invents the earth anew with help from scientific knowledge. She loved nature and felt the need to conserve it. What makes Wright one of the world’s most important poets is that in a grossly materialistic age, she has re-established the conventional values of love for nature through her poetry.

Chapter – III

PASTORAL ECOLOGY

‘Nature,’ is not by any means to be thought of

as wholly passive, as mere ‘material’ to be acted on.

--Judith Wright

Literary pastoral, from an eco-aesthetic point of view, is not an arcadia where one forgets the fever and fret of life but it redirects human consciousness to an endangered natural world. The enduring appeal of literary pastoral is a testimony to the innate sense of man as a creature of natural origins, who must return occasionally to the earth for the rootholds of wisdom denied to him by civilisation. But there is a need to redefine pastoral in terms of the new and more complex understanding of nature. Buell is a part of the new movement seeking to describe the most recent shift in modern pastoral creed as the development of eco-criticism:

a pastoral that has avoided the traps of idealization in seeking to find a discourse that can both celebrate and take some responsibility for nature without false consciousness….As the ecocentric reposssession of pastoral has gathered force, its centre of energy has begun to shift from representation of nature as a theatre of human events to representation in
the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake. (qtd. in Gifford 148)

While traditional pastoral literature reduces nature to the background, modern pastoral represents an alternative kind of human-nature relationship facilitating green consciousness. Some eco-critics have discovered ways of reconnecting men with our natural environment in an attempt to mend our estrangement from nature. The present-day pastoral does not seek to realise a utopia but the pastoral can be a mode of social critique, or it can be a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension. Buell calls this “Pastoral’s multiple frames” (qtd. in Gifford 11). They are borderland spaces of activity which can be seen through a number of frames. It is very clear that the traditional pastoral is overpowered by anti-pastoral or post-pastoral. The anti-pastoral has emerged as another critical form of the pastoral and has been used as a critical contrast to the pastoral. In traditional pastorals, individuals were suffocated with the vices of urban life and journeyed to rural landscapes where they could be transformed and rehabilitated. The pastoral offers a means of healing in what appears to be a conflict-free Arcadian landscape. In contrast to this, the anti-pastoral alludes to pastoral conventions in order to stress their falseness. In anti-pastoral works, nature ceases to be a divinely ordered space in which one finds rest and renewal. The natural world becomes the backdrop of a battle of socio-political survival by challenging class-consciousness and male tradition:

That the natural world can no longer be constructed as ‘a land of dreams’, but in fact a bleak battle for survival without divine purpose is
a position which places Mathew Arnold in a tradition of anti-pastoral poets which includes Goldsmith and Crabbe in the eighteenth century, runs from John Clare to Patrick Kavanagh in the twentieth century, and from Blake to Ted Hughes in contemporary poetry. (Gifford 120)

As opposed to earlier descriptions of the pastoral world as optimistic, a safe Arden, the anti-pastoral offers a vision of nature as dispassionate or even dangerous. Following the anti-pastoral another post-pastoral convention has emerged which also has its origins in the pastoral and anti-pastoral traditions. The post-pastoral takes care of the welfare of the planet and takes responsibility for nature without ignoring the ecological problems arising out of our dealings within nature. Gifford’s post-pastoral theory is summed up:

1. An awe in attention to the natural world. 2. Recognition of a creative-destructive universe equally in balance in a continuous momentum of birth and death, death and rebirth, growth decay, ecstasy and dissolution. 3. Recognition that external nature is also the working of the outer; that of inner human nature can be understood in relation to the external nature. 4. Awareness of both nature as culture and culture as nature. 5. With consciousness come consciences-our ability to take responsibility for our behavior towards the outer species of the land and towards the land itself. 6. Exploitation of the planet is the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities. (152-67)

Within Judith Wright’s collection of poems one might read different lines as anti-pastoral or post-pastoral. She diagnoses “the separation of man from nature”
(qtd. in Platz 259) as the major cause of Australia’s ecological crisis. She calls men to change their attitude towards nature from anthropocentric which confers intrinsic value for human and regards all other things as being only instrumental; that is nonhuman exists only for human purpose. In her poetry, she highlights the abuse of the land and natives, destruction of the native plants and animals by the colonisers. Her poems can be thought of as analogous to a scientific view of nature as a self-perpetuating system. Wright opines:

Nature can no longer be viewed as a machine. It has a living aspect, with which we find ourselves identifying….We can perceive, in the change from day to night, from winter to spring, an inescapable correspondence with the processes of our own bodies, and we can see those changes going on in creatures other than ourselves….So it was this revived sense of a correspondence between man and his world that revitalized poetry…. (qtd. in Hawke 161)

Wright centres nature not as a backdrop but as an active participant. The lands, rivers, forests, birds and animals co-exist with human beings and they have full of ecological connotation. Instead of painting an idealised picture of Australia, Wright attributes consciousness to nature. She avoids fantasising nature, presenting scientific details regarding the aspects of nature. Her unmistakably nature-oriented writing is rendered artistically and aesthetically without an obvious environmentalist agenda. The balance of nature is then mirrored in the balance of human perceptions and emotions which need to be retrained in order to establish ourselves securely in a universe that can be threatening. All human sufferings and loss of fertility of the land
are portrayed not as the result of invasion of technology alone but also as the consequence of the fall of humans from the high moral standards and accepted social mores. In Wright’s view,

> If we want to “change the way we look at the world,” we cannot do so by repressing our feelings and emotions but by deliberately acknowledging the affective qualities of the natural phenomena we see. When, in further step, we engage in “a conscious mental struggle towards a new attitude to the world and our relation to it,” we shall be prepared to acknowledge the intrinsic values that reveal themselves to us when watching nature and natural processes. Our awareness of the values inherent in nature will allow us to discover “the capacity to change our values.” (qtd. in Platz 261-62)

In the traditional pastoral poems nature is presented as a green utopia whereas in her anti-pastoral poems, the place is a nightmarish vision of environmental disaster. Her description of Australia in the poems, ‘South of My Days,’ ‘Bullocky’ and ‘Soldier’s Farm’ is thoroughly non-anthropocentric. The place is not a mere setting or an extrinsic one but an intrinsic one which exists by its own right. In the poem ‘South of My Days,’ Wright confers intrinsic value to the land, moreover, it becomes the centre of her focus:

> rises that tableland, high delicate outline
> of bony slopes wincing under the winter,
> low trees blue-leaved and olive, outcropping granite—
> clean, lean, hungry country. (CP 20)
Wright gives a vivid picture of an abused or exploited environment which may reflect the neglect, or greed of the colonisers responsible for its condition. The land is personified as, “clean, lean, hungry country.” ‘Hungry country’ carries two linked meanings; the country that has to be nourished if it is to be productive; but it also means the country that can suck the spirit, the life, from the settler waiting to take revenge. The metaphor ‘slopes’ were ‘wincing’ indicates the land was shrinking in distress as deforestation is the main reason for climate change. As Wright mentions in her book *The Generations of Men*, “These slopes, once uniformly dark with the low black sally-trees and stringybarks of the original timber, now opened here and there into clearings of dry silver skeleton trees, ring barked to Albert’s [Wright’s grandfather] plans, were grass crowded to the base of the dead trunk” (227). In contrast to the European trees, the reader can find the generalised, unnamed native trees, “low trees blue-leaved and olive” clothing the upper slopes near the ridges.

