CHAPTER IV

ALWAYS WITH FEELING

IN PRAISE OF THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

Man has a kinship with each stone, each tree
which only civilization drove him from:
If he returns, he’ll find no loneliness.

Livesay, “Hermit” (LCP 19)

I am born of the conquerors
you of the persecuted
Raped by rum and an alien law,
progress and economics.

Wright, “Two Dream Times” (WCP 317)

Livesay’s poetry has gone through several phases over a long span of many decades, but there is one trait that has always stood apart quite strikingly: her eagerness to alert us to the folly of ravaging the environment which nurtures and sustains us:

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Men have called the country
by their names
The names grew
taller than trees
than clouds they are
more memorable
[The passionate naming
is how we fool
nature -
fool ourselves?]. (LCP 52)

Even as she speaks vehemently of the need to protect the environment and the rights of the Aborigines, she cautions us against falling into the trap laid by an aggressive and destructive technology. Apart from poverty and rampant exploitation, another menace that haunts the twentieth century psyche is the prospect of extinction. Unless we mend our ways, mankind is sure to tread towards total annihilation. Man, at the height of his stupidity allows technology to enslave him and severs all connections from the life-giving nature. So the Commoners confess
She: I see our self-destruction looming:
machines do all my washing now
clothes demand no touch of sun
no fingers folding

He: I need never walk
to the store again
for cigarettes
or speak face to face
with the smiling cashier
or on Saturdays
answer the door
for the paper boy--
video games are here. (RE 17)

Humanity itself has been rendered mechanical by modern technology. Human emotions are increasingly getting sidelined and even the heroic deeds of the great men of yesteryear appear as myths only. Hence the Sybil’s comment:
So all the great have gone
the shining ones:
men women
leaders and pioneers
have left their messages
like bird marks in the snow
and flown. (RE 23)

Science, however advanced, sans spiritual values is a veritable Satan. So the scientist confesses

Yes, I am Milton's Satan - Saint
his horror and his fascination

I am become death

the shatterer of worlds. (RE 25)

He is the other side of the poet, the "dark side of your moon" and has woven there "so delicate a machination" that could erupt a mountain". The poet, however, does not lose hope - the scientist can still turn this knowledge round

the otherway
thrust the universe.

into reverse
sweep scenarios back
on to new day. (RE 25)

He expresses the hope that the power of art will triumph over
the destructive forces that seem to have gained ascendancy in
the world:

We may go down bombed
set on fire then dying
but the word the poem
has been hurled
to the tombed target
our epitaph defying. (RE 27)

In her earlier poems Livesay had presented the sun as a symbol
of a patriarchal society, but in later poems it is hailed as a
natural force which sustains life. Life, she believes, is like nature
with its continuous process of rebirth. “The Whole Sun” best
exemplifies her new stance. The entire poem is in fact her appeal
to enjoy all the experiences of life, whether pleasant or
unpleasant. In order to be “whole” one must accept all the
experiences that life has to offer because
to be complete
we must hold the whole sun
wholly
in the marrow of the bone. (SCT 110)

To attain "wholeness" one must imbibe the spirit of brotherhood and learn to empathise with others—both living and non-living at the same time without losing one's humanity and remaining self-sufficient in oneself. "Zambia: The Land" is a poem in praise of the self-sufficiency of the trees which "with ripe moon-silvered fruit, / parade in columns / towards blue stars (SCT 4). The poet does not feel any qualms about envying the tree "Happy the self-completing tree / that brews, in secret / its own seasons" (SCT 5).

"Survival Kit - Bluff Park" sings the glory of nature, with her daffodils that shoot up joyously in spring and the "mauve scotch thistles" that "maintain dominion/ amongst bent over grasses". The whole poem is a tribute paid to the glory of nature where everything survives

Even after our blackened bones are buried
and the planet's face
is turned to stone
these memories of you and me
will thrive survive
for, nameless, out of the crevices
these seeds will spring again
opening their rainbow colours
to the sun
to celebrate
all we have done
and undone. (SCT 11-12)

"InterRim" is a poem suggesting the essential unity underlying all things and it reveals the poet's complete identification with nature. There is an obvious pun on the word 'Inter Rim'. It could mean either 'balancing between two rims without falling in' or "interim" which means 'in the meantime' suggesting that this life on earth is only an interlude till the soul is released from the body to join the Almighty. The capacity to come to terms with all aspects of experience leads inevitably to self sufficiency

Today
I am tomorrow
and yesterday -
that song sparrow’s lilt
on the old fence post -

Today

I am song itself. (SCT 17)

Her mystical experience makes her realize her “oneness” with everything. She sees in life the beauty and the melody which is the very essence of life. This poem therefore seeks to expose the folly of waging wars against nature or against our fellow beings.

“Waking in the Dark” is another poem that betrays Livesay’s chagrin at the dangers of an unthinking technology for she is aware of the disastrous effect it will have on the environment and the human psyche. If something is not done at the earliest, a hundred years will be enough to “finish this genocide”:

When I see my grandchild running
in a game of football
his helmet is empty
in his right arm
he carries his head. (SCT 55)
Canada, along with the CIS (the erstwhile Russian Federation) comprise about one-fifth of the dry land territory of the globe and control an even greater share of the world resources of fresh water. So these two countries have a great responsibility for what happens to the global ecosphere as they control about two thirds of the Arctic which as the main ‘weather-kitchen’ of the Northern Hemisphere has become the largest ecologically fragile and menaced region of the world. Natural defences are very weak in the Arctic and the region is quite vulnerable to industry. A major environmental problem relates, therefore, to the ecology related problems of the Native population which traditionally lives off the land and which is vulnerable to any deterioration in its habitat. A lot of thinking has gone into probing the safest way of handling the environment and the concept of “sustainable development” has gained wider acceptance. In simple terms, the concept can be described as realizing an approach to natural resources and the environment as a whole; an approach that permits people to use, yet still conserve, the resources for future generations. It demands the restoration of moral, rather than physical values and therefore implies a change in ways of thinking. It enjoins the people to sign a contract with the environment and to fulfil their commitments wisely under the terms of that contract. Essentially,
it is the Native population and their way of life which attests to this way of thinking and which still conserves the traditions of not just consuming, but rather preserving and conserving the environment.

