

**AUSTRALIAN
FANTASY
AND
FOLKLORE**



JOHN S. RYAN

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FOLKLORE

by

J. S. Ryan

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With an Introduction by Joan Phipson

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1981

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INTRODUCTION

My qualifications for the privilege of introducing the following survey are that I know no more than the average person about folklore and perhaps less about Aboriginal folklore; about fantasy in general, perhaps a little more than average. Backhanded qualifications perhaps, yet they do allow me to receive as fresh and new many of the ideas put forward by Professor Ryan and the writers quoted.

When I began to write stories for children in the 1950s I was told then, and for some years afterwards, that it was useless to try to write fantasy, that Australian children did not - could not - read fantasy, and in any case, the suggestion was, why waste time on such trifling stuff? I was sorry because I remembered my own intense pleasure in the books of fantasy I had read when young - all the fairy tales that ever were, my favourites (*pace* Hans Andersen) being the bloody-minded brothers Grimm; but also *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Water Babies*, skipping the exhortations to childish virtue, *The Wind in the Willows* and many others. If one could write anything remotely resembling these, what a pity to deny children the enormous pleasure of reading it.

That the statement was all too true I found out when for a short period I read at regular intervals to the children of a small country primary school. But the fault lay, not with the fantasies, but with the children, to whom books of any kind were foreign, not to say anathema, whose imaginations had never been stretched and who understood only stories whose backgrounds encompassed experiences as narrow as their own. No children, I thought, needed fantasy more.

Later on I realized that what my advisers had in mind was not the great, soaring classics of fantasy but the kind of thing referred to in this survey as 'petal fairies' - the coy, sentimental outpourings of, not writers, but baby lovers.

The 1980 School on which this paper is based is proof enough that those sad days are past. Fantasy is again understood for what it is: the conveying of thinking minds to vast realms previously unimagined.

'Fantasy is Man Thinking.' And Patricia Wrightson qualifies this by '-thinking about reality but beyond the known facts'. And where does imagination come in? At some point thought and imagination blend, become incandescent and take flight and true fantasy - a long way from the petal fairies - is born. And the reader's mind has been stretched, stimulated and enriched.

Much, but not all, fantasy is based on folklore, and folklore is based on the relationship of primitive men to their environment. The seasons, the earth's diurnal revolutions, the sea, the moon, all have their part in man's folklore. And never more than in the folklore of the Australian Aboriginal. And, unlike most folklores, it still lives. But up to now the Australians who have based their fantasies on Australian folklore are not indigeneous. Their bloodstream is from the north. It does not, as it should, flow from the ground they stand on.

This, as I see it, is the great challenge that is faced in this survey, based on this second writing course in Armidale. As I read through the paper I found myself stimulated, ignited almost, by the great possibilities that lie here.

The first section covers the wide area of fantasy in general, quoting many writers on the subject and contracting towards the end to the folklore basis of fantasy in particular.

Part Two starts by expanding the subject of folklore in general and Australian folklore in particular, and focussing specifically on Patricia Wrightson, who has undoubtedly thought more about fantasy and folklore than anyone else in Australia and who has, moreover produced what will be in time to come the first fantasy-folklore classic of Australia.

I must here digress to express my own enthusiasm for her earlier book, *An Older Kind of Magic*, which, though not powerful, poetic and vibrant as are her later fantasies, is full of wit and sparkling invention and an imagination that spreads its net over the whole curdling Australian scene and, indeed, to the sky as well, for all hangs on the arrival of the comet.

Part Three focusses closely on the other two consultants, Patricia Scott and Bill Scott, and one learns from them the value and necessity of the spoken story and its impact on the child. It is interesting to compare Bill Scott's investigations and conclusions on Aboriginal folklore with those of Patricia Wrightson. On several occasions different paths had led them to similar conclusions.

I was left with a feeling of an enormous subject with profound human implications. And of a vast problem - how to combine the rich mines of Aboriginal folklore in our fantasy while it is yet living, how to capture the tremendous imaginative scope without violating subjects which are still sacred to many. What an opportunity, and what a task! How providential that in the event there were nine Aboriginal writers present.

Joan Phipson,
Mandurama, New South Wales
12th February, 1981

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AUSTRALIAN FANTASY AND FOLKLORE*

For all early people, even the least civilized, possess the germs of literature. They have their hymns to the Divine Father above the sky, and to gods and spirits; they have magic-songs, - they possess fairy-tales and legends in prose concerning gods and fabulous heroes; they have tales of talking birds and beasts; and they have dances in which the legends of old heroes are acted and sung. These dances are the germ of the drama - and the fairy-tales are the earliest kind of novels. [Andrew Lang, on Anglo-Saxon literature in his *History of English Literature* (1914), p. 1]

If children are pleased, and they are so kind as to say that they *are* pleased, the Editor does not care very much for what other people may say. [Andrew Lang in his 'Preface' to *The Yellow Fairy Book* (1894)]

The stories that seem to appeal to everyone from pre-schoolers to octogenarians are stories about the supernatural - ghost stories, tales of monsters. [Val Watson in 'Writing for Children', p. 11, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 1976]

In exchanging your own cherished folklore for a strange one it is very natural to feel at least a chill, and even some revulsion. I know because I felt it myself. It wasn't easy to swap Puck for a Pot-kurok; it was only, I felt, essential. I was still grappling with my own problem of fantasy when I began *An Older Kind of Magic* (1972). I had tried, both as a reader and as a writer, to accept the European import. It was failure to open that door that brought me at last to another: 'All people have fairies. Therefore the Aboriginal people have fairies. Find them.' (Patricia Wrightson, in 'When Cultures Meet: A Writer's Response'¹ (1979), p. 188).

* * * * *

Introduction

The resurgence of the narration of fairy-tales, a feature of the last quarter century, has been related to the contemporary development of fantasy, a genre usually held, in its most ambitious form, to be the best quality writing for children. The earlier approach to fairy stories had been solemn, scholarly, almost pedantic, as even this more recent Australian quotation makes clear -

Mine, now, was the task of finding the various pieces and fitting the jigsaw together, tracking up Aboriginal words in her glossaries, enhancing the simple stories with just a touch of drama or poetry for appeal both to children and as general literature with anthropological verifications and value - a link in the world's mythologies that delighted me. [Ernestine Hill, commenting, in 1947, on events of the last years of her friend, *Kabbarli*, *A Personal Memoir of Daisy Bates* (1973), pp. 169-70]

The most luminous modern fantasies which many have designated by the equivalent term, 'high quality' fairy-tales, have been very much akin to the retelling with integrity of myths and legends from many cultures by such a writer as Roger Lancelyn Green, himself an avowed disciple of Andrew Lang. Whether all the retellers, fantasy writers and creators of 'new' fairy-tales would agree with Bruno Bettelheim's argument in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1975) that 'children need the safety-valve² of the fairy-tale for uncomplicated emotional development', there is no doubt that that literary kind is without rival for its assistance to the expansion of the imagination, of wonder and of the sense of mystery and the poignancy - the *lacrimae rerum* - of the

* This title of this review article, one used for a writing course held in Armidale in October 1980, is also used to assess this general field at the beginning of the 1980s.

human condition. For fantasy is the true experimental cauldron³ used by some of the finest writers and most fertile minds of all times. In the earliest periods, however, the discoverers in fantasy were dealing with the realities of their day, for the monsters and magic that made up their worlds were recognized as part of a real cosmos, a conception which has received re-endorsement by the Australian children's writer, Patricia Wrightson, in her essay, *The Human Experience of Fantasy*.⁴

'Fantasy is Man Thinking' (P. Wrightson)

Her ongoing argumentation there - so reminiscent and even echoic of Coleridge, Chesterton⁵ and Tolkien - finally takes her to her most valid definition

For me, fantasy is man thinking; thinking about life and reality, but beyond the known facts. (p. 7)

Hence for her, modern experimental physics is to be seen as founded upon this 'thinking beyond the known', and thus she exclaims -

No wonder we write fantasy with increasing purpose in the age of science - the two are so closely related. (p. 7)

And so she relates with satisfaction the story about Einstein who, when asked what a young son interested in science should read, replied: 'Fairy Stories',... 'More Fairy Stories' and 'More Fairy Stories', and so he could indeed extend the mind beyond reality.

Indeed, she suggests the universal need for the kind coming from 'fantasy-hungry adults' is a sign among them of fantasy's 'old strength and purpose revived' (p. 12), -- 'and because the time is ripe we use it as naturally as breathing' -- for:

we're thinking intensely about reality, exploring it beyond measurable fact. So of course we're writing fantasy. (p. 13)

Her paper, discussed below in detail, concludes with the assertion -

We need the freedom of magic, this vitality in fantasy, because, I submit, this is an age of fantasy. An age of man thinking, intensely and with conviction, about life and reality but beyond the known facts. (p. 16)

* * * * *

Yesterday's Fantasy and Australian Children's Literature

In his two volume work, *A History of Australian Children's Literature 1840-1970* (1969), H.M. Saxby makes it clear that the fantasy read by Australian Children can be seen to move through several phases -

- a) fairy tale and fantasy written in England (1841-1900);
- b) imitative fairy tales and fantasies produced in Australia (1841-1900) with some few false zoological, mythological and Aboriginal intrusions.

While this later period was contemporary with such authoritative works as Kate Langloh Parker's *Australian Legendary Tales*⁶ (1896), Saxby noted that

These collections of Aboriginal myths and legends have never been as popular with children, even in the country of their origin, as the traditional classical tales. This is probably because the stories which have become popular have been skilfully retold⁷ for children;

adding:

Folk literature is traditionally adult and has to be adapted, or at least edited, for children;

and that:

Many of the stories in Mrs Parker's collection -- are adult in their conception and so the appeal of the work has been limited. (Vol. I, p. 59)

- c) fantasy and magic (e.g. N. Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding*) (1900-1918);
- d) more fairy-tales and animal fantasy - the time of May Gibbs, Dorothy Wall, Nuri Mass, etc. (1918-1941); and
- e) fantasy (1941-1970), a kind unlike the pseudo-form of the late nineteenth century and earlier twentieth, but rather one which

takes for granted not only the existence of the physical, or primary world, but also that of the supernatural, or secondary world where truth is that which is apprehended by the imagination. (Vol. II, p. 140)

He sees folklore as an aid to help manipulate the relationship of the two worlds in literary fantasy, where

- (i) 'the physical laws of nature are no longer immutable';
- (ii) 'the tyranny of time is broken';
- (iii) 'secondary worlds emerge from behind the barrier of time and reality';
- (iv) 'these hidden worlds are inhabited by beings of another dimension, often with suprahuman powers -- or -- of rare quality';
- (v) 'humans -- are bequeathed special powers'; and
- (vi) 'both words and objects can gain special portent'.

After making this analysis, Saxby stresses that 'very little fantasy of consequence has been produced in this country in the last thirty years' (p. 142), but he does single out for praise for their various devices and success:

Patricia Wrightson's *Down to Earth* (1965), pp. 146-147;

Nan Chauncy's *Tançara* (1960), pp. 147-148;

Randolph Stow's *Midnite: The Story of a Wild Colonial Boy* (1967), pp. 148-149; and

S.A. Wakefield's *Bottersnikes and Gumbles* (1967), pp. 149-151.

The particular appeal of the last comes from the fact that

It tells of fantastic creatures that inhabit the Australian bush; nasty, lazy, uncouth, ugly creatures called Bottersnikes⁸ who live in the rubbish piles that litter our landscape, and press the giggly, easy-going, utterly pliable Gumbles into their service. (Vol. II, p. 149)

The name systems will inevitably remind the reader of the C.S. Lewis devils⁹ and Tolkienian orcs, specified 'Snikes being Chank and Weathersnike, and Gumbles, Tinkigumble and Happigumble, Merrigumble and Willigumble.

In the last sections of the survey, Saxby notes the assistance that Marjory O'Dea has obtained from Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and the Narnia of C.S. Lewis in her fantasy, *Six Days Between a Second* (1969), with its child protagonists entering a secondary world of aeriids and pedestrids, both species of basilisk. Help is accorded those who attempt to put down these enemies of mankind by a gryphon, two unicorns and a group of dolphins. He also considers another artistic failure, Alan Marshall's *Whispering in the Wind* (1969) a work which

tries uneasily to blend the trappings of folk-lore and fantasy with the traditional Australian tall-story. (p. 153)

and is dependent on magic rather than moral choice and is blurred by 'pointless side-issues'.

Thus his section on modern fantasy¹⁰ - one quite separate from that on Aboriginal myths and legends (pp. 206-215) - concludes with these highly significant thoughts

For a hundred years writers have been trying unsuccessfully to blend the traditions of folk-lore with the contemporary Australian scene. It is almost as if the land itself rejects the imposition....

It is a pity that there have been so few authentic Australian images created to link the world of reality with the secondary world of fantasy - the Gumnut Babies of May Gibbs, perhaps, and Bunyip Bluegum and his friends: and that is about all. (pp. 153-154)

In short, Saxby, writing in 1969, felt that fantasy in children's fiction had yet to appear, since 'the most demanding form of story-telling that exists' had not yet the vision of a poet, nor had there appeared images that 'touch the experience of Every-man' and 'embrace a deep understanding of the human condition' and thus are profoundly wise.

* * * * *

The Voice of the Editors (and Critics)

Many of those in charge of publishing 'serious' children's literature had sought to encourage the return to authentic Australian materials in recent years. They had not confined their remarks to comments on submitted manuscripts but by actual publication policy and by public statement had sought to assist this necessary movement. As Maurice Saxby put it

Australians... Anne Ingram (Collins Australia) and Barbara Ker-Wilson who has edited for both Angus and Robertson and Hodder and Stoughton...are as well known in the world of children's books as the authors they publish - names such as...Ivan Southall, Patricia Wrightson, Eleanor Spence, Colin Thiele from Australia. (In his essay 'Children and Literature', p. 20, *Current Affairs Bulletin*, Vol. 54, No. 7, December 1977.)

Earlier (p. 14) he had stressed that the best modern tales or modern versions of ancient legends 'retain the folk rhythms of the original', being meant for reading aloud and so of 'keeping alive the tradition of oral storytelling'.