Wright shows the revolutionary spirit of the mysterious land whose soil failed to accommodate the crops the settlers wanted to grow as it was “outcropping granite.” Much of the New England Tablelands is granite country, especially in the west. The trees are low and struggling because of the wrong agricultural practices and ill-use of the land. There is a struggle between land and man and the land is defeated repeatedly. She pictures the land as protesting to cooperate with the colonisers:

The creek’s leaf-silenced,
willow-choked, the slope a tangle of medlar and crabapple
branching over and under, blotched with a green lichen;
and the old cottage lurches in for shelter. (CP 20)
Wright’s anti-pastoral poem expresses her protest against inhumane agricultural change that had altered the land itself. She expresses her resentment towards the colonisers who had destroyed and tamed the pastoral order by replacing the native plants. The plant represents subversion of the colonial practices. The ‘crab-apple,’ a native fruit which grows in Australia, is replaced by ‘willow’ and orchard trees due to the European settlement in the New England region. The precise mention of trees in the first stanza reflects the impact of European settlement in the New England region. Wright states in her book *The Generations of Men*:

Even the landscape she scarcely recognized, looking in vain for the landmarks of her childhood. With the passing of the big houses and station families, and the springing up of small farms and cottages, the trees too had disappeared. Clusters of houses now stood where she remembered timber and pasture-land; the slopes and hills, once covered, were now bare, and here and there marked with the slight scars of water-eroded gullies. The rich flats of the riverside, which had once been an unbroken plain of wheat, were criss-crossed with fences and patched with the alternating dark and pale of corn and plough. Set against her memory of it, this landscape seemed to be constricted, grown narrow and small.

(199)

The habitants of pastoral setting do not abuse nature but the anti-pastoral poem ‘South of My Days’ depicts a landscape exploited by the colonisers for monitory gains. The winter setting evokes a fallen landscape of colonisation. The man and the country alike are suffering from the winter cold. This is evident in the lines, “Dan can
spin into a blanket against the winter ... the old roof cracks its joints....cottage lurches in under the tangle of medlars...” (CP 20). The poem brings home the idea that man and his environment are emotionally bound.

The men amidst nature are happy and rejuvenated but the key character Dan suffers due to bad weather conditions. Wright uses the key character Dan to symbolise this hardship. Throughout the first and second stanza, the poet makes the reader shiver in the winter chillness. The dilapidated old cottage is like a cold wayfarer hugging its sides for warmth. The unity of man and the environment is expressed through personification. “Mustering up in the Bogongs in autumn when the blizzards came early” (CP 20). It conveys the meaning that the stockmen were mustering cattle, and that many of them died in the blizzard or snow storm on the high mountains and could not be brought down to the winter pastures. The lines “frost on the roof / cracks like a whip” (21) substantiate the idea how man and nature suffer due to extreme climatic condition which is the result of man’s anthropogenic activities. The ‘black-frost’ freezes and the plant life becomes limp and black when thawed out by the sun as extreme weather causes damage to both land and man.

The pastoral arcadia is fertile and bountiful whereas in the anti-pastoral poem ‘Bullocky,’ the rough land is aggressive and intimidating. Nature is not reassuring as it is in the traditional pastoral literature because the bullock driver is exposed to extreme weather conditions. Grief drives the bullock driver mad and in his delusion, he sees himself as Moses leading the children of Israel to the Promised Land: “…thirsty with drought and chilled with rain / he weathered all the striding years / till they ran widdershins in his brain” (CP 17).
Pastoral poems particularly celebrate the climatic conditions, but in the anti-pastoral poem ‘Bullocky,’ the line “thirsty with drought and chilled by rain” (17) is an early instance of Wright’s concern for climate and the link between animal husbandry and land damage. The bullock driver ‘weathered all’ denotes the negative climatic conditions. Wright mentions in her book *The Generations of Men*, “The bullocks were slow on the road, for water and feed were scarce and they had to be rested at each camp” (134).

Pastoral retreats are happy union with nature whereas in the anti-pastoral poem, Wright clearly mentions that bullock drivers stay in the bush land and it is not a happy retreat amidst nature but it is forced labour. The bullocky driver has only bulls for company, the only voice being his own as he cries out into the nothingness, waiting for response: “Till the long solitary tracks / etched deeper with each lurching load” (CP 17). These lines evoke the nature of the first colonial encounter with the vast bush and how the settlers would have shouted to overcome their fears. There is no hope or happiness for the bullock driver. He is alienated and filled with grief and experiences loneliness:

While past the campfire’s crimson ring

the star-struck darkness cupped him round,

and centuries of cattlebells

rang with their sweet uneasy sound. (CP 17)

The embrace of nature is cold and unfriendly and it is effectively the breaking of the possibility of the traditional pastoral. In the line “the star struck darkness
cupped him round,” the dark sky described as embracing him by the use of the word ‘cupped’ is set against a sky full of stars: a feature of a bitterly cold, cloudless night.

Grass is across the wagon-tracks,
and plough strikes bone beneath the grass,
and vineyards cover all the slopes
where the dead teams were used to pass. (CP 17)

The representation of the pastoral land is not cheerful but it is terrible and ghastly. The “plough strikes bone beneath the grass” (17) and the land is covered with vineyard. The death of the bullock driver was noticed after many years. He was swallowed by the soil which had claimed the lives of so many other drivers before him. At this point the pastoral order is not a utopia but it becomes a tomb for the bullock driver. Wright views in her book The Cry for the Dead:

The land itself was now disfigured and desecrated, studded with huts, crossed by tracks and fences....The all-embracing net of life and spirit which had held land, and people, and all things together was in tatters. The sustaining ceremonies could not be held, men and women could not visit their own birthplaces ... (and) proper burial became impossible and injustice had to be done to the rights of the dead. (27)

Pastoral poems are set in beautiful rural landscapes, such as Arcadia, which is portrayed as a sort of Eden by the poets, but the poem, ‘Soldier’s Farm’ is like the Eden after the Fall. It is an anti-pastoral poem where Wright presents the soldier’s return to his village as a sad one:

This plough land, captured with the dust of dreams;
these delicate gatherings of dancing trees,

answered the question of his searching eyes

as his wife’s body answered to his arms. (CP 11)

In the poem, the picture of the farm is not an Arcadia but it is “vapoured with the dust of dreams.” It may be a reference to air pollution caused due to war. The soldier’s gaze at nature is not happy and serene but one of emptiness: “The mist was early and the moon was late, / and in between he stared his whole day full” (CP 11). It is perhaps dubious pastoral. The heroes of the pastoral poems were filled with hope as they were happy in the presence of nature. But in the poem ‘Soldier’s Farm,’ the soldier just makes a plea to survive: “He asked for nothing but the luck to live, / so now his willing blood moves in these trees / that hold his heart up sunwards with their arms” (CP 11).

Wright’s ‘Unknown Water,’ an anti-pastoral poem, depicts the drought affected rural Australia. The uncomplaining fortitude of the farmer establishes a distressing mood of suffering and despair:

No rain yet, and the creek drying, and no rain coming;

........................................................................

