politically and moved men emotionally through her poems leading to self-realisation which would ultimately make one feel humble in front of nature.

For Wright, the tree around which her poetry grows is surely Love. Love of this kind includes both the acceptance and connection with many other lives, and the need to protect them. It is in a sense the same feeling that produces powerful poems about aboriginal peoples of Australia, rare species, environment and sacred sites. The poetic imagination is part of and comes from her ‘heart’; it took different forms in different periods of her life and in drawing upon feeling and experience, this imagination grew. Responsiveness and love of the natural world are the seeds from which Judith Wright’s poetry budded and grew.

Chapter – VI

AESTHETICS OF POETRY

Don’t ask for meaning, ask for the use.

--Wittgenstein

Wright’s style is an amalgamation of conventional and modern. She is a modern poet but a modernist in a fairly different sense. The strong lyrical element in her work takes a typical modern form. She is conventional in having been influenced first by thinkers from Plato, Bergson, Baudelaire, Eliot and Yeats. Wright’s love of nature, which starts with the influence of Romantic poets, gradually evolves into a sensibility of totality that evokes the Buddhist consciousness of the interconnectedness of all things and illustrates Wright’s engagement with the East, with Haiku, Sufi poetry and Japanese Zen poetry. The eco-aesthetical values that she is concerned with in her poetry are the same values that she fought for in the political arena. Consequently,
nothing in Wright’s poems is impulsive; everything serves a specific purpose.

Wright’s poetry is at the same time, symbolic and real. Hall comments:

> Wright’s poetry celebrates the Australian physical landscape consisting of tree frog and Dingo, rainforest and sea coast, stark cliffs and,
bushfires and flood, dust and drought, wind and rain, flame tree,
Cicadas, gum tree and cyclone. Each has its distinctive oral / aural
communication to make; each has its poetic and phonological identity
with ready resonances to the ear in Australian collective memory. (70)

Wright draws her symbols from nature rather than from the society. The images mirror the familiar aspects of nature in novel ways, making the readers understand that each and every species has an intrinsic value and it is the responsibility of every human being to protect the weaker ones. Her poetic images surprise the readers with originality. Wright uses symbolism to express the awe-inspiring reality in the correspondence between the endless cosmos and the unexplored region of the human consciousness:

> Wright [was] dealing with problems surrounding the depiction of Australian ‘Nature,’ but from a new perspective; [she was] attempting to find Symbolist correlatives in [her] own Australian experience. [She was] not simply trying to write descriptively, but to initiate a philosophical inquiry into ‘the question of man in nature’ by adapting local landscape and history to symbol. (Hawke 163-64)

Commenting on her own poetry, Wright says, “the attempt was to transfer a queer end of the earth landscape into something symbolically functional” (qtd. in Hawke 164).
Central to Wright’s eco-aesthetical thinking is the relationship within and between the natural, to the degree that they become inseparable by being made to appear as one. Poetry is essentially, for Wright, the unified domain of the individual, nature and the society.

Wright’s poetry enables men to change their attitude towards nature in order to live in harmony with nature. For Wright, her mission was to connect the human experience with the natural world, through poetry and other works and to fight for the rights of natives who lived in close communion with nature; she strongly believed in preserving the native culture in order to create an eco-friendly society.

Wright is not merely a nature poet but an eco-aesthetic, and natural processes are the central fact in her vision of the world, the source and standard to which everything else is referred. Wright time and again returns to the idea of nature as an overriding, animated force against which man is helpless. She believed the spirit of mother earth is present in the universe and one can feel her presence as you visit earth’s venerated places. The landscapes are imaged in her words and her words represent the natural physical entities including animals, plants, and even inanimate objects possess a spiritual essence. Wright views:

As a poet you have to imitate somebody, but since I had a beautiful landscape outside that I loved so much and was in so much … it was my main subject from the start. Most children … are brought up in the ‘I’ tradition these days—the ego. It’s me and what I think. But when you live in close contact with a large and splendid landscape as I did you feel yourself a good deal smaller than just I. (qtd. in Brady 105)
Given a long poetic vocation and broad-ranging interest, a wide variety of poetic language is to be anticipated. Wright’s encounter with the natural environment is basically spiritual and emotional, with strong metaphysical searching. Though Wright’s standard poetic form was metaphysical she used varied poetic styles. Her poetic career could be divided into three parts. Her earlier poetry is in the voice of a lover of land and people. It displays a surprising breath of poetic technique and poetic diction. Her style in the early poems is mainly anti-pastoral or post-pastoral. She focused on pollution and dehumanisation that have led to the decline of our inner and outer worlds. She dealt with these problems in a beautiful metaphysical language.

The second part was highly philosophical where she mainly used the post-romantic style to express anger at the way the land is misused and how it reflects on humanity. In the third part, she writes personal lyrics in the style of haiku and ghazal.

Wright’s finest anti-pastoral or post-pastoral eco-poems in *Moving Image* (1946) are written in metaphysical style, and they are, moreover, expressed with a disciplined clarity that it is common enough in modern poetry. The eco-poems are filled with nostalgia for a lost Australian innocence, forests, pioneers, explorers and other versions of the pastoral; she clearly states through her poetry that nature can no longer be a safe resort but is endangered and man has the responsibility to save the environment.

‘South of My Days’ is an anti-pastoral representation and appreciation for the complexities of nature from an Australian point of view. Wright juxtaposes multiple perspectives engaging nature, society and the individual. This emotional knot is created through the personification of the landscape. This is evident in the metaphors
“bony slopes wincing” and “clean, lean, hungry country” (CP 20) which show how deforestation has destroyed the landscape.

The unity of man and the environment is expressed through personification. Man and the country alike are suffering from the winter cold. This is evident in the phrases, “the old roof cracks its joints” and the “cottage lurches in under the tangle of medlars” (20). This conveys the idea that man and his environment are emotionally tied. This technique is effective and helps the responder to relate to the hardships of her country.

Wright’s liberal use of figurative imagery gives richness to the passages, while personification helps the responder to emotionally relate the ideas conveyed to the country and old Dan. The metaphor “a wave of rambler roses” (20) can be seen as a symbol of youth. Since roses flow in frothing masses during the flowering time, the responder can relate this to his youthful years. The ‘circle’ of days represents the generational cycle, the winter setting evokes a fallen landscape of colonization (20).

The creek symbolises the lost water of life. Every presence becomes a symbolic situation to be explored and, on doing so, she not only creates an Australian symbolism but also transforms her land into an emotionally conventional background from which she can grow self-assuredly as a writer.

