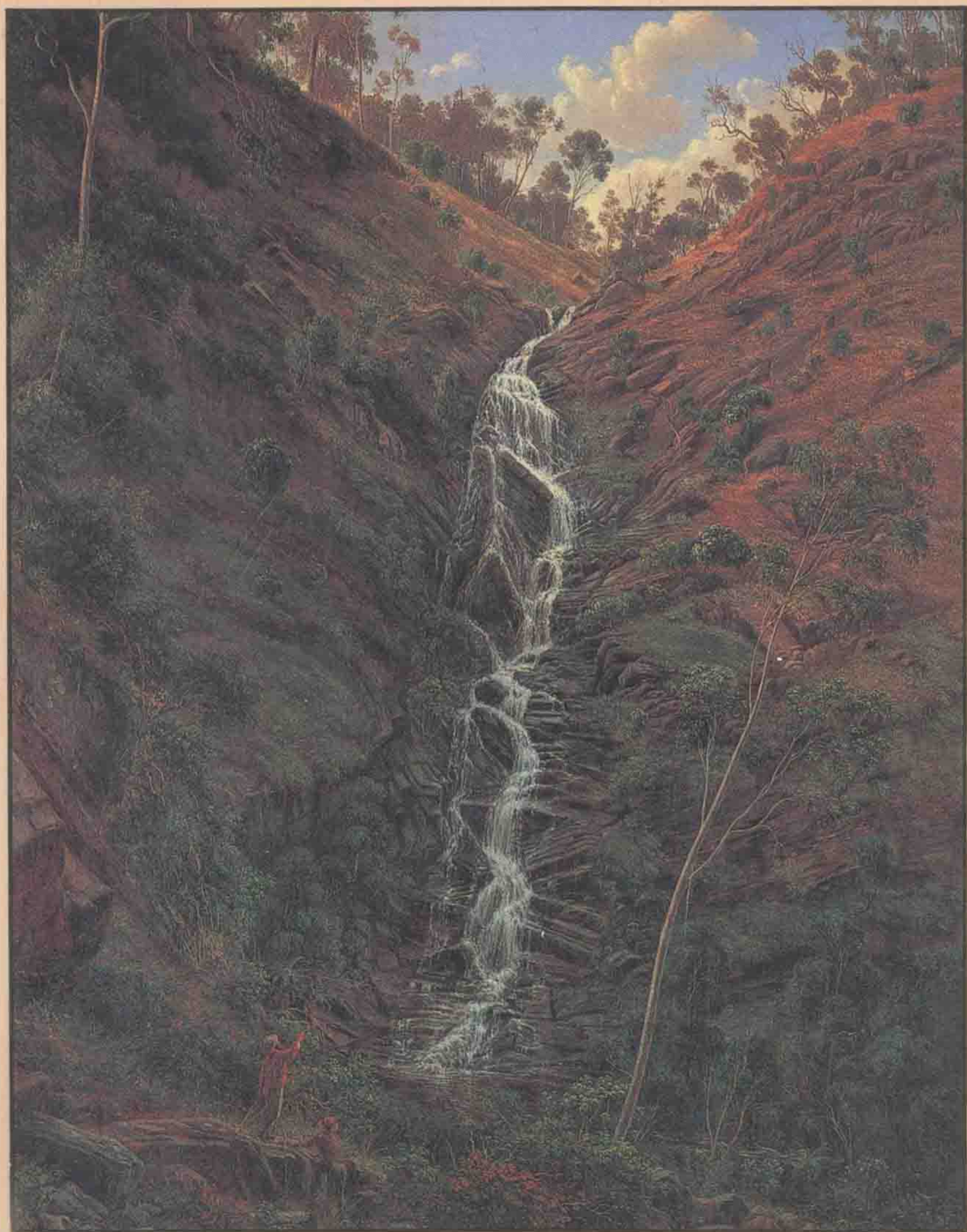


PERSISTENCE IN FOLLY

Les A. Murray



Selected Prose Writings

PERSISTENCE IN FOLLY

Les A. Murray

A SIRIUS BOOK

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THE PEOPLE'S OTHERWORLD

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Preface

This, my second collection of prose articles, comprises those written between 1977 and 1982 which I have wished to preserve. With a very few exceptions, the articles are presented in the order in which I wrote them. Emendations have included the restoration of my original titles for some of the pieces, and also the restoration, sometimes from rough memory, of bits cut out by editors. I am ruefully amused by the variations in paragraphing in the book, likewise reflecting the efforts of different editors when the articles were first published. Left to myself, I do perhaps incline towards trying to write everything in one huge paragraph, out of a sense of the simultaneous interconnectedness of all things. I have updated a few of the pieces in ways which seemed appropriate; sadly, some of these updatings have been made necessary by the deaths of persons alive when the relevant articles were first published. Details of publication are given at the end of each article, recording its appearance or appearances in print. It should be added here that the final three essays comprised the Colin Roderick Lectures for 1982, commissioned by the English Association of James Cook University of North Queensland, in Townsville, and first delivered at that university. I would like to thank the Association, and especially Elizabeth Perkins, for their kindness and hospitality to me on that occasion.

This book differs from my earlier prose collection, *The Peasant Mandarin*, (University of Queensland Press, 1978) in a number of ways. It contains fewer short book reviews on widely differing topics, a greater proportion of general essays, and fewer adverse criticisms of individuals' writing. Little or no rewriting was undertaken in that book, while in this one many things have been expanded and worried towards a more definitive shape. If thought is to be organic, there has to be room for expansions and after-thoughts. One article in particular, "The Bonnie Disproportion", has grown larger and more detailed with each re-publication, and I suspect it wants to grow into a full-length book. I have restrained it, however, and hope that it may be useful as source material for the person who does someday write the large history of the Scots

Australians which the subject seems to call for.

