

Aboriginal Issues

Seminar II

1 December 2010

Aboriginal poetry

Read the following poems and articles:

- Kevin Gilbert: "Introduction." Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry. Ringwood: Penguin, 1988.
- Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker): "We Are Going" (1964)
"The Past"
"Municipal Gum"
"No More Boomerang"
Jack Davis: "Aboriginal Australia"
"John Pat"
"The First Born"
"Urban Aboriginal"
Robert Walker: "Solitary Confinement"
Mudrooroo Narogin (Colin Johnson) "Song Cycle of Jacky"
"They Give Jacky Rights"
"Jacky Demonstrates for Land Rights"
"Jacky Hears the Century Cry"
Eva Johnson: "Weevilly Porridge"
"A Letter to My Mother"
Iris Clayton: "Kidnappers"
Grandfather Koori: "Never Blood So Red"
Lionel Fogarty: "Breaking Down the Barriers" and "Guerilla Poetry: Lionel Fogarty's Response to Language Genocide." In Fogarty, Lionel G. New and Selected Poems: Mungaljali, Mutuerrjaraera, South Melbourne: Hyland House, 1995.
"I'm Not Santa"
- Good to know: Adam Shoemaker's book: Black Words White Page can be found on Googlebooks. There is a chapter on Aboriginal verse (179-230).

Wilbert, Kevin, ed. *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of
 Aboriginal Poetry: Reprinted & Revising 1988.*

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades the Aboriginal voice has received quite a remarkable amount of attention and scrutiny in the European Australian world of literature. Many, especially those exercising a critical overview and expecting something different, more exotic perhaps, from a people whose traditional expression was an oral tradition, have not come to terms with this often raw, certainly rugged, and definitely truthful subjective material drawn from the creative impulse. There are a number of difficulties in perception and analysis, the most difficult of these is to attempt rationalisation of hundreds of thousands of years of oral tradition against the last twenty years of limited access to white education and education in the alien English tongue.

The successful transformation from oral to written form can be attested by the success of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's (Kath Walker's) writings, Robert Merritt's play, *The Cake Man*, Gerry Bostock's play *Here Comes The Nigger* and the more recent plays of Jack Davis. All of which have won acclaim here and overseas. In 1929 David Unaipon had his *Native Legends* published. This was the first complete work by an Aboriginal. Oodgeroo Noonuccal, with her book of poems *We Are Going*, published in 1964 under her previous name, Kath Walker, became our first poet to be published. Colin Johnson produced the first Aboriginal novel *Wild Cat Falling* in 1965. Jack Davis followed in 1970 with his first published book *The First Born and Other Poems*. In 1973 I completed the first major political work by an Aboriginal *Because A White Man'll Never Do It* and in 1978 *Living Black* the first collection of contemporary Aboriginal oral history from an Aboriginal viewpoint. Altogether 'Aboriginal Writers' as such were very thin on the ground – the merest handful – and, to add to our difficulties, were an unknown market potential.

In the 1980s, with the showing of *Hyllus Maris* and Sonia Berg's *Women of the Sun* on TV, and of other Aboriginal films, has come the realisation in the Aboriginal community that we can write and express our view more forcibly, and more importantly, more truthfully than can whites writing about or making

films about us. The result has been a small avalanche of Aboriginal biographies, plays, political writings and poetry. Many of these writers and poets are fully occupied in producing news magazines and broadsheets within the Aboriginal community, which in turn will ultimately produce a much wider participation in literature within the next decade.

A whole new education 'industry' has arisen in the academic area, where it would appear that every student is doing his or her PhD English thesis on 'Aboriginal Literature'. Some people ask the inevitable questions: What is an Aboriginal poet? How should they be differentiated and why differentiated from any other poet writing in English? Is it necessary to know that they *are* Aboriginal poets provided that the criteria are comparable, i.e. aesthetics, imagery, relationship to traditional forms or drawing on other poetic forms? Aboriginal poetry rattles, flings and bends the chains and rules of verse, sometimes in a remarkable manner. But within each bending one can see the cyclical incantation, the emotional mnemonics, the substance from which Aboriginal poetry is made.

When Europeans see a group of Aboriginals sitting around a camp-fire singing a corroboree song, they say 'corroboree' or 'Blackfellas yaekaaing'. But to *understand* what they are doing introduces a whole new area for examination. For instance, most people know what transcendental meditation is about, or yoga positions, or they understand something of the process when some people kneel down, clasp their hands together and look up into the sky, saying, 'Our Father which are in Heaven'. The Aboriginal way is the creative continuum:

At night as I sit by my camp-fire
the Great Serpent Spirit a'star
I sing songs of love to the Presence within
as It plays with the sparks on my fire.*

So, that which is seen as a bit of a sing-a-long, a 'yaekaaing' by Blacks, is a deeply sacred and spiritual experience. So much so that, if an uninvited man or woman enters the circle unbidden, they can well court a death sentence, for within that circle the Great Creator Essence is present.

Rarely has Aboriginal poetry much to do with aesthetics or pleasure or the pastoral views, those remarkable views the city person finds in the commonplace torn by bulldozers, overstocking and mining operations. There is another reality, a reality that could find parallels in the experience of the indigenous peoples of South Africa or Bolivia, or of oppressed populations within the national boundaries of one culture, the Jews in Nazi Germany or the Palestinians in Israel. For instance, I was talking to an old man in the desert country, blind from trachoma, one leg lost to leprosy, his hands twisted to a macabre semblance of digitless talons. He sat in the ashes of his camp-fire and, pointing a twig at an equally gnarled and twisted tree, said:

That leaf, the seed, that leaf
my old old grandfather
he was a baby
little fella you know
a big mob camped
a big mob
the horsemen came
guns guns guns
pulled stirrup irons from saddles
bang bang blood
and shit everywhere
his mummy buried him
and 'nother two quick
under rocks and rocks
and her blood run through
the rocks and leaf
the leaf with seed attached
stuck to him
red with seed stuck on
the leaf the leaf
with seed stuck on
the leaf.

In emphasising the leaf, the seed and the rock, the speaker thus assured that I would remember the story thereafter by focussing on the leaf, the rocks, with seed attached to the leaf. In

subsequent reiteration, an emotional visual shorthand would be used with the key symbols, selecting the poetic metaphor.

Many critics of Aboriginal poetry, whether using polite language or digital graffiti, express some difficulty in finding comparisons and parallels. Their solemn enunciation on the aesthetics, the imagery, rhyming and metric patterns, metaphors, lucidity, fluidity, linguism, jingoism, polemicism, chantism, phenomenalism of the Aboriginal voice, is an assurance to us that the debate will long continue. Of course, there will be many who, not wanting to reveal any overt or covert racism, paternalism, condescension, misconception, self-deception or otherwise to the value of the contribution, will dart like a prawn in a barramundi pond to the safety of antecedents. To us it is like seeing a saga of these British Boat People returning to the wreck to salvage a plank and, holding it aloft, try to make comparisons with the indigenous tree and twist it to the semblance of the 'tree back home'.

Aboriginal poets share a universality with all other poets, yet differ somewhat in the traumatic and material experience of other poets, especially those who have wandered through Europe and, for that matter, Australia, starving in ghettos or rejecting established constraints.

Aboriginals have done their starving in miasmas, gunyahs, shanties or under loose sheets of old iron gathered from the white man's rubbish-tip; in below poverty-level ghettos, or in gaols. For instance, a white South African poet's voice is easily identifiable with his English, Dutch or American counterpart, especially when each so lavishly follows the 'new poetry' trends of the other in the 100th monkey imitation style that was so prevalent in Australia during the 70s. Aboriginal poets, on the other hand, can be identified with the freedom poets of the lately decolonised countries and as a new phenomenon upon the Australian scene, demanding a new perception of life around us, a new relation with the sanctity, the spiritual entity and living Presence within the earth and all life forms throughout the universe.

As Aboriginal bark paintings reveal the fundamental elements of the subject, so too does the Aboriginal poet reveal the fundamental subject of the song. The emotional experience is...

a great degree, an extension of the traditional oral language, where the history or song cycle is recorded on bark paintings – symbolic mnemonics which link together the beginning and end of the complex whole – stimulating recall of the intervening detail. In written language we see the poems as emotional mnemonics, which, to fully appreciate their import, one needs to understand a little of the poet, the social and historical context from which is wrought the subjective crystallisation of the voice.

Much of the historical subject of this poetry has been carved indelibly in blood over the past 200 years and before the poets were born. That the psyches still quiver with the shock of these horrendous times can be directly attributed to the continuing brutality, the national lies, the callous indifference to Black human life and the continuing practices of institutionalised racism today.