Although others are involved, it will be sufficient here to discuss the views of the three editors, two particularly referred to by Maurice Saxby in 1977. They are prime movers of the change, also discerned generally by John Rowe Townsend¹¹ who put it after his publication of *A Sense of Story* in 1971. Thus in his revised and much altered second version of this book, now entitled *A Sounding of Storytellers* (Kestrel Books, 1979) he felt he had to refashion his remarks about those writers

who were included in the earlier book, but have moved on to new ground since...: Paula Fox, Leon Garfield, Alan Garner, William Mayne, K.M. Peyton, Ivan Southall and Patricia Wrightson. (*op.cit.*, p. 7)

(a) Barbara Ker-Wilson's 'A Visit to the Dreamtime'

In an essay of this title, published in the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, Volume 49, Number 10, June 1975 (pp. 720-727), and subtitled 'Experiencing Aboriginal Folk-lore', this editor opened with a challenge:

Time and time again, over my quarter-century as a children's books editor, the sheer *adequacy* of folklore has struck me anew.

'Why go past?' as the gasoline advertisements...ask. It's all there: plot, situation, characterization, observation, humour, tragedy, ingenuity, imagination...every novelist, every poet in the sophisticated folklore of primitive man. (p. 720)

It is also worth stating immediately that this writer does not suggest but merely leaves implicit the idea that this material may be used by today's creative writers. Rather does she stress the feeling the modern has of closeness to the folklore in Australia and New Guinea.¹² Since in both countries 'the oral tradition of storytelling is still maintained' (p. 720) and 'the actual stories have stayed amazingly true to the way they have been told right from the beginning' (*ibid.*), and so the collecting, retelling and editing of these folktales is peculiarly exciting and rewarding.

Her further exploration of Aboriginal folklore and comparison of it with others worldwide leads her to certain most important conclusions -

that it may 'be described as by far the most developed of all primitive mythology' (p. 721);

that its strength is its 'dependence on the land, for the Aborigine revered it and sought to increase his wonder in it; in his imagination, it became the chief influence in his spiritual life' (*ibid.*);

that all the folklore was part of his total spiritual life; and

that Aboriginal folklore was originally created within the Australian continent.¹³

(b) *Barbara Buick, in 1967*

Virginia Haviland's prestigious volume, *Children and Literature - Views and Reviews* (1973)¹⁴ contains a 1967 essay by Barbara Buick, then of Cheshires, on 'An Indigenous Children's Literature', in which Patricia Wrightson is praised for 'family stories' and 'stories for teen-agers' (p. 344), but it is then observed that 'many subject fields are still untouched, as are fine historical writing and fantasy' (*ibid.*).

(c) *Anne Ingram on the 1960s and 1970s*

Writing in the 'Children's Bookworld Supplement' to the *National Times*, week ending July 15, 1978, Anne Bower Ingram had several interesting points to make. Beginning with

In future years, the 1970s will be recognized as the decade when Australian children's books began their climb to acceptance in the international world of children's literature,

she went on

The 1960s were the decade of the novelist. It was the time when writers who had made their first, hesitant steps into print in the 50s gained confidence in themselves and began to experiment, to extend their own creative writing.

This can be seen most noticeably in the works of writers of the calibre of Ivan Southall, Patricia Wrightson, Eleanor Spence and Joan Phipson. These writers, and many more, developed the genre of the Australian children's novel, in their own individual way, so that it became a style that was both national as well as international....

The novel continued from strength to strength into the 70s, and again there was change. Our writers explored new themes, new ideas. In one 12-month period, three of our top writers wrote fantasy stories - this especially difficult genre had been almost ignored by our writers up till then. This is not the case any longer. (*loc.cit.*, p. 28)

While an editor must of course edit, it is interesting that Anne Ingram had also compiled a collection of 'ghostly tales' from Australia, entitled *Shudders and Shakes*, while her *Too True: Australian Tall Tales* (1974), in its Introduction, indicates a preference for 'the "chilly", not quite real, tall story' (p. 7) and in various means 'of capturing the imagination of all "new chums" to these shores' (p. 8). Although she does not say so, it is very possible that much of this laconic genre

masks a form of what Manning Clark has called

the Irish sense of wonder, the awareness of magic in the world.

* * * * *

The Earlier New England Writing Occasion (1978)

The University of New England, through its Department of Continuing Education, has for about fifteen years been arranging varying forms of residential opportunities for established writers and for those still aspiring, the former often leading the latter. Thus following on such retreats as those led by Kenneth Slessor, Judith Wright, Frank Hardy, John Manifold and others, there were such Schools as those entitled: 'Writing for Radio' and 'The Writer and the New Video'.

In similar vein in 1977 Frank Bitmead of the University of New England's Department of Continuing Education began to plan for a writing event to be held in Armidale. The broad aim of the residential course was to foster the writing of more good quality books for young Australians by bringing into residence for ten days in a University college 'a group of novice writers of children's books who have already shown some promise'.

The Residential School, 'Writing for Young Australians', was held at the University of New England from November 15 to 26, 1978, and it was supported by the Literature Board of the Australia Council. On that occasion some 33 enrolments from five states were accepted; 26 women and 7 men. There was great diversity in both age and experience, with a good sprinkling of school teachers and CAE lecturers - many of the participants having written much which had not at that stage appeared in print. While most came as writers working on their own, several had been associated with the 'Writing for Young Australians' course conducted at Melbourne State College as part of librarianship studies, and so saw the Armidale experience as a most useful follow-up.

Their tutors then were Anne Ingram, editor, and the prestigious writers, Joan Phipson and Eleanor Spence, whose joint task it was to reveal the heavy and complex demands made on a writer, and to underscore that, as well as literary ability and some business acumen, that all writing demands considerable self-discipline, dedication and tenacity.

(a) Topics

Before coming to Armidale the participants had been required to read 17 books, chosen by the tutors, upon which the evening discussions were based.

They are listed here as an underpinning part of that school

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Publisher</i>
A. Picture Books (1-6 years)		
1. M. Sendak	<i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>	Puffin
2. Paterson/Digby	<i>Waltzing Matilda</i>	Lion
3. E. Carle	<i>Very Hungry Caterpillar</i>	Puffin
4. R. Briggs	<i>Father Christmas</i>	Puffin
B. Young Fiction (7-9 years)		
5. M. Lurie	<i>The 27th Annual African Hippo Race</i>	Puffin
6. M. Bond	<i>A Bear Called Paddington</i>	Lion
7. M. Mahy	<i>The Bus Under the Leaves</i>	Puffin
C. Fiction (10-14 years)		
8. I. Southall	<i>Josh</i>	Puffin
9. P. Wrightson	<i>An Older Kind of Magic</i>	Puffin
10. R. Adams	<i>Watership Down</i>	Puffin
11. S. Cooper	<i>Dark is Rising</i>	Puffin

12.	A. Garner	<i>Red Shift</i>	Lion
13.	W. Mayne	<i>Earthfasts</i>	Puffin
14.	E. Koningsburg	<i>From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs Basil E. Frankweiler</i>	Puffin
15.	K.M. Peyton	<i>Flambards</i>	Puffin
16.	R. Stow	<i>Midnite</i>	Puffin
17.	Blishen/Garfield	<i>The God Beneath the Sea</i>	Corgi/Kestrel

It was stressed that these books all lent themselves very well to discussion, as the event illustrated very clearly.

It is noteworthy that a chronological/historical background list suggested but not used in the event, had included such authors/topics, chronologically as:

1. *Little Women*
2. *Water Babies*
3. *T. Sawyer/H. Finn*
4. Beatrix Potter
5. *Boys' Own Annual*
6. Ethel Turner - *7 Little Australians*
7. *The Wind in the Willows*
8. May Gibbs - *Smugglepoot and Cuddlepie*
9. Norman Lindsay - *The Magic Pudding*
10. C.S. Lewis
11. Enid Blyton
12. E. Enright - *Doublefields*
13. Le Guin - *The Wizard of Earthsea*
14. Ivan Southall - *Ash Road*
15. Patricia Wrightson
16. Judy Bloom - *Forever.*

From it only two items appeared in the actual list, although one, the first, was taken from a supplementary list:

William Mayne - *The Big Egg*
Anne Holm - *I am David*
Russel Hoban - *The Mouse and his Child.*

* * * * *

(b) *The School Itself*

While at least one tutor was dubious that such a subject could in fact be taught, events proved that it is 'at least possible for would-be writers to take some vast steps forward'. The group and individual tasks all went well, from the first writing assignment, 'Why I want to write for children', through: a synopsis of a plot (for stated age group); a character sketch; opening paragraphs for books for three age groups (5-7 years; 8-10 years; 11 years and over); to the major writing task, the first chapter of a book for the 11 years and over group. The daily programme struck a good balance between lecture/discussion, small group discussion, writing and private discussion between the tutors and individuals. All of the three tutors were able to read and to assess all of the major assignments.

The areas of the craft of writing which were handled included:

theme and plot; character; style, including suitable styles for different age groups; discipline and technique - practice of writing, grammar and syntax in relation to clarity, the professional approach, e.g. regular working hours; the psychological aptitude for writing books for children as opposed to writing for adults.

Editorial advice was given on such basics as:

the presentation of a manuscript;
working with an editor;
the need for a writer to accept criticism and guidance;

financial returns;
the place of the publisher in the world of literature; and
the role of the illustrator.

Perhaps most importantly the writers came to understand the relationship and trust that can develop with an editor, and, indeed, the need to have total faith in an editor and to rewrite sections if this is deemed necessary. And as with other writing courses, there developed and increased the members' considerable existing awareness and understanding of children's literature.

(c) *Sequel*

All of the participants said that they gained much from the course and many have since maintained contact with their tutors. Two years later (November-December 1980) it is known that the following members of the group have made progress in bringing their work into print -

Gillian Barnett, of Merricks, Victoria;
Dianne Bates, of Tanja, via Bega, N.S.W.;
Jan Berry, of Mount Waverley, Victoria;
Peter Dargin, of Dubbo, N.S.W.;
Pearl Hadfield, of Lismore, N.S.W.;
Esther Jones, of Merewether, N.S.W.;
Jan McKeever, of Mooroolbark, Victoria;
Anne Pirie, of Frankston, Victoria; and
Stella Sammon, of Hazelbrook, N.S.W.

The course members had sent a letter of appreciation to the Chairman of the Literature Board of the Australia Council on November 23, 1978, referring to themselves as 'lucky participants' and expressing their appreciation of its 'comprehensive nature' and their 'deepest gratitude...for the instruction, assistance and enthusiasm of the three tutors' and describing the course as 'an amazingly broadening and enlightening experience'. It may well also prove to have been a watershed in the writing of children's literature in this country.

* * * * *

Typical Modern Attitudes to Folklore

In 1956, the late Tom Inglis Moore - an indirect line descendant of Rolf Boldrewood - in an article entitled 'Are We Neglecting Our Australian Folk Lore',¹⁵ asked what was meant by Australian folklore and then defined it as

Songs, dances, poems and legends, anonymous in origin, accepted by the people as describing their life and sentiments, (p. 8)

arguing that 'our stock of folklore has been limited by the short period of our national development' and that it was some considerable period

before we found groups coming together with a common life and common ideas to give the material for a traditional lore.

These were the nomadic bush workers. Moore then turned with approval to the work of Russel Ward in interpreting the old bush songs and ballads as the primary material of Australian social history,¹⁶ regretting the paucity of native material in folk dance and music, but rejoicing at the new interest in colonial poetry and in the revival of the ballad as a literary form

by such poets as Dame Mary Gilmore, Douglas Stewart, John Manifold, and David Campbell. (p. 9)

Moore also noted the new wide interest being taken in such forms of Australian folklore as traditional sayings, local legends and tall stories, citing with approval Bill Wannan's *The Australian* (1954), with its subtitle: 'Yarns, Ballads, Legends and Traditions of the Australian People'. He also observed that the tall

story, with its exaggerations drawn from bush life, has become a literary cult in recent times and that in the hands of Dal Stivens, a skilful short story writer, it

has developed...into a special form of fantasy in such recent collections as *The Gambling Ghost* and *Ironbark Bill*,

and that the same is true of the work of Alan Marshall.

Very significantly no Aboriginal material appears in any of these works, apart from the odd inclusion of the blackfellow as a part of the fauna, as in the many anecdotes told by Bill Wannan. A similar stance is to be found in such a work as the exhaustive *Complete Book of Australian Folk Lore* (1976), compiled and annotated by Bill Scott. In his long preface, the collector and reteller notes the Irish and American background to folk song here and that

the links abroad for the Bush lie, the local tall story, are almost exclusively American. (p. 17)

Writing in 1979 on 'Australian Folklore and the cultural cringe',¹⁷ Warren Fahey expressed a different viewpoint, challenging the limiting view of Russel Ward 'that Australia inherited the "fag-end" of a folklore', or a residue of an (overseas) folk experience, and argues that it is

definitely a folk *tradition* and definitely *unique* to Australia. (p. 10)

He argues that Australians, originally *transportees*, carried with them their 'songs, dances, poems, yarns, weather lore, traditional skills and all those other treasures we call our folklore'.

For Fahey 'folklore is simply a process of borrowing, adapting and adopting...a living process...through to the present day' since the 'folk' are creative beings who still compose songs to express our feelings as they did:

to comment on the Shearers' Strike of the 1890s;
in the trenches during the War;
during the Depression of the 1930s; and
for Vietnam, Uranium, Westgate Bridge and for Green Bans.

He seems no essential difference between the 'old' song in which a convict complains of his lot and the chants in which a 'young man expresses his fear of Uranium Power'. He questions the obliterative American ideas as promulgated by the media, and the assault on the mind of advertising and media images, which kills both memory and the performance of song and makes us merely 'audience', forgetful of our folklore. His somewhat muted challenge would seem to be found in his stress on the oral transmission still of what must be seen to be 'authentic folklore':

Every country needs traditions to provide that ever-important feeling of National pride and purpose of direction. Without traditions we have nothing to fall back on - no comparisons to improve life. I feel like an Australian and I don't want to feel as if I'm living in a suburb of the US of A. The folksongs are a time-piece to remind us of ourselves.