Both Livesay and Wright have written poems upholding the value of Native peoples who have been giving a fresh impetus to the concept of "sustainable development". Arkady I. Cherkasov, an expert in the field asserts the imperative of assigning decision making powers to the Native population. When handled properly, any environment can satisfy the needs of humankind without destroying long established eco-systems. Though the Native population inherently possesses the sustainable development mentality, too often it is ignorant of modern technology and of ways to manage economic and social processes. Hence the need to provide an education that aims "to equip the Native population to manage wisely the vast expanses of the northern land" (Cherkasov 16).

Livesay's struggle throughout her poetic carrier has been to make the world a better place. Naturally, she is much peeved at the ravaging of the environment. One easily notices that even in later years she is not free from the social concern she had shown in her youth, particularly during the thirties. In
fact, she emerges as a poet with a wider social concern - concern for the very future of mankind. She knows that the natural world may not be a veritable paradise, but it is the only world available to us. So she cautions us in "Bellhouse Bay" against neglecting nature. It is not enough that we protect our world and our children but nature as well, for nature is

a rung on the ladder

upwards

towards a possible

breathtaking landscape. (FTW 74)

In "The Dark House" one finds a pessimist brooding over the dark future awaiting the universe. Employing the imagery of violence, she presents a world "gone wrong" through the actions of men who it seems "had rallied conspired / to destroy our lives / the space / where we breathed" (SCT 240).

Man does not find it wrong to destroy the very nature that nurtures him. This depresses the poet and makes her feel

It is as if we were born to deny life

cut throats

gasp for a spasm of air

then end it
there

It is as if

we were not meant

to be here. (SCT 240)

In poem after poem Livesay tries to expose the folly of perceiving nature as "other" instead of identifying with it. She seems to convey through her poems that only through identification with both 'self' and 'other' that we can finally ensure a resolution of the conflict between nature and culture. Her insistence on the conservation of forests seems to have a strong psychological basis too. For her, the tree is often the symbol of mankind in general and of the Garden of Eden. It is also the Tree of Life. The tree's need for other trees is in keeping with her belief in man and woman as complementary rather than opposed to each other. The forest is at once the Garden of Eden, the patriarchal garden of the Bible and the garden of nature to which Livesay flees whenever her identity is threatened.

According to Diana M.A. Relke, Livesay has earmarked a special role for the woman-poet in her early poems. This role is not just to articulate the female experience, but to mediate "the conflict between culture and nature" (17). Like Susanna
Moodie and many others, Livesay also presents the figure of the pioneer as emblematizing the relationship between culture and nature. Livesay's clearest and most profound statement regarding the nature-culture conflict is undoubtedly "Pioneer". In no unequivocal terms, she calls the pioneer who sings nature's praises after ravaging her, a hypocrite:

He sits with folded hands
And cries to see
How he has ravaged earth
of her last stone,
Her last, most stubborn tree. (LCP 53)

Evidently, this poem is a pointer to her conviction that culture's blind determination to eradicate nature is suicidal.

"Hermit", a long dramatic monologue echoes the sentiments expressed in "Pioneer", especially the poet's credo that nature's processes should not be feared but welcomed, as signs of sustained vitality: "Man has a kinship with each stone, each tree / which only civilization drove him from; / If he returns, he'll find no loneliness" (LCP 19).

Sherry B. Ortner's article, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" is helpful in accepting poetic mediation as a
uniquely female role. According to her, “culture”, though still unambiguously equated with men should recognize woman as actively participating in its special processes like being a poet. Though woman has direct affinity with “nature” in her mothering and home making role, she is also associated with culture as the one who performs the basic, quintessential task of culture, namely, changing babies into socially acceptable people. She further maintains that though woman’s body and mothering role align her closely with nature, her obvious participation in culture places her in an intermediate position “performing some sort of synthesizing or converting function between nature and culture” (84).

Livesay’s task of poetic mediation is in keeping with her belief in literature as a vehicle for social change also. As she knows that the opposition between culture and nature is destructive to both realms, she brazenly attacks the hierarchical and oppositional relationships between culture and Nature, male and female within the arena of poetic language. Like Emily Dickinson before her, Livesay wants nature to remain an autonomous entity. Significantly enough, Livesay has borrowed the title of her poem, “Haunted House” from a poem by Dickinson “What Mystery Pervades a Well”- which best expresses the poet’s chagrin at human efforts to possess nature.
Livesay’s poem deftly affirms nature’s autonomy and points to the damage inherent in the persistent alienation of nature from culture.

If people go away
Or even fear to pass
wild raspberries and grass
Are here to stay. (LCP 36)

One cannot easily miss the echo of Tennyson’s poem “The Brook” also here.

Livesay’s attempt through her poems is to transform this state of mutual alienation into mutual co-operation. In order to achieve this goal, she explodes the illusion that culture can possess nature. We may invade nature and even occupy it, but to know it on its own terms is not that easy. It is possible only through a process of self-reflection. For Livesay, being conscious of nature on its own terms tantamounts to becoming conscious of the self which is possible only through an identification with nature.

“Green Rain”, apparently a simple love poem where she reminisces about her lover’s house and her disappointed hopes, expresses a complementary rather than a contradictory
relationship between culture and nature where woman is the uniting force. It is only through identification with both self and "other" that a final resolution of the conflict between woman and man, nature and culture can be achieved.

