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Kunapipi 1(1) 1979, Contents, Editorial, Contributors

Anna Rutherford
University of Aarhus, Denmark

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Abstract

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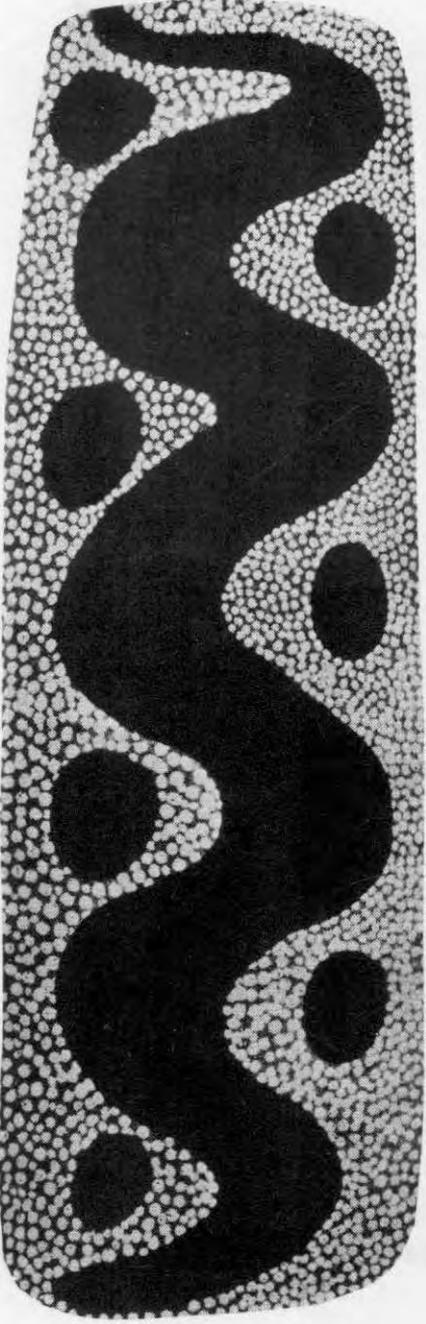
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VOLUME I NUMBER I

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Kunapipi is a continuation of *Commonwealth Newsletter* and is published twice a year, Summer and Winter, by Dangaroo Press, Department of English, University of Aarhus. It is a journal of creative and critical writing concerned with the new literatures written in English. The major concentration is on the present and former Commonwealth countries but this is in no way exclusive. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics will also be included.

The journal is the bulletin for the European branch of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. As such it offers information about courses, conferences, visiting scholars and writers, scholarships, and literary competitions.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet and should be accompanied by a return envelope.

All correspondence – manuscripts, books for review, inquiries – should be sent to:

Anna Rutherford
Editor – KUNAPIPI
Department of English
University of Aarhus
8000 Aarhus C
Denmark

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Editorial

ANNA RUTHERFORD

If I may begin by quoting from my foreword in *Common Wealth* (1971):

When one reads the literature of the Commonwealth one finds a constant interaction of forces, in opposition but also conjoined, for all struggle is a form of conjunction. In every development some part of the old must yield to the new for destruction is an essential part of the process of creation, essential for nothing stays alive unless it is continually being reborn and recreated by the imagination. This regenerative spirit seems to me to be one of the vital forces at work in Commonwealth writing today. It is for this reason that I have chosen the entwined serpent as the emblem for the cover. As such it is a symbol of the synthesis of opposing powers, of life-in-death and death-in-life, of inheritor and maker, of creation and destruction, of constant renewal, continuity and life.

I hope that *Kunapipi* is evidence of this regenerative spirit and that the new name and emblem are indications of my intentions. The emblem is to be found on an aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia. The shield is in the collection of aboriginal art belonging to the South Australian museum. It is described by F. D. McCarthy in *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art* and Ronald M. Berndt in *Australian Aboriginal Art*. Berndt suggests that 'it is possibly associated with the mythical rock python and used in Kunapipi (Gunabibi) rituals'. He continues, 'It may represent the female counterpart of Lightning, husband of Kunapipi, the Great Mother, in his snake form. In other contexts it might refer to the rainbow snake, which has both male and female manifestations'. McCarthy suggests that 'it rep-

resents the ancestral snake, Julungal [the rainbow serpent] who had swallowed the Wawalag sisters in the historical re-enactment of the Gunabibi (Kunapipi) ceremony'.