In the big drought,

he said, the mares knew when their milk gave out,

and I’ve seen a mare over the dead foal

with tears coming out of her eyes…

........................................................................

The truth I am trying to tell is a kind of waterhole
never dried in any drought. (CP 110-11)

In the traditional pastoral poetry, nature serves as a background to human emotions while in the above lines the animal’s love for its little one becomes the central issue. Wright depicts a sad picture of environmental degradation where the animals die due to severe drought conditions.

The post-pastoral poem, ‘Remittance Man’ expresses the poet’s vision of the relationship between remittance man’s inner life and the natural world around him. “The third feature of the post-pastoral is the recognition that the inner is also the working of the outer, that our inner human nature can be understood in relation to the external nature” (Gifford 156). The Remittance man’s psyche is steadily absorbed by the environment and he becomes one with the landscape. The journey through “the backtracks in the summer haze” (CP 10) in the first stanza is correlated with an inner pilgrimage via loneliness to complete loss of his identity. It is worth observing here again how the poet renders the blending of the remittance man’s spirit with the landscape. In her book Preoccupations in Australian Poetry, Wright views:

Australia has from the beginning of its short history meant something more to its new inhabitants than mere environment….It has been the outer equivalent of an inner reality; first, and persistently the reality of exile; second, though perhaps we now tend to forget this, the reality of newness and freedom…. (Johnson)

The post-pastoral poem ‘Dust’ highlights man’s voracious urge to conquer nature which had resulted in environmental crises. As Gifford puts it, “realization that the exploitation of the planet is of the same mind set as the exploitation of the
minorities” (165). The poet urges humans to have a biocentric view despite their apparently incorrigible anthropocentricism due to their selfish nature. It was an attempt to express that for a long time nature was not given its due consideration. The poet mourns that the settlers had exploited the mother earth by wrong agricultural practices, which had a boomerang effect resembling the dust bowl disaster.

Wright refers to the dust disaster which is purely anthropogenic. The disaster was caused by severe droughts coupled with decades of extensive farming without crop rotation, crop-free fields, or other techniques to prevent wind erosion. Deep ploughing of the topsoil had displaced the natural deep-rooted grasses that normally kept the soil in place and trapped moisture even during periods of drought and high winds. “This sick dust, spiraling with the wind, / is harsh as grief’s taste in our mouths / and has eclipsed the small sun” (CP 23). She describes it as ‘sick dust’ because it has been shown to increase the spread of disease across the globe. The dust storms arise when a strong wind blows loose sand and dirt from a dry surface. “Spiraling with the wind” refers to the displacement of the surface air causing an inward movement of surrounding air, creating the common spiral shape of the dust devil. The dust “eclipsed the small sun,” as the clouds blackened the sky:

The remnant earth turns evil,

the steel- shocked earth has turned against the plough

and runs with wind all day, and all night

sighs in our sleep against windowpane. (23)

Wright warns the reader that every aspect of environmental degradation and abuse of nature will translate itself into a serious menace to the life of human beings.
She moves from resentfully blaming the land for failure of the harvest, “the remnant earth turns evil,” (CP 23) and acknowledge her own accountability in the disastrous consequences of this drought. It refers to the wreckage caused by the dust bowl disaster. The damages caused by the tragedy are immeasurable as millions of acres of farmland were damaged, and hundreds of thousands of people were forced to leave their homes.

In this work of eco-warning, Wright highlights the fact that the coloniser by crushing the culture of the aborigines has damaged the land. Gifford is of the view, “an awareness of both nature as culture and of culture as nature” (162). Aboriginal culture was influenced by the natural environment and resources and its relationship with country life may be described as ‘holistic.’ Europeans cleared the land for agriculture and buildings, removed or altered habitat vital to both the native plants and animals. Wright opines in her book **Born of the Conquerors:**

The second century of occupation changed this picture as tractors and other machinery were put to use in clearing and ploughing vast acreage for wheat. The inland once more altered past recognition as cropland was pushed far into semi-arid zone. Unwise clearing of land, as in the mallee country, resulted in encroaching dunes of sands, and in the 1940’s drought dust storms sent red Australian topsoil far across the Pacific, but a second great industry was established in formerly pastoral country. (38)

Anthropocentricism has resulted in reducing the Earth to the status of a mere resource under human sway and this has become the root cause of natural disaster.
Earth has survived all the harm done to it: “Earth was kinder, suffering fire and plough, / breeding the unaccustomed harvest” (CP 23). It had been kind to man by breeding the ‘unaccustomed harvest.’ The earth that is now running with the wind, having previously been stolen from its indigenous landholders, is said to be ‘steel shocked’ and forced to breed an unaccustomed harvest for the private profit of its new owners.

For a people who for certainly more than 40,000 years have owned, revered and cared for land which was never, to them, a source of profit or a place to be parceled out, sold, bought and exploited, but a parent to be loved, and spiritual and material source of life, this is both damaging and insulting. (BOC 47)

The aboriginal culture can be described as an advanced culture which nurtured the land but in the name of progress the modern mind has misused the land. The usurpers entered into war and further damaged the ecology. The dust has realised, this is no purely natural disaster, but the result of the cultural attitudes of its European colonisers. Just as drought and wind add to the coming out of the dust storms, poor farming and grazing practices also expose the dust and sand to the wind. Just as the Europeans silenced the natives, the standpoint of human mastery silences the Earth's cry. The poem ‘Dust’ traces the moment when such silencing mechanisms begin to break down:

But the wind rises; but the earth rises,

running like an evil river; but the sun grows small,

and when we turn to each other, our eyes are dust
and our words dust. (CP 23)

Wright’s eco-poetry conveys the idea that evil seems to be manifest in the land, as the dust runs “like an evil river” in place of the waterways that have run dry. It is one of the fundamental aspects of the post-pastoral, that is, the “recognition of a creative-destructive universe” (Gifford 153). It conveys a dawning realisation that it is not only the land that is eroding, but the perspective from which her people had hitherto viewed and spoken of it: “our eyes are dust /and our words dust” (CP 23). Literally it refers to the most hazardous effects of a dust storm and the reduction of visibility. Dust storms commonly reduce the visibility to less than a quarter of a mile, however in some cases, it can be much less. The health of people can also be affected by dust storms. “O sighing at the blistered door, /darkening the evening star, / the dust accuses” (24). As the standpoint of mastery begins to crumble, the land too is calling out in grief, and the speaker is forced to recognise her own culpability in the wrong to which the dust bears witness. As stated by Vandana Shiva in her article, “The Impoverishment of the Environment”:

In the late twentieth century it is becoming clear that our scientific systems are totally inadequate to counteract or eliminate the hazards. Each disaster is like an experiment ... to teach us more about the effects of deadly substances that are brought into daily productions and use.

(82)

Man feels that he is superior to other forms that inhabit the biosphere. Now he has come to understand that nature is also a co-inhabitant and not a subordinate. The
poet becomes aware that their dream was a wrong dream to dominate the world and so advocates change in their attitude towards the land.