Wright’s anti-pastoral poem, ‘Bora Ring’ deals with the annihilation of native culture. The ‘ring’ is eternity in its traditional symbolism, as Ouroborus or wheel, and the invocation of ‘the fear as old as Cain’ recalls the descent into sin in the primal myths of occidental religion. Rees observes, “Wright’s form helps divide the poem into two perspectives: Nature and the Western civilization as represented by colonial Australia.” Stanzas one and three parallel to each other with their beginnings: “The
song is gone” and “The hunter is gone” (CP 8). The remainder of the stanzas continues the parallel rhythm of idea, pursuing the impact of the loss of Aboriginal culture from the perspective of Nature and Western civilization. Stanzas two and four also mirror each other. That the first two stanzas take the perspective of nature is obvious from Wright’s images:

Only the grass stands up

to mark the dancing-ring: the apple gums

posture and mime a past corroboree,

murmur a broken chant. (CP 8)

The naturally occurring ‘grass’ and ‘apple-gums’ of the second stanza give sharp contrast to the man-made ‘spear’ and ‘painted bodies’ of the third. As art attempts to reflect nature, ‘the song’ and ‘dance’ of line one also take on a natural quality in contrast with the human classification of ‘hunter’ and ‘nomad feet.’ Wright refers to Aborigine’s song as ‘ritual,’ ‘tribal story,’ ‘past corroboree,’ and ‘broken chant,’ but never to the Aborigine himself. The reading of this poem makes the reader feel as if he were one with the apple-gum trees which mourn for the loss of the Aboriginal culture. Wright, then turns Nature into a mourner which is sad to see that the “song is gone,” can only “posture and mime a past corroboree” (CP 8).

Wright perfectly observes Aborigines’ religious tradition which considers man as a part of Nature. In a similar manner, the “Bora Ring” a site of Aborigine initiation ceremonies, becomes the confirmation of the Aborigine’s spirit: “Only the grass stands up / to mark the dancing ring;” (8) read lines five and six. Though physically
destroyed, the spirit of the Aborigine still exists in the ‘grass’ and ‘apple-gums’ that represent nature.

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. (CP 8)

The Aborigine’s survival in nature returns to disturb western civilisation in the fourth stanza. The ‘rider’ senses the spirit of the Aborigine in ‘sightless shadows’ and ‘unsaid words.’ Cain represents colonial Australia, which murdered the Aborigine in cold blood. In this case, the “sightless shadows” are a haunting reminder of Australia’s guilt and unavoidable punishment in accordance to the “ancient curse.” Wright presents the image of “painted body” which is a sign of their religious faith but according to Western culture, it symbolises evil. The Aborigine, far from being the source of this perceived evil, is only a mistaken symbol of the primitive evil inherent in the human soul. “Colonial Australia sought to destroy its evil by destroying the Aborigine. Instead, it brought its own dark nature to light” (Rees). The fear and guilt is both collective and it pertains to all the white.

Similarly, White colonisation culminates in the account of massacre in ‘Nigger’s Leap and New England.’ The image of night dominates the poem. The range is compared with a human body, its spine stretching in outline touching the clouds. It is a dark place then, not a surprising setting for the murderous events described later in the poem:
be dark, O lonely air.
Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull
that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff
and when were silent, waiting for the flies. (CP 15)

The Aborigine stands as a pure symbol of historical injustice and of repressed
Australian fear. In the book **Black Words, White page: Aboriginal Literature
1929-1988**, Smith writes,

> The black Australian characters she creates in her poetry can be more
appropriately interpreted as symbols of the Aboriginal people’s unity
with the environment as well as of the invasion which they had been
forced to endure….In symbolic terms, it is as if the souls of the
murdered blacks are in limbo, or the perpetual rootlessness….” (83)

A similar theme underlies the poem which follows, ‘Trapped Dingo,’ where the native
dingo might be seen as a symbol of the “native world.” “The persona rehearses the
tragedy and sets up a chorus and protagonist dialogue juxtaposing the dingo as the
poet and herself as its echo in pain: “I heard you, desperate poet” (CP 8). Now
rehearsing her own voice, the poet appeals: “Did you hear my silent voice take up the
cry?” (8). In her compassion she empathizes with the dingo and she feels the pain and
agony of the dingo.

The nature poems from Wright’s second collection, **Woman to Man** (1949) may be
more open about the harsher side of nature than her first volume **Moving Image**.
**Woman to Man** also reflects one of the most important aspects in the poetry of
Wright: the desire to make connections with the particular and the universal in an
attempt to relate man to the cosmos. Critics have found *Woman to Man* famous for its striking imagery and focus on love and chaos. The child in the poem ‘Child and Wattle Tree’ also affirms her deep ecological thoughts of becoming one with nature:

Take me into life and smother me with bloom
till my feet are cool in the earth
and my hair is long in the wind;
till I am a golden tree spinning the sunlight. (CP 34)

Similarly, Wright expresses deep ecological thoughts in the poem ‘Night’ through the archetype of the Great World Tree which suggests the unity of all beings. Wright moved towards abstraction in the form of heavy symbolism. The poem offers insight for futurity in a recovery of the unity of purpose and connectedness lost at Eden:

Standing here in the night
we are turned to a great tree
every leaf a star,
its root eternity.

So deeply goes its root
into the world’s womb,
so high rises its stem
it leaves for death no room. (CP 51)

Wright aimed for a giant metaphor of the life cycle. Wright tried to express her sense of feeling at one with the world through these symbols:
Walker sees this symbolism and its purpose, the search for unity, both physical and psychic, as the most important element in Wright’s poetry, so most of Walker’s book is full explication of Wright’s complicated Jungian and Heraclitean symbolism. The symbols depend on opposites, night / day, darkness / light, birth / death, and on correspondences in the life cycles worthy of Mediaeval Scholasticism in their tightness….(qtd. in Bridge 112)

Wright portrays the tree as a symbol of fulfillment. To see the human race as growing into a great tree offers many resonances about the patterns, processes and purpose. As Smith observers, “This metaphysical turn in her verse emerges readily enough to link the particular and concrete sensory perception with temporal and spatial contexts” (2).

In the poem ‘Midnight,’ Wright tries to establish that man is at one with nature and the psychic world of imagination.

Darkness where I find my sight,
shadowless and burning night,
here where death and life are met
is the fire of being set. (CP 61)

Wright’s use of symbols throughout the poem causes the reader to interpret this “darkness” as a transcendent experience. The primeval darkness from which all creation emerges, and to which all life returns in death is the darkness of the unconscious mind from which all creative activity springs.

In Wright’s poem ‘Midnight,’ its main appeal is drawn towards the post-pastoral idea of life as a continual and never ending cycle. As something dies, it is only to be
replaced by another living being. To create this image of life’s incessant cycle, Wright uses the symbol of seed. Slowly, the seed finds its way through the darkness of the warm and moist soil, and surfaces as a plant or a tree:

As the leaves in winter dies,
Down into the germ, and lies
Leafless, tongueless, lost in earth
Imaging its fierce rebirth; (CP 61)

This life cycle is linked to the story of creation, death and rebirth. Nothing ever ends, for an end is only a beginning in something new. The seed becomes a symbol of continuation of life cycle. The poet describes the seed, finds its way through the darkness before it springs above the soil, but also as the plant dies, or when the leaves begin to fall in return to the soil. This can be affiliated to the Biblical image of “from dust to dust.” The lines of the poems urge the reader to fight for the values of love and life, and by the clarity of her language and the transparency of her symbols. Wright here conveys the idea of the elements joining together in order to give life to the plant:

And with the whirling rays of the sun
and shuttle-stroke of living rain
weaves the image from its heart
and like god is born again— (CP 61)