Another piece, "The Human-Hair Thread", was written in 1977, just too late to be included in *The Peasant Mandarin*; since then, I have drawn on Aboriginal tradition and art in one large and a few smaller instances, and my thinking on the use of borrowings from this source has slightly altered. I did think of writing an appendix to that article for this book, but I have found that some critics rather resent authors who seem to intrude into their province, and I am aware of the danger of imprisoning poems in authorial comment. Also, there is a lot of continuity between the concerns and themes of "The Human-Hair Thread" and those of *The Boys who Stole the Funeral*, the verse novel published in 1980 which constitutes the major instance referred to above. This is especially true of the main body of the story. New elements mainly occur in the delirium sequence near the end, which is as much as anything a fantasia on many different Aboriginal and other elements, bushrangers, escaped-convict cedargetters, swagmen, mad hatters, *Karadji* "clever men" and fragments of the ancient Bora religion of south-eastern Australia, as well as Central Australian echoes. Incidentally, I don't think Clancy Forbutt, the verse novel's main (living) character, really undergoes subincision, circumcision or any other literal operations during his visionary trip. He doesn't mention such traumata afterwards, and he would tend to notice if he had been cut about the generative parts in any literal way. As many have demonstrated, the dreamworld is a frequent and natural place for white and Aboriginal Australians to meet. Really, though, the emphasis in the whole poem is on what the races have in common, rather than on what divides them. Much of its action takes place in that rural world where being Aboriginal or white can sometimes be a matter almost of choice. Not always, sadly, of one's own choice. Mrs Ella Simon, mentioned in "The Human-Hair Thread", relates in her autobiography how she was sometimes told, when she was living at Purfleet Settlement, and before she had her Dog Licence (citizenship papers in her own country) to "Go and live in Taree with the other whites". Not that she would have been allowed to do so by the white authorities of the time. I should add, now that I seem to be writing that appendix after all, that my other main use of Aboriginal material since 1977 is in the poem "The Mouthless Image of God in the Hunter-Colo Mountains", which is based on a painting of the Supreme Spirit I was once shown in the mountains to the south of the Hunter Valley wine district. The figure has no mouth, and I was told that this referred to the time when birds and animals could speak, while humans were dumb. The creatures, however, told too many of their sacred secrets, and the Supreme Being took away their speech and gave it to the humans. The

cautionary nature of that tale is clear, I think, though it saddens me. When I was very young, I used to think secrecy, or even ordinary reserve, was a little undignified and cowardly.