In an attempt to clarify some of the misconceptions about Aboriginal life and time in this land, I'll draw on some established criteria. The earliest existing record (skeletal remains, carbon dated implements) of the appearance of 'modern man' has been discovered in Australia. Australia has the oldest geological formations in the world and the oldest life forms. Aboriginals inhabited this land before the great ice-age, disproving the theory of the land bridge immigration path, in agreement with the Aboriginal story that we have *always* been here.

Aboriginal culture, based on a predictable and unchanging system of Law, obviated any war for possession of land. Each tribal area is the Sovereign Domain of that tribe born into that tribal area, governed by and governing, the social and spiritual system as set down at the Beginning, the start of time. The Dreaming is the first formation, the beginning of the creative process of mobile life/spirit upon and within the land. It is the days of creation when the Great Essence, the Spiritual Entity and minion spirits formed the Aboriginal version of the 'Garden of Eden' and recorded that creation and the laws abounding upon the turingas. These laws, this Dreaming, still nurtures the spiritual body of the People who still follow 'the Business' the proper way.

When Captain James Cook landed on these shores he was able

to concede that the Aboriginals wanted for nothing and that their condition, their lot in life was better than that which was available to the European population as a whole. But he was unable to converse or comprehend signs other than those remarkably apparent ones telling him to 'go away' and, seeing that his items of trade held no real or intrinsic value with which he could trick or treat, he declared 'possession' for the Crown, stating that the land was *terra nullius*, wasteland and unoccupied.

The next remarkable episode saw the English soldiers driving Blacks from their Black Sovereign Domain. To legalise the 'dispersion', the soldiers were bidden to call upon the rightful owners, the Blacks, three times in the name of the Crown of England and, if the Blacks did not immediately surrender, to fire upon them. Of course, not understanding English ways nor the English language, the people died in the 'Catch 22' cross-fire. All of which ensured that these representatives of the Crown were very quickly able to kill the rightful owners of the land and claim the spoils as their 'right' by the historical fiction of 'peaceful settlement'.

In my country, Wiradjuri, a large mob of my countrymen, women and children were herded and driven like sheep before the guns to the big swamps near Bathurst. There they were 'dispersed' with guns and clubs, whereupon these pioneering, head-hunting whites cut off a large number of the peoples' heads, boiled them down in buckets and sent 45 of the skulls and other bones off to Britain. In much the same way, they took Penulwy's head, pickled it and sent it off to the Joseph Banks collection in England. Many people, especially white Australians, who trace their genealogy to the 'First Fleet', are anxious that such gory mementos of the infamous theft of the land and the accompanying inhumanity remain in the colonial closet. While inhumanity continues as it does continue this day in this country, the cry for justice, the cry for humanity will never be silenced.

As I drive towards Queanbeyan on my periodic visits to Canberra, yesterday's crimes wash upon me, wave after wave in the new assault by memory of the old injustice and made more urgent by the new injustices heaped day by day on the contemporary Black community.

On the Way to Queanbeyan

I look at the open fields and see
the space where my people used to be
I see the scars of wounded ground
I cry as I hear the death call sound
of curlew mourning by.

I drive past Mitchell, a suburb of Canberra, and glance towards the buildings that house some eight hundred Aboriginal skulls, including many in the Murray Black Collection, taken mostly from Wiradjuri country, skulls of my ancestors. This triggers my mind to dwell on many more Aboriginal skeletons lying disrespectfully in the State museums around the land, as well as in many museums overseas; the 'tobacco pouches' made from dried scrotums of Blacks and used as tobacco pouches; the bodies skinned for their cicatrice patterns and pickled in the South Australian Museum basement. I drive along a 'bit of bitumen which bears the sign 'This is a Bicentennial Project'. I pick up the papers and read of 'Black Deaths in Custody', a race riot in Bourke, where the Government advances the preposterous proposition that what is needed is 'more sporting facilities'. Perhaps more footballs and tennis rackets to kick their frustration away, to keep at bay the tyrant killer, white society, that daily grinds away any hope of justice and a recognised humanity for Blacks.

I look at the new 'voluntary work for the dole' plan of the Hawke administration. I know that his Government has already forced Aboriginal communities to work for the dole and called it community work employment project. I also know that this scheme caused hardship and increased the level of malnutrition for Blacks, but it is a sop for the white Australians. It might catch a few more votes from those right of centre. The fact of this latest violation of Human Rights passes unnoticed overseas. In the minds of at least some of my fellow poets is the traumatic image of yesterday's events, ricocheting into today's boast of peace and justice and Human Rights' conventions. There is the constant attempt by white Australia to 'assimilate' Aboriginals; to hold them politically powerless, by cultural genocide, by stopping Aboriginal language programmes. To us this is symbolically and

directly representative of another favourite pastime of whites of yester-year in their sport of 'Lobbing the Distance', which entailed the burying of live Aboriginal children up to their necks in sand and seeing who of them could kick off the heads of the Black children to the farthest distance from its body. Another pastime in those days, made popular by the close proximity of good dry firewood, was to cut the throats of Black women and men and let them run in terrified flapping circles and, when they collapsed, throw the bodies while still alive upon the fire. Live children were thrown directly into the flames.

Moving to less grim moments in Black history, the Aboriginals were finally chained and exiled in areas euphemistically called 'reserves'. Here they were kept under the control of police and camp commandants or under the hardly less barbaric control of the missionaries. Apartheid laws were enacted and co-habiting with whites in *loving relationship* was savagely punished, while house slavery and sexual abuse was considered more or less a 'civilising' influence. Slavery was called 'wardship'. Pass-laws and curfews such as not being near any town *after* sunset, on the pain of imprisonment or death, left a lot to be said for our so-called civilised invaders.

The missionaries, full of savage zeal to 'convert' the heathen also wanted to stake a claim to title upon Aboriginal land, much of which they still hold onto, topping up their coffers from time to time by selling off a bit of the ill-gotten real estate. The missionaries aided the attempt to destroy the Aboriginal culture by kidnapping and imprisoning young Blacks and placing them in separate male and female compounds (concentration camps), where they were kept estranged from their tribal family until they were in their late teens. The children were not allowed to speak Aboriginal language in many of these 'missions' and were discouraged by the simple expedient of locking an offender away in solitary confinement on a bread and water diet, often for as long as twenty-one days. If they repeated the offence, their hair was cut off, they were 'chastised' and again put in isolation. If a girl waved her hand at a boy who passed her compound fence, her ways were curbed by cutting off her hair, a few chops with the cane and several weeks in solitary to 'cool off'. Of course this meant her saying, 'Hello' in the *lingo* was a punishable offence.

For many of us the missionary zeal has meant the loss of our traditional tongue, the more quickly to heed and comprehend the dreamed of commands that would be delivered by 'the master' to us in the role of tinker, tailor, drover, Jacky, dishwasher, maid and cane-cutter as he, in his wild erratic fancy, imagined our destined roles to be.

These memories, these experiences, are juxtaposed in the twentieth century for the majority of Aboriginals with the sub-human conditions they are still living under: many are denied access to rivers and waterholes by pastoralists and miners; living in confined areas where they can no longer move camp and hunt; living permanently under scraps of tarpaulin and hessian and derelict car bodies; dying in custody at the hands of the 'enforcers of the law'; dying from curable eighteenth century diseases; blinded by trachoma; dying from malnutrition and dying in droves from hepatitis B because the Gubba' ment won't provide the cost for the immunisation — \$150 per person — so they die without a murmur of protest, except that of the thundering roar of outrage by the Flying Doctor Service, whom the whites have chosen to ignore because they feel that someone like the Flying Doctor Service should only comment upon and tend whites in the outback. This 'blind spot' in the racist's eye causes the Aboriginal to suffer one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. Life expectancy for adult males is but forty-nine years, while a Black woman's life expectancy is a mere fifty-two years; some twenty years less than that of whites whose culture has successfully been cloned from the English one and become a parasite on Aboriginal land and resources.

As I write this introductory piece, as other poets write more poems, more people die. In Australia, Blacks die needlessly, shamefully, and their death can be contributed directly to a lie: the lie Captain James Cook gave birth to when he declared this land *terra nullius*, a wasteland and unoccupied. In so doing, he lied away Aboriginal life, proprietary right and therefore right of Sovereign Domain to our rightful land and gave every murderer, every rapist, every thief, every sadist, every racist an open pass to kill, torture, enslave and take at will everything that had been protected, nurtured, sanctified and kept spiritually intact from the

How many will remember Aboriginal history as Australia marches to the 1988 Bicentenary to celebrate the *terra nullius* fiction – the lie of peaceful settlement – while Aboriginals and people from all round the world see the celebration of thieves holding the garment aloft, the spoils of theft and mass murder? How many poets shall sing? Black poets sing, not in odes to Euripides or Dionysus, not Keats, nor Browning, nor Shakespeare; neither do they sing a pastoral lay to a ‘sunburnt country’ for they know that that russet stain that Dorothea Mackellar spoke of is actually the stain of blood, our blood, covering the surface of our land so the white man could steal our land.