The conflict between culture and nature, a significant theme in Canadian Literature has been presented in gender terms by DG Jones in his *Butterfly on Rock*. According to him, western man

seeks to consolidate his power over nature rather than to extend his communion with her. He has persisted in opposing to nature the world of ideas, the world of his ideal, and in his idealism he has tended to become exclusive rather than inclusive, arrogant rather than humble, aggressively masculine rather than passively feminine. In extremes, he has declared war on the wilderness, woman or the world of spontaneous impulse and irrational desire. (57)

In universal terms, this is the conflict between male and female in patriarchal culture and this is the conflict Livesay tries to mediate in her poetry.
In his conclusion to the massive three-volume *Literary History of Canada* Northrop Frye says that he has long been impressed in Canadian poetry by "a tone of deep terror in regard to nature" (25). According to him, the human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even sanity. But the richness and variety of Canadian poetry by women writers testifies that Frye's terrifying view of nature as "other" and irreconciliably opposed to human consciousness is unfounded. It may be that Frye, in keeping with the male ethos of early modernism, is downplaying the relevance of women poets in Canada. But it cannot be denied that what is Canadian about Canadian poetry is its femininity as is evident from the large number of women poets who have been making significant contributions to a new Canadian culture. One may recall here the words of Margaret Atwood in her Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*: "... although Canada was and is no Utopia for women, it has historically and for mysterious reasons favoured the production of good women poets to a greater extent than have England, the United States or Australia" (xxix).

Though Livesay’s poetry has gone through several phases spanning many decades, her concern for the environment and the native population has remained steadfast, and this major
pre-occupation she shares with Judith Wright. Wright's life is
dedicated not only to literature but also to the compassionate
championing of just causes. It is, in fact, in this respect that
she resembles Livesay most. Apart from the fear and horror
of war, and the increasing awareness of other forms of violence,
the destruction of the land and acts of aggression against animals
and human beings also figure as two major concerns of both
these poets. As writers, both have been trying vehemently to
reassert the values of compassion, reverence for all living things
and conservation of natural resources. Judith Wright's
involvement with the issues of conservation and wildlife
protection and her staunch views on aboriginal justice and civil
liberties have attracted international attention.

Wright seems to have inherited her love of the land and
her deep concern for conservation issues from her father, Mr.
Wright. She used to accompany him as a young child when
he undertook camping trips to the New England National Park.
In an interview she gave to James Murdoch in 1985 she admits
that this area was preserved mainly through her father's efforts.
In recent times people are increasingly aware of the ecological
danger and this growing awareness has led to the founding
of the Wildlife Preservation Society.
A founding member of the Aboriginal Treaty Committee, Wright has been heavily involved in the campaign for justice for the Aborigines. *The Cry for the Dead* published in 1979 was a sequel to *The Generations of Men*. In 1991, came out a more searching book dealing with the aboriginal issue significantly titled, *Born of the Conquerors*. She is actively involved in the long-running Murray Island Land Rights case, the great Barrier Reef issue, coastal sand mining and the preservation of rain forests. These embroilments led her to be a member on the Committee of Enquiry into the National Estate established by the Whitlan government. This in turn led to the setting up of the Heritage Legislation and the Heritage Commission.

It has been widely admitted that almost every Australian writer, from Harpur to the present ones, is largely the product of Australian ecological and sociological conditions. Judith Wright is no exception. But her attitude towards her land and its people is neither jingoistic nor disintegrating. She maintains a fine equilibrium in this regard with her conviction that "the best of our poetry is concerned with poetry" (BIWI 181). But this does not deter her from projecting her social vision even as she makes us hear her lyrical voices. The Australian landscape with its varied flora and fauna and the Aborigines is almost ubiquitous in her poetry. True to the typical aboriginal faith,
she too believes that her country's landscape is no lifeless entity, but has its own life.

In her first two volumes, *The Moving Image* and *Woman to Man*, the geographical environment of her early days forms the physical backdrop or even the direct themes of the poems. In "Bullocky" for example, as J. McAuley rightly points out, it is "the pioneer past of the Hunter River district" which has been evoked (28). "The evening camp beneath / the half-light pillars of the trees", the grass "across the waggon-tracks" and the cattle bells ringing "with their sweet uneasy sound" take us immediately to the days of the adventurous pioneers (WCP 17). In "Northern River" she appears in the true guise of an avid conservationist:

Where your valley grows wide in the plains
they have felled the trees, wild river
Your course they have checked, and altered
your sweet Alcaic metre
Not the grey kangaroo, deer-eyed timorous,
will come to your pools at dawn;
but their tamed and humbled herds
will muddy the watering places. (*WCP* 6)
With a war-scared mind, she recapitulates the new England scenario in “South of My Days”. The despair and gloom of the war atmosphere does not allow her to give a romantic, cheerful account of the region which she claims to be a “part of my blood’s country”. However, the way she describes that tableland, outlined with “bony slopes” merits special mention:

South of my day’s circle, part of my blood’s country, 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. (WCP 20)

According to Judith Wright one’s country “must first be observed, understood, described and as it were absorbed” before one can settle down to write confidently about “its human figures” (Australia’s Double Aspect” 1). Her treatment of the landscape and topography, and flora and fauna is in full agreement with her precept that every successful writer should be “at peace with his landscape” (1).

