
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION : AN OVERVIEW

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

I remember, when I was studying in college, each time a new writer was approached with the comment that we would first 'do' a little bit of the background, we would all heave sighs of despair. That was THE most boring part of the entire exercise! However, it was only later that I realised that the study of any writer cannot be isolated from the age in which s/he lived. The ideas and modes of thought prevalent immediately before, during and after a particular period of time play a very significant role in shaping a writer's sensibility. Of course, one cannot make clear-cut divisions and say that such and such is the cut-off point but it is possible to make a wide generalisation. I will try to incorporate only the most important of the influences and trends that mark this period of our study - 1901 to 1970 - and hope that it will enhance your appreciation of the writers we will study at length in the later units. I will attempt to present a very broad picture of the socio-political events of the time and relate it to the literary and intellectual leanings of the people who were writing during those significant moments. Certain trends which sprouted up had their share of critics and admirers. There were counter-trends and writings of revolt. In other words, the field was thoroughly ploughed to allow a new literature to develop and flourish. Inevitably, there were extremes but those have gradually given way to a more balanced outlook.

Activity I

At this point, I would like to ask you to list what your expectations were prior to taking up this paper. What was it that you thought you would be reading about? What made you opt for this field of study in the first place? Please write down your responses and compare them with what I have to say later in this unit.

1.1 WHAT IS AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE?

Before I begin to talk about Australian Literature, I would like to share with you an experience I have frequently had when I tell people about my interest in this field. More often than not, the response is: "Australian literature? So you know Australian then?"! Everybody looks terribly impressed until I tell them that Australian literature is written in English! Have you encountered something similar while doing this paper?

To get back to the question I asked you earlier, what did you first expect when you took up this course of study? Did you imagine that you would find a broad expanse of an endlessly stretching landscape of the mind dotted by the exotic figures of unusual animals and unfamiliar vegetation, almost bizarre in their strangeness? That you would meet swaggering *stockriders* in outflung cattle stations, the whole enveloped in an atmosphere uniquely Australian and reflecting the upside down nature of the climate and geography of this southern continent? Most people expect that the literature of Australia will in many ways be 'foreign', wrapped in an aura of novelty. Have I guessed your responses - atleast some of them - correctly? However, by now you must have realised that although the spirit of Australia is uniquely its own, the language and the poetry is made out of 'English' with all its inherited genius and not out of some off-spring language called 'Australian'. This brings me to the point that I wish to make. Why then would one want to explore the uncharted regions of Australian writing only to discover some more English literature? This question could be answered by posing another. Why does one go to any literature at all? Do we read Wordsworth or Keats to journey through the woods, pastures and hamlets of England or to find a depiction of the externals of English life? Do we not approach all literature with the expectation that it will, in some way, enrich us by adding to our perception of life, certain ineffable qualities of thought and feeling? In that sense, the literature of any country - England, America, India, Australia, Africa - is at its most sublime when it concerns itself not so much with the externals of life but when it seeks to express the human and psychological facets of existence. It is not necessary to wrap sociological details or geographical features in verse and serve it up as the special offering of a specific country. To pick up an anthology of Australian poets and expect to find a guide book in verse, of Australian customs and physical features, would be to denigrate the very concept of literature. The best Australian poets, like the best English poets know that the true haunt of poetry is the ideas and emotions of Mankind and if they use a vivid picture of an Australian scene, it is not merely to add local colour but because it is the means of conveying something which is universal and not confined to the Australian ethos alone. When **Judith Wright** (a poet you will meet in one of the later units) penned her *Woman to Man*, she was not speaking as an Australian woman but as one who shares with countless others, the traits, apprehensions and joys of being a woman. So, if you have felt let down in certain ways, given the nature of your expectations before embarking on this journey through Australian Literature, and have been wondering why you need to read Australian literature at all, I would like to remind you, in the words of one of their critics, Alec King, that the people of that country are humans by necessity and Australian by accident.

1.2 THE SOCIAL PICTURE

A great many changes took place in Australia between 1886 and 1904 - the sharp division between the bush and city cultures, the characters of the two principal cities of Sydney and Melbourne (the former regarded as hearty and heartless while the latter was hailed as consciously conscience-ridden - though this has been dismissed as a myth) and the capacity of Australians to discriminate. The Australian character is sometimes summed up in the difference between the two major cities, Sydney and Melbourne. Sydney, the original settlement, was overtaken in the 19th century by Melbourne, which became the nation's banking and mercantile capital. However, in the 20th century Sydney has reclaimed supremacy, something often resented by Melbourne writers, who see themselves as intellectuals, ranged against Sydney's hedonists and stylists. Melbourne has had many schools of poetry, the most distinguished being that which was active at Melbourne University in the period between the 1950s to the 1980s.

The coincidence of universal education, the spirit of the nation, and the organisation of labour had brought a new voice into literature - that was earthy, realistic,

democratic and optimistic. As it grew to a rapid consciousness of the world, its optimism died but its other qualities survived in rather different forms.

The years of World War I and the depression confirmed the patterns of urbanisation and industrialisation, adding at the same time, new elements to Australian thinking. Nationalism, in its first manifestation, had a republican flavour to it but with the outbreak of war in 1914, Australian sympathy was overwhelmingly on the side of Great Britain. There were many strange things about Australian participation in the War - Australian territory was not at stake, Australian troops were mainly centred in France and the Middle East and the soldiers were throughout volunteers. There was the overtone of affirmation of nationhood together with the undertone of a child seeking recognition from the parent of its maturity. There were mixed reactions about this participation. While some thought of it as a baptism of blood, others wondered whether the heroism had been well spent. However, all agreed that it had been a climactic moment in the nation's history. As British power waned, so did Australian security and with this grew the country's recognition that it must adapt to its special position in both geographical isolation and peculiarity in the world market. Through the inter-war years, pressure to 'Australianise' Australia kept growing.

The great financial depression was another momentous period in the nation's history. The 1920s had seen years of rapid growth and the inflow of migrants and capital had been substantial. New industries were established, old ones expanded. Thousands of men set themselves up as independent traders and artisans. Good seasons and prices raised farmers to high levels of optimism. And then came the crash and by 1931, almost one third of the workforce was unemployed. The slow climb back, as world markets recovered and local confidence was restored, could not wholly erase the bitter after-taste of the depression.

World War II too, changed Australia in many significant ways. The fall of Singapore and the Japanese drive south destroyed the comfortable belief that the Royal Navy was sufficient to protect the Australian continent. Isolation, which fifty years earlier had been a safeguard, now became a threat and the realisation dawned that the future of Australia could never again be separated from that of Asia. Secondly, American co-operation with Australia during the war now led to increasing American cultural, political and economic influences. American capital poured into the country and has been a major factor in post-war Australian growth. Although Australian politics still followed the British model, in foreign relations, it was increasingly influenced by the United States. Finally, Australian industrialisation accelerated rapidly and the war was followed by a period of great economic growth. A high inflow of capital from Japan as well and of migrants (predominantly from northern Europe), and healthy export markets has made the society an affluent one.

One event which, more than any other, changed contemporary Australian sensibility and the climate in which the arts were practised, was Vietnam. It polarised opinion on Australia's relations with the outside world as sharply as did World War I. It shattered beliefs and assumptions regarding the future of the country and forced Australia out of the political indifference in which it had lain for two decades. Vietnam engaged the minds and hearts of poets and painters in a way that no cause had done since Spain.

1.3 LITERARY TRENDS

The development of Australian Literature has been a slow and arduous process, marked by conflict between the old, convict legacy of *bush ballads*, a colonial hangover, the self-conscious attempt at carving out a distinctively national literature and the growing awareness that to be truly effective, it must offer insights and values

that are universal. Three broad phases may be distinguished in its pattern of development. The colonial period from the beginning to the late nineteenth century, the period of national independence from the 1890s to World War I and then from the 1920s to the present in which both the colonial and national outlook alike have been absorbed into a more diverse and balanced literary pattern.

For writers during the depression, unqualified optimism was already a thing of the past. The voices of the 1890s had almost universally rung with hope but the dominance of these voices proved exceptional and short-lived and the spirit which had nurtured them was passing. However, at least two of their attributes - an assertion of the nation and a faith in social reform were carried over to writers who followed them and to this was added a democratic concern to find a popular language and therefore, a wider audience. The most personal, the least concerned with immediate realities of time and place, the most desolate of Australian poets was Christopher Brennan for whom

...a bitter wind came out of the yellow-pale west
and my heart is shaken and fill'd with its triumphant cry:
You shall find neither home nor rest : for ever you roam
with stars as they drift and wifful fates of the sky!
(*The Wanderer*, 1902)

Brennan ignored the Australian scene and turned to Europe and Western philosophical thought, more specifically, the movement which was most important in contemporary literature and poetic thought - the Symbolist movement. He used myth to present a problem of choice, relating the story not for its own sake but using it as a symbol, a vehicle to convey a purpose beyond it.

The new writers were different - while many of them had their roots in the bush, most were of middle class origin and of higher and more systematic education and almost all turned to the cities for intellectual sustenance. These writers were caught between two conflicting impulses - a conflict which is perhaps characteristic of all colonial literatures. On the one hand was the urgent need to express the land to which they belonged and on the other was the demand that universal standards be imposed on the literature. There was the feeling that the *bush* and the *outback*, the distance and the *emptiness were unique to Australia and that by re-creating them*, writers could simultaneously delineate and define their country and create a new imagery. By singing of the lives of the pioneers, the explorers, the first settlers, even the misery of the convicts, they could create a depth of time, a substitute for ancient castles, churches and ruins - the memorials of past generations - the absence of which they believed, would retard the flowering of the new literature.

The strangeness of the new country - its inward flowing rivers, its monotony, its great deserts which were inhospitable to human habitation (even at the end of the twentieth century, the country supports a population of only 18 million people), the mixture of opposites - it is the smallest continent but one of the largest countries - demanded a setting aside of previous associations and a forging of new bonds. Through four decades, from the foundation of the Commonwealth at the beginning of the century to the outbreak of World War II, the way of these writers was not an easy one. They needed their own land yet its intellectual and cultural atmosphere was too thin for sustenance. The cultivated minority with 'elevated tastes, a lofty conception of writing, a severe standard of criticism, thinking and conversation, was disproportionately small.' Australia had 'no culture', it was 'crude, materialistic'. Many Australian writers sought inspiration from Europe and stayed there permanently but most came back. The novelist, Vance Palmer, wrote:

'Art is really man's interpretation of the inner life of his surroundings, and until the Australian writer can

attune his ear to catch the various undertones of our national life, our art must be false and unenduring.'

Introduction: An Overview

And later in London, he discovered that

'My loyalties were fixed : I had no intention of making a home in London. To me it was a gloomy, friendless place...[the] villagers of Hardy's novels were not as near to me...as the station-folk and camp-blacks of the Maranoa among whom I had been living...'

If a date must be fixed for the beginning of 'modern' Australian poetry, the choice would be 1924, the date of **Kenneth Slessor's** *Thief of the Moon* - though Slessor himself would probably fix on 1909 when McCrae's *Satyrs and Sunlight* appeared. In the successive volumes from *Thief of the Moon* to *Five Bells*, Australian verse becomes contemporary in its attitude and technique. The tension in his work between surface irony and despair makes him recognisably modern. Another poet, writing at the same time as McCrae, was **John Shaw Neilson** who, despite having had no formal education, wrote hauntingly delicate lyrics and was one poet who was above all, a singer. He is not a representative of his age in the sense that his poetry has nothing to do with fashion of the twentieth century and it ignores the preoccupations of locality as well as time. If Slessor was considered to be the heir to McCrae, **R D Fitzgerald** was said to carry on the tradition of Brennan. From his earliest volume, *The Greater Apollo* (1927), he has shown a preoccupation with the situation of man in an inscrutable universe. In the 1940s and 1950s, a sudden rush of regional and national awareness was brought about by the onset of World War II as there was then a real danger to Australia's borders. At that time, Fitzgerald provided strength and reassurance as an elder poet asserting human and ancestral values in a world gone mad.

A weekly paper, *The Bulletin*, (started in 1880), greatly encouraged new writers, many of whom first published their verse in the journal. **David Campbell** characterised the best of *The Bulletin's* school of nature poets although by the late 1960s he had completely remoulded his style to deal with the 'modern', and the more immediate. Although there was some loss of the quality of timeless purity in his pastoral lyrics due to his later concerns, there can be seen a revitalisation of his style and the essential lyrical quality still underlies his work.

The Australian writers' need to come to terms with the land which they called home and to derive inspiration from it without looking towards Europe all the time, was exemplified in the verse of **Judith Wright** and **A D Hope**. They tried to maintain a balance between the colonial, slavish attitude on the one hand and the aggressively artificial, forced nationalism on the other. There is the acceptance of the country with all its alienness and hardships and a plea to stop being 'second-hand Europeans' and evolve their own culture and traditions. **Hope**, alongwith **James McAuley**, is known for his satires while **Wright's** is a powerful voice which seeks to draw attention to issues pertaining to women - their views and feelings - ignored in a male-dominated world.

Women writers, until a decade or so earlier, were a largely neglected lot although there have been many whose works have been so good that their omission from the history of the mainstream of Australian Literature is a reflection of their refusal to conform to the masculine image of the mainstream. Women writers project their own perception and point of view with regard to men, their attitudes and behaviour, and frequently question stereotyped notions. Of these, **Rosemary Dobson** is a noted poet, translator and critic who has been published extensively.

Australia's early history of British colonisation and the relations between the white settlers and the native Aborigines have been major concerns in many novels. Treated as savages in nineteenth century fiction and poetry, there has been a change in their portrayal although they are still seen as a mysterious and unfathomable people. However, a more realistic and credible portrait of the Aborigines has emerged from the writings of the Aborigines themselves. The first major work by an Aboriginal in English was **Kath Walker's** (now known as **Oodgeroo Noonuccal**) volume of poems *We Are Going* (1964). Her poems as well as those of others often express a vehement revival of self-respect and a demand for opportunities (including land rights) previously denied to them. After the 1960s, there has been an acknowledgement of Aboriginal rights - they were granted full citizenship, the right to vote (1967) and in the same year, included for the first time in population statistics.

Australia, which started off as a convict settlement and an outpost of the British Empire, is today a nation of many races, languages and cultures. Due to the large number of migrants (including Asian) who have now settled there, it is turning into a great melting pot of world cultures - a term that was once applied to America. Each of these groups of New Australians have had their share of problems in adjusting to the strange continent for each of them brought their own baggage of customs, food habits, myths and beliefs. This conflict between what was old on the one hand and the newness of the land on the other, has resulted in some beautiful and intense writing in which the tumult of the mind seeks to be expressed and, perhaps, resolved.

1.4 THE JINDYWOROBAKS

At the turn of the century, writers tended to concentrate on specifically political aims but the best work done was the putting down of markers towards a definition of the Australian character. The writers had an inward intention - to look into the Australian soul. The need to find a genuinely Australian niche was characterised in its extreme form by the *Jindyworobak* movement. In 1938, a writer called Rex Ingamells founded the Jindyworobak club in Adelaide and published *Conditional Culture*, its prose manifesto. They called themselves "Jindyworobaks", an Aboriginal term denoting specific local identity. Their chief representatives were Ian Mudie and Rex Ingamells. They rejected all European myths, opting instead for a culture derived from Aboriginal legends and modes of thought. This was too unnatural to be successful but their example is still observed today. Each year sees the publication of literary works claiming to interpret the country according to Aboriginal concepts such as *Dreamtime*, or attempting the refurbishment of major Aboriginal legends.

Jindyworobak is an Aboriginal word meaning 'to annex, to join' and the purpose of the movement was to free Australian art from the alien influences that chained it and to bring it into proper contact with its material. Ingamells laid down his credo in the following terms:

- a clear recognition of environmental values
- the debunking of much nonsense
- an understanding of Australia's history and traditions, primeval, colonial and modern

They found a fitting symbol in the Aboriginal *Dreamtime* of *Alchera* or *Alcheringa* - the myth of the first time, the time of creation itself, the root of all Aboriginal lore. In an attempt to break free of the shackles of colonial thinking as well as to counter the international influences that had breached Australia's isolation in the 1920s, the Jindyworobaks tried to force Australia's literary development into narrow nationalistic channels. They saw Australia as the country untouched by white men. They called this the real Australia and did not see that a railway train, a sheep station

a windmill or a city had become as much part of the natural background as 'the haggard outback valleys, silent deserts and straggly scrublands'. They insisted on including Aboriginal words which were incomprehensible to the majority of the readers and there was a forced and affected 'indigenous' tone. The movement was symptomatic of a deeply felt need to perceive and express a sense of national identity, and initially received much support. However, it faded out because it was too backward - and inward - looking, too isolationist and parochial in nature. The winds of change that gusted in after World War II simply swept the naiveté of the Jindyworobaks aside as of having no real relevance in the altered world situation. There are a couple of poems by Ingamells included in the Reader which represent the basic principles of this movement. Before going on, there is one activity I would like you to do.

Activity II

Please read the two poems of **Rex Ingamells**. How much did you understand of the poem *Moorawathimeering*? What came in the way of your understanding? What do you need to know before you can enjoy the poem?

1.5 THE ERN MALLEY HOAX

In 1940, a magazine which published the experimental work of many Australian and overseas poets was first brought out and was called the *Angry Penguins*. Some of those who had been associated with the earlier Jindyworobak movement, also appeared on its pages. There was an attempt to assert allegiance to the Australian landscape often by the deliberate introduction of Aboriginal words and myths to achieve authenticity. Highly subjective imagery, obscure symbolism etc., were regarded in high esteem. The journal was the victim of Australia's most celebrated literary hoax in 1944. Known as the Ern Malley affair, the hoax was the brainchild of two poets, **James McAuley** and Harold Stewart who wanted to expose the false pretensions of the people associated with the *Angry Penguins*. To this end, they invented a poet - 'Ern Malley' - and sent poems apparently written by him and discovered posthumously, to the journal. The poems were published and were acclaimed as the work of Australia's first real genius. When the hoax was revealed, there was considerable embarrassment. One interesting off-shoot of the whole episode was that the 'fabricated' poems refused to die away for they were too full of moments of brilliant sensuous invention. The Ern Malley poems are now viewed in Australia as important documents in the process of national maturity. Based on passages selected from public reports and scraps of general cultural information, they feature some memorable phrases. They inspired later artists and acted as a key influence for later experimentation in Australian writing. I have included one of the 'Ern Malley' poems in the Reader. There is another activity I would like you to do at this point.

Activity III

Why do you think poems like the one given were accepted so readily by the *Angry Penguins*? Do you find anything there in common with the poem of Ingamells?

The Ern Malley hoax resulted in a mood of inhibition opposed to experimentation and an insistence on classical forms which was strangely at variance with the post-war changes of a quickly maturing society. **McAuley**, in the period of reaction against excess, was a secure force to hold onto and when the war with its atom bomb unleashed terror, his poetry was a means, like an incantation, of keeping it at bay. Well, I have taken you on quite an exhaustive (but I hope not exhausting!) tour of the social, political and literary landscape of Australia. You must have noticed that some of the poets' names are in bold letters. These are the poets whom we will study in

depth in the units which follow. This unit has been a wide-angle, generalised view which will soon give way to a zooming in for the close-ups! But first, a brief recap of what has been said so far.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

The twentieth century has been a turbulent one for a country which saw the two world wars at close quarters and experienced their devastating after-effects. Australia was witness to exciting changes from the 1890s onwards, starting with the welding of the six Australian colonies into a single nation; new pattern of politics in the early years of the Commonwealth; the two wars and the financial depression in the period between them; the arrival of waves of migrants and its emergence as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic nation. After the six colonies were federated into a Commonwealth in 1901, the twin concerns were: (a) to create a nation independent of British control and ready to adapt British role models to local circumstances and (b) to discover and nurture qualities perceived to be wholly and admirably Australian.

World War I was a turning point in many ways, not least because the number of Australian casualties was not proportionate to the number of soldiers engaged. It also increased an awareness of Australian isolation amid its heavily populated neighbours in Asia and the South-East Pacific as did World War II.

Beginning in 1946, thousands of immigrants were transported from eastern and southern Europe to Australia. This migration rivalled the earlier one of convicts, and with the arrival of the 'boat people' from Vietnam after the Vietnam war as well as from other Asian countries. Australia became more cosmopolitan.

There has also been a coming to terms with the physical features of the country with its strange flora and fauna and an attempt to adapt to the environment as well as to adapt it to their needs.

The literature of the country has flowered and it is possible to trace its development through the convict legacy of the bush ballads and the early attempt to copy European modes and follow their traditions, to the rise of national consciousness, its extremist form as characterised by the Jindyworobaks and the subsequent, mature writing which maintains a balance between the two. There has also been a long-due recognition of women writers and their concerns as well as an expression of rights and the point of view of the Aborigines by those belonging to that dispossessed minority themselves.

The passion and horror of war, the emotional turmoil of migration, the plight of disadvantaged groups such as the Aborigines, the muted political and industrial conflict of the post-war years, attracted many writers who worked from within the democratic tradition. However, they were criticised for clinging to tradition and for having lost the sense of forward movement.

Definition of the nation and land remains a major concern of Australian writers. Although there were complaints from writers like **McAuley** against the blind acceptance of whatever was indigenous, even they could not escape defining at least the spiritual and intellectual landscape around them while **A D Hope** believed that one day, from the deserts, prophets would come. The fascination with the unique remains.