These poems, these voices are unforgettable and remain emotionally intact long after the words have passed from memory. It is the echo of the sea crooning inside a sea-shell many leagues away from the seashore, the quick drawn breath of a woman who comes suddenly upon an image, a face, a scene that reminds her of a loved one; a song once sung and now only memory orchestrates for one brief moment the emotion, the flash of sweetness and the pain. The pain. These poems then are not poems of protest, but rather, poems of life, of reality. The poetry of a people concerned with life and loving and dignity and justice, birth, regeneration and children and the land and they are saying how, where and why. *Why* has it gone so wrong?

Kevin Gilbert

W. Les Russell, Boolidit Boolidtha, was born in Melbourne, 1949. Les spent his early years in rural Victoria. He joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1965, and trained as a photographer in the Fleet Air Arm. However, his upbringing and beliefs were not compatible with the servile martial-anglo-christian ethics of the Navy so he requested and was granted an honourable discharge in 1970. For the following ten years, he worked as a photographer for the Education Department of Victoria. In between poems, he helped set up the South Eastern Land Council and later served on that body as chairman. His dedication and hard work in the Black community gained wide respect which, in turn, meant an extraordinary workload and responsibility, especially in his home state of Victoria. He served as Honorary Cultural Officer with Aboriginal Education; was co-founder of the Mara Organisation, which assisted in the struggle at Portland against Alcoa; worked with the Aboriginal Advancement League on the Government's proposed changes to the Archaeological Act; helped set up a mock oil rig on the grounds of St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, to raise awareness and support for the people of Noonkanbah, and so the list could go on. In 1979 he was asked to help the North Queensland Land Council set up and chair the Aboriginal Mining Information Centre. He helped make this organisation one of the largest indigenous research bodies in the world, with capabilities to monitor the plans and behaviour of those who pose as 'developers' of this country.

In 1986, Les' poems were printed in *Green For Green*, published by Impact Media Productions. His poem 'Tali Karng: Twilight Snake', first printed in *This Australia* magazine, Winter 1985 (Vol. 4 no. 3), shows a control and imagery far beyond the parameters of the majority of Australian poets to that greater universal level beyond country, beyond life.

OODGEROO NOONUCCAL (KATHI WALKER)

With her first book of poems, *We Are Going*, Oodgeroo became the first Aboriginal poet to have a book published and became one of the best selling poets. Of greater significance to Blacks, her works brought national and international focus to bear on the oppression of Aboriginals and raised the question of human rights and equality. Hers was virtually a voice in the wilderness and was, without a doubt, a major contributing factor in the recognition of citizenship rights for Aboriginals following the 'Yes' vote in the 1967 Referendum.

Oodgeroo, of the Noonuccal, spent her early childhood years on Stradbroke Island. Born in 1920, some eight years before the last recorded massacre of Aboriginal people at Coniston, N.T., she left school and became a 'domestic', being paid two shillings and sixpence a week. When the second world war broke out, she served as a telephonist in the Australian Women's Auxiliary Service and later trained as a stenographer.

Her intensive efforts to gain social and political change have never wavered. She held the position of Queensland Secretary of the Federal Council of the Aboriginal Advancement League and served on the executive of a number of other organisations. For many years she has fought for an 'Aboriginal Charter of Rights' which seeks to alter the conditions under which Aboriginals live. Such changes include a reduction of the Aboriginal infant mortality rate, an end to slave-like work conditions and to the dreaded 'pass laws' which force fathers and mothers to be separated from their children, and a cessation of the virtual exile in the guise of 'service' to remote stations or cattle empires. Her cry was a challenge to the society that victimised the Aboriginal and stole Aboriginal land and resources.

'Give us welcome, not aversion
Give us choice, not cold coercion
Status, not discrimination,
Human rights, not segregation . . .'

Oodgeroo later wrote *The Daren is at Hand*, published in 1966 by Jacaranda Press in which she said in 'Assimilation - No . . .'

'Change and compel, slash us into shape,
But not our roots deep in the soil of old.
We are different hearts and minds
In a different body. Do not ask of us
To be deserters, to disown our mother,
To change the unchangeable.
The gun cannot be trained into an oak.

In 1970, her third book of poems, *My People*, was published by Jacaranda Press and was testimony to the strength of this proud woman and her unquenchable fire for gaining justice and rights for Blacks.

She wrote *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, published by Angus and Robertson in 1972, and *Father Sky and Mother Earth*, published by Jacaranda Press, 1981. On the 11.11.1986, I met her at a writers' conference, where she was speaking on a panel of 'Writers Against Nuclear Armament'. She spoke of a new age, a new terror as well as of the old terrors that continue for Blacks in this country. Her poems, if one listens carefully, speak about universal love, universal rights, universal dignity, and love and peace for this land. Like her, we wonder if white Australia will ever hear and heed what this poet says.

Oodgeroo, now 66 years old, says 'Old' is an honourable word in our world. In the white world it's a disgrace. And, to prove her point, she made her acting debut in the role of 'Eva' - a powerful, spiritually moving old woman and one of the camp Elders - in the 'Fringedwellers', a film based on the novel by Nene Gare.

Despite the fact that she has flown to many countries, many times, she admits to a little apprehension for she was once involved in a 'hijack', of which she says, 'I was more than a little nervous, but they (the hijackers) treated me with the utmost respect when they realised that I was an Aboriginal'.

Henry Kendall
THE LAST OF HIS TRIBE

puches, and buries his face on his knees,
 nd hides in the dark of his hair;
 e cannot look up to the storm-smiten trees,
 or think of the loneliness there—
 Of the loss and the loneliness there.

5
 allaroos grope through the tufts of the grass,
 nd turn to their covers for fear;
 e sits in the ashes and lets them pass
 Where the boomerangs sleep with the spear—
 With the nullah, the sling, and the spear—
 10
 a, behold him! The thunder that breaks
 On the tops of the rocks with the rain,
 he wind which drives up with the salt of the lakes,
 ave made him a hunter again—
 A hunter and fisher again.

15
 s eyes have been full with a smouldering thought;
 ut he dreams of the hunts of yore,
 f foes that he sought, and of fights that he fought
 With those who will battle no more—
 Who will go to the battle no more.

20
 ell that the water which tumbles and fills,
 oes moaning and moaning along;
 n echo rolls out from the sides of the hills,
 nd he starts at a wonderful song—
 t the sounds of a wonderful song.

25
 e sees, through the rents of the scattering fogs,
 he corroboree warlike and grim,
 he lubra who sat by the fire on the logs,
 o watch, like a mourner, for him—
 Like a mother and mourner for him.

30
 e go in his sleep from these desolate lands,
 ke a chief, to the rest of his race,
 he honey-voiced woman who beckons and stands,
 nd gleams like a dream in his face—
 Like a marvellous dream in his face?

35
 (1864)

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker)
WE ARE GOING

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.

5
 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.

10
 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.

15
 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 his place.
 The bora ring is gone.
 The corroboree is gone.
 And we are going.

20
 25
 (1964)

signed
 Vivian

No More Boomerang

No more boomerang
No more spear;

Now all civilised —
Colour bar and beer,

No more corroboree,
Gay dance and din.

Now we got movies,
And pay to go in.

No more sharing
What the hunter brings,

Now we work for money,
Then pay it back for things.

Now we track bosses
To catch a few bob,

Now we go walkabout
On bus to the job.

One time naked,
Who never knew shame;

Now we put clothes on
To hide whatsaname.

No more gunya,
Now bungalow,

Paid by hire purchase
In twenty year or so.

Lay down the stone axe,
Take up the steel,

And work like a nigger
For a white man meal.

No more firesticks
That made the whites scoff.
Now all electric
And no better off.

Bunyip he finish,
Now got instead
White fella Bunyip,
Call him Red.

Abstract picture now —
What they coming at?
Cripes, in our caves we
Did better than that.

Black hunted wallaby,
White hunt dollar;
White fella witch-doctor
Wear dog-collar.

No more message-stick;
Lubras and lads
Got television now,
Mostly ads.

Lay down the woomera,
Lay down the waddy.
Now we got atom-bomb,
End *everybody*.

