

## Aboriginal Nature in Judith Wright's Selected Poems

By

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### Abstract

The early realization of Judith Wright (1915-2000), the Australian poet and environmentalist that she did not really belong to the English Tableland is the first seed of all her ecopoems that tackle the Aboriginal rights and history. Once she knew that she was not the original owner of her land, she began to search for her true national identity. The notion of national identity for Wright is closely related to the individual's relationship with his landscape. The purpose of this study is to explore Wright's ecopoetical representation of the Australian Indigenous people and their integral connection with Australia's national unity. As the study examines Wright's selected poems, it argues that no real sense of national and cultural harmony can be achieved if Australia's ecology and Indigenous people are retained degraded by the White settlers. The study is also centered on examining Wright's ecopoetry to implement a new sense of place and national belonging through an ecological lens by which Australia's cultural identity can be reidentified.

**Keywords:** Wright, ecology, ecopoetry, Indigenous, Aboriginal people, landscape, national belonging.

### Introduction

#### *Aboriginal Nature in Judith Wright's Selected Poems*

Examining and studying the Aboriginals' songs, stories, dances, traditions, and rituals were Wright's major source to strive for the reunion she sought to establish with the Australian landscape. As an invader or as she liked to call it a conqueror (*Born x*), she decided first to apologize to the Aborigines she and her ancestors wronged. In her book *Half a Lifetime*, Wright expresses her genuine apology, saying:

To all of the peoples of true and old Australia on whose land I have trespassed and whom, by being part of my own people, I have wronged, I plead for forgiveness. To all of them, I owe that overweighing debt of life itself, and to all of them, I now bend my head and say Sorry. Sorry, above all, I can make nothing right. (296)

By recognizing them as the original owners of the Australian land, the poet employs her poetry as the very means to reconcile Australia with its native people. Wright's selected poems are centered on the importance of restoring the Aboriginal's self-dignity as an essential path to preserve the Australian ecology and with the Aboriginals' suffering under the invasion of the white settlers. The impact of the white settlers' colonization on the Indigenous people and the environmental devastation it caused are equally taken into consideration. The chosen poems do not only celebrate the flora and fauna of Australia but reveal the truth behind the Aboriginal traditions, history, doctrines, and the rich heritage the Aborigines have patterned in

nature. Therefore, an ecocritical approach is applied on Wright 's poems about the Aborigines to highlight the colonized environment, reminding Australia of its national origins. It is an approach that focuses on the representation of the natural world in poetry, emphasizing that human culture is integrated to the physical world, influencing it and influenced by it.

In an interview with John Thompson in 1965, Wright was asked whether she saw herself as a nature poet to whom she replied: "No, I don't. My real interest, I think, is the question of man in nature, man as part of nature" (Thompson 23). She knew that the Australian land was the key to her quest for the national unity of its people. The love that Wright 's poetry carries for Australia strongly echoes the aboriginal people 's love for their land and their place in nature. Similarly, she knew that the relationship between man and his landscape is deeper than just a commodity from which one can profit. For the Aborigines, Australia is a country that is loved, needed, and cared for; and country love needs, and cares for her peoples in return. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self (qtd. in Pairman and Tracy 164-65). In other words, the land is the lens through which they perceive life; it is intertwined with their existence. The Aborigines are connected to it spiritually, culturally, and ontologically. When people come to be denied their land and displaced, their cultural and spiritual being would subsequently suffer too.