1.7 QUESTIONS

The questions which follow are meant to refresh your memory of the facts outlined in the introduction and to help fix them there as well as to bring to your attention certain

important details you may have missed. They have been phrased in such a way as to ensure that you read the unit carefully. Please do not make the mistake of thinking that they are based on the pattern of questions you will be expected to answer during your examination.

Introduction: An Overview

- 1) What was it about Australia that disturbed writers?
- 2) Make a list of the poets you will study in this Block. Using the background information given in this unit, put down the qualities which characterise their work and make it distinctive. Make a table of the writers and their preoccupations and interests. You can keep adding to it as we proceed through the later units when each of these poets will be discussed in detail.
- 3) How did the two world wars and the intervening period affect social and literary trends?
- 4) What was the movement the meaning of which is 'to join' concerned with? What were its avowed aims and how far did it succeed in achieving its objectives?
- 5) What kind of writing did the *Angry Penguins* group encourage?
- 6) What did the *Angry Penguins* insistence on a certain kind of writing lead to?
- 7) Make a chronological listing of the major literary trends outlined in this unit.
- 8) Outline the characteristic features of the literary trends you have thus listed.
- 9) What sort of poems would you expect to find in an anthology of Australian poetry?
- 10) What are the different socio-political trends that have affected the writing of Australia?

1.8 GLOSSARY

stock riders

stock is used in the sense of animals used for breeding/farm animals like cattle, sheep, horses etc. A stock rider would therefore be some one on horse-back who rounds up cattle/sheep/horses, who rides with the stock.

bush

uncleared wild country especially in Australia or Africa.

outback

(especially in Australia) the part of a country far away from cities.

Bush ballads

ballads are fundamentally songs that tell a story/a musical accompaniment to a dance. Ballads have certain basic characteristics like an abrupt beginning, simple language, often tragic themes, with refrains. The story is told through dialogue and action and usually deals with a single episode, the action moves swiftly and there is a strong dramatic element. Ballads may be distinguished broadly between the literary ballad and the popular/folk. The reference here is to the latter, belonging to the oral tradition and handed down by word of mouth. Bush Ballads refer to those popular songs that originated in the vasts of Australia, the Bush as it was called.

UNIT 2 BEGINNINGS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 The Grand Old Man of Australian Poetry
- 2.2 *Each Day I See The Long Ships Coming Into Port*
- 2.3 The Native Singer
- 2.4 *The Orange Tree*
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Questions
- 2.7 Glossary

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall be looking at two of the earliest Australian poets - Christopher Brennan and John Shaw Neilson. I will tell you a little about what influences can be found in their work, about the kind of lives they led and if it has any bearing on their poetry. By the end of this unit you should be able to identify the distinctive style and preoccupations of these two poets. We will also be reading and discussing one representative poem of each poet in detail.

2.1 THE GRAND OLD MAN OF AUSTRALIAN POETRY

A few years before the death of Brennan, a distinguished Professor of English at Sydney, Professor John Le Gay Brereton, who was a close friend of the poet remarked that Brennan could have held any one of five chairs with distinction at the University. The five chairs were those of Philosophy, Classics, French, German and English. This will give you an idea of the range and depth of his encyclopaedic scholarship.

Many critics have pointed out that in taste and influence, Brennan (1870 - 1932) was fundamentally a nineteenth-century poet. Taken as the foremost Australian poet of the twentieth century, his verse was written substantially in the nineteenth. His poetry, though written in Australia, can only be understood in a European perspective. His first serious verse was written in 1891, under the influence of the English poet, Swinburne, and as a personal response to the metaphysic of **Absolute** propounded by Herbert Spencer and T H Green. Studying in Germany on a travelling scholarship in 1892-94, Brennan was influenced by French poetry of the later nineteenth century, especially by the works of **Baudelaire**, **Regnier** and **Mallarme**. He found in their poetry, a reflection of his own metaphysical search and became convinced that the single impulse behind all the writers of the 'symbolist' and 'decadent' schools was a search for a level of experience, some ideal of beauty that could not be found in ordinary life. From Mallarme he learnt to focus his vague aspirations on the ideal of Eden, and after his meeting with Elizabeth Werth (later to become his wife), he sought to achieve this in human love. Brennan's first volume of poetry, *XXI Poems : Towards The Source* (1897) is the record of this endeavour. This is an essay in the *livre compose*, 'the book of verse conceived and executed as a whole, a single concerted poem'. In the course of the next five years this preliminary sequence was extended and then merged with a more ambitious cycle, patterned on the symbolist pattern of Baudelaire's or Regnier's work. In 1902, the cycle acquired another chapter - the series *The Wanderer* - in which the tensions of the previous

chapters are triumphantly resolved. It ends on a note of conviction - conviction found in the attempt to achieve something, the attainment being a distant promise - and the Wanderer repudiating the dream of the lost paradise for the Miltonic conception of the paradise within us. Completed by 1902 but published more than a decade later, the cycle belongs to the poetry of the 1890s. Brennan acclimatised the symbolist *livre compose* in Australian verse and extended the frontiers of Australian poetry.

The Edenic vision which governs Brennan's poetry may be understood as a phase of romantic sensibility, just as the theories of the Absolute form, which he propagated, shows his conforming to the intellectual modes of the nineteenth century.

During the 1890s, a popular school of 'nationalist' poets arose, who exhibited an intensely patriotic attitude. The admiration for their type of work wore off quickly but they deserve to be remembered because this 'nationalist' movement along with an increasingly sentimental emphasis on the Bush irritated a few writers into taking up an altogether opposite position. One of these was Brennan who, completely ignoring the Australian scene, turned to Europe and to Western poetic thought. He alone, of all the poets of his time and place, immersed himself in the Symbolist movement - the most important in contemporary literature and Western poetic thought, foreshadowed by Baudelaire and summed up in the work of Brennan's most admired poet - Mallarme. It was a new poetic vision of the relation between man and his world, as between thought and thing, image and experience. For the Symbolists, nature became 'a forest of symbols', full of images which vibrated and corresponded to the truths of human experience.

Poetry, for Brennan, was that which mediated between the 'two lives' of man, the 'outer weariness which made Baudelaire a maniac' and the 'hours of insight'. The symbol would be the mediator between appearances and underlying truth. The 'two lives' - the real and the ideal - and their constant opposition and interaction form the great subject that occupies Brennan in almost all his poetry.

Brennan rejected intellectual analysis and was in favour of symbolism which he equated with poetry. He emphasised the role of the imagination and not the intellect in the task of humanising the universe and uniting soul and matter, man and his/her world. But when it came to actual practice, he chose the intellectual and the literary symbol, not the real facts of the real world - he preferred a generalised concept to an actually seen thing. For him, a Rose is a spiritual and not an earthly flower.

His somewhat abstract poetic thinking and the form of symbolism he adopted were a considerable help to him technically. Brennan was never involved as other serious poets in Australia have been, in the difficulty of finding imagery in his own environment which would convey the full weight of meaning and association that his poetry needed. Older countries with a long literary and cultural tradition do not pose this kind of difficulty for their writers. But for Brennan, who moved freely amidst the symbolic language of European thought, religion and philosophy, this was a problem which hardly arose. The flowers which he so abundantly fills in *Towards the Source*, are the symbolic roses and lilies, the familiar flowers that are scattered across the European landscape of his imagination, not the unfamiliar, unpoeticised flowers of his new country which yet had no associations of rituals or religions in literature - even to his own countrymen. Where there are any corresponding images from his immediate environment to be seen in his poetry, they are of a generalised nature and do not assume any personal or particular significance. Consequently, although Brennan's symbolic method allowed him to bypass certain obstacles and strengthened him as a poet, it took away an essential quality from his poetry - the immediacy which can come only from a direct contact with experiences on a sensual and emotional level. There is a distance from fact and daily problems and this does not bring Brennan closer to his readers. Also, as he seemed to have a foot each in two centuries and two hemispheres, it meant that he could not truly be in complete unison with either.

Although the focus of the symbolist movement altered with the change of the century, Brennan remained poetically in the nineteenth century, as demonstrated by his poetic task, his diction and versification. Though he could see the gradual breaking away from the stricter poetic forms in favour of speech which sounded more immediate, he refused to change his own style.

In Australia, his detachment from tasks that lesser poets saw as important to the time and his involvement with Western thought that was not perfectly understood there, ensured that he remained more a legend than a living, breathing poet. The radical-political thought or sprightly, uncomplicated songs of other poets seemed more attractive than Brennan's vague, symbolist lyrics and his readership was so small as to seem scarcely visible.

2.2 *EACH DAY I SEE THE LONG SHIPS COMING INTO PORT*

Now, before we go on, please read Brennan's poem and as you read it, jot down a few points regarding the following:

- a) Does he use any obscure symbols or do you find the poem easy to read and understand?
- b) Does he make any references to forces of nature? What are those forces and what does he have to say about their power?
- c) Does the poet wish to wander around the world? Where does he express an opinion regarding this and does he change it later on? If he does, what reasons does he give for doing so?

Discussion

The poet watches huge ships coming into the harbour and, crowding the rails are people, eager to have a glimpse of land after being tossed around on the sea for months at a time. To the travellers, it does not matter that they have come to an alien land, one that will require a great deal of adaptation before it will finally seem 'home' to them. The monotonous song of the seas and the force of winds have swept away all fears and 'rancour' so that any land is seen as welcome. After all those months of isolation, cut off from the daily commerce of the world, 'not to have known of anything in any crowded way', the prospect of once more walking on firm land and coming into contact with other human beings, is a thrilling one. Although they may have left their native land filled with anger, disgust or disappointment at their fellow humans' behaviour, the sea and the wind together have swept clean all those negative feelings and they are once more eager to take up life from where they had left off.

In that sense, it is an acknowledgement of the power of nature to soothe, to repair and rejuvenate our spirit so that all bitterness is washed away and we are ready to face the trials of the world with a renewed faith. It also attests to the force of the human desire to seek companionship and the need to trust others even if one has suffered betrayals or losses. Man never gives up hope, no matter what he has experienced. At every turn, he feels a thrill of expectation course through him and the hope that there are good things in store for him in the future. To this end, he never gives up the struggle.

The people and the ships could therefore be said to stand for Man's restless, searching mind and eternally unsatisfied spirit of human consciousness. The quest and thirst for adventure motivates many a man to pull up his roots and leave home

and hearth for unknown dangers. History is full of tales of intrepid explorers who have mapped our world as we know it today.

The lack of antiquity in Australia led many writers and politicians towards adopting a stance in which a concern with history was replaced with a belief in the future. In the light of this belief, the ship is an appropriate metaphor since it figures prophecy, anticipation and contact with culture, spirituality and home to which the sailor hopes it will soon return him.

The poem also embodies the spirit of the migrant experience. Driven out of their familiar world through force of circumstance and/or human perversity, they now approach the new land with an eager, unquestioning acceptance, sure that it will provide succour.

The poet feels a twinge of envy at their open happiness on reaching the port and questions this unexpected emotion of jealousy. Surely he would not like to be in their place, to wander 'hither and thither upon the earth and grow weary with seeing many lands and peoples and the sea'? Would he like to take up the nomadic life of a wanderer, leading a rootless, unsteady sort of life? The question makes him pause to examine his own feelings. Not having thought of this before, he suddenly, in all certainty feels that if he could be sure of a welcome and a chance to rest his troubled mind somewhere, he too might take the opportunity to spread his sails wide and catch a wandering wind, allowing it to take him where it will. This is probably a sign that all was not well in Brennan's life. However, the lines 'but if I might, some day, landing I reckon not where/ have heart to find a welcome and perchance a rest', indicate that it might make no difference wherever he went as his heart would be the same. He needs to come to terms with whatever is troubling him and only then will his heart allow him to find welcome and rest somewhere.

The short poem is reminiscent of the *Romantic tradition* in which the poet starts off with a description of a general scene and then gradually relates it to his own subjective experience, making it a part of his immediate reality.

2.3 THE NATIVE SINGER

Can you imagine a man, the son of a small farmer and contractor, with hardly any schooling, who spent years at hard farm work, and who, not having read much and with no encouragement and literary contacts, wrote poetry of an unexpected kind with the utmost delicacy? This was John Shaw Neilson, (1872 - 1942) who above all else, was a singing poet.

From the kind of life he led, you would expect his poetry to be of a distinctly national flavour and tint, full of the scenes, people and life around him. However, in reality, there is hardly a poem of his which is recognisably Australian. His descriptions of places or events are such that it is possible to place them anywhere in the English-speaking world. Because his poetry is so distinctive and in a sense so unlikely a product of his surroundings and education, it has the appearance of what can be called pure inspiration.

Neilson belonged to a selector's family which lived and struggled for thirty or more years in a semi-arid and monotonous bushland. Life was full of grinding poverty, continuous labour, disasters and disappointments. Finally, forced off the land, Neilson spent most of the rest of his life as a casual labourer on farms, railways, coal mines, grape-picking, ditch-digging and as a quarry worker. When he was past fifty, some friends got him a job as a messenger in a government department. It was well meant but the hours were long and city life did not suit him and he almost stopped

writing. By this time he had published several books of poems but he remained very much alone.

Although some literary people corresponded with him and helped him, he spent almost the whole of his life in surroundings where no one knew or cared about poetry. When he once requested a fellow labourer to take down a poem as he dictated it (his eyes were too bad for him to do his own writing), his mate was full of amazement, asking him, "Yeah, but what is it? What's it *for*? Yeah, but what d'you want to *do* it for?" And finally, "But this ain't poetry anyway. Jock, you must be going off your onion!" The final remark is particularly interesting. Poetry that his mate would have recognised as poetry would probably have been a bush-ballad. But Neilson was writing something delicate, cultivated and highly civilised, similar to classical compositions like symphonies and sonatas in music and totally incomprehensible to the people he was surrounded with as would have been classical music.

Neilson, unlike Lawson or Kendall, did not have unexpected access to literature in unlikely surroundings. His father never went to school and his mother had no literary interests. Neilson himself went to school only enough to learn to read and write. Yet, both father and son were natural poets - the father started writing when he was thirty and the son almost as soon as he had learnt how to write.

Although he had read some *Shelley*, *Burns*, *Coleridge* and the Australian balladeers, Neilson's poetry shows none of their influence. After the age of thirty, his eyesight became so bad that he had to give up reading altogether. In 1934, he said that for the past twenty five years, he had been unable to read anything much or have someone read out to him. As a consequence, he was shut in a world of his own and had no chance of studying the language or the works of other poets. He acknowledged that when he was criticised for having become monotonous or for having a limited range of vocabulary, it was justified. However, we can understand the reasons behind these drawbacks of his poetry as they were the direct consequence of the kind of life he led.

He knew nothing of literary criticism or theory and had never read any books on poetry. Yet his literary judgement on the few writers he had read shows the same quality of mind that his poetry does.

His own account of his creative methods suggests that poetry in him was nothing learned or acquired but a deep natural force that possessed him and forced a way out. He never selected themes or composed them. The poems came to his mind and he worked on what came from within. Often he would have dozens of poems in his mind at once struggling with one another to get to the light. *Dryden* too, once described this ferment and struggle of poetic ideas forcing themselves on his mind. Neilson seems to illustrate the view that the poetic imagination is an innate thing and that in those specially gifted, it expresses itself spontaneously and recreates the fallen world.

Neilson did not care for scenery. His poems often started from scenes and experiences he knew but they are entirely transformed in the poetic process. His poems do not describe the world, they use the world to create something entirely new - the world of the imaginative experience. His poetry has the underlying quality of clear and unearthly vision and a childlike simplicity which is impossible to imitate. The magical movement of his melody is based on very simple devices.

Neilson's method of composition was to make up dozens of stanzas and then choose from them what he considered the best, to be organised into one poem. This could sometimes make it irrelevant or inconsequential. However, his singing quality, and his felicity of verbal imagination gave him the power to create magical combinations of common words and ideas which Coleridge called 'esemplastic power'. He has the rhythmical genius of the born lyric poet.

Good brothers of the song,
Be not too humble; it is you and I
And a few others lift the world along.

His poetry was always the most important factor in his life although his circumstances prevented him from sparing it much time. His hard life and poor eyesight meant that a great deal of his work was lost due to the lack of leisure or people to write it down for him. These factors also influenced the kind of poetry he wrote. He had to confine himself to the simpler rhythms so that he could remember them easily since much of his verse was composed and carried around in his head till he got the opportunity to put it down on paper. He was an uneven writer who never fully smoothed the roughness from his poetry. He has a core of incandescence which allies him to the tradition of *William Blake* and the *English Mystics*.

His colour perceptions are consistent throughout his poetry. Green is for him, the colour of youth and spring, violet the colour of death and of the ground, red stands for strength and violence, white for innocence and childhood and so on. He fuses other perceptions and ideas in striking ways - 'the silence honey-wet'; 'the morning was too loud with light'; 'the tremble of the hollow year'; 'I saw the mushrooms hoping'.

His poetry was never very popular. It ignores the sentiments and absorption (and politics) of the time and place and this may well prove to be its strength rather than weakness. His poetry has frequently been dismissed as weak and feminine by critics immersed in the Australian cult of manliness and toughness. However, the best present day poets have begun to adopt an unselfconscious attitude towards the country which Neilson was one of the first to do. The poetry springs from the soil so to speak instead of being applied to it artificially like some strange cultural manure. Neilson is a remarkable phenomenon, a minor but genuine and gifted poet who is distinctly individual and not afraid to be universal - the qualities which make his work one of lasting value.

2.4 THE ORANGE TREE

The best of Neilson's poems have something of the subtlety and tender colour, the vague and shifting vibrant light, of a spring morning. They are never muscular in ideas or expression, their quality is as delicate as something newborn. This special kind of vision and expression is peculiar to Neilson, no other poet in the English language possibly possesses it in equal kind. This quality is best exemplified in *The Orange Tree*.

Please read the poem now and answer the following **before** you proceed with the discussion that follows:

- a) What do you think the poem is about?
- b) What do you feel served as the inspiration for the poem?
- c) Do you think the poem is set in Australia?
- d) What is it about the poem - language, imagery - which strikes you as special?
- e) How many characters or voices are there in the poem? Can you say who they are?

Discussion

Now keeping your answers in mind, go on to reading the discussion of the poem. Keep a pencil and paper handy and jot down any points which occur to you as we go along.

If you look at the poem, you will detect nothing that suggests an Australian orange orchard - yet, it is this which gave Neilson the idea for the poem when he was working at Merbein in Victoria. In Neilson's own words:

I think it was just after I gave up the horse-driving job that I did a little weeding amongst the oranges for a few days. It was then that I was struck with the very beautiful light there is in May in northern Victoria. The dark-green of the orange-trees and the beautiful sunlight gave them enchantment hard to describe. It was there that I got the main idea of *The Orange Tree*.

Neilson had a perfectly definite Australian scene in mind but the poem may have been written in any part of the world where oranges grow. What he gives you is not the external details of the experience but the essence of it. It is the orange-tree transplanted into the internal landscape of the imagination where it links up with things not to be found in the external landscape of northern Victoria at all. Neilson made another comment regarding this poem:

I have said before that I got some of the ideas when I was weeding oranges at Merbein. There was also something which I tried to drag in, some enchantment or other. I cannot well describe it. I have seen Botticelli's wonderful picture "Spring" - I think that is the name. It has lovers, it has maidens and greenery, and I think a robber in the background. Of course I know nothing about art at all, but anything of Botticelli's I see fills me with emotion. Prints of other great pictures leave me cold.

The fact that the delicate-mannered and symbolic art of Botticelli should so intensely attract Neilson, is again proof of something in him which he could not possibly have got from his surroundings. Also significant is the fact that we see here a perfect example of the imaginative fusion of disparate images and impressions which is the basis of poetry. Many descriptive poets try too hard to give a rendering of what is in front of their external eyes and their imagination is all directed outward. Sometimes this tends to stop the ferment of ideas within from meeting and coalescing in new images and emotions as the impression of Botticelli and the impression of the Australian orange orchard meets and coalesces into a work of true poetic imagination in Neilson's poem. He sees the orange-tree with the inward eye of vision, not with the outward eye of descriptive assessment.

Please read the poem again as we look at its structure :

Out of ten stanzas, the first is balanced between the two voices, two lines for the man, two for the girl; then every two stanzas devoted to the man's questions are counter pointed by a statement made by the girl, who also speaks the final lines, thus having the last word.

The first stanza describes the physical position of the two speakers who are standing side by side in front of the orange-tree. The girl is captivated and speaks the first words almost unaware that she does so. The man seems not to understand what she means. In the entire poem there appears to be a dialogue but no real communication between the man and the young girl.

The first stanza sets out the roles the man and the girl are to play - she to 'see' and he to 'tell', reporting and voicing not only her statements but also his own questions. This essential difference is conveyed through the negative :

The young girl stood beside me. I
Saw not what her young eyes could see:
A light, she said, not of the sky
Lives somewhere in the Orange Tree.

The words delineate the sense of loss in the man and also highlights the power that the girl still possesses. She is capable of seeing something that he cannot. However, she is not able to express her vision rationally but attempts to do so in indirect and imprecise terms. The girl is a 'spring' figure, a child who has a freshness of perception that the adult man lacks. Perhaps it is a perception, a power of the imagination which we all have as children but gradually lose later on.

