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Billy Pogo's fire: a creative arts project in drama, poetry and visual arts on the theme of an aboriginal wiringin or clever man

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BILLY POGO'S FIRE

**A CREATIVE ARTS PROJECT IN DRAMA, POETRY AND
VISUAL ARTS ON THE THEME OF AN ABORIGINAL
WIRINGIN OR CLEVER MAN**

VOLUME 1 of 2

of

a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS



from the

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

**Ken Stone M.C.A.(W'gong) B.A (New Eng)
DIP.ART (ED.) (National Art School)**



FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

1994

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CORRECTION: This thesis takes creative inspiration from a photograph of an Aboriginal man in a top hat, incorrectly identifying him as 'King Billy Mogo', which inspired the fictional character, Billy Pogo. This photograph is of the Aboriginal elder known as King Jacky Springheal, of the Barrington NSW, who died in 1909 and has family in the Barrington, Gloucester and Kempsey areas of NSW.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis researches and then creatively explores the life of a Wiradjuri Wiringin in the fictitious western N.S.W. goldmining town of Bindari.

The poetry sequence, **WIRINGIN: BROTHER OF FIRE**, covers the period 1889-1908 and deals mainly with Billy Pogo's contact with the mining community, and events leading to his tragic death at the mine edge.

The graphic works have derived mainly from ideas generated in the sequence, and in some cases have provided stimulus for further poetry. As much as possible, I have attempted to cross reference common ideas and feelings into each of the three creative disciplines.

The stage play is set in contemporary Bindari. The existence of Billy Pogo's skull in the local hotel, and the proposed reopening of the mine on land deemed sacred by the Aborigines, generates dramatic conflict.


Volume One contains the poetry sequence **WIRINGIN: BROTHER OF FIRE**, the stage play, **BILLY POGO'S FIRE** and a laser printed selection of associated graphics (photography and photomontage drawings).

Volume Two includes background research on place, people, and the Wiringin phenomenon, as well as documentation of the creative development of work within each discipline.

In the graphics section I closely examine the archival photograph which inspired the creative program, and as a non-Aboriginal I attempt to state my views on the appropriation of Aboriginal material. My awareness of this contentious issue prompted me to offer the work in progress to Aboriginal scrutiny and comment wherever possible.

I hereby certify that this work has not been submitted for a degree to any other university or institution.

Signed:



Date: 19.9.94.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A thesis with the scope of BILLY POGO'S FIRE doesn't happen in isolation during the five year period of its inception and completion. In essence, the work is the result of a lifetime's encounter with place and people.

I visited Western New South Wales several times during the period of writing and visual image gathering, and each time it was a journey home.

Peak Hill stands much as it did during my childhood, although 'Talkie' Chappel's Premier Theatre is missing, and so is the Commercial Hotel.

Most of the old identities of my childhood have vanished - Les Stanford, Titch Collison, Steve Leary, Bill Merrilees, Joe Hunt, Jackie Peelar, and many others, including, in recent years, my father Eric, and just lately, his tale spinning brother, Harold. I acknowledge these people for making Peak Hill such a special place for me. In particular, I acknowledge my Aboriginal friend, the late George Robinson, who now exists forever young in a school photograph.

I thank Mudrooroo Narogin for his positive reading of the play and poetry, and I greatly appreciated the comments offered by Oodgeroo during our brief meeting shortly before her final illness.

I also thank those Aboriginal actors who provided valuable feedback during the play's workshopping at the Stables Theatre.

I thank my very special friends, Les and Careen Barnet, for their continuing encouragement. In particular, I thank Les for accompanying me on my many enjoyable treks into Western New South Wales, and for giving me valuable advice with photography.

I thank Les Murray for his helpful comments on the Aboriginal theme, and for accepting two of the early poems for publication in Quadrant. This gave me an early morale boost.

I thank Peter Skrzynecki for his close reading of the sequence and his supportive comments. I also thank John Scott and Ron Pretty for their valuable comments during the development of the text.

For the stage play, I acknowledge the insightful comments from the National Playwright's Centre. I also thank David Allen and Don Reid for their valuable comments.

Special thanks also to the Griffin Theatre Company, and in particular, Kate Wilson and the talented actors who workshopped the script towards an energetic rehearsed reading as part of that theatre's playreading network.

For help in the last stages of the play's development, I thank John Senczuk for his supportive comments and academic guidance.

I acknowledge the helpful comments of Bert Flugelmann in the developmental stages of the Visual Arts component, and also the input of Peter Shepherd.

I appreciate the support given by my workplace University, specifically the Faculty of Education of the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur. The internal research grant from this University enabled me to frame and exhibit photography and graphics at the Foyer Gallery, Milperra Campus in 1992.

Finally, I thank my family, and in particular, Bev and Laura, for their support and patience.

Further Acknowledgements

1. Photographs of Peak Hill Proprietary Mine - taken from A History of Peak Hill and District by C. Chappel (ed). 1988.
2. Aboriginal Song - taken from The Port Stephens Blacks: Recollections of William Scott: p.15 published by Dungog Chronicle. 1929.
3. Information from Peak Hill Express taken from A History of Peak Hill and District by C. Chappel (ed). 1988. (p. 23 and p.24 of Sequence)
4. The Billy Mogo Photograph - copied from the original print by courtesy of Stroud Historic Society (Quambi Museum, Stroud).
5. The poems, WAY OF THE POET and STRANGE DOG, were published in the December 1992 issue of Quadrant Magazine.

CHAPTER 1

WIRINGIN

BROTHER OF FIRE

A POEM SEQUENCE

BY

KEN STONE

Ken Stone, 1994

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Other poetry by Ken Stone

Hunter, 1979
Hilltop Journal, 1981
Horizon Change, 1990

WIRINGIN: BROTHER OF FIRE

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SYNOPSIS

The sequence begins with poems showing a Wiradjuri Wiringin at the height of his spiritual and psychic powers.

The year 1889, however, sees the onset of a second wave white invasion into the Bogan River region. The first invasion was many years earlier by drovers with wandering mobs of cattle. This second invasion is a goldrush, and the town of Bindari is rapidly established.

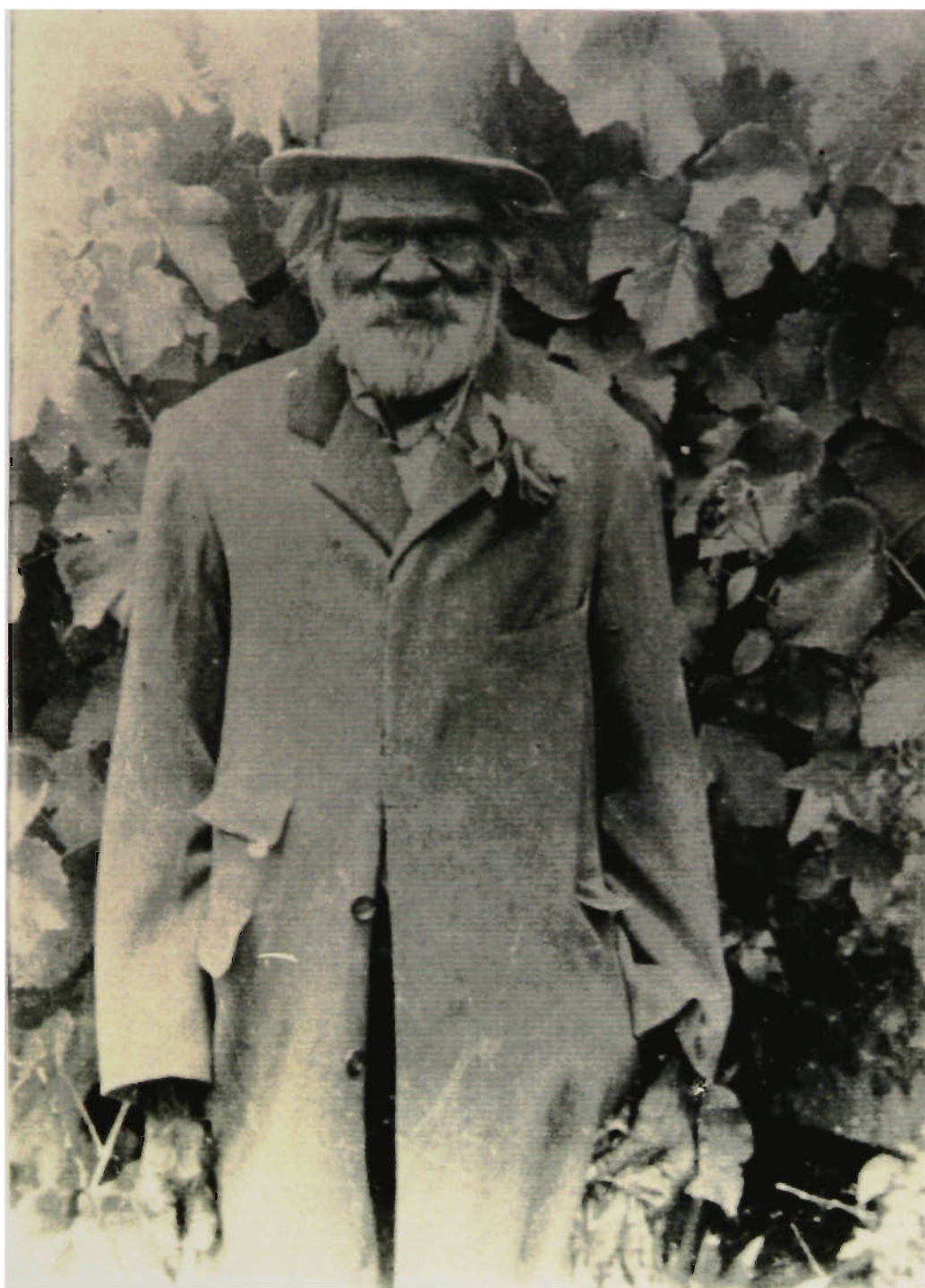
The remaining Wiradjuri people are quickly embroiled in an event which many will not survive, and the lives of those who do are forever changed.

The sequence narrates incidents in the life of the Wiringin, who is known by the community as Billy Pogo. Midway through the sequence this mysterious fire walker and spoon player is made Bindari's clown king and forced to wear a top hat and tails and, hopefully, end the prolonged drought which makes mining extremely difficult.

Several poems attempt to examine the community through Wiringin eyes, until the unexplained death of a miner in Live Bird Lead, and the destruction of the great hotel by fire, sets in motion a series of events where Billy Pogo becomes a scapegoat, and is finally destroyed at the mine's edge.

WIRINGIN

Brother of Fire



Ken Stone

**'Pindi pindeingy pindreingi
cou-a-yna poon-maree
wy-gneahn.**

**Yangarongo gnaralonga
cou-a-yana poon-maree
wy-gneahn'.**

What it meant I could never discover, but in it there must have been some rare morsel of humour that they relished immensely, for at the end of the song they would burst into shrieks of raucous merriment.

-Recollections of William Scott, 1873.

Baiame

took Spider-bird from hunting
and shook his throat across the Bogan
and Barcoo Creek -

took Spider-bird from hunting
where the sun stood lonely on Bulgandramine.

Spider-bird hovered where there was nothing yet:
Moon was an empty bowl-
No grubs,
no song yet.

Moon was in a cloud when clouds came down
from Culgoa's watering-
Down to Bogan's watering.

Water, once in the Spider-bird eye, trickled
and polished where emus bobbed with cloud on their feet.

Baiame

took Spider-bird, first Wiringin
and filled the moon bowl.

Song came to Bulgandramine, and laughter
where grubs dropped,
where rocks yawned and ran.

World was born here in the Spider-bird throat -
Barcoo Creek a trickle and the Bogan deep.

**1.
RIVER**

Billy Pogo, a Wiringin man,
brought water down to the Bogan,
or sent it back on a track
beginning in the circles of his eyes.

And if water sulked under its river
instead of blinking in it like fish and light,
he danced it out of shadows
and sang it into clouds.

And when clouds were deep with river
on the sky world's shoulder,
Billy Pogo eased them down again
on a hairstring moist with song.

**2.
CLOUD BURST**

There was a time when Bogan
cracked its bed to a brown mosaic
and then bleached it like a bone.

Bogan was lurking underground
and Billy Pogo knew.

He became a leech and delved, drank
and spat Bogan into daylight.

It was a cloud burst from deeper down;
it was magic not for ordinary men
to know, but a sign was there.

It was a smudge of Bogan's
kidney fat on Billy Pogo's mouth-
and for those who dare to dream
the maker of song there was the dazzle
of quartz in Wiringin eyes.

3.
HUNTING

It was mystic hunting time
and emu clouds nested
on hills as the rainbow
crept down.

It was rainbow tracking time,
but the creature's feet were perfect light.
Wiringin eyes strained to shape its spoor
with never a leaf bent or twig astray.

In a swarm of raindrops
it arched its back - red here,
and orange along its rump.
Its ribs were bold yellow and green,
its neck blue, and soft violet.

The Wiringin reached the river,
he too, not leaving a twig astray.
He glimpsed the creature with its head deep
in the last waterhole, but it sensed him
like sunlight high on its shoulder, and disappeared.

Billy Pogo melted into the meaning
of the waterhole where a quartz crystal
awaited him, a talisman, but greater,
held in the gentle grip of sand -
Waiting to be folded under
the skin of his brow,
but showing no scar -

Making him one and many,
taking him above and below
with the dead and the living.

This was his now which had chipped
off the skyworld and slid down the rainbow
forever disturbed at its nervous drinking.

4.

TRANSCENDENCE

To them he was a pool's ripple
and then its calm.

He was the storm
in a thought, and in firelight,
when shadows shuffled
and blood was deep,
he would stand apart, dismissing
them with a glance
which the dogs heard.

They all haunched smaller
in the flicker of his thinking.

They had burnt the day
with green thoughts
in familiar places where time
was a spear's length,
and hurl of crafted bone.

Having feasted with them
he vanished into a skygap's
distant stars,
while they felt the chill
of absence and dragged
a log's damp
into a flame circle.

Sparks flocked and scattered
like he had when sparking
through crystal to murmurings
shaped from shadows.

They slid the log deeper
into its lit centre
but the old men haunched
to rock and shivered.
Only the unaware children
nuzzled motherings of sleep.

All those who had been sung
to a song's bleeding stared
into thickenings of stars
to shape his footprints,
but all failed.
Like their dogs they
could only track the ground.

All of them were the night's
brief creatures illuminated,
but unable to spark the crystal.

They needed him out there
firesticking the cooling stars
from his spun centre,
as they sat stoking
the log's collapsed centuries
with whispers of flame.

5.
CURRAJONG HILL

A currajong hill,
Wiradjuri-rich with bones.
Interlocked stands of pine
destined to be rafted.

Belah and Wilga upturned
in a billabong of monitor lizards
and Methuselah cod,
while embanked frilled-necks
angled flanges of self to the sun.

Unaware of their name change
apostle birds roosted
in biblical number,
and a wedgetail eagle
became a taloned cross
in miraculous air.

6.
BINDARI

In 1889
Denis Madden, a self confessed
rock ferret, had taken a stone
and broken it, and its largest portion
had impaled the day on a perfect spike of gold.

On a roused hill
axe blades spread like fever.
A shovel and mattock flirted
and their union was consummated
in the ground.

Gestation was brief
and Bindari was born.
Men with trundle-wheels
and polished measures
confirmed its shape, size
and exact location.

County of Wangara parish of Mingelo
area 290 acres commencing at a point
bearing south 22 degrees 56 minutes
east 220 chains 22 links from the south
eastern corner of portion 7 parish of
Bulgandramine and bounded thence by part
of the north eastern side of Euchie street
bearing north 27 degrees 58 minutes west
23 chains thence by the north western
side of Bivanna street where a fire
was lit and three crows landed.

Because it was noon and sweltering,
the instruments were swaddled in shade.
Damper, achieved in Wilga ash,
was smeared with sun-quick treacle,
and serious mugs of English tea
affirmed Empire -
 where three crows loitered.

7.
WILD BEE

Wild bee flew low
in the crafted grip
of a thread -

was made too heavy
to avoid human reach
but light enough to skim
rocks and grass -

was knotted so that boys
could follow -
flew shoulder high
to where its hive
was seeping.

The old people arrived
and time was honey.

Now laughter had gone
and bees flew high

beyond trees split by strangers
and beyond a blunt song
colliding with rock and shovels
and submerging into cyanide
troughs of gold.

8.

STRANGE DOG

The strange dog entered
the camp, cocked its leg
and marked the tribe.
With hackles up and tail curved,
it challenged Wiradjuri dogs
who snarled, snapped and then
diminished into grass.

The strange dog smelling of horse
breath and Gubba hands,
sniffed the nervous toes of women,
and invaded thoughts of the old men,
who clapped their spears,
but withheld the blades.

The strange dog sniffed the fire's edge,
smouldering twigs, and emu bone;
sniffed whispering words flitting
into cold air, and sniffed
the squeezed cry of a child.

The strange dog looked at the one
later to be dubbed Billy Pogo,
the clown-king.
The calm Wiringin snared the dog's look,
a twig at the fire edge flared,
and a darting flame encircled a log.

Billy Pogo, delving the dog's eye,
saw an altered world
being changed again.
He glimpsed illuminated horsemen,
shaky wagons, fire pots and shovels,
and at the eye's centre was a hole
digging itself to the core
of his people.
He heard a glittering word
spinning its echo onto a rubble rim-
The word was gold.

The dog could be held no longer
It blinked and ranged into cold dark.
The old women rubbed warmth
into their toes, old men growled
at their spears, and the tribe dogs
renewed their status with leg-cock and snarl -

While Billy Pogo stared into the dog dark
and felt a shovel slicing through
him and the centuries of his people.

9.
DROUGHT

A great mob from Nyngan
was an invasive ballad
of saddle and spur
 and its whip-cracks of thunder
 channelled the river
 like a storm-rush mirage
 draining into stillnesses of air.

Meroo Merah and his shred
of people competed with cattle
herded for the gold-scramble
at Bindari.

Fire billies were gathered,
thirsty children, ribbed dogs
and a mission of blankets.

Meroo Merah knew the last place
of water and would not run lame-winged
from Gubba like a feigning bird.

Those men later renamed in mockery
stepped forward: men later known
as Jarranbowie Jack, Tiny Ribbons
and One-armed Timmy.

Then the one stepped forward
who was gimlet-eyed,
and all moved in a haze
of centuries to the last sweet water.

At dusk the branded onslaught
trampled plover nests at Bulgandramine;
ants invaded egg-shell, and enraged
birds were rips of sound
in smothering air.

An incurved mob drank
muddied, broken water,
while balladic horses, the day's
rhythm souring on their flanks,
rinsed the governing steel
of their mouths.

Meroo-Merah cried his ancient
heart and spleen to a quick embankment
of horses, and at head stockman Roach
who let his stockwhip flex across
the old man's back.

Stockwhips and rifles
had the last word
where drought was drinking.

Flinching horses smelling death
trampled cloven dust as smoke
palled on Buree Techala
and plovers flew high.

10.
EARTH

*Fold quartz into the land,
yet make no scar:*

*Let earth be Wiringin
and learn.*

Earth shuffled on dancing feet,
with ochre and charcoal markings,
and with rock as bone.
Earth swayed with caul-fat
in its hair, when thunder rolled
off a crow's wing and a talus
of dreamings was washed, as a hill
shrugged its shoulder of cloud.