Dorena Wright is right when she observes that Judith Wright’s success as a poet is mainly on account of an “unapolegetic concentration on those regions that she knows intimately and
can, therefore, evoke vividly and precisely, the table lands of northern New South Wales and the rainforests of coastal Queensland" (143). In her excessive concentration on the land, she even attains a sort of mystical identification with it, as is clear from the following lines from "For New England":

Many roads meet here
in me, the traveller and the ways I travel
All the hills' gathered waters feed my seas
who am the swimmer and the mountain river;
and the long slope's concurrence is my flesh
who am the gazer and the land I stare on
and dogwood blooms within my winter blood,
and orchards fruit in me and need no season. (WCP 23)

But it is doubtful whether Wright, a child of European expatriates, can succeed wholly in achieving an intellectual identification with her country. No wonder, she frankly confesses, "Australia is not yet wholly our country of the mind" ("Australia's Double Aspect" 2). One finds a similar confession in her reference to Ulysses who died "twice a stranger" in his own land, and in the lines "But sullenly the jealous bones recall / what other earth is shaped and hoarded in them" (WCP 23).
Birds, an anthology intended primarily for the entertainment of her young daughter, Meredith, shows Judith Wright to be an experienced ornithologist with rich knowledge of the migratory and communal habits of the diverse birds that enliven the Australian skies. This volume comprises thirty lyrics, each on an individual bird. The whole volume is the poet's tribute to the myriad birds that live in a world marked by love, contentment, perfection and discipline. "Torn and beleaguered by my own people", Wright even finds the birds a better class: "Whatever the bird is, is perfect in the bird" (WCP 86).

Like Shelley who wanted to transform himself into a skylark for other reasons, Wright also expresses her wish to be transformed into a bird

If I could leave their battleground for the forest of the bird
I could melt the past, the present and the future in one
and find the words that lie behind all these languages
Then I could fuse my passions into one clear stone
and be simple to myself as the bird is to the bird.

(WCP 86)
 Mostly, the poet is simple and non-philosophical in her treatment of the birds. In “Rain-bow-bird” she feelingly speaks of the fatal error committed by the bird – “that bird that turned too late to find the spring”. This error led to its death by freezing cold. At the sight of the rainbow bird lying fallen at her feet, pity welled up in her heart:

   And I stood looking. All of me was chilled
   My face was silent as a mask of wood,
   and I had thought my very core was killed
   But he in his soft colours lay more cold
   even than my heart. He met me like a word
   I needed - pity? love? the rainbow bird. (WCP 174)

She gives a very amusing account of the apostle-birds in her poem of the same title. She narrates how she and her friends who “were strangers in that place” were made “to feel embarrassed” in the presence of “those big grey birds”. She cannot put up with people who are self-possessed and clannish. So these human attributes she finds in these birds are equally revolting: “So self possessed and clannish, / we were glad when they flew away” (WCP 168).

   The koel, “a migrant without a home” “whom so many hate” does not invite the poet’s wrath because this bird, whose

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"two strange syllables" are endlessly repeated, marks the advent of spring and fills her country's air with new life and floods of joy: "And when he calls, the spring has come again / and the old joy floods up in memory" (WCP 179).

But she does not hesitate to refer to the wrong he does. It is well known that the koel lays its eggs in the crow's nest so that the crow is duped into brooding over them: "Yet his sad foster kin cannot forget / the wrong he does them -- Cain from his infancy" (WCP 179).

Thoughtless denudation of the country's landscape results in the extinction or at least endangering of many a rare bird. Most of Judith Wright's poems betraying her deep concern for these birds, naturally combine an elegiac tone with a bitter censure of human vandalism. In "Extinct Birds" she gratefully remembers Charles Harpur, who in his journals long ago "recorded the birds of his time's forest - / birds long vanished with the fallen forest - / described in copperplates on unread pages" (WCP 179). But she is sad that many of these "brightly tinted" birds like "the scarlet satin-bird, swung like a lamp in berries" is no longer sighted.

Myopic and callous human beings feel no qualms about destroying the habitats of those birds which lend beauty and
colour to the Australian firmament. A few poems in Alive express her sense of anguish at their disappearance and reveal how fondly she remembers them. “Oriole, Oriole” is one such poem.

Does poison creep through earth or air?
Did the last nest fall with a felled tree?
has every oriole gone away
and left my acre lonely?
Not a stirring heard or seen
of green wing, green melody.
Oriole, oriole,
I whistle you up, my green-in-green,
but day after silent day
you leave my acre lonely. (WCP 318)

“Lament for Passenger Pigeons” as the title suggests has been written in an overtly elegiac vein:

We have not heard the bird. How reinvent that passenger, its million wings and hues when we have lost the bird, the thing itself, the sheen of life on flashing long migrations? (WCP 319)

“Reminiscence” is another remarkable poem in Alive where she speaks fondly of the birds now lost:
Not a flock of parrots left to number
Just a picture, fifty years behind,
left embroidered on my childish mind
parrots! They were something to remember. (*WCP 330*)

Wright’s next volume *The Fourth Quarter* also contains an avian lyric, “Platypus”, “a poem for your sake” where she nostalgically remembers her girlhood days when this typically Australian duckbill used to frequent the pools and water-holes in summer. But they are no longer seen there with the waters having been recklessly polluted

No warm summer day
would bring a girl to watch
that current pass
for your wild shyhead
The pool runs thick
with car-bodies, cans, oil
The river’s dead. (*WCP 369*)

In short, apart from evoking the birds of her country, Judith Wright through her poems cautions her countrymen against bringing harm to them.
Judith Wright's love is not confined to the birds of her country alone. She is equally concerned about those animals that face the serious threat of human attack or extinction. Dingoes, horses, bulls and lions have claimed her attention. Besides the individual poems on them, there are references made to them in many of her poems. The small blue Arab stallion that dances on the hill is to her "a centaur-god": "netting the sun in his sea spray mane, forgetting / his stalwart mares for a phantom galloping unshod; / changing for a heat mirage his tall and velvet hill" (WCP 8).

"The Bull" is Wright's tribute to this "Curled God, a red Jupiter" who lay among his women "heavy with power". She is therefore greatly annoyed when this "angry god" is betrayed and made to run "down the hill sides":

What enemy steals his strength - what rival steals his mastered cows? His thunders powerless, the red storm of his body shrunk with fear, runs the great bull, the dogs upon his heels. (WCP 38)

The dingo which guards the squatter's sheep is a valuable asset in the outback. Hence it is most pitifully mourned when it dies a painful death "twisted in steel and spoiled with red" and the poem "Trapped Dingo" assumes the stature of a fine elegy:
Insane Andromache, pacing your towers alone,
death ends the verse you chanted; here you lie
The lover, the maker of elegies is slain,
and veiled with blood her body's stealthy sun. (WCP 9)

In her love and concern for these beasts, Wright has even gone
to the extent of attributing a sort of divinity to them. The blue
Arab is "a centaur-god" while the bull is "Jupiter" and the
dingo, both "Achilles" and "Hector".