The very old review of Cole Turnley's biography of G. W. Cole, dating from 1974, is one which I unaccountably missed when compiling *The Peasant Mandarin*, and is included here out of liking for its subject. I would like to have met Cole, and used his great Book Arcade. We need such bookshops nowadays, and such booksellers. I think that a great bookseller, of whom there seem to be only a few in every age, is one of the key cultural figures in a nation. It is good to report that Cole's policy of unrestricted reading of the stock continues as a tradition in a few Australian bookshops. Sadly, most of them are small, and some are getting smaller. In the years since I wrote about Cole, I have often been moved by thoughts of Amos Cole, his farm-labourer father. Dying young and poor, in the anguish of leaving a family unprovided for in an age before social services, he is a face briefly glimpsed out of the millions of peasant Europe who were our ancestors. A moment of human tragedy reaches out from among the dry, branching names of genealogy to touch us. As will be obvious, this book continues many of the concerns of *The Peasant Mandarin*, the republicanism, the mistrust of elites. Concerning one of the later articles in it, an academic friend sneered affably the other day, "Ah, another chapter in your disguised autobiography, I see." I doubt the book is that, or that any autobiography I wrote would wear much disguise, but he may have a point. My own suspicion is that I am taking part in an experiment, one which I am not aware that I designed, to discover whether it is possible any longer to be an individual in Australia.

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Chatswood, New South Wales

The Human-Hair Thread

It may seem strange, and immodest, for a poet to embark on a lengthy account of one of the elements in his own work. My justification for tackling it is threefold: first, I was asked by the editor of *Meanjin* to do so, second, it will tend to use my writing as a springboard for talking about matters of wider interest, and third, its centre of gravity is not so much what I have been able to do with one of the great Australian cultural heritages, but rather what that heritage has given me, and how it has contributed and may yet increasingly contribute to a richer and more humane civilisation in this country.

Since the demise of the Jindyworobak movement, this resource has been largely neglected by writers; the main effect of Aboriginal culture on the general Australian consciousness in the last twenty-odd years has tended to flow through the conservationist movement and, to a lesser extent, through painting and perhaps music. Growing politicisation of the Aboriginal question has also, perhaps, made many non-Aboriginal writers wary of charges of exploitation, paternalism and the like. It will be a tragedy if the normal processes of artistic borrowing and influence, by which any culture makes part of its contribution to the conversation of mankind, are frozen in the Aboriginal case by what are really the manoeuvrings of a battle for political power within the white society of our country, or by tactical use of Third World rhetoric by jealous artists trying to damage each other professionally. Artistic borrowing is quite unlike the processes of finance from which the metaphor is drawn: it leaves the lender no poorer, and draws attention to his riches, which can only be depleted by neglect and his loss of confidence in them; these cause them to be lost. Borrowing is an act of respect which may restore his respect for his goods, and so help to preserve them. And he is at all times free to draw on them himself with the benefit of his own superior understanding of his treasures.

There has been an Aboriginal presence in my work almost from the start. This is natural enough, in one coming from the country. Until quite recently, the original Australians were almost exclusive-

ly a country people, and the white culture they had to resist or assimilate with was the Australian rural one. Growing up outside the cities, one couldn't fail to be conscious of them, living on the fringe of things, mostly in poverty, hanging around the pubs in Taree or walking the two hot, dusty miles back out to Purfleet Settlement. In my part of the north coast of New South Wales, they were not really poorer or more broken down than the poorest farm families or seasonal workers. All the same, one was dimly conscious of a difference that went beyond the often slight differences of skin colour. One knew there were special laws about the Aborigines — to some extent, the modern Aboriginal people is a *creation* of discriminatory laws working against the declared policy of assimilation — and one heard they could be treacherous, apt to repay slights exorbitantly after long and patient delay, though I don't remember any examples being given. They had a way of looking stately in tattered clothes, walking along the road to Taree, but one had no idea then of the warmth with which they supported and cared for their own. Nor any idea of their tradition of sharing. Ugly, contemptuous words were used to refer to them: coon, darkie, koori, black-gin. My mother, a city woman, prohibited these words in our house, and it was only years later, in the city, that I learned that *Koori* was what the black people called themselves. About the term gin, I remember hearing the story of Constable Crotty, of Taree, who was caught in flagrante with a Purfleet woman down at the Manning River car ferry, in the days before the Martin Bridge spanned the river; a six o'clock curfew was imposed on Aborigines in Taree in those days, and Mr Crotty was supposed to be seeing that all the black people were across the river by that hour. For a long time afterwards, in all the pubs of the town, a gin-in-milk was known as a "Crotty's"; the word drove Constable Crotty to leave town.