Ancient tumblings were gurgled
through, and old middens,
those encrustings of feasts
hillocky with use, were dampened
by mimicking lips of rain.
 as if all the dead tribe
 and stealthy Wiringin
 were feasting again.

Billy Pogo felt his thoughts smile
when laughter was heard,
 but it was water laughing
 through a feasting place -

 Its dish a carapace,
 brimming cold.

11.
CENTI GRADE 1063

And three men down
a monkey shaft had grown
to many.

Pennyweight, dolly-pot and stamper
were words forged on a currajong hill
deep with Wiradjuri bones.

Centtgrade a thousand and sixty three
bubbled and the mirage in its heat
was ancient:

It was gold's illusion,
as in a great death pit
at Ur where a plum-eyed
bull's head had decorated
the framework of a lyre
whose music now drifts
to the spheres.

This trumpet-eared ruminant
had a princely beard
of ringletted lapis lazuli
but all else was beaten
leafings of gold.

And out of the same rubble
a gilded goat still reached
imperishably into a thorn shrub's
bejewelled flowers.

But this pit with all its crafting
was an earth crush of human bone.

Sumerian Royalty
hesitated to be alone
forever with that most ductile
of earth which for all its power
to stretch itself like the human mind
might fail to enleaf the mortal
fracture in kings.

12.
SAPA INCA

And what could be learnt
from the Inca world
where kings became the golden
prisons of themselves?

The Sapa Inca took
the golden hoe and broke
the first sod.

His mummified ancestors
and alert subjects
gaped as the son of the sun
stirred spring from dreaming.

The Sapa Inca was animated
gold. Ear spooled, lip plugged
and necklaced he would return
with his cosmetic dead
to Cuzco Palace where he,
his sister-wife and entourage
would feast off golden plate.

In death, he too, would be
mummified and ensheathed
in a woven treasury.
His sister-wife and lesser mortals
would be strangled after an interval
of tears to attend his immortality.

But for now, he had ceremoniously
consummated spring and his blood
rekindled as he strolled,
into his hammered garden's
golden maize rows and jewelleries
of flowers, where glittering
birds on crafted boughs
pouted their metal
as if in the thrall of song.

13.
UNGILDED

But here at Bindari
the Bogan people dusted
the ground with dance,

their only adornment
a timeless mythology
cut into their blood.

The geologies of Bindari
clutched beginnings
which whispered wordlessly:
the quenching of fire
and the deepening of water.
Fin and paddle quickened here
and a great ocean breathed.

Then came the swell and subsidence
of lumbering creatures.
Swamp drifted as cloud
and rock flexed quartzite knuckles
to clench fossils
with deeper fleckings of gold.

Time danced here
to become the shadows
of the Bogan people
who dusted the ground.

But time caste aside
its dancing and became shift-hour
daylight for men of all nations
when whistles blew and cages submerged
with minds fastened by a golden latch.

14. PRODUCTION

Gold production was down again, the total yield being 6.428 ounces. The mines, however, steadily developed, the lack of water again being the drawback. Large bodies of payable ore were found at the Myall and a 40-head stamper battery was being erected. The New Year's Gift, receiving aid out of the Prospecting Vote, crushed 6 tons for 24 oz 15 cwt of gold. The Monte Carlo crushed 20 tons from the 110-ft level for 9 oz, 11 tons from the 150-ft level yielded 369 oz, and a crushing during Mr. Slee's visit of 22 tons gave 222 oz of gold. At Live Bird Lead on Beasley's conditional lease, 50 tons yielded 82 oz.

Bindari Times, 1896.

15.
WARDEN'S COURT

*November 14, 1902,
Bindari Warden's Court
Application for suspension
of labour conditions at Live Bird Lead.*

Magistrate: I cannot grant this application as seven day's notice has not been given. It is imperative that you give seven days notice that you require a suspension

Manager: We only ask you to make it conditional on rain falling.

Magistrate: I cannot. You have never had the labour on.

Manager: We have 28 men on.

Magistrate: You should have 49! Another difficulty in the way of granting a suspension is that the rent has not been paid.

Manager: But the Directors have been granted an extension -

Magistrate: Which has expired! However, I suppose you have no water - When it rains do you intend to go on working?

Manager: Certainly. We are at present blocked with dirt which is impossible to get away.

16.
DANCE

*Where's the little magician
with the watery eyes -
 grab him
 and make
 him dance!*

*There's cloud wisping
the north-east,
and one unsure
to the south -*

*Grab stealthy Billy
from his river haunt,
and make him dance,*

*so that rain might
rinse those living statues
carved from Live Bird Lead.*

17.
LETTER TO MOTHER: 1895

Her letter was carriaged
above spinning rims
and waft of horses.

*They've built a town of sap houses
plum-bobbed on timber stumps,
but the Post Office is Percy's pride,
brick upon brick when the mail trots through.*

*French doors with shutters protect my writing
and there's lavender for our memories -*

*Mother in London, the Bogan is dry
but Percy is Master and the children
are tall.*

*Shanties have been built with quick
and simple craft, but a man
at our corner is fashioning
an hostelry with filigreed verandahs.
Why waste delicate embossing
on rough-neck drinking?*

*There's gold scurry and a forest of rooms
rearranged for white-ants;
a forest of rooms with dark nibbled corners,
no moulded sills, no decorative wall tiles;
only a coming and going and a spending of dreams.*

*Fowls scratch upturned allotments,
and the white-ants withdraw for daily damp
in the quick foundations.
They are down with the miners*

*Blacks lay about with nowhere to go
but the Post Office is punctual.
We'll thrive here with brick upon brick
all English bonded -*

*But Mother in London,
the Blacks lay about
and the Bogan is dry.*

18. OCCURRENCE

In the draggletail hours of light,
mullock and cyanide,
came the paper and bell man
resplendently starched:

Teddy Grace strutting
closely shaven, while the forty
stampers of Australian Star United
laboured up and down
into crushings of quartzite.

Tonnage of rock and sunlight
had subsided on that timber-split
rise as Teddy Grace, clarion of language,
swaggered amid lanterns
towards men around fire-tubs.

Such light lent
bright leafen thinning
to those who would kill,
or suffer for gold.

At levelling of incline
staked tallow candles fluttered
like miners' angels girdled to dance,
but all eyes shaped the town crier
moving out of the distant tread
of Live Bird Lead.

Edward T. Grace, tattle-tale
to local events, glanced
left and right at spinning Yankee
sweat-wheels and sundry games of chance -

then glided, clipped and swallow-tailed
towards Goodie Penman's concertina
playing sugared love notes to rabble;

Teddy Grace moving moth-like, vulnerable,
into the glare of warty teamsters
spitting rum flares
into fire.

Goodie Penman's concertina
won the company of spoons,
now answering the tune
against threadbare trousers.

An old black and tested fire-wizard
played as if spoons were
bejewelled creatures whose earth tryst
was Goodie Penman's Tavern.

Here was the old coon, they said,
 with the gift of cutlery,
 not for food but sound.
 Here was the one who had withstood
 the fire-tub and won-
 For the amazement of others and a coin
 he had set his feet in embers
 to a count of ten and walked
 away more surefooted than any mortal
 who had crossed Goddie Penman's threshold.

On this night when Teddy Grace
 was splendid, the teamsters took
 it in their heads, along with rum,
 to thank the spoon player, this old
 Billy Blackfellow who with slight tutoring
 might play the anthem on a shovel.

One teamster wartier than the rest
 and reeking of rum and pickles,
 held Billy Pogo in the mock
 embrace of brothers -

*"We must thank you for
 that rhythm of steel",
 and Gustav Schmidt's face
 illuminated with concurrence.
 "With practice you could take
 up the violin wand and play
 a Strasbourg saw!"*

A miner with no past shocked
 the ashen tub with a new log.
 Those with discernment might
 have noticed Dartmoor's lock forged
 on his brow, but there were many
 misshapen shadows here -
 and a grotesquerie of dreams.

The one with prison eyes
 spoke as if briefly schooled:
*"Don't squander a coin.
 We'll give him style.
 We'll deck him in Old Teddy's
 suit and make him king"*

And all agreed as if this thought
were final and clean in the night
like a spark.

The bellman was too slow
and yielded to calloused force
like shale, but yelled like one
with news of greatness or calamity,
or both -
And the mob grew, abandoning
Beauchamp's Inn and the rum
stench of Roache's.

Rumour spread like miner's lard,
"They've made the old coon, king!"

Those who arrived late saw
bell-less, suitless, Teddy Grace
stripped of his namesake
and cringing, dapple-pink and hairless.
The fire-tub had stirred,
and the sappy log seethed with burning.

Billy Pogo, brother of fire,
yielded to kingship
and stood gawkish in short sleeves,
his hunting hands slightly clenched
as if gripping weapons of air.

Billy Pogo saw shadows,
some of which were his thinking
and some his people,
shrink towards the river -

Any other imaginings faltered,
and marrowed in his bone.

The forty stampers went up and down
but the bellman was subdued.
He was, to one wit, clapperless,
and his lips and nose were blood.

An occasional spoon player
near a crackling throne of fire
had become Bindari's king,
and all were satisfied,
a teamster having warned Billy Pogo
that the suit and top hat
were his to wear forever like a smile.

So the crowd dispersed,
but Goodie Penman, out of modesty
for Teddy Grace, sent her glass groom
with a blanket, and Old Teddy draped
it around the dignity implicit
in his name -
and became the night.

While the clown-king stared
into the fire, whose crude
revealing flames, now feeling foolish,
darted under the log
to smoulder the thin hours
when Goodie Penman's concertina
caught the sob in time
and played alone.

19.
RESPENDENCE

*Resplendent no more,
Teddy Grace?*

Those flat-ironed trousers
had crossed thresholds
blocked to the common lot,
ranked in everlasting serge.

And what of those
deemed less than common:

those widgeons of Empire
ignorant of the Centre;
those devalued painted ones,
exotic featherers, and spear hurlers?

You disdained myth dancers,
calling them basic gatherers
of long-beard grain at the world's
forage-edge - that void of alphabet.

Having been stripped of husk
now you'll learn, Teddy Grace.
Having been peeled to pinkness,
you'll range beyond those,
who jealous of your throat,
snickered at your shrunken tap
embedded in its haunch.

Yours had been a privileged
enclave in stone and pediment,
with flannelled youth lounging
on cropped grass,
but you glimpsed
the canker of Empire,
ran foul of by-laws and decorum,
which sent you down with rumour
below Plimsoll and family,
to New South Wales.

So here you are, your remittance
long gone, but with your smattering
of Dryden and couplets of Pope.
Here you are at the river's edge
with the one now king of your weave;
with the one offering Wiradjuri words
in lieu of a coat worn in fear.

And what are these words
your mouth begins to practise?

The river blinks a fish
and rumpled water tucks
and pins itself against embankment
A lizard lifts it timeless throat
and frills to sunlight.

What are these thousand names -
words from ancient breath
which shaped the land and water?

Your lips pucker a strangeness
which might be known (or remembered)
at your tongue's root,
where the lizard of all our blood
learnt to unfold the intricate
flare of self.

20.
PHOTOGRAPH

Faded Wiradjuri man,
little paper clown in coat
and tails.

You stare uneasily
as the camera measures
you with its cold eye
and flicks you into its gut.

Only Gubba could make
this brass strapped snare
which, in a trick of mirrored light,
upturns people, dogs and trees,
and at a whim can focus
all the world, turning it small
and grey, after spitting out the sun.

21.
CAGED CROW

Wiradjuri crow was stolen
from his nest in a tall tree
above Bindari mine.

His brothers cursed a while,
but Gubba clapped their skulls,
and they dropped down flightless air.

Now, young crow stands
in his cage near the barber's doorway
at the end of Struggle Street.
His feathers gloss as if freshly combed,
as he watches the barber snipping
Gubba hair.

Sleek crow knows some Gubba words.
and juggles them on his tongue,
while the barber laughs.

(The manic scissors ignore
all as they dazzle the comb
in a wave of hair)

The last Wiringin, shuffles up
in his swallow-tail coat and top-hat,
and stares deeply into the glossy eyes
of young crow who fumbles
the Gubba words and sits thinly
like a shadow.

Unseen by the barber,
the cage latch is lifted
and Wiradjuri crow is thrown
to the sky, but falls.

Crow is thrown
to all the winds,
but they in turn
gust him back
onto the cage floor.

The Wiringin feels a terrible pity
for Wiradjuri crow because his glossy
feathers are only a shiny clown suit,
and his wings have been distorted,
by the scissors' shear.

22.

TENT: 1902

Billy Pogo watched a tent
being pitched where his people
had danced on wide-awake nights
when the possum dropped down.

The tent stood braced
by spidery strings, and Billy Pogo shared
the puzzlement of small flowers
marooned in dim closure.
He felt the flit and panic
of insects nudging and prodding
drab borders in a quest for sunshine.

Several sleeveless miners arrived
with waxed tables and chairs,
two carried a large board baulking
the wind, and another wheeled
a barrow of books into the canvas mall.

A stake was driven into the ground,
and on it was a Gubba sign
which Billy Pogo was unable to read.

What were these markings, neatly placed
like plover feet in mud?

Would spruce men and their pleated
women gather here to sing
of their Nailed One, a sky traveller
made great with dying,
and the gift of return?

No -
Bindari already had churches
ringing in the blueness of special days.

Would oiled politicians gather
in this tent to jig, and yell above
their dazzling rings and vest clocks?

No -
They did their work best on a street
corner or in the depths
of a public bar.

Billy Pogo spat on the ground
to be rid of white thoughts.
He would direct himself towards
the secretive world only he knew.

It was then that he saw
an assemblage of anxious children,
some still with the sop of milk
on their mouths, and others
old enough to track the land,
and taste its dreaming.
(If this could be ever possible with Gubbas)

Billy Pogo made hesitant enquiries,
and the answers were tacit in return;
brisk answers you'd expect
from the sharpened one who then ruled
his mouth to a straight line,
and marched the assembly into the tent.

This was a temporary school, he'd said:
one awaiting traditions of brick and mortar,
mottoes, and English ways.

The Wiringin stood alone,
pondering the thin-lipped words.
So this was how young Gubbas learn-
Without sky, trees, or river;
without quartz, and the subtleties
of a lizard's ways.

23.

WAY OF THE POET

There was froth on Gubba mouths
as he played the spoons on his knees.
There was sweet smelling malt
on red-creased faces.

In his lop-sided top hat
and swallow-tail coat the clown-king
was their stringed puppet, but unknown
to them a hairstring was a hank
of magic in his pocket.

They joked at the sparrow thatch
of his whiskers, and at his spread nose
carved with a lazy knife.
They thought his eyes were too sheltered
by bone for seeing and laughed
at him as the spoons
clapped their metal.

He gave the Gubbas a shallow song
from just behind his tongue.
They teetered at its edges, became bored
and back slapped inside to a painted
Wunderlich ceiling where he was illegal.

He stared through the grapevine
while the easily amused spoons relaxed
in his pocket.
He was Wiringin now stroking the sky-string.
Wawi, the serpent, stirred in him
and listened.
Wawi's coils loosened like the hank
of string, and stretched with it beyond
the blue shell of daylight.

Billy Pogo was now outreaching
green tendrils seeking lattices of air.
Whispering grapeleaves jostled
their faces towards gaps of light
but the Wiringin was gone:

Gone to where Wawi spangled
and foraged with stars;
Gone to the campfires of long ago
Wiringin to revise real song.

While on the dappled verandah
the clown-king cancelled
Gubba Time.

24. GOLD DIVINER

Joseph Speed in dungaree and vest,
a stick pointer and stranger,
drew miners from mullock holes
and a blunted ridge.

Joseph Speed, diviner,
won early drinkers from mainstreet
whisky stops, and Gustav Schmidt
from shaving, while Billy Pogo, Wiringin,
master of quartz and air, but disregarded,
watched from shadows and despaired
at the distant crush of gravel.

Billy Pogo whispered '*Divining Rod*'
and its words mouthed strange
but not its object which was
a stick and ordinary -

Not a spearshaft shaped
in flexing fire for the set
of flint or bone.

This stick, mere flame stuff
touted as magic, made bullocky men
abandon Live Bird Lead, Trewilga Prospect,
and the cyanide tubs of Australian
Star United

In a tobacco haze of believers,
Speed gripped the elevated stick
which balked, falsely dipped
and turned, not ready yet
for earth jab, the cue to dig.

It led Speed and his rabble
into a labyrinth of dead bird gullies
towards an ancient clench of rock
where it reared, dipped
and finally jabbed.

Then it was a sky of handles
the gnash of mattock heads
and shining greed of shovels.

It was a gold-conjured morning
and Speed was praised
as he flung the stick
into the mothering embrace of wilgas -

But Billy Pogo had made
their shape his shadow
and caught the Judas stick.

In the downward clash
of blades nobody heard
it snap...

25.

RUBY WINDOW

They saw him at St. Stephen's
rubbing his palms on a travesty coat,
his trickster fingers, beguilers
of button and bone,
but the masters of fire.

Midday's shadows jostled where
a swallow sat, her daubed nest
lined with eider from quilt thrashings,
feather of orpington, quick starling
and sparrow.

The engagement of feather and clay
intruding on English bond-
such is the will of nature
and tolerated.

But they saw him enter the church,
although he'd been warned.
His hand dulled the brass
and the nervous hollyhock palled
on its stack of flowers.

His dog baulked at the vestry-
withdrew to sniff the histories
of the south-east quoin:
wall-eyed butcher's terrier,
contrived poodle, and tom cat
now beatific on the rectory steps.

The sprung dog, hackle-shouldered, tribal,
sniffed outrage ranked in mortar and negated
it, while in St. Stephen's, Billy Pogo
breathed waxed cedar, eau de Cologne
and the faltering of Sunday's roses.

He viewed the Nailed One,
White Wiringin, lead-sectioned
in glass and newly puttied.
 And he saw the crooked stick.

Was this another diviner,
not of gold, but light;
one who stared with painted eyes,
yet smelt of earth and fire?

He saw the etched palm
of the proffered hand, ruby studded
but unlit, wait for shadows
to slip down the east wall
 and leave the swallow to her
dream of flying.

Billy Pogo, curious, tribal,
saw afternoon amaze the west wall
and kindle the glass;
 saw the hurt palm wince
 and the clotted ruby spill its blood.

26.
CHURCH STREET

Intimidated by radiance
in a gospel of glass,
he moved into the crystal day
where dragonflies were Wiringins of air.

Shuffling through the churchyard,
he paused, and ripped
a button from the laughable coat
and conjured its bone.

He whispered to the circle of it,
and stroked the weak thread
which impelled a journey
into murmurs of time.

He called his dog which whimpered,
afraid of the one who had fed him the
scrap of his scrap, and shared
the coat.

The dog cringed, knowing
the human mind is a fearful place.
It waited at the Wiringin's feet;
waited a moment, or a century,
in the eternal now.

Billy Pogo climbed out of grief
into an afternoon deepening
the dog's shallow eye.
He left the churchyard
and crossed to a row of adzed
houses whose kitchens
were a taboo of white women.

Through a drapeless window
he saw a drop-slab room
covered with paperings of words.
On a bleached board, flour was roused
and sifted through soft fingers
dancing like ghosts
on scrubbed pine.

Above the sill where scones pouted
from greased trays, he engaged
startled blue eyes, and mouthed
'plour and wine'.

The grim glass now billowed
with angry apron and grain dust.

Plump underarms were dampened
tafetta and taboo.

Crossing to the rectory gate,
he saw the church cat
preening its maleness,
its cocked leg held jointless
like a furred stick.