▶ The Unhappy Race

The Myvull Speaks

White fellow, you are the unhappy race.
 You alone have left nature and made civilized laws.
 You have enslaved yourselves as you enslaved the horse and
 other wild things.

Why, white man?

Your police lock up your tribe in houses with bars,

We see poor women scrubbing floors of richer women.

Why, white man, why?

You laugh at 'poor blackfellow', you say we must be like you.

You say we must leave the old freedom and leisure,

We must be civilized and work for you.

Why, white fellow?

Leave us alone, we don't want your collars and ties,

We don't need your routines and compulsions.

We want the old freedom and joy that all things have but you,

Poor white man of the unhappy race.

▶ The Past

Let no one say the past is dead.
 The past is all about us and within.
 Haunted by tribal memories, I know
 This little now, this accidental present
 Is not the all of me, whose long making
 Is so much of the past.

Tonight here in suburbia as I sit
 In easy chair before electric heater,
 Warmed by the red glow, I fall into dream:
 I am away

At the camp fire in the bush, among
 My own people, sitting on the ground,
 No walls about me,

The stars over me,
 The tall surrounding trees that stir in the wind
 Making their own music,
 Soft cries of the night coming to us, there
 Where we are one with all old Nature's lives
 Known and unknown,
 In scenes where we belong but have now forsaken.
 Deep chair and electric radiator

Are but since yesterday,
 But a thousand thousand camp fires in the forest
 Are in my blood.

Let none tell me the past is wholly gone.
 Now is so small a part of time, so small a part
 Of all the race years that have moulded me.

◀ Municipal Gum

Gumtree in the city street,
Hard bitumen around your feet,
Rather you should be
In the cool world of leafy forest halls
And wild bird calls.
Here you seem to me
Like that poor cart-horse
Gastrated, broken, a thing wronged,
Strapped and buckled, its hell prolonged,
Whose hung head and listless mien express
Its hopelessness.
Municipal gum, it is dolorous
To see you thus
Set in your black grass of bitumen —
O fellow citizen,
What have they done to us?

▶ Time is Running Out

The miner rapes
The heart of earth
With his violent spade.
Stealing, bottling her black blood
For the sake of greedy trade.
On his metal throne of destruction,
He labours away with a will,
Piling the mountainous minerals high
With giant tool and iron drill.

In his greedy lust for power,
He destroys old nature's will.
For the sake of the filthy dollar,
He dirties the nest he builds.
Well he knows that violence
Of his destructive kind
Will be violently written
Upon the sands of time.

But time is running out
And time is close at hand,
For the Dreamtime folk are massing
To defend their timeless land.
Come gentle black man
Show your strength;
Time to take a stand.
Make the violent miner feel
Your violent
Love of land.

These breasts can fill and overflow,
 They've suckled babies, watched them grow,
 This womb, too, has given birth,
 How dare you, then, to judge my worth.
 By all the gods and powers that be,
 That made woman and man,
 You and yes, me,
 Till they create another human race,
 I spit, defiant, in your face,
 Though you watch me die as you have done,
 I will live again, in my daughters, my sons.
 And you will hear my cry, even as you deny,
 I, too, am human.
 I'd spit on the sun and put out its light,
 If I could keep all this hurt from you,
 Flesh of flesh,
 And blood of my blood,
 You never hear how my aching heart cries,
 To a people too cruel,
 Too blind to see,
 The tears in a black child's eyes.

JACK DAVIS

Jack Davis, Noong-ah, was born in 1917, in Perth, W.A. With his first book of poetry *The First Born* (published by Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1970) Jack firmly established himself as an Aboriginal poet shouting, sobbing, demanding that his song, the Aboriginal song against injustice, be heard. The opening cry was one of outrage and lament from which the title of his book emerged: 'Where are my first born, said the brown land, sighing.'

Jack Davis's family history is so typical, in so far as it is an experience shared by many Aboriginals: his mother was taken away from her tribe in Broome and reared by a white family; his father, William Davis, was also removed from his tribe and reared by whites. Such removal of children from the tribe was a common practice by white authorities in their 'assimilation' policy and as an aid in gaining psychological control over the Aboriginal population. No attention was paid to the desires of the Aboriginal family. Indeed, Aboriginals were denied any say in their affairs at all. The 'reserves' were concentration camps; the Aboriginals, the prisoners, the victims of their conquerors from overseas.

The Davis family moved to Yarloop, a milltown in the south west of Western Australia. There were ten children in the family and the mother displayed a special kind of courage, and self-sacrificing guts in the face of racial genocide.

Jack had eight years of education, in public schools, then worked as a mill-hand, an engine driver, boundary rider and drover, which brought him into contact with the tribal people, and gave acute examples of the everyday ill-treatment and victimisation they suffered. While the squatter kings in their grass castles waxed fat, Jack witnessed their abuse of Black labourers who were forced to work without pay, apart from a few rations — dry bread or flour, camp meat, a stick of tobacco. If Blacks dared to kill cattle to eat, they risked death or at the very least, imprisonment, removal from tribe and family, and the ever-present fear of their children being taken away. These are some of the influences on the development of this poet's voice. He later furthered the cry for justice with *Jagardoo: Poems from the Aboriginal Australia* published by Methuen, Sydney, 1978.

In 1977, much to Aboriginal disgust, Jack was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to literature and the Aboriginal people. Aboriginals collectively believe no 'honour' can come from one as dishonourable as the thieving British Empire, believing instead that our, "Good on you, Bunji" or "Youai Moodjarrng" is the greatest accolade we, the sovereign sons and daughters of this country, can bestow on one another. When this grand old 'grandfather' of the Aboriginal voice in print produced the plays *Kullark* (first performed in Perth, 1979) and *The Dreamers* (first presented by the Swan River Stage in 1982 and subsequently staged by the National Theatre Company of W.A., then taken on a six month national tour by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust), Aboriginals recognised that here indeed was a voice ready to depict events as they were and, in many instances, as they remain and will remain until we all unite for justice and win by whatever means justice demands.

His latest play, *No Sugar*, received standing ovations when performed in Vancouver and Edinburgh in 1986.

▶ The First-born

Where are my first-born, said the brown land, sighing;
 They came out of my womb long, long ago.
 They were formed of my dust – why, why are they crying
 And the light of their being barely aglow?

I strain my ears for the sound of their laughter:
 Where are the laws and the legends I gave?
 Tell me what happened, you whom I bore after.
 Now only their spirits dwell in the caves.

You are silent, you cringe from replying:
 A question is there, like a blow on the face.
 The answer is there when I look at the dying,
 At the death and neglect of my dark proud race.

▶ Aboriginal Reserve

The long low sweeping ground,
 The horizon black in starlight
 And somewhere now the sound
 Of a child's cry in the night.

They stir a fire that is dying,
 The sparks fly upward blending
 With night and a people crying:
 O where, O where is the ending?

The mind forgets tomorrow,
 Eyes grow dull with the years,
 Afraid of the heights of sorrow
 And to fathom the depths of fears.

▶ Slum Dwelling

Big brown eyes, little dark Australian boy
 Playing with a broken toy.
 This environment his alone,
 This is where a seed is sown.
 Can this child at the age of three
 Rise above this poverty?

The walls all cracked and faded, bare.
 The glassless windows stare and stare
 Like the half-dead eyes of a dying race...
 A sad but strange, compelling place.

♦ My Brother, My Sister

There's a gleam of the moon on the man on the rim-rock:
His arm, lifted high, flashes down in an arc.
The kangaroo runs, spins, leaping and tumbling
And falls to the ground with a spear through the heart.

When they hunt in the swamp it's a piccannin morning,
Then the water-hen ripples away from her nest.
Oh, his harvest of food is truly God-given
For life has a purpose and love's at its best.

Then the sheep and the cattle came over the ranges:
They flattened the grasses and muddled the waters.
The iron^a and carda crawled into the boulders
And the bigorda is hiding behind the full moon.

Come, brother, come into the townships and cities.
There's food and there's drink, all yours for the asking,
A house, near-condemned, some clothing to match it
And a Guy^bment man with his tongue in his cheek.

Come Marpoo, bring Jeeri: she's young and becoming.
She's frightened, we know, but we show her the way.
We show her the brute and the beast that is in us,
Then turn her loose in the city to play.

Oh, my people, my people! You are the changelings.
The neon lights flicker: 'Kia-ora Saloon'.
The kangaroo comes from the shop on the corner.
My brother, my sister, you are dying too soon.

^aUron – the bob-tailed goanna. Carda – the race-horse goanna.
Bigorda – the hill-kangaroo.

♦ Urban Aboriginal

She was born with sand in her mouth,
The whisper of wind in her hair;
They washed her clean in warm wood ash
And wrapped her in loving care.

