

# ABORIGINAL MYTHS

Tales of the Dreamtime

A. W. REED



Reed New Holland



What makes the bullroarer more than just a toy? How did the frilled lizard scar its tongue? From acts of creation and the deeds of the Great Spirit, to totemic ancestors and tales explaining natural phenomena, this delightful collection of stories paints a picture of the mystical bond that exists between Aboriginal people, the environment and the spirit life of the Dreamtime.

Gathered from often quite isolated Aboriginal groups throughout Australia and passed down over thousands of years, some of the myths have striking similarities.

*Aboriginal Myths: Tales of the Dreamtime* gives a fascinating glimpse of the wild and entertaining deeds of the mythic beings populating Aboriginal spiritual life.

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Tales of the Dreamtime

**A. W. REED**

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Reed New Holland

# **ABORIGINAL**

## MYTHS

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, a myth is a 'purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons etc, and embodying popular ideas on natural phenomena'.

In this collection emphasis has been placed on myths that attempt to explain the origins of natural phenomena while a companion volume, *Aboriginal Legends*,\* deals with the legends as distinct from myths. The distinction is tenuous. Resorting to the dictionary again, we find that a legend is a 'traditional story popularly regarded as historical, myth, such literature or tradition ...'

While the definition is adequate for most purposes, it fails to differentiate between myth and legend. The terms are not precisely synonymous. In dealing with Aboriginal subjects in the series in which this book is included, legends, as distinct from myths, may be regarded as folklore, i.e. in the nature of fireside tales, that include some miraculous or supernatural element. Myths usually deal with whatever pantheon of gods may be believed in and, frequently, attempt to explain the 'origins' of a variety of phenomena.

The first part of the present book deals with acts of creation as exemplified in the deeds of the Great Spirit or All-Father; the second with those of totemic ancestors; the third (which approaches more closely to legends) with tales of the origin of certain natural phenomena and specific features of animal life. In most cases names of animals have been capitalised to indicate totemic ancestors. Few of the tales are confined to a single category, and distinction between the three topics is blurred, the division being one of convenience.

An attempt has been made to convey some idea of the mystical bond that existed between man, his environment, and the spirit life of the Dream-time. Even the homelier tales in the last section are imbued with that

\* A. W. Reed (A. H. & A. W. Reed).

'oneness' that links all living creatures in a spiritual relationship.

A certain 'westernisation' of the traditional tales must be admitted. In some cases they are the retelling of twice-told tales; in others the story may be adapted and enlarged from the transcript of a myth or legend recorded directly from an Aboriginal teller of tales. In such circumstances, particularly in more recent times, the original myth may already have suffered a number of changes. Again, it should be remembered that a favourite tradition may have been preserved in song and dance rather than or in addition to the spoken form.

A fragment of legend from the Katherine River district illustrates the difficulty of adaptation to another culture:

He-came came into-cave budidjonanaiwan (a kind of wallaby) that-one? went Ganwulu. From-Ganwulu (to) Nganyordabmag from-there (to) Nganyoron. From-Nganyoron (to) Nganwaragbregbregmi. He-went-down into-cave at-Ninganda. To-the-cave (of) Ninganda not he-went-in. Children (and) women not-allowed, white-man (?ghost) cannot? shut-up, make play, (?blow). Not come-out cannot-go-out cannot-depart-altogether.\*

This fragment has been paraphrased by Dr A. Capell who points out that Nganwaragbregbregmi was stated to mean 'where the dingo broke his shoulder and cried out', but that the story of the giving of the name was not collected. 'The sand-wallaby came and went into the cave. He went to Ganwulu, and from there to Nganyordabmag and thence to Nganyoron. From Nganyoron he went to Nganwaragbregbregmi. At Ninganda he went down to a cave. He did not go into the Ninganda cave. Children and women are not allowed to go to that cave.'

Fortunately there is infinite variety in the Dreamtime tales. The Aranda

\* A. W. Reed, *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Life* (A. H. & A. W. Reed), quoting *Oceania*, vol 30, no 3, p. 218.

traditions collected by Professor T. G. H. Strehlow preserve their beauty and poetry in translation. Similarly, there is singular charm in some of the renderings of stories by modern Aboriginals retold by Roland Robinson. Every writer who ventures to retell Aboriginal myths and legends must adopt his own style and presentation. For my part, I have rewritten a variety of myths and folk tales with sincere admiration for the men of old who gave pleasure and inspiration to their fellow tribesmen. Profiting by the research of others I have retold them simply, as they appeal to me, and with only sufficient change to make them acceptable to present day readers. If by chance they give enjoyment to others and a little insight into the treasury of Aboriginal lore, something will have been gained.