The dog hackled,
and the receding kitchen flavoured
the air with the close warmth
of tafetta and cake.

27.
BLIND WINNIE

Blind Winnie was led
to the water -
Her eyes were pale moons
with dead light behind them,
but she had a special hand.

The tip of her little finger
had been ligatured long ago
to drop, and be sung over,
and then thrown in the river.

The river's fish-mouth
swallowed it with such delight
that it would hunger always
for the rest of the hand.

Billy Pogo took ordinary twine
and rubbed its blandness into
old Winnie's palm where it savoured
the scent of alert fingers and meaty thumb.
He closed the gifted hand onto the line
and shaped his thinking into bait
at the end of it.

The twine dipped into the river,
sank further, and hung there,
its morsel silvering all shadows
in a shock of fish and water.

Blind Winnie laughed as she
controlled the hunting twine
now reeling onto her hand.
A great fish rose and its eyes reflected
all the images Winnie could no longer see.
Then it flinched on the ground
and its eyes went blank.

Billy Pogo touched Winnie's hand
and she released the twine -
This will be our feast, he said
now freeing a flame
from the circles of a stick
and letting it dance.

From his side of the fire Billy Pogo
stared into Winnie's eyes
and saw all sorts of darkness,
some warm, some cold;
and behind it the flicking shadows
of children robbed of names.

Billy Pogo heard blind Winnie's words
before they shaped with sound -
Having feasted she was ready
for the last journey, and she begged
him to lead her.
But this could never be
because he was a Wiringin
and must always travel alone
to places beyond the death of others.

He rose and the fire's warmth
followed him like a creature tamed.
He ordered it back to the flames,
but it cringed on the verge of cold.

He ordered it again with a serpent-flick
in his eye, and it crossed to Winnie,
where it sat, waiting for her flame to die.

28.

FAILED POSTULANT

To sing Wawi
 into a new life
 was the last green thought
 to track before words
 shrivelled and scattered
 in the wind.

Here was a boy who might
 have shared an old man's death;
 received how thunder is hatched
 on a crow's wing, and why the moon
 whittles to a thin bone.

But the boy's bones were wrong.
 His skin was bleached by more
 than dusted clay,
 and his blood was flavoured
 by the bilge brine of an Irishman.

How could this boy have been a Wiringin?
 His eyes should have full-mooned
 the glint of magic, not blinked,
 and then waded blue shallows of reason.

This skull had shaped
 to fit Gubba's sunlit thinking.
 Gone was the massive bone-ridge
 where magic made its camp.
 Of all his tribe, only Billy Pogo
 had this dying bone marrowing
 the secrets of his people.

Upon dismissing the hybrid boy,
 Billy Pogo withdrew into his deep
 Wiringin brow and revised
 ancient rock markings
 and scrapings of song.

Wawi must leave him soon,
 slough magic's flicker,
 and be a snake again
 in a Bogan waterhole.

29.

CROW MORNING

The sun shook mist
from its hair, and moved
with its spears.

If only it would have lent some,
then both could have tracked
a feast and found his people,
but the sun was a lone hunter
and quick climber who left
Billy Pogo staring into ashes.

Then the old Wiringin saw a crow,
and soon heard the others.
They sat in the tree above him,
and yelled like Gubbas.

No, not Gubbas!
Snake flickering thoughts
coiled in him.
These crows were Kamilaroi men,
the northern enemies of long ago.

The big one cursed him, but Billy Pogo
was too far from his hidden sky-string,
and besides, all the magic had withered
along its length.

The other crows, all on one branch,
yelled and laughed at him -
even the most insignificant Kamilaroi man.

This was the work of an enemy Wiringin.
This was certain -
and the loudest and largest came closer,
and its whiskers spiked like rush grass,
and its blackness was stolen thunder.

He would have the caul-fat of this one,
and then the others would be a twig
of sparrows.

Wiringin fingers moved weakly
into ashes and banded
upon a stone.
They threw it at the loudest Kamilaroi
man and Billy Pogo thanked them.

Now all the fingers tore at crow,
tore the crowness
of that Kamilaroi man,
tore his feathers which remained
crow feathers, tore his skin
which remained crow skin,
and blood rushed -
but remained crow blood.

And kidney fat?
None!

Just the acid pips of crow kidney.
There was no Kamilaroi fat here
to make Billy Pogo strong.

It was just feather upon feather
of endless crow.

30.
TRANCE

Wawi had been there all his Wiringin life,
placed secretly during a shuffling dance
and heart beat of song.

But now the song was trance
and Daramulans came with
the faces and flit of ghosts

beckoning Wawi to leave
the gritting place of crystal
at its stanchion of bone.

The trance was song once warmed
by dancers in ochre and blood;
a song swept on a sunless pulse
to where earth and bone sinewed
and breathed as one:

A time of heroes out of sky gaps
and Daramulans flitting.

But now time was vest clock
ticking, and children calendering
thin days and shaping white rhyme.

Time, when dreaming
was the land's thoughts
feeling chosen ways with song,
and it was *everywhen*.
But time could be ordinary
with children, life trackings and at night
the resharpening of familiar stars.

Ordinary time was the singer,
not the song.

Billy Pogo in a trance
sings the serpent, feels blood
and sinew snap, and sees
a boy of scars; the boy he was,
living in the death of the old Wiringin
until knowledge invaded silence
like a smell.

Now, in the loosening grip
of coil and chant,
Wawi leaves him
 empty and cold
 like a cave.

Nobody is worthy
of the spark in the crystal,
so he watches the serpent,
its pattern of knowledge
fading as it moves aimlessly
 in its coils.

31.
LIVE BIRD LEAD

*Who is the sleeping man
in the gravelled dark
of Live-Bird Lead?*

*Bring light to his face
that we might know him,
nudge and then chide him.
This is no depth for sleep.*

*Did he hear you?
This is no depth -
Wait - there's a rug
more final upon him.
It is the first dust of him.*

*And his hands are clenched
like his face -
Open them.
See what he's holding.
It could be the wealth of him
that panics our flame.*

*Open his hands and if
there's gold in the grit of him
let it dazzle us.
It could be the spun soul of gravel
spooled on his palms.
Then we would praise him!*

*But there's only the smell
of dust and death's
cold blister.
Should we burrow him in
and leave him, or grapple
him skyward so the sun
can shrive him?*

32.
CONFLAGRATION

Balusters were in the air.
Architectonic thermals
were ghostly with gables and cowls.
Corbels and soffits vaporized
in crackling uplift.

Bindari hotel was burning.

Fenestration shattered, or melted
down brickwork seething to clinker.
Mullions were fickle with flames,
but hallways grew fierce
and rankled the attic.

Risers abandoned their treads
and a blistering newel-post
varnished the air.
What had been forest, and what
had been fashioned with spoke-shaven
measure, became incendiary.

Bindari hotel was burning.

Scotia was crackling like kindling
and purlins and rafters were snapping.
At ridge-guard a finial toppled
into corrugations of smoke and water.

The great hotel which had mimicked
Kalgoorlie in concept and brick
became a chronicle of chimneys.

Chimney stacks stood gawkish
in sunlight, their fractured
mantel-slabbing marble-cold
with smoke stench and ash,
a dank tribute to gold.

33. SCAPEGOAT

*Bring in the clown-king
and shake him from his suit.
There's trickery under his hat,
not of rabbit or dove,
but the spark of him
waiting to burn.*

*We'll delve into the distance of him
for that mythic smoulder
as old as cave ash.
Hail and sleet might fall
onto Buree Techala
but that mountain still burns.*

*Bring in the Wiringin
before he ignites the town.*

*Rumour says he's the brother of fire
and the hotel burnt when he chafed
its joinery with his gimlet eye.
Rumour says extinguish him before
he inflames the rum corners of Roache's,
Goodie Penman's brittle tunes
and the Cyanide tubs of Live Bird Lead.*

*We didn't know when we played him
at sceptre and orb that the moon-glow
of his eyes would flare into hostelry flame.*

*We gave him a spoon upon
spoon's simplicity of sound
and humoured him with listening,
but he turned Old Teddy's coat
into a threadless shadow
and monkey flames leapt from it
into gracious rooms.*

*It's time to fear his chattering spoons,
his threadbare lapels and buttons of bone.
Snatch him from his brow-ridge
and dowse his ancient fire.*

34.

JUDGEMENT

Three days after the conflagration,
and myriad sightings of the ferreted king,
Teddy Grace lurched from river dapple
like one hard pressed by dreams.

It was midday on payable returns
from feldspathic rock and quartzite,
as Teddy Grace fossicked his thoughts
along Bivanna Street and past
Goodie Penman's to the regiment of chimneys.

At the most southern stack
the publican dawdled with the pallor
of one bereft of a material world
of cups and plate; and of crafted
shapes, lovingly aligned and bevelled.

Teddy roused him from gaping hearths,
from blobbed cathedral glass,
and fractured Marulan marble.

The publican acknowledged Bindari's Crier
with a nod, but it was Teddy's
nature to proclaim:

*It wasn't poor old Billy
who lit it, yet you hunt
him like a dog.*

But these words snagged on frazzled
paddock and the publican's response
was char:

Then who!
was shouted back by one
whose prejudice was tightly
mortised in unconvivial air.

Teddy's words were rondels of reason,
but the publican remained oblique,
and the breath he drew through dottle
stoked resolution in his pipe.

There must be proof!
was Teddy's final plea
but the publican walked away,
roofpitch and stanchion
still blazing in his head.

35.
SEARCH

Nobody will manacle this man,
although they seek him, shake
wilga branches near Roache's;
imagine his eyes and his brow's history.

They fossick his footprints
near New Poppet Head
and its fifteen stampers,
but the dust is blank of him
and the tailings dumb.

They mull along Ten Mile Ridge
until the day gulps for breath
and crouched rocks seem to rise
with a shuffle that's painted,
and tall trees blink.

Nobody will manacle this man
in a place of gruel
and four-walled terror,
even though Sergeant Kenny
and one-striped Crowhurst
dwindle on horseback into closed
gullies when they might as well
canter the sky.

A shadow was seen
at the battery plant
and a glance which falters
English blood was reported
by William Fen.

The stars above the fire-tubs
seemed colder and an owl
was shot for its moon-glow.
(It was Peter Gormley who panicked
when he heard it calling)

Nobody will manacle this man
although his magic withers
and his quartz is dull.

It was Teddy Grace who reported
a great snake subsiding
into the Bogan.
It was Teddy Grace who saw
a scarred man rise out
of the water's thin ripple
like a thought.

It was a trackless man
who stooped and offered
the Town Crier an old coat-
And there was a light
on and through its thousand threads.

Teddy Grace recognised,
but denied it, and cried out.
He was heard because resonance
was his daily bread.

Yet when he came to tell
Bindari it was silence;
it was an eloquence only
he and the river had heard
near a place of scars.

36.
RESERVE

Office of Board of Protection,
dated, December 1, 1908.

*Sir,.... regarding the erection
of Aborigine huts at Bulgandramine
I now beg to inform you that
the tender of James Guy was accepted
and includes enclosed fencing
at that place.
The Aborigines will assist.*

Four Clydesdales in exhausted
Wilga shade watched in their calm,
yet blinkered way, proceedings of Empire.

Ten rolls of netting wire, and assorted
gauges of plain and barbed, were stowed
and lashed to wagon rails.

Crowbars, shovels, pliers and axes
were clustered and recorded
by Peter Gormley who had been
seconded to click his tongue and drive.

Sergeant Kenny came forward,
the fifteen stampers on Live Bird Lead
drumming his position and self-esteem.
His bearing pouted military upon
Tommy Waterloo, Old Granny Wishbone
and the normally ebullient Cubby.

One-armed Timmy, Jarranbowie Jack
and Tiny Ribbons, survivors
of the so called 'Bogan Skirmish'
where Meroo Merah was flayed,
all stepped forward under the tight
surveillance of Crowhurst.

Jarranbowie Jack baulked
at a sunlit edge which darkened
into wagon and horse rump.
He gazed high above New Poppet-Head's
crushed geologies onto interlocked
stands of pine which murmured *Wiringin*
and the word became a spark
in the sap of sombre green.

Jarranbowie Jack flinched
as his spirit flitted across
a goldfield, and as his body
was secured by Crowhurst
with a chain.

37. COMMOTION

There was renewed commotion
at Live Bird Lead,
the miners having lately raised
their grim man from gravelled
dark to hallow him fit for psalms.

There was scuffling shanty clearance,
and abandonment of the half made
sconce on Bickman Gully.
Gospel Oak mine had halted,
along with Australia Star United
and Black Snake Reef.

Teddy Grace's proclamatory throat
was mimicked by the anvil lout
at Smithie's Corner:

*The old spoon clapper
has spiked the boiler
at Poppet Head and there's
not a blister on him!*

And men drew close
as if to praise a priest of fire,
or scoff, or bray for blood.

Each in his own way's telling
would snatch a thread
and weave hyperbole from it.

Who was this steaming man
with the rind of magic on him?
All of those with usual minds
would have been rendered
third-degree, or jellied.

Gustav Schmidt had been
thrown a rope to bind him,
after the furnace quenched
and its vapour steadied in a cloud.

The glistening Wiringin
with his muddied clothes beside him
was knotted to a wattle
on the verge of flower.

And most of the mob withdrew.
There was no magic in the shadow
and sneer of Constable Crowhurst
with his stripe, or in the ink
and book of Sergeant Kenny.

38.
ESCAPE

In that yellow moment
between the last miner
averting from Billy Pogo bound,
and the encroachment of Crowhurst
and Kenny across gravelled incline,
a Wiringin keened his ancient
mind and disappeared.

Crowhurst purged himself
of words posturing as deeds,
as he kicked the tree whose sudden
flowers seemed to bubble in the sun
and over reach pervasive green.

Sergeant Kenny, contained as a book,
gazed across a currajong hill
which readjusted its subtle blank
of wilga and belah to orchestrate
a breeze..

From ridged wattle to wilga,
and down to mullock, scolding
apostle birds challenged Crowhurst
to check their biblical number,
and prosecute if a thirteenth
perched in masquerade, flouting
the predictable world.

But Billy Pogo with trackless ease
was already in lower Struggle Street
and mottled unseen to Bindari's
watch-house cells.

During a journey known to crows
and clouds, he had shaped Jarranbowie Jack
tip toe in air, but it wasn't sky-cord
and it wasn't crystal.

The Wiringin now clung to the gaol
wall and moved to a barred gap
where Jarranbowie Jack gyred
in confined silence, left to right
while the flitch beam braced his myth:

Beyond a finger gripped sill,
and out on a crushed ridge
where Kenny and Crowhurst
began to move, a shining bird
hovered coldly on its ethereal string,
and a heedless wattle tree
erupted golden in the sun.

39. LAST FIRE

Near his last fire at the edge
of Bindari Mine, Billy Pogo
took off the swallow-tail coat
and threw it to the flames.

Slow fingered green flames fumbled it,
but orange and blue ones grouped, prodded,
and found the weakness in its weave.

Billy Pogo threw the top hat into the fire -
Some smoke held its breath under it
and red flames were flamboyant.
 The white smoke turned blue
 and the hat was gone.

The rest of the Gubba clown-suit
was fed to the fire, and all
the flames tip-toed with applause.
Billy Pogo sat with his own body now,
his tribal scars grimaced with fire light
and his singing was low.

He took the knife which had tempered
its blade with burning.
It cut his chest and blood
moved to the shape of sorrow.

He became a corroboree of mouths
red with song, while startled
Gubbas gathered at a distance.
Their old clown king was being usurped
by this madman endangering the town,
and blocking its pathway to gold.

He must be silenced, because one
who assails himself with knife jabs
and such dark singing is alien
to the real King, and Empire.

But the man with Dartmoor's shadow
had no love of kings -
or the king's men with their
watch-houses and allotted powers.

He had bestowed monarchy
in a glowing rim on one
adept with spoons and fire,
and the time had come to encircle
him again, and this they did.

Others arrived from the grit
and flicker of the hour,
to reshape displeasure:
to think of gold too thinly
speckled in its reef, to brood
over a dog that bit, and Goodie
Penman's illusive dower.

They all remembered a boiler stabbed
and the grand hotel obscene with fire.

And one not known for want of malice
provoked the heat with images
of the pallid man whose breath
had been stolen in Live Bird Lead.

But what was that sudden
breach in wilga shadow
and the distorting rotund form
distending the leaf-edged night?

It was a wheeze of man
with an elocutionist's book
of sound spittled on his tongue.

It was crier and bellman
forgoing glibness to fumble
an unrehearsed defence
which had the potency of blood
because it was ordinary and human.

In the shaping mouth
where words are freed
from the nip and dab of ink
and borne as sound,
one word rose above the rest
to placate the night.

Atonement was that word, honed
to simplicities in gathered air,
yet still denied, when such
a word's thesaurus might have shone
more brightly than all Bindari's gold.

In that mattocky and ignorant
dark, Teddy cried in vain
to faces chipping down
to an under-reef of fear.

•

It was Edward T. Grace, now crier
of expletives who moved
to shield a spearless man
whose eyes were embedded embers,
and whose gapes of blood
predated agony and psalms.

There was a pause of miners
at the blistering edge
and then a surge upending a bellman
onto voided feldspathic rock.

Suddenly there was fear,
and it was ancient, and had
been often crowned as king.
It closed its mind upon Billy Pogo
and then tightened its circle of men
onto a knife which had tempered
its blade with burning.

Next morning there was a hanging
man in the wattle tree.
There was no ash of his quick fire,
no remnant of his coat, or song.

40.
SKULL

Who would care now that words
were shattered, and the song-line broken?
Who would warm this cold bone
where blood and words once bloomed?

Who could explain this bone
once layered with thought
and carved by language into coherent
pathways, and complexities of sound?

Who could journey this abandoned skull
where magic once clung, its million
dark wings quivering as one, and when
night dropped, flitting into mystic
flight to confront forebodings and secretive stars?

Who would dare travel the calcified depths
of Billy Pogo and hear his real name
whispering clues to vast mythologies
shaped when rivers suckled bed-rock
and readied themselves for journeys
into oceanic greens and blues?

Would there be nobody to net
the bright spawnings of words
from conscious rock and bone;
catch their silver and shadow,
feast upon them, and at the campfire's
dreaming circle dance old metaphors,
and resume the journey?

CHAPTER 2



BILLY POGO'S FIRE

A Stage Play

By Ken Stone

SYNOPSIS

The play has an Aboriginal land rights issue at its centre and the sacred land claim, that of a long disused gold mine and its vicinity, sets the scene for conflict in a small Western N.S.W. town. Conflict is exacerbated because the mining company wants to reopen the mine, and this would mean full employment to a depressed rural community.

The land claim is given specific and human focus with the existence in the hotel of Billy Pogo's skull. Billy Pogo was the last Wiringin or 'Clever Man' of Bindari and he was murdered when the mine was operating at fever pitch early this century.

Lionel Smith, a high profile Aboriginal activist goes to Bindari to secure the Wiringin skull for decent burial. The hotel, mine and Anglican church are focal points to the action which involves, amongst others, a wavering, essentially decent publican, an Anglican priest suffering spiritual inertia, a 'red-neck' shearer bitterly unemployed and a palaeontologist unable to compromise his scientific quest.

The play attempts to examine human strengths and weaknesses manifesting themselves in the context of church and hotel and with the sombre gold mine/sacred site as the pivotal symbol of spirituality locked in a struggle with material well being.