In the poem ‘Dust,’ Wright grieves for the wider Earth community that she and her breed have wronged, the speaker is forced to admit that, “Our dream was the wrong dream, / our strength was the wrong strength” (CP 24). According to Gifford, his fifth post-pastoral quality in literature is that, “with consciousness comes conscience” (163). This recognition has come too late to avert disaster. The dream to dominate the earth was a wrong dream. Yet, in keeping with the Biblical tradition upon which Wright draws at the same time that she departs from it, there remains the possibility of going forward otherwise, incorporating a new covenant, if not with God, then with the Earth itself. According to Wright, exploitation of the native land has lead to the exploitation of the planet. The poem ‘Dust’ speaks powerfully to our present historical moment of eco-climatic imperilment.

Wright’s poems on aborigines like ‘For a Pastoral Family,’ ‘Two Dreamtimes,’ ‘At Cooloola,’ ‘The Dark Ones,’ and ‘Bora Ring’ highlight the post-pastoral elements of “the exploitation of the planet as the exploitation of the minorities.” And “an awareness of both nature as culture and culture as nature” (Gifford 162). The poem ‘For a Pastoral Family’ evaluates the views of Europeans towards the stolen land. It reflects on the treatment of Aboriginals by the early settlers and the Europeans’ loss of any spiritual connectedness with the land. The natives were controlled by the statute of *terra nullius*, a Latin expression deriving from Roman law meaning “land belonging to no one.” This proclaimed that the native inhabitants could not sell or
assign land, nor could an individual person or group acquire it, other than through distribution by the crown.

And after all,

the previous owners put up little fight,

did not believe in ownership, and so were scarcely human.

……………………………………

For the good of the Old Country,

the land was taken;

Would any convict us?

Our plea has been endorsed by every appropriate jury.

(JW CP 407)

The age of pastoralist superiority was an age of domination over the land, and with its demise comes the death of Wright’s childhood dreamtime. Yet pastoralists would still cling to their “field of reference,” their self-justifications even into the late twentieth century with conservative voting patterns: “Some actions of those you vote for stick in your throats. / There are corruptions one cannot quite endorse; / but if they are in our interests, then of course…” (JW CP 406). Wright expressed her grief at the earth which has become tainted by ‘corruptions’ in globalisation when the multi-national corporations bought New England farms for mines, and fast food chains bought local cattle stations. More broadly, the poem interrogates Australians at large.

Another poem ‘Two Dreamtimes’ is addressed to the heartless colonisers who abused the land of the natives. In Wright’s childhood, she had believed her forefathers’ land was hers, later she realised it was stolen. The land is “poisoned now
and crumbling” (*JW CP* 316) and “I mourn it as you mourn / the ripped length of the island beaches, / the drained paperbark swamps” (317). The poet knew she had left the “easy Eden-Dreamtime.” She had irretrievably left that world of childhood innocence and realised she was “born of the conquerors,” who, as pioneers conquering the land, also conquered Aboriginal society.

‘Two Dreamtimes’ also has the post-pastoral element which considers nature as culture. It deals with the problem of cultural identity, with what Australians believed themselves to be as a nation. She accepts that the two Dreamtimes are lost; now the world of Aboriginal culture with its unspoilt beauty is gone and the pastoralists’ inheritance is “doomed by traders and stock exchanges,” with the impact of big business. She laments this immoral seizure of the land and teaches the need for redress, responsibility and connectedness. This timely poem begins to redeem the invasion of the Great South Land and to undo the domination of its bloodied racism against traditional owners.

Similarly, the poem ‘At Cooloola’ is one about coming to terms with the past and with the guilt spawned by that past. She observes in her wanderings near Cooloola how the ancient ‘blue crane’ (*CP* 140) has been fishing down the centuries with a calm and assurance denied to her. 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” (*CP* 140). The past incident of crime and racial tension casts its gloom over the poet’s present self critical awareness. ‘The Dark Ones’ focuses on the oppression of the Aborigines by the dominant European race,
like intruders in their own home country. When they are described as spirits it evokes a sense of fear and alarm. There is also a deep sense of awe and wonder in their deep connection to ‘the night’ and land. The description of them as spirits evokes a limitlessness about them and their everlasting presence.

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

Wright’s ‘Bora Ring’ deals with the subject of the annihilation of Aboriginal culture by the White settlement. By destroying the natives they have destroyed the eco-friendly practices of the natives. Bora ceremony, involves the learning of sacred songs, stories, dance and tradition. She emphasises the importance of traditional cultures and their continuing impact as every religious festival includes appropriate dances, songs and stories which insist on worshiping and protecting nature.

These are the earthen rings connected by the Sacred Way, along which boys of the clans were taken to their initiation ceremonies to be made men and to begin to enter into the tribal ceremonies. But such sites were now on privately-owned land, sometimes only just visible, overgrown by trees, or cut by fences and roads, or even ploughed up. (BOC 5)

Wright is guilty that her ancestors are responsible for having destroyed the tribes as well as their culture. The physical and psychological violence suffered by the Australian Aborigines over the decades is recollected by a sensitive mind:
It was impossible for a sensitive conscience to remain untouched by the exploitation, murder, and dispossession of Aboriginal people specially if one’s own ancestors had been directly involved in the process. In some parts of Australian society there was, beneath the surface, an element of guilt which was routinely sublimated by charity, and more often by distancing and ignorance. It is not surprising that, following the stresses of World War II, this latent guilt would find its way to the surface through the workings of a hyper-sensitive mind. In this case, it was the mind of a poet keenly attuned to suffering and injustice; the mind of Judith Wright. (Shoemaker)

Wright observes the Aborigines had become outcasts, landless in their own places. Many tribes had not even been allowed the privilege of endurance. The leftovers of tradition salvaged by a few records from the largely missing tribes can tell us very little of the reality of which they were part. It is dance, song, story, art and adornment which articulated the entirety of Aboriginal life in relation to the country: “The web of religion and knowledge, that whole way of seeing, have been torn apart and scattered in many places as though they were no more than worthless fantasy” (BOC 13).

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. (CP 8)
Aboriginal culture has been lost because of the invasion by the Europeans. It tells us that the rituals, tribal stories and memories of the Aborigines are gone “lost in an alien tale” implying the Europeans were aliens. It also suggests that once the Aborigines had been invaded, they were forgotten. “Posture and mime a past Corroboree” (8). ‘Corroboree’ is a night-time festivity with songs and symbolic dances by which the Australian aborigines celebrate events of importance.

Broome views, “The core of Aboriginal spiritual belief is oneness with the land and everything that lives on it” (qtd. in Schnierer, Adam and Chris 8). A deep understanding of the land and connection with the natural living landscape is fundamental to contemporary Aboriginal culture. “The song is gone” the songs of primitives are replete with passionate and serious significance, “the dance / is secret with the dancers in the earth” (CP 8). The beating of drums and dancing to folktales form the core of the tribal art, music and dance as a whole. Tribal religion has long been described as animistic. Animals, plants, trees, stones, hills, or mountains are all abodes of spirits. Worship of nature is another form of belief, which prevails among the tribal people. Every religious festival includes appropriate dances, songs, and stories reflecting the mythology of the people. After the invasion of the English, all the ‘ritual’ was considered useless.