The lines are studded with contrasting images which suggest that although Australia is a land of beauty, it suffers from the excessive heat resulting from the anthropogenic activities of the human beings.
In Wright’s eco-poem ‘The Cycads,’ she conveys the idea that nature has been existing for a long time. It may go back to the time of creation. Nature is immortal and man is mortal. In ‘The Cycads,’ the image of timelessness is typically and impressively brought out. The full impact of these lines is felt only if one is aware of the appearance of these typically Australian native trees. Cycads are palm-like plants of very ancient lineage. One variety grows on Tambourine Mountain in Queensland, and surviving specimens are believed to be thousands of years old:

Only the antique cycads sullenly
keep the old bargain life has long since broken;
and, cursed by age, through each chill century
they watch the shrunken moon, but never die,
for time forgets the promise he once made,
and change forgets that they are left alone. (CP 41-42)

Cycads grow to a considerable height, and produce brilliant red flowers. To visualise the scene evoked by the poem, therefore, would explain why Wright makes the cycads her symbols for timelessness. When she proceeds to the truly real, natural world she is much more successful; for instance, in ‘The Cycads,’ she contemplates these strange, ancient plants, unchanged for millennia, clinging to a ledge above a deep valley in the tropical forest of Mount Tambourine. The real landscape is described as “…the rising forests of the years / alter the climates of forgotten earth / and silt with leaves the strata of first birth” (41). The images used by Wright like “birth,” “seeds,” and “roots” are completely fitting and the poem achieves an easy, natural unity: “It builds up to become a fine metaphysical meditation on time, evolution, transience and
eternity, till we too are looking over the abyss” (Bridge 113) “over the unthinkable, unfathomed edge / beyond which man remembers only sleep” (CP 42).

In Wright’s eco-poems, she expresses regret that many of the native plants are destroyed due to the new farming practices but some plants resist and continue to grow. In the poem ‘The Flame Tree in a Quarry,’ the flame tree is a strong breed which grows in an unfriendly environment:

   From the broken bone of the hill  
   stripped and left for dead,  
   like a wrecked skull,  
   leaps out this bush of blood.

   Out of the torn earth’s mouth  
   comes the old cry of praise. (CP 62)

The personification of the flame tree is to instill a sense of life in the landscape: “stripped and left for dead, and “wrecked skull” (CP 62) is a reference to death, showing the murder of the environment. From this, the reader understands that the poet is drawing inspiration from destruction by using references to death and life. This is also seen by the personification “leaps out this bush of blood,” where the word ‘blood’ is used metaphorically as life.

The reader would find a crystallisation of eco-ethical and instinctual values in her third volume The Gateway. She uses archetypal symbols like ‘star,’ ‘moon,’ ‘Eden’ etc. The Gateway shows the influence of William Blake and T.S. Eliot in its consideration of love, creation, and eternity. This means that she celebrates the way
the natural forces constantly change, optimistically accepting the tensions between positive and negatives. Hashiuchi views:

The gateway, as metaphor of a transition to a different and unknown place, is one that evokes anxiety, anticipation of change, and hope to the readers of the poems of this anthology. Australian nature always provides a gateway to death for all living beings. Its flora and fauna suffer the power of natural disasters, dryness, and floods but are able to continue their species’ survival. (39)

The eco-poem ‘Eroded Hills’ bemoans human destruction and rewrites the colonial triumph over man’s domination of nature. Wright’s initial nature poetry here becomes a memorial to nature. She writes, “When the last leaf and bird go / let my thoughts stand like trees here” (CP 83). The ‘ancestor’ who appears in ‘Eroded Hills,’ is an image of a destroyer of nature. She says, “my father’s father stripped” the hills to cultivate thereby explaining the harm of deforestation undertaken by her ancestors. ‘The Orange Tree’ stands for productive cycle and it is a symbol of unity which is the main feature of deep ecology. Wright brings out the idea of eco-holism. The orange tree lives interacting with earth, bird, air and life in a world with its own distinctive contribution:

The orange-tree that roots in night
Draws from that night his great gold fruit,
and the green bough that stands upright
to shelter the bird with the beating heart. (CP 89)
The cycles of nature manifested in the four major seasons, each with distinct attributes also suggests regeneration. Spring, proverbially associated with fertility, becomes a bringer of pain and discomfiture in ‘The Cedars’: the phrase “By the sunken pool” (CP 76) refers to the water level that has fallen in the dry winter season. In spite of the negative situation the cedar trees continue to grow: “Spring, returner, knocker at the iron gate…” (CP 76). The phrase “the iron gates” is an image suggesting prison, a fortress, a stronghold:

Spring, impatient, thunderer at the doors of iron,
we have no songs left. Let our boughs be silent.
Hold back your fires that would sear us into flower again,
and your insistent bees, the messengers of generations. (CP 76)

The phrase “thunderer at the doors of iron” recalls the prior personification of spring in the second stanza though here, on another level, it implies the spring rainstorms after winter’s aridity. The phrase “hold back your fires…” (CP 76) on one level refers to the bushfires that stimulate new growth; on another level “new sap that burns along old channels,” more generally, the fire are symbolic of life.

Wright was a staunch defender of aboriginal rights and environmental protection, and thus the poem ‘Unknown Water’ is significant in terms of being a symbol for rebirth and for expressing the poet’s attitude towards Australian natural resources. Water is a symbol of sustenance to life; is essential for the lives of both men and cattle, especially in times of drought.

As an example of contrasting themes, water that causes death in one poem nurtures life in another. While the silent dryness under the sun scorches all living beings that
need water to live, violent floods can destroy all frail lives suddenly and without
warning. In the poem ‘Flood Year,’ Wright communicates that human suffering and
nature’s pangs are one:

Walking up in the driftwood beach at day’s end
I saw it, thrust up out of a hillock of sand—
a frail bleached clench of fingers dried by wind—
the dead child’s hand. (CP 85)

Wright in her poem ‘Cicadas,’ highlights the deep ecologist’s idea that even the
insignificant species has a role to play in the ecosystem. The poem ‘Cicadas’ begins
with the description of the harsh and scorching Australian landscape, that Wright
powerfully adores and works out to protect:

On yellow days in summer when the early heat
presses like hands hardening the sown earth
into stillness, when after sunrise birds fall quiet
and streams sink in their beds and in silence meet,
then underground the blind nymphs waken and move. (CP 102)

The line “…in yellow days in summer” (102) uses the colour yellow as an imagery
which symbolises heat. The line “streams sink in their beds” (102) personifies the
streams, creating the image of the stream resting and relaxing as if a human being and
adds to the tranquil and blissful mood of their first stanza. Wright uses personification
in order to humanize and bring nature to life. This makes the audience feel connected
to it on a deeper level that is almost human. Summer is personified as a hand that
presses down and hardens the earth. The fact that summer is said to have hands gives
it a very human aspect. Wright refers to the nymphs; it may be a reference to the native Australians who endure pain and darkness. Wright describes them as having spent their entire life “crouched alone and dumb in patient ugliness enduring the humble dark” (102). Wright uses a paradox by using the word nymph, while describing them. However, the word also refers to a minor nature goddess usually depicted as a beautiful maiden.