CHARACTERS:

John Fielding: An academic palaeontologist about fifty five years old.

Rupert Fielding: An Anglican minister about sixty years old. John's brother.

Narella Fielding: Rupert's fostered Aboriginal daughter about twenty years old.

Lionel Smith: An Aboriginal activist about thirty years old.

Mace McNamara: Bindari Publican - about fifty five years old.

Nola McNamara: Mace's wife - same age.

Brian Glasson: Bindari's policeman and Vin's brother - about thirty five years old.

Vin Glasson: A shearer - about thirty eight years old.

ACT 1 SCENE I.

Hotel. (Evening). MACE stands at the bar sorting glasses. VIN barges in and gives a victory shout.

Vin: We've got them knackered!

Mace: It's not confirmed yet.

Vin: Pig's arse! Them judges aren't as silly as they look. It calls for one of them better ports you got there.

Mace: All it said was the mine presented a strong case. It looks favourable, that's all they said.

(MACE reaches for a cheaper port)

Vin: No - the George Wyndham Tawny - and put it in a middy glass.

(MACE fills a small glass and pushes it along the bar towards Vin who gulps, and pouts with optimism)

Mace: I'll believe it when I hear the big machinery moving in. Now come on. I've told everyone I'm closing early.

Vin: Settle down! We'll get them big raffle nights going again - there'll be a mob of real drinkers in here. You'll be able to paint this joint - get a few swivel chairs like at the club in Wangara.

Mace: Nothing has happened! Some loud mouthed journalist got a warm feeling. I'll believe it when I see it - Look at Kakadu and Ayer's Rock - Oola-bloody ru.

Vin: Oola what?

Mace: They'll have the whole country a sacred site if we aren't careful.

Vin: *(looking around)* Get a new dart board too, Mace, and a couple of fresh sets of feathers.

Mace: All the brawling over that hill has almost ruined me. There used to be a bit of law and order here twenty years ago - bloody sacred sites!

Vin: It looked touchie outside last night - I stirred them abos a bit but they held back.

Mace: Come on, Vin. Some of them want work too.

Vin: Work?

Mace: You know as well as I do that there are good workers amongst them.

Vin: Please yourself but we need that mine to reopen, or the town's finished. I've got my name on the top of the list and I put my boy's name down too. He'll be sixteen by the time they stop farting about and start. I've even tried to talk him into joining the police force.

Mace: I thought one in the family was enough.

Vin: Probably. Anyway the young bugger's all prick and ribs like a drover's dog, and he won't learn.

Mace: The mine's not going to be all roses. They're planning a fair bit of tunnelling.

Vin: Bullshit! I'll get my boy at the wheel of something big - he's not burrowing around in the ground like a bloody rabbit, if I can help it. There's plenty of useless country up there - let's rip it open and look around.

Mace: *(refilling VIN'S glass)* Hurry up. I hear lights have been seen at the mine.

Vin: Probably the professor.

Mace: Not at this time! I think it's trouble.

Vin: One of the company people celebrating - that's all -

Mace: You won't get them budging out of Sydney 'til they have to. *(confidentially)* Someone saw a car and a couple of black fellows just on dark. *(pause)* One drove off about eight and one stayed.

Vin: *(quietly)* You don't think it's got anything to do with that letter that Sydney bloke sent you?

Mace: Then why didn't they just come straight here?

Vin: You didn't answer it, so they might be planning a raid on you. As I said the abos were a bit whispery last night.

Mace: Those few local blokes can growl all they like. I barred them, didn't I? I don't care whether they're black, white or brindle as long as they behave. I won't have bush lawyers coming in here saying I'm racist.

Vin: You were a bit sudden on them.

Mace: I've got rules! You've been barred before.

Vin: That wasn't my fault!

Mace: It's never any bugger's fault.

Vin: He trod on my dart, didn't he? - and all he got was a warning.

Mace: He apologised - I heard him. You didn't have to king hit him.

Vin: *(Stirring)* That city bloke's come after them bones you've got planted away.

Mace: I won't be pushed around.

Vin: Not even if fifteen of his mates rush in here with mattock handles? -

Mace: I'd call the police.

Vin: There's only Brian! And he might be out along the highway booking someone.

Mace: I must've been crazy mentioning that letter to you - Just forget it!

Vin: That blackfella mightn't -

Mace: *(aggressively)* You just live in a little air bubble around you!

Vin: What?

Mace: Look, I've got nothing against Aborigines but a court case is on - and you'd have me big note myself with an old blackfellow's skull.

Vin: Make ya point.

Mace: *(patting Vin's cheek and adopting a sad tone)* A Sydney reporter grabs the story and a swarm of T.V. cameras turn up on the pub lawn like grasshoppers. A couple of old black women cry on the Midday Show. Public sympathy is stirred and the politicians panic - and we lose the lot.

Vin: Jesus! - I didn't think of that.

Mace: It's called surviving - and it doesn't take much to go under.
Imagine Bindari without a pub?

Vin: I can't.

Mace: Go on - try.

Vin: It's impossible. I'd rather be dead.

Mace: That's why we have to be careful. It's a matter of pride, too - and family. My old grandfather poured his money and soul into this place. He made a pile down Victoria way dealing in land and cattle. Finally he lobbed here and fell in love with the idea of it all. Kalgoorlie was going to have nothing on it. *(looking about the room)*. A real architect designed this place. They didn't find it in any threepenny pattern book *(looking up)*. See that ceiling?

Vin: *(looking)* So?

Mace: *(expansively)* Wunderlich.

vin: It needs a lick of something.

Mace: No - See the banksia and waratah pressed into the metal. Pretty isn't it - and priceless.

Vin: There's fly shit all over it.

Mace: Times are tough but that's easily fixed - it's the quality under it. That's what you fight for *(pause)* I'm not a mean bugger. I'd have answered that letter under normal circumstances.

Vin: It did come across as a bit pushy. There are ways of going about things.

Mace: *(reassured)* The first thing I'm going to do when the mine reopens is bring back happy hour on Friday. The wife will

serve up a few little potatoes in butter, and a bit of decent cheese.

Vin: Is it far away?

Mace: When the mine reopens, I said.

Vin: No, the skull.

Mace: Why?

Vin: Let me check it out.

Mace: You'll only big mouth about it.

Vin: No, I won't! Me and my boy have too much to lose.

Mace: Forget about it!

Vin: And I will too - 'specially when you get grabbed by the short and curlies!

Mace: All right! I'll show you, but go on about it outside and you're barred for good.

Vin: Fair enough.

(MACE unlocks a safe under the bar and brings out a small cardboard box)

Vin: It's - in there??

Mace: What did you expect - a bloody coffin? Come on have a gawk at it and I'll put it away.

(MACE undoes a piece of twine holding the cardboard flaps down. He turns the flaps back and VIN attempts to handle the contents).

Don't touch it! I noticed some of the teeth were loose.

Vin: *(His head close to the box)*. Some have gone.

Mace: They're meant to be gone. He was initiated.

Vin: So?

Mace: They knocked out his front teeth.

Vin: Who did?

Mace: His mates, I suppose - or his uncles. *(MACE refastens the cardboard flaps)*. It happened to all of them when they were young.

Vin: Who was he?

Mace: I've told you enough -

Vin: That bullet hole looks bad, Mace. Hard to miss, isn't it?

Mace: I'll tell you - then you forget, OK? This old fellow was Billy Pogo.

Vin: So?

Mace: He was a magic man - the brother of fire.

Vin: *(laughs)* I'm real scared - pull the other one!

Mace: That letter writer went on about burying the skull up at the mine, but he's got no chance now considering what's happening.

Vin: I reckon!

- John: *(John enters briskly)* Good evening, Vin *(to MACE)* My usual little one, then it's bed for me.
- Vin: *(lifting his glass to John)* Don't rush about like a blue arsed fly
- Have a proper drink.
- Mace: He reckons the mine's in the bag but I reckon he's dreaming.
Did the missus get that extra blanket to you O.K.?
- John: She's up there now - never stops does she?
- Mace: We're both rushed off our feet. I'll put a girl back on once I get a clearer picture of the future. *(He passes JOHN a small brandy)*
- Vin: *(to JOHN)* Give them fossils a miss and we'll catch some real fish. I know the best water hole in the district. A mate of mine got a few the other day baiting up with bits of bacon fat. The buggers love it.
- John: I'll take you up on that one day, Vin.
- Vin: In the morning, then.
- John: No - Time's running out on me. I've got to be back in Sydney in a couple of days.
- Vin: Last month I reeled in a cod that must've been eight kilo - just like the old days. I'm dead against blokes dropping in sticks of dynamite - that's not sport.
- John: It's certainly drastic -
- Vin: You might get more joy with them fossils if you use a few sticks *(confidentially)* I know where to lay my hands on half a box.

- John: *(laughing)* Hell no! Patience and luck is all I need. It's even slower than real fishing.
- Vin: *(to MACE)* You should get a few more big fish skulls mounted on the walls and be done with other sorts.
- Mace: That's enough! *(to JOHN)* What about another quick one?
- John: Not now. In the morning the carrier from Wangara's dropping off more packing cases. It's all right if he backs right up to the verandah?
- Mace: Go your hardest.
- John: I've got to finish up in a few days. Other duties call.
- Vin: It beats me how you lot have the nerve to hold out your hand each fortnight.
- Mace: *(sharply)* We've been through all that!
- Vin: My missus wanted to know what you do exactly. I didn't remember much of what you told me - just enough to say Upper Devonian Period and get chased outside with the broom for talkin' filth. *(unseen by JOHN, VIN winks at MACE)*. What exactly did you say was found just over at Canowindra a while back?
- John: Rhipidistians.
- Vin: Rhipid - Rhip -
- John: - idistians.
- Vin: Spot on - and?
- John: They were long bodied and covered with thick rhomboidal scales.

Mace: *(laughing)* Half a dozen shearers, were they?

Vin: Watch it!

Mace: A joke, Joyce. *(all laugh)*.

Vin: *(to JOHN)* You're not looking for rhip - whatsits, though are you?

John: Not exactly.

Mace: He's taking the mickey out of you - ignore him.

Vin: No - I've got a thirst for knowledge. Got to be paid first, have you - Professor?

John: No - I won't have that said.

Vin: Tell me then.

Mace: And that's the end of it.

John: I'm searching for a curious class of extinct fish known as placoderm.

Vin: A bit like a mullet?

John: Not at all. The antiarch - the one in which I'm specialising - had the pectoral fins modified into long paddle-like appendages.

Vin: Why?

John: *(absorbed)* We can only speculate on that but I've found a couple of perfect fossils here in Bindari showing the antiarch in the cusp of that change over.

Vin: Eh?

John: From fin to paddle.

Vin: Got it! I'll tell my missus later - word perfect.

Mace: Yeah - and turkeys are baritones.

John: *(Observing the cardboard box)* What have we got here - more of Vin's tomatoes?

Mace; *(gripping the box)* You're not meant to ask.

John: Oh?

Vin: You'd better show him or he might think it's marijuana.

Mace: Well it's not! *(He puts the box under the bar)*

John: No problem. I'd better go.

Mace: *(confidentially)* Be on your guard at the mine tomorrow.

Vin: Car lights were seen a while ago.

Mace: We reckon someone's still there.

John: Who?

Vin: A blackfellow -

Mace: - from Sydney.

John: There's room for both of us.

Mace: He mightn't think so.

- Vin: He might think it's his. He mightn't give a stuff about fish with paddles.
- John: There's been no final ruling on it yet - or have I missed something?
- Vin: It's as good as ours.
- Mace: Not quite -
- John: I feel for them - It was theirs for thousands of years. It's sad that it was such a sacred place.
- Vin: *(aggressively)* What's sad about it? Let them use the town cemetery like the rest of us.
- John: It's not the same. They're a very spiritual people. It's important that their ancestor's bones go back into sacred land.
- Vin: That's bullshit! That mine means jobs.
- John: Unfortunately there are two sides to everything.
- Mace: It's a grab for power and we have to have our wits about us.
- (laughing)* You intellectuals are all the same. You can't see over the university fence.
- Vin: That's what I reckon.
- John: *(Attempting a retreat)* It's far too complicated for the three of us to work out.
- Mace: Try this thought for starters. Let's just say you find something big down there today - Not the first goldfish - but the first whale.
- John: That's highly unlikely.

Mace: Let's be hypothetical.

Vin: *(out of his depth)* Yeah!

Mace: You find it today and need a fortnight to chip it out and number it - or whatever you do - but tomorrow the Abos by some fluke get ownership of the mine.

Vin: - and piss you off because they've got Mabo, haven't they?

Mace: What then? -

John: Well, I'd -

Mace: - and remember, they're a spiritual people. The place will be a grave.

John: I - I'd respect their position.

Mace: - and lose your great find? I've got you all wrong - fossils mustn't mean that much to you then.

John: What I'm finding is the closest I've come to something really big.

Vin: You have found a whale, then?

Mace: *(to VIN)* Shut up and concentrate *(to JOHN)* Well?

John: I'd reason with them. I'm sure they'd see the value in what I'm doing.

Mace: Fossils are that special, eh? - even to them.

Vin: And gold is only the shit that would give us jobs!

Mace: Stop raving about that and give him a say!

John: Gold means the total destruction of the site. Look at the damage they did a hundred years ago and that was only with shovels and picks.

Mace: *(to VIN)* He's a greenie now. *(to JOHN)* If the decision goes against us we'll all be out including you. We can't afford to be generous.

John: We took their land, and denied the fact they'd lived on it for thousands of years.

Vin: The bloody place was empty, except for a few of them, and a heap of fucking kangaroos!

John: There's no sense continuing this argument -

Vin: What do you make at that university?

John: I've told you - I teach - among other things.

Vin: What do you make? - forty, fifty, sixty thousand, or what?

John: Around sixty - and like any job it's not without its worries.

Vin: *(snapping)* Then I've got no worries, because I've got no friggin' job!

Mace: Drop it Vin! He's paid to teach bright kids about fossils - so let's leave it at that.

John: *(retreating)* We'll talk about it some other time.

Vin: Sure. I've got heaps of time - but don't leave it too long because me and my boy are going to be flat out. Bulldozers and dynamite are going to be heard around here. Them fish of yours are going to need their little paddles.
BLACKOUT.

ACT I SCENE II

The Church. (Same evening) RUPERT FIELDING stands in the pulpit. He wears his clerical shirt and collar, but also still wears a rather frivolous barbecue-type apron: NARELLA arrives unnoticed at the door during Rupert's reading.

Rupert: *(Sonorously)*. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were as the flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

(He takes a glass of water from the pulpit, has a mouthful and gargles extravagantly and swallows).

Boys and girls, that was the sound of God's many waters!

Narella *(amused)* Don't you dare do that at Sunday school!

Rupert: Narella - Hullo! You caught me updating my act.

Narella *(laughs)* And don't tell them about God being all those terrible things - the little kids will have nightmares.

Rupert *(leaving the pulpit)* But it's working! I see what you mean now. A bit of novelty, like on television *(excited)*. I had the infant group enthralled last week. I brought along a snake in a bottle. It gave a bit of excitement to Genesis.

(He kisses her on the cheek) You look smart.

Narella Oh - the hair-cut? Thanks.

Rupert *(pause)* I didn't think I'd be seeing you until the new year. You aren't going to Lismore?

Narella Not for a while. Aunty Lill's gone to Brisbane. Cathy's baby's due anytime and Jimmy's cleared off to Cairns. He's taken

little Shane with him. Cathy's beside herself and Aunty's furious.

Rupert I see -

Narella I can't imagine how you could -

Rupert I'm not totally out of touch.

Narella I didn't mean it like that. It's just that it's all so complicated. Poor Cathy.

Rupert I warned you it might be difficult.

Narella I know - but I love Aunty. I'm glad I finally met her - and Cathy's been real nice to me.

Rupert It might be a good idea not to get too involved.

Narella But I am involved - and you encouraged it. All families have their problems.

Rupert I know - it's just that I'm thinking of your studies.

Narella I'm talking about the real world - not Uni.

Rupert - or Bindari Anglican church.

Narella You said that -

Rupert It's a shame you left that nice flat I found you. The landlady seemed so supportive.

Narella She was a bloody old busy body - and a racist.

Rupert I don't think that's fair.

- Narella Dad - she put on a big act for you. She was earning Brownie points in heaven. I couldn't even invite my friends over.
- Rupert Not all of them at once... I think that was reasonable. She was caring enough to phone me.
- Narella It was my flat.
- Rupert Very well. That's done with but Redfern - And you've told me hardly anything -
- Narella I'm with two girlfriends. It's a terrace - freshly painted, new carpet and most of the time we're either at Uni, doing assignments or asleep trying to escape all thought of lectures. *(pause)* It's not a brothel.
- Rupert *(Hushed)* I wasn't suggesting that. I want you to be safe that's all *(touching her shoulder)* I've been counting the days. *(pause)* I've had dinner on hold but I'm afraid I'm losing it. You insisted you'd be here early. Your tutor couldn't make it?
- Narella He's here.
- Rupert Then go out and get him. He's very articulate on television. I'm sure I'll like him.
- Narella Lionel insisted I drop him off at the mine. You won't be seeing him tonight - but I did try -
- Rupert It's so forsaken up there.
- Narella He has a torch and blankets. He has all sorts of vague memories of Bindari and wants to be alone with them tonight.
- Rupert He's very committed, isn't he?
- Narella We all like him but he insists on being a koori morning, noon and night.

Rupert And you?

Narella No drastic changes - I'm going to Florence before I go to Lake Mungo.

Rupert There's nothing wrong with that.

Narella Tell Lionel -

Rupert But he's been to England.

Narella We didn't get to see any slides of The Strand or Trafalgar Square. He's become a bit strange since he returned. We all think he's seen too many koori bones with numbers and labels on them.

Rupert He's heard the news?

Narella What news?

Rupert A while ago - the decision could possibly come down in favour of the mining company.

Narella Damn them! I should go and tell him.

Rupert Leave it until tomorrow. You know what the media's like.

Narella What's the use? I'm going to bed.

Rupert But dinner?. Nothing's worked out this evening. I hoped the four of us could relax together.

Narella Four of us?

Rupert John - but he had excuses.

Narella I hoped he'd gone - the mine's using him to stir trouble.

- Rupert I don't think it's that sinister.
- Narella It's probably just as well your dinner didn't go as planned.
- Rupert There's still us. I'll revive it. You must be famished.
- Narella *(laughing)* It depends. It's not chump chops and onion gravy?
- Rupert Indeed, no! We put ourselves out for special guests at St. Stephens. Guess again.
- Narella Rissoles and mashed pumpkin.
- Rupert You'd never guess - it's Chicken Cordon Bleu in sherry cream sauce. It was magnificent an hour ago but like all things -
- Narella It's not one of those sweet little chickens you were given at Easter?
- Rupert They all grew into young giants. The congregation was forever bringing scraps *(pause)* I'll give the others away. I could never do it again.
- Narella You killed it?
- Rupert The chicken's death is a pre-requisite for Cordon Bleu - unfortunately. Having done the deed - clumsily, I lost grip of the brute's legs and it bounced like the devil on springs towards the church. I thought it was going to leap the rectory fence and batter these hallowed walls.
- Narella *(laughing)* Dad - you're crazy sometimes. I'm going down the street to get a pie. *(She turns to exit. Rupert follows)*
- Rupert Delicious flavours were wafting to the belfry an hour ago and the neighbours' dogs were all a frenzy.

Narella I believe you.