The Australians seem to share the same concern an Arab
has for his horse. Wright's "To a Mare" is an elegy on the
death of a horse "eager and gentle" which died during a drought.
"The drought is over" and "the roads of spring are waiting
now". The poet stands beside the mare's carcass and reflects
on her pathetic plight. She has nothing else to tell her rider
"who will miss you most" except that "All born must die; /
all loved be lost?" (WCP 232).

In "Unknown Water", an old man mournfully remembers
a mare who kept on standing beside its dead foal refusing to
"go near water or look for grass". Pathos reaches its height
when he tells us how "When the rain came she stayed where
the foal died, / though we dragged it away and burned it"
(WCP 109). To Judith Wright, no form of life, however small or trivial it may be, is noxious or sickening. In her reverence for any form of life, she is with Dr. Schweitzer. She has written poems even on the termite queen and the casemoth. Memorable are her lines on the termite queen, a woodworm resembling a white ant:

She is nursery, granary, industry
army and agriculture
Her swollen motionless tissues
rule every tentacle. (WCP 364)

In a similar vein, with a few suggestive strokes, she presents the casemoth in her poem titled “Casemoth”.

Homespun, homewoven pod,
case-moth wears a clever web
sloth-grey, slug-slow,
slung safe in a sad-colored sack,
a twig-camouflaged bedsock,
shifts from leaf to next leaf;
lips life at a bag-mouth. (WCP 365)

“Habitat” is a powerful poem where she warns us of the consequences of turning against the very creatures whose presence is benign for our easy survival. She speaks in particular
of an “eight-foot carpet-snake” that “used to winter in the ceiling” and was killed by “some stick-happy farmer” just for the fun of it. The outcome of this unthoughtful act was that “That winter the rats / came back”. The farmer, who, like Coleridge’s ancient mariner, took the snake “for a trophy” was really thwarting the native utility of such a reptile in meeting the rodent menace (WCP 299).

Both Livesay and Wright are alike in their unflinching concern for the conservation of forests. “The Eucalypt and the National Character”, a poem dedicated to Sir Otto H. Frankel, deserves a special mention here for the rich tribute it pays to the tree which has an unrivalled place in the Australian landscape, and in our perception and consciousness of Australia. Her lines “she is artist enough to manage a graceful asymmetry / but we are more apt to turn crooks” (WCP 362) amply bring out how the world of the eucalypts contrasts with that of men.

In her increasing awareness of the dangers inherent in the destruction of the land and in the acts of aggression against animals, Judith Wright is with Sugathakumari, the noted Malayalam poet who was awarded the first “Vrikshamithra” (Friend of Tree) award instituted by the Government of India for her selfless service in the field of environmental protection.
and conservation of wildlife. Her poems like “Trees”, “In Praise of the Tree”, “In the Forests of California” and the “Elephant” are very similar in treatment and concept to the poems of Judith Wright. In many of her poems, Sugathakumari points to the imperativeness of protecting the flora and fauna so that a proper ecological balance is maintained. Her poems also offer a thanks giving to the trees for the many services they render to us. “Marathinnu Sthuthi” (“Salutations to the Tree”), a poem from her award-winning anthology, Ambalamani (The Temple Bell) is a paean to the trees which she almost deifies:

Salutations, O tree, who with your
Sprawling branches lends a cool shade
to all who come near you.
Salutations, O life giver who like
Lord Neelakanta takes in the poison
to give us the life-breath that sustains all. (135)

No one can easily escape the similarity of approach and treatment of the same idea in Judith Wright’s poem, “The Flame-Tree”. This poem is a song in praise of the tree “the careless blossomer” that helps humanity in various ways.

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This is the flame tree; look how gloriously
that careless blossomer scatters; and more and more
what the earth takes of her; it will restore
These are the thanks of lovers who share one mind.

(WCP 97)

In both Australia and Canada, indigenous peoples were forced
to succumb to the needs of British imperial expansion. In
Australia, the Aborigines played no major role in the white
economy except as guides in exploration. But, by the mid
nineteenth century, they became an inevitable force as labourers
on stations in the interior. Interestingly, the situation in Canada
was reversed. The Indians who were essential as fur traders
to the early economy were of less value thereafter. Only the
Maori, thanks mainly to differences in topography, seemed of
limited use initially and continues to be so in indigenous as
well as white economy.

The majority of writers in both Canada and Australia have
given scant attention to native peoples. Though the image of
the indigene is a consistent concern, it is a limited one, barring
certainly, with the Jindyworobaks. Terry Goldie, in his
monumental work, Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene
in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures speaks of
the complex process of "indigenization", the process by which the whites in Canada, Australia and New Zealand try to become "native" to belong there (13). The only chance for indigenization lay in writing about the humans who are truly indigenous like the Indians, Inuit, Maori and Aborigines. J.J. Healy notes:

The Aborigine was part of the tension of an indigenous consciousness. Not the contemporary Aborigine, not even a plausible historical one, but the sort of creature that might persuade a white Australian to look in the direction of the surviving race. (173)

Many Canadians and Australians have responded to the indigene and to their own need to become indigenous. Mention must be made here of the Jindyworobaks whose clear collective agenda was to free Australian art from all alien influences. Rex Ingamells defined Jindyworobak to mean "to annex, to join" and he exhorted his followers to join in

1. A clear recognition of environmental values
2. The debunking of much nonsense
3. An understanding of Australia's history and traditions, primaeval, colonial and modern. (Elliott 231)
The indigene is often used to present the possibility of nature in a human form. Similarly, the indigene's closeness to nature is used to justify an emphasis on the indigene as the land. In the one nature becomes human, in the other, human becomes nature.