The word 'light' can have a variety of meanings. The most obvious is that which is visible and makes other things visible too, eg., the sun, fire, etc. Another meaning denotes the eyes, our visual faculty. And the third metaphorically indicates our intellectual and spiritual faculty which discerns everything and transcends the limitations of the material and physical world. This light is not only 'luminous', it is 'almost a sound', 'a step', 'a call'. The girl knows intuitively that the light is not one of the sky - it is a heavenly or spiritual radiance which, though at the moment seems to be separate from her, she will soon realise is actually within herself. The poetic voice - the 'I' is struggling to recapture a vision he has lost and which he can see the girl still possesses. Although she too will lose it soon for that is a part of the life process, he still strives to grasp the essence of what she is experiencing.

The man's questions, his references to the 'luminous boy' are indirectly connected to the girl's statements and her destiny which will be the loss of innocence and vision, decay, death. His questions concerning the boy seem to trace an ideal journey which moves us away from the physical reality towards a spiritual experience that finally reaches a climax in the mysterious sixth stanza with its references to 'green' and 'blue'. This could refer to the light of knowledge and the abstract, ideal world that can never be reached because it is beyond the limits of human consciousness and perception.

The luminous boy, carried away, 'borne to the blue', his ascent and descent to 'the last word of a little child' at a grave, is a circular process which exemplifies the cycle of birth, growth, decay and death, and the loss of innocence. Entwined with this movement are the girl's statements concerning the mysterious presence of the light in the Orange Tree which she will finally 'listen' to within herself. This double movement - the luminous boy's journey and the girl gradually merging with the light - emphasises the similarity and relationship between these two spiritual journeys and diminishes the impact of the autumnal figure proceeding towards the grave with his inevitable load of disillusionment and loss of imagination.

The girl, inspite of her verbal inadequacy, her inability to describe her feelings clearly, is quite sure of her vision. Indeed, in a spiritual experience, 'feeling' counts for more than 'saying' and it is what is perceived which is more important than what is expressed. There are two inner forces here which pull the reader and form the core of the poetic tension. One is the visionary who experiences 'Truth and Beauty' through the girl's eyes and the other is the rational man trying to question this experience and obstructing the process with his flow of words through which he tries to express the vision clearly.

The girl exhorts the man twice to 'listen!' This is not only a plea to exercise his auditory powers but also to sharpen all his senses, to go beyond the sensory element and participate with his whole being in the experience. Divine Love and Truth can be

reached and perceived only through silence, not in continuous babble which is like the 'faltering flute', a 'stammering at a grave'. The girl's last command to the man is for silence, to stop his 'hapless', wearying, plaguing talk. By the end of the poem, the girl is 'listening like the Orange Tree' - she had begun by looking at the light that fell upon it but now she has drawn it into herself. There is a complete surrender to the Spiritual Principle that underlies all things and whose physical manifestation is the orange-tree. There is both a death and a birth here - the death of the ego, the 'I', and the birth of a more complete human being in whom the spiritual self has been wholly realised.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Neither Brennan nor Neilson wrote recognisably 'Australian' poetry. In addition, neither were widely read in their day. However, the chief hope for poetry as such, at the beginning of the 1920s, lay in the sweeping vision Brennan had achieved and the lyricism of Neilson. While the former was influenced by Western thought and philosophy, specially the Symbolist Movement, the latter, with hardly any education or reading worth the name, wrote out of an innate gift. Both of them ignored their contemporary preoccupations and wrote poetry which, though, not offering an immediacy of experience, offers universal insights, not bound by time or place. *Each Day I See ...* expresses the unquenchable thirst of the human spirit for fresh world-while *The Orange Tree* speaks of the other thirst of the human spirit - the quest for the sublimity of the spiritual experience which transcends the mundane and ordinary facts of existence.

2.6 QUESTIONS

As in the earlier unit, these questions are meant only to increase and clarify your understanding of the poems we have discussed. They will encourage you to read the poems a number of times and perceive the underlying, unsaid feelings that permeate them.

- 1) What are the issues that appear to be taken up in Brennan's poem?
- 2) What do you feel is the tone of the poem - cheerful, gloomy, non-committal... ? What makes you think so?
- 3) Does the poet express any personal opinions or is the poem a mere description of a general scene?
- 4) What, if any, is the relation between Man and Nature?
- 5) Imagine you are one of the people standing at the rail of the ship. What would your feelings be on sighting the new land?
- 6) Do the man and girl in Neilson's poem seem to be taking up opposite positions or are they both two sides of the same coin?
- 7) Though the girl speaks very little, she conveys a lot. What do you think is the essence of what she is saying?
- 8) Why does the man ask so many questions? What is he trying to establish?
- 9) Pick out the images and descriptions which appeal to you and try to explain why you find them attractive.
- 10) List the things the man compares the light to, in his questions, as he tries to find out what the girl is trying to convey. What effect do these comparisons have?

2.7 GLOSSARY

Absolute	variously defined in the philosophy of the day as the 'Unknowable' or 'the Unknown Reality'
Baudelaire, Charles Pierre (1821-1867)	French poet and critic, a leader of the symbolist school.
Blake, William (1757-1827)	English poet, painter, and engraver, who created a unique form of illustrated verse; his poetry, inspired by mystical vision, is among the most original, and prophetic lyrics, in the English language. His work in the literary and visual arts marks a rejection of the Age of Enlightenment in favour of the new Romantic Movement.
Botticelli, Sandro	real name Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi (1445-1510), one of the leading painters of the Florentine Renaissance. He developed a highly personal style characterised by elegant execution, a sense of melancholy, and a strong emphasis on line; details in his paintings appear as sumptuous still lifes.
Burns, Robert (1759-1796)	Scottish poet and writer of traditional Scottish folk songs.
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772-1834)	English poet, critic, and philosopher, who was a leader of the Romantic movement.
Dryden, John (1631-1700)	English poet, dramatist, and critic.
Lawson, Henry (1867-1922)	Australian poet, writer of short stories and the best known of all the <i>Bulletin</i> contributors.
Mysticism	an immediate, direct, intuitive knowledge of God or of ultimate reality attained through personal religious experience.
Mallarmé Stéphane (1842-1898)	French poet, one of the originators of the Symbolist movement.
Regnier	French Symbolist writer who later abandoned Symbolism for Classical forms and themes.
Romantic tradition	in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America, a movement that lasted from around 1750 to about 1870, characterised by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealisation of nature. The term <i>Romantic</i> first appeared in 18th-century English and originally meant "romance-like", that is, resembling the fanciful character of medieval romances.
Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792-1822)	English poet, one of the most influential leaders of the Romantic movement.

Symbolist Movement

a movement in literature and the visual arts that originated in France in the late 19th century. In Literature a Symbol combines an image with a concept. Baudelaire and his followers created the image of the poet as a seer, who could see through and beyond the real world to the world of ideal forms and essences.

Slessor, Kenneth (1901-1971) Australian poet, newspaper editor, writer of light verse, and club raconteur.

UNIT 3 THE NOTION OF AUSTRALIA

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 The Obsession with Australia
- 3.2 The Father of Modern Australian Poetry
- 3.3 *South Country*
- 3.4 R D Fitzgerald
- 3.5 *This Night's Orbit.*
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 Glossary

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In the last unit we looked at the work of Brennan and Neilson who were the precursors to the modern era in Australian poetry. I hope you remember that in Unit I, I spoke of the publication of Slessor's *Thief of The Moon* (1924) which can be regarded as the beginning of modern poetry. In this unit, we shall read about Kenneth Slessor and R D Fitzgerald for whom the way was paved by the earlier poets when they started writing in the 1920s. As usual, we shall touch upon the influences that affected their thoughts and style and how they influenced other writers in turn. We shall be reading one poem of each of these poets in detail. If you look into your reader, you will find that there are a number of poems which have Australia as their theme. Prose writers too have felt it necessary to write about Australia. In this unit, we will be looking very briefly at the possible reasons for this, see how the country has shaped the sensibility of its writers, in what ways they interacted with it and gave expression to their attitudes and involvement with not only the country but the *idea* of the country.

3.1 THE OBSESSION WITH AUSTRALIA

When I first got interested in the field of Australian literature, a friend who taught Geography at Mayo College, Ajmer, asked me, 'Do you know how Australia got its name?' I did not and I am pretty sure you do not either! So here is what he told me: before the continent was 'discovered' by white settlers, ships would routinely sail around the world, taking advantage of the trade winds. On one such voyage, the captain of a Portuguese ship noticed a land mass and entered it into his chart as '*terra australis incognita*' which means 'unknown land to the South' (*terra* - land, *australis* - southern, *incognita* - unknown). Although I have been unable to verify this, I have no reason to doubt my friend's version as it sounds quite plausible!

Well, the land is no more unknown, is it? And it has grown and developed its own identity to the extent that we are now studying its literature! The concept of national identity, a continuity of tradition and values, troubled thinking Australians. Writers specially, felt the lack of a rich repository of cultural resources to draw upon and as far as forms and genres were concerned, they had to rely upon their own, singularly unique perceptions of a cultural past and history which was basically European.

The Australian tradition did not flow with any continuity from one writer to another, all joined in some communality of interest. This feeling of fragmentation, of the lack

of a recognisably unified tradition tended to affect writers. The thoughtful Australian was trapped between allegiance to his European historical roots and the new geography: the size of Australia and the sense of his own personality expanding to accommodate that immensity. The new continent spoke in the present tense. Europe spoke in the past, offering values and cultural experience that put the traditionless Australian into a position of apparent inferiority. Even more destructively, it inhibited Australian self-realisation. The weapons of the country were its emptiness, its sameness, its distances, its extremes of climate; the weapons of its settlers were endurance, persistence, a home-made ingenuity, and a sardonic attitude to the failures and reverses that they soon learned to expect.

The process by which a writer seeks to secure a closer emotional relationship with his/her country is to produce an inventory of its features, to survey its flora and fauna, in order to revise its ideological place. By naming it, there is an attempt to bring the strange land into the domain of familiar discourse. But the strangeness of the land is not always to be overcome. The image of the land as exotic and harsh is a persistent one - it may be a device for retaining the power of the familiar culture to designate what is strange and what is familiar.

If white history is felt to be short, the maps unfilled, it is assumed to be the duty of writers to supply the lack, to provide images of the land and its experience that will sustain it. And while many of them take that metaphysical national duty seriously, most seem conscious of it as a discursive process by which cultural meaning is attached to images of the physical environment. There is the need to find an appropriate relationship between land and meaning. There is the implicitly held belief that geography is destiny.

Before one's country can become an accepted background against which the writer's imagination can move unhindered, it must first be observed, understood, described and absorbed. The writer must be at peace with his/her landscape before s/he can turn confidently to its human figures. But in Australian writing, the landscape seems to have a life of its own, it forces its way into the foreground and seems to take up an immense lot of room. This is because Australia means more to its inhabitants than mere environment and mere land to be occupied, ploughed and brought into subjection. It has been the outer equivalent of an inner reality - the reality of exile and the reality of newness and freedom. From the beginning, Australia loomed large in the consciousness of her white invaders - either as a prison to be escaped from as soon as possible failing which, to be endured till death or as a new country of hope and faith.

There has also been a resentment at being one of the British colonies, at the beck and call of British masters. In trying to write *about* Australia, there is an attempt to establish and confirm one's individual identity and the denial of a subservience to mainstream culture. It is as though the writers, by delineating the Australian landscape and character of its inhabitants, are trying to stand up in front of the world to shout 'Look at us - we are not English'. If, in writing about their distinctive characteristics they can make the world recognise the Australian as a separate entity, the writers will have achieved their wish.

Eliot would not have written a poem called 'America', Baudelaire one called 'France', or Rilke one called 'Austria'. Behind these "Australia" poems is a particular cultural phase, a different intellectual milieu and a completely different historical situation. In some poems there is the sense of Australia's future and destiny and the country tends to be viewed through the colours of fervent patriotism rather than dispassionately observed. Others sweep this sort of '*mera Australia mahaan*' aside. Some are dogmatic or monolithic in their vision; some, consciously or unconsciously, transport their vision from elsewhere and seek to impose it; some are pluralist and prepared to allow for contradictory demands. But all rely on Australia as a source of metaphor.

3.2 THE FATHER OF MODERN AUSTRALIAN POETRY

It is in the period from the end of World War I to the present that Australian literature has really attained maturity. It is a maturity attested by the emergence of fresh talent, the range and variety of the literary output and by the greater degree of sophistication and accomplishment to be found not only in creative writing itself but also in the criticism. In the period between the publication of *Thief of The Moon* and *Five Bells* (also by Slessor, in 1939), Australian verse can be seen as gradually becoming contemporary in tone, attitude and technique, in the sharpness of image and occasional cynicism, in its adjustment to the atmosphere of the city and the ability to even find beauty in city life.

When we talk about influences on modern Australian poets, one name that looms large is that of Norman Lindsay, who, in his lifetime, was a figure of controversy and adulation. A cartoonist, painter, novelist and author of one of Australia's classic children's stories, he very early laid down his philosophy and values to which he remained constant throughout his long life. The vitalism and gaiety which underscored his controversial paintings were too attractive to be ignored by the upcoming creative people of the day. Lindsay himself consciously expounded this 'vitalism' as a philosophy. The immediately positive effects of Lindsay's 'vitalist' ideas upon the poets was to stimulate a delight in clear, colourful surface detail and a celebration of the overwhelming vitality of the masculine Life Force.

A poet, who as a young man, had come under the influence of the Norman Lindsay circle, is Kenneth Slessor (1901 -'71). He was one of Lindsay's earliest followers and in many of his attitudes and beliefs, remained constant to the Master. Lindsay's position was elaborately anti-materialistic - an attitude that is appealing to the idealistic young people of any generation and his demonstration of *Gaiety and Vitalism* was glamorous and intoxicating. Also, his promise of rekindling the classic culture in Australia, after snatching it away from decadent Europe, and lustful America, was tempting as Australians were only too painfully aware of the lack of cultural traditions in their own country.

Slessor may be called the father of modern Australian poetry, and is the most important poet in Australian history after John Shaw Neilson. His most active writing life occurred between the late 1920s and the end of World War II. Once he had shaken off Lindsay's influence on his style, Slessor began to write the earliest poetry in the country that showed the influence of European and American contemporaries, especially T S Eliot. Slessor has more claim at being a more true national poet than any other outback writer. His masterpiece is *Five Bells*, a lament for a dead friend that portrays Sydney and its harbour from the time of the early settlement to the modern city of showboats and naval destroyers. Slessor's sense of history pervades his vision of the present day, and is displayed in poems of past hardship and cruelty, such as in *Vesper—Song of the Reverend Samuel Marsden*.

Slessor's early works rapidly outdistanced that of his contemporaries in its technical absorption of the material and attitudes of Lindsay. However, his continually introspective mind rubbed against a colder darkness beyond the dazzle of the asserted Life Force. In a later poem, *Stars*, there is a self-directed irony which barely conceals the whole horror of a universe from which godhead has been drained away, and in which man has been reduced to meaninglessness. Whenever he uses a light, cynical manner, one cannot help but remember the depths of darkness which lie behind it.

From this point, his poetry becomes a series of explorations along different corridors of escape from this dark vision. This was a specially disturbing vision for the man who had accepted the philosophy of Lindsay's 'vitalism'.

By the time Slessor virtually stopped writing poetry in 1938, he had made notable explorations into new territory. His *Five Visions of Captain Cook* opened a vein of 'voyager' poems that consolidated important myths of heritage and ancestry in Australian poetry, an area that continued to be mined by such poets as Fitzgerald and others.

His poetry is notable for its powerful images and visual impact. He shows signs of romanticism and a sense of humour which is more or less submerged. He is disillusioned about the conditions in which man is set, conditions which crucify him but he retains a sensuous delight in certain aspects of nature, an intoxication even, with their loveliness. He has a gift for the expression of the essential texture, shape, character and sensual impact of objects which allowed him to transform the merely ornamental imagist effects of the school he followed into a revelation of the metaphysical sense of the sensual. His poetry has the power of illuminating the miracle of naked existence. His humanity saves him from shallowness and his great triumph is taking unpromising material, accepting the romantic jumble and creating a genuine poetic world out of it. He has created a country of the mind for poetry and demonstrated that for Australia, such a country is as suitable a source of creation as the native landscape.

Slessor's small but significant number of landscape poems like *South Country* were important precursors of the 'poetic identification of regional inscape' that later characterised so much of the poetry written in the 1940s. He also attempted to domesticate certain current overseas influences - Owen, Sitwell, Eliot - at a time when European and American intellectual energy was regarded in Australia as decadent or too remote.

In 1940 Slessor was appointed official war correspondent with the Australian army, an experience that inspired his acclaimed war poems *Beach Burial* and *An Inscription for Dog River*. Slessor's later silence seemed puzzling to his contemporaries specially since he had set in motion the discussion of many issues that were taken up in the 1940s. However, the Creative Effort, as Lindsay had asserted, was justified for Slessor has survived : as a poet of desperation and despair.

3.3 SOUTH COUNTRY

Please read *South Country* now and answer the questions that follow before you read my interpretation of the poem.

- a) Does the poet relate the landscape to human beings in any way?
- b) How does the poet evoke the senses in his description?
- c) Do you think he is being serious or sarcastic in his comments?

Discussion

Slessor, a loving citizen of Sydney, was not really given to writing about Australian country scenes. But *South Country* is one poem which deals with the Australian landscape. This poem shows something of a quality very visible in his poetry - a physical rather than a sensual imagination, a sense of objective things vividly present but not deeply imagined in feeling. It is a quality not only found in the images he gives us but in the obvious need to give, in sound, texture and rhythm, the rub and bruise of solids that are in contact with us. Even the thunderstorm is 'flesh' and Slessor's fondness for the echoing of vowel and consonantal sounds within rather abrupt rhythms emphasises the sense of physique.

The senses of touch and sight are evoked repeatedly throughout the poem, whether it be in the detailing of the landscape, the quality of light, or the approaching storm. The vegetation is pale and characterless with no distinguishing landmarks to set the miles apart. There is only 'whey-faced anonymity', the monotony of which grates on the imagination. There is an ascribing of human qualities to the trees as though they have finally reached an end to their 'arguments...doubts and quarrelling... plots and pains' and have flattened out in clear distances 'like an abrupt solution'.

The 'flat earth of empty farms' is symbolic of the void that is so essentially a part of Slessor's work, his recognition of the emptiness that lurks in a spiritually depleted world. In a continuation of this idea, the colour of the sunlight is depicted as tainted - it is no longer bright and unclouded but is 'rotting' for it has been tinged by the hue of the imminent storm with its 'black, bruised flesh'.

The fourth stanza is vividly physical. The huge pressure of air 'pounding the bony ridge', the spine of the earth - its mountains - as it were, is vibrant with a sexual imagery which, combined with the reference to the 'drench of light', is suggestive of new life and beginnings. The storm clouds have passed and out of the blackness there pours forth a luminous ray of light which erases the horizon and obliterates the demarcation between sky and earth so that one seems to be walking 'on the sky's beach'. The 'dwindled hills' are implicative of the ancience of the land which has rounded and flattened the contours of the elevated areas over centuries of wind and rain. The little bulges seem to have forced their way up from under the earth like skulls seeking air in a spirit of rebellion, refusing to give up and just smother to death. The Australian spirit of determination is evoked in this image, giving rise as it does, to the picture of a frail, fragile life unwilling to give up the fight against the harshness of the land and the wrath of the gods.

The little knobs of hills are like 'skulls' evocative of the intellect, the thinker who, in spite of the adversity of his environment, still pushes his way up to the air in an attempt to express his thoughts and communicate his feelings. They are symbolic of the Australian writers who did not find an environment conducive to creative endeavour yet strove to leave their mark in the literary world.

The poem is most remarkable for its fusion of mood and style. It is a highly ambivalent piece - the initial solution of the plain landscape giving way to an oppressive sense of vastness and overwhelming clarity; the sense of understanding giving way to a sense of being obliterated. It expresses mingled distaste and fear. The combination and relating of images of decay with phenomena like sunlight and thunderstorms (usually associated with vitality and renewal) contributes powerfully to the ambivalent feeling of the whole. So does the sense of deadening immensity further reinforced by the image of the hills, so far away that they are dwarfed by the enormous sky and yet asserting themselves against the emptiness: they are buried by air. The poem's balance comes from this dynamic fusion of the dead and the living, the human and the inhuman, the growing and the diminishing. Here one feels that the landscape is not being used to convey a mood or a state of mind but that both inseparably illustrate each other.

There is irony in the poem, an emotion which is obviously not taking itself too seriously, a sense of slightly mocking emphasis and exaggeration. The landscape in the poem is experienced as something verging on the absurd, the portentous, unmanageable by the imagination, something which mocks any feelings one may start to have about it. This is genuine Australian irony, allied to their fondness for 'tall stories' of a wildly exaggerated improbability, their easy going slang, their liking to cope with immediate physical problems, their lack of passion and violent engagement. It is obviously a kind of defence, perhaps inevitable in a transplanted people face to face with the unhomely enormity of their oversized and intemperate continent.

This irony is the lesser irony - the defence-irony which moves too easily from the strength of not taking oneself too solemnly or pompously to the weakness of not

taking anything seriously. The greater defence is not defence but exposure : it knows how feelings passionately believed in can be opposed by others equally valid. It exposes one to the irony of existence.