I am deeply indebted to the writings of T. G. H. Strehlow, R. M. and C. H. Berndt, Ursula McConnel, Roland Robinson, Aldo Massola, W. E. Harney, Mildred Norledge and others, together with those of missionaries, field-workers, and enthusiasts of earlier generations, for recording many tales of the Dreamtime and helping to preserve part of the diverse cultures of the Aboriginal people of Australia.

It should also be mentioned that two or three stories that appear in *Myths and Legends of Australia*\* have been retold in this collection.

A. W. REED

\* A. W. Reed (A. H. & A. W. Reed).

*Part I*

*The Great Father*

Separated by some two thousand kilometres of ocean, and with different racial characteristics, some interesting comparisons can be made between the Aborigines of Australia and the Maoris of New Zealand. In New Zealand the famous field-worker Elsdon Best once stated that the Maori people (one of the several branches of the Polynesians) had taken the first step towards monotheism in their belief that Io was the Divine Father of Mankind, the uncreated, the creator, omnipotent and omniscient. The Io cult was an esoteric belief known only to the highest grade of Tohunga (priest), and possibly only to those of certain tribes. Those who had not been trained in the whare wananga, the school of sacred lore, were unaware even of the name of the highest and holiest of gods, being content with a pantheon of departmental gods who controlled the forces of nature, and groups of lesser deities.

In order to form even an approximate comparison between Maoris and Australian Aborigines, it is necessary to consider the environment of the two ethnic groups. Nature was kind to the Maoris. It provided them with an equable climate in a land where birds and fish were in abundant supply. Bracken root, unpalatable though it might be, was a staple form of diet, available at all seasons; while in northern districts the kumara or sweet potato, brought from tropical islands of the Pacific, could be cultivated in specially prepared plantations. The availability of food from forest, lake, river, and sea therefore encouraged settlement. With permanent buildings in which to sleep, meet, and hold special 'schools' for candidates for the priesthood, and with a common language, it was not surprising that over the centuries they developed a distinctive culture, which is today summed up in the word *maoritanga*.



In striking contrast, the forebears of the Aborigines had come to a land that varied immensely in its physical features and climate, from the harsh environment of the Centre, to dense steamy jungle, and the more temperate regions of the south-east. Over a large area, life was an unending struggle against a seemingly hostile environment. The outstanding feature of this so-called primitive race of people is their adaptation to these conditions.

The environment that white Australians regard as barren and hostile and incapable of sustaining human life, was home to the Aboriginal, at least that part of it that belonged to his totemic ancestor. Away from that familiar territory he was indeed virtually lost and defenceless. Within it he was part of it, attuned to its every mood, relaxed, under the most gruelling experiences, confident in his oneness with the spirit and presence of the ancestor, living a full life in the region created for him and all who preceded and succeeded him.

The concept of a Father Spirit, which was held by some of the larger tribes, a deity who was before and beyond even the ancestors, was therefore an astounding leap of the human mind and spirit from the material to the divine.

It may be objected that this is a romanticised view of the Aboriginal mind, far removed from the harsh conditions, and cruel practices such as those of the initiation ceremonies. It is inescapable that man is to some extent the product of his environment, and that when his survival is at stake, finer feelings and humane practices must be subordinated to the need to exist and to continue the life of the clan, moiety, social group, or tribe to which he belongs. It is equally true that the realities of life in his particular environment will enter into the stories he composes and the beliefs he inherits.

Although worship in its more refined forms was unknown to the Aboriginal, he shared his existence with the supernatural powers to which he owed his life—and is this not a form of worship that might set an example to many in our present civilisation who have abandoned religion for materialism?

The 'environmental impact', varying from one part of the continent to another, resulted in separation and a considerable degree of isolation of the various tribes, leading in turn to the evolution of distinct dialects and languages, thereby inhibiting communication and intensifying the isolation of individual communities. As each tribe had its own ancestor who journeyed through a particular territory, forming its physical features in the Dreamtime and entrusting them to his descendants, so each had his own name and characteristics, and so, also, had the Great Father Spirit who is a sovereign god known by different names. The concept is not universal, but was widely spread in the south-east of the continent.