She lay in the mould of her mother's arms,
She suckled her honeyed breasts;
She grew and she watched day turn to night
When you came out of the west.

You came loud-mouthed, with eyes cruel,
You made her a concubine;
Then flung her into a wilderness,
That beautiful Woman of Mine.

With murder, with rape, you marred their skin,
But you cannot whiten their mind;
They will remain my children for ever,
The black and the beautiful kind.

^aThis poem was written in reply to a statement made by a Minister
for Aboriginal Affairs that urban Aborigines are not true Aborigines.

♦ Aboriginal Australia

to the others

You once smiled a friendly smile,
 Said we were kin to one another,
 Thus with guile for a short while
 Became to me a brother.
 Then you swamped my way of gladness,
 Took my children from my side,
 Snapped shut the lawbook, oh my sadness
 At Yirrkala's plea denied.
 So, I remember Lake George hills,
 The thin stick bones of people,
 Sudden death, and greed that kills,
 That gave you chin-oh and steeples.
 I cry again for Worarra men,
 Gone from kith and kind,
 And I wondered when I would find a pen
 To probe your freckled mind.
 I mourned again for the Murray Tribe,
 Gone too without a trace,
 I thought of the soldiers' diatribe,
 The smile on the Governor's face.
 You murdered me with rope, with gun,
 The massacre my enclave,
 You buried me deep on Melarty's run
 Flung into a common grave.
 You propped me up with Christ, red tape,
 Tobacco, grog and tears,
 Then disease and lordly rape
 Through the brutal years.
 Now you primly say you're justified,
 And sing of a nation's glory,
 But I think of a people crucified –
 The real Australian story.

All things all created by God
 Are in me this whole universe
 Are of me—we speak and we cry
 We talk and we dance and we sing
 And I bring them gifts of my soul
 Of my love God has bidden me bring
 Mister man
 If perchance you do find
 The essence the life force in hand
 All giving expression to self
 To soul-force then you'll understand
 The God-soul in all things around
 This essence of life then you live
 Then indeed, Mister man, you do live.

Jack Davis
JOHN PAT

Write of life the pious said
 Forget the past the past is dead
 But all I see in front of me
 Is a concrete floor a cell door and John Pat.

Ah! Tear out the page forget his age
 Thin skull they cried that's why he died!
 But I can't forget the silhouette
 of a concrete floor a cell door and John Pat.

The end product of Gudiya* law
 Is a viaduct for fang and claw
 and a place to dwell like Roebourne's hell
 of a concrete floor a cell door and John Pat.
 He's there Where? there, in their minds now
 deep within
 There to prance a sidelong glance
 a silly grin
 To remind them all of a Gudiya wall
 A concrete floor a cell door
 ... and John Pat.

* Gudiya: Kimberley term for white man

(1978)

40

35

30

Mudrooro
 from THE S

50

I know that I am
 No jargon, please
 I know that I am
 Water and earth
 Mixed with a little
 Don't tell me who
 A child cries in m
 My mouth curves
 In sadness these d
 I know that I am
 Like a lonely child
 Locked in a black
 Huddled in the da
 Don't tell me who
 A deserted hotel r
 A sink in one cor
 A wardrobe, bed
 No poetry, only a
 Opened at random

5

10

15

(1988)

If you want me, tr
 In solitude, a bible
 If you want me, w
 Holding in each d
 Nothing, but your
 Then stop, look d
 An empty bottle, a
 Pink streaming ur
 If you want me, fo
 Rushing pigs to cr
 Brother against bre
 And hustle away fr
 If you want me, tr
 In solitude, old me

ROBERT WALKER

Robert Walker was born at Port Augusta on December 25th, 1958. He died aged twenty-five years, between the hours of 4.30 and 5 a.m. on Tuesday, August 28th, 1984, in the confines of the prison at Fremantle.

Robert Walker was the fourteenth child of a total of fifteen children born to Linda Walker (née Giles) and Anzac Walker. Linda and Anzac lived on Point Pearce Aboriginal Mission in Yorke Peninsula, leaving Point Pearce shortly before Robert's birth to go to Andamooka, the opal fields. Port Augusta had the nearest hospital facilities and it was there that Robert was born on Christmas Day, 1958.

Being born on Christmas Day, being part of a big Aboriginal family, having a hard-working, caring Dad who taught the children that speaking up for their rights was not arrogance, that human dignity and pride in family and self was a good fine thing, to survive, to defend one's rights was full of portent for Robert and his family. When Anzac died, Robert moved between the families, sometimes staying with Mum, his big sister Charlotte, or with his Uncle Mooni and Aunt Edna. Robert used to cry to be with his other uncle, Andrew, an Elder of the Kokatha, so Robert absorbed the tribal influences and mores of the old people in the camps as well.

Later, his mother, Linda, took the family to Adelaide, where Robert underwent the usual schooling for Blacks; white kids beating up on him, speaking on his lunch, demigrating him, and he starting hitting back. Later he was getting into 'trouble', having run-ins with police, and he had a taste of Yalata prison and then, inevitably, Fremantle gaol.

In Western Australia, Aboriginals make up 3% of the population, yet at any given time their numbers in prison are never less than 30% of the prison population. Such an alarming proportion of Aboriginals in gaol does not mean that Aboriginals are more criminal than whiteites or immigrants, but rather reflects the attitudes of a racist society, a government policy of discrimination and, of course, the attitude of a police force that has targeted a minority group with the approval and support of the

government of the time. It all goes back to the initial denial of Aboriginal rights and justice that began with the Letters Patent which approved the setting up of Western Australia and South Australia, providing that 'Aboriginals retain usufructuary rights to hunt, that land areas be set aside for Aboriginals, that 15% of all land sales within the colonies be set aside for Aboriginals' benefit, and 1% of the gross national product be set aside for the benefit and education of Aboriginals.' Of course, as soon as the areas mentioned attained status, they immediately ignored, or repealed the Letters Patent obligations and, instead of honouring the Imperial Directives, they disposed of our lands and, driven, shot, poisoned like dogs and kangaroos, the few remaining of our people were placed in 'reserves', concentration camps, refugees, exiles in our own country.

Robert Walker, the poet, has been given this longer biographical space for he, the poet, was seeking answers to universal questions about the denial of humanity and callous indifference to Aboriginals' lives in this country; a fear, a hatred even, of Black skins and Black culture. What are the causes? Why does such inhumanity persist? Is it a leftover of superstitious fear in the minds of European Australians, a sort of race memory fear carried over from the times they tortured women and burnt them, fearing 'curses' and 'witches'? Why such callous indifference to the lot of Blacks in this country, when the whites respond to the 'boat people', the starving peoples in Africa? How can a young poet understand why the Australian Government refuses to give medical funds to Blacks dying from Hepatitis B by the hundreds, saying there are no funds available, while announcing billion dollar grants to defence or the Bicentenary? There can only be one answer, an intolerable bitter racism in the ranks of the Australian Government and white society.

Isolated, subject to fear and hatred made even more intolerable by the claustrophobic walls of the prison cell, Robert Walker cut his wrists and began playing his guitar. He didn't intend to die, his wrist slashes weren't that critical. His personality unerringly dictated that he protest his treatment, that he force someone to take notice.

Someone did. At about 4 a.m. on Tuesday, August 28th, 1984, prison officers removed him from his cell. Emerging from the cell

Robert Walker

to the landing, he noticed the officers and began screaming in mortal fear. In a grassed area within the prison confines and within full view of a large number of prisoner-occupied cells, Robert Walker was held by officers and beaten with fists, boots and truncheons. In evidence later given, witnesses said . . . 'the screams were the kind to make hair on the back of your neck stand up. Every time Robert screamed the officer would hit him with the truncheon . . . the impression I got was that the . . . officer . . . was damn terrified that Robert would wake the whole of Fremantle up' and . . . 'there must have been over eighty blows'. 'Walker was not resisting at any time', 'His whole intent seemed to be to stop being hit'.

After seventeen or so such minutes on the lawn area where the beating took place, an injection of Largacil was thrust into Robert's body. His body went limp. He was handcuffed and taken away. At 5.15 a.m., Dr. David Bookman pronounced that life was extinct. A post mortem conducted on the day of death did not find the cause of death and described minor injuries.

Meanwhile, after hearing over the radio the news of her son's death, Linda Walker sought to have an independent autopsy, and sought the return of her son's body for burial. The State Prisons Department refused her request and tried to arrange cremation of the body. Finally, a second autopsy was conducted in Adelaide which found that Robert Walker died from 'acute brain death due to an obstruction of the blood supply to the brain caused by compression of the neck'.