Rupert Look - about that pie - you'd better bring back two.

BLACKOUT

ACT 1 SCENE III

Mine (about 11 a.m.) LIONEL *sits as if in a trance, staring at a wisp of smoke coming from the embers of the campfire.*

The local policeman, Brian Glasson, stands behind Lionel, a short distance away.

Brian: Hey! *(pause)* Hey, you!

(LIONEL startles, looks around and scrambles to his feet).

Lionel: What do you want?

Brian: Take it easy.

Lionel: I've done nothing.

Brian: I want to talk to you for a minute.

Lionel: Why? I was just leaving.

Brian: There's been a complaint.

(BRIAN advances and looks closer at LIONEL) Haven't I seen you before?

Lionel: I haven't been out this way since I was a kid.

Brian: The gold's too mixed up with gravel to be of interest to you- so what's the story? Why here?

Lionel: Should it matter?

Brian: I'll decide that, so don't make it hard.

Lionel: I camped here last night.

Brian: There have been complaints. I hoped you'd be gone by now.

Lionel: I didn't get much sleep.

Brian: No bloody wonder if you choose this spot *(he kicks the embers gently)* This fire -?

Lionel: Yeah, I lit it. If you're going to charge me you'd better get on with it.

Brian: All in good time.

(He squats closer to the fire ashes and pokes at the edges with a twig)

No marijuana butts, no syringes *(he looks around generally)*
No cans or sherry bottles.

Lionel: There wasn't a rock festival - like I said, I camped here.

Brian: *(standing)* There used to be a sign prohibiting drinking, bicycles, dogs and fires.

Lionel: What about breathing? Can I do that?

Brian: So I'm talking to a bush lawyer after all? This area isn't sacred - not yet.

Lionel: It's always been sacred.

Brian: There's talk of bulldozers. Nothing's sacred to them.

Lionel: What am I being charged with?

Brian: A couple of things come to mind - trespassing, lighting an illegal fire.

Lionel: The same old story - get the blackfellow.

Brian: That's a racist comment - did I say anything about colour?

Lionel: You don't have to.

Brian: I'm just doing my job. What's your name?

Lionel: Lionel Smith.

Brian: Are you sure?

Lionel: As sure as anyone can be.

Brian: I appreciate a sense of humour - Identification? Driver's licence?

(LIONEL takes out his wallet and hands over his licence)

Lionel Smith - it's a good likeness. What brings you to wonderful little Bindari?

Lionel: I have friends here.

Brian: It's hardly being friendly to them, hanging around up here.

Lionel: I needed to sit alone for a while and think. Does there have to be a law against that?

Brian: I'll ask a real silly question. Do you work?

Lionel: Yes, I work -

Brian: Where?

Lionel: At a University.

Brian: Where?

Lionel: In Sydney.

Brian: Fancy that - times change - and you like to sit alone and think. You must be a philosopher.

Lionel: I'm a tutor.

Brian: The penny drops!

I saw you on television. You were going on about ancestral bones, weren't you. You were all steamed up.

Lionel: I might've been.

Brian: Of course you were. You had a smart suit on, didn't you?

Lionel: Does it matter?

Brian: I almost remember the colour. Navy blue! No - that was the interviewer's. It was fawn - wasn't it?

Lionel: Yeah - it was fawn.

Brian: I like the forensic side. I've got bigger things in mind. A doberman could do this job.

Lionel: Could I have my licence back?

Brian: There was someone with you last night

Lionel: She's with her father.

Brian: She? Oh? - and her father?

Lionel: He's the Anglican minister -

Brian: *(laughing)* She's not long left school. Does he know about you?

Lionel: That's got nothing to do with you!

Brian: O.K. That's his problem - but if you're both up to other mischief, then it's mine - and I have a feeling you are. *(He gives LIONEL the licence)*. Why don't you move on?

Lionel: You're ordering me out of town?

Brian: I'm advising you out of town. Don't test my patience. You're on private property. Don't be seen here again.

Lionel: It might be ours again in a few days. You'll find that hard to wear won't you?

Brian: Move on - Dreamtime's over.

(LIONEL moves off - lights down)

Lionel: Who needs to train a doberman when you're here.

Brian: I didn't hear that for the moment. Now drive on!

Blackout

ACT 1 SCENE IV

The Mine (shortly after LIONEL's departure).

JOHN *taps at some rock samples. Lights up.* NARELLA *enters.* JOHN *sees her and stands. (There is a palpable tension between them, making their exchange rather forced).*

John: *(startled)* Narella! - you're the last person I expected to see amongst all these rocks.

Narella: I thought Lionel might still be up here.

John: I haven't been here long - I'd like to talk to your friend. I'm beginning to feel like a child robbing Grannie's lolly jar.

Narella: Hasn't Dad talked to you?

John: Forcefully - but I'm addicted to lollies.

Narella: It's not trivial!

John: I'm no good at analogies. This Lionel your father's been mentioning - I mean, he's - reasonable?

Narella: He's probably still up here somewhere *(pause)* He won't point a bone at you.

John: In my mental state that's all it would take. By the way, I like your new hair style.

Narella: *(Smiling)* That was Dad's feeble compliment. Why didn't he say straight out he hated it? Would you like some coffee? I thought Lionel might appreciate it.

(She holds the thermos out to him)

John: Thank you. My hands are a mess - could you?

(She pours coffee into the thermos cup).

You said you'd phone Jean. She's been asking about you.

(He takes the coffee. NARELLA recorks the thermos and puts it down).

Narella: I'd better find Lionel.

John: Can't we talk for a moment?

Narella: *(reluctantly)* All right. *(pause)* How is Jeannie?

John: Convinced she's about to fail second year medicine - but she's well. I've promised her a week in Bali if she passes.

Narella: She might appreciate it more if she fails.

John: Can't afford to think like that. I know, fail or not, why don't I take you both to dinner? I know a top little place in Balmain. What do you say?

Narella: Sure - if you and Jeannie want to -

John: Of course we do! I'll get your father to give me your phone number,

Narella: No - I'll ring.

John: I won't be put off - it's a date *(pause)* Thanks for the coffee. Look, I know I'm in the wrong place at the wrong time, but that's me. I should've found my fossils years ago and made a dash for it.

Narella: *(looking across the open cut mine)* Once when Jeannie was staying with us, Dad brought us up here to see the pigeons *(looking up)*. Amazing isn't it - the way they let themselves go

limp and free fall. *(laughing)* We wanted Dad to make us a long rope ladder so we could climb down and visit them. We were certain it all opened up down there into blue sky and green meadows like in a fairy tale. Jeannie imagined all the pigeons lived in a special golden palace that only they and children could see.

John: That's a lovely story.

Narella: I wonder if Jeannie remembers it.

John: Why don't you ask her?

Narella: I told Lionel about it.

John: That's nice.

Narella: He called it a romantic Gubba construct and said not to forget the hundreds of Wiradjuri spirits destroyed here.

John: Oh!

Narella: How much is the mine paying you?

John: What do you mean?

Narella: It eggs you on to show its contempt for us.

John: You all read too much into it. I'm a scientist *(he sits the cup onto the thermos)* If the mine wins, the bulldozers take over. If the Aborigine's win, it's closed for good - so I scavenge while I can -

Narella: I don't think I want to have dinner with you.

John: But Jeannie will be disappointed. She -

Narella: What does she care? We're in different worlds now, aren't we? And all you care about's bloody fossils and making a big name for yourself.
(NARELLA *exits*. JOHN *follows*)

John: That's totally unfair!
(*He returns to retrieve the thermos and moves to exit*)

It's my hunch there's also a rich stratum of rhipidistians no more than a few more metres down. That's even more astounding than a golden palace.

(JOHN *exits*. NARELLA *reappears with* LIONEL)

Narella: Come on! You're lucky you weren't arrested. What if that Gunjie comes back?

Lionel: We can't let him bluff us - This will always be ours -

My family left here when I was seven but Sydney was hopeless - Dad in and out of gaol. I remember, just faintly, sitting with him in a park near a big tree. My little brother thought he'd just gone to sleep (*pause*). My Mum struggled on for a while but she lost me and Neville. He was taken away first and then they sent me down south to some white people. I kept clearing out and soon got packed off to the catholics. Growing up seemed to be forever. I was too late finding Mum, and I gave up trying to find my brother. I started off doing all sorts of ordinary things - picking grapes and cherries - catching chickens. I soon started to read about our old people - the bits and pieces picked up by anthropologists: blokes who wore shiny-arsed trousers and had safe jobs at universities. Most of what they wrote sounds only halfway there. The old people wouldn't have told Gubb what really lived in their brains - especially those Wiringin. They'd sit at the edge and stay real quiet. But then I wonder why Billy Pogo decided to take all that knowledge with him. Why didn't he take a chance with someone (*pause*) You're like that, aren't you? You won't take a chance.

Narella: All this could drag on forever - anyway what's the point? All this aggro just to bury a few old bones.

Lionel: Not just a few old bones! - Dogs bury bones. You'd better think a bit more about this. It's easy to sit at Uni and get all angry and say we should change things. Out here is where it has to change - and it is - just a bit at a time. It's up to us what we want to believe - we can't be like the old people but at least we can bury them properly. If their bones are in the right place they can still be part of their land - even visit it.

Narella: Do you really believe that?

Lionel: I believe more of it than you do. You've lived with the whites too long.

Narella: I know who I am! When I'm up north they don't go on the way you do. Auntie's too busy thinking about her family and the future. I'd be more useful up there helping Cathy when the baby comes.

Lionel: What's happening here is more important. Have you spoken to your aunt about what we're doing?

Narella: No - It's too depressing.

Lionel: It has to be done - and she'd agree. We have to set the past right - that's how you and I will get our shadows back.

(He moves a few steps towards the mine rim) I lit a fire last night like the old people did - just with speed and friction. I've done it before, but this time it was late and the grass was damp. When it lit I was so glad that I yelled to those pigeons. I heard more than their wings - I heard laughter. You think that's crazy, I suppose, but I get a different feeling here - the way the light shapes all those rocks and the way the trees reach out above it all. Is it stupid to think like that?

Narella: I guess not -

Lionel: I watched the smoke struggle out of the grass and suddenly a flame jumped up and seemed to dance - I saw its shadow on those rocks.

Narella: That was last night. We had some hope then. Where's your dancer now?

Lionel: It was Billy Pogo - he was here. I think the rest of his bones are here.

Narella: That sort of talk is just poetry - it's not real.

Lionel: But poetry can be real.

Narella: It sounds like the things my father says from the pulpit. Come on - being here is just asking for trouble.

BLACKOUT.

ACT 1 SCENE V

Church (later) Light on RUPERT at the pulpit. He is in a squatting position having just set a mouse trap. He stands and examines it with care. JOHN watches from the doorway.

Rupert: Sh, Johnny! Even talking might spring it.

John: I'd always imagined old Nick as being somewhat larger.

(He moves closer as RUPERT positions the trap near the base of the pulpit)

Rupert: Don't you believe it. He comes in all shapes and sizes but he's met his match this time. I've resorted to science - you'd be impressed - the delicacy of the setting, the strategic positioning and the bait - Ambrosia at twelve dollars a kilo.

John: A common cheddar would do.

Rupert: Let it die nibbling the best -

John: But isn't a mouse one of God's delicate works?

Rupert: I won't be shamed. One's been fouling the pulpit.

(He takes a straw broom and flicks at real or imagined droppings)

Whoever designed this extravagance left a gap at the base.

John: A niche for doubt?

Rupert: No, merely a place for mice to shit. There I go - swearing in here again. I'm fed up. I've lost two prayer books and I'm sure they've been shredded and put under here.

(He prods the base with the broom handle)

I should attach some boards but then the wretch might die, and I'm only assuming there's one. There might be a multitude - lurking.

John: Ah! The old theme of plague and pestilence. It makes science so dreary.

Rupert: Let's not get into that. Narella arrived home last night.

John: We clashed a while ago at the mine. I thought I'd better come and make peace.

Rupert: I had hoped she'd call on Jeannie.

John: Not yet.

Rupert: The Lismore connection isn't without its problems.

John: She'll work it through.

Rupert: You make it sound like a bad meal.

John: No - just family. I didn't charm her with my fossils, I'm afraid.

Rupert: It's where you're finding it. That's the problem.

John: The politics of it are tedious.

Rupert: Was Lionel there?

John: Just missed him. It was hard enough coping with Narella.

Rupert: The mine and you are being provocative. For God's sake call it quits!

John: I can't - not yet.

Rupert: I'm hearing all kinds of violent talk.

John: I need a couple of more days.

Rupert: Why don't you leave the pub and have some time here - just relaxing?

John: The pub suits me.

Rupert: It's easy to sympathise with both sides, but I can't tell Narella that.

John: She'd only see one side.

Rupert: And can you blame her?

John: I sympathise with them but there are fossils up there a palaeontologist would kill for.

Rupert: We all have vested interests. Mine is not to lose my daughter. Stop everything until we see what happens.

John: But this might be my only chance - while they're arguing over it.

Rupert: Why all this fuss now? The mine's been up there gathering pigeon dung for seventy years.

John: Don't even whisper that. Next we'll have the animal-lib people closing it off as a bird sanctuary (*conciliatory*) I know how you feel but I can't deny knowledge. I understand what Aboriginal idealists are doing and I can also see that the town has a chance to renew itself. Narella isn't a child. If you have to continually worry about offending her it might be better if she goes her own way.

Rupert: You might be able to function that way. When's the last time you relaxed with your children?

John: Jeannie and I communicate briefly toing and froing at the front door.

Rupert: That's what I mean -

John: I did my bit to help fledge them and now they've flown.

Rupert: It's not a zoology exercise.

John: I lost custody, didn't I?

Rupert: I think it suited you.

John: I had to make do. Geoffrey would be more settled now if I'd had him full time. His mother gave in to him too much but what could I do? Now he's selling encyclopaedias - and inferior ones at that. He could be well on his way to a Masters if he'd knuckled down - he had a real feel for biology - trouble is he was allowed to discover girls too early. His interest in the reproductive behaviour of crustaceans took a quantum plunge.

Rupert: Thank God for that.

John: I wish you and Jane could've had a heap of kids. I mean - with Narella - you knew it was going to be difficult.

Rupert: I enjoyed every minute of it.

John: You've done well under the circumstances. She's a credit to you.

Rupert: She's a credit to herself. Best of all she still comes home to me *(pause)* Jane would've hoped for that. I won't have you spoiling things.

John: You don't have to answer to her for me. Come on! I've been a thirty year slogger - this is my last chance of enjoying a little

prestige. Come outside (*he beckons RUPERT and they move to the churchyard bench.* JOHN retrieves a bag and takes out a rock sample).

I've hardly slept.

(*He passes it to RUPERT*)

Rupert: (*flatly*) It's a fish - or rather was a fish.

John: (*grabbing it*) It's almost perfect, and the most primitive antiarch I've seen. I'm working on a hunch it's the most primitive anyone has ever seen.

(RUPERT *laughs*) What's wrong.

Rupert: Scientists are passionate after all -

John: Of course they are.

Rupert: As well as being compulsive and obstinate.

John: I plead guilty to the lot (*referring to the fossil*) See the delicate imprint of the hinged paddles. What simple, honest shapes.

Rupert: God made us all different.

John: No, seriously! They're like a child's drawing, and I have you to thank.

Rupert: Steady on! Don't spread that around the town.

John: How else would I have found Bindari? You need to be fortified either by Christ or a bottle of rum to stay for more than a night.

Rupert: You should've visited me a bit more down the years and got this fossil fetish over with.

(NARELLA enters. JOHN quickly puts the fossil away)

Narella: (coldly to JOHN) Hullo. (to RUPERT) Lionel's visiting his auntie - He'll call here later.

Rupert: He's not avoiding me is he?

Narella: (sharply) I don't know! He could be avoiding me too, I suppose.

John: Sorry about earlier.

Narella: It wouldn't worry me, normally.

John: Lionel?

Narella: Yes - I tag along, I suppose - not sure what camp I'm in.

Rupert: Narella, you're a person first, remember? John will do the right thing when the pressure's on - You'll see. (to JOHN) Show her that fossil. (to NARELLA) It looks like a child's drawing. It's remarkable.

John (awkwardly). She doesn't want to see it.

Narella: Yes, I do -

John: Your father's exaggerating a bit. They aren't terribly exciting really.

Rupert: Show her, Professor. She has a good eye for design.

(JOHN takes out the fossil)

Narella: Is this all?

Rupert: *(laughs)* It's only a primitive little fish, not a brontosaurus thigh-bone.

John: I've been careful not to damage anything else.

Narella: *(handing it back)* You're finishing up, so that's something.

John: I never said that.

Narella: *(to RUPERT)* I thought you said ?

Rupert: I'm working at it, but he's very determined.

Narella: I should be determined too. I've got to be one or the other - not a koori when it suits me.

John: I know it's hard.

Narella: Don't preach at me! I don't care about your little fish. It doesn't matter and neither does gold. *(to RUPERT)* You've always told me it's people who matter. Why can't you convince him like you tried to convince me it's our spirit that's important.

Rupert: I've been trying - but it's not easy - especially when some of us get our minds' set on something and we won't budge. All I know is we have to talk about it sensibly and be a family.

Narella: You aren't my real family!

(She exits RUPERT moves to follow but hesitates)

John: You're going to have to let her go.

Rupert: You're going to have to get your priorities right! I've never wanted her to be made feel a victim.

John: Don't get all tragic.

Rupert: Can you blame me?

John: All right! I'll talk to this Lionel Smith person. I'm sure he can be reasoned with. Now, cheer up - She's young and enjoying her anger.

BLACKOUT.

ACT 1 SCENE VI

Hotel verandah area. JOHN packs small rocks into wooden crates. Loosely piled rock is visible, giving the impression that the earth is moving into the hotel backyard. NOLA McNAMARA is to one side sweeping energetically. MACE stands near JOHN.

Nola: (to JOHN) It's time Mace and I moved to the coast.

Mace: You don't have to get drastic. I've told you before - they'll wheel me out of here.

Nola: But you mightn't be dead the way you're going. *(She moves to the sickly potted geranium nearby)* Look at this poor little thing. It's getting a fossil look about it, just like us.

Mace: I'll see to it.

Nola: Make sure it's not with beer slops. *(to JOHN but her mood lightening)*. He killed my aspidistra *(MACE is crestfallen and she pats his cheek)* Of course you meant well - you'd have all my shrubs alcoholics.

Mace: Aspidistras are too delicate for around here.

Nola: Like me. *(to JOHN)* I saw a nice little town house advertised at Nelson Bay, reasonably priced, too. I'd like that - a few decent shops - and heaps of water.

Mace: I don't want to talk about it.

Nola: *(to JOHN)* We wither and crumble but he doesn't want to know. Rocks - that's my life.

Mace: *(agitated)*. It's a worry - that's all I said. I didn't think he'd collected so much of it

John: *(defensively)* It's manageable. There's no point in panicking.

Mace: There's a bloody mountain of it!
 (*JOHN attempts to enlist NOLA'S support*)

John: (*moving to NOLA with a fossil*) Millions of years ago it swam
 here -

Nola: (*dryly*) We could do with a bit of that water now.

John: (*gesturing*) They swam here all sizes and colours.

Nola: They might've been grey.

John: They'd be all colours - and they've left a few impressions of
 their passing.

Mace: Whatever you say - but a rock's still a rock and this lot's out of
 the mine (*He examines some of the crated pieces*). There's
 nothing human in here is there?