Aldo Massola in *Bunjil's Cave\** has listed several of the Great Spirits known to the tribes. He points out that each sent a son to earth to carry out his designs for mankind and care for them, and to punish evil-doers. To the criticism that this concept has arisen as a result of missionary teaching, he points out that the sacred knowledge relating to the Father Spirit has come from the 'old men' and that it is unlikely that this theory is soundly based. The names of the Great Spirits he refers to are:

*Baiame* (there are several variations in spelling—*Baiame*, *Byamee*, and others), known to the *Ya-itma-thang* of the High Plains (and widely through the south-eastern regions); and his son *Daramulun* (or *Gayandi*).

*Nooralie* of the Murray River region and his son *Gnawdenoorte*.

*Mungan Ngour* of the Kurnai of Queensland and his son *Tundun*.

*Bunjil* (there are several spellings of the name) of the Kulin and of the *Wotjobaluk* and his son *Bimbeal*, or *Gargomitch*.

*Pern-mehial* of the Mara of the Western Desert and his son *Wirtin-wirtin-jaawan*.

To these could be added others such as *Karora* and his many sons, *Nurunderi*, *Goin*, and *Biral*. Of the many individual tribal myths of the Great Father, three have been selected—those of *Baiame*, *Punjel* or *Bunjil*, and *Nurunderi*.

\* Landsdowne Press.



## Baiame

One of the many significant features of Baiame is that he is the incarnation of kindness and care for others, and that he has the distinction of having elevated Birrahgnooloo, one of his wives, to a position which may be described as Mother-of-All, to live with him in the sky for all time. As Mrs Langloh Parker has said, 'She, like him, had a totem for each part of her body; no one totem can claim her, but all do.'

Having made a world in which man and the animal could live, Baiame looked at it and, in the majestic words of the first chapter of Genesis, 'he saw everything he had made, and, behold, it was very good'.



## Baiame and the First Man and Woman

And again like the Lord God, Baiame walked on the earth he had made, among the plants and animals, and created man and woman to rule over them. He fashioned them from the dust of the ridges, and said,

'These are the plants you shall eat—these and these, but not the animals I have created.'

Having set them in a good place, the All-Father departed.

To the first man and woman, children were born and to them in turn children who enjoyed the work of the hands of Baiame. His world had begun to be populated, and men and women praised Baiame for providing for all their needs. Sun and rain brought life to the plants that provided their sustenance.

All was well in the world they had received from the bountiful provider, until a year when the rain ceased to fall. There was little water. The flowers failed to fruit, leaves fell from the dry, withered stems, and there was hunger in the land—a new and terrifying experience for men, women, and little children who had never lacked for food and drink.

In desperation a man killed some of the forbidden animals, and shared

the kangaroo-rats he had caught with his wife. They offered some of the flesh to one of their friends but, remembering Baiame's prohibition, he refused it. The man was ill with hunger. They did their best to persuade him to eat, but he remained steadfast in his refusal. At length, wearying of their importunity, he staggered to his feet, turning his back on the tempting food, and walked away.

Shrugging their shoulders, the husband and wife went on with their meal. Once they were satisfied, they thought again of their friend and wondered whether they could persuade him to eat. Taking the remains of the meal with them, they followed his trail. It led across a broad plain and disappeared at the edge of a river. They wondered how he had crossed it and, more importantly, how they themselves could cross. In spite of the fact that it had dwindled in size, owing to the prolonged drought, it was running too swiftly for them to wade or swim.

They could see him, some little distance away on the farther side, lying at the foot of a tall gum tree. They were on the point of turning back when they saw a coal-black figure, half man half beast, dropping from the branches of the tree and stooping over the man who was lying there. They shouted a warning, but were too far away for him to hear, even if he were awake. The black monster picked up the inert body, carried it up into the branches and disappeared. They could only think that the tree trunk was hollow and that the monster had retreated to its home with his lifeless burden.

One event succeeded another with bewildering rapidity. A puff of smoke billowed from the tree. The two frightened observers heard a rending sound as the tree lifted itself from the ground, its roots snapping one by one, and soared across the river, rising as it took a course to the south. As it passed by they had a momentary glimpse of two large, glaring eyes within its shadow, and two white cockatoos with frantically flapping wings, trying to catch up with the flying tree, straining to reach the shelter of its branches.

Within minutes the tree, the cockatoos, and the glaring eyes had dwindled to a speck, far to the south, far above their heads.

For the first time since creation, death had come to one of the men whom Baiame had created, for the monster within the tree trunk was Yowee, the Spirit of Death.