The Aborigines were partly a people, partly a caste, partly a class, though really that last term is inaccurate: they were actually part of a larger class of the rural poor, and it is still often more useful to see them in that light than in currently fashionable radical-racist terms. We, my family, were in the same class ourselves. The Murrays were among the earliest white families in the Manning district, but my father was a tenant-at-will of *his* father, who, before letting him rent a hived-off segment of his large property and farm it, had exploited his labour as a bullock driver and timber cutter for eight years with no pay beyond gruff promises of future rewards, Grandfather John Allan Murray, called Allan to distinguish him from his wildly generous and hospitable, if feckless, father Johnnie Murray, the first white settler at Bunyah, was always a man to do well out of family

loyalty, but he was not at all unusual in that, in his time and place. Until it was pulled down some years ago, our house on the farm never had a ceiling, or lining on the walls; summer and winter, the wind through the cracks in the plank walls provided us with air-conditioning. As my father says, “We were poor people — hardly had a roof to our mouth.” I suppose we were heirs to the unadmitted guilts of the white conquest of Australia, though I don’t remember our being conscious of them at all. Perhaps we were too poorly educated. A certain slight shyness on my part when meeting Aboriginal people may stem from subterranean feelings of guilt, however; indeed, I almost hope they come from there. They may be no more than an outgrowth of learned liberalism, or a residue of childhood fears. Really, I am not at all sure about white conquest-guilt; it may be no more than a construct of the political Left, that great inventor of prescriptive sentiments and categories. It certainly isn’t a reliable sentiment for outsiders to invoke among country people.

We may also have been heirs, tangentially, to guilts about miscegenation, a topic on which many older country people of all colours are deeply and ambiguously touchy, in part because of real tension between racial scorn and ordinary decency, in part also because it has been a stick used by urban elites, past and present, to beat us with. Then, as now, the sunny, self-righteous, generalising confidence of urban commentators was inimical to rural Australians. When I was growing up, the injustice of urban attitudes was shifting from the black people (feckless, primitive, a doomed, inferior race) to the white rural population (bigoted, conservative, ignorant, despoilers of the environment, a doomed, obsolete group), though it had not reached its present levels of intensity.

I grew up in what had been the country of the Kattang people, a region lying between the Manning and the Karuah Rivers and extending westward towards Gloucester and Dungog. This is the country which formed me, and I have celebrated it many times in verse. When I was a child, though I did not know it then, there were still initiated men living at Purfleet, men who had risen through the ceremonial stages of the Bora, that ancient religion whose name means resurrection and rebirth. I read about these men much later in the memoirs of Mrs Ella Simon of Taree, who was one of the last fluent speakers of Kattang, as well as a recognised keeper of family trees and traditional lore. Mrs Simon was one of the informants in Nils M. Holmer’s study, published in two parts by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1966–67, of the Kattang and Thangatti languages. Her autobiography, titled *Through My Eyes*, will correct and greatly amplify anything I could say here about the life of the Aboriginal people Up Home, and people wanting an

account, from the inside, of relations between the races in the Manning region are advised, most warmly, to look out for this book, which was published by Rigby in 1978. Mrs Simon was a great lady of my country, the first Aboriginal Justice of the Peace in New South Wales, and a person of immense wisdom and justice; she knew where all the corpses were buried. She would certainly have known who the old black man was who stood by the roadside in Purfleet with his hat in his hands and his eyes lowered the day my mother's funeral passed by on its way out to Krambach cemetery. I was twelve then, but that man has stayed with me, from what may well have been the natal day of my vocation as a poet, a good spirit gently restraining me from indulgence in stereotypes and prejudices. Or trying to. I don't know who he was. He could have been one of the Bungey family, a relation of young Cecil Bungey who jumped into the Manning from Queen Elizabeth Park in Taree one night when the police were after him and drowned. This tragedy, in the mid-fifties, was an important event in the district, because the indignation it caused among black and white people alike led to some curbing of police oppression of the Purfleet community and a beginning of social change in the settlement. He could have been a Saunders, or a Lobban, a member of that Scottish settler family of a century ago which seems to have no white members left now. Or he may have been one of the Syrons, visiting from Minimbah.