Yet for all his compassion, Warren Fahey, in his stress on the 'melting pot', while allowing 'Yugoslavian/Australian' and 'Irish/Australian' mixes, has nothing to say about the original inhabitants and their voice beyond the passing remark that 'we have all "invaded", a continent belonging to Aboriginal Australia' (p. 10). For him Aborigines would not seem to be a part of folklore.

Close Contact of Significant Retellers and Other Writers With the Aborigines

It merits some stressing that many workers in the field of folklore have had close personal contact with the Aborigines. Thus as a child, Catherine Field - the

K. Langloh Parker to be - grew up alongside her father's cattle drovers and so had heard first hand the stories which she was to record in her *Australian Legendary Tales*¹⁸ (1896). Similarly, Daisy Bates who had spent nearly forty years living alongside the Aborigines, had been concerned to record 'hundreds of unfinished tales', many of which were retold and published by Barbara Ker-Wilson in 1972 under the title, *Tales Told to Kabbarli* ('White Grandmother', the Aboriginal name for Daisy Bates). The respect of the modern for her materials is reflected in her words -

In retelling the legends I kept as close to the original drafts as I could and incorporated into the narratives many Aboriginal words and phrases, rather than appending a glossary to the book.¹⁹

Similar knowledge of the Aborigines and respect for the manner in which the material was recorded is to be found in the work of Roland Robinson, as in his *The Man Who Sold His Dreaming* (1965) or *Wandjina* (1968). Like all the others he made certain that what he recorded was not secret, and so in the Preface to the former work he notes that

The stories...were not myths, but they were tales in which mythical beliefs, tribal customs and magico-religious practices still played an important part. (p. 5)

Like Daisy Bates, the recorder was born in Ireland, a fact which may have some relevance in their appreciation of folklore and of the oral transmission of the tales. Yet they also saw beyond to the conservation purpose or initiating significance of the particular legend.

Mary Gilmore who in her youth had witnessed much of the tribal disintegration in southern New South Wales, recorded it in her poem 'The Waradgery Tribe' in lines like

Emptied of us the land;
Ghostly our going;
Fallen, like spears the hand
Dropped in the throwing.

Similar last contact with odd surviving tribal people is behind the collections of Roland Robinson, as in his *The Man Who Sold His Dreaming*, or the slighter corpus from Mary Norledge (*v. infra*). It is surely relevant to this point that Patricia Wrightson had had childhood contact with the first Australians -

At Bonalbo²⁰ Patricia had gone to school with Aboriginal children. Meeting them in later life, she was disturbed at the deterioration in their condition. The insensitivity of whites 'evaluation' of Aboriginal life struck her then and strikes her now. [Noel Donnan, Introduction, p. ii to P. Wrightson's *The Human Experience of Fantasy*]

This same awareness of the fate of Aborigines in the areas in which they were brought up has informed the fiction of so many others - Xavier Herbert, from Perth and Darwin; Randolph Stow, from the Kimberley region; or Thomas Keneally, from Kempsey in Northern New South Wales (see his 'The Blacks' Camp', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 21, 1974, p. 15).

* * * * *

George Mackay Brown on the Orkneys

The need to keep in contact with his folk background has dominated the life of the modern Orkneyman - storyteller George Mackay Brown - to such an extent that he has not yet allowed himself to travel as far south as England.

Orkney, Edwin Muir the poet said, is a land where the lives of living people turn into legend. What he meant probably was that in a small community, enclosed by sea and sky and field, it is possible to see a man's life as a whole. It has a clear outline. It becomes elemental

and larger than life...The islanders - told stories - about the vivid people who were a part of their own circumstances. Their imaginations were touched too by some of the strange phenomena around them. There were certain mysterious things that needed an explanation. [George Mackay Brown, 'Introduction' to his *The Two Fiddlers*, Tales from Orkney (1974), Piccolo Pan edition, 1979]

His life and thought are synonymous with his folk memory, his people and the place which gave birth to both.

* * * * *

Modern White Creative Usage of Aboriginal Folklore

It is important to stress that a number of modern writers have used 'the fabric of Aboriginal folklore' in their own work. While Patricia Wrightson is perhaps best known here, Nan Chauncy, as in *Mathinna's People* (1967), or Hesba Brinsmead, in *Longtime Passing* (1971), were her contemporaries; they have been followed by such more recent publications as Bill Scott's *Boori* (1978). Although this trend has been accompanied by works for younger readers, such as Osmar White's *The Super-Roo of Mungalongaloo* (1973, 1978, 1979), it is probably significant that

adult novelists do not appear to have used Aboriginal folklore in this thematic way. (Barbara Ker- Wilson, *loc.cit.*, p. 726)

Yet it is a part alike of the author's thought and reviewers' feelings that Patricia Wrightson's later works such as *The Ice is Coming* (1977) or Bill Scott's *Boori* (1978), by their more heroic fantasy, stress on the dignity of the Aboriginal people and grandeur of theme are moving into this necessarily mature or ageless readership range.

A work like Jenny Wagner's *The Nimbun* (1978) which is set on the sea shore in Victoria, is hard to classify. It is not a 'Young Puffin' and one feels that, in its crying for profuse illustration, it should perhaps have been a picture book like her *The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek* (1974) or her recent *John Brown Rose and the Midnight Cat* (1980). Perhaps it is closest to *An Older Kind of Magic* in its presentation of 'a dark little thing...scratching at the door', 'a dark little shadow' (p. 8) 'running over the sand towards the dunes'. Although its size is too small and its temper too mischievous and greedy, its name at least recalls Roland Robinson's *nyimbun* ('a supernatural being living in a mountain'²¹) or the distinctive 'pointed rock' in the Richmond-Tweed area,²² the former idea also occurring in the poem sequence by Les Murray which is discussed below.

In his use of various folk materials in his poetry and drama, Douglas Stewart, a New Zealand born writer of Scottish extraction, has turned to Aboriginal legend as well as to Maori myth or Scottish lore. Typical of his use of ancient Aboriginal dreamtime themes is his poem 'The Bunyip', with its humour, its Wordsworthian sensitivity and its self-mockery -

I looked at myself in the water's glass and I nearly died of fright;
Condemned to haunt a pool in the bush while a thousand years go by -
Yet I walk on the stars like stepping-stones and I'll climb them into the sky.²³

* * * * *

Les Murray and Aboriginal Fantasy

One of the most interesting users of Aboriginal material is the celebrated poet, Les Murray, born in 1938 at Bunyah, 'between Foster and Gloucester', on the north coast of New South Wales. In all his poetry he is concerned with a 'Vernacular Republic', including three cultures of the common people which will give it its strength and distinctiveness, namely the peasant folk of the country,²⁴ the Aboriginal and the immigrant. He sees their affinity with the land as an essential part of their identity, as is the dreamtime of their legendary past, and the continuation of the traditions of their ancestors. In an important analysis of the Aboriginal material in his own work, the essay, 'The Human-Hair Thread',²⁵ Murray stresses of this third, that

its centre of gravity is not so much what I have been able to do with one of the great Australian cultural heritages, but rather what that heritage has given me, and how it has contributed and may yet increasingly contribute to a richer and more humane civilization in this country. (p. 550)

The basis of their totem-country relationship, Murray argues, must be reintegrated into the modern Australian's consciousness, and this people's love for the land, their sense of kinship, their legends and morality, even their poetry itself, all provide a huge untapped reserve of heritage for both the life of all Australians and for the literature which Australians may produce.²⁶ In his more recent work he is increasingly involved with the greater Australian experience, as contrasted with the rainforest-dairy country where he grew up. In 'The Wilderness' he describes how he went finally

To the far-back country

long after his earlier naïve, pretend Aboriginal

Frivolous games
But they sustained me like water.

This intuition of the special relationship of Aborigines with the land is found elsewhere in this collection as in his identification of the 'old writhen gods' in his 'Treeroots and Earth'.²⁷

Les Murray also identifies himself totemically with his own *touri* or tribal area in the following way. It is of interest that the bat held a peculiar place in the superstitions of the area, being 'the friend of all the men' (*The Land of Ulitarra*, p. 98), as L.E. Threlkeld had noted as early as 1834. Murray saw himself, like other poets, as akin to the flying-fox, in search at night of his food and so he examined this in the poem of 1974, 'The Flying-Fox Dreaming, Wingham Brush, N.S.W.' As he described it in retrospect

Along the Manning in pre-white days, there seems to have been a seasonal ecology of native figs, flying-foxes, and Aborigines. The fruit bats are very nearly my 'dreaming'. ('The Human Hair-Thread', p. 560)

While many poems explore the consequences of the cultural collision between whitemen and Aborigines, the most generative parts of the poetry move on to the appreciation of Aboriginal people in a landscape or, as in the *Meanjin* essay, of those involved in the

really worthwhile project of fusing Aboriginal and European elements into a new and genuinely Australian poetry. (*loc.cit.*, p. 554)

He singles out for especial praise here Mary Gilmore and Roland Robinson. He then observes

The first poem in which I deliberately incorporated large amounts of actual material was one called 'Stockmen Songs', which forms part of a long sequence entitled 'Walking to the Cattle-Place'²⁸ (in *Poems Against Economics* (1972)).

The significant thing about these stockmen is that they are 'blackmen chanting the sort of non-sacred verses which Aborigines compose on the spur of the moment, to celebrate the casual events of the world around them'. He even refers to this style of song-making by its Kimberley name, *djabi-dja* (p. 559). Another significant poem, written in 1972, is his 'Thinking About Aboriginal Land Rights; I Visit the Farm I Will Not Inherit', an account of his family's dispossession and yet of his own 'knowledge of the place which dispossession cannot touch', a process which puts him in the Aboriginal position. Thus, at its end, he becomes a totem ancestor, like figures in legends -

I go into the earth near the hayshed for thousands of tears.

He refers to the impact on him, about 1966, of reading 'R.M. Berndt's translation of the great Wonguri-Mandjikai Song Cycle of the Moon Bone',²⁹ as perhaps 'the greatest poem ever composed in Australia' (p. 565), and how it bore fruit in late 1975 in 'the idea of writing a cycle of poems in the style and metre of Berndt's translation of the Moon Bone Cycle' (p. 566), ordering the whole by a particular device

the annual exodus of many urban Australians to the country...people...
only a generation or two away from the farms, or even less, going back to
their ancestral places in a land of unacknowledged spiritual walkabout...
in order to draw sustenance from it. (pp. 566-567)

The resultant sequence, 'The Buladelah Taree Holiday Song Cycle', written in 1976 and collected in Murray's *Ethnic Radic* (1977), is a moving account of one man's search for his own language, nurturing landscape and the kin not yet deracinated.³⁰

In 1980 Les Murray published another Aboriginal-inspired cycle of poems, 140 sonnets, which he subtitled 'a novel sequence' - namely *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral*, an account of two young men who, against all odds, manage to return to the country the body of Clarrie Dunn, the old soldier who had wished for burial in his home district. While much of the plot and characterization are white, there are integrated various Aboriginal strands - legendary figures; the use of the rock crystal, talismanic in Aboriginal ritual life; and various conceptions about Aboriginal infanticide; - for all of which specific acknowledgements are made (p. v). While the second and third are anthropological and ritualistic, the first strand is fascinatingly used, not least because it is adapted from research work published by the present writer, *The Land of Ulitarra* (1964, 1966).³¹ In the cycle - sonnets 120 to 132, - the hero, Kevin Stace Forbutt, when lost in the bush has eaten a snake and experienced a form of vision -

another time he finds the two hands that care for him
feeding him tasty wizened circles, and applying
a burning twig to his legs, cooking more leeches.

There seem also to be a very black man and a cross-hatched
bearded man companionably arguing.³² (Son. 120: 8-12)

These are - the 'Irish' black man whose name is variously spelt Birrigan, Berrigan, Birrugan, Birroogun; and the Nimbin or Njimbin. The first is described in the source - where he is always spelt Birugan - as 'a peculiarly manifold male deity,...the hero of any myth...the god (to the Kumbainggiri, yet) killed in so many of the legends' (p. 117), a hunter of kangaroos and a creator of mountains from yams (p. 119). The Njimbin is best recorded in the collection of legendary fragments³³ which M.J.C. Calley obtained from the remnants of the Badjelang nation during 1954 and 1955. Thus 'the word *njimbin* has the primary meaning of 'goblin', a diminutive, sometimes malicious spirit which inhabited mountains and rocky country.

The word can also, as in this story, refer to any short man, particularly if he is well-built. The *njimbin* in Bandjalang folklore is often rather like Tom Thumb in European folklore.

The Southern Queensland legend from among the Minjangbal clans makes him a tiny fellow who collects honey and who, when exploited by his uncle who then tries to kill him, turns the tables and incinerates the cruel uncle.

Whatever the other (lost) legends may be for these two figures, there is no link between them or any hint of the strange Grail-guardian rôle which they perform in administering the Common Dish (91: 1; 129-30; 132: 4) which is no rarified experience but grittily real

What you're not free to do is to taste in theory;
it has to be body and soul, this pitch of knowledge.... (130: 5-6)

The taste suggests the holiest thing in the universe
is a poor family at their dinner. It is that dinner. (131: 8-9)

Together with the deceased white digger, Clarrie Dunn, they become the Three Wise Men, able to initiate today's confused Australian urban man into his true humanity,

'ordinary', 'subtle', 'serious', revealing' the depths of your happiness' and 'the blood in your adventures', the last a Christological allusion, since his other self, Reeby has just been killed pointlessly. The Aborigines' 'things to show you' (121: 8) are all the pointless follies, 'their hundred million dead soldiers' (125: 4), the confused 'tears of men' over 'a godless integrity' (69: 7)... 'sacrificing everything to anything' (69: 8). Certainly all white Australians, Anzac worshipers, have been tempted by idolatrous War. As the wise priest puts it at the Requiem Mass, referring to war -

We're been tempted, in this age, to look for grace in its occasions
but to turn from its Source is to enter death's arena -
"In the defiance of fashion is the beginning of character." (69: 11-13)

Thus the denial of the glorification of war, the true practice of humanity, become the message of Celtic priest, Aboriginal wisemen and the dead soldier. The Aboriginal perspective makes even clearer the necrophilia of white thought, and the Aboriginal time-scale which is only concerned with universals, instead of underscoring the enormous cultural difference between the two races, brings both to a new appreciation of the 'nailed man', Christ the sacrifice whose meaning is underscored by the lives of poor elderly Clarrie, the despised 'Beaut Old Digger', and Cameron Reeby, 'nicknamed Ratchet, for his prospects' (2: 8), who in an eschatological moment had met his hope and understanding of grace.