The attitude of the European settlers to the land was mainly beneficiary, for they desacralized the land and displaced its native people instead of preserving its historical and spiritual substance. Establishing their national character involved a practical exclusion of the natives, their origins, and indignity their knowledge that they cannot belong to the land they banish its history and culture. It is the very feeling of guilt that prevents them from nurturing a real sense of belonging. In this regard, the Australian historian Stuart Macintyre (1947- ) argues that:

The desire for a binding national past that would connect the people to the land was frustrated by the feeling of rootlessness, of novelty without depth. The longing for belonging to an indigenous culture was denied by the original usurpation. A history of colonization yielded to a realization of invasion. (Qtd. in Clarke xi)

The longing to be connected to the Australian land is strictly connected to the post-colonial guilt of invasion. This sense of guilt and the notion of national identity are the main factors found in Wright 's poetry to raise questions about the future of the Australian landscape. In the introduction to her book *Preoccupation in Australian Poetry* (1965), she uses D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* as a starting point, saying:

Lawrence. . saw that something had gone out of the European consciousness, in this country, and that as yet nothing had taken its place. And he related this emptiness to the country itself. . Lawrence saw . the scar left by the struggle to conquer and waken, for our own purposes, a landscape that had survived on its own terms until the world's late days. Its only human inhabitants had been the aboriginals whom we dispossessed – who were bound to the land we took from them, by the indissoluble link of religion and totemic kinship, so that our intrusion on the land itself became a kind of bloodless murder, even where no actual murder took place. (Xvi-vii)

That is to say that Wright shares Lawrence's belief in the oneness of the Indigenous people with the land. Displacing or violating their existence does not change the original nature of the land. The violence the White settlers used against the land and its Indigenous people is highlighted by Wright to become a method to raise consciousness in her fellow Australians.

She considers the White settlers' ignorance of the Australian ecology, its indigenous reality, and culture is the main reason for the destructive tendency they imposed on the land, including themselves:

Violence towards our fellow human being is inextricably linked to violence towards the land, and much of the destruction caused over the two hundred years of European occupation of this continent has stemmed from ignorance—of the realities of Aboriginal life and ignorance of the land itself. (*Born xv*)

If violence stems out of ignorance, it means it does exist in the mind as a sign of man's control over and his fellow men and nature and to use them as he pleases.

One of Wright's prominent experiences that helped her develop a great sense of history and culture of Australia was her trip to Europe in the spring of 1937. During this trip, she visited Great Britain, Holland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, and France in which her love for her native origins vanished due to the devastating conflicts and cultural crises she witnessed in Europe. There she came to believe that a writer should have a profound relationship with his land because it is the base of his/her literary output. In this respect, Wright states that: "Writers must achieve reconciliation with their land before they can turn confidently to other concerns" (qtd. in Moore xviii). Though she thought highly of her original background as an English poet, her confidence in it was shaken as she describes it in her poem "To A.H., New Year, 1943" from *The Moving Image*:

Over the lands of Danube and Rhine wherein an uneasy year,  
in a loaded spring  
there yet was laughter and dancing and some kindness, darkness covers a million  
crucifixion. (*CP 14*)

The cultural crisis she encountered in Europe such as the tension between Italy and the members of the League of Nations<sup>1</sup>, the Spanish civil war (1936-39) the off-limits of its borders, and Mosley's Blackshirt's<sup>2</sup> march in London's streets caused great despair in her cultural orientation. This exposure to the social- political crisis in Europe had a profound impact on Wright 's perception of the Aborigines and the value of the land (Kennedy 3).

Like the Aboriginal people who were exiled in their own country, Wright experienced the foreignness and estrangement in Europe that was supposed to be her ancestral land. She lived the feeling of being within and apart from the European land simultaneously. Her lack of a sense of belonging to Europe led Wright to return to Australia, the country with which she wanted to reconnect and rediscover its identity. Her sense of alienation echoes the principle of 'Outsideness' of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). Bakhtin explains his principle of outsideness in different fields like history, culture, aesthetics, linguistics, and widely in the literature. He refers to it as:

a phenomenological account of how we perceive and relate to each other as people in a social world. It is an attempt to understand how we experience our own bodies as objects in the

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<sup>1</sup>League of Nations is "an international diplomatic group developed after World War on January 10, 1920, as a way to solve disputes between countries before they erupted into open warfare" (*Britannica*).