Subsequent autopsy testimony given to coroner McCann was in agreement that the injuries to the body were consistent with force 'of a restraining nature', and, under cross-examination, conceded that he couldn't exclude that all the injuries to the body, including the fatal injury, were caused by numerous baton blows, kicks and punches as described by witnesses. Coroner McCann dismissed the evidence of prisoner witnesses in their claim of a 'brutal and unlawful assault'. In his finding the coroner, assessing the evidence of the 41 prisoner witnesses, said that, 'it is clear that in most cases they spoke of what they believed to have occurred . . . clear observation must have been difficult. The very prolonged struggle together with the screams and yells of the deceased must have had a profoundly disturbing effect on

the inmates.' Ultimately it was found that 'the death arose by way of Misadventure', i.e. 'death caused by another unintentionally and in the course of doing something lawful'.

Finally, sometime, somehow, somewhere, white Australia has to come to terms with, and accept the fact that Black Australia was not settled peacefully, nor was it *terra nullius*, wasteland and unoccupied, as declared by Captain James Cook in 1770. In twentieth century maturity Australians should seek to rise above the psychology, the moral malaise of the convict heritage which has been so effective in allowing white Australia to maintain the lie of *terra nullius*, and to continue to parasitise Aboriginal land, Aboriginal resources, Aboriginal heritage without redress to justice and human dignity.

Robert Walker is not the only case of death in a prison, but his case represents a cry for justice and humanity. His call was upheld by Pope John Paul, who in his address at Alice Springs in November 1986 stated 'acknowledgement of the Land Rights of a people who have never surrendered those rights is not discrimination'.

Robert's sister, Charlotte Szekely, wrote to me and said, 'Robert's spirit isn't really here - not in the grave here in Adelaide. It's over there. In Fremantle Prison in the pool of blood. Aboriginal culture, the spirit can't rest until evil is stopped.' Grandfather Koorie replied to questions, saying, 'The spirit is a cycle. Robert Walker, Dixon Green, Tony King, Charlie Michaels, Eddie Murray, John Pat and the many tens of thousands of our people who have died in custody, or around waterholes, in the bush, return to their people to help the people survive, to face the enemies of humanity who have forced two hundred years of war, poverty and terror upon us. Robert Walker, his love, his *Nghilli*, is back with the Kokatha people.' He then wrote his poem to Robert Walker, 'Never blood so red'.

◀ Life Is Life

The rose among thorns
 may not feel the sun's kiss each mornin'
 and though it is forced to steal the sunshine
 stored in the branches by those who cast shadows,
 it is a rose and it lives.

◀ Solitary Confinement

Have you ever been ordered to strip
 Before half a dozen barking eyes,
 Forcing you against a wall –
 ordering you to part your legs and bend over?

Have you ever had a door slammed
 Locking you out of the world,
 Propelling you into timeless space –
 To the emptiness of silence?

Have you ever laid on a wooden bed –
 In regulation pyjamas,
 And tried to get a bucket to talk –
 In all seriousness?

Have you ever begged for blankets
 From an eye staring through a hole in the door,
 Rubbing at the cold air digging into your flesh –
 Biting down on your bottom lip, while mouthing
 "Please, Sir"?

Have you ever heard screams in the middle of
 the night,
 Or the sobbings of a stir-crazy prisoner,
 Echo over and over again in the darkness –
 Threatening to draw you into its madness?

Have you ever rolled up into a human ball
 And prayed for sleep to come?
 Have you ever laid awake for hours
 Waiting for morning to mark yet another day of
 being alone?

If you've every experienced even one of these,
 Then bow your head and thank God.
 For it's a strange thing indeed –
 This rehabilitation system!

MUDROOROO NAROGIN (COLIN JOHNSON)

Colin Johnson, Bibbulnum, was born at Narrogin, WA in 1938. He was educated partly in an orphanage and later thrown on the streets of Melbourne when the promised employment was withdrawn. Colin pursued his writing to draw attention to the injustices, which finally made him seek a more humane aspect in Buddhism.

In 1959 he wrote a play called *The Delinks* and won a competition run by the University quarterly *Westerly*. With this encouragement to his writing he went on to write a novel, *Wildcat Falling* (first published by Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965), which became runner-up for the 1966 Lewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize and was the first major success story for Aboriginal writings.

For many years Aboriginals lamented the departure from his land by Colin, who travelled to India and became a Buddhist monk for seven years. He travelled widely in south-east Asia, the U.S.A. and Britain. Upon his return he joined the Aboriginal Research Unit at Monash University in Melbourne, Victoria which was under the Directorship of Colin Bourke.

In 1979 he wrote *Long Live Sandanarra* (Quarrel Books, Melbourne), and was joint author with Colin Bourke and Isobel White of *Before the Invasion: Aboriginal Life to 1788* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1980). His novel, *Doctor Wooraddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*, was published in 1983, followed by *The Song Circle of Jacky and Selected Poems* (1986) and another novel, *Doin Wildcat* (1988), all published by Hyland House. He changed his name to Mudrooroo Narogin in 1988.

▶ Song Circle of Jacky

Jacky him been sit listening to the wind;
Jacky him been walk listening to the wind.

▶ They Give Jacky Rights

They give Jacky rights,
Like the tiger snake gives rights to its prey;
They give Jacky rights,
Like the rifle sights on its victim.
They give Jacky rights,
Like they give rights to the unborn baby,
Ripped from the womb by its uncaring mother.

They give Jacky the right to die,
The right to consent to mining on his land.
They give Jacky the right to watch
His sacred dreaming place become a hole –
His soul dies, his ancestors cry;
His soul dies, his ancestors cry:
They give Jacky his rights –
A hole in the ground!

Justice for all, Jacky kneels and prays;
Justice for all, they dig holes in his earth;
Justice for all, they give him his rights –
A flagon of cheap wine to dull his pain,
And his woman has to scull herself for that.
Justice for all, they give him his rights –
A hole in the ground to hide his mistrust and fear.
What can Jacky do, but struggle on and on:
The spirits of his Dreaming keep him strong!

Jacky Demonstrates For Land Rights

The last I and rights' demonstration is over,
 All the allies have gone home,
 But black youth make their stand
 On Capital Hill – feeding the maggies:
 Finding there the Site of the Magpie Dreaming.

People come and people go,
 Tourists ignoring the plight of our land,
 But high flies the Black, Red and Gold,
 High flies the Black, Red and Golden Sun.

People come and people go,
 The youth stay on, broke and hopeful
 Beneath the Black, Red and Golden Sun.
 Sick of Redfern, sick of Fitzroy,
 Sick of pigs, blows and booze,
 Sick of sickness, filled with hope –
 Going to stay on 'till they get their rights:
 Going to stay on 'till we get our rights:
 While people come and people go
 Talking beneath the Black, Red and Gold.

The last I and rights' demonstration is over,
 All the allies have gone home,
 But black youth make their stand on Capital Hill,
 On the lost site of the Magpie Dreaming –
 They are no longer there; the maggies have all gone,
 All gone, have gone from the dreaming site
 Along with Jacky and his kind.

Jacky Hears The Century Cry

In 1914 I was young and creative:
 Then I made my first attempt,
 Tried bullets and bayonets,
 And killed millions of myselfs,
 But not enough, I still lived.

I ached and pained,
 Stayed in hospital for years,
 But grew inventive:
 I had to try again.

In the thirties, I used the aeroplane,
 Followed it with careful plans of gas ovens,
 Hacked and bombed and shot and cut,
 In the last explosion thousands died to add
 To the millions dead, but I still lived!

How to end myself, how to end this life?
 I employed scientists and set them to work;
 They discovered napalm and how it hurt;
 Thousands died, but I still survived,
 Planning the final solution to myself.
 Jacky runs from such a terrible dread.

Jacky Sings His Songs

I
 I know that I am –
 No jargon, please –
 I know that I am,
 Water and earth
 Mixed with a little wine.

▶ Child, leave the tape recorder

Child, leave the tape recorder
and video alone. It will make
your eyes go very sore if you
look and look at it all the time.

Play the music a bit low,
or else, your ears will explode
from listening to it.

Leave cigarettes alone or they
might burn you and another thing
is, leave the grog alone too.
You might make yourself sick.
Be good!

Leave the White man's things
music, grog, cigarettes, video
and those other things as well!

Come to the ceremonies
come hunting and dancing
come, so that you can know your
own culture.

EVA JOHNSON

▶ Eva Johnson was born at Daly River, Northern Territory. Eva was forcibly taken away from her mother by white authorities when she was three years old, and brought up on Croker Island Mission.