On her hillside, sun-outlined: Jennie. (96: 13)

As his poetry evolves, Les Murray has found more and more in his Aboriginal heritage. Governor Phillip realized that 'Much may be learned'³⁴ and Jimmie Governor cried: 'It aint all one way any more'³⁵ but the true meeting will only come when white Australians become part of the land in the sense that the Aborigines always have been. Through such a process and by listening to an understanding the distinctive silence of the land, the Republic³⁶ (a Platonic ultimate reality and a prefiguration of the Christian Heaven) can become 'Vernacular' or incarnate on earth. Reeby had been so taught by Jennie

She teaches him by silence, by silence...in shared walking. (98: 7-8),

but in senseless violence (117-118) has thrown away his life, his all. In another poem³⁷ Murray refers to the white Australian style of sexual boast and crudity, the towns 'built out of defiance of taste' and considers the antithesis, the Aboriginal way -

*Country the forecful can
wreck but not reach
shall welcome the calm man
with nothing to teach. (VI, 31-34)*

That is the ultimate Aboriginal contribution -

I will improve my silence and listen to lives.
Those who would listen
have always been the Republic. (VII, 7-10)

This is surely no accident that the most imaginative of his poems and the moments of fantasy within them are almost all possessed of Aboriginal content.

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Other National Usings of Folklore for Fantasy

The phenomenon of using indigenous folklore for the serious writing of fantasy is, of course, not confined to Australia. Tolkien's magnificent synthesis of the Germanic known and presentation of the intuited is peculiarly effective for its creation of new orders of beings; ents, wowses, orcs, talking eagles, and above all of hobbits.³⁸ Modern rehandlings of Celtic story (for young readers) are to be found in:

Joan Aiken, *The Whispering Mountain*, Puffin, 1975;

Lloyd Alexander, the quintet begun with *The Book of Three*, New York, Dell, 1974, etc.;

Susan Cooper, *The Dark is Rising*, Puffin, 1976;

Susan Cooper, *The Grey King*, Puffin, 1978 (a work which received the Newbury Medal in 1975);

Dorothy Crowder, *The Ogham Stones*, London, Dobson, 1975 (a book telling of the working of ancient Celtic influence on people living in the twentieth century);

William Dickinson, *Borrobil*, Puffin, 1973 (an account of the magical night of Beltane);

Sylvia Fair, *The Ivory Anvil*, Puffin, 1977;

Mollie Hunter, *The Kelpie's³⁹ Pearls*, Puffin, 1973;

Mollie Hunter, *A Stranger Came Ashore*, Puffin, 1978;

Andre Norton, *The Crystal Griffin*, Penguin, 1976 (a tale of a freshly imagined world involving 'the old ones'); or

Ann Turnbull, *The Frightened Forest*, Kestrel, 1974.

A parallel of particular Australian interest is the cluster of tales about selkies, a race living in an underwater realm in human form, but who put on the form of seals to enable them to pass through water from one region to another. Ronald Lockley's *Seal Woman* (Collins, 1974) tells in the first person how the narrator falls in love with a seal girl and passes with her beyond the horizon. Jane Hyatt Yolen's *Greyling* (Bodley Head, 1969) is a picture story from the Shetland Isles about such a *selkie* and is intended for younger children. This modern 'cult' of the 'selkie' is akin to the similar mythological beings repopularised by Patricia Wrightson.

Interestingly both the Germanic and Celtic mythologies have had new guide-books written - such as Ruth Noel's *The Mythology of Middle-Earth*, A study of Tolkien's mythology and its relationship to the myths of the ancient world (1977), Robert Foster's *The Complete Guide to Middle-Earth* (1978), 'intended to be supplementary to the works of Tolkien', while Nancy Arrowsmith and George Mure have produced in their *A Field Guide to the Little People* (Macmillan, 1977) an attractive dictionary of the various orders, as well as an account of their preferred habitat, - of the various Celtic minor orders of supernatural being.

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FOOTNOTES - PART I

1. Being pp. 187-202 cf: M. Saxby (ed.), *Through Folklore to Literature: Papers presented at the Australian Section of the IBBY Conference on Children's Literature, Sydney, 1978* (1979).
2. Compare Tolkien's concept of 'distancing' in his *Tree and Leaf* essay, 'On Fairy Stories'.
3. This also is Tolkien's term for the mixture of ingredients.
4. Published by Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, 1978. It is discussed below in much greater detail.
5. In his 'The Ethics of Elfland', pp. 66-102 of *Orthodoxy* (1908).
6. Discussed several times below.
7. Compare Andrew Lang's justification for turning back into a fairy-tale the splendid saga of Sigurd, but it was once, doubtless, a Märchen. like the rest -. (Introduction to his compilation, *Red Fairy Book*, (1890))
The sharpest notes of magic and wonder were often lost in Victorian-style re-telling.
8. It is to be noted that these names, like their owners, are fantastic rather than Aboriginal and that the fanciful occurs in their conception and onomatopoeic whimsy in the sound of their kinds.
9. In the various *Screwtape* texts.
10. This text was used for background at the Armidale School of October, 1980.
11. He is both original story-writer and one of the most influential and stimulating living critics of children's literature.
12. In his paper, 'In Our Time: Folklore in Transition', (in *T.F. and L.*), Ulli Beier actually has a section on 'Papua New Guinea Folklore and Literature for Young People', pp. 164, ff. in which he expands on his proposition. He had earlier taught creative writing for a number of years at the University of Papua and New Guinea.
13. Almost all other folklores have materials from elsewhere, a cultural mix that is also to be found in the modern fantasies that have an Aboriginal base.
14. Published in New York by Lothrop, Lee and Shepard.
15. *ABC Weekly*, July 28, 1956, pp. 8-9.
16. This work was published as *The Australian Legend* in 1958 and is now deemed a classic.
17. In the *Nepean Review*, No. 5, Spring 1979, pp. 10-11.
18. This volume, the first notable collection of Aboriginal folklore, had an introduction by Andrew Lang in the first edition. Regrettably it has not been included in the many twentieth century select editions.
19. In her *Wilson Library Bulletin* article (*loc.cit.*), p. 723.
20. That is, in northern New South Wales.
21. See *The Man Who Sold His Dreaming*, pp. 73, ff.

22. See J.S. Ryan, p. 46 of his 'Some Place Names in the Richmond-Tweed Area', pp. 24-52 of *Papers on Australian Place Names*, University of New England, 1963.
23. Lines 30-32 of 'The Bunyip', in *The Dossier in Springtime*, (1946). See also pp. 226-28 in *Collected Poems 1936-1967*, (1967). Elsewhere similar treatment is accorded to mice, kookaburras, gang-gangs, wombats and lizards.
24. Which he calls 'mainstream'.
25. In *Meanjin*, No. 4, 1977, pp. 550-571.
26. Interestingly this stage of vital respect for the indigenous cultural heritage came very early to the white settlers in New Zealand. It is noticeable that the Maori parts of such a fairy work as Edith Howes, *The Sun's Babies*, (1910) are much stronger than the traditional English sections. Contrast 'The Apple Fairy' or 'The Daffodil Baby' with 'Red Bill', 'Kelp' or 'Black Shag'.
27. In *The Weatherboard Cathedral*, (1969), p. 56.
28. *loc.cit.*, p. 558.
29. Printed in *Oceania* in 1948: Volume XVII, No. 4 and Volume XVIII, No. 1. Another, more available, translation by Berndt from Australia's 'indigenous literary heritage' is his *Three Faces of Love: Traditional Aboriginal Song Poetry* (Nelson, 1976).
30. For a brief discussion see pp. 51-52 of '...The Frequent Image of Farms - A Profile of Les Murray', in *Westerly*, Volume 25, No. 3, September 1980.
31. Subtitled: Early Records of the Aborigines of the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales, compiled and edited by J.S. Ryan. It was published by the University of New England, pp. xv + 241. Pages 98-128 were entitled 'Mythology and Folklore'.
32. Compare 'Birugan and an old man who was a medicine man used to live together' W.E. Smythe, writing about the Gumbaingar, *Oceania*, Volume XIX, No. 3, March 1949, p. 297, with the following article, *op.cit.*, Volume XX, No. 1, September 1949, p. 29.
33. Published as 'Three Bandjalang Legends', *Mankind*, V (February 1958), pp. 208-218.
34. 'The Conquest', in *Poems Against Economics*, (1972).
35. In 'The Ballad of Jimmie Governor', *op.cit.*
36. 'The Vernacular Republic' is the sub-title to his *Selected Poems*, (1976).
37. 'Cycling in the Lake Country', in *Lunch and Counter-Lunch*, (1974).
38. See, in particular, J.S. Ryan, 'Germanic Mythology Applied: the Extension of the Literary Folk Memory', *Folklore*, Volume 77, Spring 1966, pp. 45-59.
39. A story which may be read alongside *The Nargun and the Stars*, (1973).

PART II

Many another national mythos has been ransacked by fantasy writers, including the Irish, Norse, Finnish and Roman,⁴⁰ even American Indian folklore⁴¹ has not gone untouched. [Lin Carter, *Imaginary Worlds* (1973), Ballantine Books, p. 7]

While not all treatments of folklore have been either tasteful or artistically successful, it must seem strange that there should appear to be an attitude of critical opposition to even the attempt being made. While some purist readers may prefer E.R. Eddison's scholarly translation of *Egil's Saga* (1930) to his fantasy *The Worm Ouroboros* (1926), the romantic epic with its Homeric, Icelandic, Arthurian and German Romantic elements, this reader at least is able to read both and not feel that the romantic epic is any the less effective for its diverse source materials, since the work is held together by its 'lordly narrative sweep' (Orville Prescott), its splendid rhythmic prose, its cosmic dangers, and by a system of ideal values believed in so passionately by its creator.

More Celtic Adaptations

In another vein, one may cavill at the modern stories with often forced interpolations of ancient Cornish folklore - piskies that gallop a farmer's horse half to death on a moonlit night, giants who hurl great boulders at each other, mermaids 'combing their hair by the noontide sun', the fairy miners known as 'knockers', or phantom ships that sail over the moors.⁴² Another and more tasteful use of the mythological and distant past - this time of Wales - occurs in the work of Evangeline Walton who published in 1936 *The Virgin and the Swine*, drawing upon a little-known story, that of Gwydion, in the last book, the Fourth Branch of *The Mabinogion*. This adult fantasy, a novel magnificently conceived, won considerable critical acclaim for its presentation of the godlike heroes of Welsh mythology, particularly in its retitled second edition, *The Island of the Mighty* (1970). Her sequel, *The Children of Lyr* (1971), based on the Second Branch, won an equal but differing response for its grim, stark and merciless tragedy, and similar discriminating praise has been extended to her treatment of the Third and First Branches. As the late John Cowper Powys observed of her initial volume -

What a discovery! A magical book on a magical subject - done with that deep emotional sympathy for the old mythology which is so rare....

* * * * *

Fictional Use of Maori Lore

Although their indigenous societies were different and their natives' experience of white settlement has been distinct at almost all points, the New Zealand experience of the Maori in fiction may be of some interest. Thus the fanciful writing of a period even prior to the Maori Wars, as is illustrated by R.H. Horne's 'The New Zealand Zaubrerflote'⁴³ (published in the Dickens edited *Household Words* in Vol. II, October-November 1850) was succeeded by

- a) emotional historical fiction;
- b) lusty accounts of the Maori Wars, with a brilliant dramatization of moral issues, as in the Errol Braithwaite trilogy which began with *The Flying Fish* (1964); and
- c) earlier and even pre-pakeha tales of Maori experience, written particularly from the viewpoint of Maori sensibility, such as Barry Mitcalfe's *Moana* (1975).

While there has been a steady stream of scholarly collections of Maori folklore from Sir George Gray's *Polynesian Mythology* in the 1850s to, for example, Margaret Orbell's *Maori Folktales in Maori and English* (1968), most of them assembled by speakers of Maori, this has in no way either determined or limited the use which creative writers have made of traditional legendary and folk material.

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Mythology and the 'Unteachable' Child

In his collection of essays, *Children and Writing in the Elementary School*,⁴⁴ Theories and Techniques, Richard Larson, includes a paper, 'Teaching the "Unteachable"' by Herbert Kohl which describes the writer's extraordinary success in teaching children from ethnic minority groups, and low-income families, most of whom were skeptical, often alienated and culturally deprived. His new set of attitudes in working with these young students is shown to hinge on his teaching of language and modes

that would enable children to speak about what they felt they were not allowed to acknowledge publicly. (p. 146)

To his surprise the children wrote a great deal, inventing their own language and characters to do so. They were fired by the ideas that 'many people have suffered throughout history' and that 'some were articulate enough to create literature from their own lives'.

Almost accidentally the teacher offered them mythologies as a means of exploring language and then

Some of the children wrote myths themselves and created characters named Skyview, Missile, and Morass...exploring through them their own thoughts. (pp. 153-154)

From these they proceeded to short novels one of which was entitled 'A Journey Through Space and Time'. These frameworks enabled them to utilize the responses of both their own lives and their now soaring imaginations. While all wrote in their own voice, not all of these were literary, yet qualitative teaching had its own reward, since all produced fables of their own after listening to readings from Aesop.

As Kohl concludes,

In writings of this sort we can sense the exhilaration felt by children in saying things that might have been out of bounds in the atmosphere of the conventional classroom. (p. 158)

Clearly these are unorthodox views, both from the point of teaching and from the point of view of 'creative writing'. These views of the value of 'narration' and 'distancing' as an aid to liberating the imagination suggest new values for myth and legend, particularly if they are first presented orally.