<sup>2</sup> Mosley's Blackshirt was a radical movement or March in 1937 made by the British Union of Fascist (BUF), that was established by Sir Oswald Mosley, to restrain any movement stand against its standards, which were known by its Nazi-style (*Britannica*).

world and the asymmetry between our inner experience of ourselves and other peoples' experience of us and vice versa. (Qtd. in Pollrad 10)

It explains Wright 's sense of outsidership, for she is a White settler of a European origin, and at the same time, she is deeply rooted in her Australian landscape. Her description of the native Australians is quite objective since she does not recognize them from a partial perspective. By writing about them empathetically, Wright does write about herself.

As a European Australian, Wright 's poetic and ecological portrayal of Australia and the Australian ecological issues stem from her full-scale awareness of these two identities, an objective and subjective knowledge at the same time. She experienced living the two characters, the outsider and the insider, the European, and the Australian. Being from another culture, Wright developed a full understanding of the Australian character, as Bakhtin puts it:

After all, a person cannot see or make sense of even his own exterior appearance as a whole ... only others can see and understand his authentic exterior, thanks to their spatial outsidership and thanks to the fact that they are others. In the realm of culture, outsidership is the most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly. (6-7)

The awareness of being a part and apart from a country is revealed in the language Wright uses in her poetry and non-fiction writings regarding the Aborigines. Her poetic language "lives, as were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context" (Bakhtin 284). Wright could not feel that she really belonged to Australia unless the guilt of colonization would be forgiven by the Aboriginal people. The White settlers' occupation of the land, the displacement, and exploitation they imposed on the Indigenous, along with the omission of their history stand for the guilt with which Wright was burdened (Sharma 51). Acknowledging this guilt on the part of the Australian settlers and re-establishing their connection with the Australian landscape and its Indigenous people are the very factors to perceive their sense of belonging. Otherwise, this belonging would be a mere an external matter projected by the mind rather than a real inner integration and union with the land as Wright comments:

Australia is still for us not a country but a state of mind. We do not speak from within but from outside. From a state of mind that describes rather than expresses its surroundings or from a state of mind that imposes itself upon rather than lives through landscape and event. (*Because*300)

In -For New England! an early poem from *The Moving Image*, the poet articulates her love for her motherland, saying:

Your trees, the homesick and the swarthy native, blow all one way to me, this southern weather that smells of early snow:

And I remember the house closed in with sycamore and chestnut fighting the foreign wind.

Here I will stay, she said

the harsh horizon rimmed with drought. — Planted the island there and drew it round her. Therefore, I find in me the double tree (*CP* 22).

The poem does not simply penetrate Wright's love for the landscape but her strong

notion of place in terms of her British native culture and her sense of nationhood of Australia. The imagery of the trees and the southern weather that makes the speaker smell the –early snow| indicates how the physical nature does nurture one ‘s identity and sense of home. That is why the blowing of "the foreign wind" plays an important role in affecting the land and its indigenous people. It stands for the White settlers‘coming to the new land, leading to its drought, dispossessing the Aborigines from their origins, and imposing a new foreignness.

Being in between the influence of her native and birth countries, Wright finds herself as "the double tree". Though feeling nostalgic about her country of origin, she identifies herself with the Australian landscape. By "the double tree" she indicates her two senses of belonging as well as her two vocations as a poet and environmentalist:

1. who am the swimmer and the mountain river; and the long slopes‘concurrence is my flesh who am the gazer and the land I stare on;
2. and dogwood blooms within my winter blood, and orchards fruit in me and need no season.
3. But sullenly the jealous bones recall
4. what other earth is shaped and hoarded in them. (*CP 23*)

The ecological ethics that Wright tries to uphold in her literary output stem from her belief in a relation of interdependence between man and the natural world. The above lines extend the speaker ‘s identification with the landscape –Many roads meet here/ in me;| she is both the –swimmer and the mountain river,| –the gazer and the land|. As she was returning to her family farm during World War II, Wright wrote: –I found myself suddenly and sharply aware of it as my country ‘. These hills and valleys were – not mine, but me (qtd.in Sarangi 140).