South Country, full of quiet passion, unspectacular, finely made, shows how in an unexpected way, contemporary Australian poetry may express the experience of being Australian. The poem has a universal and not a local theme. It does not represent any Australian outlook but perhaps it does represent the isolation and loneliness of Australia in an indirect way. It expresses the experience of being a poet in Australia, far from the sophisticated centres of the 'old world'.

3.4 R D FITZGERALD

The influence of Norman Lindsay was not confined to Slessor. Robert D Fitzgerald 1902-1971, the only other Australian poet of stature in the '30s, was another disciple and, when Douglas Stewart took up the position of literary editor of the *Sydney Bulletin*, he helped to extend the basic tenets of the Vitalist philosophy. There was no exhibition of a romantic swagger or heroic self-consciousness. There was an emphasis on action rather than intellect, on the physical rather than the emotional, a rejection of subtleties of thought and feeling, a tendency towards statement rather than suggestion, a certain lushness of imagery and perception. These traces can still be found in the writing of certain writers. Fitzgerald's early work displayed an attachment to the Lindsayan fantasy, a phase which he soon left behind. The publication of his collection of poems *Moonlight Acre* established him as a poet of a comparable stature as his friend Kenneth Slessor.

Fitzgerald's voice is different from Slessor's, being more stocky and physical in a firm but not sensuous way. His gruff containment within the experienced world, 'It is enough that trees are trees, that earth is earth and stone is stone' opens up possibilities for the imagination. There is a reflection of Brennan's resolute, densely textured style in Fitzgerald's manner. He is a slow-moving and philosophical poet.

While Slessor seemed to be in danger of withdrawing from reality, Fitzgerald's attitude is threatened by complacency. His later work was a continual effort towards growth - leading to achievement - within the boundaries of a sustained **determinist** philosophy. His greatest achievement was to capture and compress a sense of historical presence in a world ridden with inherited guilt. The unyielding boundaries of events throw the poet back to the most fruitful of sources : man caught in action, and its interchange.

The richly allusive humanistic concern that can be found in his best poems stretches his imperiousness and restrained pride to more flexible limits. His technique of concentrating on each word and phrase makes it inappropriate to the lyric form and he is at his best in the longer, meditative and historical poems. Fitzgerald is fundamentally a scientist as well as a poet.

If one looks for romantic striving and life-enlarging ambitions in his work, one may be disappointed and apt to judge it limited in its range. However, his sensible, down to earth attitude may prove to be more enduring than the delicate responses of other poets.

Fitzgerald is fascinated by moonlight and the idea which predominates over the image is of clear statement and indignation over paradox and pity. In spite of the limitations in his poetry from the point of view of sensuous immediacy or vitality and flexibility of language, he is a humanly appealing poet - resolutely optimistic, prepared to celebrate the world of human action and endeavour. He has a deep belief in the power of the life force, of some central energy in existence which keeps life moving. He believes above all, in the value of action, of doing things and nearly all his poems are a declaration of this faith.

His position in Australian literature is still uncertain. His poetry does not give the sense of width and experience or of feeling and there is a certain homogeneity of theme and ideas which limits his range. There is a preoccupation with the connection between past and present, the need to grasp life and a sense of meaning through action; admiration for dogged persistence and the sheer capacity to endure; a sense that every thing and every person is significant and must have a place in the scheme of things. His imagery is largely drawn from the world of tides and currents, rocks and stones, pylons, metal towers, concrete and steel - images of things that both endure; change and flow or else represent spiritual and mental creations.

In the 1940s and '50s, Fitzgerald provided strength, presence and reassurance when there was a sudden onrush of national and regional awareness brought about by World War II. There was the first genuine threat to the nation's borders and Fitzgerald's work, asserting human and ancestral values, was in response to the fears and trepidation of that period when the rejection of moral and traditional values was as unwelcome in Australia as it was in fashion abroad. At one point of time, the literary scene was dominated by the monolithic and conservative influence of Douglas Stewart and Fitzgerald.

3.5 *THIS NIGHT'S ORBIT*

Now, please read *This Night's Orbit* and try to understand what the poet is trying to say with the help of these questions.

- a) What does the title suggest to you with regard to the passing of time?
- b) Does the past vanish, never to return, or are we left with a certain residue of moments gone by? Relate this to the ideas generated by the title.
- c) What, according to the poet, is the worst thing you could have done and which you might regret at a later time?

Discussion

The very title stirs up the sense of the inexorable movement of time, the feeling of continuity as expressed in a cycle of the orbit of the planets. The orbit moves in a circle where there is no beginning and no end. The revolution and rotation of the orbs is a sign of the universal order and the night's orbit indicates the passing of many such nights while, at the same time, presaging the approach of many more. Human life is also dictated by the sequence of night and day and is thus, of necessity, bound to the universal pattern and rhythm while the waxing and waning of the moon has its counterpart in phases of mortal life and existence.

While the poet walks back and forth on the moonlit grass outside his house, he is reminded of the other times that he has done so and recognises that those moments have vanished into the past, never to return and that this a natural occurrence. If this were not the case, he 'would not be bound in this night's orbit or this moon's'. Being mortal, he has to accept that time drifts away inevitably. Sometimes even one's memories dim and one is left only with hazy remembrances - but there will be other nights and days in the cycle of life, bound as we are to the night's orbit and the moon's.

The past is always with him at every turn of the road - 'old scenes are blown like sand across these hillocks' - as he revolves memories around in his head. The present would not be what it is if it were not for the past and sometimes it is tempting to let go off the present and evade its responsibilities by escaping into the bylanes of memory, to allow one's head to 'bury in the past'. But then the poet expresses his determination to meet 'the fresh hour' as he has always done. The past, precious as it may be, is not to be sacrificed at the altar of regret or fond recollections. There is the

acceptance of the need to get on with life, a rebuttal of Shelley's lament that 'we look before and after and pine for what is not'.

It is natural to look back on our life and catalogue our sins of omission and commission, 'regret blunders made, chances killed outright', the worst being not to use our time constructively. Days thus passed unprofitably are soul-destroying, entirely joyless without affording even an iota of satisfaction at something achieved. But as we leave that behind, the wheel of time and fortune turns on relentlessly and we find history repeating itself. The more things change, the more they remain the same. Although people and events may be different, the nature of the interaction is alike, given the sameness of human nature. 'Wars, business' go on as usual and one finds oneself participating in this grand pageant willy-nilly whether of one's volition or otherwise.

And while he gets on with the business of living, he makes forays into the past, drawing from previous knowledge and fashioning of it, the new stuff of experience which will lead him on Time's pathway - overgrown now - but one which he can still navigate blindfolded as the roads traversed earlier are still clear in his imagination.

The poem features a regular rhyme scheme of ab, ab. The similes where he pictures the past as being alive to him at every moment are vivid and evocative. Time is pictured as a winding road over the earlier part of which grass grows and is forgotten. The comparisons and images from nature serve to emphasise the cyclical nature of existence, our inextricable bond with and unquestionable obedience to its laws.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

The land becomes a natural subject for an Australian poet - the discovery of the South land, the significance of that discovery and hence of modern Australia in the history of the human spirit. Slessor and Fitzgerald, both influenced in individual ways by Lindsay's Vitalist philosophy, made strong statements about the nature of human existence. *South Country* is a passionately written poem which brings out the ironic mindset of the Australian spirit. It speaks of the isolation of the continent and of what it means to be a poet there, far from the 'happening' centres of art, culture and philosophy. *This Night's Orbit* is a more personal poem, meandering through the corridors of the poet's memory as he contemplates his past and future and revolves memories in his mind, seeking to relate them to his growth as a human being.

3.7 QUESTIONS

- 1) In what ways do the poets use the land to express their feelings? Why do you think there is so great a focus on the land? Please try to answer this in your own words, adding to the ideas I have already given you in this unit.
- 2) Why did they need to come to terms with the land before they could get involved in their creative endeavours? You could draw upon information given in other blocks as well, to answer this question.
- 3) Pick out the physical images in *South Country* and say how it sets the tone of the poem.
- 4) In what ways can you find the influence of the Vitalist philosophy in Slessor's poem?
- 5) Do you think *South Country* is a pessimistic poem or an optimistic one? Could you offer reasons, supported by the text for your opinion?
- 6) What sort of a picture of the Australian landscape is drawn in the poem? Could you, basing your observations on the text, write a brief description of the physical features of the country?

- 7) Is *This Night's Orbit* a forward-looking or a backward-looking poem? State your reasons.
- 8) When one looks back on one's life, what are the thoughts that come to mind according to the poet?
- 9) In what ways does the poet draw equivalents between the natural course of events and human life?
- 10) Make a list of the similes and metaphors used in the poem and say how they carry the poet's ideas across to the reader.

3.8 GLOSSARY

Determinism	the doctrine that all events including human action are determined by causes regarded as external to the will.
Eliot, Thomas Stearns (1888-1965)	American-born English poet, literary critic, dramatist, and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, who is best known for his poem <i>The Waste Land</i> .
Owen, Wilfred (1893-1918)	British poet.
Sitwell, Dame Edith (1887-1964)	English poet, critic, and biographer, who was most successful as a writer of satirical verse.
Vitalism	an aspect of the philosophy of idealism (the claim that ideas, or abstract and immaterial essences precede and give rise to the material) arguing that living organisms, no matter how simple, are distinct from nonliving entities by possessing a non-physical, nonchemical "vital force".

UNIT 4 KEEPERS OF THE FLAME

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Judith Wright
- 4.2 *Legend*
- 4.3 *Bullocky*
- 4.4 David Campbell
- 4.5 *The Australian Dream*
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Questions
- 4.8 Glossary

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will be looking at the first woman poet in this Block and see how her poetry developed over the years from voicing feminist and feminine concerns to an environmentally conscious one which overrides all gender and national barriers. We shall be reading two of her poems in detail in this unit. The other poet we will be discussing is David Campbell who has shown his excellence in the area of nature poetry. However, the poem which we will be discussing is concerned with Australian attitudes and is not a nature poem. The poem embodies many of the attitudes of Australian writers that I spoke about in Unit III. It is purely Australian in spirit and tone.

4.1 JUDITH WRIGHT

In 1944, Judith Wright (b. 1915) published her first *Bulletin* poem and was immediately hailed as a powerful new voice. The first impression did not prove illusory and the feeling that here was a great talent flashing with brilliance, was proved when a number of her poems appeared in rapid succession the same year. Those poems have now become a part of the accepted heritage of Australian verse. Her first collection, *The Moving Image* (1946), was seen as a landmark in which the shorter lyrics explored the landscape and inheritance in a spirit of restless enquiry merged with an apparently effortless mastery over technique. The second collection was *Woman to Man* (1949) and it consolidated her position on the poetic firmament. Her preoccupations with the concept of time led her to deeper, more abstract questions, to the idea of nothingness itself. The question of Man bereft of godhead became one of her central concerns. However, the 'Nothing' apprehended in her work does not possess the quality of cold panic that underlies Slessor's poetry. Despite her constant circling around the theme of mankind's place and purpose in the universe, there is an implicit earth-assurance, the deep knowledge that 'Nothing' is only flux - the continuous flow and change in existence.

Born in New South Wales into one of Australia's pioneer families, Wright grew up in the country, acquiring both a love of the landscape and a concern for the Aborigines which subsequently influenced much of her work. After completing her studies at Sydney University, she travelled in Europe and then, in 1939, settled in Sydney to write. During the war years, however, when there was a shortage of labour, she returned to the country to help out on the family stock farm. This renewed contact with her childhood environment stimulated Wright's creativity which led to the

publication in 1946, of *The Moving Image*. Over a dozen individual collections have followed as well as several selections including *The Double Tree: Selected Poems 1942-1976* (1978) and *The Human Pattern: Selected Poems* (1990).

In her early poems Wright uses nature as the key to a greater understanding of human experience, and the poems disclose an imagination responsive to the moods of nature, curious about the legacy of the past and moved by the suffering of people and animals. The lyrical impulse is strong and the poetic logic is shaped by feeling and intuitive awareness rather than reason and thought. But in later collections the quest for an ultimate reality takes her beyond the immediate world of the senses. The exploratory, tentative poetic statements were superseded by the assured, mature lyricism of *Woman to Man* at the heart of which are poems about a woman's experiences of love and childbirth. They are poems of passion which express fine shades of feeling in striking images and render the intangible in sensuous terms. In this collection, Wright revealed and gave voice to aspects of human experience which had hitherto been unexpressed. This was done dramatically, in the form of a monologue, frankly and with tact but without any affectation.

Her earlier volumes are densely packed with invocations and rich piles of imagery, in an attempt to define the undefinable fear that existence is really a black void and life itself is only an illusion of death. However, each successive book developed and remoulded her basic themes and the treatment of those themes. The thematic changes have been pretty radical. There has been a shift from the feeling that words are inadequate to a recognition that words are primal; Time as an intractable enemy, to time as an acceptable framework for freedom of action; from a view of the world as a shadowy form of death and Nothingness to a celebration of the life force and the affirmation that 'man (kind) is central to the maze where all's made new'. However, her search throughout has been a metaphysical journey seeking harmony with the essential energies of life. At all stages of her development, the illumination of her seeking has provided the context for the poems during that period. This is itself unusual in Australian literature as most poets are content to adopt a static viewpoint or have written from only one phase of their experience. Her poetry has matured from a mixture of country and feminist themes to an impassioned defence of the environment that now faces all kinds of commercial encroachment.

Judith Wright's work has little to do with the great movements and concerns which have consumed the European and American literary minds. The primary reason for this was that she needed to solve a conflict between language and experience itself - experiences of a land utterly foreign to the language that was being used to express it. She had been brought up on the land, she lived on the land, she loved the land but - she was not of the land. The spiritual power of an outcrop of rock for example which might be expressed by an Aborigine, would be totally out of the realm of the European collective consciousness and its vocabulary, symbolism and meaning. It is the problem of all colonial cultures that they never went through the period of a stage of trying or actually learning the land. This gives rise to intensely-felt cries of disillusionment, an emotion to be seen in Wright's *The Moving Image*.

What makes her poetry distinctive is that she manages to achieve a balance between the experience of the land and the imagist poetic form which arises from the culture she had her roots in. In contrast to Slessor's landscapes in *South Country* and *Crow Country*, which are like masterful colour sketches done in bold strokes, she does not treat the land as an object but as the action of the spirit. In one sense then, the land remains remote, outside her poems yet an essential part of them.

She was of course, not alone in attempting a true understanding of the land in its natural state for the Jindyworobaks tried something similar. What was different in the approach of the latter was that they wanted both the land and the language to remain untouched and as they were, with the addition or deletion of a few Aboriginal words.

Moving away from the theme of alienation of colonial sensibility from the genius of the land, in her next book, she goes on to a poetry that negates the whole idea of the land as an environment for the human consciousness.

It could be said that the development of themes in her books appear to follow the pattern of human relationships. The early poems have a solitude which slowly blossoms into the duality of sexual love culminating in parental love and are crowned by the realisation that all experience is valid to human life. Since 1961, Wright has moved away from large fixed issues. There has been an increased immediacy in her poems, one may even call it a relaxation. One of the aspects of her earlier volumes was an avoidance, even in the love poems, of nuances of human exchange but the later poems have opened up from their earlier reserve. Even if they have lost something in intensity, they have gained in warmth.

She is not a satirist and her poems on the subjects of environmental protection, war and technological development are impulsive cries of outrage rather than calculated essays in ridicule. She shows a compulsive urge in some of her poems to reach out to the far beyond, believes that there should be some fluid interplay between the human and the natural world and opposes the mystic world of the night against the perceptions of the day. There is a marked preference for an intuitive understanding of reality. She is mainly lyrical in most of her poems, with leanings towards a ruminative, mystical apprehension of experience. A fundamental tenet of her credo as a poet is that the basic fact of our human situation resides in our bold confrontation with the encircling night of silence and in forcing it to give out some kind of a spark. For her, the poet is basically a 'maker' - maker of poems and meanings - understood not in the sense of an inert phenomenon but as a vital living force. The poet does not function as an observer of nature but is an active ally in creating forms. The poet's role is described in terms of the functions of the soil and the lake - 'the source of all living things that are'. The attempt to get back to the core of the vitalist forces of the natural world also implies that one becomes aware of the glaring realities of the world around us, of the gaping chasm between the phenomenal world and the spiritual. In some poems she accuses Australian colonial society of crimes against the land and its original inhabitants as also against other lands and people - Vietnam for instance. The reason for this cruelty she says is because we have allowed ourselves to become mechanistic and have abdicated human responsibility. In the final analysis, she is the messenger of love, humility and courage.

Although best known for her poetry, Wright has also published short stories, essays, books for children, and a major critical study *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1965). In her role as an activist she campaigns for Aboriginal rights and also supports conservation issues, such as the fight to save the **Great Barrier Reef** from mineral exploitation.

As I have done in the earlier units, I present a few simple questions for you to answer after reading the two poems of Wright.

4.2 *LEGEND*

- a) Do you think *Legend* only tells the story of a blacksmith's boy or can it be read at a deeper level too?
- b) What are the physical hardships described by the poet that the boy has to face during the course of his quest?
- c) What do you think the rainbow stands for? Does the boy actually pick up the rainbow and take it home with him?

Discussion

Keepers of the Flame

The poem has an almost fairytale-like quality about it. One grows up reading stories of brave young men who, overcoming all manner of dangers, are finally crowned with incredible success and riches. *Legend* talks about the pioneering spirit of the settlers of Australia who were full of the spirit of adventure and willing to risk their lives for a dream. They had confidence in their ability to conquer all obstacles in their path, to attain their objective and the poem is a paean to the vibrant spirit of the founding fathers of modern Australia.

The very first words - 'the blacksmith's boy' - sets the tone. This is not a poem about people of noble birth or those born into the aristocratic fold with all its accompanying comforts and advantages, it is a story of a poor blacksmith's boy - a member of the labouring class - who sets out on his quest with a rifle (even that breaks up later) and a dog. The poem is placed in an egalitarian society and projects Australia as the land of opportunity, ready to reward those who have the heart to toil and the determination to succeed.

The 'cobwebs' of routine and tradition, the temptations of the creature comforts of a settled, secure life cling to his feet and try to hamper his seeking steps. Likewise, the land poses its own difficulties - 'rivers hindered him, thorn-branches caught at his eyes to make him blind' and the sky turns to an ominous hue, portending a violent storm. But, he 'didn't mind'. This is an optimistic understatement, with the lines that follow reflecting the dogged intention, die-hard spirit and stout-heartedness of the boy.

The second stanza delineates the physical adversities that beleaguer him, appearing suddenly as if from nowhere while the voice of convention discourages his adventurous spirit crying, 'you'll soon be dead'. But nothing deters him and he continues on his way, in spite of the heavy rain which falls upon him in sheets like a mat of hair. Soon, night falls and the blackness of oblivion and failure is ready to swallow him up. Gentle, faint-hearted creatures wail while the grass gets ready to receive his body. Everything fails him - his rifle breaks, his hat blows away and even his faithful companion, the dog, deserts him. But not for him the pliant acceptance of a malignant fate for he is willing to risk all in order to realise his vision.

And, sure enough, 'just as his heart foretold', he sees a rainbow cresting the mountain, appearing 'in front of the night', holding back the forces of darkness. The rainbow is a natural phenomenon, appearing as it does, after the rain and is symbolic of the reward that is to be attained if one perseveres long and hard enough. In order to get his hands on the rainbow, he needs to be nimble, fleet-footed and flexible - all qualities essential for success in the rough and tumble of life. Victory does not come without a price, however - the rainbow is not an unmixed blessing for it is both a 'ring of gold' and 'a bar of ice'. The pessimists - the pigeon, the magpie and the dove - stop their fearful wailing and crowd around to stare at his prize.

The entire poem is replete with similes from the world of Nature. The preponderance of the colour black in the first three stanzas is contrasted in the concluding stanzas, with the multi-hued brightness of the rainbow which is radiant and intense enough to drive away the night.

The last stanza presents the conqueror as hunter with his prey slung over his shoulder, homeward bound as obstacles mysteriously make way for him. There is the recognition of the Australian spirit of determination in 'all the world said... nobody else has done anything to equal it'. The Australians have created a nation, overcoming the alienness of the land and the hardships of its landscape and the poem pays tribute to the creative and experimental temper of the first settlers.

4.3 BULLOCKY

- a) Does the description of the bullocky and his work sound familiar to you? Where would you come across a scene like this? Are the conditions the same?
- b) Do you think the bullocky is a young man? Are there any markers in the poem which might suggest his age?
- c) Is there a difference in the landscape towards the end of the poem?

Discussion

The poem depicts the hard, backbreaking drudgery of the early settlers, the hardworking toilers of the field who, in tandem with their strong beasts of burden, worked doggedly throughout the year in all vagaries of the weather to make the land fertile.

Time passes quickly as the bullocky labours without any human company, only his strong team of bullocks working shoulder to shoulder with him until finally, the 'striding years' take their toll and time 'runs widdershins in his brain'. Involved in his back-breaking labour day in and day out, he loses track of time which suddenly seems to start moving in the opposite direction so that he retreats into the mythical past. With no one to share his tedious hours, there is a detachment from reality and madness of a sort sets in as he begins to see 'fiends and angels' using his road.