The land is considered as a revengeful spirit waiting to take revenge on the people who had killed them. “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). Murmur is quite a soft sound to describe where the rituals once happened but the only thing left is sorrow. The grass is personified as ‘standing up.’ It encircles the dancing
ring, almost as if it is guarding the sacred area. As Gungil views, “Ancestral spirits represent real entities that still exist today. They shaped the land and gave it life, law of nature and people. These laws of nature are reflected in Aboriginal society through religious belief and totemic ancestry” (qtd. in Schnierer, Adam and Chris 8).

Aboriginal Australia is a living legacy of spiritual knowledge. It is based on a long understanding of land culture, people and the connectedness of all things shared through rituals, art, dance, music, secret stories and journeys into the mysteries known as Dreamtimes. According to the Aboriginal beliefs, the spirit ancestors of the land and its people descended from the sky, emerged from the earth or sprang from the waterways:

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)

In the poem “Bora Ring,” Wright compares the Europeans to Cain, saying that they have killed their ‘brothers’ like Cain killed his own brother, Abel. These ancestral spirits possessed supernatural powers, enabling them during the Dreamtime to change into human, animal or other forms. Nature is the only reminder of the lost aboriginal culture. Wright in her book The Generations of Men, mentions the fear of her grandfather, “He felt for the dry black earth under his horse’s hoofs an aversion that was almost horror; it seemed to breathe up wavering forms of death among the glassy waves of air” (135).

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. (CP 8)

Wright laments that the tradition and stories are gone, lost in an alien tale; the Europeans being aliens. The aborigines’ use of earth pigments to colour the body is indicative of an intricate relationship between human beings and the environment, and is practised mainly during ceremonies. Wright uses powerful words to show how the Aborigines were quickly ‘invaded’ and ‘forgot.’ The line “Sightless shadow, spear splintered” creates an image of a culture crushed with strong, harsh sound. As White views in the article ‘To the Centre’: “The land’s First Peoples whom we regard as ‘primitive’ and doomed to extinction knew ... that we are part of the fabric of life as whole. The land was telling me that we have to learn from them not to dominate and exploit the natural world for our own selfish ends” (qtd. in Brady 3).

Wright’s snake poems ‘Snake Hunting,’ ‘Killer,’ ‘Snakeskin on the Gate’ are post-pastoral poems which call attention to Gifford’s views of wonder at nature and awareness of the creative and destructive energy of nature and nature as culture (153). The attitude of the persona of the poem ‘Snake Hunting’ is similar to that of the persona in D. H. Lawrence’s poem ‘Snake.’ There is the same awe-struck observation of ‘black snake’ a sense of stopping dead in one’s tracks. The opening lines give an idealized picture of nature: “Sun-warmed in the late season’s grace / under the autumn’s gentlest sky / we walked, and froze half through a pace” (JW CP 411). The protagonist then froze as the “snake went reeling by.” The word ‘Reeling’ describing the action of the snake, conveys the impression that the snake was disturbed by the
intruders. The poet describes it as the ‘great black snake,’ the word ‘great’ gives the feeling of something powerful. The use of the word ‘pace’ hints that the narrator was walking in a steady speed until they were awe-struck by the snake which made them ‘freeze.’ The word ‘froze’ suggests that the narrator and her companion were really shocked to see the snake that they actually didn’t move a single millimetre.

The speaker is wonder-struck that she gives a graphic description of that great black snake, whose colour itself is terrifying. “sun glazed his curves of diamond scale, / and we lost breath to watch him pass” (411). The poet further describes the reflection of the sun on the skin of the snake, diamond is something that is precious and rare, at the same time, this description of the snake’s skin makes the reader wonder if the poet is trying to look at the beauty of the snake despite the impression that the snake was giving. The poet describes the awe and fear that the snake inspires in the line, “we lost breath to watch him pass” (JW CP 411).

Another element of post-pastoral is “the creative and destructive universe equally in balance, a continuous momentum of birth and death, death and rebirth, growth and decay, ecstasy and dissolution” (Gifford 153). However, the snake, almost as if it wanted to prove the poet wrong, attacks its ‘small food’ (412) with a ‘fierce intent.’ The ‘fierce intent’ shows its wildness. “we scarcely thought; still as we stood / our eyes went wi...
he has gone” (412), the word ‘dark’ gives a hint of mystery around the snake and ‘splendid’ a word closely linked to wonderful.

Wright implies the dominance of the snake and conveys the reader that although human beings often think they are in control of nature, nature is a powerful thing that needs to be respected. Some cultures view nature and culture as two different entities, whereas others are seeking to assert their dominance over nature. However, some cultures hold a more inclusive view of perceiving humans as interdependent components of nature.

What track he followed, what small food
fled living from his fierce intent,
we scarcely thought; still as we stood
our eyes went with him as he went. (JW CP 412)

On its own terms, this small snake manages to stop adults in their tracks. The above lines show that though the snake is small in size it seems to have control over human beings. Wright’s ‘The Killer’ also expresses awe and wonder at the sight of the snake; she describes the snake as:

Black horror sprang from the dark
as a violent birth,
and through its cloth of grass
I felt the clutch of earth. (CP 53)

Though most snakes are harmless and had inhabited this biosphere even before man did, people are scared of them as soon as one is spotted. Our cultural perception shapes our attitude towards snakes. The Christians associate snake with man's fall
from grace, and it was banished from the Garden of Eden. Some African cultures revere rock pythons as sacred, while aborigines in Australia attribute the creation of life to a giant rainbow serpent. The speaker’s culture has taught her to hate the snake. The persona of the poem kills the snake,

O beat him into the ground
O strike him till he dies-
or else your life itself
drains through those colourless eyes. (CP 53)

The verse ‘Snakeskin on a Gate’ is a chilling description of a “coil of poisonous dark” (CP 246) waiting somewhere “in the pools of shade.” The speaker expresses awe and fear at “… its dry scales of horn blew newly-cast in the hot wind” (245). The narrator is caught between two realities—life and death. The protagonist saw the skin of the snake and she looked around in fear expecting “a coil of venomous dark in the pools of shade.” But when the enemy is at last discovered he is stretched out in the sun, shining like a jewel and showing no sign of fear, thus begging the question of fear in the one who approaches. The poem is set in “a time of life like January, double faced month of change” (246). The idea of the constant renewal of life is suggested in the phenomenon of the snake shedding its skin. This may be found somewhere in the line “neither alive nor decayed … stretching warm in the sun; shining his patterned length clean as a cut jewel” (246). The poet looks at the snake with the mixed feeling of admiration and fear. But like a king, the snake is “Set free of his dim shell, his glinting eye /saw only movement and light and had no fear of me. / Like this from our change, my soul, let us drink renewal” (246).
Wright universalises the experience of this poem as she is aware of the fundamental aspect of the post pastoral element, “creative-destructive universe equally in balance with the continuous momentum of birth and death, death and rebirth” (Gifford 153). Human’s confrontation with Nature has its origins in some irrational ‘logic’ of the soul. The fear, as expressed in the poem, is seen by the poet to spring from the same source as the snake, symbolizes, our primitive past embedded in our sub-consciousness. By revealing the kinship of feelings that permeates all Nature, John Muir views,

The antipathies existing in the Lord’s great animal family must be wisely planned, like balanced repulsion and attraction in the mineral kingdom. How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! How blind to the rights of the rest of all creation…. Though alligators, snakes etc., naturally repel us, they are not mysterious evil. They dwell happily in these flowery wilds, are part of God’s family, unfallen, undepraved, and cared for. (qtd. in Palmer)

Wright is aware of the creative and destructive power of nature. In Wright’s poem ‘Fox,’ the fox is an active force, causing “a bushfire” (JW CP 415) and “a rustle in dry litter,” with the image of stealth and deception normally associated with these predatory pests. The poet takes a biocentric look at the fox, as foxes have been very useful to control pests on fruit farms while leaving the fruit intact.