In the poem ‘Train Journey,’ the personification of mother earth reveals her love for the land which has been exploited. “I looked and saw under the moon’s cold sheet your delicate dry breast, country that built my heart” (CP 77). The metaphor “delicate dry breast” highlights the idea of deforestation. The simile “the small trees on the uncoloured slope / like poetry moved, articulate and sharp” gives a sense of rhythm to the poem and creates a vivid image. With the use of imagination, Wright adds a sense of life into the environment. This is seen with the personification “Be over the blind rock a skin of sense,” which adds life to the rocks.

The Flame-Tree is a strong and powerful symbol with numerous meanings that are explored in several other poems. The scarlet blossoms of the tree are compared with a living ghost of death because the colour of the flower reminds us of blood and wounds, which are scattered. Eventually they are restored to the tree’s efforts though the earth continually tries to take them from her.

In the poem ‘The Ancestors,’ the surface of the water gathered into the unknown stream and reflected “That stream ran through the sunny grass so clear” (CP 112). Around the source of the water, the narrator finds fern-trees “locked in endless age,” and their roots spread out into the mud and stone. There, in each notched trunk, the
narrator sees the image of an ancestor with “unopened eyes, face fixed in 
unexperienced sorrow, /and body contorted in the fern-tree shape” (CP 112). The 
ancient figures in the primitive forest were the very images that had been awakened in 
the narrator’s mind, and to him/ her they became visible on the trunk of the fern-trees 
so that we, the living, can see their wish for the rebirth in the Australian natives. 
Through images and metaphors Wright portrays the natives’ belief of the ancestors 
living in the form of plants and trees. Wright’s attitude towards nature is similar to 
that of the natives who looked at nature in an animistic way. 
The adventure of a blacksmith’s boy who bravely faces his fate in ‘Legend’ is a good 
example where his heart only is a guide for action and morality. The narrative style is 
like that of a folktale and the effect is magical due in part to repetition. He does not 
acknowledge natural obstacles such as bad weather, high mountains, and many 
threatening predictions. The metaphors “Cobwebs snatched at his feet, /rivers 
hindered him / thorn branches caught at his eyes to make him blind and the sky turned 
into an unlucky opal” (CP 100) are beautifully brought out to show how nature 
stopped him as it is dangerous to challenge nature. He perseveres and as his heart had 
foretold, “in front of the night the rainbow stood on the mountain” and he could catch 
it in his hand. The boy “went home as bold as he could be / with the swinging 
rainbow on his shoulder” (CP 100). A rainbow is a meaningful symbol alluding to 
the rainbow serpent of the aboriginal dreamtime stories.
Wright’s The Two Fires (1955) is a kind of eco-warning that explores the deadly 
progress of human beings who try to direct nature. The title poem, ‘The Two Fires’ 
explores two opposing infernos; one that metaphorically represents the love from
which humanity originated and the one that is man-made atomic fire that might extinguish love. The poetry confronts an existential terror magnified by humanity’s complicity in collective extinction. About Wright’s intense pessimism in *The Two Fires*, the Australian critic Inglis Moore writes:

She has deserted the metaphysical for the social, and social poetry is of its nature ephemeral….It is to be hoped that she will return to the metaphysical in her future development, that the lost traveler in her quest for reality may turn from the time’s troubles to some timeless form, as she did in the lyrical richness of ‘The Moving Image,’ and the intense affirmation of ‘Woman To Man’. (qtd. in Bureu)

Wright, an elemental poet, finds ample faith in the creative and regaining power of fire also. She tries to turn to mythology to give her guidance. “In the beginning was the fire; / Out of the death of fire, rock and waters; / and out of water and rock, the single spark, the divine truth” (*CP* 121). But in the modern age, due to man’s hatred the fire has caused havoc. The simile “like matchwood” is a reference to the atomic bomb and man-made fire which is capable of total destruction.

In the poem ‘At Cooloola,’ Wright draws a metaphysical picture of the lake; she describes how the ancient “blue crane” has been fishing down the centuries with a calm and assurance denied to herself.

The blue crane fishing in Cooloola’s twilight

    Has fished there longer than our centuries.

    He is the certain heir of lake and evening,

    And he will wear their colour till he dies….(*CP* 140)
The operative symbols in this short poem are; the blue crane, the white swan, the clean sand and the drift spear. The poet begins in this way to establish the subject matter which is the spiritual connection to the landscape. This is quite interesting as the poet here establishes a third perspective; that nature has been here long before humanity.

The narrator’s close identification with nature is challenged by “a driftwood spear / thrust from the water; and like my grandfather/ she must quiet a heart accused by its own fear” (140). There is a new awareness that the land Wright has closely identified with has been stolen and tainted by guilt. She is aware that “he is the certain heir of lake and evening /and he will wear their colours till he dies” (140). The “White shores of sand, plumed reed and paperbark, / clear heavenly levels frequented by crane and swan” (141). Wright describes the scenic beauty of Cooloola that is frequented by crane and swan. Like the romantics, the outward scene turns the poet’s attention inward, to an examination of her own relationship with the environment: “I cannot share his calm, who watch his lake / being unloved by all my eyes delight in / and made uneasy for an old murder’s sake” (140).

The poem ‘Gum-trees Stripping’ reflects deep ecological thought. The surface similes constitute a humanisation rather than a spiritualisation of nature. “These rags look like humility, / or this year’s wreck of last year’s love, /or wounds ripped by the summer’s claw” (CP 133). True wisdom, the anxiety of the totality of the event, is achieved by the synchronised synthesis of sense perception and a deep intuitive sense of significance which is beyond the strained use of simile. The poem is its own best
example, and what it has to say about perception is skillfully enacted in the metaphors
thus:

    Wisdom can see the red, the rose,
    the stained and sculptured curve of grey,
    the charcoal scars of fire, and see
    around that living tower of tree
    the hermit tatters of old bark
    split down and strip to end the season….(CP 134)

These metaphors are wholly integrated into the description. They do not work by
intellectual association, but by a deep awareness of the multidimensional worth of
experience. The gum trees enact a silent ritual; the “hermit tatters of old bark” suggest
a necessary solitude and withdrawal from the world; while “charcoal scars of fire”
imply the suffering demanded by natural process. Meanwhile “living tower” defines
the grandeur and magnificence of natural growth which, it is implied, is superior to
human architecture. Thus the poem operates on two levels—concrete, particularly
apprehended by the senses, and an intuitive sense of implication. Both levels are
completely integrated. It brings out Wright’s deep ecological insight that nature is in
harmony.

Wright brings out deep ecological thoughts in her poem ‘The Wattle-Tree’ through
images and symbols. Wright’s poems celebrating the wattle focused on Australia’s
strong and enduring symbol of itself. Thus, after a long process of experimentation
and discovery, the Golden wattle, became the national floral emblem in 1988. Its
prodigality and golden prosperity were symbolic of the hopeful spirit of the emerging nation.

The poet reminds the reader that the wattle tree is composed of the four basic elements in medieval philosophy, and so combines four truths in one. In its growth and abundance, the tree images “one great word of gold.” Thus wishing to learn the word, the poet exalts its symbolism, “For that word makes immortal what would wordless die…” (CP 142).