There is the recognition that a land grows fruitful through the labour of its uneducated, working-class and not its aristocracy and that they should be given due credit. In so doing, the bullocky assumes a larger than life dimension and passes into the realm of myth and the Australian legend. He is **Moses** and there is the identification of the Australian tradition with pre-Christian and Christian traditions, sanctified by age, and the transfer of legend into myth. A new dimension of continuity has been added to the uniqueness. This too is part of the process of identification - this re-definition of the Australian symbols of the discoverer, the pioneer, the bushman, in terms of everyman.

The never-say-die spirit of the pioneers is epitomised in the image of the bullocky metamorphosing into 'Moses, and the slaves his suffering and stubborn team'. And, at the end of his day of labour, the bullocky fills the half-lighted funnel of the day with his prophecies, the future thus being inextricably linked with the past and present. The 'half-light pillars' reinforce the dreamlike quality of the situation while the 'steeped cone of night', with its evocation of a church steeple, in combination with Moses and his prophecies, underlines the spiritual connotations.

Beyond 'the campfire's crimson ring', the atmosphere is saturated with ancestral sounds; the land is alive with the past. The darkness, far from being threatening, is nurturing and filled with benevolent spirits and he is 'cupped' by it, as though enfolded in an embrace. The bullocky has vanished into the past and old methods have given way to new - 'grass is across the waggon-tracks and plough strikes bone beneath the grass'. However, the barrenness of the land has yielded forth fruitfulness for now 'vineyards cover all the slopes where the dead teams were used to pass'. The buried bodies still nourish the land - in life and in death, the people and beasts continually enrich the adopted country. The bullocky's bones feed the land he helped to open up and the intimacy of the relationship is suggested by the word 'hand' - the vine holds the land closely as in the sealing of a pledge or a pact, with its sense of inter-relationship and continuity. The land of exile has been converted into a lush and productive one, the font of future generations. There is a parallel drawn between Moses leading the Jews out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land of **Canaan**

and the bullocky through his labour, fashioning for posterity, a promised land of opportunity out of an alien, harsh land.

Keepers of the
Flame

The bullocky was one of the stock, clichéd images of Australian writing and has been the subject of widely different writers. Wright's poem is not a simple piece of realism or affectionately comic observation but a highly-wrought icon, elevating its subject matter through its range of references and its deliberately mannered choice of words and images. However, it bears the same kind of relationship to its predecessors as Hope's *Australia* bears to the patriotic, nationalistic poems which preceded it. For all the heightened realism of its detail, the poem builds up a sense of religious awe for human kind and their work. It relates two backgrounds - that of the bullock driver of pioneering days and of the Shepherd of the Bible, relating the former's life and the meaning of his existence to that of the Old Testament Prophet. The poem has an intricate pattern of symbolism and is shaped towards a sense of affirmation and a celebration of achievement and is an extraordinarily compact tribute to a pioneer.

There is the concept of time as an imposition, imprisoning its creators and the means through which the poet escapes its tyranny is by manipulating Time by spatially telescoping it. This can be seen very clearly in this poem, the most celebrated of her poems on the theme of the transplanted culture of the Australians. The tone of this imagery is repeatedly one of longing : the wish to be other, not to be an intruding European sensibility. As she has written approvingly elsewhere : 'Ours is a poetry without echoes ... may it not be that the only real maturity lies in striking out one's own line, remaining faithful to one's own experience?'

4.4 DAVID CAMPBELL

Brought up on the family sheep station in New South Wales, Campbell (1915-1979) went to Cambridge University where he developed a love for poetry. Returning to Australia he worked as a **jackeroo** before serving with the Royal Australian Air Force during World War II. After the war, Campbell lived on various stations in the Canberra area, dividing his time between farming and poetry.

His first volume, *Speak with the Sun*, appeared in 1949. Its tone is predominantly Australian, with poems about the landscape, life in the bush, and Aboriginal themes. The collection also includes the memorable war poem "Men in Green".

Among Campbell's other collections are *The Miracle of Mullion Hill* (1956), *Poems* (1962), *The Branch of Dodonna* (1970), *Devil's Rock* (1974), and *The Man in the Honeysuckle* (1979). Although his later work retains an Australian dimension, the focus is more universal, often concentrating on contemporary social issues.

In 1964 Campbell was appointed poetry editor of the *Australian*. He received numerous awards for his poetry; he has also produced two collections of short stories and, with Rosemary Dobson, published translations of Russian poetry.

Campbell characterises the best of *The Bulletin* school of nature poets. His first verse was published in 1942 in *The Bulletin* and until the late 1960s, his writing retained a consistent standard of quiet poise and unassuming precision. His admiration of the Elizabethan lyric sharpened the almost ethereal clarity of his countryside songs and sonnets. Under the editorship and encouragement of Douglas Stewart (for many years arbiter of the *Red Pages* of the *Sydney Bulletin*), Campbell worked steadily but by the late '60s, when Stewart's influence had waned and other influences assumed dominance in Australian poetry, Campbell completely remoulded his poetic style, moving beyond country pleasures to grappling - sometimes uncomfortably - with modern times. This striving for immediacy has revitalised his poetry although there has been some loss in the timeless purity of his pastoral lyrics. The essential lyric style still persists and

indeed, seems to be renewed in certain poems. There is a resilience in Campbell's work which becomes more apparent as his range of poetic concerns increases.

4.5 THE AUSTRALIAN DREAM

Read the poem and please give reasons for the opinions you express in the answers to the following questions:

- a) Do you think the poet, as described in the poem, is a rich man? What makes you think so?
- b) Does the Queen seem at a loss and unable to adapt to the situation?
- c) Is it a serious or humorous poem?

The poem is written in an anecdotal style with a regular rhyme scheme which goes aa, bb, cc and so on. The first stanza has a felicity of expression that immediately grabs the reader's attention. The poet's head is 'bronze with claret' when he is suddenly woken up at three in the morning for, after having imbibed freely the previous night, his mind is still foggy and blurred with the effects of the alcohol. 'Light blinded the stairs' in a vivid metaphor as he stumbles down to the door and 'the hatstand sprang upright', assuming substance and shape once it is illuminated, springing up from out of the darkness that surrounds it. And finally, once he manages to open the door, what should he find there but the 'Royal Family with a wavering torch'! The unsteady and dim light of the torch is in ironic contrast to the imperial brightness of the sun that never set on the British Empire in bygone times.

The Queen proceeds to apologise for the intrusion and explains why they are there at all - 'the pubs were full, most of our subjects rude' ... it seems the Queen's Command brings only, "Tell the dead marines!" There is a questioning of tradition and blind loyalty to the Queen and an expression of resentment against the participation of Australia in the war at Britain's bidding, with its consequent high number of casualties. There is also the implicit notion that respect and awe cannot be engendered purely through status or taken for granted over succeeding generations but must be earned through one's life and actions. There is a movement towards a more democratic world in which everyone is equal and respected for their qualities of mind, heart and intellect.

This is brought out more clearly in the lines that follow in which the poet, 'with a laugh', puts them 'at their ease'. The commoner takes up the mantle of graciousness (once the prerogative of the Queen and her family) and hospitality to help bolster their confidence and ease their discomfiture in a delightful reversal of roles.

What a situation to find themselves in - where the Duke has to make do with bedding down in a tiny boiler room in the basement - a far cry indeed, from the grand opulence of the Buckingham Palace - and the Queen, with her mother, has perforce, to share the poet's bedroom! The poet, like a good and courteous host, is willing to make adjustments, and quite happy to spend the rest of the night curled up in a chair. However, the Queen, realising that she has no option but to move with changing times, insists that the poet will share the bed with the two ladies. There is the recognition that it is only through adaptation that a modicum of respect can be gained and that unless she follows the dictates of circumstance and changes her conduct accordingly, she will be consigned to the dust-heap of oblivion. This is symbolised by the act of her removing and placing *The Garter* on a pouf.

When the poet enters his bedroom, he finds their crowns and pearls and regal robes discarded on the 'lowboy', and other items of furniture. There is the contrast between the meanness of his possessions and their splendid dresses and jewellery, brought out tellingly in the line, 'ropes of pearls lassoed the plastic lampshade'. In a

most unlikely turn of phrase, the Queen Mother invites him to 'hop in' and go to sleep, flanked by herself and the Queen.

However, in a residue of awe, the poet finds himself lying rigidly 'like a stick of wood' and totally unable to come to terms with the situation. His heart pulses 'like rollers at the ebb of tide', indicative of an era that is passing, ebbing away. The time has come in which everyone is to participate equally in the dance of life and there will be no kings or commoners. In order to lighten the atmosphere, he says, using a totally incongruous mode of address considering they are all in bed together: 'I hope your Majesties sleep well'. The Queen, quick to recognise this inappropriateness and responding with the generations of graciousness bred into her, pats his hand and asks 'Jock' to call her 'Ma'am'. This too is a sign of transformed times - this shift towards a new informality in which the Queen addresses the poet by his nickname and herself moves several rungs down the ladder towards a more egalitarian position.

The poem is a dream of a time when everyone will be equal and Britain's dominance will be overthrown, to be replaced by a home-grown government more suited to and in tune with Australian aspirations.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

After the early work shaped by personal experience first of a recovered childhood and ancestral past, and then of fulfilment in love, Wright, without losing her sense of place and identity, became increasingly concerned with philosophical issues. Time becomes a central preoccupation. There is also another voice - that of protest - against the destructiveness of Man and his inhumanities. *Legend* depicts the struggle of the early settlers in a light-hearted manner which belies the intensity of the purpose underlying it - that of unveiling the determination and hard work that went into the making of the Australian legend. *Bullocky*, with its vivid evocation of the promised land, displays her concentrated powers of suggestion.

Moving away from his early focus on nature, Campbell remoulded his poetic temperament and perspective, to focus on contemporary issues. His essential lyricism still persists even in his later work, where it is combined with a more universal tone. *The Australian Dream* brings out Campbell's egalitarian attitude, incorporating within its folds, an ironic, hard-hitting critique of the Queen which is characteristic of the Romantics' general disapprobation of institutions and symbols of authority. This is also concomitant with the Australian national ethos - their profound dislike for the Queen which can be traced as far back as Lawson's *The English Queen*.

4.7 QUESTIONS

- 1) What, according to Wright, are the qualities needed to succeed in life? Does she express these openly or do you deduce it from the poems you have read?
- 2) How has the country been transformed into a promised land? What was it like earlier?
- 3) Do you think Australia is a classless society with equal opportunities for all? What make you think so?
- 4) In what way is the comparison of the bullocky with Moses, apt?
- 5) Who are the people who have made a home out of the harshness of Australia?

- 6) How does the repeated use of the adjective 'black' serve to reinforce certain ideas in *Legend*?
- 7) In what way is Campbell's poem democratic?
- 8) What ideas make up the spirit of the Australian dream?
- 9) Do you think the royal family cuts a sorry figure?
- 10) What is the tone of Campbell's poem and what are the factors which serve to set it?

4.8 GLOSSARY

Bullocky	a bullock driver.
Canaan	in the Old Testament, designation of the land to the west of the River Jordan, later known as Palestine, and the name of the reputed ancestor of the Canaanites, the original inhabitants of that land. The Israelites gradually conquered and occupied this territory during the 2nd millennium BC or earlier. It was probably the Canaanites who gave the Israelites the language now known as Hebrew.
Order of the Most Noble Garter	order founded by Edward III in 1348. It is represented by an eight-pointed star emblazoned with the cross of St. George. The order hangs from a blue ribbon. The number of knights (and ladies) companion is traditionally limited to 24 people. The motto is: <i>Honi soit qui mal y pense</i> ("Evil to the one who thinks evil").
Great Barrier Reef	chain of coral reefs in the Coral Sea, off the north-eastern coast of Australia. The largest deposit of coral in the world, the reef extends about 2,010 km from a point near Mackay, Queensland, to the Torres Strait, which lies between Australia and New Guinea.
Jackeroo	a novice on a sheep station or cattle station.
Lawson, Henry (1867-1922)	Australian poet and short-story writer.
Moses	Hebrew prophet and lawgiver and founder of Israel, or the Jewish people. Islam venerates him as Moussa.
Pastoral lyrics	portraying country life usually in a romantic or idealised form.
Pouf, pouffe :	large firm cushion used as a low seat or footstool.
Widdershins	in a direction contrary to the sun's course - anti-clockwise - and considered unlucky; dust devil, a whirlwind visible as a column of dust.

UNIT 5 COMING OF AGE

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 James McAuley
- 5.2 *Terra Australis*
- 5.3 A D Hope
- 5.4 *Australia*
- 5.5 *Moschus Moschiferus*
- 5.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.7 Questions
- 5.8 Glossary

5.0 OBJECTIVES

We shall be carrying forward the discussion of the preoccupation with Australia and the Australian identity in this unit in our reading of McAuley and Hope. The two representative poems of these poets reflect this absorption. We shall, in addition, read one poem of Hope's which voices environmentalist concerns and should be of special interest to Indian readers as it is set in the jungles of Assam. By the end of this unit you should be in a position to compare the perspectives of the various writers we have already discussed along with their 'Australian' poems. The other poems I have included in the Reader which have Australia as their theme are meant to give you a clearer idea of the perceptions of the writers with regard to Australia.

5.1 JAMES MCAULEY

James McAuley (1917 - 1976), apart from his complicity in the Ern Malley hoax, had at that time published only two volumes of verse *Under Aldebaran* (1946) and *A Vision of ceremony* (1956). While the first of these showed traces of a writer toying with the idea of a type of modernism which he was later to parody, it ends with a long, formal satire. The second collection, in spite of having some exquisite lyrics, was practically insulated in its remoteness and coldness of tone.

McAuley, who was a brilliant and tortured intellectual, lapsed into political and religious reaction, emerging only at the end of his life as a lyrical and elegiac writer. His was an inhibiting influence, though in a period of reaction against excess, his cool formalism offered something of poise and certainty to cling on to, a means of incantation against the terrible unleashed holocaust of the war and the atom bomb.

His own preoccupations in life and art seemed to be : a unified world view, a soaring ardour of heroic self-dedication and an opportunity of producing significant social results. His deep awareness of the spiritual tradition and spiritual malaise of the West was found not in Europe but in the jungles of New Guinea in the years during and immediately after the war.

His early poetic thought was nourished by a vision of the cyclical upheaval and stagnation of society and a concern for the revolutionary role of the poet. His aesthetic theory asserts the visionary and intuitive nature of poetry and speaks of the craft of the poet as a mystery requiring self-dedication which is ratified by exceptional experiences yet he sees the vital sap of poetry as flowing from the traditional values of Western society. His political concern is with the organic life of

society, just as in poetry, despite a sense of deepening despair, he is concerned with the unity of the human personality in a world which is seen to have essential metaphysical significance. As a literary figure, his influence in Australia is considerable.

Although his experimentation with fixed verse forms, his intellectual clarity, his subdued and noble music have earned for him the title of **classicist**, several critics believe that it is a misconception. McAuley is the most subtle and inward of Australian poets and his verse is romantic and symbolist. It continually recalls the cadences of the Romantics the **Metaphysicals** and diverse European influences. Essentially, however, he owes very little to any other poet or school and the individuality of his imagination is too conspicuous to be missed. Later, he experimented for a time with classical myth and wrote fragments of drama and epics.

McAuley is in agreement with Hope on the question of modernity but unlike him, he explores the meaning of modernism philosophically and in terms of the history of ideas. Like Hope too, he is a learned poet with interests and first-hand experience of anthropology, religious history, music, politics and those large movements of thought which shaped the intellectual debates of the twentieth century. But unlike Hope, his poetry is not overtly learned, does not display his range of knowledge, nor is it as allusive. He is essentially a lyricist who wrote with the sense of the spoken poem in mind. His early poems reflect his interest in periods of historical crisis and revolution, his sense of the intellectual sterility of the Australia of his youth, his thoughts on traditional values and his strong lyrical gift.

As he himself said, his poetic concern was 'the search for and the struggle to express, an intuition of the True Form of Man' and 'to write poems that are lucid and mysterious, gracefully simple but full of secrets, faithful to the little one knows and the much one has to feel'. His understanding of the True Form of Man is rooted in his belief in a world which is the expression of a divine order, and in which are to be discovered complex relationships between animate and inanimate form, the human and the divine.

Despair is a recurrent word in McAuley's poetry and his apparently simple, lyrical celebration of 'a world of sense and use' is qualified and enriched by the recognition of countervailing and disturbing forces. Images from daily life and the natural world present impressions of growth and decay, fulfillment and loss, age and youth, hope and despair balances against each other. His sensuous world shines through the simplicity of texture. His voice appears firm but not dogmatic, reflective, vibrant, wise yet unassuming.

5.2 TERRA AUSTRALIS

Please read the poem and try to answer the questions which follow:

- a) To whom is the poem addressed? Is there a shift from a first/second person discourse to a more general tone? What purpose does this shift serve?
- b) What are the adjectives and expressions the poet uses to describe Australia?
- c) What are the different aspects of Australia portrayed in the poem?

Discussion

The first stanza speaks of Australia as a place of myth, a 'country of the mind', to use a phrase from Patrick White's *Voss* (1957). It conjures up the Australia of fables and dreams, the unexplored continent, the yearned-for destination of intrepid explorers in days gone by. It is not a physical, experienced reality but an imagined

land which exists in 'Quiros' vision - his *hidalgo* heart'. In order to reach this 'Southern Continent', one needs to voyage within oneself, on 'the fabled ocean' of fantasy and dream as Quiros and others of his ilk did.

The second stanza sets out the democratic and egalitarian values of the country. The surroundings 'give ease', and the wattle sows the seeds of faith in the hearts of the doubters, kindling love and loyalty even in those who are sceptical of the future and stable existence of Australia. It is 'home' there where you are recognised by the birds as the magpies whistle at you 'like *larrikins*' and 'call you Jack'. The recognition by the native inhabitants, the warmth, the easy familiarity, the use of the nickname - all signify the egalitarian, classless nature of Australian society. 'It is the land of similes', says the poet, for the landscape, its flora and fauna reflect certain human values and sentiments.

The third stanza draws a darker picture of alienation and exile, of the Australia of the convicts, the colonised land cut off from the mainstream of European culture. The angophora dots the hillsides, spreading and tossing its branches 'with the gestures of Moses' as the white cockatoo perches on the boughs and 'screams with demoniac pain' in its characteristic screeching voice. 'The insolent emu', all the while, struts 'on the edge of the plain', straddling the twilight world 'between morning and night'. It is a gloomy, abstract world in which alienation and exile loom large.

The last stanza takes us away from the darkness of the preceding one. Beginning as it does with 'but...', it indicates a change or reversal in perception and mood. The unearthly light between morning and night gives way to the 'valleys of the fiery Goat where the sun like a centaur vertically shoots his raging arrows'. Great heat and brilliant light is evoked in these lines as the poet draws a picture of valleys brimming over with the radiance of the sun which ignites 'the ecstatic solitary pyres of unknown lovers'. These are the markers of the isolated Romantic heroes who carved out an identity for themselves by overcoming all odds and are imbued with the light of life and vitality, serving as beacons to the uninitiated.

The invocation of Moses reiterates the image of Australia as the Promised Land which is peopled with strange creatures like the cockatoo shrieking with 'demoniac pain' and the 'insolent emu' striding on the edges of twilight in the boundary of the plain. It is a land which seeks to find its similes in the imagination and thus become a part of the living consciousness of its people.

The poem speaks in the language of metaphors and projects Australia as the symbol of imagined constructs which can be moulded according to the inclination of the perceiver.

The poem makes direct contact with the Australian reader for it makes the familiar new. It invites from him scrutiny of a different kind since he is able to assess the accuracy of the poem. He can hardly avoid measuring, and perhaps questioning, the poem in terms of the direct knowledge he shares with the poet. But the process is a two-way exchange. *Terra Australis* might invite a challenge from its Australian reader, but it also issues challenges; it challenges the reader's awareness of his familiar world and his understanding of what he sees.

5.3 A D HOPE

Born in Cooma, New South Wales, Hope (1907-2000), studied languages and literature at Sydney and Oxford universities. Returning to Australia, he taught at Sydney Teachers' College, then Melbourne University, and in 1951 was appointed Foundation Professor of English at the Australian National University in Canberra. He retired from this position in 1968 to concentrate on writing poetry.

Hope's first collection of verse, *The Wandering Islands*, appeared in 1955. Others followed including *Poems* (1960), *A Late Picking* (1975), *The Drifting Continent* (1979), *Ladies from the Sea* (1987), and *Orpheus* (1991). Through his poetry, which characteristically uses traditional rhythms and forms, he comments on contemporary values and seeks to provide insights into human experience. Acknowledged as one of Australia's leading poets, his work is acclaimed internationally. In addition to poetry, Hope has also written critical studies on aspects of Australian literature. He was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 1981.

The early poems of both Hope and McAuley reflect their strong intellectual interests as well as their responses to experience. McAuley and Wright published their first volumes in 1946 and Hope, who is more than ten years their senior, brought his first volume out in 1955. These three poets became major poets in the next thirty years and along with R D Fitzgerald, Douglas Stewart and David Campbell, virtually wrote the history of Australian poetry in this period. Their poetry represents not so much a **renaissance** in Australian poetry as a first full flowering, as a form able to challenge what had hitherto been the dominance of fiction and, their work characterises both the diversity and quality which continue to characterise the work of younger generations.