Texts which represent the indigene as an emissary of untouched nature and fear the ecological dangers of white technology turn to the indigene as environmentalist. Rex Ingamells appeals to the "faith of vanished men" in order to make white Australia ecologically responsible: "Australia wants a race whose active bone / will mutter the white light of her limestone rocks" (32).

Much has been said for and against the Jindyworobaks, but there is general agreement that they must be given credit for insisting on the value and relevance of Australian literature in a world still prone to the cultural cringe. As Bruce Clunies Ross has said, "... there could not have been many schools and universities in the forties and early fifties which tried seriously to develop an appreciation of local culture" (56).
It should also be admitted that some of the ideas they struggled to express and embody in their poetry are now generally accepted. For example, they were conservationists who denounced in their verse, as well as in their polemical writings, the ecological damage wrought by white men in taking possession of the country, and they detected specious elements in that cluster of ideas and attitudes which came to be called 'the Australian legend'.

One of the major hallmarks of Judith Wright as a poet is the unstinted concern she shows for the cause of the Aborigines. The Aborigines and their unique culture have had a deep influence on the Australian imagination. As Wright herself has admitted, "The traces of the various changes in our attitudes to the aboriginals are embalmed in our verse" (BIWI 140). Herself a white settler, a descendent of the very Europeans who humiliated, conquered and dispossessed the Aborigines of the real Australia, she is haunted by a heavy guilt conscience. This explains the relevance of the title *Born of the Conquerors* she gave to one of her major prose works on the aboriginal issue. Her concern for the aboriginal almost parallels Rousseau's famous concept of the Noble Savage. As a woman, she finds herself on a vantage ground in defending the cause of the
Aborigines, “The burden of guilt is on the men, and where a woman could step out of line to express compassion and indignation, a man who did so would have been more harshly viewed” (BIWI 144).

Even from her early days, Wright had taken a pro-Aborigines stance. The Jindyworobak movement was at its height of activities when she was developing into a poet during the early forties. By her own admission, her interest in the movement was only academic and essentially non-committal. Beyond a certain degree, it could not influence her. She looked askance at the movement and those who supported it: “Ingamells was a naive and technically clumsy writer, and the Jindy movement itself was uncritical and published far too much bad verse” (BIWI 146). But Ali Athar has justly observed, “The fact that the movement sought to salvage a race and a set of mythology must have had great appeal to her own mind as a conservationist” (183).

Judith Wright’s earliest outpourings on the Aborigines -- “Bora Ring”, “Nigger’s Leap, New England” and “Half-Caste Girl “have received wide acclaim for the well deserved success they have attained in evoking “Australia’s pre-history and the tragic fate of its inhabitants” (Hope 10). “Bora Ring” is probably one of the most Australian poems in its theme, background
and tone. She makes here a nostalgic commemoration of the
dance and corroboree of the Aborigines which has become a
thing of the past now. In poem after poem, Wright reiterates
her stance, stemming from her guilty conscience, that the
Aborigines are a wronged tribe. Thus the poem becomes a
veritable elegy on the death of an indigenous culture.

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
Only the rider’s heart
halts at a sightless shadow, an unsaid word
that fastens in the blood the ancient curse
the fear as cold as Cain. (WCP 8)

Commenting on the content of this poem, James McAuley has
remarked, “The memory of aboriginal tribes driven out and
exterminated haunts the poem” (161). F.R. Brissenden prefers
to call it Judith Wright’s “epitaph” on the Jindyworobaks (90).

“Nigger’s Leap, New England” is at first glance a simple
poem evoking the depressing war milieu with its reference to
the “lonely air” and the “bone and skull.... falling in flesh from
the lipped cliff”, “waiting for the flies”. But at the same time,
this poem poses a most disturbing question to the conscience of those who give scant respect to the life of the blacks and reminds us of the bond that exists among the different races: “Did we not know their blood channelled our rivers, / and the black dust our crops ate was their dust? / O all men are one man at last” (WCP 16). Cautioning us against the folly of considering the black’s life as cheap, she tells us “Never from earth again the coolamon / or thin black children dancing like the shadows / of saplings in the wind” (WCP 16). Written in a humorous vein, with touches of irony and pathos, the poem “Half-Caste Girl” presents the story of “the lithe dark hearted lubra”, Little Josie, though dead and buried under the bright moon, who wished “to push death aside”: “So she is restless still under her rootwarm cover, / hearing the noise of living, / forgetting the pain of dying” (WCP 19). This half caste girl who with her voluptuousness and impetuousity dares to “beat with a waddy on the bright moon like a gong” symbolises the herosim and glory characteristic of the race to which she belongs.

Wright’s concern for the Aborigines has never slackened as is clear from her subsequent volumes. In “Old House” she nostalgically reminisces about the good old days when “that red-haired man my great-great-grandfather” heard “with one part of his mind” the songs made up about him by the
Aboriginales who lived in the camp by the river. There were thousands of them in those days, but few are left in these days. Only the “sad river” flows on.

And in those days
there was one of him and a thousand of them,
and in these days none are left -
neither a paleman with kangaroo-grass hair
nor a camp of dark singers mocking by the river
And the trees and the creatures, all of them are gone.
But the sad river, the silted river,
under its dark banks the river flows on
the wind still blows and the river still flows
And the great broken tree, the dying pepperina,
clutches in its hands the fragments of a song. (WCP 82)

In the poem, “At Cooloolah”, Judith Wright expresses her sense of anguish at the callous way a whole black race has been exterminated in so short a span of nine decades. Unabashedly she admits that she is “a stranger, come of a conquering people” and that the other members of the white race are “oppressed by arrogant guilt”. Even the name Cooloolah was given to that region by the black race to whom “earth is spirit”. Any conscientious white can therefore only live tormented by a guilt-complex:
Those dark skinned people who once named cooloolah knew that no land is lost or won by wars, for earth is spirit: the invaders' feet will tangle in nets there and his blood be thinned by fears.