John: No! - A vast ocean of ancient fish swam here! I stare into the
 air sometimes and imagine them quietly moving through it.

Nola: Why don't you go to Bondi and have a real holiday?

 (*to MACE*) Did you get someone for that privet?

Mace: Vin?

Nola: Are we that desperate?

John: (*grinning*) It's not an aspidistra.

Nola: I suppose so. I'd do it myself if I could find the mattock.

Mace: Don't get all drastic.

Nola: *(slightly quieter but still in earshot of JOHN)* We've got the bank manager to see later.

(MACE considers this highly private and draws her aside)

Mace: We've been through all that!

Nola: You'll tidy up a bit won't you? *(pats his cheek)* and a real shave today - and your new tie.

Mace: That's just a lot of palaver. He knows the value of what's here.

Nola: That's what I'm afraid of, so we do it up a bit - make it look like real estate and sell.

Mace: Sell? We didn't discuss that!

Nola: We have now.

Mace: I'm a third generation publican - I can't just walk away - and besides, I have a few bigger things to settle than privet and roof paint.

Nola: I want to see cotton white seagulls, and pelicans. I'm sick of galahs and crows.

Mace: I'll look like a loser if I sell now.

(VIN enters)

Nola: You'll look all right to me sitting on a beach towel.

Vin: Are you selling your booze out here now, or what?

Mace: *(for NOLA'S benefit)* I'm selling it inside for a good while yet. You'll all learn that. *(to VIN)* Go home and get your mattock. I'm putting you on the payroll.

Vin: Bullshit! You could cook meat on a shovel out there.

Nola: *(sharply)* Be sure to keep him away from my geranium. *(She exits with broom).*

Vin: What's prickling her?

Mace: She's got her ideas.

(Lights out)

ACT 1 SCENE VII

Hotel. Midday.

VIN *throws darts and sings slurringly from a sentimental ballad, "The last Waltz with You" (Tom Jones)*. MACE *wipes the bar*. LIONEL *enters and VIN stops singing*.

Mace: What's yours, mate?

Lionel: A lemon squash -

Mace: The cafe's down the road. You'd do better down there. I'm out of ice.

Lionel: I'll have it without ice.

Mace: Oh, all right -

(VIN moves across to LIONEL)

Vin: How you doin' - ?

Lionel: Good, mate.

Vin: Lookin' for Jeffie Simms?

Lionel: No.

Vin: I thought you might've knew him. There's no work in the sheds so he went walkabout *(pause)* You're not a shearer?

Lionel: Haven't done that.

Vin: Thought so - that's not a shearer's drink.

(MACE placed down the squash and LIONEL pays for it).

Lionel: *(a forced laugh)* No risk then - I'm not a shearer.

Mace: Get out of his ear, Vin.

Vin: Just being sociable - What are you then?

Lionel: *(measuredly)* I used to be a chicken catcher.

Vin: Eh?

Lionel: Caught chickens.

Vin: Not much skill in that.

Lionel: Have you ever been in a shed with thirty thousand?

Vin: Chooks?

Mace: Battery roosters, you silly bugger.

Vin: What'll they invent next? How do you catch them?

Lionel: With your hands.

Vin: Wouldn't you get a shock?

(LIONEL looks at MACE)

Mace; A little joke - I think.

(LIONEL laughs)

Vin: You look as though you'd have speed.

Lionel: *(Still amused)* They all bunch up.

Vin: *(enlightened)* So that's the skill - corner 'em. *(pause)* In the dark?

Lionel: Lived here long?

Vin: All my life. *(holds out his hand)* Vin.

Lionel: *(Shaking VIN'S hand)*. Lionel.

(NOLA enters with a small ice bucket and places it on the bar)

Nola: *(to MACE)* Give your customer some ice. *(to LIONEL)* Sorry about that - the machine's been playing up. *(MACE puts ice in the lemon squash)*

Vin: Don't spoil him - What's he want with ice? Nola - this is Lionel. He's an expert on chooks.

Nola: Nice to see you both getting on. Staying long, Lionel?

Lionel: Just a few days.

Nola: That's nice *(She takes out a cloth from her apron and dusts the side of the bar)*

That privet, Vin - am I going to get a result?

Vin: Lay off me, Nola - I went and got the mattock but can't you see I'm talkin'?

Nola: When you're ready - we don't want you breaking a leg.

(NOLA moves to exit and VIN watches her)

Vin: She's as bad as my missus - privet this and privet that. Come on Mace - Make it port for me and my mate.

(LIONEL goes to refuse but thinks better of it)

No - you wouldn't catch me drinking this time of day. We'd've hit the road at sparrow fart to one of the big sheds. The mobs'd

be on the move. You'd see their dust miles away. I'd suddenly get this good feeling in my arms as if I was already standing over a big six tooth, the handpiece all sharp and rearing to go (*pause*). Tell him, Mace.

Mace: (*dryly*) Best shearer 'round here - him and Jeffie Simms.
(MACE places two ports on the bar).

Vin: (*swelling*) At the end of a day I'd lob here feelin' dangerous. This place would be brimmin' full with shearers and cockies - only the little cockies; the rich buggers'd be at the R.S.L. in Wangara. Just on dark you'd look out in the street and there'd be a row of trucks and old utes. Kelpies would be sitting up in the backs of most of them - no complaints, just snappin' at flies or eyeing each other off. (*choked up with his rough eloquence*) I'd give my left ball to live that life again.

(LIONEL takes advantage of VIN'S emotional pause).

Lionel: (*to MACE*) Could I have a word?

Mace: No vacant rooms - sorry.

Vin: He's got vacant rooms up there breedin' -

Mace: No offence. It's just that there's been a bit of trouble. I'm running the business lean until things settle.

Vin: Run it any leaner it'll be dead.

Lionel: I don't want a room.

Vin: (*gulping his port*) Don't jump the gun, Mace. What does he want with a room?

Mace: (*quickly*) I wasn't discriminating.

Vin: He knows. Yeah, I'd have seventy big wethers notched up by now, all fresh and pink as a bloke's missus -

Lionel: *(to MACE)* I wrote you a letter.

Vin: Fuck - it's him! He's caught up with you, Mace.

Mace: What letter?

Vin: You know - why hide it?

He's only a chicken catcher, give him what he wants. Poor bugger.

Mace: *(savagely)* Play darts!

Lionel: So, you do have some bones here?

Mace: Only my old dog - he's a bag of bones. I tell you what I do have - fish skulls. Billy O'Neill makes great trophies out of them.

Lionel: No, a human skull.

Vin: Murder somebody, Mace?

Mace: I will, if you don't disappear.

(VIN reassesses LIONEL)

Vin: Are you still a chicken catcher?

Lionel: No.

Vin: Oh? What if he has got bones - what's it to you?

Lionel: I'm talking to the publican.

Vin: And I'm talkin' to you. You're something to do with the court case aren't you?

Lionel: I might be -

Vin: Chicken catcher turned lawyer - out here grabbing good land and locking it away for good. We've got no skull and that's that!

Mace: Thanks, Vin. You've been real subtle. Now back off. *(pause)* So you are to do with the land claim?

Lionel: Yes - and I'm told you have a skull here - of a man who was very special to us.

Mace: Billy Pogo?

Vin: *(to MACE)* Did you know him?

Mace: My grandfather did.

Vin: It was that Black Jenny you had workin' here. She's gone off stirring trouble. She had her beak in all the upstairs cupboards - you said so yourself. Do them a favour and they turn on you.

Lionel: *(to MACE)* You won't have any trouble from us if you give it to me.

Mace: Well, I -

Vin: Fuck you - don't cave in! Listen, chicken catcher, there's no skull here - not now *(inspired)* Mace's old dog found it years ago and crunched it all up.

Lionel: *(ignoring VIN)* Well?

Mace: If I did happen to find it - I'd need reassurances.

Vin: Bullshit! - It's like you said. He'll get old Black Jenny cryin' on T.V. She'll tell a horrible tale. We'll have hundreds of them here - they'll wreck the town - even my house.

Lionel: It won't come to that.

(BRIAN unseen by the others enters and observes the commotion)

Mace: I don't know anything about a skull!

Lionel: You seem decent enough - I'll come back when this lunatic's not here.

Vin: I'm always here! *(He approaches LIONEL threateningly)*
Now piss off! No one's going to do you any favours here.

(He sees BRIAN)

Oh - Briannie - didn't see you there.

Brian: *(moving in)* What's all the yelling. *(to LIONEL)* Didn't I make it clear to you earlier? The last thing I need is my brother doing his lolly.

Lionel: *(incredulously)* He's your brother?

Brian: When it suits him. What's going on?

Vin: You know him, Brian?

Brian: We've had reason to communicate.

Vin: He's an agitator standing over Mace for the skull of some old blackfellow.

Lionel: *(to MACE)* I'll be back later.

Brian: Wait! We'll sort it out now - with all this yelling, glass breaks next and then there's blood.

Vin: Stop farting about and arrest him!

Brian: Play darts!

Vin: I've already played.

Mace: Then dig out that privet.

Vin: Fuck privet!

Lionel: *(to BRIAN)* You can't get all heavy with me. I've broken no law.

Brian: You lit a fire.

Lionel: Come on?

Brian: *(conciliatory)* I want no trouble. *(to MACE)* What's happening. Let's sort it out and then Lionel here can move on.

Mace: It was a misunderstanding.

Lionel: We know there's the skull of an old koori fellow here.

Brian: *(to MACE)* Is there?

Vin: *(laughing)* Mace started caving in.

Mace: *(snapping)* I'm fed up with fellows demanding this and that. I sell beer!

Brian: So there's no skull?

Lionel: Your brother as good as said there was.

Brian: He's not the publican *(to MACE)* Well?

Mace: Bugger it! It's a big pub. I'll look around for it.

Brian: It's the sort of thing you'd have noticed!

Mace: Well, I haven't! *(VIN laughs)*.

Lionel: *(grabbing at VIN'S arm)* You know it's here?

(VIN back pedals and topples a bar stool. He capitalises upon the commotion)

Vin: See that! - he assaulted me. What more do you want, Brian?
Grab him!

Lionel: *(close to MACE)* Have a real look for it - It means nothing to you, but it's important to me.

(LIONEL exits)

Vin: *(to BRIAN)* You've let him go!

Brian: *(disgusted)* I can't just shoot him! *(quieter)* I've made a few inquiries - and he's trouble - not loud mouthed trouble. Most of the time he hunts alone - like now, but he's hard to nail and he knows important people. *(pause)* Is there a skull or what?

Mace: *(snapping)* I'll have the greenies demanding my fish trophies next. It's not right.

Brian: Is there a fucking skull??

Vin: Of course there is! - it's under the bar in the safe.

Mace: *(to VIN)* You promised!

Brian: How's Vin involved?

Mace: We decided to tell the abo it wasn't here - for political reasons.

Vin: - but you caved in.

Mace: I thought of the ramifications.

Vin: Big words won't help you.

Brian: It's simple. If he wants the bloody thing - give it to him.

(MACE takes the box from under the bar and places it on the counter)

Mace: *(urgently)* Will you let me settle this my way before things really get out of hand.

Vin: Stop fart-arsing about and do it then - toss the bloody thing in the garbage.

Mace: No!

Brian: Whatever you do, think of the town.

Mace: I've wanted to do something about this all my life - my father did too, but he took the easy way out and hid it. This pub's big enough, he said. Out of sight, out of mind was what he reckoned. I was exploring up in the roof when I was a kid and I found it there. The cardboard box was crumbling under dust. I was scared as hell - It haunted me for months. That's when Dad said out of sight out of mind. I grew up and almost managed what he said until all this talk on T.V. about bones and then that letter came. I finally got courage enough to see if it was still up there, and it was.

Vin: Black Jenny beat you to it a while back.

Mace: She just sensed it was here. They're like that. I want to do the right thing - and it's not before time but what about my pub and Nola - what if the abos turn on me?

Brian: *(looking into the box)* Jesus - there's a bullet hole in it.

Mace: How will it look - close up on T.V?

Brian: It's not as straight forward as I thought.

Mace: Should we call in the sergeant - see what he reckons?

Brian: Not that bastard - not yet. He'd like to come over here and find me not coping.

Vin: I'll smash it and bury it somewhere.

Brian: No - I appreciate Mace's reasoning. We have to be careful - use it to suit us.

Vin: What's the big deal anyway? - I mean, it's dead - what use is it?

Brian: *(disgusted)* Thank you for that observation, Vincent, but don't you watch T.V.? This Lionel Smith's a crusader - that's the word. He's been all over the world bringing back abo bones - some of them belong out here - and now there's this old fellow needing to be buried *(pause)* Where?

Vin: In - the cemetery. There's room for all of us.

Mace: No - not in the town cemetery but up at the mine and all the land around it - that's where, so there goes your gold.

Vin: No way!!

Brian: *(looking into the box)* The bone's gone all yellow - must've been a while ago.

Mace: Eighty years or more. My grandfather was there when it happened. This wasn't just any blackfellow - and Smith knows. He'll play it for all it's worth. *(pause)* This old fellow was a Wiringin.

Brian: Eh?

Mace: The tribe's last magic man. He could turn into a rock or a butterfly.

(VIN looks into the box and laughs)

Vin: - or a publican.

Mace: Shut up, you! *(pause)* Why don't they let the past be done with?

Vin: I'll get rid of it.

Mace: No - *(pause)* My grandfather knew all about it - held back a lot he knew. He told my father that this old fellow had his guts cut out when he was a boy and had a special snake sewn inside. He was so magic he could climb up the sky on a string. He could make his enemies die a horrible death just by staring at them.

Brian: That's a heap of rubbish. The main thing is it's important to Smith - and we might be able to use it.

Mace: *(still moved by his reminiscences)* It's said that he was the fire's brother - Most of Bindari burnt - this hotel was lucky to be saved.

Vin: *(looks up)* Yeah. See the waratahs, Brian.

Mace: The highway out there was called Struggle Street and one night it burnt. Someone said they saw him burst into flames and spin like a fire-ball.

(VIN moves to the box and takes out the skull before MACE can prevent him)

Vin: Them old miners drank fire water, that's more like it.
(chuckling) It's just a simple old blackfellow.

Mace: Give it here! (VIN steps back) Don't you drop it!

Vin: Do you reckon his ghost could still be around here somewhere?
It's all a bit spooky, eh?

I still reckon I should smash it?

Brian: No! Give it to Mace. (VIN places the skull near the box).
We'll hang on to it. If things start to get out of hand you can say you had a good look around and found it. They might be grateful.

Mace: Especially after we get the mine. It might smooth things a bit.

(MACE replaces the skull just as JOHN enters)

Oh, Jesus - it's not my day.

John: I've come for the key. The truck with the extra crates is out in the lane.

Brian: Did you see what was put in this box?

John: I might have.

Brian: Of course you did.

John: It appeared to be a skull.

Brian: Have you met Smith yet?

John: I've heard about him. The skull has something to do with him?

Brian: Yes, he wants it. Some involved story. I'd be careful at the mine - he's a loner. Take a look in the box.

Mace: I'd rather he forgot about it.

Brian: He's with us. *(to JOHN)* The mine's been good to you, hasn't it? - what is it, five or six weeks you've been up there digging?

John: *(uneasily)* Something like that.

Vin: *(peering in)* See the bullet hole? *(JOHN looks closely)* He was supposed to be magic.

Brian: Would you prefer us to lift it out?

John: No - I can see it.

Mace: *(relaxing slightly)* What do we do? Smith wants to bury it at the mine along with heaps of other bones.

Brian: We'll hang onto it until after the decision. *(to JOHN)* We expect you to say nothing about it.

John: Haven't you been listening to the news?

Mace: No.

John: The decision came down in the mine's favour but -

Vin: *(drowning out JOHN'S qualifier)* You beauty!! It doesn't matter who knows about him now. *(VIN grabs the skull from the box)*

Me and Billy Pogo are having a drink.

(VIN pours wine into the skull and shakes it)

That's the best magic.

(He holds the skull up and catches some of the wine on his tongue)

John: Stop him, for God's sake! That's disgusting.

Brian: That's enough! No harm intended. Give it to Mace. (MACE replaces the skull) Now pull yourself together!

Mace: Haven't enough terrible things been done?

Vin: But I've got work!

John: You didn't let me finish what I was saying -

Vin: Eh?

Mace: The decision's been made?

John: But there's an injunction.

Vin: What's that mean?

John: The Aborigines and environmentalists are lodging an appeal to go to the High Court - could take months - even longer to finally decide it.

Vin: But my job - and my boy?

Brian: Settle down and listen!

Vin: You're dangling on the government tit - like the professor!
You're both all right. I'm not a shearer anymore and now I can't even move rock. I'm nothing!

Brian: (to JOHN) You won't mention anything you've seen here to anybody?

John: I can't promise that. Do the decent thing and give it to him. It can't benefit you.

Mace: We don't see it like that - we have to live here.

Vin: (To JOHN) Your flash talk and your fucking fossils won't pay my house off, but gold will.

Brian: (to MACE) Didn't you say you lost that key to the back gate?

Mace: No, I -

Brian: Remember?

Mace: Yeah! (to JOHN) - I've lost it.

Brian: And that heap of rock on the back verandah? It's hotel property isn't it?

John: You can't do that! I've worked for weeks!

Vin: That's not real work! When I shear - that's work *(laughing)*
We've slapped an injunction on you until you work out whose side you're on.

John: Negotiation is the best way.

Mace: If you're on our side you say nothing about this cardboard box.

John: I can't do that, and I won't!

Vin: *(advancing)* You old bastard!

Brian: (to VIN) We don't do that! Mace knows what else to do.

Mace: Well, I -

Brian: Do it!!

John: It doesn't have to be like this - Come on, give me time to move it all -

Mace: *(against his better judgment)* Settle up your account and clear your room!

John: I can't believe this! *(to BRIAN)* You can't lock people into sides.

Vin: This isn't University. This is here.

Mace: I'm sorry it's come to this but we don't know what's ours anymore.

Vin: But we don't hide in sand like that old fish of yours, otherwise the next time we want to splash around we might be rock.

(JOHN withdraws and VIN follows driving home his point)

You think about that, Professor. *(turning)* and you too, Mace. This is no time for you to panic or be a bloody hero, eh, Brian?

BLACKOUT

ACTII SCENE I

Hotel. (Later)

VIN stands behind the bar whistling. BRIAN enters.

Vin: Just keeping it warm for you, Briannie.

Brian: It seemed a good idea once.

Vin: It still is! *(wiping the bar)* This is easy - beats shearing -

Brian: But the cash register died didn't it? Where is he?

Vin: Ducked down to the bank with her. He looked desperate. Why don't you make him an offer?

Brian: It's a bit of a long shot now. I think I'll have to settle on a promotion instead. They can't refuse me if I hold things steady here.

Vin: I thought all that money Uncle Brian left you was going to buy you out of the boys in blue?

Brian: Don't start up on that!

Vin: I'd've used his money right but I had the wrong name, didn't I? The miserable old bugger could've left me something.

Brian: - but he didn't.

Vin: Hey! - I'll sell the little cottage and buy a part share with you. Look at that ceiling. This place didn't come out of a threepenny pattern book.

Brian: You just keep an eye on Mace. He's hopeless when it comes to dealing with blackfellows *(pause)* Where's the box?

Vin: *(motioning under the counter)* He locked it in the safe.

Brian: Make sure it stays there.

Vin: Do you want a freebie?