In the lines where she says: "Here I will stay....; be done with the black north, / the harsh horizon rimmed with drought/ planted the island there and drew it round her" (23), Wright expresses the White settlers' desire to create a native land for their own and to tame the Australian wilderness. The longing to belong, which is felt by the White settlers is equally felt by Wright. She undertakes the responsibility of the past on her own, accentuating the doublings of the White settlers' identity through the repetitive use of the anaphora: "And I remember/Therefore I. / And therefore I. /Therefore, I find in me the double tree" (23).

Interestingly enough, Wright tries to reconcile the two identities, endeavoring to create unity out of "division": "Many roads meet here/ in me, the traveler and the ways I travel. / All the hills‘gathered waters feed my seas" (23). In these lines, the speaker negates any tendency towards assimilation but affirms the need for the "interdependency of division and concurrence" (Kennedy 26). Wright believes in the integrated image that is composed of binary oppositions. The Australian national unity comes from the integration of the Aborigines and the White settlers. In her poetry, both are represented in several opposed ways to illustrate her view of the meaning of integration and opposition. Wright saw that acknowledging Australia's Indigenous people is inseparable from recognizing its history and national character. It was the very path to nurture a real sense of belonging. No full integration into the land would be accomplished if the White settlers, including herself, would keep considering the Aborigines as the different 'Other'. This is quite evident in the first lines of Wright's memoir *Half a Lifetime* where she says:

To begin with, in Australia, who am I? None of my genes is Indigenous.

The place to find clues is not in the present, it lies in the past: a shallow past, as all

immigrants to Australia, know, and all of us are immigrants. The history of our arrival holds a history beyond itself. It begins in another hemisphere. (3)

In poems like "The Nigger's leap, New England" and "Bora Ring" from *The Moving Image*, "Walker in the Darkness" and "The Ancestors" from *The Gateway*, "The Dark Ones" and "They" from *Fourth Quarter* (1976), Wright describes the history of the Aborigines and articulates their stories, rituals, myths, and culture, highlighting their vital dwelling all over the landscape without any static pattern. Through her portrayal of the trials of annihilating their existence and culture by the new settlers, Wright endeavors to reveal the truth behind the White settler's so-called civilization. She also critiques the stereotypical representation of the Aborigines usually found in colonial literature. Usually, they are portrayed either as ignoble savages, inferior to the White settlers or as noble savages, exaggeratedly romanticized. Wright's literary representation of Aborigines, on the other hand, stands as an illumination of the Aboriginal and eco-reality of Australia.

In "Bora Ring", Wright expresses that the destruction of the natives, and their culture is the reason for the destruction of the original ecological features of the landscape. The Aborigines have a strong eco-friendly relationship with the physical world that is ruled by the love, respect, and preservation of their earth (Das 151). Bora Ring is a place known personally by Wright as she says that it is: "not far from my grandmother's home, and the paddock was named Bora paddock, I wrote Bora Ring. I am told the ring area has now been ploughed. . . it was not thought of preserving" (3). At the same time, Bora Ring is a sacred site for the Aborigines, a site where little boys are initiated to become men ready to inherit their tribal heritage.

The Aboriginal heritage is considered as the core of the Aboriginal existence where the little boys learn the rituals, traditions, stories, myths, and culture through songs and dances. These customs are interconnected to the land and the preservation of the natural world of which Wright says:

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. (5)

Wright feels guilty as she belongs to the White settlers who have replaced the primitive traditions with foreign ones: "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 12).