In the desolation of the drought-stricken world, all living things mourned because a man who was alive was now as dead as the kangaroo-rats that had been killed for food. Baiame's intention for the men and animals he loved had been thwarted. 'The swamp oak trees sighed incessantly, the gum trees shed tears of blood, which crystallised as red gum,' wrote Roland Robinson, in relating this legend of the Kamilroi tribe in his book *Wandjina*.<sup>\*</sup> 'To this day,' he continued, 'to the tribes of that part is the Southern Cross known as "Yaraandoo"—the place of the White Gum tree—and the Pointers as "Mouyi", the white cockatoos.'

It was a sad conclusion to the hopes of a world in the making, but the bright cross of the Southern Cross is a sign to men that there is a place for them in the limitless regions of space, the home of the All-Father himself, and that beyond death lies a new creation.



### Baiame and the Bullroarer

One of Baiame's many accomplishments was the fashioning of the first bullroarer. To those who know it only as a child's toy, the statement will no doubt be surprising; but to those who realise something of its significance in sacred ceremonies and the care taken to hide it from prying eyes, the legend that ascribes its invention to the All-Father will add to the respect that must be shown to it. It is the voice of Baiame. No woman was allowed to see it and in speaking of it, women were not permitted to use the same word as men. In one district men called it gayandi (a name that has great significance), the women gurraymi. Both words are said to mean 'bora spirit'. Bora is a term used originally in New South Wales, but now applied

<sup>\*</sup> Landsdowne Press.

generally throughout eastern Australia to the secret ground or ring in which initiation ceremonies (again forbidden to women) were performed. Professor Elkin believed that the smaller bora represented the sky world, and was therefore linked with the dwelling place of Baiame.

One of the functions of smaller bullroarers was to attract women, as portrayed so vividly in Dame Mary Gilmore's poem 'The Song of the Woman-Drawer':

I am the woman-drawer;  
Pass me not by;  
I am the secret voice:  
Hear ye me cry;  
I am that power which might  
Looses abroad;  
I am the root of life;  
I am the chord.

More important than their ability as 'woman-drawers' was the fact that the sound of these sacred artifacts was the utterance of Baiame. Speaking in the voice of the Dreamtime, they warned the uninitiated from the bora ground. Because they symbolised the one who had created them and, in the initiation, was drawing them to himself, they were the means by which initiated men were linked together in a spiritual unity. Young men undergoing the painful ordeal of initiation heard the wailing of the bullroarers in the distance as they left the camp where women had been confined. The bullroarers spoke in unuttered words that only the wisest men could interpret, telling of acceptance or rejection in the ritual of death and rebirth in the sacred life of grown men.

In manufacturing the prototype, the skill of Baiame was put to the test. He wished to provide an instrument that was his own, yet one that men could use. It was to be his voice, yet it must have material form, with sufficient substance to knock out the front teeth of young men who were preparing to be accepted into the ranks of men.

Baiaame's first attempt was not successful. In adapting his creation to the needs of man, he was too ambitious. He made a stone image in the form of a man, and placed it in the first bora. The figure, which represented his son, was therefore called Gayandi or, among some tribes, Darramulun. As the representation of a son of the Sky-Father it was endued with life, while still retaining the composition of stone.

Gayandi was soon found to be far too strong and vigorous to preside over the bora ground. He was successful in knocking out front teeth, but when he began to eat the faces of the initiates, Baiaame realised that his enthusiasm must be restrained. He therefore changed the stone figure into a living animal, somewhat like an echidna, with hair on its back instead of spines. In doing so, he went to the opposite extreme, for this peculiar animal refused to remain in the bora circle. It trotted into the bush and has never since been seen. Nevertheless its spirit remains, a devil that lives to injure mankind. It lurks near bora grounds, always remaining in hiding. If it touches a man or boy (or even a shadow), that person will be affected with a rash from which no one has ever recovered.

Baiaame's next attempt was to fashion a stone bullroarer to simulate his voice. It was smaller than the image of Gayandi, but was sufficient to crack a man's skull if he approached too close. Unfortunately it proved too heavy for men to wield.\*

After these unsuccessful experiments Baiaame abandoned his quest, perhaps waiting for further inspiration. The answer came unexpectedly, just as men often find their problems solved in unexpected ways.

Baiaame was chopping firewood in the Sky-land, for even there the nights can be cold. When men see the myriads of sparks of the sky-fires they are aware that the spirits of the sky have lit many fires to warm themselves. Baiaame was felling a coolabah tree with such energy that chips flew in every direction. Occasionally one would spin through the air, emitting a

\* Small stone bullroarers have been seen but were rare. Wooden ones ranged in length from 12 centimetres to a metre in length and 2 to 10 centimetres in width. They seldom exceeded 6 millimetres in thickness.

humming sound that varied only with the speed or the size of the splinter.