In tracing the black thread as it runs through my work, I am conscious of many mistakes, shortcomings and impositions of myth on the facts. Leaving aside a couple of short stories I wrote while at university, heavily programmatic tales which were really about the tension between individuality and community values, and not about real Aborigines at all, the first poem of those I have kept which deals with an explicitly Aboriginal subject is one titled "Beside the Highway", written in about 1962 or 1963. It is an outsider's view of an Aboriginal settlement of the old type, and is, of course, based almost entirely on Purfleet and the life I saw or imagined going on there, the heat, the ennui, the sense of dereliction and aimlessness — in other words, very much the conventional white liberal picture, enlivened by an eye for detail. The thing in this early poem which gives it some fleeting originality is the image of cars on the highway, which "approach like missiles/and scatter glare as they pass". Purfleet used to be bisected by the Pacific Highway, exposed to the constant intrusive passage of cars and trucks that violated its inwardness. It must have been a fearfully dangerous place for little children — though they grew up into public-spirited youngsters capable of putting out placards on the approaches to warn motorists of police speed traps — and one can

imagine the disruption and chronic restlessness which the endless glittering stream of vehicles must have provoked in the people there. Mrs Simon says in her memoirs that Purfleet should be bulldozed now; it had value in its day, and was a step up from the squalid riverbank blacks' camp it replaced, but the need for a refuge, a separate community, in effect a ghetto, has now passed. The poem is stitched shakily together by the imagined figure of Mad Jess, who owes more to Wordsworth and Yeats than to actual observation; this figure is made to bear the burden of Significance in the poem:

“And I was dreaming,”
says old Mad Jess to herself, “flash cars was coming
at me like hailstones, cutting me to pieces.”

What this highly literary figure allowed me to do, I see now, was to use the rural dialect I had grown up speaking, but which I was as yet too conventional to employ in my verse. Perhaps the most perceptive touch in the picture of Mad Jess, though, is the image of her contemplating her shoes. This image, with its concomitants of remembered barefoot freedom and of lore and magical practices connected with tracks, recurs in a much later poem, “The Ballad of Jimmy Governor”. Images of the ground and of tracks abound in the poem, and in one place the half-caste outlaw ironically refers to his full-blood accomplice Jacky Underwood as having “already give back his shoes”. The implication is that the only footwear Underwood ever owned was that given to him by the prison officials in Dubbo for his appearances at court. Now he has been hanged and the shoes have been taken back. The Governor Ballad is written entirely in the dialect, or more properly sociolect, of the rural poor. I have heard it read in an Aboriginal accent by the actor Bob Maza, and the effect chilled even me!

In a poem written while I was living in Wales in 1967, entitled “The Wilderness”, there is a reference to the day my friend Peter Barden and I, watched by curious peak-hour crowds, trotted down Wynyard Concourse in Sydney towards the railway ticket barriers, excitedly pointing out imaginary animal tracks in the dust and pausing to make more with our knuckles in the manner of Aboriginal hunters discussing the finer points of their trade, while all the time exchanging remarks in an Aboriginal-sounding gibberish. We even avoided sibilants in our mock-Aranda, knowing dimly that these don't occur in Australian languages. The yen for travel to the Outback and for what Barden called the “clean country” of the Centre was strong on us that day. And it was a good stir. In the poem, which is about a hitchhiking trip through the Centre which I'd done in 1961 to while away the hungry months of the Credit

Squeeze that year, I refer to our gibberish as mock-*Arunta*, and thereby fall into the same sort of error as the old Jindyworobak poets, Rex Ingamells, Ian Mudie, Flexmore Hudson, Max Dunn, Roland Robinson and the rest, who lacked the really first-rate scholarly sources available to us now. The spelling “Arunta” comes from the writings of Sir Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, who carried out valuable but faulty anthropological studies in Central Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The people these men were principally concerned with were the *Aranda*, who pronounce their tribal name with the stress on the initial A. The common white Australian mistake of pronouncing the “Arunta” form with the stress on the medial *u* probably stems from popularising material derived from Spencer and Gillen.