(WCP 140)

Jimmy Delaney, blind and partly aboriginal is the protagonist of the poem, “The Blind Man”. An offspring of the dust like his forefathers, he sits alone “by the war memorial” singing for the dust. “The pollen coloured dust” is a potent symbol of fertility and rejuvenation. She makes her point clearer in “Jet Flight Over Derby” where the sight of the “curved symmetry of dunes” below stirs in her some primaeval associations and memories: “Curved symmetry of dunes / echo my ribs and hands / I am those worn red hands” (WCP 279). Towards the end of the poem, she emphatically asserts: “I am what land has made / and land’s myself” (WCP 280).

Judith Wright’s longest pronouncement and maturest thinking on the issue of the Aborigines undoubtedly is “Two Dream Times”, a poem dedicated to Kath Walker whom she fondly calls her sister “If we are sisters, it’s in this -/ our grief for a lost country” (WCP 316).
When she was a child, Wright was not allowed to play with Kath Walker, who was “one of the dark children”. It was only much later that she realised that Kath Walker and her people had to part with their land for the clever whites:

the sullen looks of the men who sold them
for rum to forget the selling,
the hard rational white faces,
with eyes that forget the past. (*WCP 316*)

She is aware of the difference between the white’s and the black’s psyches:

I am born of the conquerors,
you of the persecuted
Raped by rum, and an alien law,
progress and economics. (*WCP 317*)

Though Kath Walker writes poems with a view to bringing about a “change of heart among the white people”, Wright is doubtful whether her effort is likely to bear fruit. The whites and the blacks are to suffer mutual separation despite any effort at their integration:
A knife's between them. My righteous kin
still have cruel faces.
Neither you nor I can win them,
though we meet in secret kindness. (WCP 317)

She knows that her griefs and those of Kath Walker are different. But this does not prevent her from trying to comfort her "torn heart" and "sad eyes". So she assures her hoping to console her: "But we are grown to a changed world / Over the drinks at night / we can exchange our separate griefs" (WCP 317).

Kath Walker, "with a knife-blade flash in your black eyes" and the "Spanish koori face" represents the whole race of which she is a member - "the koori dead" and alive. The "knife" repeated thrice in the poem, is the metaphor for mistrust between the two races. This metaphor of the knife reminds one immediately of the image of the knife used by Philip Larkin in "Deceptions". With a clever stroke of his pen, Larkin had described the pain felt by the poor working girl who was raped by a young man: "All the unhurried day your mind lay open like a drawer of knives" (364).

"Trust none -- not even poets", she cautions Kath Walker. This warning rules out any possible amity and harmony between
the two races. Even the title pathetically points to the impossibility of any integration between the Aborigines and the whites into one united community with a common dream. As a poet, Judith Wright can at best dedicate a poem to her sometime "shadow-sister" whom she dares call a "sister" now: "I don't know what to give you / for your gay stories, your sad eyes, / but that, and a poem, sister" (WCP 318).

In her poetry and far more in her prose works, Wright has been speaking of the primitive rituals and mores with great regard and verve. But, unlike the Jindyworobaks, she does not get emotionally involved in them. She, however, does not look down upon them and snub them as an unenlightened lot spending "their time in illicit joy and love unhallowed" badly in need of moral and cultural edification. Their legends and rituals are in fact held in high esteem by her. In "At Cedar Creek", a poem which reveals much of her poetic credo, while looking for "the formula for poetry" she refers to "complex ritual connections" between culture and nature and observes that they are "demonstrated by linguistic studies". She is all deference for the primitive myths: "The myths of primitive people / Can reveal codes / We may interpret" (WCP 279).
“New Guinea Legend”, a long narrative comprising nine independently titled sections has been written in a distinctly Jindyworobak strain, though for a purpose different from the one envisaged by the Jindyworabaks. Though its protagonist is an Aborigine named Aruako, it is not an aboriginal story she is striving to narrate. He has noble parents - “a burning father”, the sun, and an “angry mother”, the forest. But he is essentially “a dreamer and a fool” and hence he easily becomes a butt of ridicule before the village-belies: “Bachelor, lazyman / village laughing stock / since your days began” (WCP 247).

The section entitled “The Moon is Born” is the objective correlative for the advent of wisdom:

Fine as threads where dews condense,
faint as starlight’s faintest silver,
light is born within his sense
Light moves from mist to glow. (WCP 250)

The real motive behind the genesis of the poem is conveyed to us in the final section fittingly titled, “The Poet Boasts”. Every poet, “the lazy singing man”, Wright seems to suggest, is an Aruako, at once mad and in love, inviting only the scorn of society.
Yes, now, my people, my elders, I understand the meaning of my pain, the song on the empty wind that stole my wits and left me your wandering fool, the mock of this village that clings to its cruel hill.

(WCP 251)

But society is also at fault, failing to understand a poet’s vocation and place in society. The poet who has “cuckolded even the sun” stands apart from the rest of society with his capacity to dig from the depths of his heart “that sleeping child of light” which none else can. So she boldly proclaims:

We invent both light and dark: that is man’s fate. And I the chosen one, the moon’s lunatic mate, know well what current in you drove me apart to dig from my depths the image of man’s unfinished heart. (WCP 251)

Thus the poem deals more with the function of the poet than with any aboriginal myth or legend. However, she has succeeded in lending an aura of primaevalism to the poem through her deft use of the Aurako myth.
Herself a myth-maker in her own right, Judith Wright does not seem to have any penchant for any set of readymade myths. She is gifted enough to transmute, according to her own poetic exigencies, a tree, an animal, a bird or even a human being into a myth rather than try to rely on some old one. Quite often, the myths created by her attain greater profundity and strength than the traditional ones. T. Inglis Moore’s comment in this context is not out of place: “Judith Wright shows that the despised tree can call forth, no less than a classical myth, lyrical power and depth of vision, with “this fountain slowed in air” turned into a universal symbol of the “silent rituals” of seasonal earth (9).