'Oh! Here is the answer to my problem,' Baiaame thought. He gathered a handful of the chips that had produced this peculiar sound and examined them closely, sorting them into several shapes, some long, straight, and narrow, others broader and oval. Selecting a straight piece he trimmed it to shape and smoothed it back and front, pierced a hole at one end, and threaded it on a stout cord. Another he fashioned to a different profile and from another kind of wood. When they were finished he hung them from the branches of the coolabah tree and went to his camp to see whether his evening meal was ready.

During the night the wind rose. His wives sat up, staring into the darkness and huddling together. They had heard a new voice in the sky and were afraid. They woke Baiaame.

'Help us!' they said. 'A strange spirit has come to the coolabah tree you cut down today. What shall we do?'

'Listen to it,' Baiaame said. 'What does it sound like?'

'Like a voice speaking, but we can't hear the words.'

'Whose voice do you think it sounds like?' Baiaame asked.

They looked at each other and said nothing until the youngest wife, who was bolder than the others, said reluctantly, 'I cannot tell. It sounded like your voice—but that is ridiculous.'

'Not as ridiculous as you think,' Baiaame said, and laughed until the booming sound echoed from the farthest bounds of the sky.

'Now run away and hide. What you have heard is indeed my voice. That is all you need to know.'

The women hurried away, while Baiaame went to the coolabah tree where he had hung the two bullroarers. They were vibrating, spinning round the axis of the cord by which they were attached to the tree, and emitting the strange noise that had been heard for the first time in the realm of heaven.

'You are my Gayandi, and Gayandi is my voice,' he said as he untied them and carried them down to earth, where he gave them to the first men of the first bora ring. He warned them to treat them with reverence, to hide

them when not in use, and showed them how to swing them in circles when they wished to receive a message from him.

'These are my Gayandi,' he said solemnly. 'You must protect them with your lives. No stranger, no woman, may ever see them. I will teach your wirinun, your clever-men, how to bring them alive to speak to you. They are the finest gifts I have ever made. You must treasure them.'

And so, for thousands of years, Baiame has spoken to his people, not with his own voice, but through the voice of the sacred bullroarer.



## Baiame and Man

Light was brought into the dark world by Yhi, the goddess of the sun. As few living things can grow without light, there was a close association between the two great spirits, Yhi and Baiame. Light and warmth were necessary for the preservation and growth of the animate world of Baiame's creation, and these were provided by Yhi. Yet light and warmth alone were insufficient for the making of mankind. Another dimension was needed, something more than the instinct that directed the actions of animals. That indefinable element could be supplied only by the All-Father who, in the beginning of the Dreamtime, could be described as thought, intelligence, even life itself. Baiame had no corporeal body, nor did he need one until the time came to show himself to the beings he had formed. He was part of his creation, part of every single animal, and yet he was Baiame, indivisible and complete.

He confided his intentions to Yhi.

'I must clothe myself in flesh that is recognisably that of both man and god,' he said. 'My whole mind must be put into something that has life and is worthy of the gift. It must be a new creation.'

From the processes of thought, the joining together of atoms and microscopic grains of dust, the forming of blood and sinews, cartilage and

flesh, and the convolutions of the substance of the brain, he formed an animal that walked erect on two legs. It had hands that could fashion tools and weapons and the wit to use them; above all, it had a brain that could obey the impulses of the spirit; and so Man, greatest of the animals, was fashioned as a vessel for the mind-power of the Great Spirit.

No other eye saw the making of Man, and the minutes of eternity went by in the last and greatest act of creation. The world became dark and sorrowful. Floods ravaged the land, animals took refuge in a cave high up in the mountains. From time to time one of them went to the entrance to see if the floods had subsided. There was nothing to be seen except the emptiness of the land and the endless swirling of the waters under a sunless sky.\*

Yhi had turned her face from the birthpangs of spirit in man. As sunlight faded from the earth and the cave of refuge became black as night, the animals were bewildered. One after the other they went to the mouth of the cave, peering through the gloom straining their eyes looking for something—a light—or a shape—that would explain the change that had come to the world.

Goanna was the first to report something that brought even more confusion to their rudimentary minds.

'A round, shining light,' he said. 'Like the moon. Perhaps it is the moon and the darkness is only an untimely night.'

'Where is this light?' asked Eagle-hawk.

'Here, outside the cave, floating in the air, but close to the ground.'

'The moon is far up in the sky where the Great Father lives,' Eagle-hawk objected.