The Jindyworobak poets were very prone to romanticise the Aborigines, but their really worthwhile project of fusing Aboriginal and diverse European elements into a new and genuinely Australian poetry was made more difficult by the shaky incomplete source material they had to work with. Roland Robinson, the greatest of the Jindies, is of course an exception, largely because he did his own original research. Many of the best modern studies only appeared at the end of the Jindyworobak period or even later, in the late forties and early fifties; T. G. H. Strehlow’s monumental and superb *Songs of Central Australia* only came out finally in 1970. Before the Second World War, for those who read German there were accurate poem-texts in Carl Strehlow’s *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien*, published between 1907 and 1920, and other accurate texts could be found in odd articles by E. H. Davies and the young T. G. H. Strehlow in *Oceania*. Other texts, whose reliability I cannot judge, existed in George Taplin’s “The Narrinyeri”, a chapter of *The Native Tribes of South Australia* (1897), in A. W. Howitt’s *Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, and in a few other old books. Older texts were often clumsily literal, or else rendered Bill Harney-fashion into totally inappropriate English traditional rhyme and metre, which smothered their tone and flavour and usually made them look merely banal. Mary Gilmore’s renderings are a partial exception, as Judith Rodriguez points out in a recent review article in *Contempa*. To digress for a moment, it would be wonderful if we could recover the transcriptions of native, probably mainly Wiradjuri, songs Mary Gilmore’s father is said to have made; these were allegedly most painstaking, and were glossed by Mr Cameron in his native Gaelic so as to avoid missing nuances, before he made his English versions. It was not until 1945 that R. and C. Berndt published the results of their early field work in the Ooldea region,

and not until 1951 that Ronald Berndt published his study, with sensitively translated texts, of the Arnhem Land Djanggawul cycle. Similarly, the younger Strehlow's authoritative *Aranda Traditions* only appeared in 1947. The Jindyworobak poets also suffered from too great an emphasis on only one Aboriginal tribe, the Aranda, important and fascinating as the traditions of the Aranda are. Pretty well their whole understanding of Aboriginal metaphysics and philosophy comes, it is clear, from Spencer and Gillen's often shaky understanding of Aranda belief.

If this last point is true of the Jindyworobak poets, it is even more true of the hazy ideas of Aboriginal philosophy and religion held by most white Australians. A particularly good example of this is the term "Dreamtime". This term, taken from Spencer and Gillen's studies of Central Australian tribes and applied indiscriminately to all Aboriginal groups in Australia, is analysed incisively by T. G. H. Strehlow in his *Songs of Central Australia* (pp. 614-15):

Spencer and Gillen's *alcheringa* (altered in *The Arunta* to *alchera*), which has been mistranslated as "dream time" and popularised by them and others in this sense, owes its origin to a confusion of *altjira ráma* and *altjiranga* (*ngámbakála*). The English "dream time" is therefore a vague and inaccurate phrase; and though it has gained wide currency among white Australians through its sentimentality and its suggestion of mysticism, it has never had any real meaning for the natives, who rarely, if ever, use it when speaking in English. "Dreaming", or rather "dreamin", which is commonly used by pidgin English and Northern Territory English native speakers means *totem* only, and is a translation not of *altjiranga* but of *kngánakála* (= someone who has originated). Thus "emu dreamin" would be a translation of *ilia kngánakála* (= someone who has originated as an emu).

Strehlow discusses the word *altjira* in some detail; it is apparently a rare word used only in a few fixed phrases, and its root meaning seems to be "uncreated, sprung out of itself". The suffixed form *altjiranga* means "from all eternity", and is given as an answer to questions about the origin of the world. In the Aranda view, the earth and the sky have existed *altjiranga*, that is, from all eternity. So have the supernatural beings who created the features of the earth and its human and animal inhabitants, and who continually reincarnate themselves in them. Some of the immense dignity of traditional Aborigines, when seen outside of degrading circumstances, obviously comes from their sense of being the present forms of eternally existing beings. A man who "owns" a certain ceremony or set of verses belonging to a sacred site does so because he *is* the supernatural being who indwells in that site. The only slight connection between *altjira* and dreaming, in our Western

sense of the word, is through the idiom *altjira ráma* "to see altjira", that is, "to dream".