The same ideas may be found, although much more tentatively expressed, in the following typical books from England - (i) Boris Ford (ed.), *Young Writers Young Readers* (first edition, 1960); and (ii) Joy Taylor, *Reading and Writing in the First School* (1973); the latter work quotes with approval the most

dramatic revolution in English teaching...the amount and quality of children's writing. (*Plowden Report*, para. 601)

The spontaneous creation of lore among 'the younger folk' is, of course, one of the great themes of Iona and Peter Opie's study *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (Oxford, 1959), a remarkable collection of the strange and primitive lore of the British child of yesterday. The work also takes its reader into what V.S. Pritchett (in the *New Statesman*) called

the most dramatic and imaginatively nourishing period of our lives.

* * * * *

H. Drake-Brockman and Necessary Symbols

For too long the Australian writer of fantasy, and especially of fairy tales, has been denied a fitting vehicle for his own symbolic vision of life's tale with which he might delight young and old alike. Fantasy, like romanticism, has always depended

on dreams, of laughing childhood and of disconsolate adolescence. Yet the experience here has not been one of forbidding locked wooden door, spiral stairs, or earthen-floored dungeon. let alone of the little folk unnaturally transported from half a world away. Language and symbol are alike crucial to the effort in human culture of making men more fully human, liberating them from the mundane, the banal and the trivial, opening up new dimensions of wonder and richer appreciation of life to make it whole. The names of the referents must stay meaningful and symbolic and participate in the meaning and reality and power of that for which they stand, even as they must free the mind from bondage to a concrete object. Such symbols must not only open up new levels of the reality but also disclose new levels of the self.

Writing in 1953 for the mid-century edition of K. Langloh Parker's *Australian Legendary Tales*,⁴⁵ Henrietta Drake-Brockman helps us in the search for objective correlatives for the life of man in this distinctive island continent. After referring to the original collector's

sympathetic yet completely objective attitude which helps to make these legends and tales so vivid, so dramatic, so alive (p. v),

she then comments on the added charm in fresh images that yet seem familiar and to what may be called their potential for fantasy.

The legends possess a poetic quality, child-like in its simplicity despite their adult wisdom, that should endear them not only to children but the young in heart. (*ibid.*)

A.P. Elkin, No 'Child Race'

She quotes with approval the words of the late Professor A.P. Elkin on the maturity of the law, philosophy and religion of the so-called 'child-race':

A child-race is so called because it has not attained to the stature of our civilization; its grown men and women, however, are adults; they do not think as children but as social personalities who are responsible for the development and maintenance of the social, economic and religious life of their community. Therefore we should not expect the understanding of that life to be a matter for the kindergarten; it is a subject worthy of our best efforts.⁴⁶

Her further remarks about these legends and Australian myth generally may be summarised to stress the important concepts -

- (i) this 'lovely legendary world,...a magic world, a world of myth woven about the characters of our own trees and birds and beasts' ...is 'entirely different to any others in the world' (p. vii);
- (ii) 'these are indeed Australian stories that belong to Australia and to all Australians - dark, white, or newly arrived' (p. vii);
- (iii) the Australian born do not wish 'continually to read stories about European, American, Asiatic, or even African, flowers and fairies; about castles - never seen, or strange minarets; about witches, princes and hobgoblins and genii' (p. vii);
- (iv) the young here have 'longed for satisfying tales about soft bush creatures, the wicked snakes, the gay or spiteful birds' (p. vii).

The philosophical conclusions to this introduction are threefold. Firstly, 'if a country is to be loved, it is necessary to have stories and poetry about its own soil and creatures'. Secondly, such legends enlarge 'realization of human affinity with the original Australians' and will make us 'feel at home in the deepest and best sense'. Thirdly, because of the lack of a written language, or a single one⁴⁷ which the settlers might then have had a reasonable chance of learning and so of coming to a better understanding of the native peoples, the legends will assist realization of Aboriginal imagination and beliefs and so make

the way of the future...a way of mutual understanding and respect. (p. viii)

and so assist 'national growth' (p. ix). Her conception is, surely, that the legends of animals, spirits and of seasonal happenings give us the new common language as well as shared imaginative concepts.

* * * * *

New and Dynamic Perspectives

People of one culture will perceive a particular phenomenon or aspect of life in a different way.⁴⁸ All too many symbols with religious significance have lost their meaning, the consequence in part of the lack of creative and exploratory religious literature. All such symbols were once fresh and meaningful, borne for living people in a dynamic culture. The way to keep them from dying is not to fossilize them but keep them alive and growing, to relive their suggestiveness, to enrich and deepen their meaning, to expand them and from them to generate further symbols.

It has been said, justly, of Patricia Wrightson that she has woven the cultural threads of European and Aboriginal Australians into a most convincing series of stories that rely on neither group for their relevance but create an original and most valid folklore in their own right. And so it was not surprising that she hoped that the 1980 school might even stimulate

the development of an Australian mythology, implying a commitment to both the European tradition and the Aboriginal culture,

but that certainly that its special value would be

to develop a creative use of Australian folklore in our fantasy, just as and no less authentically than European writers use European folklore.

This echoed her 1976 comment

Children need a good solid diet of indigenous reading material.⁴⁹

It also amplified her 1979 comments on one story:

(The Ice is Coming - 1977) is not a real-life story but a legend. Legends do not go in for sociological studies. They take a simplified view of reality, flow over it and sweep on to the magic...the theme...is not the one...known as *goodnevil*...but the land itself; or even land itself. Its silent enormity. Its primeval quiescence, committed neither to good nor to evil. Its wearing away and rebuilding, in cycles so huge that they seem unmoving. Its accidental support of life. Its isolation among the stars and between the seas.⁵⁰

Significantly these recent minor pieces of Patricia Wrightson had also anticipated the new but general problem of concepts, or names and of the need for valid symbol.

An 'On Fairy Tales'⁵¹ for Australia - Patricia Wrightson's 'The Human Experience of Fantasy'

In 1977, when she was the first writer-in-residence for the Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, Patricia Wrightson chose to define fantasy, examined its forms and considered 'authentic' fantasy and the connections between it and reality in a paper, *The Human Experience of Fantasy*.⁵² She comments at the outset on the insatiable contemporary demand in Australia for talks on and books about fantasy.

Her own investigations and search for the source of fantasy in folklore laid bare its history rather than its 'biology' (p. 1), so that she felt that a continual production in this country of what was not understood as art form would inevitably produce 'a tradition'...of the 'whimsical and the trivial' (p. 2). Her 'explanation', coming from reading and writing, and the behaviour of men under stress proved

that fantasy isn't a dead study, a historical accident, that it can't be outgrown or discarded by the individual or the race. (p. 3)

Her thoughts place fantasy alongside dreams, the universal *experience* of 'time-splits and spirits and monsters, shape-changers, a logic with a different base' - 'the purposeful intrusion of the dream into waking', showing how 'wild fantasy', in waking life, springs up to answer the unanswerable at 'the borders of knowledge' or 'at the dark edges of vision' (p. 4). Yet whereas as children we will accept both the real and the unreal, 'we accept it as adults, if only it's genuine' (p. 4).

Thus it is that man accepts fantasy as 'part of our basic equipment for handling life creatively', and so she agrees with Tolkien that fantasy or fairy-story, like real life stories, grows from human experience, and 'is good insofar as it is true to and illuminates life'. She deplores the debilitating of literature by removing the element of fantasy from life and argues that we need to experience realms where wonder is possible, underground caves, or the sea which 'is full of wonder and mystery, even now' (p. 5) and where an earlier age could imagine tritons, sirens or mermaids. She also asks who 'on the most ordinary day, hasn't had that strange experience of losing his place in time, or feeling a movement at the edge of his vision', and asks us to ponder the dangers and small mysteries of a less well-lit world -

What do you know of a world where all reliable light came from the sun, moon, or stars? Where only the flicker of a fire or a candle made a small ragged hole in the dark - and then only when you had kindled it with care? What do you know of a world without glazed windows? Very little indeed; but you can find the experience preserved in authentic fairy tales. (p. 6)

Her view of those who dismiss tales of magic and of monsters and so 'choose to accept only the sawdust theories of folklore' is that they 'wipe out a large area of living' (p. 6). Her retort is that a specific story could only have

lived so long, spread so far, appealed to so many because it reflected life itself and because its nature was part of the nature of wondering, inquiring, chronically puzzled man. (p. 6)

Her corollary is that fantasy is not free from the laws of logic and reality but merely extends them, so that creative fantasy has to be reasonable, fitting to its own sphere of truth, so that, for example,

dragons and witches belong in other spheres (and) have nothing to do with spaceships. (p. 7)

Thus true fantasy must be suitable, logical and able to 'explain the inexplicable by a process of creative reasoning...and fittingly extend reality'. And so she comes to her own definition -

fantasy is man thinking, thinking about life and reality, but beyond the known facts. (p. 7)

She concludes that the first story ever told as a story

would have examined some real-life wonder or mystery and explained it beyond the known facts.

Acknowledgement is paid to folklore's collecting 'so many of these old tales' concerned to explain 'the inexplicable or the intangible to sensible men and women' such as:

the destructiveness of power and cruelty;
the grace of kindness;
the near-humanity of animals;
the boldness of luck; and
the strange progression of the seasons.

Their simple direct quality is the best for the very young, presenting as it does a set of instantly understood symbols, but fantasy is needed to explore new and more

relevant questions. Her investigation of fantasy shows that, by concentrating on the very young, fantasy is all too often a nursery toy, producing a 'wishy-washy area of failure'. 'Petal-clad fairies' have finally vanished, 'dragons have abdicated their old might', witches have become good, magicians funny, fantasy trite and wistful and without 'something to say', strong and real, 'about life's dark borders or its intangible ideas'. In a fashion which reaffirms Andrew Lang, John Buchan and J.R.R. Tolkien, her demand is that

Fantasy, like any other story, must compel your belief.⁵³

This form of exploration may be found in some writing for the very young - Stockton's *The Bishop and the Minor Canon*; Margaret Mahy's *Pillycock's Shop*; or Jenny Wagner's *The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek*. It can be found in an invented form of fairy if their inventors understand fantasy's laws - as with *The Borrowers*, possessed as they are of 'obstinate adherence to their own logic, that mark the genuine world of magic' (p. 10).⁵⁴ This logic must make things plausible, unlike a story allowing 'King Arthur turning up in the United States', which does not deserve the powerful name of magic. Indeed it is as wrong-headed as tales of 'the hob who traded good luck for a bowl of milk'; whereas, the truth is that 'the household was the hob's pet', a concept behind *The Mouse and His Child* or - one might add, the modern suspicion that the house and its occupants are there to serve its true autocratic master - the resident cat, since both raise 'the question of the animal's exploitation of us' (p. 12).

Modern fantasy is 'not much concerned with what moves in the dark' (p. 13) but rather 'to mix and blend'⁵⁵ as we explore and test ideas and values - as in

Tolkien exploring the strength and steadfastness of little people;

Le Guin examining the destructiveness of self;

Hoban magnifying patience and courage by setting them large in a tiny world

- always 'thinking, wondering, exploring the inexplicable...restoring fantasy to what it was' (p. 13). But in Australia the problem for fantasy is that 'the geography is unrelenting' and that the fantasy must needs fit the Aboriginal mind. A valid modern usage is that of P.J. Trezise in his *Quinkan Country*,⁵⁶ drawing as it does on the Aboriginal myth of the Tooroota

hairy little people with long noses who snuffle in swamps and waterholes in search of food

based on the wild pigs of the stock released by Captain Cook.

* * * * *

The lecturer went on to discuss her own collecting of monsters which she was to elaborate on more specifically in a further contemporary article,⁵⁷

To begin collecting Australian fairies and monsters you do need a little basic equipment: a concept of folklore in general, and some background reading on the life and culture of the Australian Aborigines. You have probably been equipping yourself since childhood for the first and need only a little reading to bring your awareness into focus. (Remember that the study of folklore cannot be more than a study; all that is positive is the grassroots of folklore itself.) For the second it is best to begin with some sound and understanding study for the layman, something basic like Elkin's *The Australian Aborigines* - and to grapple with those genealogical tables in order to penetrate a vision of life that is strange to you. If you can then avoid the trap of fancying that one such study can make you an expert, you can begin. Your background reading will increase of itself as the collecting goes on.

You go into a library and look for some book on the Australian Aborigines. You will probably choose first something by one of the more modern anthropologists, and it may have a section on mythology, and you will turn

eagerly to that; and be disappointed. The mythology it provides is of the sacred kind, or the established legend: immutable, unyielding, not available for freely imaginative fiction. Never mind. It has already increased your background reading; and already you know that you are in search of the elusive half-vision, the chance haunting, the fairy. Read the whole book carefully, learning the gaps that yawn in your background knowledge. Somewhere along the way, illustrating some argument on trade or travel or marriage rites, there will be a glimpse of some free-roaming spirit, an incident in domestic life; and *aha!* You have caught your first fairy. Comb out the meagre details and record them. Try not to mind if the creature is depressingly horrible. The life-in-darkness that produces folklore has much to fear, and you never know when you may need a horror.

Soon you will be choosing first the oldest of the anthropologists, who knew least to begin with and so recorded most. You will know that almost any book was something for you; even a slender vocabulary can reward searching. You will warmly welcome the experiences of laymen of the order of Bill Harney and Ethel Hassell and Roland Robinson: simple people who accept with understanding another simple people. You will be selecting with more confidence, playing-off your experts against each other disinterestedly. The only books you will avoid are those in which stories have already been retold for European readers, for in those it is impossible to tell how much detail is authentic and how much belongs only to the retelling. As a keen collector you want only the authentic, and you want it backed by the authority of first sources. You want it supported by the words or reactions of the Aboriginal people themselves.