When the decision was made to make certain changes to *Commonwealth Newsletter* in terms of content we decided that this would also be a good time to change both the name and format. But what to call it? I suddenly knew what parents went through choosing a name for their new child. Then one day, whilst going through the aboriginal art books for something else, I came upon the picture of the shield which I have used for the emblem. And this led me to *Kunapipi*. So many people have asked 'Why Kunapipi?' that I feel I should say a few words about the Rainbow Serpent and the myths connected with it.

For the aborigines the Rainbow Serpent stands out above the rest of the totemic ancestors because of its particular concern with the regeneration of nature and human fertility. 'In the Mother cults of Arnhem Land the Great Snake is sometimes identified with the mother herself, sometimes with her male companions, sometimes with both. In many places "his" sex is not clear and in Australia as in other parts of the world the snake symbolises the ambisexuality of the creator. There is also a creation-destruction polarity about the concept of the Rainbow Snake' (Roslyn Poignant, *Oceanic Mythology*).

Above earth his body arches across the sky as the rainbow; on earth he is to be found in the deep rock pools and waterholes which are the reservoirs of the life-giving rain he has sent down. His name varies from region to region and the myths connected with him are numerous. One name for him is Julunggul and it is under this name that we find one of the most famous of the myths connected with the Rainbow Serpent, that of the Wawalag sisters. In *Oceanic Mythology* Roslyn Poignant records the Milingimbi version of the Wawalag myth as told to L. Warner. The Wawalag sisters are travelling through Southern Arnhem Land and eventually camp by a water hole sacred to Gulunggul.

They prepared their food but as soon as they placed each animal and plant on the fire it jumped out and dived into the waterhole because it had taken on the sacredness of the well. Then the elder sister went to fetch water and profaned the pool with her menstrual blood. The great snake rose up in anger and the water spilled from the well and flooded the countryside – the rain fell. At last the women realised their danger and tried to stop the rain and the advance of the great snake towards them by singing and dancing. Whenever they paused he moved forward. At last they fell asleep and he swallowed them.

Again he raised himself to the sky and all the other great pythons of the other centres also raised themselves up. The great snakes talked together about the ritual they shared although they spoke different languages. Then they told each other what they had just eaten. When it came to Yurlunggur's turn he was ashamed and at first refused to say, but at last he admitted to having eaten the two sisters and their children. Then he fell down, splitting the ground, and spewed up the women and children. Green ants bit them and revived them. Again he swallowed them and again he regurgitated them, and each time he rose up and fell down he made a ceremonial ground for each of the great rituals with which this myth is associated. The most important of these ceremonies are the Djunggawon or Djungguan, the Kunapipi or Gunabibi, and the Ngurlmak, or Ulmark. . . . In each the central theme of the myth, namely the swallowing and regurgitation of the sisters by the snake is ritually represented. In the Kunapipi the ceremonial ground stands for the body of the great snake and a hole is dug to represent the sacred well. Later a crescent-shaped trench is dug which is the hollow made by the great snake's fall, and also symbolises the womb of the Mother. . . . In the same ceremony the voice of the snake is the sound of the bullroarer and is called Mumuna. This is an alternative name for Kunapipi, the Great Mother, and it is also one of the names given to the Lightning Snake.

There are alternative names and versions of the myth and links can be made with other myths and rites throughout the whole area. What they all show is the concern with fertility which finds expression in the interlocking images of the Great Mother and the Rainbow Serpent. This I hope explains the choice of emblem and title.

To me it all seemed extremely appropriate. The regenerative spirit is stressed, a link is established between the old world and

the new, between ancient cultures and those of the twentieth century.

You will see that we are broadening the scope of the magazine by including creative writing as well as critical work. We also hope to publish the work of artists. And whilst the major concentration will no doubt be on the present and former Commonwealth countries, in no way is this exclusive. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics will also be included. The Spring issue of each year will contain a review of the major literary events in the various regions.

Finally a practical note. As must be immediately obvious it is much more expensive to produce *Kunapipi* and therefore we have had to raise subscription rates. However, we hope that you will agree that given the quality of the magazine they are very low indeed.

We can only continue with this present format if you help us. One way you can do this is by getting your university library (should you have one) to subscribe.

Mark O'Connor

THE RAINBOW SERPENT

(A sequence of poems on Hinchinbrook Island, designed to accompany a photographic exhibition by Jeremy Carew-Reid.)