She moved to Adelaide in 1957, went through her school years and became interested in theatre in 1979, joining Black Theatre for their first performance at the Union Hall, Adelaide, in *When I Die, You'll all Stop Laughing*. Since then she has acted in Troupes' production of *Samizdat*, the TV series *Women of the Sun*, Black Theatre's *Onward To Glory*. She wrote and co-directed the play *Tjindarella*. She gained wide acclaim at the Aboriginal Playwrights' Conference in Canberra, 1987 for her play *Murras*, the story of a mother's spiritual power.

Eva is currently a full-time student studying for a Bachelor of Arts Degree, majoring in Drama, as well as writing her book, a biographical history, *In Search of My Mother's Dreaming*.

Eva draws upon her experience of life and knowledge of the Black community. She wrote to a friend, 'I write about some of the special people whom I love, people who are important to us, and who are victims of an inhumane environment.'

▶ Right To Be

Don't stereotype an image of what you want me to be
I'm a Woman and I'm Black and I need to be free
I'll give back your sense of values you bestowed upon me
And regain my pride, my culture, and true identity.

To the future I will strive and there's no looking back
I'll look to other women to support me on my track
I'll fight as a Woman for the right just to be
The most important contribution to this society.

No more river – Big dam now
String bag empty

Supermarket now

Women sitting in big houses

sharing, singing, remembering

Mother crying, baby clinging

Women telling stories,

new stories, new names

NEW LANGUAGE . . .

◀ Weevilly Porridge

Weevilly porridge I'm going insane

Weevilly porridge gonna wreck my brain

Stir in treacle, make'em taste sweet

Put'em on stove, turn'em up heat

Milk from powder tin, milk from goat

Weevilly porridge, pour'em down throat.

MmmMmm, mission food, send'em from heaben must be good

MmmMmm, mission food, send'em from heaben must be good

Nebba mind the weevil, nebba mind the taste

Missionary she bin say, 'don't you waste'

Weevilly porridge make'em pretty strong

Spread'em on Damma can't go wrong.

Bless'em little weevil, bless'em little me

We bin lunga trick'em just you see

Catch'em little weevil, put'em in the tea

Only fullah drink'em up Missionary.

Protector He bin call on us give us dally ration

Cook'em plenty food for Him, together we bin mash'em

Weevils in the sago, weevils in the rice

Protector He bin lunga saying – Mmmmm, taste nice.

MARY DURoux

▶ Mary Duroux lives in Kempsey, New South Wales where, for many years, she has worked with various Aboriginal services and cultural committees, mostly in an executive role. Her latest position is with the Central Coast Regional Aboriginal Land Council.

Mary is of a mature age, and of the Thungutti. She is a fine artist as well as a sensitive, lyrical poet.

Mary Duroux has had her few poems included in a wide range of community journals and one day, hopefully, we will see her produce a volume of them for the many fans who have long awaited a book of her poems.

▶ Dirge for a Hidden Art

The legendary life of a long-ago tribe

Is told on the wall of a cave.

Where grass has grown on the corroboree ground

And the totem lies in its grave.

How the ashes were scattered by wind and rain

And the gunyahs have rotted away,

When the tribe of the Yuin departed this land

And memories were left to decay.

No one can remember the tales that were told

Of their culture, dreamtime and lore.

The warriors so brave with the weapons they made

Have died in the days of yore.

Now I'm an old man and the last of my tribe

And I'm lonely as a human can be

I weep silent tears as I trace each line

For these pictures were painted by me.

Yes, I'm a Woman and I know that there's nothing that I lack
 I'll progress with my learning till I finally get the knack
 It's my independent thinking that makes me feel so strong
 Our trust in solidarity, simply means we can't go wrong.

I don't want to be no second hand rose
 I don't want to be on your centrefold pose
 I'm a Woman and I'm Black and I need to be free
 Being upfront and powerful is the only way to be.

▲ A Letter To My Mother

I not see you long time now, I not see you long time now
 White fulla bin take me from you, I don't know why
 Give me to Missionary to be God's child.
 Give me new language, give me new name
 All time I cry, they say – 'that shame'
 I go to city down south, real cold
 I forget all them stories, my Mother you told
 Gone is my spirit, my dreaming, my name
 Gone to these people, our country to claim
 They gave me white mother, she give me new name
 All time I cry, she say – 'that shame'
 I not see you long time now, I not see you long time now.

I grow as Woman now, not Piccaninny no more
 I need you to teach me your wisdom, your lore
 I am your Spirit, I'll stay alive
 But in white fulla way, you won't survive
 I'll fight for Your land, for your Sacred sites
 To sing and to dance with the Brolga in flight
 To continue to live in your own tradition
 A culture for me was replaced by a mission
 I not see you long time now, I not see you long time now.

One day your dancing, your dreaming, your song
 Will take me your Spirit back where I belong
 My Mother, the earth, the land – I demand
 Protection from aliens who rule, who command
 For they do not know where our dreaming began
 Our destiny lies in the laws of White Man
 Two Women we stand, our story untold
 But now as our spiritual bondage unfold
 We will silence this Burden, this longing, this pain
 When I hear you my Mother give me my Name
 I not see you long time now, I not see you long time now.

▲ Remember?

Born by river
 Gently rested on a lily pad
 Woman – tired eyes
 Wading beside filling string bag with lily roots,
 fish, small tortoise, buds
 Woman – singing

Around fire, night time sitting
 With Kin – sharing food
 cooked in hot ashes
 Children laughing,
 Mother singing
 baby on breast
 Women telling stories, sharing, giving
 Songs, spirit names, teaching
 IN LANGUAGE.

▶ The White Man Problem

It's 1982 and 200 years gone by,
 Aborigines have fought yet continue to lose.
 The white man came and spread his plague,
 With them came their rights we did not choose.
 We cannot control this thing engulfing us,
 Yet onward we must stand our ground of life.
 And remain true to our beliefs as they evolve,
 In hope, the white man problem becomes less rife.

We can teach our ways but few whites want,
 For they believe their technology is best for man.
 And on they succeed in changing our ways of life.
 With 'civilization' widening the span.
 They cannot see how they are wrong in this,
 For blinded minds of glory and power.
 'Tis the power which prevents their gain in life,
 And creates the white man problem turning us sour.

The white man problem is greed and rape,
 And their ten commandments they ever break.
 Why have such laws if they prevent their aims,
 Forever strived by whites alike.
 The answer must be that whites with power,
 Exploit the poor and down of their kin.
 That dog eat dog is white history known,
 That the white man problem is not just his skin.

IRIS CLAYTON

▶ Iris Clayton of the Wiradjuri tribe was born at Leeton in the Riverina district of New South Wales. Iris grew up on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River, the south-west border of Wiradjuri country, in 1945.

Her Grandmother had a lot to do with her upbringing, helping to develop Iris' interest in creative art and oral history. There were nine children in the Clayton family. The 'Aboriginal Board' – Welfare – took the eldest six children away from the mother as was the common practice then to 'de-stabilise' and 'assimilate' Black children and families. It was during this era that many Aboriginal children became the 'stolen generation'. 'Welfare' authorities deliberately kept parents apart from their children, had our children adopted or put them in 'wardship' which in real terms meant slavery, being paid a shilling and sometimes two shillings and sixpence a week 'wages' while working as cooks, housemaids, gardeners, stockmen, and quite often being sexually abused and used as concubines.

Iris and her sisters went to Gootamundra Aboriginal Girls' Home where the 'training' began. Her two brothers were sent on to Kinchela boys' home. As Iris says: 'We weren't allowed to see our parents. We were really cut right off. They tried to wipe us out in one hit, our whole family background. We were brought up with white outlooks. Never taught Black history or anything and if we used Wiradjuri (Aboriginal) words at the home we were dreadfully punished. It's a sad story really. A lot of the girls died from sclerosis of the liver, through alcoholism, after they left the home. Some turned to prostitution, lots of them committed suicide. They just couldn't cope with the brutal system and being Black, knowing Black, and not being allowed to be Black. A lot of those who were put into "service" were sexually abused, and when they fell pregnant, were sent to Farramatta Girls' Home as "uncontrollable".'

Iris has six children and, after studying Aboriginal History, began work with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra. Her main interests are painting (oils), poetry, writing and letting the world know about the injustice, racism, slavery and abuse that still happens in this country today.

Worship

◀ **Kidnappers***Stew Quenster*

There were nine little blackfellas
 having fun and running free
 along came the welfare
 said this just cannot be
 he grabbed the little blackfellas
 sent them all to the homes
 to train them all as servants
 to slave in gubbars' homes
 and when the little blackfellas
 grew up to be eighteen
 some of them were shy and timid
 and some of them plain mean
 now some of them have children
 of their very own
 and they don't want
 to see them sent
 to the bloody training homes
 They all hate the whiteman
 with his racist laws
 and they all keep the whiteman out
 when he knocks up on their doors.