* * * * *

The Alexander Mackie paper concluded with several references to her collections of new fairy material from Aboriginal lore - Little People from Cape York; giants; ghosts; shape-changers; tricksters; human monsters; an Aboriginal Echo-figure; and various other figures; as well as idealised underground realms. Their awesome quality comes from their affinity to 'their causative geography and life-style' and the closeness of the time when they were living beliefs. The faeries belong to the middle ground between divine cosmology which is sacrosanct and legends which are complete. The fairy free-spirits are needed for Australian fantasy, not least because of the fact that they

govern the luck, chances, dangers and mysteries of daily domestic living.

The Lead-Up to the Second School (October 1980)

The Director of the 1978 School, Frank Bitmead, had hoped to have Patricia Wrightson visit it and when this did not happen, a form of epistolary dialogue continued between them after it, particularly fired by the thoughts of one of the members, Dick Allen of Sydney, who on 7 May 1979 had wondered about a follow-up event, with 'a sufficient length of time in which to become completely absorbed in the work in hand', preferably a three week period in a peaceful environment totally free of any social obligations. He suggested that a writer-consultant should be present

a writer of convincing and consistent fantasy...because such writing requires intense skill and vision (so) that the writer would probably be able to assist participants writing in other styles.

He concluded with a personal preference which he stated in these terms:

the theme of the school could well be something that embraced the development of an Australian mythology. This would imply a commitment to both the European tradition that lies behind the majority of us and the Aboriginal culture upon which we are seated.

For he defined the moment of contact of the two folk cultures thus:

We seem to be in the process of standing up and looking more closely at what we have been sitting on for the past two hundred years, and examining it on terms of equality with our own culture; so such a theme could be appropriate and attractive to other prospective participants.

To the suggestion of 8 June that the theme be the somewhat daunting one of 'The Development of an Australian Mythology', Patricia Wrightson replied on 19th June that she saw the ideal theme to be -

the development of an Australian fantasy and the basis of folklore, or Australian fantasy and folklore

and the task as follows:

What I believe we have to do is to develop a creative use of Australian folklore in our fantasy, just as and no less authentically than European writers creatively use European folklore. We can only do that with considerable difficulty, by getting to know, understand, respect and appreciate, the very rich gift we have to work with.

A few days later she deliberately drew back and from then on endeavoured to state her position so that it could be known and assessed by the organizers -

I'd be talking from a pretty firm set of convictions which I can't support except from personal experience, thought, and argument;

and again, on 21 July, her position was further clarified

I'm a writer, sometimes of fantasy, and my whole approach puts the accent on 'folk' rather than on 'lore'. I suppose I'm professionally related to the old tale-tellers...My eyes glaze at the mention of types and motifs but flash sparks at a strong 'true' bit of invention. And I hold that the man or woman who invented the story is the one who knows where it came from and what it's about.

Thus the event began to take shape and, even more significantly, the tutor-consultants began to think their way into the contribution which they could make. The first chosen was Patricia Wrightson, the second Patricia Scott from Tasmania and the third Bill Scott of Brisbane.

Patricia Wrightson and Her Writing of Australian Fantasy

In a letter to the University on 19 June 1979, Patricia Wrightson explained why she had turned to her own particular form of fantasy:

It was because of this Australian poverty in a field so richly productive everywhere else and because of personal experience of the difficulty of breaking into the field for an Australian, that I had the tenacity to start on a course that was really beyond me and pound away at it insistently. The response in the areas where it matters, encourages me to feel that the diagnosis was right and the treatment wanted.

She also stressed then the awesome sense of responsibility which she felt in her chosen genre:

This is a still-living folklore that we propose to handle creatively; it involves special ritual secrecy and the dividing lines merge and waver; it involves people at fifty different levels of acceptance and development, none of them readily agreeing with each other; it concerns two races forced to share a nation and between whom relations are strained; and it gives me nightmares. It's most helpful and encouraging of Jack Davis to urge me on publicly - but he can't speak for the desert people who insist that every folk belief must be inviolate, and he can't take away my literary responsibility for a folklore in all the freshness and power of its living strength, never before handled by the creative writer.

Her remark about her support by the Aboriginal writer, Jack Davis, referred to the latter's support at the IBBY Conference in Sydney in 1978. His formal paper then⁵⁸ is of particular interest here since in it he stressed that, by irony, his fantasy background was multi-cultured:

my imaginative childhood years were spent in a world of gnomes, pixies and fairies...My imagination was rather wild, and I would sometimes stop and look for the little people under the carpets of green...(After) my fourteenth birthday...I was transported to another world. A world of mummaries, moorlies and widargees. The widargees and the moorlies were not fearsome folk, but were more inclined to be annoying like the poltergeists - mischievous and spiteful. But the mummaries were fearsome creatures - very bad tempered - they were about two to three feet high, possessing red hair and eyes, and a white skin. (pp. 121-122)

While the 'Proceedings'⁵⁹ do not record Jack Davis' remarks direct, they are referred to very movingly elsewhere in the volume by an Austrian-Australian, Marlene Norst, when discussing respect for the culture which migrants bring and 'from which they came'.

I was tremendously moved by Jack Davis' response, 'Be bolder' to Patricia Wrightson, when she spoke of her worry about translating Aboriginal culture into Anglo-Saxon terms. He was telling her to be brave in the enterprise of making contract with another culture. He was implying, 'I trust you. You have given proof of the kind of reverence you have, you have demonstrated your sympathy and understanding. Now go ahead reassured and confident that what you are doing is needed and tremendously worthwhile.' This exchange between Jack Davis and Patricia Wrightson can well serve as a model for all the cultural interchange that still has to take place in Australia. (In her 'Story Traditions in the Multi-cultural Society', pp. 205-206, *op.cit.*)

The encouragement at that time and place was particularly appropriate, in view of the caution if not criticism expressed in the latter part of her paper, 'The Rainbow Serpent Lives' (*op.cit.*, pp. 133-150) by Catherine H. Berndt:

The increasing interest in Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal stories is long overdue, but it must be balanced by a transmission *within* the Aboriginal scene - not allowed to slip entirely out of Aboriginal hands. Otherwise, it could become something that survives only in books, or in the minds of *non*-Aborigines, in a new and more subtle kind of takeover, a new phase of the old colonial relationship. (p. 149)

At the time that the 1980 School was being mooted she had, not long before, proofed her own remarks about her own 'first nervous attempt to use traditional Aboriginal folklore in creative, present-day fantasy...in *An Older Kind of Magic*' and her feeling then that there was for the critics 'the shock of cultures meeting unexpectedly'. She had continued:

In exchanging your own cherished folklore for a strange one it's very natural to feel a chill, and even at least some revulsion. I know because I felt it myself. It wasn't easy to swap Puck for a Pot-kurok;⁶⁰ it was only, I felt, essential. (p. 188)

She had tried to use European imported fantasy -

It was failure to open that door that brought me at last to another:
'All people have fairies. Therefore the Aboriginal people have fairies.
Find them.'

When she had turned to the earlier anthropologists and to the laymen recorders of tales she found what she wanted:

There was such a richness of experience and response, of poetry and toughness and terror, of all that a folklore conceives and conveys, that I was naïvely astonished...I'd...uncovered a welling spring. And the

spring was purely Australian, the response of man to the mystery and wonder of life in this country. (pp. 188-189)

The door was the right one - 'because the folklore does reflect man's wonder and awe in this country'. She stressed her delight at its living quality, its freedom from watering down by nannies or Walt-Disney strips, and her feeling of its poetry and terror for adults. Yet there was also unearthed 'a nest of worries and challenges'.

She stressed then that she acted - not as anthropologist, nor as folklorist - but rather as writer.

The dilemma is that to lift a folklore out of its static past, to carry it on into the continuing life of fantasy, we *need* writers; to preserve its purity and strength we need experts in other fields. (p. 189)

She continued:

Again: this is the living folklore of a proud and sensitive people, a people who meet hurt with a tightening of reserve...The worst thing that could happen to this folklore is that some writer should reduce it to whimsy or fail to convey its power. That would be a gross belittlement. Far better that the folklore should be lost. (pp. 189-190)

This, her literary and fantasy *apologia*, had more than answered her critics, since her concern and principles were as lofty as theirs.

For she had realised that the important issue was not that writing down in any form would kill the folklore,⁶¹ but rather that the material should be respected and that what was to be handled should come from the middle level.

In the middle, wavering unerringly up and down, is the ongoing, always-active, freely experienced stratum of faeries and superstitions. The middle level is the level of creative freedom. (p. 190)

This method left nell alone equally the 'sacred created myth' and 'other people's beliefs' at the top, and, at the bottom, the 'once-upon-a-time, and there-they-were-in-the stars forever, definite story', where the tale is complete and its characters and events known, so that the writer has no artistic freedom.

Name and Symbol

What's in a name? The answer, broadly, is identification; and that's exactly what Australian fantasy needs. A Nargun⁶² and a Troll may both be examples of stone monsters, but in philosophy, style, appearance and habits they're as different as an Aboriginal is from a Scandinavian. Just exactly that different; and since the difference arises from the difference in their environments it's exactly the difference Australian fantasy-writers should be looking for. (Letter of 8 September 1980)

The view of the leaders of the Armidale school is similar to thoughts of all those who have contemplated the linked fields of imagination and the spirit. They see the eternal need to press back still further the frontiers of understanding and to elaborate more fully a living vision of the meaning of things, to enrich by means of them our own selfhood and self-understanding. The less anthropocentric Aboriginal cosmos is strangely powerful in expressing ultimate concern.

'An Offer of Union' - W.E.H. Stanner

Long ago Sir James Frazer referred to Aboriginal myth as 'a noble testimony to the aspiring genius of man'⁶³ and the events of the last thirty years have proved the Aborigines to be 'no dying race'. In his Boyer Lectures⁶⁴ for 1968, Professor W.E.H. Stanner chose to focus on *After the Dreaming* - Black and White Australians - An Anthropologist's View, and stresses in his fifth lecture, Composition, that the true situation of the Aborigine had long been misunderstood, but that there were and are

a people's will to survive, somehow, under any conditions, and an offer of union which until recently we were not minded to take up. (*op.cit.*, p. 59)

In his conclusion he suggests that the Aborigine had acquired since 1788 a concept of futurity and that there was now 'enough imagination and inventiveness within the country to find a way to compose the troubles' (pp. 53-54), and what he chose to call an implicit offer of some sort of union with us. (p. 56)

It is a valid conclusion from this wise view, based as it was upon a lifetime of knowledge of the Aborigine, and chimes in with those of Jack Davis and other Aborigines of two worlds,⁶⁵ that it is acceptable and appropriate for Australian writers to use Aboriginal legend and lore for their fantasy, provided always that this is done with integrity, sensitivity and imagination. There was really no other way for the Australian writer of serious fantasy to go, as Patricia Wrightson said in an unpublished letter

But we can't now develop an Australian mythology: that is a natural growth from experience outstripping knowledge and generating wonder - then the wonder grows into shapes strongly influenced by and reflecting the local geography - so in Australia we're stuck with the mythology the Aborigines have already developed. (Letter to the University of New England, 19 June 1979)

The Search for Real Values

Speaking on the eve of the great maturing of Australian literature, in 1956. Kylie Tennant assured her audience that

Australian literature is engaged most earnestly and rewardingly in the search for realities and for real values...We should be grateful that in this country, often against great odds, the novelists continue to reproduce the truth of human living as they see it...rather than an...embroidered background of reassurance.⁶⁶

In the case of fantasy, the long period of apprenticeship would seem to be over as these Australian writers turn to a more meaningful background and, realism absorbed, start to work out their stories. The best of these contemporary fantasies, as in the recent work of Patricia Wrightson or Bill Scott, has been observed to not relate merely to white children but to imaginative Australians of all ages.

In his essay of tribute⁶⁷ to Emeritus Professor A.P. Elkin, W.E.H. Stanner had urged students to look beyond the symbol to the symbolized in Aboriginal religion and so find that the end was 'to unite hearts and establish order' (p. 237). Thus it is that the 'tolemic system' shows itself as

a link between cosmogony, cosmology and ontology; between Aboriginal intuitions of the beginnings of things, the resulting relevances for men's individual and social being, and a continuously meaningful life. (*ibid.*)

The rich and relevant background, with the writer's imagination focused on specific place and handling imaginatively 'an authentic non-sacred spirit' (Patricia Wrightson's phrase) has given a new meaning and vitality to the writing of fantasy in Australia.

The reader of these new writings - so different from the pragmatic cynicism of 'adult' fiction - is able to search out to 'the stars', even as the mind of such a writer-creator grapples to reflect on life and its meaning and to express man's longings and portray his ideas. At the loftiest level the writings achieve the outcome predicted by the religious Platonic philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

From now on the tasks of literature and philosophy can no longer be separated. When one is concerned with giving voice to the experience of the world and showing how consciousness escapes into the world, one can no longer...attain a perfect transparency of expression.

Philosophical expression now needs literary mould and

it cannot be expressed except in 'stories', and, as it were, pointed at. One will not only witness the appearance of hybrid modes of expression, but the novel...will become thoroughly metaphysical.⁶⁸

* * * * *

Modern Aboriginal Sympathy at Sensitive Legend Telling

This is to be found in many places and it is made clear in numerous works, but in this context we may take as example the volume, *Aboriginal Legends from Eastern Australia: The Richmond-Mary River Region*,⁶⁹ compiled by Mildred Norledge and issued in 1968. Not only had the collector known Aborigines all her life, but she had a number of important concepts about her work -

that she had had a privilege in 'collecting these Aboriginal legends... and committing them to paper' (p. 6);

that the tales should be given oral (i.e. radio) presentation to whites;

that the tales had particular local meaning (they are from a particular region); and

that a group of most responsible Aboriginal men had told her particular tales.

In his wise 'Foreword' (p. 3), A.P. Elkin refers to the 'brightness' of spirit of these men and 'the sincerity with which they told her these simple legends', adding, of these friends of hers and of his, that

They are men of two worlds. They look wistfully back to the Aboriginal past but recognise that that past has no meaning for their grandchildren for these must work out their destiny in today's Australian life.

Clearly all three persons now deceased - Miss Norledge, Professor Elkin and publisher A.W. Reed⁷⁰ - were convinced of the propriety of what they did and of the need for wider dissemination of particularised local legends.