Both Hope and McAuley have been labelled classicists and I have pointed out earlier the reasons for classifying the latter as one and why it may not be entirely correct. Hope's case is similar. In his poetry and critical essays, he has asserted the value of traditional modes and has argued that the modern period has presided over the destruction of the specialised forms such as the **epic, epistle, ode, elegy and satire**. In consequence, the modern poet has available to him only the short lyric which has largely replaced the earlier variety in forms and thus reduced the range of poetic possibilities. Yet, despite this, Hope is in important ways, romantic. Much of his best poetry is made out of experiences of frustrated or unfulfilled love, destructive passion, the inner conflicts of a divided will and a strong sense of isolation, loss and guilt. The pains and ecstasies of existence are mediated through fable, legend, myth or allusion and it is the manner rather than the content which marks him out as a traditionalist.

On display in his works are his range of interests and learning and his authoritative use of language. His tone is frequently didactic and the relationship between poet and reader that of teacher and student. Given the seriousness of his purpose, the most prominent quality of his expression is gravity. But his verbal facility also makes him a witty poet - a trait to be seen in his satires. Beyond the sharp edges of his wit is a sense of recoil, perhaps of horror, as though faced with a difficulty - the idea of close human exchange. Man is better seen as a predator, isolated from God and his fellows. In much of Hope's poetry of denial, the very framing of the denial stresses the agony of loss, of deprivation from a state profoundly wished for. Many of the early poems remind one of Slessor's similar hollow celebrations but the elegance and fussiness of Slessor is replaced by a harsher, more impassioned tone, a protest, the anger of someone starved of some birthright, of some nourishment withheld.

He is a poet of man's persistent preoccupations. There is a conflict in the centre of his poetry between the world of the intellect. Some poems are hard and some are soft and tender. Certain themes have been repeated many times he has viewed man in his splendid, almost tragic, Nietzschean hero. The idea of man stands in various ways.

He has not been influenced by modern trends in poetic subject matter. He has indeed written about the disadvantages of the **free verse** forms. Strangely, of defining himself as an inheritor and transmitter of tradition, he was thought of as the most controversial and daring of Australian poets. He was a fierce campaigner

5.4 AUSTRALIA

After reading the poem, do the following:

- a) Compare the description of the landscape to Slessor's rendering of it in *South Country*.
- b) Do you find a change in tone or attitude during the course of the poem or is it uniformly the same throughout?
- c) Is it an emotional, satirical, ironic, sad ... poem?

Discussion

The poem is a traditional 'homecoming' poem with the point of view presented at the beginning, of a revenant - of someone returning home but seeing his country from the outside, as if for the first time, after a long absence. It is necessary to keep this in mind if one is to understand the apparent change in the last two stanzas. It takes as its theme, the idea of Australia's qualities as a nation. The description maps the geographical and physical aspects of the country as well as its psychological territory. The poem begins in a disenchanted, sardonic but completely accurate observation - 'a nation of drab green and desolate grey'. There is a deliberate downplaying of natural beauty and the landscape emerges in muted tones of grey and green. Hope evokes the monotonous colour, the flatness, the sense of age and attrition. There is a direct comparison to the colours of army uniforms - an image replete with suggestions of horror, waste and destruction. This is further reinforced when he compares it with the Sphinx. There is no idea here of vitality or growth but only a stark picture of desolation and emptiness. It is a country as inscrutable as the **Sphinx**, characterised not by the vivacity and spirit of its people but by the flora that 'darkens her hills'.

'They call her a young country but they lie', he states unequivocally. Geographically, it is one of the oldest lands but is known as a young country because it has only recently been brought under 'civilised' white domination.

There seems no hope of fertility - no possibility that exuberant vitality will once more pour forth from its depths; it has seemingly exhausted all its resources of creation and rejuvenation. Hope dwells on the bleak prospect, painting a picture that is without joy or colour. He laments the paucity of a distinct Australian culture and identity as he cries out - that it is a nation 'without songs, architecture, history...' The men who inhabit this country do not - cannot - boast that they 'live' but only that they 'survive'. It bears out the theory of the survival of the fittest which implies that there is nothing delicate, artistic or innocent about them for they are tough, hardened veterans of life's battles in a harsh, inhospitable continent - 'a type who will inhabit the dying earth'.

It is not only the land itself that gives rise to dismal reflections. The men who have colonised the continent have made of its five major cities, 'five teeming scres' and have reduced the nation to a state where '...second hand Europeans pullulate timidly on the edge of alien shores'. These lines are among the most widely quoted of Hope's works and regarded as expressing his scathing contempt for his countrymen. In an attempt to imitate European culture and customs, the Australian is left without an identity of his own and is a pale, washed-out version of the original. His home is still alien to him for he pines for another country - England - which he regards as his true home. But since he can not participate in the mainstream of Europe's consciousness,

he remains, painfully, only a second-hand European, even if he may not be aware of this harsh reality and it is left to thinkers like Hope to point it out.

So much that Hope felt about Australia in the 1930s - its aridity, its stupidity, its colonial timidity - is suggested in the poem and is all the more forceful, coming as it does from an insider, an Australian who love-hates his country. It is interesting to note that at a time when so many Australian writers and painters were expatriates, Hope practised a kind of inner expatriation in an attempt to ascend the insularity of Australian culture. If Hope's poem consisted only of the first five stanzas, it would have been impressively concise with a directness of statement that would impose its own emotional tone and conviction. However, the last two stanzas are important for the feeling of the whole, being remarkably optimistic, offering a marked change from the dullness and desolation pictured so far. They change a disillusioned comment into a paradoxical affirmation of the place.

After the cruel indictment of his country and its inhabitants, Hope abruptly changes the tone and tenor of his thoughts. Other civilised societies are merely 'lush jungles' in which intellectualism and its pseudo counterpart walk hand in hand. If, as has always been the case, true prophets arise from deserts, then Australia seems the best bet. The desert, ostensibly its greatest drawback, might well prove to be its greatest asset and its distance and isolation may contribute in great measure to the birth of an original philosophy uninfluenced by modes and trends prevalent elsewhere. For, what is 'called civilisation over there', is nothing more than 'the chatter of cultured apes'. True to his name, Hope, expresses his belief in the power and energy latent in all creation and of its ability to renew and manifest itself in different ways. This recognition transforms the poem, leading it away from a wallowing in depression to the silver lining that lightens every dark cloud.

Whatever its defects, Australia, to Hope, is home. He in fact returns somewhat like the prophets of the old to the desert. Not only is Australia 'placed' in relation to the rest of the world in the opening stanzas, the rest of the world is 'placed' in relation to Australia. Here quiet work is possible as the place is conducive for undistracted concentration and there is hope for the future. Above all, there is contact with something ancient and elemental and profound as opposed to the superficial glitter of the modern which is often - and mistakenly - considered to be 'civilisation'.

This poem remains one of Hope's most distinctively personal and authoritative poems. Its savage inversion of all the accepted nationalistic clichés - 'they call her a young country but they lie' - struck home with particular force in the late forties, when the Australians in the grip of post-war euphoria, did not on the whole feel like regarding themselves as 'second-hand Europeans'. It is a tough-minded poem, intent on facing the facts without subsiding into despair or ascending into empty optimism. It is also an adult poem for it is a sign of one's growth and development that one is able to handle criticism constructively, an even healthier sign if one shows the ability of introspection and self-evaluation. The adolescent person or nation cannot stand criticism and even if many Australian readers could not appreciate such criticism just then, it was still significant that a couple of Australian writers were capable of producing it.

5.5 MOSCHUS MOSCHIFERUS

- a) What do you think the title means?
- b) Is the poet conveying a message through the poem? If so, what is he trying to say?
- c) The poem describes the hunting of the deer by human beings. Do you think the hunt is justified? What is the difference between an animal killing another and a human killing the deer?

- d) Please try to read Dryden's *Song for St. Cecilia's Day* and contrast the description of the power of music with Hope's report of its destructive use.

Discussion

It is a poem set in India against the backdrop of the jungles of Assam. The 'kastura' deer, hunted unrelentingly for the musk it carries within its body, is the *leitmotif* of the poem. In an entrancingly vivid description, the poet unravels the process whereby hunters use music for perverse ends - to lure the deer within the range of deadly poisoned arrows.

The lines which describe the music resounding through the woods are exquisite in their evocativeness - '...a tremulous skein of melody wavers ... now dancing... now a rain of pure, bright drops of sound'. Hope makes the most effective use of language to convey the passionate intensity of the music which heightens the horror of the indiscriminate massacre. The silvery notes of the flute drift, soaking through the gloom of the forest, spreading enticing tentacles into its depths till the deer, forgetting fear and with souls aquiver with the melody, step into the clearing where the predators are waiting with infinite patience.

And how much more noble is the animal whose being responds instinctively to the haunting melody, making it oblivious to its innate caution while Man, who has the ability to create such beauty, makes such devilish use of it! The most noteworthy point here is that there is no overt condemnation of such cruel practices, no attitudes struck of horror or repulsion. There is just the detailed description of the progress of the whole hunt beginning with the siren-like notes of the flute. The horror emerges out of the narrative itself.

It is supremely ironic that music which has been described as the balm to sore minds, with the ability to soothe man and wild beast alike, is here monstrosly used as a bait, as an instrument of destruction. Hope ends with a mock-reverent address to St. Cecilia (the patron saint of music), which bring up echoes of John Dryden's *Song for St. Cecilia's Day*, 1687, a poem in which Dryden speaks of the creative, regenerating power of music, set in contrast to the destruction wreaked by music in Hope's rendering.

The multiple ironies of the poem are characteristic of Hope. It is a song dedicated to the patron saint of music but it is about music perverted to cruel, profit-motivated destruction. The beauty of the language expressing the beauty of the music and of the deer is in total contrast to the viciousness of the situation. The moment of death corresponds with the most exultant movement in the music. The music continues after each death but the continual killing will soon make the deer extinct and the music redundant.

The hunters, like **Orpheus**, entrance the animals with music and the narrative celebrates music's power and refinement at the same time that it recounts the slaughter of the deer and the continuing depletion of their numbers. Many have praised the powers of music. Few have spoken of the uses and abuses it can be put to. The poem is a comment on the price to be paid for certain exquisite refinements and pleasures. The price is the final elimination of the very source of those pleasures.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

Evidence of the impact of an aloof and bleak landscape is best seen in Hope and McAuley. They both belong to a tradition in which the most important questions about man's fate are beginning to be asked.

Terra Australis insists upon Australia as a place in myth, as having its existence in imagined constructions, 'a country of the mind'. But the poem also makes it clear that the nature of that country may vary according to the ideological predisposition of the writer. So, it may be a land which reflects the egalitarian Australian legend, one which is modelled on a gloomy metaphysical conviction of alienation and exile, or one which is the natural site for the isolated Romantic hero. In each case, the land (topographical and intellectual) seems to make available an appropriate metaphor for the preferred ideology.

Hope, in his finest poetry, aims to strike at the core of human experience without raising the question of a national identity at all and what he celebrates is a radically human aspiration. *Australia* expresses a romantic desire for the spiritual purity of desert landscapes where Hope locates 'some spirit which escapes the learned doubt'. He defines 'his' Australia in terms of what it does not have and attempts to recuperate these deficiencies and see them as offering a distinctive site for a somehow purer human experience.

Moschus Moschiferus, a prayer or report to Saint Cecilia about the way the power of music is being misused, is one of Hope's most perfect and serene pieces. It is a poem of protest, a conservationist's plea to save from extinction the musk deer that are killed in horrific numbers for the perfume industry. The protest is delivered with all the resources of art and is a delicate tissue of language and sound.

5.7 QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the shifts in the poet's perception of Australia in each stanza of the poem, *Terra Australis*?
- 2) Where does the poet speak of Australia as a democratic country and how does he put this point across?
- 3) In what ways is the poem different from or similar to Slessor's and Hope's poems?
- 4) What are the features referred to in the poem which set it out as explicitly 'Australian'?
- 5) Do you think that Hope's attitude to his native country is a harshly critical one or is it mixed with other emotions as well?
- 6) Could we draw a parallel between the Australian and the Indian experience as post-colonial nations? In these days when everyone is talking of a cultural invasion, do you think Indians are in the position of being 'second-hand Europeans' or, more pertinently, second-hand Americans? This question requires you to draw on your own perceptions and ideas.
- 7) How do you think that the criticism of one's own country is different from a foreigner's criticism of it? Are you happy with all aspects of the Indian situation? How would you react if someone who is not Indian made adverse remarks about your country even if you happen to share the same opinion?
- 8) In what way does *Moschus Moschiferus* reflect Hope's concern over the degradation of art?
- 9) Can the slaughter of the deer also be called the slaughter of innocence and an environmentally conscious way of life?
- 10) How does Hope depict the horrors of the killing of the deer through music without making any overt references to the cruelty of the hunters?

Centaur	(in Greek and Roman mythology) one of a race of animals believed to be half man and half horse
Classical Style (art and literature)	a descriptive term for art and literature of ancient Greece or Rome, or similar in style or quality.
Cockatoo	a type of Australian parrot with a number of large feathers on its head that can be raised or lowered at will.
Elegy	originally, in classical Greek and Roman literature, classical elegies were often songs of lamentation, but elegies were also written on other themes, such as love, war, or politics.
Emu	a large Australian bird, smaller than an ostrich, that can run very well but cannot fly.
Epic	long narrative poem, majestic both in theme and style.
Epistle : (Greek, <i>epistellein</i>, "to send to")	formal and instructive letter, often intended for publication, written in verse form.
Free verse	rhymed or unrhymed poetry composed without attention to rules of metre. Free verse was first written and labelled <i>vers libre</i> (French, "free verse") by a group of French poets of the late 19 th century, including Gustave Kahn and other Symbolists. Their purpose was to deliver French poetry from the restrictions of formal metrical patterns and to re-create instead the free rhythms of natural speech. Pointing to the American poet Walt Whitman as their precursor, they wrote lines of varying length and cadence, usually not rhymed. The emotional content or meaning of the work was expressed through its rhythm. Free verse has been characteristic of the work of many modern poets, including D H Lawrence, Ezra Pound, and Carl Sandburg.
Hidalgo	Spanish gentleman; Spanish for <i>hijo dalgo</i> , literally 'son of something'.
Larrikin	a hooligan.
Metaphysical	exemplified by the poetry of John Donne and the other so-called metaphysical poets, which carried the metaphorical style to heights of daring complexity and ingenuity. This often paradoxical style was used for a variety of poetic purposes, ranging from complex emotional attitudes to the simple inducement of admiration for its own virtuosity; exhibiting subtlety of thought and complex imagery.

Moschus Moschiferus	the musk deer belongs to the family Cervidae. It is classified as <i>Moschus moschiferus</i> .
Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm (1844-1900)	German philosopher, poet, and Classical philologist, who became one of the most provocative and influential thinkers of the 19 th century.
Ode	dignified and elaborately structured lyric poem praising and glorifying an individual, commemorating an event, or describing nature intellectually rather than emotionally. Odes were originally songs performed to the accompaniment of a musical instrument.
Orpheus	in Greek mythology, a poet and musician, the son of the muse Calliope and Apollo, god of music, or Oeagrus, King of Thrace. He was given the lyre by Apollo and became such an excellent musician that he had no rival among mortals. When Orpheus played and sang, he moved everything, animate and inanimate. His music enchanted the trees and rocks and tamed wild beasts, and even the rivers turned in their course to follow him.
Quiros, Pedro Fernandez de	led an expedition in 1605-1606 in search of the elusive Terra Australis ("southern land") but Quiros abandoned the party at Espiritu Santo, an island of the Vanuatu group, and returned in one of the ships to Mexico (perhaps as the result of a mutiny).
Renaissance	period of European history that saw a renewed interest in the arts and in the classical past. The Renaissance began in 14 th century Italy and had spread to the rest of Europe by the 16 th and 17 th centuries.
Satire	in literature, prose or verse that employs wit in the form of irony, innuendo, or outright derision to expose human wickedness and folly.
Sphinx	in Greek mythology, monster with the head and breasts of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of a bird. Her name means "throttler". Lying crouched on a rock, she accosted all who were about to enter the city of Thebes by asking them a riddle.
Wattle	an Australian acacia with long, pliant branches, with bark used in tanning and golden flowers used as the national emblem.
White, Patrick	became the first Australian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was cited for his "epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature".

UNIT 6 THE MARGINALISED VOICE

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Women's Writing
- 6.2 Rosemary Dobson
- 6.3 *Cock Crow*
- 6.4 The Aboriginal Voice
- 6.5 Kath Walker
- 6.6 *We Are Going*
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 Questions
- 6.9 Glossary

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will talk about the literature of two marginalised sections of society - women and the Aborigines of Australia. Women have been deified or demonised at will, neither extreme according them the status and dignity of human existence. Although they constitute one half of humanity, their thoughts, feelings, aspirations and wishes have been routinely ignored. Now, they are coming into their own, their innermost concepts, perceptions and experiences of being women, finding expression in an increasingly large number of works by women. The Aborigines of Australia too, having been dispossessed of the land of their forefathers and denied basic human rights, are finally voicing their concerns and hurt, and their anguish over the passing away of an entire way of life. Rosemary Dobson's poem speaks of the inner life of a woman while Kath Walker's delineates the collapse of the Aboriginal modes of living.

6.1 WOMEN'S WRITING

Women's writing has a pertinence and force for a variety of reasons. While projecting the observations, situations, responses and struggles of the female half of humanity, it also reflects a consciousness created by gender, the entity traditionally defined by the frameworks of kinship, marriage and procreation. At another level it questions values and constructs considered self-evident so far. It focuses attention on the definition of freedom and creativity and raises a number of queries related to oppression and colonisation. It has helped both to put together and express the idea of the female self as well as to dismantle the concept of the all-pervasive male figure.

Working through revolutionary movements as well as silent changes, through legal, political battles and by breaching psychological barriers, women are beginning to know and discover themselves. All women's writing is not **feminist** and, even when gender identification overrides cultural barriers, certain cultural concepts also define and differentiate feminist positions. Feminist interpretations, however, can flow out even through absence and denial and are not necessarily dependent on equivalence and identification. Many women writers are wary of their feminist affiliations even today for fear of being further marginalised as the feminist is not juxtaposed with the masculine but is regarded as a sub-culture and the voice and class of the victim and the oppressed, thrust upon it.

Feminism begins with the self - and not essentially the intellectual self. Most cultures define women's roles through their bodily behaviour, and their reproductive functions. Most societies have their own versions of conduct books for women, the majority of which have been written by men. Women's writing is occupied in changing the terms of these definitions, moving through individualism and analysis of the self toward assurance and confidence. It has projected different patterns and interpretations in lieu of the existing ones and attempted to crumble contrarities. Men need, love and desire women but they do so in relation to their own selves. The desires and aspects of a woman's life which is not connected to their needs, does not usually interest them. Women's writing has learnt to express the untold narrative of being a woman through struggling against an internalisation of role models thrust upon them. It focuses attention on both the representation of a female sensibility, a feminine reality, and on its significance as a means of bringing about an awareness of this reality.

Women's writing has been slow to find recognition, for several reasons. There were not enough women writers and not enough access to education to make their writing possible; history has neglected and drowned their contribution and their work has been disregarded as being involved with a limited world of experience since they were limited to domesticity. Their writing has been dismissed as inconsequential on the grounds that, according to religious and political thought, they held a subordinate position and were labelled as less rational and intellectual than men.

Freedom is the first requirement for any type of creative endeavour for taboos, inhibitions and sets of controls fetter the pursuit of experience. Yet, women have been denied the freedom to move, breathe and meet people freely over centuries and confined to kitchens or behind the *purdah* and deprived of the openness and freshness of experience outside the domestic prison. Child-marriages, child-bearing and child-rearing were the other chains that prevented the woman's imagination from soaring and finding expression. They have been creatures split into two - the physical and the intellectual selves - with the latter having been largely left undeveloped due to the demands of society and family.

While on the one hand women have been placed outside culture and history, on the other, they have been projected as the guardians of culture, expected to preserve and continue it through procreation and an adherence to tradition and rituals.

Women's writing has questioned patriarchal concepts relating to their education, marriage and family. There has been a tremendous amount of work done in the last three decades - the result of the efforts of hundreds of women across continents and cultures who have resisted domination. The accessibility to education, right to economic independence, to vote and to inherit property have been the focus of socio-political struggles. While gender differences are acknowledged, they are not regarded as making women inferior in any way. This has led to an introspective analysis of the female self and the right to pride and dignity within it.

In a sense, women's writing is the literature of silence for its meaning lies enveloped and disguised, preferring the subtle means of communication to the more overt ones. It also qualifies for this nomenclature for it seeks to express what has been effaced and suppressed and blanketed in the muffling cloak of silence for so long.

6.2 ROSEMARY DOBSON

Rosemary Dobson (1920-1985), taught art, was involved with cipher work during World War II and was also in the publishing business. She has edited a feminist anthology, *Sister Poets* (1979). Her training in art manifests itself in poems on

painters, painting and design. Hers is a detached, reflective writing, characterised by craftsmanship and formal elegance.

The Ship of Ice (1948) illustrates the timelessness of art and its power to immortalise the fleeting moment. Her later poetry is concerned with personal expression - specially motherhood - and Greek themes.