Through her poetry, Wright tries to revive the primitive-native traditions of the Aborigines in which she herself believes. Her target is to save the land and its national character, restoring customs and traditions that are closely related to the Aboriginal self-dignity and spirituality:

Aboriginal spirituality is defined as at the core of Aboriginal being, their very identity. It gives meaning to all aspects of life including relationships with one another and the environment. All objects are living and share the same soul and spirit as Aborigines. There is a kinship with the environment. (Grieves 191)

The Aboriginal songs as well as their stories, and dreams are the path to enlighten the White settlers who are ignorant of the Australian ecology. They form the essence of the

Australian heritage, which corresponds with the ecological ontology of the land. For Wright, the aboriginal songs and stories are a crucial part of their history, and acknowledging them would be the first step to bridge new channels with the land:

It would be quite wrong to think that these Aborigines' tales are no more than moral stories or childish fancies. Like dreams, they have meanings we have forgotten or never known. Yet, unless we can somehow strengthen the small bridge offered by such stories and paintings, we other Australians will never begin to heal the wounds we have inflicted on ourselves as well as on the people we have wronged. (*Born* 14)

As one of these White settlers, Wright understood that their desire to tame the land and create a well-built country, but she also knew that the method was the wrong one. It was a method that deprived of the aborigines from their humanity and dispossessed them their land. Bringing their own traditions and customs into a land that already has its own was the first problem that both the White and the original settlers faced (Das 147).

Through her poetic output, Wright seeks to put the White settlers face to face with their guilt to make real amendments to their fellow Aboriginal brothers. Her aim is not to recall the White settlers' violence, but to reintroduce and integrate the Aboriginal people to the Australians' mindset. She endeavors to implement a realization on the part of the white settlers that would encourage them to embrace the Aborigines as their own fellow people who deserve to be respected and treated humanely (Bureau 6).

In her poem "They," Wright ironically states that the problem is that the Aborigines are human beings like the White settlers: "They look like people/ that's the trouble" (*CP* 324). The very title indicates the White settlers' conception of considering the Aborigines as the different Other ' , They, ' stating their difference. Wright reveals through the poem that the new settlers deep down themselves knew their wrong deed and their shameful bargain: "Only afterwards When you're alone/You realise what you said What the bargain was" (324).

The poem "They" explains the state of the "rider's halt "of the last stanza of the poem -Bora Ring. -The rider's heart" is the heart of the White settler that is full of fear from the sightless shadow that they believe it surrounds. This sightless shadow stands for their sense of guilt that they refuse to encounter and admit that those they wronged are just people like them. "Bora Ring" is the poet 's method to give voice to the voiceless Aborigines: "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" (12).

The last line that refers to the biblical story of the two brothers, Cain and Abel in the book of Genesis underlines the victimized Aborigines by their own brothers; this eradication of the land's origins will remain the 'unsaid word.' Explicitly, the white settlers' wrongdoing will always be remembered as the bloody old curse of Cain. Both Cain and Abel are the sons of Eve. Eve stands for the mother-earth, the mother of all living beings whose son was killed. Does the reference to the curse mean that the mother-earth would avenge this ill-deed? The refusal of the environment and the natural elements to respond to the White settlers' trials to accommodate the land might be that curse materialized to revenge for native people.

The poem ends with a grieving note where the land seems to mourn the Aborigines. The grass stands up to protect the sacred site of Bora Ring, "the apple-gums" are placed in a way to present the ancient ceremonies. The "corroboree" and murmur the old songs of the Aboriginal people that are now broken: "Only the grass stands up/to mark the dancing-ring:

the apple-gums posture and mime a past/ corroboree, murmur a broken chant” (12).

In "The Ancestors", Wright points out to the Indigenous people's belief in "spirit ancestors", which is a belief in the superordinary beings that created the life forms and set the law of the world. These spirit ancestors protected and kept protecting the landscape; the world and the law they made to maintain the continuance of life as it is stated: "Many of the superordinary beings interact with people. . . Many of these beings also act as guardians of the country taking care of the people who belong there, and harming people who do not belong there" (Rose 23). It is a belief related to one of the Aboriginal dominant principles that are the Dreamtime.<sup>3</sup>

The ancestors' spirits are believed to have a supernatural power that enables them "to change into human, animal, tree, rock, or other forms" (8). The focal point is their oneness with the land. In the following lines, Wright portrays a forest peopled by spirits. In a way she calculates a feeling experienced by the aborigines towards every physical thing in the forest that is believed to have a living spirit: "and in each notched trunk shaggy as an ape crouch the ancestor, the dark bent foetus, unopened eyes, face fixed in unexperienced sorrow, and body contorted in the fern-tree's shape" (*CP* 105).