“The Dark Ones” in The Fourth Quarter also deals with the theme of the Aborigines. When on the other side of the road, the dark ones stand “something leaks in our blood / like the ooze from a wound” (WCP 354). These “mute shadows” gliding through the town know how ingloriously they are avoided by the whites. So they too “veer, drift away” from the “faces of pale stone”: “Those dark gutters of grief, / their eyes, are gone / With a babble of shamed relief / the bargaining goes on” (WCP 355).
One can only listen with bated breath when Judith Wright narrates the injustices meted out to the blacks and how they had been driven out of their lands by the white settlers in her important work, *The Generations of Men*. She tells us of the queer swarthy native cherry trees that grew in the hills, always near a certain kind of big gum tree. When the big gum tree was felled, it seemed as though some mysterious relationship had been abruptly broken; the native cherry began to droop and wither, and in a few months would be dead, though its roots were whole and it seemed to bear no wound. "It was in that way that the blacks were dying quietly as though they had chosen death" (GM 162).

There was a brief lull in Judith Wright's poetic interest in the Aborigines. But this was not to last for long as she resumed soon to write on them with greater vigour and zeal in her prose works. *The Cry for the Dead* is based on her great grandfather's diary and offers us some rich and original insights into the hitherto unknown facets of the life and culture of the original inhabitants of Australia. It is the story of the settlement of the Burnett and Dawson River district of Central Queensland. But the book mainly carries the story of the callous neglect of proper land management procedures and the story of the
brutal extermination of Aborigines. An earlier book, *The Coral Battleground* speaks of the battle to preserve the Great Barrier Reef from all oil drilling and limestone mining. In *We Call for a Treaty* she urges support for the Aborigines's human and political rights.

Both Livesay and Wright have written a few poems about the hardships endured by the pioneers or the explorer heroes. Wright's "Bullocky" is a poem belonging to this specific group. According to Ali Athar, this poem, "conjugates up the entire milieu of the inhospitable realities that the forefathers of the present Australians had to fight with foreheads puckered and lips compressed" (191). The pioneer who proceeds "thirsty with drought and chilled with rain", weathering "all the striding years" even assumes a sort of prophethood and recalls Moses heading for the promised Land:

O vine, grow close upon that bone
and hold it with your rooted hand
the prophet Moses feeds the grape,
and fruitful is the promised Land. (WCP 17)

The bruised, bleeding protagonist in "The Lost Man" is a Christ like figure who recalls the untold miseries suffered by the pioneering settlers on their way to the pool
To reach the pool you must go through the rain forest through the bewildering midsummer of darkness lit with ancient fern, laced with poison and thorn. (WCP 112)

and tells finally that

To go by the way he went you must find beneath you that last and faceless pool, and fall. And falling find between breath and death the sun by which you live. (WCP 113)

In countless other poems written during the early phase of her poetic career one finds the pioneer symbolism used at least sparingly. As she herself has admitted, "it was during the middle and late 1940s that the explorer - hero theme was rediscovered" and it may justly be surmised that the inspiration that originated from that "rediscovery" could not be long sustained (BIWI 130). And this probably explains the absence of the pioneer theme in her subsequent volumes.

Judith Wright has written a few poems about the larrkëins and the social dropouts as well. It is in fact these poems that lend a typically Australian psycho-sociological tinge to her
poetry. In “Country Town”, a curiously titled poem from her maiden volume, she speaks of the many problems resulting from urbanization. In the course of listing these, she refers to the legendary bush-ranger, Thunderbolt killed long ago.

"Thunderbolt was killed by constable Walker / long ago; the bones are buried, the story printed" (WCP 14). The final three-line stanza assumes an incantatory rhythm and the reference to the legendary hero “buried under the air raid trenches” takes us immediately to the gorier and more harrowing scenario of the Second World War: “Remember Thunderbolt, buried under the air raid trenches / Remember the bearded men singing of exile / Remember the shepherds under their strange stars” (WCP 14).

In a couple of poems, she speaks of the metho addicts whose miserable plight she attributes to the ruthless treatment meted out to them by city culture. In “Metho Drinker”, she pictures a metho-addict who has made “the terrible night” his “home and bread”. It was “the cruelty of human eyes that dare not touch nor pity” which made him an addict. The way she describes the plight of this broke is fit to exact anybody’s sympathy:

His white and burning girl, his woman of fire, creeps to his heart and sets a candle there
to melt away the flesh that hides the bone,
to eat the nerve that tethers him in Time. (WCP 52)

In “City Sunrise” also, a poem written much later and addressed to Joyce Wilding, she refers to the plight of the metho drinkers:

Out of the fountain of dawn
the arm of the sun in impartial glory
touches the grime-covered windows
the metho bottles, the tears on crusted eyelids.
(WCP 223)

In “The Old Prison”, a poem rich in suggestive images, Judith Wright writes with indignation of the hardships suffered by the inmates of an old convict-built jail at Trial Bay near Kempsey in New South Wales:

Who built and laboured here?
The wind and the sea say
- Their cold nest is broken
and they are blown away
They did not breed nor love
Each in his cell alone
Cried as the wind now cries
through this flute of stone. (WCP 53)
Shirley Walker is right when she finds in this poem "a crushing comment upon a cruel system where men were isolated from life and love" (70).

Thus we find that both Livesay and Wright, from the beginning, have displayed a serious concern for the protection of nature, with its myriad flora and fauna and defended the rights of the original inhabitants of their respective countries. The local strains in their poetry are ample proof of their abiding interest in and concern for nature. But it must be admitted that, though they show a serious concern for nature and though it serves as a major reservoir of images, man remains the pivotal point of their thinking and poetry.
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