The poet celebrates the permanence of the world, because this tree “welds love and time into the seeds” of eternal renewal. Combining all basic elements, the tree recombines natural elements to produce its blaze of gold, nature’s richest colour.

Wright gave Australia an instantly recognisable image of the cycle of life, as an epitome of its history and enduring symbol of religious transformation. Wright uses the image of bud “now I bud, and now at last I break / into the truth” (CP 142).

Wright uses the image of the bud in many other poems. The bud’s arrival promises much more. Marvelously, the bud betokens ecology, renewal and continuity. Having passed through the growth stages of bud to blossom, she now finds she has a voice to speak her truths. Just as the tree in its renewal is true to its nature, “is forever tree,” so she hopes that in her vocation as a poet she can ultimately be true to herself, to speak the truth “into a million images of the Sun, my God” (CP 129). Thus, just as the wattle-tree is child, the fruit of the Sun, the poet’s truth is fruit of, and images that greater truth, her God.

In the poem ‘For Precision,’ she speaks of the difficulty of synthesising sensory experience and significance. She prays for the strength and certainty of the natural
world. Only when she can be “sure and economical as the rayed / suns, stars, flowers, wheels” (CP 130) can she speak with a “pure voice” that “joins all,” gives all a meaning, makes all whole” typifies her intellectual framework. She brings it all together in a metaphysical shell “forming into one chord.” In the poem ‘For Precision,’ Wright writes about the struggles poets have when they are unable to string the exact words together that highlight their true inner thoughts. Light is symbolised as her central metaphor which represents knowledge. She refers to this metaphor of light, “Yet I go on from day to day, betraying / the core of light, the depth of darkness…” (130). Here, Wright introduces confusion through the repetition of days she spends betraying her knowledge “the core of light.” She juxtaposes light and dark which function as opposites that symbolise clear expression verses confusion and uncertainty of darkness.

Wright also published Birds in 1963, a collection of poems that remarks on the uniqueness of Australia’s winged wildlife. Birds is a celebration of Wright as a writer and an affectionate ecologist and of the centrality of the birds in the poet’s imagination. According to Wright, birds are symbol of perfection and they communicate so many life lessons to men. Each one is a symbol of sacrifice, love, courage and beauty. It is the duty of every human being to listen to the language spoken by them. And it is our duty to conserve such heavenly beings. In the ‘Wounded Night Bird,’ she appears Buddha like with her concern for the bird with a broken breast. “A bird with broken breast. But what a stare / he fronted me with-his look abashed my own” (CP 172).
In the poems ‘The Peacock’ and ‘Extinct Birds,’ she chastises men for keeping birds in dirty cages and for destroying their habitat. The peacocks which are symbolic of pride and beauty are trapped and teased for the idle amusement of human eyes. But ever resistant and Phoenix-like nature rises above it all, she muses; “Love clothes him still, in spite of all” (CP 163).

Wright admires the “Extinct birds” lively colours, through a simile “The scarlet satin-bird, swung like a lamp in berries” (CP 182). The birds vanished with the fallen forest. Wright says, “All now vanished with the fallen forest” (CP 182). She feels sad that she could never see these birds as they have become extinct due to deforestation.

Wright compares through lively similes and metaphor the perfect “Lyre Birds”: “a splendid bird, bearing / like a crest the symbol of his art, / the high symmetrical shape of the perfect lyre” (178). Wright is sad about the extinction of the Lyre birds and she describes them as “dying poets.” She moans these “walking fables” because they live only in “the reverence of heart” (CP 178).

In the poem ‘Thornbills,’ Wright admires the flight of the birds; she uses similes to describe the activities of the birds. “Their tiny torrent of flight / sounds in the trees like rain.” The thornbills are “little like bees” (CP 167). Wright prays in a metaphorical language “Oh let no enemies / drink the quick wine of blood” (167). “Migrant swift” is a strong image of paradise lost, for falling short of its destiny through sheer exhaustion and misadventure. Here, Wright invokes the values of sympathy for the battler who has finally lost what he struggled to attain. Wright
compares the flight of migrant swift to that of Icarus; the bird also was over ambitious like Icarus and it met with its fall after travelling a long distance.

In the poem ‘Brush Turkey,’ Wright grieves the way the tourists spoil the natural habitats by throwing plastic bags and bottles. The metaphor “his forest shrunk” (CP 180) explains how the tourists exploit the natural habitats of the birds and animals.

In the collection *Five Senses* (1963), Wright mediates on lost opportunities for establishing continuities with the natural environment. It contains wonderful details, mystery, philosophical speculation and evocations for a better way of treating the natural world. The poems throw deep insights on relating to the world in a percepational level. She starts feeling whatever is inside is the reflection of the outside world.

Wright’s deep ecologist views in the poem ‘Interplay’ display that the subconscious, too, is involved in this interaction. The resulting poem can transcend both its maker and the sense experience from which it has been woven. When self-realisation is attained “whatever is within becomes what is around.” She uses the mirror image to convey the idea of the reflection of the self. The image of ‘light’ is symbolic of knowledge. “This angel morning on the world-wide sea /is seared with light that's mine and comes from me, / and I am mirror to its blaze and sound” (CP 192).

The poem ‘Dry Storm’ begins with the elements and then moves to the symbolic. We survey the rock mountain boulders, the old forest, the green vines and thorns of the canopy. “Curls of fern / and coil of water over leaves and rock / pattern the snake’s long body, hide from harm / moth, bird and lizard” (CP 193). Abruptly, the drought drives the snake, moth, bird and lizard to hide in rock crevices. In the night sky, there
is thunder and much lightning but no rain. The farmer’s fear of the lightning igniting the dry grass is well founded. Analogously, their hearts are torn open in the thirst and waiting. Wright’s powerful image of release after the storm is aurally suggestive of such vital change: “a cool sky and a soaked earth left bare / to drink its light in peace.”

Caught between wonder and irony, the poem’s perception soon transfers to a more universal view at a second level removed from the just description of depiction, to seek the why of things. As rain is symbolic of life and rebirth, the poet’s prayer for rain becomes a universal cry to quench thirst and reduce craving.

Wright’s metaphoric landscaping is a creative exercise in mind's eye when it assumes the purpose of interrogating life, and thus “Dry Storm” becomes an opportunity for drawing out possibilities beyond conservative understandings. Though storm is a threat, it is also symbolic of clearance of the dead wood and a way for new growth. Her visions may have a philosophic ring to them but the point is always not greater cognitive insight but deeper relatedness with life and the environment. Hers is a holistic admiration for reality. Exploiting the ambiguities in paradoxes, her interrogations seek to bring the poem to life, scorched land brings real alteration.

Continual rain brings personal, social and economic recovery. It is the key to community survival and continuity. Wright showed that rain is essential to the natural life cycle, and the fruitfulness and conversion are words of that natural process.

Wright conveys deep ecological reflections in the poem ‘The Nautilus’ in metaphysical style. The poem analogises the sea snail’s evolution into a successful survivor which is a worthy design for human lives. With poetry’s exceptionally
sensuous appeal, eco concerns can be felt in poetic metaphors such as nature’s “sweet completion,” these poetic images acquire a timeless relevance and refreshment.