Inheritors of the Ancient Aboriginal Tradition

In the post-1945 world various Australian Aboriginal writers have been concerned to use the fabric of Aboriginal folklore in their work. Thus Kath Walker, the poet, tells new stories based on Dreamtime patterns in her book *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972), and the Aboriginal artist, Dick Roughsey,⁷¹ has collected and illustrated memorably folklore material, as in his *Giant Devil Dingo* (1973) or the earlier *Moon and Rainbow* (1971). Various other collections, as well as simpler versions of single stories are being produced by Aboriginal teachers, often with assistance of the Aboriginal Council for the Arts or the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

* * * * *

Patricia Wrightson's Fairies, Spirits and Monsters

As Patricia Wrightson has experimented in fantasy she has slowly evolved her own working mythology in order to explore there

at the edge of our knowledge - things we only half understand. (p. 150 of her essay, 'The Edge of Vision', appended to *An Older Kind of Magic*.)⁷²

As she says of her first full fantasy - discounting the magical strand of the legend of Warrimai, the club-thrower and his hiding of the stone-axe, in her *The Rocks of Honey* (1960) - there was need for something else



The Bitarr



The Pot-koorock chuckled



Nyols



'You wrestle', they insisted

another kind of magic, a kind that must have been shaped by the land itself at the edge of Australian vision. (*loc.cit.*, pp. 150-151)

Thus she explains what we now see to be the beginning of her neo-Aboriginal mythology. The writer indicates that she had obtained one strand from New South Wales -

Roland Robinson...collected from the Gumbangirr nation an account of the Bitarr⁷³ who played with children and were only seen as a few more children than there should be. (p. 151)

Thus in her text it is they 'who played secretly with dark native children' (p. 136) and who stand out in the assemblage of ancient orders of being

with their white beards blowing in the wind. They were sturdier and more at home than the others, for there are always children to play with, white or brown. (p. 137)

The rest of her spirits, she tells us then,

as well as the belief in the power of a dog's speech, are taken from Aldo Massola's book *Bunjil's Cave* (1968), (p. 151)

a valuable collection gathered over a period of ten years from among the Aboriginal nations of Victoria.

She accepts that she may be criticized for 'assembling in Sydney spirits originating from so many sources so far away' (*ibid.*) but argues that the authenticity now needed is a 'more human' one, provided that writers are sensitive to the difference between inland plain, hilly watered coast, rock, water, scrub, desert 'and the haunting spirits of each' (p. 152). Hers has been a task of brooding:

over those spare words, trying to catch the character of each creature and its place in that mysterious world at the edge of Australian vision.

And she has been concerned to restrict herself to the simpler creatures. Perhaps, then, whether she realized it or no she was following Henrietta Drake-Brockman⁷⁴ in selecting

woggi-gai, or fairy-tales pure and simple, as told for the piccaninnies.

The text itself develops her 'little spirits', the other orders of fairy beings:- the Nyols who lived in the deep rocks (p.136)-

old things of the land - small and stone-grey and shadowy' (p. 102);

simple creatures, not very clever, but, bright with the happy mischief of children (p. 103);

with happy smiles...pleased because he had eaten some more grubs; they had never had a guest with such a good appetite (p. 106);

in a fever of impatience...for Nyols are simple creatures and can think of only one thing at a time (p. 135);

the hairy little Net-Nets

who lived in the rocks above the ground (p. 136);

the Bitarr

who played secretly with dark native children (p. 136);

the Pot-Kooroks, practical jokers,

the imps of the streams (p. 136),

led by one who

had come out of the pond and sat on the edge, dangling its webbed feet and staring at the sky (p. 121);

and who

lived in a little stream⁷⁵ that had once flowed through a forest, but which long ago the city had gripped in a concrete fist, and turned into an underground drain (p. 125);

and yet was ever

looking for an open space, and something more real than asphalt or concrete under its feet (p. 126);

the Turongs

who tricked hunters in the bush (p. 136); and
howled with the lost, long howlings of dingoes (p. 137);

the Tutugals who punished children

when they were bad (p. 136);

and the ghostly and shapeless Mahracks,

whose one trick was to scare people (p. 136).

Significantly for this book and her later fantasies, Patricia Wrightson's creatures reach out to the stars, co-aeval with the time of creation, being the first spirits upon earth but 'translated in various forms to the heavens before the present race came into existence'.⁷⁶ They are yearned for by Skit, the lizard (p. 22), and, in the case of the comet, thought to be millennial (pp. 121, 125, 126, 135, 141, 147) and concerned with a reappearance of the old magic (pp. 121, 123, 124, 135, 136) after 'the passing of a thousand years' (p. 125). Thus all the little people come: 'All of them, of every kind, lifted their faces to the comet' (p. 137)

The Gardens were full of their mourning, and the pale light of the comet touched them gently; for they would not cry again for a thousand years and soon they would forget. In an hour, perhaps, they would chuckle and play. (p. 138)

Thus the intrusion of magic into the 'real' world is associated with these other beings, and focussed on the comet as an image of wonder and of especial significance, even as it is when the evil Sir Mortimer is metamorphosed into a stone tree (p. 138). It is also interesting that the plot, for all its concentration on Sydney children and the coming of the comet for those who will receive it, has allegorical and Christian dimensions, the place being not merely central Sydney and its Gardens, but the very spot where, in convict times a nation was born, and the time the millennial moment an hour when it is required that all awake their faith and sense of wonder, and yet so many of the materialistic and selfish people and 'the great-office-blocks' have no magic.

The Nargun and the Stars

In her *The Nargun and the Stars* (1973)⁷⁷ this mythology is continued, even though the setting is the Upper Hunter Valley, just below Crawney Pass. Now the legendary characters are less tentative and come into the foreground and the less assertive humans are reduced to three in number, a boy and his aunt and farmer uncle. This time there are continued over a Potkoorok and the Nyols, the Turongs become more prominent and are joined by the moving stone, the Nargun, which in 1880 had begun to leave its 'ancient den' (p. 7) 'in Victoria' (p. 9) and 'slowly, relentlessly, it worked its way north' (p. 11) finally to Wongadilla, a place whose own

ancient creatures sensed the Nargun that had come so far. They knew its age - ten times their own - and its slow, monstrous coldness. They stirred or were silent, like children. (*ibid.*)



Turongs

With her family association with the area we may well accept her publisher's note: 'I respond to people and places' (dustcover), even as the endpaper contour aerial maps localize for us Turong Forest, the Nyols' Caves and Nargun Gully, and in the book's dedication the writer expresses 'thanks to Jill, who sent me to the Nargun's den' (p. 5).

While it is not practical to dissect the book, it is possible to underscore the plot's respect and compassion⁷⁸ which writer and reader feel for the 'poor old things' (p. 101). When the Nargun is entombed

Simon felt something curl up inside him, he had always thought it was naked fear, but now he was not sure. It might be naked pity. (p. 153)

But he had experienced that emotion before, when confronting 'the dark emptiness of its crooked stoneface' (p. 132) -

That granite face turned to the sky seemed to bear all age, all emptiness, all evil and good; without hope or despair; with rock-like patience. He was shaken by a sudden storm of pity and fear. (*ibid.*)

The varying relationship between 'the old things' (p. 66) is very well put to the farmer by the mischievous 'swamp-creature' (p. 22)

'The Potkoorok tricks men and boys and Nyols', it said smugly. 'Most old things it cannot trick. Not Turongs, for they are tricksters too. Not Narguns, for they see with different eyes: less, and more deeply. Nyols are like boys. The Potkoorok could trick the Nyols, even out of their rocks. But this is a wrong thing. An old one does not trick another old one. We trick men.' (p. 133)

To the boy, the creature puts simpler issues, never quite allowing banal thought or blanket label from the other -

And what is this, and what an I that live here? A Bunyip that lives in a swamp? And what is it that runs in the far gully below? Another swamp, maybe?

The Turongs are like "'elf" and "magic"' (p. 60), yet 'part of the earth and this mountain' -

There was something old and innocent in the way the Turongs danced,... something that didn't care...elusive like the blue shadows of distance. (*ibid.*)

They seem like 'grey shadows with straggling beards'⁷⁹ scuttling like spiders round the trunks of trees' (p. 53), play their jokes, wave wispy arms, move stick-like, come 'sliding and circling down the trunks' (p. 94), they dive and quiver and 'scuttled like spiders in branches and peered shyly from leaves' (p. 154). The Nyols, too, are developed beyond the first book, for they 'know stone'⁸⁰ (p. 97), can move the greatest objects 'all over you, hundreds of them, like a giant octopus' (p. 128), and in addition to their old love of wrestling (p. 108), they dangle each other from rocks far beneath the surface 'to touch and feel the water, making splashing noises' (p. 144), and will creep back into their mountain just before dawn.

While the Nargun is revealed to be many things, the ancient creature is both suggestive of innumerable parallels in other mythologies⁸¹ and poignantly *sui generis*.

Up in the high gully the Nargun had raised its crooked shape to stand as men do. It had lifted its snout and cried in anger to the stars. The mountain stilled and hushed around it. The treetops were still where the Turongs peered and did not stir...From small hidden openings in rock the Nyols gazed, stilled by the cry of the stone. 'Old one...' they whispered. (p. 125)

Its vast age is now made clear and origins with the cosmos

Since first it oozed from rose-red fire into darkness - since it saw light - in all of endless time.... (*ibid.*)

The references to the stars and to the comet - symbols of the beginning of time and of the period of a thousand years - in the earlier fantasy are now followed by many more specific references, appropriate to the yearnings of the Nargun who 'remembered the world's making' (p. 8) and is roused from pondering when 'the sky was a pale blue with a shine to it like the chime of a bell' (p. 42), and then after the storm 'there were the stars again, wide fields of them' (p. 43). The stars are there for all races comforting, for, as the Potkoorok says:

The mountain is my friend, and the stars. They do not vanish when I close my eyes, and leave me lonely. (p. 94)

So, too, the Nargun contemplates the stars, ever anticipating again the renewed moment of the world's creation

in all endless time...in the quiet time of waiting for the stars. (p. 125)

enduring as

the calm voice of silence reached it, and the cold, forever light of the stars. (p. 126)

In moments of crisis for it, the stars seem to waver in empathy (p. 150), even though, as time rolls on they become 'brighter, colder' (p. 156). For them, as for all ancient beings, the farmer's wife, Edie, strikes the necessary note of respect and compassion, calling them 'Poor old things' (p. 101), and teaching the young outsider to try to understand - 'They didn't upset you then, the old creatures?' (p. 71).

The Aboriginal mythical point not mentioned in the text itself, concerns a spiritual system referring to the place of superhuman spirits, explained thus by Aldo Massola:

Each of the several Aboriginal tribes in Victoria had a different name for the Land Beyond the Sky and for its inhabitants, the Great Men who had become stars...All tribes believed in the Great Men, who were the creators of the land, though not in every case the creators of the men and animals who lived upon it...All tribes also believed...that after the death of the body the spirit ascended to the Land Beyond the Sky. (*Bunjil's Cave* (1968), p. 139)

Further, a myth of the Kulin (the tribe of central Victoria) is recorded by Massola, that the headman long ago, Bunjil, after he

had made the mountains and the rivers, and man and all the animals (p. 40)

and taught men how to fight and to behave with one another, caused the Musk Crow who had charge of the winds to let them out

and a terrific whirlwind came out, and blew Bunjil and all his people to the sky where they live in plenty, and look down on the world as stars. (*ibid.*)

* * * * *

The Wirrun Stories, 1977-

While one might trace the extension of the Aboriginal lore in Patricia Wrightson's later fantasies, *The Ice is Coming* and *The Dark Bright Water* - for such new orders as the Ninya, men of ice who live in frosty caverns and who want to come out into the world, raise mountains of ice, bind up the rivers, and build the cold crystalline land they desire - enough of her attempt has been discussed already. Something of her later cultural vision is clear from her author's note to *The Ice is Coming* in which she states that she knows

a country as powerful and as magical as Earthsea or Middle Earth. It is the only one I know and the one I want to write about.

It is of course, Australia as the further dimensions of her imaginative sense extends it, as she attempts to make an Australian epic fantasy viable. And yet many critics have questioned whether it is not unnecessarily long, and over complex - or more adult and philosophical:

I suspect that what is lacking is something quite simple: the power of sheer compelling narrative. The story gives the impression of going on and on...it brings in more and more creatures, many of whom do not contribute anything very striking to the action...*The Ice is Coming* does not, I think, quite come off: it is not so good a book as *The Nargun and the Stars*. [John Rowe Townsend, *A Sounding of Storytellers*, Kestrel, 1979, p. 204]

Perhaps, too, her skill with short direct plots was not employed on this occasion as with her earlier tension-building and morally enriching work.

Sources in Massola's *Bunjil's Cave*

The various folk-spirits which appear in *An Older Kind of Magic* and are satisfyingly developed in *The Nargun and the Stars* were largely drawn from Massola's survey of the Victorian tribes. Because of their importance to Australian white fantasy, it may be of interest to detail some source passages from the 'Aboriginal nations of South East Australia'⁸² about 'the phantasmagoria with which the Aboriginal mind peopled the earth and sky' (p. xi). The book was an excellent base because, more than most, it is concerned to stress that

a wealth of myths must be recognized as a sign of great imaginative power and poetic feeling on the part of the people using them. ('Foreword', p. x)

The myths are all related to the six separate nations of the area.

The first discussed⁸³ is 'the story of the Nyol', a Kurnai tale from Gippsland of a hunter who put his foot into an opening between two rocks -

He put his foot in one of the many caves in the vicinity. The cave was lit by a strange light, and was inhabited by many very small people who came to him showing signs of friendship...He tried to get back above the surface but found that he had to wrestle with the little people. They were very strong, although small, and although he fought many of them they all overcame him.

Feeling exhausted, he lay down to rest. The little people, the Nyols, gave him rugs to sleep on and grubs to eat. The latter were a great delicacy, and he enjoyed them very much. At last many of the Nyols went away and he was left in the charge of one of them. Everything had been quiet, but now he heard a rustling sound. One of the Nyols came to him saying he would show him the way to the surface of the ground.