Brian: No -

Vin: You're a serious bugger - just like old Uncle Brian - and he was as serious as a pig pissing. Now, if I'd had an Uncle Vincent -

Brian: My job is to hold this little town together - no flashing lights and sirens from Wangara - just me in charge - that's pride *(lowers his voice)* Now this pub's another story - if somehow I can help Mace out with it to keep it going - I mean, a business deal - let's not be stupid about it - then who would complain - Would you?

Vin: I like a drink, Briannie - you know me -

(MACE enters)

You look like an old ram who's lost his overcoat.

Mace: I'm ruined.

(VIN moves to the other side of the bar)

I can't get enough money to paint the front door let alone the ceiling. I never thought it would come to this.

Brian: Can't you hold out any longer?

Mace: They want their money by the end of the month or they'll sell it from under me. What would my poor old father think?

Brian: How much do you owe?

Mace: Enough.

- Brian: No - seriously (*pause*) We might be able to talk business.
- Mace: You? --
- Vin: He's got a quid - You ought to listen to him.
- Brian: How much?
- Mace: Try this for starters - a forty thousand dollar overdraft.
- Brian: What did you do with it all?
- Mace: My Missus and I have been living on it - that's what!
- Brian: How much is all this worth?
- Mace: Ten times more if the mine opens. Bugger it! I thought I might've just made it.
- Brian: It's worth forty thousand to the bank. What's it worth to you now?
- Mace: I'd be lucky to get a hundred and fifty thousand -
- Brian: Let me put it this way - I'll buy in with you.
- Vin: You beauty, Briannie!
- Mace: (*Carefully*) Just say I was interested. What sort of share would you be thinking of?
- Brian: Half.
- Mace: I want control. What about a third for sixty thousand. I mean you're a local boy. We'll do the both of us a favour. Nice little dollar in it for you, too.

Brian: I'll give you forty thousand for half.

Mace: That's robbery! You can't buy a decent motor car for that much! Didn't you hear me? I said I'd get over a hundred and fifty thousand -

Vin: Who's going to give you that! Bindari's fucked.

Brian: Nobody's going to take that sort of risk. You'll stand here whinging until the bank moves in. The bank manager might know something - he's setting it up for the bank - you watch.

Mace: Bullshit! The bank's not getting this - My grandfather -

Brian: He can't help you. You think about it - It could be worth a million - but if that doesn't happen you and I are smart enough to turn it into something.

Mace: Like what?

Brian: I've got ideas but that would be showing my hand.

Mace: I know what you're planning - you'd stand over me and get me to move it. You fancy a boutique hotel on the coast, don't you?

Brian: *(flatly)* Rip a board off and you'd have white ants nibbling your boots.

Mace: *(snapping)* White Ants, my arse and you know it! A hundred cedar logs went into this place. My grandfather went up the coast and hand picked them. This place is in the architect books - the biggest weatherboard pub around - the mantelpieces are Marulan marble.

Brian: You're dreaming. Who'd move this?

Mace: *(bitterly)* Not me! It's mine and it stays. I was born here! The trouble with you is you believe in nothing. At least Vin believes in rams and kelpie dogs.

Brian: Don't miss out. Money doesn't just sit on a branch scratching its arse.

Vin: Good one, Briannie!

Nola: *(entering)* There's a ton of rock in the cool room!

(VIN laughs)

Mace: We had to make some quick adjustments.

Vin: If the professor behaves himself he'll get it back.

Nola: But he was about to leave.

Vin: And he will too if he shuts up about old Jack-in-the-box.

Nola: *(to MACE)* What's he mean?

Mace: Take no notice of him. He's full of plonk..

Vin: I'm in better nick than the dead bloke under the counter.

Nola: *(alarmed to BRIAN)* What's happened here?

Vin: It's Mace's little secret.

Mace: *(to NOLA)* I didn't want to worry you.

Nola: *(peering warily over the bar)* It's a sick joke, isn't it?

Mace: No - It's the skull of an old fellow killed years ago.

Vin: A magic blackfellow, eh? He's been hid out of sight out of mind for years.

Nola: In our hotel?

Mace: All my life and longer.

Brian: And now isn't the right time to parade him around.

Mace: They might wreck the pub when they find out, Lovvie. We can't cope with more problems.

Brian: There's a Sydney stirrer on the streets already.

Vin: A bone collector who's onto Mace.

Mace: Thanks to your big mouth!

Nola: That boy I met? Be decent and hand it over to him. Better still, I'll do it!

Mace: (to BRIAN) It might be best to get it over with -

Vin: Gutless!

Brian: (to NOLA) Mace has decided to hang on to it a while - for the town's sake.

Nola: (to MACE) You're letting them order you about?

Mace: There are a few different angles - Bindari's future - our pub.

Vin: Ours, too - eh, Brian?

Brian: Mouth!

Vin: Oh - sorry.

Nola: What's he mean?

Mace: They want to rob us, Lovvie.

Brian: I wouldn't phrase it like that.

Nola: How would you put it?

Mace: *(interceding)* They offered forty thousand for half share - in the lot.

Nola: *(scanning VIN and BRIAN)* You are criminals then.

Vin: You can't call Briannie that!

Brian: Drop it! She'll face reality. *(to NOLA)* Just make sure you don't tamper with that package.

Vin: *(to MACE)* We're watching you!

Nola: *(snapping)* I want you both out of here.

Brian: *(to MACE)* Line up a couple of quick ones, will you?

Nola: I want them out!

Mace: It's a public house, Lovvie. I can't do that.

Nola: *(enraged)* Then what exactly can you do, Mace McNamara?

BLACKOUT

ACT II SCENE II

The Mine. (early afternoon) LIONEL has been sitting poking at the ashes of the previous night's fire. He rises and moves closer to NARELLA.

Lionel: When I looked down from that plane a few weeks ago, I saw the land letting me see it through the clouds - just a little bit at a time - I didn't really have to see it because I felt it. I thought that's my place - no more than that - that's me, and nothing can come between myself and me. I was an old fellow down there with tribal scars, and rivers carved in me. I saw my old face with its cheek bones and forehead. I saw a scrag of a neck and old hands. I closed my eyes and listened to the engines and when I looked again the clouds had sealed and I was being offered biscuits and coffee. When I finally looked down again it was cloudless - all I could see was the ocean, and I was already homesick.

Narella: Imagining gets us nowhere. It takes us far away, but it hurts when you have to come back.

Lionel: I know what I'm doing.

Narella: This isn't a shiny aeroplane ride to England. It's dangerous here - You're still on an ego trip!

Lionel: You think that if you want to - I'll cope better by myself - if I cope at all, O.K. - I've gone a bit loopie over all this. My childhood memory is of my mother telling me all sorts of weird and wonderful stories. She told me stories about old fellows who could climb to the sky world on a string and hunt among the stars. That's what Billy Pogo could do.

Narella: It's easy to sit daydreaming - but it's all shit. We don't have the mine and the bastards down in that pub still have your Billy Pogo. He'll always be a prisoner and so will we. We might as

well go and sit on the post office bench like two well behaved coons.

Lionel: *(shaking her)* Shut up! That's the sort of talk they want to hear. Don't ever say that. We're not victims! - not you - not me - not fuckin' any of us! OK? That father of yours might be just the bloke to help us out.

Narella: How can he help?

Lionel: We must keep up the pressure, and he can help.

BLACKOUT

ACT II SCENE III

The Church (early afternoon)

Lights on RUPERT and JOHN on churchyard bench.

John: So what am I to do? If this injunction is successful all of us will be locked out of the mine - perhaps for months, while litigation drags on. Even the environmentalists are kicking the can now.

Rupert: The Aborigines still have a chance!

John: And I want justice to be done -

Rupert: - but only on your terms.

John: I should've promised to shut up but no, that would be too easy. I had to be all outraged and politically correct.

Rupert: You were thinking of somebody other than yourself.

John: No - I didn't think they'd go to that extreme. The last I saw of my antiarchs they were being wheeled into the hotel cool room.

Rupert: *(laughing)* The hotel food was never good but this is ridiculous.

John: Don't joke about it! I was planning on being out of here in a couple of days.

Rupert: But now you're going to stay and help?

John: It's very well for you to talk about causes - what are you doing?
- *(pause)* I thought you might have a talk to the publican.

Rupert: And get Billy Pogo from him?

John: Yes - do that too. And impress upon him the importance of my work - I don't think he fully realises -

Rupert: *(laughing)* But I'm a creationist. I might be at a loss for suitable words.

John: You're enjoying the mess I'm in, aren't you?

(NARELLA and LIONEL enter).

Rupert: *(Standing)* I've been expecting you all morning.

Narella: This is Lionel.

Rupert: *(He shakes LIONEL'S hand warmly).* I've heard such good things about you.

Lionel: Nice to hear it. *(looks up)* Quite a church.

Rupert: *(laughing)* The pulpit needs a nail here and there. *(pause)*

Sorry things haven't worked out for you yet but there's still hope.

(he draws LIONEL towards JOHN)

This is my brother. He's a professor but at a different university *(laughs)* It has ivy on its walls and it tends to make him a bit smug.

John: It doesn't! I'm John - Pleased to meet you.

Lionel: You're looking for fossils?

John: I was - but I seem to be finished.

Lionel: There's going to be a total lock out until everything's settled.

Rupert: (to NARELLA) You've had lunch?

Narella: No.

Rupert: How does cold chicken salad sound?

Lionel: Thanks (to JOHN) You're at the hotel?

John: Yes - but I've decided to stay here a couple of nights.

Rupert: (lightly) He could've stayed here all along - but he's always been determined.

Lionel: (to JOHN) You'd know the publican pretty well?

John: Well enough -

Lionel: He has the skull of one of our old people - you haven't seen -?

John: No - I

Rupert: Why don't we have lunch?

Lionel: (to RUPERT) Have you ever heard the name Billy Pogo?

Narella: Can't this wait until later? -

Lionel: (To RUPERT) I'm sorry. It's all I seem to think about.

Narella: (laughing) I hadn't noticed.

Rupert: Lionel - I'd like to help. I have heard the name from time to time (he looks at JOHN who refuses to respond)

Lionel: Was it in connection with the hotel?

Rupert: Not exactly in the hotel.

Lionel: Where?

John: Look, I might skip lunch. It's been a hectic morning I'd like to catch my breath a while.

Rupert: Don't go yet - let's see if we can help Lionel (*pause*) Billy Pogo. It was at least fifteen years ago, just before I buried Sam Stubbs, our last full-blood. I'll take the liberty of using that term (*pause*) You knew old Sam?

Lionel: My family moved to Sydney when I was little. What about him?

Rupert: I visited him at his death bed - he had a humpy near the river. He kept talking about the black butterfly that lived in the hotel garden - 'Billy Pogo, he's Wiringin, brother of fire. He had a magic snake who took him to the stars'. Old Sam said other things but I could hardly hear him. It seems as if Billy Pogo had to stay a black butterfly until his bones were buried. Poor Sam. He and his wife came in here most Sundays - two of the most soulful singers I've ever heard.

Lionel: Was that all he said?

Rupert: The old people never talked about that sort of thing much - scared of magic fellows weren't they?

Lionel: They respected them.

Narella: (*scoffing*) They were terrified of them.

Lionel: (*sharply*) They didn't have to be if they kept the law.

Narella: Aunty Lill told me about the Kadaitchi men who used to live up Lismore way. They'd creep around at night in special feather slippers and scare everyone.

Lionel: *(savagely)* It wasn't her business to talk about it. Anyway, it's got nothing to do with this.

Rupert: What do you know about this old Wiringin?

Lionel: Not a lot -

Narella: You'd better tell them if you want them to help you.

Lionel: Billy Pogo wasn't his real name - nobody knew that. The Gubb's called him King Billy Pogo and dressed him in a top hat and tails. He had special knowledge - far more than ordinary people. It took him ages to learn it all - his mind became special - different to all of us. It was a long time ago - the Gubbs became scared of him and killed him. He was the last of our special people out here *(to JOHN)* Are you sure the publican never said anything?

John: No - I

Rupert: John - You can't hold back on something like this! You've got to tell him.

Narella: What do you know?

John: I would've preferred to know nothing of this. I was minding my own business.

Lionel: Is that what you call digging in our graves!

Narella: It's no use talking to them - they're all on the same side when it looks like they might get screwed.

Rupert: That's unfair!

Narella: No, Dad! Your precious church should get involved. What are you both keeping from us? *(to JOHN)* Well?

John: (to LIONEL) The publican has your magic man.

Lionel: You - actually saw it?

John: Yes.

Narella: (to RUPERT) And you knew about it but fidgetted about telling us something you heard years ago. Whose side are you on?

Rupert: It's not that simple -

Narella: Then it should be!

John: He was waiting for me to tell you - and it's not easy.

Narella: The least I expect from my so called family is honesty! You're all bloody hypocrites.

John: Be reasonable! They're keeping my fossils to ensure I say nothing - but now I've told you - what more do you want of me?

Narella: Should fossils matter that much?

John: To me they do!

Narella: Billy Pogo was a person - He should be buried decently (to RUPERT). Surely you would agree with that -

Rupert: I do.

John: It's all political - (to LIONEL) Take the pressure off the publican for a while - see what happens.

Narella: You're just thinking of yourself!

John: See how the appeal goes.

Lionel: We'll lose for sure if we don't keep the pressure up. I could have hundreds of people here within a day if I have to. The media, too.

John: And the publican panics and destroys everything!

Lionel: If I could get Billy Pogo without any trouble I'd be happy. All I'd need then is a television crew and get the whole story to everyone - skull and all.

Narella: No! You told me you wanted the old man buried in his country with dignity.

Lionel: But he has no country, eh? - not yet, - perhaps never! He can help us move things along.

Narella: It's not right!

Lionel: *(to JOHN)* You saw a bullet hole?

John: Yes.

Narella: I don't want to hear about it!

Lionel: What you feel is good - sure he was a person but he's more than that now - can't you see?

Narella: No, I can't! *(to RUPERT)* Why don't you and your precious church help in some way? *(She moves to exit and RUPERT follows)*.

Rupert: Truth can seem so uncomplicated when you're twenty.

Narella: I can think for myself and another thing, I don't need you organising my life - not anymore. I'm fed up with you!

(She exits)

- Rupert: (to LIONEL) What am I to do? I only want to help her.
- Lionel: She'll come around. (to JOHN) Will you help us?
- John: If we stay calm we might both win.
- Rupert: It's not a game, John! He wants you to make a sacrifice for a whole lot of people.
- John: But it's hard for me I've dreamt about a find like this for thirty years. I'd almost given up hope - I mean, to be glued to a chair, professorial or otherwise, concocting academic mission statements for the next triennial falls pathetically short of what I've been doing these past few weeks. I've been absorbed in rock but totally alive -
- Lionel: Let's work on the publican.
- Rupert: I won't condone violence.
- Lionel: I don't want that. We'll convince him (to JOHN) When we get Billy Pogo back you could be seen on television throwing all those fossils back.
- John: That's ridiculous! - Some are the most splendid I've ever seen.
- Lionel: Tell the cameras that.
- John: You ask too much!
- Lionel: So you lose a few fossils. We lost everything.
- Rupert: I'll talk to him.
- John: I don't have to be Einstein to work out whose side you're on. (to LIONEL) I'll think about it. (JOHN moves to exit) I'll get back to you. (JOHN exits).

Rupert: Don't give up on him. We all get caught up in our little world.
(*chuckles*) Most of the population wouldn't know what a palaeontologist is let alone an antiarch -.

(LIONEL *appraises the church*)

Lionel: Do you get many kooris in here?

Rupert: No - Not many whites either. It's a constant worry.

Lionel: (*looking up*) I might spend a day or so on the roof.

Rupert: On the roof?

Lionel: It might come to that -

Rupert: Surely Narella explained. I want you to stay in the rectory.
Relegating you to the roof would be unthinkable.

Lionel: (*laughs*) No - I'll protest.

Rupert: I won't hear of it! Those days are well behind us.

Lionel: I want to demonstrate on the church roof.

Rupert: Oh?

Lionel: There's a problem?

Rupert: The bishop will have to be informed and I very much doubt -
No, it's out of the question!

Lionel: Don't bother telling him.

Rupert: I'd have to! - it's how things are done. Not telling him would cause an incident - He's extremely conservative. It's a pity you aren't in Wangara. The Uniting Church over there is quite radical. Their lad would climb on the roof with you. He's

always agitating to save the whale and the bilby - that sort of thing.

Lionel: So here's a chance for you to get involved. I can see it now : a couple of banners up there 'Fascist Town withholds Aboriginal Remains' - How does that sound?

Rupert: No! It's too confronting. I'd lose the few loyal parishioners I already have.

Lionel: Narella hoped we could rely on you.

Rupert: Lionel - I call you that but I barely know you. Shouldn't you be part of something more co-ordinated? Just turning up here alone demanding things seems so - unorthodox.

Lionel: It's the better way, sometimes.

Rupert: Who are you, exactly?

Lionel: A bloke wanting justice.

Rupert: More than that?

Lionel: Yeah - I need to find out about myself: Who I might've been: I didn't think about Bindari much until I heard about Billy Pogo.
(pause) This Christ of yours who's supposed to be here with you - would he run scared of the bishop?

Rupert: Certainly not!

Lionel: Here's your chance to do something real.

Rupert: (lamely) But I have my mission here. I've tried to make this place relevant.

Lionel: And have you?

Rupert: Probably not -

Lionel: It has lots of fancy stained glass and high ceilings but I get the feeling it became your gaol.

Rupert: Christ would be out there with dust on his sandals *(pause)* I'll ring the bishop. I'll ask him first and then if I have to I'll tell him how St. Stephens is going to do things - *(moving to exit, gathering courage)* I'll ring him now. *(checks his watch)*. This would be his lunch time. I'll ring in half an hour.

BLACKOUT

ACT II SCENE IV

Hotel (later). MACE stands on the bar counter with a mop. He makes clumsy swipes at the ceiling. VIN drinks steadily and NOLA observes them from the doorway.

Nola: Fall and break your neck why don't you and I'll have all our problems.

Mace: Vin and his bloody fly specks. They're all I see now.

Vin: Leave them long enough and they'll all join up: Mission Brown's the colour - it was on special in Wangara. I wanted it for our guttering but the missus wanted turquoise so that was that. *(chuckles)* Nature's spot on, eh? - inventing something that can walk across the ceiling and shit at the same time.

(MACE continues to work the mop and NARELLA enters)

Eh, you've got a customer - *(to NARELLA)* You don't play darts, by any chance?

Narella: No.

Mace: *(scrutinizing her)* You're from the church.

Nola: You know very well she is.

Mace: *(climbing down)* I didn't recognise her.

Nola: It's lovely to see you, Narella. *(NARELLA smiles, wary of VIN)* Going well at Uni, I hear.

Narella: Getting there -

Vin: That's no big deal - half the bloody country's at Uni *(to NARELLA)*. Do you play poker?

Mace: Keep it clean!

- Vin: I mean cards! Jesus, you're touchie *(to NARELLA)* Are you old enough to be in here?
- Nola: Of course she is! What are you having, Lovvie - then you and me we'll have a chat in the parlour? It's more red-neck than usual in here today.
- Vin: Give her a Tia Maria to help her find her tongue.
- Narella: I don't like Tia Maria.
- Vin: A champagne girl are you?
- Nola: *(to VIN)* You beat me earlier, but harass this customer and you're out!
- Narella: *(to VIN)* I hoped you mightn't be here.
- Vin: It's your lucky day and we can go wherever you like.
- Mace: You heard Nola!
- Vin: *(to NARELLA)* I bet Smith sent you.
- Narella: *(to MACE)* He doesn't know I'm here. I thought it might be the best way to do it. Give me the box and nobody will get hurt.
- Mace: Box?
- Vin: There's no point bullshitting anymore *(to NARELLA)* That bloody old professor big mouthed to you all, didn't he?
(NARELLA tries to ignore him)

Well - didn't he!!
- Nola: Leave her alone and go and mow some grass!