‘A Child’s Nightmare’ sees the “holy image” (CP 194) not only lodging in us but raging in us, like a “stormy sea.” Earth is “bodied in beast and man and bird” (191) and she “seeks” vision and fear and chaos together with the “shaping word.” The image of earth actively seeking things such as fear and chaos emphasizes their interconnectedness with the “shaping word.” “We who travel on her path / hold ecstasy and nightmare both” (CP 194). Wright brings out the deep ecological thought that everything is connected. She believed in a common chord which connects all the living and nonliving things of nature.

She returned to metaphysical issues in the mid 1960s, with The Other Half (1966) addressing the mystic relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind. Her poem itself is the symbol of the integration of the two halves of the poet’s experience. The ideas of Carl Jung had a strong influence on Wright’s concept of the nature of human psyche. She presents the modern dilemma. Wright’s involvement in conservation is an extension of her larger concern with resolving the duality of man and nature, a duality that she sees as the very basis of scientific revolution now actually threatening the existence of life on this planet.

The poem ‘A Document’ can be seen then, as a document of a number of things. At the most obvious level, a document refers to the agreement the young poet entered into, some twenty years earlier, to sell the trees on her land in order to aid the Australian war effort. More subtly, the poem is a document of the poet’s guilt in violating the natural order.
Wright uses terms that suggest the animate, almost human, nature of these trees, “flesh-pink,” “pliant,” “they grew,” “to meet hundred axes.” “The bark smells sweetly when you wound the tree.” “Those pale-red calyces like sunset light /burned in my mind” (CP 244). The simile “like sunset light” suggests both the glorious colour of the blossoms and their transience. The metaphor “burned in my mind” is a metaphor, aptly evoking the way the poet’s responsibility in the destruction of the trees is etched on her memory.

In Wright’s ‘Typist in the Phoenix Building,’ the fire image is introduced in the first line of the poem “fire proof corridors” and also implied in the icon of Phoenix “whorls of flame” (CP 239) develops into a more complex symbol in the middle section. It gets subsumed into the “burning heat” of summer scorching the city outside. The fire image also ties up with the nature of work the typists do: the work of computing the costs due to the victims of bush fires so widespread in the Australian countryside in summer seasons. While “the city burns in summer’s heat” the interior of the office is cosy and sheltered, “yet above some distant source” the blazing sun is causing the predictable cloud formation thereby preparing the way for pouring rains at a later stage.

The fire-proof corridors sheltering Shirley and her fellow clerks from the outside heat have also, ironically, shut them off from the rhythms of life in the natural world. Mechanisation has numbed the natural human responses. Many of the implications arise out of the skilful play with words like ‘fires’ and other associative images and they all serve to highlight the pause that is there between the life of the interior and the world of the exterior. Modern life has cut us off from any meaningful contact with the
raw world of nature. Outside the building, natural, seasonal time prevails: “The city burns in summer’s heat, / grass withers and the season’s late…” (CP 239).

Wright refers to the fire which is symbolic of destruction. The clerks calculate the loss caused due to bushfire in a mechanical way. The fire may refer to global warming. Man, totally ignoring the power of nature, plays with it a dangerous game. Wright couldn’t reconcile with the tragedy because, with all sophisticated equipment, men are ignorant of the relationship with nature.

Wright has made a clever use of the snake imagery to describe the law of annual renewal and rejuvenation in nature. The snake is a symbol of rebirth and transformation in nature. No wonder, the poet looks wistfully at the sloughed snake in ‘Snake Skin on a Gate,’ stretching warm in the sun “shinning; his patterned length clean as a cut jewel” and her prayer is “Like this from our change, my soul, let us drink renewal” (JW CP 244).

Wright’s masterly collection, Shadows (1970) explores the fusion between life and death within nature, and also between nature and human consciousness in metaphysical terms suggestive of the poem The Moving image. Many of the poems from these two decades are remarkable exercises in restoring the poet’s sense of value and self, a self otherwise exposed with eyes painfully open to the horror of a destructive humanity.

The symbolic role and the power of dreams to inform memory and consciousness illustrate Wright’s Jungian interest. According to Jung, ‘Shadow’ is an unconscious part of ego that contains the animal instincts. In the poem ‘Shadows’:

   Yes, we exchange our dreams.
Possessed by day, intent
with haste and hammering time,
earth and her creatures went
imprisoned, separate
In isolating light.
Our enemy, our shadow
is joined to us by night. (CP 297)

“Night” is used throughout the book to symbolise death, darkness of the soul, and loss of faith. Here she refers to the natives as the shadows and the whites are complete only in union with the native Australians.

In Wright’s poem ‘Halfway,’ she attaches intrinsic value to the tadpole. It is Wright's effective use of words that forms an impressive description of a journey taken not only by one small tadpole, but by all mankind. It is an outstanding eco poem not only because of the poem's unusual story but also because of the unfortunate fate of an ice-trapped tadpole. Wright's image-evoking descriptions throughout the poem make it even more outstanding. In the first stanza, “He hung at arrest, displayed as it were glass” (CP 295) already introduces us to the tadpole's odd, darkly humorous state of affairs.

Wright’s most biting social satire is expressed in the poem ‘Australia 1970.’ Her contempt for consumerism and its effects on nature and society is most explicitly voiced here. The language used is extremely harsh, yet through this harsh language she shows her love for this country, and even this planet. The similes like “Die, wild country, like the eaglehawk,” “Die like the tigersnake,” “Die like the soldiers ant,”
(292) shows that the country shows resistance till its last breath. It doesn’t give in to exploitation. The poet further compares the suffering of the earth in the hand of colonisers. “Suffer, wild country, like the ironwood” is a simile that refers to the new agricultural equipments with which the earth had to undergo torture. Wright describes “I see your living soil ebb with the tree /to naked poverty” (CP 292). It is a reference to the damage of the top soil because of the use of bulldozers.

In the volume called Alive (1971), Wright breaks out of the traditional format of her earlier poems, to experiment with free verse-forms. The collection also deals with temporal matters as Wright contrasts the natural beauty of her Queensland home with the city wreck, using this comparison to comment on the destruction of the Australian wilderness.

Wright talks of symbiosis of both animate and inanimate things in the poem ‘Habitat.’ The lines on the page appear in irregular arrangements and the images such as furniture in ‘Habitat,’ are unconventional. For Wright, the urge for innovation is the only impulse that can save poetic creativity from the dangers of stagnation. The moment of compassion is Wright’s answer to the ruthless mechanisation of modern life, defined in ‘Habitat’ through the images of “The juggernaut machines, / the blue drifting gases, / the crashing air craft.” The poem pictures a depreciating view of the human contingent presence on earth. The single image of the mirrors encapsulates within itself the past and present, as well as the future:

What will the last face
look like?
Mirrors know.
It will contain all faces, all
human history
(which mirrors remember) (JW CP 301)

In ‘Geology Lecture,’ for example, in the line “We need some knowledge of the rocks beneath,” she makes us aware of the fact that human race accommodates “all prehistory in our bones / and all geology behind the brain” (JW CP 323). Wright attempts to demonstrate the deep ecological view that human progress clashes with the inherent laws of biological evolution.