In many cultures, the fox appears in folklore as a symbol of cunning and trickery, or as a familiar animal possessed of magic powers. The Australians found it difficult to love the fox, and they are rarely described in such glowing terms. Steve
Baker writes in “Picturing the Beast” that we can hope a careful and enlightened study of cultural representations of animals may stimulate our concern for the “circumstances of actual living animals in the same culture,” and may enable animal rights advocates “to develop and promote a less contemptuous and condescending attitude to animals throughout the culture” (qtd. in Malamud 59).

Wright’s tree poems, ‘Flame-Tree in a Quarry,’ ‘Flame Tree Blooms,’ ‘The Flame Tree’ and ‘The Eucalyptus and the National Character’ apparently post-pastoral poems underscore Gifford’s views of viewing at nature with “awe and wonder” (Gifford 152) “nature as culture,” (162) and having an awareness of the “creative and destructive” (153) energy of nature and its power of “exploitation of the planet” (165). ‘Flame Tree in a Quarry’ views a land that has been excavated, and looted. It describes a tree like blood flowing in an apparently barren landscape. Wright is angry with the way the land is exploited and she expresses her wonder at the flame tree which withstands all atrocities of human beings. In the poem the reader is introduced to a flame tree growing in the middle of an abandoned quarry:

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)
A quarry is a classic image of a wounded landscape, which made the sight of it growing from the ‘wrecked skull’ all the more bleak. What is left is a wound on the face of the earth, a deep wound reaching to bone that has been broken, “stripped and left for dead” (CP 62). The sight of the flame-tree is a shock, as if blood were to be seen flowing in a dry, dead landscape. It “leaps out this bush of blood.” It does not suddenly transform the scene of devastation, it exists inside it. The “scarlet breath” flows in the midst of degradation. The flame tree is endemic to the rainforests of south east Queensland. She observes the physical object, empathises with it and the tree becomes the symbol of life’s fiery spirit defeating an uncongenial environment.

In the midst of destruction of the planet by man, right in the earth’s ‘torn mouth’ up comes life. The key line of the whole poem is “the living ghost of the death.” While there might be much destruction of nature in the twenty-first century, this magic of the red flowers of the flame tree standing boldly in a quarry ‘fountain of hot joy’ (62) shows the regenerative power of the natural world. It shows nature’s triumph in the living present.

In “The Flame Tree Blooms,” the poet gives to the tree the same life force she takes into herself as maker, with the same sense of ritual. Wright expresses a sense of awe at the range of qualities that contribute to the flexibility of the tree:

suddenly, wholly, ceremoniously
it puts off every leaf and stands up nakedly,
calling and gathering,

every capacity in it, every power,
drawing up from the very roots of being
this pulse of total red that shocks my seeing
into an agony of flower. (CP 291)

Wright reflects on natural animism, sharpened by solitude and the need to invoke companionship. The flame tree blooms grandly all of a sudden. The flame tree “puts off every leaf” (291) by dropping its leaves before it blooms, and the tree gives its entire being over to the act of flowering and then, having blossomed, carelessly scatters its flowers with generous abandon. Wright observes that the adaptability of the Flame tree represents a way Aboriginal culture has withstood atrocities. It gives the poem a current urgency in the face of so much evidence of a need to live with evolving planetary conditions which now scientists call climate change. When a flame tree blooms it literally looks like a flame. The bright red flowers have a special vividness of colour and density of coral like petals. In this strange context, the thinking self of the global community became more and more aware of the repercussions of a greedy culture like ours. The term ‘culture’ stands for the exploitation of nature by man for his unlimited consumerism. The culture has taught him to reduce the pristine nature into a quarry.

In the poem ‘The Flame Tree,’ the speaker identifies her strong inner self with that of the flame tree. “How to live, I said, as the flame tree lives? /- to know what the flame tree knows; to be / prodigal of my life as that wild tree / and wear my passion so?” (CP 97). As Capp rightly observes in My Blood’s Country,

Judith Wright found answers to questions in the flame tree she could see from her back steps….The answer that came to her ‘this sudden season’
was to live and love in the same way: passionately, without reserve, always giving oneself fully to the moment and to others. (151)

Wright, in her post-pastoral poem ‘The Eucalypt and the National Character,’ unmistakably expresses awe at the range of qualities that contribute to the adaptability of the tree. The poet is wonder-struck at the adaptability of the eucalyptus tree. She says,

Yes, we do perceive her as sprawling and informal; even disheveled, disorderly. That may be because we are still of two minds about militarism and class-systems. When we are informal, we’re half afraid of bad form.

She, on the other hand, follows a delicate bent of her own. Worn by such aeons, dried by such winds, she has learned to be flexible, spare, flesh close to bone.

(JW CP 362)

Gifford in his analysis of this poem, comments, “Awe in this poem is used to counter the bombast and hubris of militarism and class-systems about which the Australian national character is apparently ‘still of two minds’ ” (81). The poet calls the nation to learn lessons from the tree. The tree is ‘disheveled’ (JW CP 362) and ‘disorderly’ and it is informal. It is ready to exist in an unfriendly situation. The disorderliness in nature is something the English mind finds it difficult to accept. But the tree is humble and one should learn to be humble and simple like the tree. The dualism of this poem appears to separate the inner human nature from the outer nature represented by the tree.
Wright feels that the exploitation of our planet emerges from the same frame of mind as our exploitation of each other. The attitude of exploitation of the other in nature and others in human society in Australia is certainly present in the poem in the form of references to militarism, class system, pine plantations, cities and the final sickness of being “apt to turn crooks” (JW CP 362) implying the sickness not only of corruption, but a treachery to the earth and ourselves. The Europeans replaced ‘eucalypts’ with ‘regiments’ of pine plantations, and it speaks of the supremacy of the white culture over the aborigines.

The qualities attributed to the eucalypt that enable it to survive its ecological conditions might also be those that humans might adopt to be characteristically Australian. Indeed, for centuries the original Australians already had been living exactly with those qualities, not only to endure, but to enjoy a rich living dialogue with the land. The adaptability of the eucalypt might represent a way of living with the continent’s conditions that has already been achieved by Aboriginal culture. In the same way the tree also has modified itself to climate change and continues to survive. She offers several crucial lessons from the eucalypt that might be suggested by the combination of ‘artist’ and ‘asymmetry’; a non-western way of living; “tough care and an economical tenderness” (362) and a flexible bending of values toward the changing conditions.

