibilities knowing the human ends in the divine. Committed to this perspective, she developed profound respect for ordinary Australian lives. She fought for developing ethical and gracious sense of human dignity and professed it as an essential world view. In the process of promoting this world view, she joined the campaign for a treaty with Aboriginals. She authored critical historical works *We Call For A Treaty* and *The Cry for the Dead* to illustrate her efforts of social activism. She perceived that the poet is a public figure with responsibility who
challenges the negative forces that demean human life and environment. Gerard Hall in *Judith Wright (1915-2000) : Australian Poet & Prophet* (2000) elucidating the significant thematic aspects of her crucial poems observes: “the truth of her life is that she was both artist and activist; the values celebrated in her poetry are the same values she fought for in the political arena. She was always the ‘ethical prophet’, calling Australia and Australians to renounce ‘pride, greed and ignorance’ in favour of a spiritual vision since, as she put it, ‘without a vision a nation perishes’” (27). It is understood that on the public front Wright had appreciated the attempts of Whitlam Govt. in promoting environment and Aboriginal issues. Wright’s influence on the declaration of the Great Barrier reef as a Marine national Park and her campaign for the end of mining on Fraser Island are considered as examples for her genuine representation of Aboriginals.

Judith Wright’s critics have denounced her poetry as a mere representation of politics. They complained that Wright’s poetry suffered from the limitations of confining to the landscape, country, flora and fauna. Critics like Evan Jones, R.F. Brissenden, Peter Coleman argued that Wright was in danger of sacrificing her poetry to her political concerns. But these accusations are refuted in the argument of Judith Wright presented in her *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1966) where she emphasizes: “the true function of an art and a culture is to interpret us to ourselves, and to relate us to the country and the society in which we live” (xviii). Beyond her
confirmation, one need to understand that Wright hailed from a pastoral family and experienced the trauma of the war times. So the themes of her poetry naturally purported the life and development of culture as a whole. She moved away from the narrow concepts of the world and provided a linguistic turn to contemporary philosophy, science, mathematics and arts. Veronica Brady in her article ‘Judith Wright: the Politics of Poetics” observed: “Wright was in fact more sophisticated intellectually than many of her critics” (Southerly. Vol.61. No.1. 2001. P.84). As a conscious poet Wright has moved with older generation of poets. She had met Jack McKinney at one of the gatherings of Meanjin group at C.B. Christesen’s home. Following the attempts of elders to rethink the world, Wright has moved away from the narrow concerns of poetry.

In view of the elucidation of some popular poems from different anthologies, it would be a fallacy to ascribe that the entire poetry of Wright is explicitly sociological. But her poetry cannot be termed as propagandist. The interpretation of Aboriginal subjectivity and characters cannot be considered as appropriate representations. Wright’s attempt is only to construct harmony between Aboriginals and Whites in Australia. She has symbolized Aboriginal people’s unity with the environment and the invasion they are forced to endure. Some of her poems ‘the Eucalypt and the National Character’, ‘Bullocky’ are viewed in the light of post pastoral eco poetry. Terry Gifford in the article ‘Judith Wright’s Poetry and the Turn to the Post-
Pastoral’ says that Wright’s poetry has to be reread as a work of colonial patriotic pastoral poetry. He says: “A re-reading of Judith Wright’s poem ‘the Eucalypt and the National character’… offer the opportunity to clarify the way in which post colonialism needs a post-pastoral theory of ecopoetry. But first it is interesting to note a tendency to read Wright’s work as colonial patriotic pastoral and the problems such reading make evident”. (Ecological Humanities. 48. May 2010).

Among all the poems of Wright only few poems ‘Bora Ring’, ‘Nigger’s Leap, New England’, and ‘Half –Caste Girl’ are considered as strikingly representative Aboriginal poems. Wright makes an attempt to reappraise Aboriginal culture. When we compare the content of these poems with other poems the distinctiveness becomes obvious. These poems exhibit a profound sense of history, sense of place and appreciation of the environment in Aboriginal culture. Wright’s observation on the pre and post conquest of Aboriginal culture is considered as her heart’s cry. G. A. Brennan in the article ‘The Aborigine in the works of Judith Wright’ says: “this reminds us that the cry of the falling Aboriginal is not only the cry of his passing culture, but of ours too. His death, and the death of his people are an ominous reminder of our own ephemerality” (Westerly, No.4. December. 1972. P.48).