'I said "Like the moon",' Goanna retorted. 'It is like a light. Come and see for yourself.'

\* A. W. Reed, *Myths and Legends of Australia* (A. H. & A. W. Reed).



The animals were surprised when he came back and said, 'It's nothing like a light. You must be dreaming, Goanna.'

'What is it like?' came a voice from the back of the cave.

'It's a kangaroo.'

The laughter of the animals boomed in the confines of the cave.

'What's unusual about a kangaroo?'

'There's something very unusual about this kangaroo,' Eagle-hawk said, taking no notice of the laughter. 'Its eyes are as bright as stars. Their light pierced right through me.'

There was a rush to the mouth of the cave. They returned, arguing, quarrelling, shouting, contradicting each other. A strange presence had made a different impression on each undeveloped mind.

Baiaime was disappointed. These were his creatures, yet none of them could recognise him. To each he appeared in a different guise. They were still quarrelling among themselves. The little portion of Baiaime that was in each of his creation had failed to recognise him in all his fullness.

The quarrel had been even more serious than he had realised. Words had led to acts of violence. Claws and tooth had rent and torn. Dead animals lay on the floor of the cave.

Saddened by the consequences of his revelation, Baiaime left them. The animals came out of the cave and, in a last supreme effort, he revealed himself in the form of a man. And in man, animals recognised the wisdom and majesty of the spirit of Baiaime. Yhi flooded the world again with light.

The spirit of the All-Father returned to his home in the sky, leaving behind him the crown of his creation, man, who walked on two legs instead of four, who carried his head high, and inherited Baiaime's capacity for thought and action.

Man was the master. He possessed tools and weapons that other animals lacked—yet he was dissatisfied. Something was missing in his life. He observed the animals mating and knew that this was the missing element. The affinity he shared with Baiaime, and which was present in birds, animals

and even insects, had no human outlet. In this one respect he felt he was less than the animals.

One night he had a vivid dream. He had lain down at the foot of a yacca tree. As he looked at it in the last moments of consciousness, it must have impressed itself on his mind, for in his dream the tree was still there. The elongated flower spike rose far above his head, looking somewhat like a kangaroo's tail. From the old leaves at the base of the trunk came an aromatic perfume so strong that he was almost intoxicated.

The tree was moving, changing shape. He felt that if he took his eyes off it for a moment it would vanish. The flower spike was growing smaller, the trunk divided into two separate limbs, two more branches sprouted from beneath the flower. The bark grew soft and smooth as the flower separated into head and trunk. The transformation was complete. Another man had been created from a flowering tree and was stepping out of the grassy clump with arms outstretched to greet him.

But was it a man? This figure, more graceful than the grass-tree from which it came, was like man and yet unlike. More gently formed and rounded. With a flash of insight imparted by Baiaime, man realised that this creature was woman, equal to man, and complementary both in nature and in form. The same divine spark illuminated her face and her thought as in man himself. He knew instinctively that in her was the otherness that separated and yet linked male and female in all life, and that they were both linked to the everlasting otherness that was part of Baiaime himself.

They came together and embraced. Their feet scarcely touched the ground in the primal dance with which they celebrated their union. It was no longer a dream but reality. The dance was ended. With heaving breasts and arms round each other's bodies, they stood still to survey the world they now knew had been created for them, and which they shared with the All-Father.

'Not yours alone,' a distant voice proclaimed. 'Yours and mine. We are linked together for all time, you and your children and the reborn babies of the spirit world, and those I shall send after me. Look around you.'

They looked, and to their surprise saw that the plain was covered with plants, and animals, standing motionless, listening to the words that proclaimed the ordering of Baiame's universe.

The voice continued. 'These are all my creatures, great and small, plant and animal, on land and in sea and sky. My creatures, made for your use and for you to care for. They will supply all your needs. They share in small measure the life that is in me, and now in full measure in you who are man and woman. This day is a beginning, for you and for me.'

The voice died away. There seemed to be a new kindliness in the sunlight of Yhi. From the plain about them came a vast and soft sighing. The spell that had held the animals motionless was broken. They scampered away and were lost to sight. Only the trees and grass and flowers remained in their places, equally aware of the coming of mankind.

The loneliness, the incompleteness was ended. The duties and obligations of man had begun. As the days and years went by, their shared existence took shape. He was the hunter, the maker of shelter. She was food-gatherer, home-maker, bearer of children. They worked, and danced, and played, and loved together and in them Baiame found fulfilment.

'In them I am content at last to show myself to the universe I have created,' he mused.