I place great reliance on Strehlow's accounts of Aranda matters because unlike other scholars to date he spoke Aranda as a native; it was one of his mother tongues. In a private discussion, Emeritus Professor A. P. Elkin of Sydney University told me that Strehlow was really the only white man who had ever learned an Aboriginal language. Spencer and Gillen, on the other hand, had to rely on native informants speaking a limited pidgin English, because they themselves spoke no Aranda at all. This led them into many mistakes, notably their belief that the sacred chants attached to the different sites (for ritual scarcely exists apart from the places in which it must be performed) were in fact nonsense verses which the Aborigines themselves did not understand, a sort of ritual glossolalia! As an example of the long survival of misinformation, I remember in 1961 being told dogmatically by a well-read, rather pedantic and in fact somewhat scary truck driver that sacred Aboriginal verse was all meaningless noise-making. As we were crossing the Nullarbor at the time, I did not persist in arguing with him when he showed signs of irritation.

The first poem in which I attempted to capture some of the rhythm and feeling of Aboriginal poetry was "The Rock Shelters, Botany Bay", written in early 1968 (we were living in Scotland then) and published, like "The Wilderness", in my second book *The Weatherboard Cathedral*. It is a rather pallid poem, "poetic" in a bad sense, and reads like a counterfeit of another culture's poetry rather than a genuine re-creation of it. It fails to catch the tone and style of Aboriginal poetry of any sort, in the way in which, say, Tom Keneally caught them in the short extempore songs he put into the mouth of the young Jimmie Blacksmith in his fine novel based on the Governor outbreak. I was perhaps too far, in every sense, from my sources. The only real point of interest in the poem is the mention of people averting their eyes from the track of a "kingparrot man", the ill-omened spoor of a soldier dressed in a red coat. It was a guess of mine that, in the first days of contact, people accustomed to ritual body painting would take figures in red coats to be spirit-figures associated with a familiar creature. Apart from possum-skin cloaks for wearing in cold weather, most Aborigines in traditional times scarcely had a concept of what we may call secular clothing. Decoration with blood, paint and the down of birds was a festive or religious act. The poem alludes to the common eastern Australian idea, reminiscent of Melanesian belief, that the white invaders were actually ghosts, a truly horrifying thing for a people with as deep-rooted a fear of the dead as Aboriginal Australians possessed. Ghosts garbed as crimson rosella

(kingparrot) men would thus be an attempt to make sense of white figures garbed in red upper-body decorations.

My next attempt to describe, amongst other things, the effect of absolute culture shock was in “The Conquest”, written in 1969 and published in *Poems Against Economics*. This is a more successful poem, I think, and deals with black-white relations during the first years of settlement at Sydney Cove, the period of Phillip’s governorship. This period is very important, in that events and reverses which happened then went far towards setting the pattern of black-white relations for more than a century afterwards; the poem outlines some of these and then, in its last two sections, moves into a more general depiction of white myth-making about the Aborigines, both in the past and today:

A few still hunt way out beyond philosophy
where nothing is sacred till it is your flesh
and the leaves, the creeks shine through their poverty
or so we hope. We make our conquests too.
The ruins at our feet are hard to see.

Early in the poem, the failure of understanding on both sides is presented in terms of perception; neither side can see the other at all accurately, because neither side can understand what it is seeing. The failure is presented from both sides, with the Aboriginal side predominating in the early sections and then fading away as white incomprehension, brutality and myth-making take over. The tribesmen see, with difficulty, what look to them like “blue parrot-figures wrecking the light with change” (Royal Navy officers and bluejackets are meant) and they see “man-shapes digging where no yam-roots were”, a solecism against the proper order of things in many ways, not least because most digging was women’s work. Later, the Governor addresses the tribesmen in English and they reply, naturally enough, in Dhuruwal, the language of the people south of Sydney Harbour. Marines stand stolidly there, with their firelocks at the ready, obeying the customs of their culture and their service, and the warriors obey *their* customs by ritually biting their beards as a sign of defiance and challenge. Beard-biting with this significance was, it seems, pretty well universal throughout Australia, so it is not inappropriate to cite an Aranda example. It comes from the sacred song associated with Ankóta, a northern Aranda dingo-totem centre on the Burt Plain in the Northern Territory; “he” refers to the dingo ancestor Ankótarínja:

Angrily sucking his beard into his mouth
He follows up the scent, moving his head from side to side.