The existence of the Aboriginal ancestors is interweaved with the shaggy "notched trunk" in which the speaker sees their "unopened eyes, face...and body," living in the trees and every plant, desiring to be reborn again. The poet's pursuit is to restore the spiritual value of the Indigenous relationship with the land. The very idea of being alive in the plants is emphasized by Wright to urge her readers to be reconnected with their land, having the desire to be reborn in nature again. Aboriginal people uphold the belief that life emerges from the earth and keeps its eternal cycle; so, do the spirits of the ancestors. Both the landscape and the ancestors form one unity. This is one of the reasons why they adore and respect their natural world; –these primitive fathers waiting for rebirth, / these children not yet born (105).

The interrelationship between the Aborigines and their land is the stream that provides them with a healthy, stable, and fruitful lifestyle. Wright felt that it is her task to spread this Aboriginal knowledge, advocating the sacred value of the land the White settlers have conquered. The ancestors' spirits stand for a matriarchal power that takes care of her children, "[the ancestors'] silent sleep is gathered round the spring/ that feeds the living, thousand-lighted stream" (105). What the White settlers have done is real exploitation of the mother-earth, which is their only source of living. They could not realize that "the Law which the Aborigines recognize is one of kinship with the natural and environmental disaster which we have invited are disasters to the whole community of beings" (*Born* 124).

The annihilation the White settlers caused to the land and its Aboriginal people tortured the spirits of the ancestors. These spirits come back to life not to be reborn happily as they hoped but to be tortured spirits, haunting the land they have lost as Wright terms it "The haunted land" (15). One of the poems that express the massacre of the Aboriginal people is "The Nigger's Leap, New England". This poem is based on a particular true incident of the invaders' reprisal in 1844 in New South Wales. Wright's father was one of the few people who knew about the unrecorded history of the New South Wales tableland. He related to his daughter the

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<sup>3</sup> The Dreamtime for the Aborigines is a spiritual belief from which all other beliefs stem. Dreamtime is a word that was first used in 1900 to define the aboriginals' religious beliefs and to describe the all-encompassing mystical persona of the Aboriginal beginning (Mckay xv).

incident that changed the name of the site of Point Lookout into Darkie Point.<sup>4</sup>

Long ago, he said, the white settlers of the region of the tableland had driven the Aborigines over its cliffs as a reprisal for the spearing of their cattle. That sank as deeply into my mind as did the splendor of the cliffs and forests into which that Aboriginal band had fallen. Long afterward, I wrote a poem about it, titled 'Nigger's Leap, New Leap'. (30)

The poem is a documentation of the disaster that had happened to the Aborigines that is deliberately forgotten and omitted. It is a recall for the past genocide inflicted upon the Aborigines. Wright tries to make her poem an apology, documenting what was completely ignored. The Aboriginal people were forced to climb the top of "the lipped cliff" and then jump from that height; they "screamed falling in flesh". The poet continues the poem, saying:

Swallow the spine of range; be dark, O lonely air.  
Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull  
that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff and then were silent, waiting for the  
flies. (CP 15)

Metaphorically and literally, the dark atmosphere suggests different meanings wherein the lines –Night runs and obscure tide round cope and bay/ and beats with boats of cloud up from the sea (15). The very word 'Night' reflects the gothic mood of the poem, suggesting that the incident took place at nighttime. When the European settlers chose the night to accomplish their deed, they knew that their evil deed cannot be done during the day. Moreover, Wright, deliberately, uses the image of darkness to refer to the Aborigines; ironically, they have dark skin, but it is no more than the reflection of the White settlers' repression. Darkness also serves to symbolize the blank-dark paper of the history synthesis of the Australian land: "Here is the symbol and the climbing dark/ a time for synthesis, night buoys no warning/ over the rocks that wait our keels" (15).