Due to her training in art, her poetry gains a quality of stillness akin to the paintings of the **Dutch Masters**. The words of her poetry select and arrange images from an experience. The poems record the surface details that survive in memory or history or art, but in reading their careful relations, we reconstruct the passions and endurance, the despair and the agony that lie behind the surface. Each poem comes, to use one of her titles, like 'The Message in the Bottle' to the reader who can

... recognise in what I say
the voice that speaks to me alone
and he the predetermined, he
the listener, finder, watcher of
the wrack that's washed in from the sea.

The messages in her bottles speak of love, poetry and oblivion. Love is the force in her work which transcends and redeems the individual; poetry, the art with which she makes sense of life; and oblivion, which is not only death but the unknowingness against which poetry and all the arts speak. The images in her poetry are drawn from the commonplaces of life. From those simple forms, we build, in our minds, the patterns that constitute the miracle of life itself.

Although she takes the whole of time as her province, this makes her no less contemporary or Australian. She argues that 'every artist should have complete freedom of choice in his(her) ideas. It should not matter if (s)he ranges back in time provided ... (s)he tries to use the equipment of thought and technique that is available to him(her) in his(her) own time with which to shape his(her) work.' Her poetry belongs to our time, with its emphasis on both the power and the inadequacies of the human mind, on the recovery and analysis rather than on a direct re-creation of experience and expression of emotion. We are aware, always, of the distance between observer and action, word and reality, in a world where mind and observation are the only realities.

She writes as one who delights in the ambiguity of the detachment of art being not only an alternative to life but an essential part of it, revealing at once, the wonder and fragility of the world. The wonder is humanity itself, which invests the world with the love, art, ceremony and science that fills her poems. There is also the realisation, however, that humanity, which realises the wonder of the world, also threatens it.

6.3 COCK CROW

Please read the poem and answer the questions that follow so that you can understand it better.

- a) What does the title suggest to you?
- b) What does the poet mean when she says at the end that she knew the meaning of what the cock was saying?
- c) Do you think 'three' has a special significance in this poem? What are the reasons for your opinion?

Discussion

The poem gives expression to a woman's wish to be herself, freed of all social roles of mother, daughter, wife etc. Wanting to be alone, the poet walks the road between the town and her lit-up house - to and fro she strides three times while thoughts pummel her and she experiences a riot of feelings. She is adrift from the normal course of her routine, closed round by the dark trees on the lonely stretch of road and gradually feels herself 'absolved' of her bonds until it seems as though she is suddenly light, freed from earthly ties, the only thing holding her being her feet on the ground.

There is a metaphorical cutting of ropes and she seems to be drifting weightlessly. She wants to snap all bonds and be her individual self but this is not so easy, however, for human bonds are elastic, you may walk away but they pull you back. Even while she feels herself 'absolved' of the bonds, thoughts of her sleeping mother and daughter consume her mind and she feels a betrayer for walking away from them and shutting the door that links them to her. The road that she walks is the bridge between the town and her house while she herself is the bridge between two generations - one with its feet in the past, the other with its eyes raised towards the future. The parallel drawn between the two images serves to reinforce the idea of linkages and connections.

And, as she continues her stroll, she feels herself 'separate and alone, cut off from human cries, from pain'. There is the recognition that if there is love, there will be pain and by cutting oneself off from hurt, one is also severing all ties with love. When one loves deeply, there is always the chance of being hurt by the loved one's actions or words and the anguish of parting. But one does not cease to love in fear of the suffering that will inevitably accompany it. 'No man is an island', wrote John Donne while A D Hope expresses the feeling that we are all wandering islands which come together for brief periods and are then torn apart again.

She feels the bonds dissolve but for a short while and is unable to sustain that experience - it is 'too brief illusion' as the cock crows thrice, recalling her to her duties. She turns the handle of the door, the symbol of her relinking with the realities of her existence and goes back to a world bound by relationships.

The title immediately brings up Biblical allusions, referring to the prediction of St. Peter's denial of Jesus Christ after he had been betrayed: 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.' And later, when this prediction comes to pass, and Peter denies Christ the third time, he hears the rooster crow and he goes out and weeps bitterly.

The poet refers to the cock crowing thrice which brings her back to a sense of commitment. She walks the road between the house, in which her mother and daughter lie asleep, and town, three times. And three times does St. Peter deny knowing Christ. This intensifies the undercurrents of betrayal one can sense flowing through the whole poem. In spite of her wish to be free, to be herself and alone, there is still a sense of guilt that she is in fact denying all that is dear and close to her heart. And just as Peter was reminded of his denial by the crowing of the rooster, so does the poet on hearing the herald of morning, walk back to her family as she 'knew his meaning well'.

In Christian religious art, the crowing cock has symbolised the Resurrection of Christ. The crowing also signals the advent of morning and therefore, of new beginnings. The speaker, having come to terms with her desire for freedom and having experienced it for a short while, is now ready to take up the reins of her life once more, knowing the cock's 'meaning well' - a reminder to acknowledge one's duty and perform the labours of love gladly.

The birth of a child involves the mother in the continuing life of the world. Yet the involvement is also painful, threatening the mother's life by absorbing it in the life of others. The poem embodies this dilemma, as the speaker flees from the sleeping

mother and daughter in her desperate need to be herself. The moment of relief enables her to create the symmetry of art from her own being and the dark trees and night that close her round. For a moment she knows herself '...separate and alone...' The separation allows the love, pain and cries to come together in their proper shape. Yet this moment, a metaphor for art, is broken by the sound of 'the cock crow on the hill', a reminder of Peter's realisation of his betrayal and of the continuing demands of life. Art and self-possession become betrayal and the speaker returns home. Although the moment is described as 'brief illusion', it remains, and gives the poem its value. The detachment of art is not the alternative to life but a necessary part of it.

6.4 THE ABORIGINAL VOICE

The indigenous, colonised population, the Aborigines, had a rich oral culture that was not translated into written form until the early 20th century, and has still made only a slight impact on the written literature of the country. The growth of a specifically Aboriginal literature in English has been slow and remains slight. The poets Oodgeroo Noonucul (formerly Kath Walker), Mudrooroo (Colin Johnson), and Lionel Fogarty have all published widely and achieved recognition. The chief repository of Aboriginal culture is in translation by anthropologists and scholars of ritual ceremonies among tribesmen. In spite of the existence of their rich oral culture, it was only in the 1960s that the first Aboriginal writing accessible to an English-speaking audience began to appear.

Although women writers have been undervalued in Australian society and their concerns pushed to the margins of public attention, women's writing has been important since the time of the gold rush. The Aboriginal people are those who have been pushed beyond the margins of society. Present generation Aborigines are asserting their right to determine their own condition and Aboriginal writers have emerged who speak both for and to their own people. These are people who were colonised and find themselves forced to use the language of the coloniser to express their own condition. Yet, they have changed the language to make it speak of their particular experience. This experience continues to be circumscribed by the whites and so even when Aboriginal writers speak to their own people, the white community forms part of the dialogue.

The early history of the colonisation of Australia as well as the relations between the whites and the Aborigines have been the focus of novels by many Australian writers. In nineteenth century fiction and poetry, the tendency was to regard them as savages which is no longer the case but they are still depicted as mysterious and enigmatic. However, writings by the Aborigines themselves offer a more credible portrayal of the people. Kath Walker, along with Jack Davis can be seen as the founders of this new literature but their output has not been great and Walker, at least has virtually ceased to write. The forms favoured by Aboriginal writers have been drama, poetry and the short story. Aboriginal writing, as with all things aboriginal, is heavily studied and analysed. Is all their writing as some have said, necessarily political writing? There is the feeling that because they are in a minority, any Aboriginal who writes must have a message to convey. This can be stifling to creativity. Most writings by aboriginal writers are autobiographical and therefore the 'message' is clear for it is the story of the person who has written it. Whether it is political is another point of view but certainly many Aboriginal writings can be disturbing to the white Australian or the non-Aboriginal reader because everything said is true.

The time is past when the whites in Australia looked upon the Aborigines as miserable brutes. The present generation of Australians do not feel the burden the white man once felt nor the sense of guilt felt by his successors. Aboriginal people are alive and well in many shapes and forms. The word Aboriginal is deceptive and

most indigenous writers call themselves Murris, Nungas, Kooris, Nyamitje, Wongai Nyooogah or any of the tribal groups that still exist in the desert regions of the vast country of Australia. Many people tend to think of them as all one group when, in point of fact, there are several hundred groups each different from the other yet all united under the blanket of oppression. They have a strong sense of pride in being Aboriginal. There are great differences among Aboriginals themselves - there are those who live fully urbanised lives, those who live on the fringes of white society and those who are still able to maintain traditional ways. These differences are reflected in the language which ranges from original tongues through dialectical forms of English to common Australian speech. Even the term 'Aborigine' is rejected by some as a European classification which gives them identity only in relation to white society.

There is a strong bond between the Aborigines and the land and the latter has a special hold on the former. It is said that they are the oldest people on the earth and that the oldest bones of Man have been found right there in Australia. It is a well known fact that the Aboriginal people have been in Australia for around 100,000 years - much longer when compared to the two thousand years that Christianity has been around! So there is a great and unexplainable spirituality that is possibly even stronger than the **Druids** or other so-called pagan beliefs of a similar nature to protecting and restoring the land.

The first major work by an Aboriginal was a volume of poems by Kath Walker, *We are Going*, in 1964. We shall be studying the title poem in this unit. It presents the tragedy of the degradation and near-extinction of a people who loved and needed and were needed by the land they once roamed freely. Her later poetry expresses an intense revival of self respect and a demand for equal opportunities and land rights previously denied to them. She can be described as an activist.

The political writings of Kevin Gilbert and Charles Perkins, the poetry and plays of Jack Davis, the poetry of Kath Walker and the huge quantity of work by Mudrooroo, all Aboriginal writers who were the first to be published outside Australia and to find a world-wide audience, threw open the door so others could follow. Now there are any number of books that tell of the life and trauma of being a dispossessed person in Australia, and also the pride and humour these people employ in order to survive. The heroes and heroines hitherto unmentioned also get a hearing and there are, as well, glimpses of their strong beliefs and culture.

It should not be forgotten that it was only a couple of decades ago that Aboriginals were finally given the dignity of being recognised in their own land and given the rights every other Australian took for granted. So, their fight - and fighters - for justice and equality from the time of the first fleet up to the turbulent 1960s, can at last be seen and read about. The ghosts of the earlier people were once left to wander alone in the annals of Australian history as other myths sprang up in their place - myths of a people weak and dirty, savage or lazy and fit only to be servants of the ruling class. But being a people of oral tradition, the stories handed down by the elders have kept intact the lives of the boxers, football players, warriors and politicians who were the spokespersons of their depleted society. Also passed down were the laws and beliefs that made their culture strong.

6.5 KATH WALKER

Kath Walker (b.1920) belongs to the Aboriginal world by birth and upbringing. But 'civilisation' was forced on her, a curse on the flora, fauna and landscape of her childhood. Strandbroke, the backdrop of her early years, was once stocked with natural beauty and she lived there with her family - birds, beasts and trees. Several

laws implicit in the Aboriginal way of life, bound man, animal and nature together. For instance, an Aboriginal rule laid down that one can kill while hunting, only to eat and not for sport. This ensured the survival of the beasts and protected them from indeterminate slaughter. Aboriginal life was perfectly ordered and complete in itself. Into this closed road of unseen bonds, the white man made inroads and Aboriginal life slowly but surely got infected by alien ways including the white man's system of education.

Like members of all conquered races, Oodgeroo has seen enough of civilisation. Implicit in her writing is the omnipresent shadow of the dark and ugly underbelly of civilisation. Her poems are generally directed to the white community in a spirit of reconciliation and an appeal for understanding. The first poem in the collection *My People* concludes with the couplet :

I'm international, never mind place;
I'm for humanity, all one race.

This sentiment animates the whole collection, but the rather glib expression raises the issue of how we should read her poetry. It is a demand for attention rather than a reflexive pondering of a situation. In some of her poems where she concentrates on the situation without comment, the simple use of language makes its point with telling force. There is a sense of loss for all of humankind in the passing of the clans that once filled the place with the lightness of 'their hearts in the dance and the game'. Grief and hope are the two poles of Kath Walker's poetry. Anger breaks through only occasionally to destroy any complacent belief in the reader that the writer offers purely a literary experience.

6.6 WE ARE GOING

Please read the poem and answer the following questions :

- a) Who is going and where in the poem?
- b) How does the use of Aboriginal words make the poem distinctive?
- c) Is the tone of the poem one of revolt or resignation?

Discussion

The poem expresses the agony of dispossession. The first five lines depict the contrast between the decimated indigenous people and the invaders who have proliferated in direct proportion to the dwindling numbers of the Aborigines. They are a 'subdued' and 'silent', pitifully small group of survivors while the whites can be seen hurrying about like 'ants'. Their 'semi-naked' state is symbolic of their situation for they are neither totally natural as they used to be in earlier times nor have they been completely assimilated into the white man's world and customs.

Their holy grounds have been desecrated and converted into rubbish heaps and in place of the 'old bora ring', there is a sign designating it as a garbage dumping site - the sacred place has been invaded by the trappings of 'civilisation'. Remnants of their culture struggle for survival but it is a futile effort and the bora ring has been 'half-covered' already. Their ancestral home has been divided up and sold to white settlers without their consent.

The rest of the poem is the lament and confusion of the original inhabitants of the land who have become strangers in their own home. Truths have been inverted - the race which had been one with the land for thousands of years now creeps around the country stealthily and timidly while the foreigners have appropriated the land and

made it their own. In a poignant dirge, they remember the past when they had lived in unison with the laws and rhythms of nature. It is a mourning for the passing away of an era, an entire way of life, culture and civilisation. The bora ground, the **corroboree**, the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders, the wonder tales of **Dream Time**, the hunts and the laughing games are all symbols of their culture, history, music and literature which are slowly but surely passing into oblivion.

The 'wandering camp fires' are a reflection of their nomadic lifestyle when anywhere and everywhere was home. They lived off the land and conserved it too, taking from it only what they needed without depleting the resources. The land is sacred to them also because it is the repository of the bones of their forefathers whose spirits are all around them and join them as the last embers of their campfires die away. The lines are reminiscent of Judith Wright's *Bullocky* where too, 'the campfire's crimson ring' is evoked and the surrounding darkness is redolent with the spirit of the past.

In direct contrast to the respect the Aborigines have for the land, the white man has raped and plundered it, sending species after species into extinction. He is seen as a ruthless predator who is insensitive to Nature. Instead of adapting himself to the land, he has violently shaped and moulded it according to his needs and desires. The land lies like a slaughtered beast being picked clean of its richness by the despoilers.

The anguish of this dispossessed group is silent - 'they cannot say their thoughts' - for they are not politically strong enough for their voice to be heard and have any effect. The complete identification of the people with the land and forces of Nature is powerfully brought about in the lines 'We are the lightning bolt ... the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon'. They were an extension of nature, like lightning and thunder, full of the boundless, vibrant energy and force of the natural elements. The Aborigines were representative of a culture and way of life which could not be separated from the land. Now they have been stripped of their very life-force and have become 'subdued and silent'. From being a vigorous and powerful race, they have gradually become ghosts of their former selves, the symbol of a life destroyed and the portent of imminent extinction.

The last lines list the extermination of the original inhabitants of the land - bird, beast and human alike. Just as the ancient culture, ceremonies and beliefs have been eroded, so has the land been denuded of its vegetation and animals and soon, the Aborigines themselves will vanish from the face of the earth. The poem depicts the murder of an entire civilisation and way of life.

6.7 LET US SUM UP

The work of women writers reflects an engagement with social and political issues, with theoretical perspectives and moves outside cultural and disciplinary boundaries. The act of writing has helped them to move outside the narrow role and man's helpmate, outside the role of seductress, the angel or the witch. It helps problematise the areas of conflict and facilitates a search for alternative models as they deconstruct literary forms and socio-political structures. Rosemary Dobson's poetry reflects the woman's point of view, presenting a world that is a minefield of emotions where the woman's need to express her individuality is suffused with guilt.

The only human inhabitants of the country when the white settlers arrived there, were the Aborigines who were bound to the land that was taken from them, by the indissoluble link of religion and **totemic** kinship so that white intrusion on the land itself became a kind of bloodless murder, even where no actual murder took place. Kath Walker gives voice to the anguish of the dispossessed, mourning the passing of an era and a way of life.

6.8 QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the issues that women's writing is concerned with?
- 2) In what way does *Cock Crow* express the feminine viewpoint?
- 3) Is the feeling of guilt and betrayal expressed overtly or through symbols and metaphors?
- 4) Why does the woman in the poem experience a feeling of guilt and how does she come to terms with it?
- 5) Discuss the various images and symbols in the poem and try to relate them to the ideas and feelings running through the mind of the woman.
- 6) Can you think of Indian or other equivalents to the problems faced by the Aborigines of Australia? Are there any tribes or communities which are faced with extinction and/or threatened with drastic changes in their way of life?
- 7) What picture of modern Australia is conjured up in the poem?
- 8) What is the contrast between the Aboriginal and white Australian way of life?
- 9) In what ways was the Aboriginal lifestyle an environmentally friendly one?
- 10) Read the poem closely and list the words which describe the plight of the Aborigines and the attitude of the whites. How do these words affect the meaning and emotion conveyed by the poem?

6.9 GLOSSARY

Bora	an Aboriginal rite in which boys are initiated into manhood.
Corroboree	a festive or war-like dance drama with song; large ceremonial meetings that took place in all parts of Australia when seasonal conditions were suitable and abundant food resources were available. Hundreds of people travelled vast distances to trade goods, arrange marriages, and participate in social and cultural activities. Such "corroborees" - which are possible because most Aborigines are multilingual - continue today, and involve strong elements of music and dance.
Dreamtime	in the mythology of the Australian Aborigines, the period of Creation in which the known landscape took shape and all life has its source. Aboriginal traditions generally do not record the origins of the cosmos itself, and the sky and Earth are thought to have been eternally present. There is, however, an exceptionally rich tradition of "myths of origin" relating to all aspects of the natural and social environment, which are thought to have taken shape during the Dreaming.

Druids

ancient Celtic priests, magicians or soothsayers of Gaul, Britain or Ireland. The Druids were well versed in astrology, magic, and the mysterious powers of plants and animals; they held the oak tree and the mistletoe in great reverence, especially when the latter grew on oak trees, and they customarily conducted their rituals in oak forests.

Dutch masters

the most illustrious national school of genre painting was that of the Netherlands in the 17th century. Probably never before or since was the ordinary life of a nation depicted so fully as was the Dutch life of this period. Not only the great masters but also the less outstanding Dutch painters excelled at it. The most important of the Dutch genre painters were the so-called *little masters*, including Gerard Ter Borch, Jan Steen, Gabriel Metsu, Pieter de Hooch, Gerrit Dou and Adriaen van Ostade. The three leading 17th-century Dutch masters, Rembrandt, Frans Hals, and Jan Vermeer, also created genre paintings of unrivalled beauty.

Feminism

general term covering a range of ideologies and theories which pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. The term tends to be used for the women's movement, which began in the late 18th century and continues to campaign for complete political, social, and economic equality between women and men. Feminists are united by the idea that women's position in society is unequal to that of men, and that society is structured in such a way as to benefit men to the political, social, and economic detriment of women.

Peter, St (died 64 AD)

the most prominent of the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ, a leader and missionary in the early Church, and traditionally the first bishop of Rome. After Jesus' arrest, Peter denied being associated with him and suffered enormous self-reproach for having done so, but the first appearance of the risen Jesus was to Peter.

Totemism

a complex system of ideas, symbols, and practices based on an assumed relationship between an individual or a social group and a natural object known as a totem. The totem may be a particular species of bird, animal, or plant; or it may be a natural phenomenon or feature of the landscape with which a group believes itself linked in some way. The term totem is derived from the language of the Ojibwa, a Native North American people.

EACH DAY I SEE THE LONG SHIPS COMING INTO PORT

Christopher Brennan (1870-1932)

And the people crowding to their rail, glad of the shore:
because to have been alone with the sea and not to have known
of anything happening in any crowded way,
and to have heard no other voice than the crooning Sea's
has charmed away the old rancours, and the great winds
have searched and swept their hurts of the old irksome thoughts:
so, to their Freshen'd gaze, each land smiles a good home.
Why envy I, seeing them made gay to greet the shore?
Surely I do not foolishly desire to go
hither and thither upon the earth and grow weary
with seeing many lands and peoples and the sea:
but if I might, someday, landing I reckon not where
have heart to find a welcome and perchance a rest,
I would spread the sail to any wandering wind of the air
this night, when waves are hard and rain blots out the land.

THE ORANGE TREE - *John Shaw Neilson (1872-1942)*

The young girl stood beside me. I
Saw not what her young eyes could see:
- A light, she said, not of the sky
Lives somewhere in the Orange Tree.

- Is it, I said, of east or west?
The heartbeat of a luminous boy
Who with his faltering flute confessed
Only the edges of his joy?

Was he, I said, borne to the blue
In a mad escapade of Spring
Ere he could make a fond adieu
To his love in the blossoming?

Listen! The young girl said. There calls
No voice, no music beats on me;
But it is almost sound: it falls
This evening on the Orange Tree.

- Does he, I said, so fear the spring
Ere the white sap too far can climb?
See in the full gold evening
All happenings of the olden time?

Is he so goaded by the green?
Does the compulsion of the dew
Make him unknowable but keen
Asking with beauty of the blue?

- Listen! the young girl said. For all
Your hapless talk you fail to see
There is a light, a step, a call
This evening on the Orange tree.