Before very long he was amongst his own people, but for several days could not tell them what had happened to him. His mind had gone temporarily blank. (pp. 74-75)

Later they are referred to again in a brief paragraph -

Nyols are like our fairies. They are everywhere, but are not often seen by mortals. They live very much as men do, but in a world of their own. (p. 159)

The Kulin, of Central Victoria, believed in a number of mythical beings, two of which are used in the Wrightson tales -

Turong were mischievous spirits who frequented the bush, always ready to play tricks on hunters.

Potkookok were also mischievous spirits, but they inhabited water-courses and played tricks on fishermen. (p. 154)

Her recension of the *Potkookok* is meant to be linked with the *bunyip* (pp. 134, 141, 157) but it seems both more engaging and less bulky than those discussed by Massola (pp. 146-147).

The *Mara* of the Western District believed in the harmless but mischievous 'little people' who live in the *Stoney Rises* in the vicinity of *Lake Condah*

They make their homes in the 'caves' made by the naturally piled-up heaps of rocks. They are still believed to exist by the modern natives of the district, who claim that they sometimes find their bones in the 'caves'. Andrew Arden...had seen one in 1932...He shot a rabbit and instantly a *Net-net*, 'one of the little people', who are recognizable as very hairy as well as very small, and who have claws instead of finger and toe nails, seized the rabbit and made off with it at full speed over the rocks. Although Andrew Arden chased him, he soon lost sight of him. (pp. 150, 152)

Both this tribe and the *Kurnai* believe in the *Mahrach* (pp. 152, 154, 156), ghostly shapes which come in the night to scare and injure the living -

One of these *Mahrach* is particularly feared by the present natives at *Lake Condah*, and has been individualized under the name of 'the Black Ghost'. He is said to appear just before a death, and he is believed to be responsible for it. He is so bold that he sometimes appears even in the daylight, especially to lonely people. It is believed that there is an intimate but undefined connection between all *Mahrach* and all *mopokes*. (pp. 152, 154)

This last passage and the non-usage of the many quite violent creatures discussed in the second part of his book, 'The Land Beyond the Sky', in Chapter 12, 'Mythical Beings' suggests that Patricia Wrightson has been more concerned with imaginative probings and with creating awe rather than fear. Massola himself prefixes this section with this general observation

Aborigines believed in the existence of a number of beings who were supposed to inhabit dark recesses in the bush, deep caves, and certain water-holes. Some of these beings were clearly an invention for the purpose of frightening children into obedience, and to stop them from wandering away from the camps. Others, however, were certainly believed to exist and were greatly feared by the superstitious natives...Most of these beings were local, or belonged to individual tribes or Nations; creatures who fitted into the tribal landscape. (p. 146)

The last creature to be discussed here is the *Nargun*, the first among the *Gippsland* beings and according to Massola 'the belief in them is continued by their modern descendants, the *Kani* of *Lake Tyers*' -

Narguns were half human, but were made of stone, and as they had the power to turn back any spear or boomerang hurled at them, they could not be killed. They inhabited dark recesses and holes in the ground, and spent most of their time calling out *Nga-a-a*, and waiting for blackfellows to come near, so they could kill and eat them. One was said to live in a hole in the ground at *Cameron's No. 2*, on the eastern side of the *Nowa-Nowa* arm of *Lake Tyers*. It is now believed that two generations ago (1880s)⁸⁴ a woman, *Lillian Cortwine*, fought and overcame this *Nargun*, it being the only time a *Nargun* was beaten. (p. 155)

Although it is placed a little earlier, opposite the account of the *Net-nets*, it is perhaps important to consider this uncaptioned photograph of a great boulder, particularly in view of Patricia Wrightson's highly imaginative expansion on this somewhat limited base.

Roland Robinson and Bill Harney on Myths

When the book first appeared it was reviewed in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (June 29, 1968, p. 21) by Roland Robinson who stressed that it was 'an anthropologist's reconstruction of the religious life of the Aborigines of Victoria as it was in the Beginning and before the advent of the white man'. He went on

This is possibly the first time an anthropologist has given the mythology of the Aborigines its rightful importance,

and then quoted Massola's own words

Myths are the fountainhead of most sciences: cosmography, botany and zoology, biology and physiography, history and law, all have their beginning in myth.... (p. ix)

Robinson also notes - a point of importance for *The Ice is Coming* -

The title of the book is taken from these tribes. 'All Father', Bunjil, an ancestral being who created the stalactic cave known as 'Angel's Cave' in the cliffs at Cape Shank. (*S.M.H.*, *loc.cit.*)

In that same year Robinson,⁸⁵ who has been called 'the bridge between the Aborigines and the white man', published his own collection, *Wandjina - Children of the Dreamtime: Aboriginal Myths and Legends* (The Jacaranda Press), in which he stresses that the stories may be up to 60,000 years old.

These stories are something like the stories in the Bible. They are like the fables of Aesop, or the stories by the Grimm brothers, or the Greek myths. They are like all stories from all over the world of the time of In the Beginning....

Some of you must have read fairy stories and fables in which the animals and birds talk like human beings. You will find this happening all the time in Aboriginal stories...in the Dreamtime, all the animals, birds, reptiles, the sun, the moon, and the stars, were all men and women. (pp. 11-12)

He also draws attention to the fact that several of the Legends related - such as 'The Wild Cherry Tree' - are about the Aborigines living in the country settled by the white man, who 'though (they) no longer lead a tribal life, they still remain the children of the Dreamtime'.

In his much reprinted volume, *Tales from the Aborigines* (1959), W.E. (Bill) Harney, lifelong friend of Aborigines, clusters the campfire tales into four main groups -

Tales of Fantasy;
Tales of Imagination;
Tales of Caution and Observation; and
Tales of Contact.

He stresses that all these tales are told at day's end by people who 'loved to weave into their daily life the stories of bygone days' (p. xiii) to keep alive the past traditions by stories, some of which 'are woven around old-time myths', while in others 'a myth fragment has crept in as a part of the tale' (p. xvii). He also stresses (p. 19) that he is happy at this late date to present a mélange from 'the fifty-two languages in the Northern Territory', despite the fact that for the tellers each may have had a sharp-focused natural environment.

While his second group are much concerned with the evil one and with those who break tribal code, his third group are particularly concerned to point the moral that fear must be faced and defeated by calmness in adversity. The first or fantasy group Harney saw as belonging to 'a class of narrative that is becoming rare in the Northern Territory' (p. 31), often parts of a vast song-cycle to be told over a considerable period of time. In them giants stride once more, the 'little men' come out of the forests to play their pranks on the stranger, and the young (mice-) women of the Mingarri (mice totem)

They were quiet women (who) never make trouble with anyone and knowing nothing about men they did not run away when they saw Pungalung coming. (p. 82)

When they are molested by the lustful giant hunter,

they squeek-squeek no more and from squeek they start singing out like dingo and change themselves into savage dogs that snap with strong teeth as they attack that Pungalung...and grow larger as they come nearer and leap on to his back and...Pungalung run with that mob dingo snapping behind him. (p. 83)

As the story-teller Mirrawong put it about the age of various parts of the cycles, explaining

that the tale was as old as rain, for by that story and song-cycle was rain, thunder, and lightning first produced in that distant time when 'we all-about were as nothing'. (p. 31)

* * * * *

It is now appropriate to turn to the more immediate matter of the Armidale School of 1980.

FOOTNOTES - PART II

40. The Roman period fantasies include Thomas Burnett Swann's *Day of the Minotaur*, (1966), *The Forest of Forever*, (1971), etc., works incorporating Cretan myth and Etruscan lore.
41. For example, 'Andre Norton' (i.e., Alice Mary Norton), *Fur Magic*.
42. All these and more are to be found in the modern collection, *Cornish Tales of Terror*, edited by R. Chetwynd-Hayes (1970). The tellers include: A.L. Rowse, Eden Phillpotts, Sir Hugh Walpole, and Daphne du Maurier. Her story is the basis for the Alfred Hitchcock film, *The Birds*.
43. For the text of this, see J.S. Ryan (ed.), *Charles Dickens and New Zealand: A Colonial Image* (A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1965). Dickens himself, in a letter to William Henry Wills, (August 10, 1850) described 'the New Zealand sketch' as weighing 'frightfully' on his mind.
44. New York, Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 144-160. Earlier printed in the *New York Review of Books*.
45. Published by Angus and Robertson, Sydney, in 1953. There have been many reprints.
46. Page viii of Preface to the second edition (1943) of A.P. Elkin's *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, (Angus and Robertson, Sydney and London).
47. This was the situation in New Zealand, so that the writing down of Maori legend became relatively easy.
48. See Bill Scott's letter of 27 July 1980 -
They (the Aborigines) do manage to look at things from such a different viewpoint...much more relaxed and oriental...Also the form of expression can be so different and dramatic; the teller often lives and performs the story rather than merely narrating it.
49. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 1976, p. 11.
50. *Reading Time*, No. 70, January 1979, p. 6.
51. This is the original title for the Tolkien essay of 1938, printed in 1947, in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, more recently published as the first part of that writer's *Tree and Leaf*.
52. Published in 1978 by the College, with an introduction by Noel Donnan, as its first Occasional Paper.
53. Compare here J.R.R. Tolkien's, explicitly Christian, statement that fairy story is '*evangelium*,...Joy beyond the walls of the world...sudden glimpse, of the underlying truth...*evangelium* in the real world' ('On Fairy Stories', (1947 text), p. 81.)
54. Compare J.R.R. Tolkien's 'the essential face of Faerie is the...Magical' (*loc. cit.*, p. 53). Presumably this is an oblique glance at the pretentious, Orwellian and confused moralistic *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, (1889), of which work there are many shortened picture book versions.
55. Patricia Wrightson's idea of writing of fantasy is that of the Dark Ages and of mediaeval literature - 'Drawing on the old roots and sending out new growth, we mix and blend and invent' (p. 12). It echoes the ancient world's *inventio*, the coming upon a new mix of old ingredients to make a fresh and distinct statement about both past and present.
56. The text was one on the reading list of recommended texts from the Armidale School.

57. It was published in *Reading Time*, No. 70, January 1979, pp. 5-8. The extract comes from p. 7.
58. 'Story Traditions in Australian Aboriginal Cultures', pp. 121-132 of M. Saxby (ed.), *Through Folklore to Literature*, (1979).
59. That is, the volume just referred to.
60. The name for a Eunyip-like creature which appears in several of her books. Cp. the first such reference in *The Nargun and the Stars*, (1973), p. 12.

And something else lives in the swamp: something sly and secret,
half as old as the mountain. On a still day you may hear it chuckle.
61. Barbara Ker-Wilson (*loc.cit.*) described it as 'a certain slow dying: from that moment, they are *preserved*, rather than maintained in their own vigorous spoken life' (p. 720).
62. Mrs Wrightson explains below, see p. 39, that the name Nargun came from her reading of A. Massola's *Bunjil's Cave*, but one wonders if she had, subconsciously recalled the Woodenbong word *nargun*, for a certain pattern of behaviour in the dingo (violence ?/brooding malevolence?).
63. Preface, p. viii to the published text of his 1911 and 1912 Gifford lectures, *The Belief in Immortality*, Volume I, The Aborigines of Australia, etc., (London, Macmillan, 1913).
64. Published by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney.
65. One is reminded of the Anglo-Saxonists' dislike of J.R.R. Tolkien's creative use of Germanic myth, but of its wholehearted endorsement by such writers and poets as Iris Murdoch, W.H. Auden, Richard Hughes or Judith Wright.
66. Published by the University of New England as *The Australian Novel*, The Commonwealth Literary Fund Lectures, 1956. Quotation from p. 58.
67. 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism', pp. 207-237 of *Aboriginal Man in Australia*, Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine M. Berndt (eds), (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965).
68. In his *Sense and Non-Sense*, (Evanston, 1964), p. 28.
69. Published by A.H. and A.W. Reed in 1968, with a Foreword by Emeritus Professor A.P. Elkin.
70. He was long a collector of Polynesian lore and, in the 1960s and 1970s, of comparable Aboriginal material.
71. His use of his 'white' name in the larger society is akin to the same custom by the Maori scholar (Sir) Peter Buck or by the Cook Islands doctor-politician, Tom Davis. This is in some ways a black retort to certain aspects of the white scholarship of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies.
72. This is the pagination of the Puffin text, 1974, 1976, 1979, but the first edition appeared in 1972.
73. The story was first in the N.S.W. *School Magazine* and then appeared in his *The Man Who Sold His Dreaming*, (1965).
74. Selector and editor in modern times of K. Langloh Parker's *Australian Legendary Tales*, (1953). Quotation from the introduction, p. vii.
75. This is, presumably, the Tank Stream which once flowed at ground level into Sydney Cove, but which, like Rome's streams-become-sewers, lies below the modern city.

76. Page 422 of R. Brough Smith, *The Aborigines of Victoria with Notes Relating to the Habits of the Natives of other Parts of Australia and Tasmania*, Volume I. It is this book which is the great source-work behind A. Massola's *Bunji's Cave*.
77. The page references are the hard-covered Hutchinson edition and are each two less than those in the Puffin edition.
78. One is reminded of the compassion felt for the aged Gollum by the hobbits in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.
79. There are some slight parallels with Tolkien's ents, such as Treebeard, but little more than odd details, as they are remarkable for their nimble movements so unlike the ponderous walking trees.
80. This dwarf-like characteristic is contradicted by their slim build and the description of them as 'small elf-spirits' (p. 154).
81. Its loneliness suggests something of: Cain; Tolkien's Gollum; Grendel in *Beowulf*; a Norse troll; Tom Bombadil from *The Lord of the Rings*; Mary Shelley's Frankenstein; the mythical white elephant; and of various land gods of Polynesia.
82. Quoted from the author, dustcover to *The Nargun and the Stars*.
83. And used very closely in *An Older Kind of Magic*.
84. See *The Nargun and the Stars*, p. 9.
85. It is to be noted that Massola was a scholar of Aboriginal culture, as well as collector. Robinson was not a scholar but one who collected and retold stories, and did not handle socio-cultural material such as is the basis of museum collections.