## Baiame and Marmoo

In the earliest Dreamtime, all was not well in the world that Baiame had made. Hills and valleys, stark mountain ranges, crystal-clear streams and rivers, and bare plains that slipped over distant horizons paid tribute to the patient hands of the master architect. Flowers of a thousand colours and shapes had been planted ready for the coming of man, while butterflies fluttered over the shaggy carpet of trees and reeds and grass. Wind played with clouds, sending vagrant patterns of light and shade across the land, where animals romped and sought their food. By day the goddess Yhi

smiled as plants lifted their heads and young grasses reached towards her from the dark earth; by night Bahloo, the Moon god, sailed serenely across the darkened sky.

The wishes that had been transformed to thought and the thought to action should have brought pleasure to the heart of the Great Spirit, but when dark clouds were torn by lightning and the wind blew chill and fierce down the mountain gorges, sweeping like a scythe through the riotous vegetation, Baiame was aware of the dark thoughts of Marmoo, the Spirit of Evil, the antithesis of all that was good.

And with good reason. Marmoo was talking to his wife, the flame of jealousy hot within him.

'Pride,' he said fiercely. 'Baiame sits there, remote in the sky world, preening himself on his cleverness, because he has created a world full of living things. It's rough and unkempt and no credit to him. I could have made such a world in half the time and to much better effect.'

'Then why didn't you?' the spirit woman asked. There was little love between her and her husband. 'If you are so clever, why don't you make a world? Then I shall believe that you are as powerful as Baiame.'

'It is easy to build something out of nothing,' Marmoo said, 'but more difficult to destroy, once it is there. That is my task.'

Seeing the look on his wife's face, he said harshly, 'Keep watch. I shall begin from this moment,' and strode away without another word.

Working in secret, he fashioned the tribe of insects, ugly as himself in their nature. Some were beautiful to look at, but with poisonous stings, others harmless but capable of walking, crawling, burrowing, or flying. There are some who say that it was Yhi who brought life to the animal and insect creation of Baiame; but there are others who believe that after Marmoo had used his evil imagination to create insects, he breathed life into them and sent them out of the cave where he had hidden them, out of sight of Baiame and Yhi, in vast swarms. The sky was dark with flying insects, the ground a heaving mass of crawling and burrowing grubs, worms, and beetles.

The grass was eaten down to the bare earth. Flowers collapsed, their petals falling like raindrops. Fruit tumbled from the trees and was devoured by the hungry hordes. The music of streams and waterfalls was drowned by the buzzing of wings, the hiss of fighting insects, the clicking of mandibles, as the army flowed on, leaving a trail of desolation.

Looking down on the world, Baiame was dismayed to see the steadily advancing tide of destruction, aware that his enemy had taken this method of challenging his authority. Confident in his own power, he sent one of his winds roaring across the land, hoping to sweep the insects into the sea. It was too late. The hordes of Marmoo were well fed and prepared for anything that Baiame might do. Some burrowed under the earth. Others took refuge in caves or under stones, while the winged destroyers clung to the bark of the trees they had killed. There they waited patiently for the wind to die away, as every wind must some time do, before resuming their march of devastation.

There was only one thing left to do. Baiame came to earth to enlist the aid of good spirits he had left on earth to guide its inhabitants. He travelled quickly to Nungeena, the pleasing spirit who lived in a waterfall in a secluded valley. Even here, Baiame was dismayed to observe, the pleasant dells were dry and bare, every vestige of plant life devoured, the stream choked with the dead bodies of insects that had gorged themselves and lost their footing. The army had passed on, but the smell of death lay heavy in the valley.

'Come with me,' the All-Father said. 'You can see what the insects have done to your pleasant home. The evil tide sent by Marmoo rolls on. Soon there will be no living creatures left and the world will be bare and desolate.'

Nungeena called to her attendant spirits, who came from far and near at her bidding.

'What have you seen?' she asked.

They had a sad story to tell of the ravages of Marmoo's brood. Not one part of their domain had been spared, and still the tide rolled on. When they had finished Nungeena, the Mother Spirit, smiled.

'We shall overcome!' she said confidently. 'Look, Father Baiame. The flowers are not all lost. Some I have kept in the shelter of the fall as it cascades over the cliff. None of Marmoo's little people dared come too close to me, and so I was able to preserve them.'

While she was speaking her fingers were at work, deftly weaving the long stalks into a pleasing pattern.

'There!' she said at last with a sigh of satisfaction, setting the beautiful flower arrangement gently on the ground.

Baiame exclaimed with delight.