-Is it, I said, a waste of love
Imperishably old in pain,
Moving as an affrighted dove
Under the sunlight or the rain?

Is it a fluttering heart that gave
Too willingly and was reviled?
Is it the stammering at a grave,
The last word of a little child?

-Silence! The young girl said. Oh, why,
Why will you talk to weary me?
Plague me no longer now, for I
Am listening like the Orange tree.

SOUTH COUNTRY - *Kenneth Slessor* (1901-1971)

After the whey-faced anonymity
Of river-gums and scribbly-gums and bush,
After the rubbing and the hit of brush,
You come to the South Country

As if the argument of trees were done,
The doubts and quarrelling, the plots and pains,
All ended by these clear and gliding planes
Like an abrupt solution.

And over the flat earth of empty farms
The monstrous continent of air floats back
Coloured with rotting sunlight and the black,
Bruised flesh of thunderstorms:

Air arched, enormous, pounding the bony ridge,
Ditches and hutches, with a drench of light,
So huge, from such infinities of height,
You walk on the sky's beach

While even the dwindled hills are small and bare,
As if, rebellious, buried, pitiful,
Something below pushed up a knob of skull,
Feeling its way to air.

THIS NIGHT'S ORBIT - *R D Fitzgerald* (1901-1971)

I have walked on moonlit grass before,
back and along outside my house.
And if there is nothing can restore
that time, and little enough to rouse
so much as thought of it here within sound
of a clean sea, beside white dunes,
amid bottle-brush, I would not be bound
in this night's orbit or this moon's.
For all that I know now or have known
is even my life itself, outspread
where still I walk; old scenes are blown
like sand across these hillocks; and my head
could bury in the past. But always I have met,
and shall meet, the fresh hour. And though one might
read a learnt lesson through and regret
blunders made, chances killed outright,
harms done, and that greatest harm of all-
days wasted, profitless, without joy-
it is not that either. The turn and fall

of living brings me into the employ
of wars, business, events, to run
new errands, hardly or my own will,
along an old time's pathway, one
overgrown but known blindfold still.

LEGEND - *Judith Wright* (1915-)

The blacksmith's boy went out with a rifle
And a black dog running behind.
Cobwebs snatched at his feet,
rivers hindered him,
thorn-branches caught at his eyes to make him blind
and the sky turned into an unlucky opal,
but he didn't mind,
I can break branches, I can swim rivers, I can stare out any spider
I meet,
Said he to his dog and his rifle.

The blacksmith's boy went over the paddocks
with his old black hat on his head.
Mountains jumped in his way,
and the old crow cried, 'you'll soon be dead'
And the rain came down like mattocks
But he only said
I can climb mountains, I can dodge rocks, I can shoot an old crow
any day,
and he went on over the paddocks.

When he came to the end of the day the sun began falling.
Up came the night ready to swallow him,
like the barrel of a gun,
like an old black hat,
like a black dog hungry to follow him
Then the pigeon, the magpie and the dove began wailing
and the grass lay down to pillow him.
His rifle broke, his hat blew away and his dog was gone
and the sun was falling.

But in front of the night the rainbow stood on the mountain,
Just as his heart foretold,
He ran like a hare,
he climbed like a fox;
he caught it in his hands, the colours and the cold-
like a bar of ice, like the column of a fountain,
like a ring of gold.
The pigeon, the magpie and the dove flew up to stare,
and the grass stood up again on the mountain.

The blacksmith's boy hung the rainbow on his shoulder
instead of his broken gun.
Lizards ran out to see,
snakes made way for him,
and the rainbow shone as brightly as the sun.
All the world said, Nobody is braver, nobody is bolder
nobody else has done
anything to equal it. He went home as bold as he could be
with the swinging rainbow on his shoulder.

BULLOCKY - *Judith Wright*

Beside his heavy-shouldered team,
thirsty with drought and chilled with rain,
he weathered all the striding years
till they ran widdershins in his brain:

Till the long solitary tracks
etched deeper with each lurching load
were populous before his eyes,
and fiends and angels used his road.

All the long straining journey grew
a mad apocalyptic dream,
and he old Moses, and the slaves
his suffering and stubborn team.

Then in his evening camp beneath
the half-light pillars of the trees
he filled the steeped cone of night
with shouted prayers and prophecies.

While past the campfire's crimson ring
the star-struck darkness cupped him round,
and centuries of cattlebells
rang with their sweet uneasy sound.

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

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.

THE AUSTRALIAN DREAM - *David Campbell (1915-1979)*

The doorbell buzzed. It was past three o'clock
The steeple-of-Saint-Andrew's weathercock
Cried silently to darkness, and my head
Was bronze with claret as I rolled from bed
To ricochet from furniture. Light! Light
Blinded the stairs, the hatstand sprang upright,
I fumbled with the lock, and on the porch
Stood the royal Family with a wavering torch.

'We hope,' the Queen said, 'we do not intrude.
The pubs were full, most of our subjects rude.
We came before our time. It seems the Queen's
Command brings only, "Tell the dead marines!"
We've come to you.' I must admit I'd half
Expected just this visit. With a laugh
That put them at their ease, I bowed my head.
'Your Majesty is most welcome here,' I said.
'My home is yours. There is a little bed
Downstairs, a boiler-room, might suit the Duke.'
He thanked me gravely for it and he took

Himself off with a wave. 'Then the queen Mother?
 She'd best bed down with you. There is no other
 But my wide bed. I'll curl up in a chair.'
 The Queen looked thoughtful. She brushed out her hair
 And folded up *The Garter* on a pouf.
 'Distress was the first commoner, and as proof
 That queens bow to the times,' she said, 'we three
 Shall share the double bed. Please follow me.'

I waited for the ladies to undress-
 A sense of fitness, even in distress,
 Is always with me. They had tucked away
 Their sate robes in the lowboy; gold crowns lay
 Upon the beside tables; ropes of pearls
 Lassoed the plastic lampshade; their soft curls
 Were spread out on the pillows and they smiled.
 'Hop in,' said the Queen Mother. In I piled
 Between them to lie like a stick of wood.
 I couldn't find a thing to say. My blood
 Beat, but like rollers at the ebb of tide.
 'I hope your Majesties sleep well,' I lied.
 A hand touched mine and the Queen said, 'I am
 Most grateful to you, Jock. Please call me Ma'am.'

TERRA AUSTRALIS - James McAuley (1917-1976)

Voyage within you, on the fabled ocean,
 And you will find that Southern Continent,
 Quiros' vision-his hidalgo heart
 And mythical Australia, where reside
 All things in their imagined counterpart.

It is your land of similes: the wattle
 Scatters its pollen on the doubting heart;
 The flowers are wide-awake; the air gives ease.
 There you come home; the magpies call you Jack
 And whistle like larrikins at you from the trees.

There too the angophora preaches on the hillsides
 With the gestures of Moses; and the white cockatoo,
 Perched on his limbs, screams with demoniac pain;
 And who shall say on what errand the insolent emu
 Walks between morning and night on the edge of the plain?

But northward in valleys of the fiery Goat
 Where the sun like a centaur vertically shoots
 His raging arrows with unerring aim,
 Stand the ecstatic solitary pyres
 Of unknown lovers, featureless with flame.

AUSTRALIA - A.D. Hope (1907-2000)

A nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey
 In the field uniform of modern wars
 Darkens her hills, those endless, outstretched paws
 Of Sphinx demolished or stone lion worn away.

They call her a young country, but they lie:
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry;

Without songs, architecture, history:
The emotions and superstitions of younger lands.
Her rivers of water drawn among inland sands,
The river of her immense stupidity

Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth,
In them at last the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not: 'we live' but 'we survive'
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

And her five cities, like five teeming sores
Each drains her, a vast parasite robber-state
Where second-hand European pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come.

Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
Which is called civilization over there.

MOSCHUS MOSCHIFERUS - *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day - A.D. Hope*

In the high jungle where Assam meets Tibet
The small Kastura, most archaic of deer,
Were driven in herds to cram the hunters' net
And slaughtered for the musk-pods which they bear

But in those thickets of rhododendron and birch
The tiny creatures now grow hard to find.
Fewer and fewer survive each year. The search
Employs new means, more exquisite and refined:

The hunters now set out by two or three;
Each carries a bow and one a slender flute.
Deep in the forest the archers choose a tree
And climb; the piper squats against the root.

And there they wait until all trace of man
And rumour of his passage dies away.
They melt into the leaves and, while they scan
The glade below, their comrade starts to play.

Through those vast listening woods a tremulous skein
Of melody wavers, delicate and shrill:
Now dancing and now pensive, now a rain
Of pure, bright drops of sound and now the still,

Sad wailing of lament; from tune to tune
It winds and modulates without a pause;

The hunters hold their breath; the trance of noon
Grows tense; with its full power the music draws

A shadow from a juniper's darker shade;
Bright-eyed, with quivering muzzle and pricked ear,
The little musk-deer slips into the glade
Led by an ecstasy that conquers fear.

A wild enchantment lures him, step by step,
Into its net of crystalline sound, until
The leaves stir overhead, the bowstrings snap
And poisoned shafts bite sharp into the kill.

COCK CROW - *Rosemary Dobson (1920-1985)*

Wanting to be myself, alone,
Between the lit house and the town
I took the road, and at the bridge
Turned back and walked the way I'd come.

Three times I took that lonely stretch,
Three times the dark trees closed me round,
The night absolved me of my bonds
Only my footsteps held the ground.

My mother and my daughter slept,
One life behind and one before,
And I that stood between denied
Their needs in shutting-to the door.

And walking up and down the road
Knew myself, separate and alone,
Cut off from human cries, from pain,
And love that grows about the bone.

Too brief illusion! Thrice for me
I heard the cock crow on the hill,
And turned the handle of the door
Thinking I knew his meaning well.

WE ARE GOING - *Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker)*

For Grannie Coolwell

They came in to the little town
A semi-naked band subdued and silent,
All that remained of their tribe.
They came here to the place of their old bora ground
Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
Notice of estate agent reads: 'Rubbish May be Tipped Here'.
Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.
They sit and are confused they cannot say their thoughts;
'We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.'
We belong here, we are of the old ways.
We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
We are the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.
We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games,
the wandering camp fires.

We are the lightning-bolt over Gaphembah Hill
 Quick and terrible,
 And the Thunder after him, that loud fellow.
 We are the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon.
 We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.
 We are nature and the past, all the old ways
 Gone now and scattered.
 The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
 The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone
 from this place.
 The bora ring is gone.
 The corroboree is gone.
 And we are going.'

HISTORY - *Rex Ingamells*

These are the images that make my dreams,
 strong images but frail, dimmed-with-glow clear:

Pioneer ships lumbering in the sunset,
 lumbering along our sombre eastern coastlines,
 swaying, awkward but beautiful, north to Port Jackson...

The stark hatred and reeking soul-fire of men's faces,
 men pent in penitentiaries and chained in road-gangs,
 herded as cattle, worked as cattle, fierce in their misery...

Stern-hearted freemen, felling tall trees, building
 rough homesteads amid far, unfamiliar places,
 hoping, cherishing their preconceived
 vision of beauty and propriety...

Herds of cattle, lowing by the fertile banks
 of eastern rivers; drowsing under redgums,
 where the black-and-white magpie sits calling
 ecstatically ..

Flocks of sheep bleating perpetually on green hillsides,
 tired of fine feeding, joyous at life ...

Deserted station-houses, quiet in drought.
 Bones of cattle, camels, horses, men.
 And the despised black who lives through it all,
 finding himself water, native plums, yams,
 and wild-honey from the honey-ants...

Cities growing up,
 towering into the future;
 and this land's destined
 vast cities of imagination.

MOORAWATHIMEERING - *Rex Ingamells*

Into moorawathimeering,
 where atninga dare not tread,
 leaving wurly for a wilban,
 tallabilla, you have fled.

Wombalunga curses, waitjurk-
though we cannot break the ban,
and follow tchidna any further
after one-time karaman.

Fair in moorawathimeering,
safe from wallan darenderong,
tallabilla waitjurk, wander
silently the whole day long.

Go with only lilliri
to walk along beside you there,
while douran-douran voices wail
and Karaworo beats the air.

DURER : INNSBRUCK, 1495 - 'Ern Malley'

I had often, cowed in the slumberous heavy air,
Closed my inanimate lids to find it real,
As I knew it would be, the colourful spires
And painted roofs, the high snows glimpsed at the back,
All reversed in the quiet reflecting waters-
Not knowing then that Durer perceived it too.
Now I find that once more I have shrunk
To an interloper, robber of dead men's dream,
I had read in books that art is not easy
But no one warned that the mind repeats
In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still
The black swan of trespass on alien waters.

AUSTRALIA - Ania Walwicz

You big ugly. You too empty. You desert with your nothing nothing
nothing. You scorched suntanned. Old too quickly. Acres of suburbs
watching the telly. You bore me. Freckle silly children. You nothing
much. With your big sea. Beach beach beach. I've seen enough
already. You dumb dirty city with bar stools. You're ugly. You silly
shoppingtown. You copy. You too far everywhere. You laugh at me.
When I came this woman gave me a box of biscuits. You try to be
friendly but you're not very friendly. You never ask me to your
house. You insult me. You don't know how to be with me. Road road
tree tree. I came from crowded and many. I came from rich. You
have nothing to offer. You're poor and spread thin. You big. So
what. I'm small. It's what's in. You silent on Sunday. Nobody on your
streets. You dead at night. You go to sleep too early. You don't excite
me. You scare me with your hopeless. Asleep when you walk. Too
hot to think. You big awful. You don't match me. You burnt out. You
too big sky. You laugh with your big healthy. You want everyone to
be the same. You're dumb. You do like anybody else. You engaged
Doreen. You big cow. You average average. Cold day at school
playing around at lunchtime. Running around for nothing. You never
accept me. For you own. You always ask me where I'm from. You
always ask me. You tell me I look strange. Different. You don't adopt
me. You laugh at the way I speak. You think you're better than me.
You don't like me. You don't have any interest in another country.
Idiot centre of your own self. You think the rest of the world walk
around without shoes or electric light. You don't go anywhere. You
stay at home. You like one another. You go crazy on Saturday night.
You get drunk. You don't like me and you don't like women. You put

your arm around men in bars. You're rough. I can't speak to you. You burly burly. You're just silly to me. You big man. Poor with all your money,. You ugly furniture. You ugly house. Relaxed in your summer stupor. All year. Never fully awake. Dull at school. Wait for other people to tell you what to do. Follow the leader. Can't imagine. Work horse. Thick legs. You go to work in the morning. You shiver on a train.

From AUSTRALIA - John Farrell

Land of widest hope, of promise boundless,
Why wert thou hidden in a dark, strange sea
To wait through ages, fruitless, scentless, soundless,

Till from thy slumber men should waken thee?-
Why did' st thou lie, with ear that never hearkened
The sounds without, the cries of strife and play,
Like some sweet child within a chamber darkened
Left sleeping far into a troubled day?-

What opiate sealed thine eyes while all the others
Grew tired and faint in East and West and North;
Why did' st thou dream until thy joyful brothers
Found where thou wast, and led thee smiling forth?-
Why did' st thou mask the happy face thou wearest?
Why wert thou veiled from all the eager eyes?
Why left so long, O first of lands and fairest,
Beneath the tent of un conjectured skies?

Then sweet Australia, fell a benediction
Of sleep upon thee, where no wandering breath
Might come to tell thee of the loud affliction
Of cursing tongues and clamouring hosts of death;
And with the peace of His great love around thee,
And rest that clashing ages could not break,
Strong-sighted eyes of English seekers found thee,
Strong English voices cried to thee 'Awake!'

Here were no dreadful vestiges imprinted
With evil messages and brands of Cain,
No mounds of death or walls of refuge dinted
With signs that Christ had lived and died in vain;
No chill memorials here proclaimed the story
Of kingships stricked for and murders done;
Here was a marvel and a separate glory,
One land whose history had not begun!

One unsown garden, fenced by sea-crag's sterile,
Whose iron breasts flung back the thundering waves,
From all the years of fierce unrest and peril,
And slaves, and lords, and broken blades, and graves;
One gracious freehold for the free, where only
Soft dusky feet fell, reaching not thy sleep;
One field inviolate, untroubled, lonely,
Across the dread of the uncharted deep!

O dear and fair! Awakened from thy sleeping
So late! The world is breaking into noon;
The eyes that all the morn were dim with weeping
Smile through the tears that will cease dropping soon!

TERRA AUSTRALIS - *Douglas Stewart (1913-1985)*

Captain Quiros and Mr William Lane,
Sailing some highway shunned by trading traffic
Where in the world's skull like a moonlit brain
Flashing and crinkling rolls the vast pacific,

Approached each other zigzag, in confusion,
Lane from the west, the Spaniard from the east,
Their flickering canvas breaking the horizon
That shuts the dead off in a wall of mist.

"Three hundred years since I set out from Lima
And off Espiritu Santo lay down and wept
Because no faith in men, no truth in islands
And still unfound the shining continent slept;

"And swore upon the cross to come again
Though fever, thirst and mutiny stalked the seas
And poison spiders spun their webs in Spain,
And did return, and sailed three centuries,

"Staring to see the golden headlands wade
And saw no sun, no land, but this wide circle
Where moonlight clots the waves with coils of weed
And hangs like silver moss on sail and tackle,

"Until I thought to trudge till time was done
With all except my purpose run to waste;
And now upon this ocean of the moon,
A shape, a shade, a ship, and from the west!"

AUSTRALIA - *Bernard O'Dowd (1866-1953)*

Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
Are you a drift Sargasso, where the West
In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?
Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race?
Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?
A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?

The cenotaphs of species dead elsewhere
That in your limits leap and swim and fly,
Or trail uncanny harp-strings from your trees,
Mix omens with the auguries that dare
To plant the Cross upon your forehead sky,
A virgin helpmate Ocean at your knees.

THE SOUTHERN CALL - *Bernard O Dowd*

Come hither ye, o'er all the world who seek the Altar room
Of spacious Freedom ever lit for worshippers to be:
Come from the jaded lands to us, come from the sullen gloom,
To sunny soils and cities sweet, to Love and Liberty!
The Truth by which ye steer by day, the Good ye pray for nightly,
The Beautiful ye would be one with - here are glowing brightly!

Here ye will realise at last the Sempiternal Dream,
Join in the Great Adventure towards the Mystic Pilgrim's goal,
And reach the summit that ye sought for following the Gleam -
For here it is, we know, and now - the City of the Soul.

When men outgrew the simple fane that awed their fathers' eyes,
And waking found the Presence gone, the Memmon music dumb,
One of the dreams they loved the best, and yearned to realise,
Told of a star that leaps to light when new gods are to come.
Surely 'tis here Messiahs new the old world's chains will sunder,
In purer skies, the genial air, and omnipresent wonder!
So, come ye all whose lighted eyes behold the star above
The crib where waits maturing long the Hope that is to be:
And bring the gold of willing hands, the frankincense of Love,
And, priceless o'er Golconda's gems, the myrth of Liberty!

We need your grit to make the Wild the fair abiding place
That ages have been yearning for, the Land of Heart's Desire:
Yet while we beacon hill on hill with signals to the race,
Sorely we need your prudence old, lest reckless we aspire
To change the orbit of the world to gratify a passion,
Or Kings eternal to dethrone to fit the moment's fashion.
Away so long from war's dire lore, we half forger to fight,
Unused to hunger we despise our smiling plenty's worth,
Wrong is a stranger so to us, we scarcely know the Right,
Yet steadied by your wisdom we were Saviours of the earth.

And not alone to feel the mouths of children at her breast
Australia wafts her sibyl call wherever white men are;
But, Warden of the Boundaries, lone outpost for the West,
She dare not risk the paling here of splendid Europe's star.
Out in the might we seem to see piratic dangers sparkle,
And on our noon's horizon growing omens grimly darkle
O'come ye of the white race hither, come ye to her call!
'Tis not alone for us the word she sends you o'er the sea.
As ye shall rise while up we soar, our failure means your fall -
The fall of Truth, the fall of Love, the fall of Liberty!

Where ancient sorrow darkens not nor ancient evils stain,
There is no air on earth to-day gives oracles so clear;
The Creed is here that opes the Door the creeds have tried in vain;
No secret of the universe ye may not cipher here.
Hither hath come the Holy Grail that ages long ye fared for;
Yea, He is here, we know, we know, the God all gods prepared for,
And builds for us, if but we will, millennial nationhood;
Song for the soul, if but we call, will fill the desert hush,
His desert ravens' from wings will bear our bodies food;
If but we strike, the desert rock will with His fountains gush.

The clanking of the Iron Age grows musical at last;
The dove replaces owl and bat, leopard becomes a fawn;
Sinister angels with the gloom are disappearing fast;
The rumbling portents slowly change as midnight flowers in dawn
Out of the yearnings that ye sowed in centuries of sorrow
Springs the fruition of your faith, Australia and To-morrow!
The Sun-burst of the Coming Age is golden on the hills;
Shouting for joy the Sons of God amid the glory stand;
Alchemist Love elixirs new for jaded man distils;
And Time the wizard rends the veil that hid the Promised Land!

Unto the wronged of ages singing songs of Human Rights,
Redolent of the wattle bloom and tonic with the gum:
Into the prisons olden flashing cleansing Southern Lights,
Unto her citizens to be, Australia cooees 'Come!'

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