Critics have felt that to Judith Wright Aborigine is a symbol of repressed Australian fear and guilt. Aborigine is purely a poetic symbol of historical injustice. Aboriginal critics have considered Wright’s engagement
with Aboriginal subjectivity merely philosophical and artistic. They have argued that Wright’s social consciousness is merely artistic. This is substantiated from her personal interview. Wright has admitted that she did not have direct contact with Aborigines during her youth. She has observed: “There were very few Aborigines around us at the time, though some passed through and some worked for us. The Bora ring of the poem was on my uncle’s place…But, we were not allowed to know Aborigines in…terms of friendship… The first Aboriginal friend I had was Kath Walker” (Personal interview with Judith Wright, Canberra, July, 1982). Even the awareness of historical guilt as a symbolic expression in her poetry is her own developed perspective. She says: “To say that we had been the murderers was not a popular view at the time! Nobody mentioned Aborigines at all in my youth. I didn’t even know there was a dying pillow… Quite certainly there was guild. That’s why there was so little said” (Personal interview with Judith Wright, Canberra, July 1982). In view of her opinions, even the few poems that celebrated Aboriginality cannot be considered as explicit representations of Aboriginal culture. It is pertinent to observe that her poetry is atonement for the European invasion. Her poetry is considered as an element of harmony between Aboriginals and Whites in Australia. Her Aboriginal poems profess a fresh sympathy, new recognition and required synthesis. ‘Half Caste Girl’ is a poem that signifies this fresh synthesis. ‘Half Caste Girl’ is:

is restless still under her rootwarm cover,
hearing the noise of living,

forgetting the pain of dying.

(Moving Image. 27)

In practically overcoming the obstacles that come in the way of realizing fresh synthesis Wright presents the potential solution in her prose work *The Generations of Men* (1959). Wright says: “Until the white men could recognize and forgive that deep and festering consciousness of guilt in themselves, they would not forgive the blacks for setting it there” (*Generations of Men*. 1959. P. 156). She clarifies the ambivalent view of the Aboriginals in the poems ‘The Dust in the Township’ and ‘The Blind Man’. Wright evokes tender Aboriginal oneness with the land to erase the sense of historical guilt. From the themes of these poems, it is obvious that she has introduced new sensibility to Aboriginal theme but it is facilitated as part of the larger aesthetic, moral and philosophical issues.

The concern of Wright for Aboriginal issues has transformed from persuasiveness to authentic representation. Her symbolic identification present in poetry has become active engagement. She became an active agent in asserting the rights of Aborigines. In her speech at the Adelaide Festival Writers conference, she spoke ferociously about the dispossession of the Aborigines and their pathetic situation. She asserted: “have been my own chief social concerns, but I don’t think they have done my work as a poet any harm whatever. Indeed, both have provided a spur to writing, and deepened
my own knowledge and perceptions in many ways” (Overland, No, 89, October 1982. PP 29-31).

Judith Wright’s engagement with Aboriginality as a subject of her writings and activism has not suffered inconsistency. The engagement of the writers and activists with Aboriginality during 1945-61 was confined to extreme empathic and sensitive identification. In Poetry, Aboriginal themes were springboards for profound moral questioning. The post 1960s received sincere commitment in the very conceptions of Aborigines. Judith Wright’s writings particularly prose writings transcended from the metaphysical concerns to the realization of Aborigines as reservoirs and exemplifications of humanity. Wright’s writings have exemplified the treatment of Aborigines extremely well during this period. However, Wright’s conception, realization and presentation of Aboriginality is found to be lacking in doing complete justice to Aboriginality. This particular phase is addressed as an ambiguous phase as most of the writers struggled to absorb the theme of Aboriginality but failed terribly in providing appreciable representations of Aboriginal culture. It was also considered that personal contact with Aboriginals was not a barometer for authorial authenticity. However, this situation has paved the way for the intriguing assimilation that produced mixed Aboriginal identity only to subscribe and satisfy the Global perception. Sally Moran’s Autobiographies My Place & Wannamurganya as the appropriate examples of mixed Aboriginal identities will be discussed in the following chapter.