Wright’s ‘Two Dreamtimes’ which is in fact a conversation between Wright and Kath Walker is in reality also a very public protest against the exploitation of the natives. Both of them dream of the past: “the easy Eden-dreamtime then / in a country of birds and trees.” The “Eden” is symbolic of paradise and now it is lost because of the atrocities of the colonisers. Wright’s own, now faded, dreamtime featured girl-like simple pleasures, free of current complexities. In honest vulnerability, she pictures herself imbibing the land’s scents and the call of the lonely plover in the moment of desire: “I riding the cleared hills, / plucking blue leaves for their eucalyptus scent / hearing the call of the plover” (JW CP 316). The call of the plover symbolises her simple, joyous connection with the land just as an aboriginal tracker would ‘read’ the land and its seasons. Bird is a symbol of ever-present fertility, seemingly eternal regeneration and adaptation.

The poem ‘Oriole, Oriole’ is written in an elegiac mood of unassuaged thirst: “for twenty years long I stilled and heard / in the blackbean tree that green voiced bird. Oriole is his singing name” (JW CP 318). Drought evokes pathetic fallacy with her
own deep-seated concern for the apparent selling off of the nation’s assets to foreign interests. Wright laments in pastoral metre: “Oriole, oriole, / I whistle you up, I wait to hear. / No orioles sing to me this year.” She perceives the grim realities of greed which exploit nature for short time gain. Orioles are familiar beacons of hope, sirens from good times past. Now they are memories of the past. The dream of ‘Eden ‘will not be recaptured it seems until the nation reconnects with nature. Being alive gives clear insight; grey survival leads blindly on.

‘Lament for Passenger Pigeons,’ for example, is a piercing and alarming meditation on human defacement of the environment that is toughly challenging, arrestingly powerful and is tightly synthesized with a political vision as any poem written by Blake or Yeats. “Trapped in the fouling nests of time and space, / we turn the music on; but it is man, / and it is man who leans a deafening ear” (JW CP 319). The metaphor “trapped in the fouling nest of time and space” refers to human beings who are trapped in a world which they are destroying because they do not know how to listen to its voice. This poem was written towards the end of Wright’s career when her vision of the world is more and more depressing.

The 1976 collection Fourth Quarter addresses present-day political and social factors that lead to ecological disaster. The book also demonstrates Wright’s abilities as a free verse poet, and employs a more relaxed tone than some of her other works. It is characterised by ironic, often satirical treatment of a wide range of subjects, ‘The Eucalypt and the National character.’ The Eucalypt reflects the most desirable traits of Australia’s national character in its suppleness, flexibility, sparseness and sprawling asymmetry. At other times, Wright treats familiar themes of racial relations and
environmental concerns in a more serious manner, taking a demagogic tone. The Eucalyptus tree is symbolic of prudence. The tree is symbolic of Australia, where it is a native tree.

Similarly, the iconic ‘Platypus’ undercuts complacency towards environmental degradation: “I sit and write / a poem for our sake / that follows a word— / platypus, paradox— / like the ripples of your wake” (JW CP 368). This is the point of the poem ‘Platypus,’ threatened by the ugly consequences of a polluted world and rationalistic ways of thought:

      Platypus, wary paradox,
     ancient of beasts,
      like a strange word rising
     through the waterhole’s rocks,
      you’re gone. That once bright water
     won’t hold you now.
     No quicksilver bubble-trail
     in that scummy fetor. (JW CP 368)

Yet when the circumstances are right the streams run clear, and the paradoxical image, half memory and half symbol rises up through scum which threatens to block it. She thus avoids, as far as possible, the propensity of symbolism to humanise nature and, by mimesis, captures the individuality of the natural form.

      Meanwhile the predatory echidna symbolizes the threat to the dark
      generative world of nature and the dark world of the unconscious – by
      the daylight forces of philistinism and rationalism. This is the feature of
Fourth Quarter, that the indigenous creature – whales, platypus, termite queen, echidna are transmuted into resonant symbols without any betrayal of their unique Australian quality. (Walker)

In the collection Fourth Quarter, the poems stress on intuitive rather than physical creativity, and the source of psychic power is symbolized by sleep, dream and water. The individual in dream or creative states floats upon the sea of subjectivity like a boat lightly tethered to the tangibility of rational thought.

Wright highlights the idea that evil is the expected consequence of rationalistic ways of thought, of the dissociation of thought and feeling, and the denial of human values which this split involves. From the rationalistic principle stems all the evils of the modern world war, inhumanity, environmental defacement and mechanistic ways of life and thought. They apply not only to the physical world but also to the mind of man.

The mire and debris of modern civilisation has silted up the well-springs of the unconscious and ethics of modern man in Wright’s poem ‘At Cedar Creek’:

Religious suppress the decays of time
and relate the Conscious
to the Unconscious (collective).

Metaphorical apprehensions
of the relations of deities, men and animals
can be set out in the schema. (JW CP 380)

Wright brings out clearly the eastern belief of relating the conscious mind with the collective unconscious. The eastern religious beliefs also interconnect the Gods, men
and animal and flora and fauna. It is an appeal to the consciousness of the modern man to respect and preserve nature because he is a part of it.

In ‘Interface III,’ she hails the sea as “the mothering upholding element” and “the faithful mother” thereby stressing the symbolic implication of water in relation to the rejuvenating force of nature. All words are symbols and in that sense the title ‘Interface II’ can be interpreted to denote the ideas and situations that meet face to face in the poem: “Nearly all those sea-smooth rocks / on the southern beach where only fishermen went / looked like small whales” (JW CP 344).

In ‘The Dark Ones,’ for instance, the aboriginals are identified with the dark and potent contents of the unconscious. They rise up like wraiths to confound and reproach the self-assurance and promise of the daylight world:

mute shadows glide.

The white talk dies away
the faces turn aside.

A shudder like breath caught
runs through the town.

Are they still here? We thought…

Let us alone. (JW CP 355)

The aboriginals are the shadow side of self; to deny them is similar to the denial of a part of the self. Like the Jungian shadow, the aboriginals must be brought up into the consciousness, accepted and assimilated, before the shame and guilt of the white race can be healed. “Something leaks in our blood / like the ooze from a wound” (JW CP
The simile “ooze from a wound” refers to the natives who are a part of the whites. They are connected with the whites and nature.

The night ghost of a land
only by day possessed
come haunting into the mind
like a shadow cast. (JW CP 355)

There has always been a point of growth in her vision, and she has followed her vision and the conflict inherent in it through to that sense of acceptance and of fulfillment which she celebrates in ‘Growing point,’ one of the finest poems in the volume. Wright’s use of symbolism is forceful, often revealing the future in the present, in natural forms, such as the seed or the sapling:

I knew no word for growing point,
but in myself the sapling rose,
an aim, a need, a leap to air;
where weighted, rounded, bough on bough
the tree fills out its limits now. (JW CP 366)

In Phantom Dwelling (1985) entitled ‘Notes at Edge,’ which commences with the poem “Brevity” the poet rejects the forms of western Literature. In Phantom Dwelling, she wrote these lines: “Old Rhythm, old metre,” and as well, the Anglo Celtic tradition “I used to love Keats, Blake. / Now I try haiku” (JW CP 413). The attractiveness of haiku lies in its “honed brevities / its inclusive silences.” It represents few words with no rhetoric.’ The words are “Enclosed by silences / as is the thrush’s call” which conveys a concept of language similar to music, where the
notes are regulated by the rest. Wright announced the loss of her “muse” and retreat from poetry at the height of her political activity.