▶ **River Bidgee**

No one knows how long he's been there
 Twisted, old ravaged beyond repair
 Father to many, too many to count.
 His dying will be a terrible account
 Perhaps if the damage is quickly mended
 His shores and banks strongly defended
 Old River Bidgee need never be
 Another lost legend of the Warrajarree.

▶ **The Black Rat**

He lived in a tin hut with a hard dirt floor,
 He had bags sewn together that was his door.
 He was a Rat of Tobruk until forty-five,
 He was one of the few that came back alive.
 Battered and scared he fought for this land,
 And on his return they all shook his hand.
 The price of fighting for the freedom of man,
 Did not make any difference to this Blackman.
 He returned to the outback, no mates did he find,
 If he had a beer he was jailed and then fined.
 He sold all his medals he once proudly wore:
 They were of no use to him any more.
 Confused and alone he wandered around,
 Looking for work though none could be found.
 The Anzac marches he badly neglected,
 Would show to his comrades how he was rejected.
 He fought for this land so he could be free,
 Yet he could not vote after his desert mêlée.
 And those years in that desert they really look their toll,
 He went there quite young and came home so old.
 This once tall man came from a proud Black tribe,
 Died all alone – noone at his side.

GRANDFATHER KOORI

▶ Born in the Beginning in the heart of the red, sandy Mallee country in Wiradjuriland, somewhere near Ivanhoe. Tribe, Wiradjuri-Nghulli: *Murar ar ao Radhur-i*. Red Kangaroo.

At school he excelled in nature studies, graduating with a Master's in life, a professorial branch in the sciences and innumerable credits in visionology.

These days he is satisfied to live his life, or rather, resigned to living his life in a haze of grieving despair as he searches in his impossible quest to find a potion, a solution or a psychic phenomenon of such magnitude as to be able to pierce the armour of ignorance, bigotry and impotence suffered by those afflicted with the atavistic malady of racism.

At our last meeting, he was kicking up dust on the Bormung and pointing, 'singing' a storm for the English 'Tall Ships' and Joh.

▶ Never Blood So Red

Never blood
 so red so red
 never blood so red
 as blood of the poet
 the Kokatha poet
 who lay in the pool
 so dead.
 Never blood
 so red so red
 in Fremantle gaol so red
 it glistens on batons
 walls and feet
 red drops on the warden's head
 never blood
 so red so red
 never blood so red
 as blood of the poet
 the Kokatha poet
 whose cries for justice
 bled
 whose cries for justice
 bled.

tegerity, Lionel C. New and ...
South Melbourne: Heyland House, 1995

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

On Reading Lionel's Poems.

The sweeping of Murri decades,
Koori, Nyungar, all Us Mobs before and beyond.
His voice echoing, singing out the ages,
Present and past, his words singing
Shining from the pages.
Lionel takes our lives into his mouth,
Spits them out, crying with our needs,
Our desires, our wants and triumphs.
A true kuta to us all,
His words singing of love and hate.
Trespass not on us, our lands.

We need his voice, we need his words;
We need to read, break-dance into our cultures,
Treasures in the warga of the earth;
In the love-womb of our earth.
Aye, you listen in awe to Lionel's magic
Words, poems, songs, singing of our deeds,
His deeds, our seedlings growing from the earth
mother.
Mooridij yida, kuta; mooridij yida, kuta.

Mudroorroo, 24 November 1994.

I want to give everybody my understanding so that they can understand what the reality is in my community, the dreaming and the need for a revival of my language and connection to the land.

When people read my poetry I want them to feel the spirit that is in me and in the people of my community.

You have to understand all the poetry I write in order to get the message. It's a performance in literary oral tradition, of even using their English against the English. The way they write and talk is ungrammatical, because it doesn't have any meanings in their spirit. More so, the cultural symbols that belong to my people are more significant to my people than the A, B and C. What I want to achieve in my writing one day is to put Aboriginal designs of art inside the lettering to bring a broader understanding to the meanings of the text.

This will break down the sophistication of black intellectual authors. My writing is to give a direction to Aboriginal people coming up in the future, to stay away from European colonialist ways of writing, and the disease of stupidity in their language. I want to use a method encouraging the readers to accept that the solitary Aborigines write to give spiritual and political understanding of the conventional social structure of their community.

I must say I think it's going to be difficult to divide the layout of my brain to you, but I have done it quite successfully in giving verses of text in a foreign tongue. I believe in the pride and heritage of an indigenous, ancestral past and future where the technicalities of written words can be broken down. I see words beyond any acceptable meaning, this is how I express my dreaming.

To Aboriginal people in my country, listening and hearing is more important than reading materials. The whole magical way of song and dance is difficult to write down very well, because poetry is emotion. Only a black writer can produce the authenticity in it. I don't believe that white writers can catch the intelligence or the meanness of the black guerrilla fighters (Jantamarra, Mubaggara, Dundalee and Penulwuy, for example). Only we can bring out on paper what our fighters back then fought to produce, the raising of people's consciousness about what really happened back then.

...written pieces of paper. It doesn't matter if it is in correct thinking when he is writing. Maybe in the generations to come this don't get confused with my negating the reality of literary white Australia. I know how white Australians write and I know how they know — and the only way they will know is through Aboriginal writers to edit themselves and encapsulate the spirit of anger, to transform a good spirit.

There are many contradictions in European written material, but tongues that dominate in our lingo. Aboriginal writers are the best to edit themselves and encapsulate the spirit of anger, to transform a good spirit.

Lionel Fogarty

This book is dedicated to my children Fletcher Campbell Lacey and Bari Willoughby (the most original indigenous muso).

GUERRILLA POETRY: Lionel Fogarty's Response to Language Genocide

Every colonised people — in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality — finds itself face to face with the language of the civilising nation ... Franz Fanon

What happened to the Aboriginal languages of Australia? The English invader sought to destroy them utterly. The native was to be forced into the state of English civilisation, and this meant the death and destruction of Aboriginal language and culture. The native was to be in a few decades Aboriginal language policy of language genocide, and words falling haplessly into English language structures of varying degrees of worth — from the invader's viewpoint! This forced adoption of a foreign language became broken collections of European tradition riddled with class and racial prejudice. Kriol and Pidgin became objects of scholarly study and Aboriginal English were criticised on their use of English and Aboriginal remnant words. What would be the Aboriginal response to this cultural and genocide imperialism, and who would make this response? Lionel Fogarty refuses to surrender to the critical norms forced upon poets in Australia. He writes in a manner which is the response of an Aboriginal songman against the genocide inflicted on his language and the tyranny imposed on him by a foreign language. It is impossible to read Lionel without realising that he is Black; it is impossible to read Lionel without realising that he is Black; it is that here is a poet using the English language in a unique and new way. He wields a black pen, and writes a language reflecting against camps as Cherbourg, where the invader language reflecting the people. He uses that language in such concentration structures which have been imposed on him and his people. I would like to stress that Lionel does not rely on European models for his poetry, and that it is his genius which shapes his verse. He was born a victim in a world in which he and his people had no say. In Franz Fanon's sense he (and his people) was the native. Other contrasted with the coloniser subject which sought to destroy the blackness within him, to render him as object into a state.

I'm Not Santa

Black santa is sad cos he found he's sacked
The Christmas has come again
messing up the family's saving
The kids at school sing praises
of a silent holy night and a
tree to be cut down for presents
And they wait for the big red
bearded white santa man to
come down the chimney
And they think this is true
but the jingle media suck dem
in to buy everything at high price.
And what the black parent
say to their childrens is, who
the bloody hell is christ coming
here and stealing our culture
with deer and sledges?
Then you all turn and sing
merry christmas, well this
is a profit making business
for the rich, don't you know child's?
Christmas destroy the poor
and it's a fake unto happiness
Christmas is against the Murri
belief cos it celebrate one man
birth and not all men.
Sure you'll get me to a black santa
but remember I'm just cringe
inside cos you're too young
to explain the political cultural
sad oppressed nature this so-called
xmas caused to our people before.
And even right here, the image of
santa forgets neglects the poor dark
childrens even white kids, why?
cos santa is the capitalist who's there to

fool you and drain your dad and mum of
every money they have.
Now how can you be merry when your
cuz relative got nothing or people starving or
people live in bad homes.
How can you merry on
a day when the world is at war for peace.
Well if in your heart you want to be merry then do it every
moon, full star shine and dawn morning
And catch the sun up before SANTA comes and
takes your PRESENTS!