According to Wright, the birds evoke a sense of awe and mystery. The nation could learn from its own birds’ effortlessness and acceptance of limits in joyful obedience to the laws of their nature. In the poem “Currawong,” Wright expresses wonder and fear at the currawong. She describes the bird as “bold, cruel and
melodious bird” (CP 166). The currawong has “shallow eyes— / Bold shallow buttons of yellow glass/that see all round his sleek black skull” (166). The currawong is a large, mostly black bird, with a bright yellow eye. They are strong curious birds that will eat almost anything. They roost in flocks “in the scarlet-tufted coral trees.” They can form large flocks in late summer and winter and may have a large communal roost.

I remember long ago

………………………………..

the currawongs as wild as night

quarrelling, talking, crying so,

in the scarlet-tufted coral tree; (CP 166)

Wright describes the creative and destructive energy of the birds. She says the birds are as “wild as night” (166). Black currawongs have been observed wrestling with each other, where a bird would attempt to force its opponent on its back.

“Robber then and robber still, / he cries now with the strange word.”(166) All species are omnivorous and they will raid other bird's nests for eggs or young at every opportunity. They are fond of grapes and fruit and thus are a pest to farmers in some areas, usually where there is timber or forest nearby. ‘Cruel’ and ‘melodious bird’ is how Wright refers to the soothing voice of the bird. It kills chicken and other small birds and animals and so it is referred to as cruel.

Wright’s sea poems ‘Conch-Shell,’ ‘Builders,’ ‘Surfer,’ and ‘Alive’ are obliviously post-pastoral poems which highlight Gifford’s views of “awe and wonder at nature” and awareness of the “creative and destructive energy of the universe”
Wright observes an empty shell that lifts the poet above the physical. “Virgin and clean the house is washed, and empty/ the wave withdrawing leaves it to my hands” (CP 31). She picks up the thing and it all of a sudden becomes the symbol of a life cycle since “The sweet enclosing curve of pearl/shuts in the room that was the cell of birth,” (31) and the flesh that died, a whole process she imagines as "the brilliant arch from darkness into darkness.” Then, the poet addresses the former inhabitant of the conch and identifies herself with it as sharer of the same life that once animated the animal:

And here, half-guess, half-knowledge, I contract
into a beast's blind orbit, stare deep down
the cliffs not I have climbed; your prodigal,
probe with my sense your senseless life—
since life, the force that leapt between your poles,
burns forward in me against the night. (CP 31)

The same pulse of life that beats with force in the last line is heard in another poem, ‘The Builders,’ but this time love works through the insects that swiftly and silently build life on the Australian coral reef against the “dark eroding seas /…. / Only those coral insects live / that work and endure under/ the breakers’ cold continual thunder” (CP 47). This poem has a special significance for the poet because she played an active role in the defense of the Australian Great Barrier Reef against oil-drilling. As in the other lyrics, the factual account of reality, this time the insects' frantic activity, is only the surface of the poem:

Where dark eroding seas had broken,
the quick, the sensitive, the lover,

the passionate touch and intergrowth of living

Alive, alive, intent,

love rises on the crumbling shells it shed (47).

Wright strikes deeper to find in the animals’ instinctive labour the force of love breaking out of darkness. The emphasis is not laid on the tiny creatures but on the lover “who dares to hold [his] love against the world” (47). The lower and the higher orders of life become again an imagined whole, partaking of the same impelling drive. Reality is a condition of unrest for it is precisely unrest, struggle and contradiction that ensure progress, the alternative being inaction, passivity and stagnation. There is no doubt that Wright is enamored of life and fascinated by the incessant turning of the wheel of creation.

Similarly in the poem, ‘Alive,’ Wright looks into a microscope and wonders at the life-cycle of the microorganism in the water. She is able to identify herself with the micro-organism and she says:

Locked in the focused stare
of the lens, my sight
flinches: a tiny kick.
The life in me replies
signaling back
“You there: I here.”

What matters isn’t size. (JW CP 321)
Wright refers to the fact that microscopic organisms can be found in every body of water, including lakes, ponds, streams, and puddles and that microscopic pond organisms share much in common with humans, in that they are composed of cells.

The poem ‘Surfer’ describes the joy of surfing, but Wright warns that the ocean can become a destructive force. Perhaps she created the poem as a warning to the audience, to watch out and stay safe when they are at the sea. The ocean can get very dangerous as described by her in the poem ‘Surfer’: “the grey wolf sea lies, snarling” (AHP 12). This is apparent through her strong word choice - eg. “sea crouches on sand” (12). This quote shows how the sea is ready to pounce on and attack passing surfers. The protagonist is fearless and a little reckless – going out very far into the “green weirs” of water and leaving it to the last minute to surf back home. Within this poem, the mood shifts from one of joy at surfing “as he in water, with delight” to caution “turn home....Last leaf of gold vanishes” (AHP 12). As the poem ends the mood is much more somber and illustrates the danger of the ocean “grey-wolf sea lies, snarling.” This best conveys the change in mood from one of joy and closeness with the sea to that of caution and danger. Interesting features include the use of enjambments.

Wright’s Bush poems, ‘The Bushfire’ and ‘Night after Bushfire’ bring to light the post-pastoral attribute of “creative and destructive” (Gifford 153) energy of nature and “exploitation of the planet” (165) and “nature as culture” (162). The poem clearly pictures a bushfire, a wildfire that burns out of control spreading across vegetated regions of bush land. Though it appears to be destructive it also creates a number of surprising benefits for the environment that cannot be created in any other way.
While men consider it a threat, fire is a natural part of our landscape and many of the native plants depend on it. Bushfires are recurrently taking place during the hotter months of the year mostly due to Australia’s hot, dry climate. Large areas of land are ravaged every year by bushfires, which also cause damage to belongings and loss of life.

Upon the burning mountain stands the palm.

Deeper was its grove than the heart’s night,

and hung with green the spring rose under it.

Hidden in miles of leaves stood the great palm,

the column of a thousand years. (CP 48)

The most obvious result of fire is the loss of plant and animal life. When an area is burned out, vegetation is destroyed as it is used by the fire as fuel. In addition, animals are killed in bushfires by high temperatures and suffocation. Due to the frequency of bushfires, some species have developed defense mechanisms to combat the flames. Thick bark and protected shoots and tissue allow plants to regenerate after a fire. Animals, such as birds, kangaroos or wallabies, are able to flee flame-stricken areas.