The poem ‘Rock’ attempts to link the lasting nature of poetry with its symbol, the “rock-lump square as a book /split into leaves of clay” (JW CP 414). The poem starts with the poet in action, “I dug from this shallow soil,” gleaning what she can from the earth of the age old continent. The impression of water ripple in the stone is as lasting as the “fingerprint” of poetry, and Wright creates a connection between the ancient past and our current creative processes: “I turn a dead sea’s leaves, / Stand on a shore of waves, and touch that day, and look” (JW CP 414).

There is an immediacy in the words which is belied by their far off sound. There is also a sense of timelessness, in which the future and the “long-before-time lost day” (414) are brought together in one moment of contemplation. In a sense, this pays homage to the popularly accepted notion of the dreaming and the traditional aboriginal culture, and their intimate connection with the geographical features of the land. The image of the Australian landscape as a ‘timeless continent’ may well have been overdone in both poetry and prose, but here Wright manages to convey her themes and one’s own sense of wonder at the agelessness of the creativity of both nature and humanity.

Wright’s last volume of poetry can thus be seen as continuous with the earlier work and as open to changes not only in her own life, but also in response to the poetries of succeeding generations. Resisting conventional patterns, Wright’s new outlook and forms of haiku and ghazal shatter the contours of those nationalist and gendered categories within which her poetry had been understood. It contains long-lined poems
as well, but maybe it reconciles the above declaration with her older prosody in the
wonderful. ‘The Shadow of Ghazals’ which while loosely using the internal
structures of the ghazal, bring the ‘shorter’ and ‘longer’ together, and free this strictest
of forms from rhyme and repetition, it is a landscape of her mind, stretching over her
life.

In the poem ‘Rockpool,’ Wright uses as her central metaphor the movement of waves
and the life in a rockpool on a beach. It’s an often-used and obvious symbol,
particularly to represent this theme: of looking down on the microcosm and watching
the change, death, growth and decay, and the waves which wash over it all. At night
on the beach the galaxy looks like a grin. Fascinating creatures inhabit her rockpool
and their activities readily reflect the “dying” generation, but are described in such a
lively language that the cliché is forgiven.

The poem ‘Rockface’ begins with all the weight of ages contained in this rhyme: “Of
the age-long heave of a cliff-face, all’s come down / except this split upstanding stone,
like a grave-stone” (JW CP 420). Having established such a serious symbolic link,
and beginning with an almost mournful tone which continues throughout the piece,
Wright goes on to display the rock in its many contexts; as part of the geography,
home to “sun-orchids bloomed here, out and gone in a month,” and as the dauntingly
powerful symbol with which she has identified. It is part of a historical and geological
movement, and has survived the “age-long heave” to become a contemporary
monument, known to the poet as well as to the traditional landowners.

    In the days of the hunters with spears, this rock had a name.

    Rightly they knew the ancestral powers of stone.
Jung found in his corner-stone the spark Telesphorus.

Earth gives out fireflies, glow-worms, fungal lights (JW CP 420)

Wright gives many interpretations of the rock, the meanings given by myth and poetry through the generations, lastly rejects all interpretations. For a poet who has so carefully constructed layers of symbolic landscape, it is an important statement: “I’ve no wish to chisel things into new shapes. / The remnant of a mountain has its own meaning” (420). The poet will not mould the world into her own interpretation. She is confronted by the reality of her environment, accepts it as it is, and will defend its right to remain intact and impervious to all attempts to co-opt it as a symbol.

In ‘Dust,’ a ghazal from the sequence, she puts her new approach to the test. The drought has stopped the song of the river; the traditional metaphor for time; and her beloved swimming hole—an emblem of the present moment—has almost dried up. Time’s current has become so sluggish that past and present merge.

The daybreak moon is blurred in a gauze of dust.

Long ago my mother’s face looked through a grey motor veil.

Fallen leaves on the current scarcely move.

But the azure kingfisher flashes upriver still.

Poems written in age confuse the years.

We all live, said Basho, in phantom dwelling. (JW CP 424)

‘Patterns’ were something that fascinated Wright. In the poem, she expresses how man with his knowledge has disturbed the natural patterns. Her poetry thrived on
what seems often paradox: “That prayer to Agni, fire-god, cannot be prayed / We are all of us born of fire, possessed by darkness” (JW CP 426). Wright is often called a poet of nature, but she is far more a poet of human contact with the land in which humans and nature are differentiated. 

Finally, one must consider that ‘nature’ commonly appears as a character or more properly as a cast of characters throughout Wright’s poetry. A particular plant, animal, place or force may be personified in acquiring emotion, reason or intention. While one would more conservatively treat these personifications solely as images, they themselves acquire distinct personality in certain instances. Ultimately, Wright’s own essential nature is integrated into the landscape to give nature a voice. 

Wright believed poetry has an important part to play in this landscape since it attempts to express the language of the earth. The world needed to be re-imagined in a way more consonant with what is actually the case. As she wrote to Shirley Walker:

I don’t think even scientists any longer regard the physical and the psychic as separate….What is the observer, what the observed? Can you tell the dancer from the dance … (Many of them are) now more interested in studying relations than in studying the object itself, ecology rather than taxonomy; the distinctions that get made are more and more blurred. (qtd. in Brady 110)

Wright’s evocation of the Australian landscape, especially of the Mountain ranges of her native New England, is immediately the most striking feature of her work, capturing the coarseness and timelessness of the bush with gentleness and accuracy.
More than any other poet, she gives Australians words to describe their land and their place in it.

She expresses her eco-critical thoughts in the form of lyrics, which is very strong, and it takes in general a modern form. It works through images which are used to bring out the eco-aesthetical thoughts. While allowing a variety of eastern as well as western influences to enrich her vision, of creating an eco-friendly society, she has at the same time maintained a great measure of originality also. She is no blind imitator of anything, however popular and worldwide it is. Eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and even Sufism have had their telling influence in shaping her as a poet. The study of Eastern literature helped her to take an intrinsic look at nature. Wright was shaped by the wisdom of the noble thoughts found in Christianity. As her language is a language of an enlightened soul who wanted to change the anthropocentric attitude of men regarding nature and the aboriginals, it is sure to touch the consciousness of other beings. Wright, like modern eco poets, mixes reason and emotion and so her style appeals to the emotions to bring a change in the attitude of the people who are responsible for ecological disaster. To sum up, we recollect the words of Judith Wright: “My real interest … is in the question of man in nature – man as part of nature” (qtd. in Bridge 108).

Chapter – VII

SUMMATION

As we get past our superficial material wants

and instant gratification we connect to deeper part of

ourselves, as well as to others, and the universe.