Moreover, Wright accentuates the importance of the history of the landscape is the cornerstone of the nation. History is an integral part of the culture of nations and the foundation from which a nation constructs its national character. Once this history is discarded "Night floods us suddenly as history/ that has sunk many islands in its good time" (15).

Even though the White settlers shushed the Aborigines and suppressed their voice, they are reminded by their presence by every element found in the Australian landscape. In the lines below from the third stanza of "Nigger's Leap, New England," the speaker uses the first plural pronoun 'we.' The poet does not exclude herself from the White conquerors:

Did we not know their blood channeled our rivers, and the black dust our crops ate was  
their dust?

O all men are one man at last. We should have known the night that tided up the cliffs and  
hid them

had the same question on its tongue for us.

And there they lie that were us writ strange. (15)

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<sup>4</sup> Point Lookout. It came to be changed due to the terrible accident that happened when the White settlers forced a group of Aboriginal people to jump from a high cliff just because they stole cattle from their owners. The naming Darkie point stands for the dark past of this place and the darkness of the night in which it took place (Wright *Half* 57).

The rhetorical wondering that Wright raises underlines the powerful presence of Aborigines and their past informing the Australian landscape. Both of the White settlers and the native Australians have lived on land. The only difference is that the land was nurtured by the Aboriginal blood, channeling rivers. Every part of nature around the White settlers works as a reminder of the injustices practiced against the Aborigines. These injustices all together were done against Australia itself. It is for this reason the speaker of the poem says: "O all men are one at last/. And there they lie that were ourselves writ strange." Both form one part of the country; inflicting pain on the native Australians means causing pain to the land and the White settlers at the same time. Similarly, Anne Collett (1950- ) states that:

It is as though the land itself screamed with their screams and molded itself to their body anguish. Now cooled by time, the war living flesh becomes sculpted granite, whose silent lip recalls the horror of those silenced voices. The shadow people are given substance, the flesh becomes earth, bone becoming rock, in the word sculpture of Judith Wright 's poetry. (6-7)

The fear that fills the land looks as if still around, encompassing the earth and becoming part of it despite the decreased sense of guilt in the minds of the White settlers and the later generations. Every part of the Australian landscape manifests the presence of the Aborigines as well as the anxiety of the early White settlers. This anxiety, in the words of Wright's biographer, is "something at once alien and familiar, a part of oneself which has been suppressed but returns with devastating effect" (34). Dwelling in the land in such a self-anxiety or devastation is totally against the objective of living in harmony together. That is why Wright emphasizes that: -Now must we measure/ our days by nights, our tropics by their poles, / love by its end and all our speech by silence( CP 15). She advocates the necessity to measure the present by the past, emphasizing the present reality by what was hushed before.

Through the employment of the dichotomies of darkness and light, night and day, black and white, past and present, Wright puts the emphasis mainly on the idea of opposites by which each one can enhance and enforces the identity of the other. To enlighten the darkness of the White settlers' ignorance of the Australian ecology requires comprehending the past darkness they imposed before on the land; to build a better present or future requires realizing the past. Wright considers it her mission, referring to it as "The task of throwing light into the outer world of increasing consciousness through increasing knowledge had not only to be directed to the external darkness, but the internal darkness as well" (*Preoccupation* 79). The internal darkness is the one that the White settlers live internally, leading them to ignore their land 's genesis. It is the state of living in self-denial, trying to purge another reality not based on ones' early roots.

Her target is to underline the aboriginal nature of the Australian land that the White Australians tend to ignore. Wright's poetry carries the ecological journey to transform this violation of the land into a concrete attempt to restore harmony. The constant engagement of her poetry with the Aborigines extends to enforce the Aboriginal identity of the land that forms part of the history of every Australian individual. The very means to give credibility to this claim is the Australian ecology of which the native people are fundamental, standing at its core.

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