Most bushfires happen in times when temperatures are high. “Too sharp, too bright / burned this winter’s sun” (CP 49). Bushfires often start when dry winds blow inland from central Australia. “The wind’s fine fever / withered and pierced.” While the winds bring dry weather, they also provide ventilation for the flames. Trees such as eucalyptus are especially prone to fire because their leaves have highly-flammable oil as dry leaves and bark are especially flammable.
“I am that which is not able to be whole,”
says the fire; “and therefore I devour
seeking the absolute I do not find.
This strength that falls to ash within the palm
grew through a million days, is eaten in an hour,
and in its death I die.” (CP 49)

Wright reminiscences Aboriginal people who used fire to clear undergrowth and regenerate growth on plants. The fires used by them for this purpose were of low intensity, which means they did not burn as quickly or as hot as an out-of-control bushfire. It is used to regulate the environment in some cases and indigenous people have used fire to manage bush land. Since these fires burned back undergrowth, it is possible that they prevented other, more catastrophic fires. “I am that which is unbuilt but to renew,” says the palm. “I was time’s living scale, and that alone in me is given to fire” (CP 49). The effects of bushfires are not all disadvantageous to the environment, as fire generates re-growth and new life. In some eucalyptus species, for example, fire is an essential part of the life cycle:

   Certain native flora in Australia have evolved to rely on bushfires as a means of reproduction and fire events are an interwoven and an essential part of the ecology of the continent. In some eucalypt and banksia species, for example, fire causes seed pods to open, which allows them to germinate. Fire also encourages the growth of new grassland plants. Other species have adapted to recover quickly from fire. (“Bushfire in Australia”)
Wright grieves, however, in ‘Night after Bushfire’ that it is not only about the consequences of a bushfire, but the possible effects of a nuclear attack, something she was also concerned with. The bleak and black environment is easily imagined through phrases such as “Charred death upon the rock leans his charred bone / and stares at death sockets black with flame” and “this landscape of charcoal and moonlight” (CP 40). The loss of life for both wildlife and vegetation due to bushfire is something that occurs often, sometimes through thoughtless defacement, sometimes through nature itself. In the line, “Sun thrust his warm hand down at the high noon,” (CP 39) the contrast is again provided between light and dark. There is also a contrast between life and death, because the sun is shining after the fire, and is showing off the destruction left behind by the flames. It also, in its own way, shows that despite the destruction, the land will rise again to be living and green.

   Carry like a threatened thing your soul away,
   and do not look too long to left or right,
   for he who wears the strict chains of day
   will lose it in the landscape of charcoal and moonlight. (CP 40)

These lines refer to the loss of soul that the fire can bring about. Fires rage through the Australian bush land, sometimes creeping into urban areas, damaging the environment, stunting the economy and creating social distress. The intensity of the bushfire dictates the effect on the environment. Severe bushfires may burn all the vegetation in a particular area, while more moderate fires will, generally, cause less damage to the natural surroundings.
In ‘Night after Bushfire,’ Wright uses darkness to great effect, both through the natural darkness of night and the black darkness of ash and the charred remains of the forest. “There is no more silence on the plains of the moon,” (CP 39) is a phrase which suggests the utter silence of the place in a way that the reader immediately knows, even without the title, that something has happened to the place where the poem is set. The silence creates a feeling of horror and, perhaps of fear. Silence can be very frightening if the silence is threatening, but the overall sense in the poem is not one of fear, but of dismay at the death and destruction that has occurred. This is a deliberate thing that Wright has done, stemming from her commitment to environmental issues.

Wright in her rock poems ‘Rock,’ ‘Rockface,’ and ‘Rockpool,’ wonders at the agelessness of the creativity of both nature and humanity. Her rock poems reflect the post pastoral traits, of “awe in attention to the natural word,” (Gifford 152) “recognition of a creative and destructive universe,” (153) “recognition that inner is also the working of the outer,” (156) that our “inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature” and an awareness of both natures as culture (Gifford 162).

The poem ‘Rock’ seems to prize its fixity and sublimity and its awesome contrast to human ephemerality. She pays homage to the popularly accepted notion of the Dreaming and the traditional Aboriginal cultures, and their cherished connection with the ecological features of the land. Wright creates a link between the ancient past and our current creative processes. 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” (JW CP 414) are brought together in the moment of contemplation.

In ‘Rock Face,’ the rock is part of an historical and ecological movement, and has survived the “age-long heave of a cliff-face” to become a contemporary monument, known to the poet as well as to the traditional landowners:

   Sun-orchard bloomed here, out and gone in a month.
   For drought stricken years. I haven’t seen these flowers.

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

   Rightly they knew the ancestral powers of stone. (JW CP 420)

Aboriginal customs, beliefs, and the sense of Aboriginal spirituality hang over the rock. ‘Rockface’ has a number of different landmarks where many ancestral beings have interacted either with the landscape or with each other on their journey across central Australia; some are even believed to still reside here. Aboriginal spirituality lies in the belief in a cultural landscape. Wright mentions in the past “the rock had a name” and the natives knew “the ancestral powers of stone” (JW CP 420). Everything on the vast desert landscape has a meaning and purpose. Life is a web of inter relationships where man and nature are partners and where the past is always connected to the present. Through their rock painting, Aboriginal artists are paying respect to their ancestral creators and at the same time strengthening their belief systems.

   ‘Rockpool’ reflects the fundamental law of ecology—the inter-connectedness. Deep rock pools provide shelter from waves, allowing frail organisms to live on an
otherwise exposed rocky shore. Rock pools provide a life-line for sea creatures and an exclusive opportunity to watch them without having to get your feet wet. Wright compares the survival of the sea animals to the lives of human beings. They are found at all levels of the rocky shore in the areas between the high and low tide marks.

Coping with all this, and with roaring waves, in addition to avoiding predators is no easy task. Yet rockpools can be very bio-diverse, teeming with molluscs, shrimps and crabs, fish and anemones. Michael Ackland opines in *The book Show*:

> [Judith Wright] sees human beings as essentially one with nature and not set there to dominate and know it in an empirical or scientific way but part of that large and natural world and much better off when they see themselves in those terms. And I think she remained very true to that, and I think she became increasingly annoyed and frustrated when people took different views on nature and tried to treat the natural world and the Australian landscape in quite antithetical way. (Gallacher)

Wright looks down on the microcosm and watches the change, growth, decay and death, and the waves which wash over it all: “I watch the claws in the rock pool, the scuttle, the crouch green humps, the biggest barnacled, eaten by sea worms” (*JW CP* 419). ‘Barnacles’ are relatives of snails, instead of one shell, theirs is made of five parts which they attach to the rocks with very strong glue. Inside the shell, the animal stays head-down and closes a ‘door’ at the top during the day. At night, this door opens and a number of ‘feet’ emerge. These feet are covered with hairs that trap passing plankton and small fish.

> I hang on the rockpool's edge, its wild embroideries:
admire it, pore on it, this, the devouring and mating,
ridges of coloured tracery, occupants, all the living,
the stretching of toothed claws to food, the breeding
on the ocean's edge...*(JW CP 419)*

The poet’s culture has trained her to think that human beings are superior to other aspects of nature. However, Wright uses some descriptions which live up the formula. Fascinating creatures inhabit her rockpool and their activities readily reflect the “dying” generation. She rejects human exceptionalism and she identifies herself with the sea animals which she views in the rock pool.—“the scuttle, the crouch” (419) and being “eaten by seaworms” (419). She realises that’s human fate, too. The poet compares the teaming sea animals to human beings and she feels human are also a species who are in no way superior to the teaming sea animals as they also live together, compete, struggle and ultimately meet with their end. Like a true ecocritic, she is able to see human beings as a part of the ecosystem. She does not consider human as distinct from the rest of nature both in spirit and body.

Wright’s prescription for humankind is an openness to listen to what nature is saying. She focuses on specific themes such as aesthetic affluence and well being. She translates nature into work of art. She understands that man is a part of nature and makes the reader understand the intrinsic value of nature so that he might understand and protect nature. The awareness of the values inherent in nature will make man abandon his attitude of superiority. She sanctifies her own reason and passion which is apparently an ecologically conscious and aesthetically holistic act. She wonders at nature and is aware of its creative and destructive energy. Glen Love views,