'The most beautiful of all birds!' he said, and breathed life into a lyre-bird, which spread his plumage and strutted proudly before him. Then the Great Spirit's brow clouded. 'But it doesn't solve the problem of saving our world,' he said gently.

'But that is why I made it,' Nungeena said wonderingly. 'Look.'

As she spoke the bird began scratching among the dry leaves and twigs and rubbish left behind by the insect plague, searching for any that might have been left behind.

'I see,' Baiame said thoughtfully. 'We must make more of them, many more,' and with the deftness of one who had created so many of the wonders of nature, he fashioned birds that flew from his hands as they were completed, and sped in pursuit of the now distant army of insects.

Nungeena followed his example. The attendant spirits, who were much younger, tried to imitate them. They lacked the skill of the older god and goddess, producing butcher-birds and magpies which had little of the grace of other birds, but were equally effective as insect destroyers. The spirits who came from the watery regions made birds that could swim or wade in swamps and rivers. The spirits of coastal lands made gulls who delayed satisfying their appetites with fish while they gorged themselves on insects. The night spirits, whose task was to close the flowers as daylight faded, made mopokes and nightjars. There were birds in flight, fantails, and swallows and flycatchers. The sound of snapping beaks and beating wings rose above the hum of insects as they were caught in flight.

'They are so beautiful they should have voice to match,' Baiame said, and gave them the gift of song. But their sweet music was drowned by the harsh cry of the crows and the raucous laughter of the kookaburras.

The few survivors of the army of Marmoo had been routed. Still singing, the birds circled round Baiame and the guardian spirits, and then flew away in search of other predators that might denude the earth of its vegetation.

Never since then have they been so well fed, but they still hope that Marmoo will some day send them another bounteous feast.



### Baiame and the Bora Ceremony

As the tribes assembled at Googoorewon, the Place of Trees, Baiame had chosen to disguise himself as a wirinun or medicine-man. It was the first gathering of the men who had sprung from the loins of the first man in honour of the All-Father. Wahn, Du-mer, Biamul, Madhi and many another tribe had gathered from far and near.

Baiame, unrecognised in his disguise, said little. There was much to sadden him, for many of the people were arrogant and others quarrelsome; and much to gladden him, for it was at his command that they had gathered together to celebrate the first initiation ceremony ever held. The young men were undergoing tests before the final combined ceremony in the bora ring that was now being constructed.

For months the young men had been required to support themselves by hunting and eating alone, culminating in a hunt lasting several days, during which no food could be eaten, and then to watch the cooking of the meal they had provided but were not allowed to partake. Severe pain had been inflicted on them, pain they forced themselves to endure without fear. The ordeals imposed alone and in silence had come to an end.

In contrast to what was happening in the bush, there was a constant buzz of activity coming from the ground chosen for the bora circle, sacred designs being painted with clay, with feathers sprinkled over them, tjurunga

and other objects had been arranged in their proper places. Baiame watched from a distance with a smile of approval on his face, for the circle was a symbol or representation of the Sky-world from which he came.

The smile was succeeded by a frown. Men of the Madhi tribe were making too much noise, shouting and laughing, taunting the workers, while their women were edging too close to the sacred enclosure. A wirinun ordered them to be quiet and respect the preparations being made for this important ceremony.

'The Great Spirit will be watching you,' he warned them, little knowing that the Great Spirit was standing beside him. The Madhi laughed contemptuously, and behaved more insultingly than before.

The time for punishment had come, Baiame decided, determined that his people should be protected, and the initiates taken safely through their final ordeal. He stepped forward and spoke softly—yet his voice drowned the shouts of the Madhi, seeming to penetrate every corner of the encampment. The men and women were drawn inexorably towards him. Some tried to resist, digging their heels in the ground or holding on to trees, but their efforts were in vain. Feet were dragged through the ground leaving channels in the dust, hands relentlessly torn from trees and rocks. Presently Baiame was surrounded by a silent ring of men and women. Even the Madhi had quietened down, waiting to hear what the strange wirinun had to say.

'I am grieved at your behaviour,' Baiame said. 'My people are happy only because they obey the laws I have laid down from the foundations of the world. Their sacredness must not be violated nor must any of my creations be taken lightly—as it has been by the Madhi during this gathering of the tribes. I have walked in your midst and your behaviour has pleased me. Except for you, the Madhi,' he added sternly, looking at them with eyes that seemed to pierce through their skulls.

The legs of the strongest men trembled at the words of power, as realisation swept through the circle that it was the greatest of all wirinuns who was speaking—the Great Spirit himself. He addressed himself directly to the Madhi.