- Vin: I'm lookin' after Brian's interests.
- Mace: *(savagely)* He's got no interests here if I can help it!
- Vin: You should be grateful to Brian. He's taking a big punt and you and him might just come home winners.
- Mace: *(to NARELLA)* What's Smith got in mind?
- Narella: There could be a heap of angry people in here tomorrow.
- Vin: Bullshit! They won't want that sort of shit fight all over the newspapers.
- Mace: You and bloody Brian! I was of half a mind to give it to Smith. I'll have no ceiling to clean fly shit off if I'm not careful.
- Narella: Give me Billy Pogo and you'll see no more of us.
- Nola: Do as she says - and I mean it! I'm putting up with no more nonsense. *(She moves around the bar)* Give me that key and let it be done with - we'll survive.
- Vin: *(to MACE)* No! *(He offers NARELLA a two dollar coin which was on the bar near him).* Go and buy yourself a fizzy drink down the street!
- Narella: *(throwing the coin to the floor)* I don't want your fucking money!
- Vin: Not much a lady after all, are you?
- Narella: I don't have to talk to you! I spent my life surviving in this stinking town and barely noticed you - let's keep it that way. *(to MACE)* Don't let him stand over you - he's crazy. Come on - do what's right.

Nola: (to MACE) You heard her. She's making sense. I've slaved here for thirty years and what for - a scared husband in a clapped out pub? I wish I hadn't set eyes on Bindari - I hate it!

Mace: Don't get drastic, Nola.

Nola: I am - because I'm tired, and now I'm ashamed.

Mace: I didn't kill him! I just inherited the problem.

Nola: And you're letting it kill us, and the bit of hope that's in this girl.

Mace: (to NARELLA) But giving the old wizard to you might be worse than hanging on to it. You should know black women don't touch something like that. You might be better to pass as a white girl. You might think we're a bit unreasonable but I bet this Smith's got hard ideas about lots of things. You'd better work out just where you stand before you rush in and hook up with him.

Vin: (Chuckling) I'd like to be a fly on the wall.

Narella: You already are. (closing in on MACE). This is your little world and that's your business - but what I am or want to be is mine... The whole world's out there - even the rest of Australia.

Nola: Don't waste your breath with him, Narella - he just wasn't thinking -

Narella: (Taking courage) I know places where I can walk safely - people smile at me - and I smile back. (for VIN'S benefit) Of course there are rough nuts and low life who flick coins at you, or stand with their hands in their grubby pockets and jangle their pathetic lives at you - one might manage to single me out from real people one night and that will be hell - but I'll manage. Real hell is being seven with born to rule white faces whispering loudly that 'with some effort she might just pass as

a white girl' - that's more than common assault - It's horror,
'specially when you start wanting to believe it.

Mace: *(shamed)* Tell Smith I'll talk to him again.

Vin: Bullshit, you will! Not without Brian.

Mace: I'll settle this!

Vin: No way! You hold off what you're about to do. I'm phoning Brian.

Mace: You do that! Tell him he might be getting close to robbing me but he's not going to rule me. You tell him that!

Vin: You're finished in Bindari no matter what way you dodge.

(VIN exits)

Mace: *(to NARELLA)* I'm sorry, Girlie.

Nola: Her name's Narella! You call her that. *(MACE hesitates)*. Go on!

Mace: Narella.

Nola: That wasn't too bad was it? Now help her get her past settled - and ours. Give her what she came for.

Mace: No! I'll give it to Smith. *(distressed)*. Nola - believe me - I'm finished if you leave me. I want to get it right. I should've done something when I was a kid. I was a decent kid. Not brave, but decent. I knew it wasn't right but Dad was the boss - he decided to keep it hidden and forget. I'm not the only decent kid who's grown up and forgot but I'll get it right, just as long as you don't get drastic with me, Lovvie. You'll see - I'll get it right.

BLACKOUT.

ACT II SCENE V

(Church bench) Lights up on RUPERT and NARELLA. NARELLA puts down her suitcase.

Narella: It's better if I leave -

Rupert: For Sydney - but?

Narella: I'm no help to Lionel - and I'm going to end up saying something to you, I'll regret. It's better this way.

Rupert: I'd been looking forward to seeing you so much - We haven't had a real talk yet.

Narella: It's time I grew up and got on with my life - You have yours here.

Rupert: *(despairing)* All I have is an irate bishop and a stupid brother! At least wait until tomorrow - give me some time with you.

Narella: I'm not angry with you - not anymore -

Rupert: But you should be - I should've helped more and now I've ruined everything.

Narella: *(touching her suitcase)* I'll keep in touch.

(RUPERT fumbles in his coat pocket)

Rupert: Give me a moment. *(he takes out a tiny box containing a sapphire brooch and passes it to her)* It's for you.

It was your mother's *(faltering)* I mean, Jane's - I hope you'll never forget those few happy memories you have of her.

(He takes the brooch)

It was her mother's - that's a sapphire at it's centre. *(He holds it to the light and they both examine it)* See how the sun lights a little fire in it?

Narella: *(moved)* It's beautiful but -

Rupert: Jane always felt special wearing it. I hope you will, too,
(pause) I was going to give it to you when you turned twenty one. *(He returns it to her).*

Narella: But that's more than a year away.

Rupert: I thought - just in case - I mean if you and I -

Narella: *(moved)* Dad - for heaven's sake! *(She puts her arms around him).*

When I turn twenty one you'll be there - otherwise I don't want a party.

(She presses the brooch into his hand)

Save it until then.

Rupert: That would be better. I'll look forward to that.

(NARELLA wipes away a tear and they both laugh) You'll stay a bit longer?

Narella: All right *(She goes to pick up her suitcase)*

Rupert: I'll bring it in. *(NARELLA hesitates a moment and exits.*
RUPERT sits on the bench and looks pensively at the brooch.
JOHN enters. RUPERT returns the brooch into his pocket and stands)

He needs our help!

- John: He'll find plenty of ways of getting his message across.
- Rupert: For God's sake, leave their graves alone! They're more important than decorative rocks.
- John: Decorative rocks! We'll never agree on this one. I thought Smith might still be here. I'd do as he asks if I could see some advantage in it -
- Rupert: Then go and grovel to the publican for your precious fossils and then sneak off!
- John: Think what you like! If I can't get Mace to be reasonable I'll start all over again.
- Rupert: The mine's out of bounds to everyone now including you.
- John: I'll work at night.
- Rupert: That's ridiculous!
- John: Not with a well positioned torch - and there's a full moon.
- Rupert: They'll see you miles around.
- John: I'm taking something out of here even if it's only an antiarch's paddle!
- Rupert: Cool off in Sydney for a few days - have a decent seafood dinner. All this talk of fossils has put rocks in your head.
- John: You've always been so tediously correct. *(withdrawing)* I've got work to do.

LIGHTS

ACT II SCENE VI

Hotel (later). MACE and RUPERT. RUPERT is drinking a small beer. VIN plays at the dartboard.

Rupert: This is fine. I'm not a beer drinker as rule.

Mace: A lot of educated men aren't. Look, I never did get back to you and thank you for the job you did on Dad. A nice few words - we all agreed - not overdone. I hear the baptist fellow in Wangara almost froths at the mouth - there's no need for that. I still remember one of your lines - it moved me - "We gather today to praise and bury a pioneer publican - one Frederick McNamara, late of Bindari - a publican, it is true but not one to neglect the well being of his fellow man within or beyond hotel walls" *(Wipes away a tear)* See - I memorised it *(pause)* I missed him pottering around in the cellar, I can tell you *(pause)* I've got a nice little Wyndham port.

Rupert: I'm right for the moment.

Mace: You've got to have a sense of humour in this game - a bit like yours, I suppose.

Rupert: It's good to hear my services are appreciated. I like weddings best. The clients get to thank you.

Mace: Yeah, poor old Dad. You did him proud. Queer thing, isn't it - death?

(RUPERT finishes his drink)

Rupert: That's a good lead into why I've popped in here.

Mace: I thought it might be. You aren't one just to drop in.

Rupert: I thought we might be able to reach some agreement. Burial's a decent thing when all's considered.

Mace: I've got nothing against any of them - It's just that the timing seemed wrong. I'm close to walking out of here with the arse out of my pants and I've got Nola to think of.

Rupert: I laid your father to rest -

Mace: Don't try to make me feel guilty . I've got that problem already.

Rupert: What if it was your father's skull in that box - or it belonged to someone you admired? (VIN *turns, his interest aroused*)

Mace: That's a powerful way of putting it.

Rupert: (*Softly*) Give it to me and I'll keep it safe.

Vin: Eh - look at you - in here?

Mace: It's Father Rupert.

Vin: I know!

Mace: (*annoyed*) I'm having a private word!

Vin: (*scoffing*) In a public bar? (*to RUPERT*) I'm not a religious man, Father, and neither's my boy but we'd like work.

Rupert: I'm sure things will pick up.

Vin: (*to MACE*) In case they don't the skull stays here.

Mace: It might be best if Father takes it.

Vin: It stays!

Mace: Give it to the church and things will calm down! (MACE *takes out his bunch of keys*).

Vin: What about the old woman blubbering on TV? It leaves here when Brian says so, otherwise I take it!

Mace: Like hell! I'll swallow the key first.

Vin: Go ahead but that box stays put! *(pause)* Give it a miss, Father. Smith will be back again-let Brian handle everything -

Rupert: I don't want violence -

Mace: Neither do I.

Vin: *(to RUPERT)* King Billy might piss off altogether if you get all religious with him - or he'll turn into a butterfly, eh Mace? *(to MACE)* Look at you - all shivery *(pause)* Come to think of it, I saw a black butterfly on the dunny wall earlier - mean looking eyes it had. Billy might've slipped out of that box already - might pay to check - what do you reckon?

Mace: He'd be there, so stop raving.

Vin: *(to RUPERT)* That butterfly down the backyard - could it be Old Billy's soul waiting to get even with a shivery bloke like Mace?

Mace: You've said enough!

Vin: A fellow in the sheds told me once that when blackfellow bones get back into the ground terrible things can happen - it could be they come alive again and send certain white fellows mad -

(MACE is drawn into VIN'S mischief and wipes his brow of perspiration)

Need the fan on, Mace?

Rupert: Go home quietly and let us take care of it.

Vin: So I can't be trusted? I'm not holy and I'm not educated? *(he sniffs the back of his hand)*. I've been out of the sheds for weeks but I can still smell sheep shit.

(BRIAN enters quietly, unseen by VIN)

Check it out for me, Mace, to see if I'm dreaming. *(He thrusts his fist under MACE'S nose)*

I hoped it might've soon been smelling of gold.

Mace: It smells of nothing - now get home!

Vin: Tell us both about your famous old grandfather again - not about Kalgoorlie and all them cedar logs but what I reckon he did to poor little Billy.

Mace: You asshole!!

(MACE swings at VIN who veers away and BRIAN steps forward).

Brian: That's enough! I've got a certain fellow waiting outside.

Vin: And about bloody time!

Brian: We've heard from you!

Vin: Please yourself! Mace is about to hand old Billy over to the church.

Brian: I've worked that out - *(to RUPERT)* I appreciate your concern, Father.

Rupert: It seems so logical -

Brian: Logic comes hard with shearers and other types I deal with
(*pause*) I'll settle things now if you have other calls to make.

Rupert: If your have Lionel outside then I demand to stay!

Mace: And I want him to stay!

Brian: (*quieter*) What got into you? (*to RUPERT*) Please yourself
Father - but I hope you realise this is a police matter now. (*He
moves to the doorway and calls LIONEL*)

Come on!

(*LIONEL enters and he and BRIAN approach the bar*)

Mace: (*panicking*) No harm done! It was in a little cloakroom upstairs
- years of clutter up there - that's the problem.

Lionel: Give it to me and I'll be on my way -

Vin: Sort it out, Brian!

Mace: (*to BRIAN*) I'm not taking it out while Vin's here.

Brian: (*to VIN*) Go home for a while.

Vin: No way! You might need a witness.

Brian: Stand well back then. (*VIN stays put*) Or we get nowhere!
(*VIN moves a few paces back*) Stay there! (*to MACE*) Happy
now?

Mace: I suppose I have to be (*he quickly unlocks the safe and brings
out the box, placing it on the counter near BRIAN*). We're all
under a lot of pressure lately (*directly to LIONEL*). You won't
stir up trouble, will you?

Lionel: Not if I walk away with that box.

- Vin: *(moving forward)* Don't believe him!
- Rupert: *(to BRIAN)*. I'll vouch for Lionel. He wants to put the past right, and so does Mace - we can all do that much without blood and broken glass.
- Brian: I agree. *(LIONEL moves to take the box but BRIAN withholds it)*. First things first *(pause)* There's talk of stirrers - media and so forth, arriving from Sydney.
- Vin: Car loads, I reckon.
- Mace: More reason to make our peace *(to LIONEL)* I'll give you a free case of beer, too.
- (VIN laughs)*
- Brian: This is how I see it. You get on that phone and tell your lawyers to stay put - You tell your unemployed stirrer mates to stay in Sydney.
- Vin: Yeah!
- Brian: And then we ring the Wangara sergeant. We tell him what's happened here - tell him how the community and the police officer have done the right thing by you and that you and your people are going to reciprocate. Channel eight should hear the same story.
- Vin: *(impressed)* Yeah!
- Brian: Then we'll give you King Billy and then you get on your bike.
- Vin: That's fair!
- Lionel: I can't agree to that! No bulldozers are moving in until things are settled. I'd be crazy to trust any of you.

Rupert: (to BRIAN) You're being unreasonable - You inflame rather than calm things.

(BRIAN *grows increasingly frustrated at RUPERT'S presence but tries hard to remain diplomatic*)

Brian: As I said - this is police business and it can't always be friendly. This isn't a church - it's close to the gutter.

Rupert: But we can be reasonable.

Brian: The gutter has its own ways of understanding.

(VIN *grabs RUPERT roughly by the arm and draws him away from the bar*)

Vin: Come on, Father! - You're in the sin bin with me.

(RUPERT *remonstrates more from shock than outrage*).

Rupert: (*freeing himself*) This is outrageous!

Brian: (to VIN) Don't touch him!

(BRIAN *reaches out to brush RUPERT'S arm but RUPERT backs away. BRIAN realises RUPERT'S presence is untenable and that the opportunity has been lost to freely confront LIONEL*)

I'm sorry about that, Father, but as I said you are in a hotel
(*pause*) We can do no more here (*he commandeers the box before MACE can move*) This goes down to the station - we'll get the sergeant and a few of the boys over (*to LIONEL, directly*) You'll find you can't dictate to them either.

(LIONEL *realises he must move quickly if he hopes to prevail over BRIAN*)

Lionel: (to.RUPERT) Wait outside -

Rupert: But -

Lionel: It's the only way - I know how these people think.

rupert: I can't just walk -

Lionel: You will! - that will help me. Go!

(RUPERT *withdraws anxiously and exits*).

Brian: Good - we can talk business now -

Vin: (*stepping forward*) This is how I see it.

Brian: (*savagely*) I'm handling this! (*to LIONEL*).

This old fellow got ideas - just like you. (*he takes out the skull and places it near the box*) and ideas and legends don't mix - not then and not now. What's your head going to look like if you don't behave. Like this! (*he slams the baton on the bar counter close to the skull. It startles the others - especially Lionel who lunges forward thinking the skull has been hit*).

Lionel: Fuck you!

Vin: Good one, Brian!

(BRIAN *assumes a combative stance with the baton*)

Mace: Not in here! I'm no part of this!

Brian: Nothing broke - not yet.

(*to LIONEL*) Come on you! - do something silly. Let's prove something!

Lionel: No way! There are other ways of dealing with you.

(LIONEL steps back towards the door. VIN lunges at him, but LIONEL catches him off balance and VIN falls to his knees)

You'll need to be quicker than that - or sober.

Vin: *(to BRIAN) Get him! (BRIAN offers no further challenge and LIONEL exits). Don't let him go!*

(VIN stands) What's wrong with you?

Brian: You both saw me. I tried to negotiate.

Mace: You did your lolly, and he outwitted you.

Brian: I tried to trap him. I thought he might've had a go at me.

Vin: You're all piss and wind. Next time I'll sort him out - the best way.

Brian: *(following VIN to the door)* You just get home - and stay there.

Vin: You're all shit, Briannie!

Brian: In future don't try to tell me my job. I'm in charge here.

Vin: I'll do it my way from now on. *(He exits grumbling and MACE quickly replaces the skull and takes firm possession of the box).*

Brian: That goes with me!

Mace: I'm having nothing more to do with you!

Brian: If I'm going to be your partner we've got to co-operate.

Mace: I'll burn the place down before you get any part of it!

Brian: You've spooked yourself! Abos are no problem. They'll yell out a bit and then when the paddy wagons come they'll be harder to find than a job.

Mace: I'm making no deals with you - and if you want this, you'll have to bash me for it - that won't look good with your bosses.

Brian: The pub can be your problem, then. Why should I care?

Mace: I've half a mind to report you for what just happened here -

Brian: Eh?

Mace: You heard!

Brian: I think I did. I'll run it by the book with you from now on - I'll enjoy that.

Mace: You've got nothing on me -

Brian: Not yet.

BLACKOUT

ACT II SCENE VII

Hotel. Back verandah area. Semi-darkness except for light on NOLA and MACE near the geranium pot plant. MACE'S singlet is strewn across his chair as NOLA massages his neck and shoulders.

MACE startles at a sound only he has heard. He rises and peers into the dark.

Mace: Who's there? *(to NOLA)* You heard it?

Nola: Nothing - You're as tense as wire *(he sits and she works his neck)* I'll ring the church again - he'll turn up.

Mace: I want to make peace with him and be done with it. *(pause)*
Hear that?

Nola: Where?

(MACE rises and moves into the semi-darkness of the garden)

Mace: Puss, puss?

Nola: What now?

Mace: It's the cat!

Nola: Fluff's been dead for months.

Mace: *(snapping)* Some other cat then - they roam about don't they?
(NOLA goes to him and urges him back to the chair)

Nola: Lionel will come back. *(She works his neck)* and you can both settle things *(pause)* Why don't we make a list of jobs we can do fairly cheaply - that carpet in the parlour could come up - I noticed the boards are perfect - We'll get them sanded and varnished - It'll give a nice historic touch.

(For the first time there is a definite hissing sound)

Mace: *(rising)* If you didn't hear that you're bloody deaf.

(Before NOLA can respond VIN flashes a torch and bursts into view. His left hand is cupped in front of him as if holding a smaller object)

Vin: I've got it! *(He confronts MACE)* Have a good look before I tear its wings off!

Mace: *(alarmed)* What?

Vin: The butterfly, eh? The bastard with the mean eyes.

Nola: Go home - You're drunk.

Vin: Bullshit - I just got here - came in the back way, didn't I - and snuck up on it?

Nola: I want you out!

Vin: *(angrily)* Keep your scanties on. I've got privet to cut.

Nola: Not now!

Vin: I'm on the job! *(to MACE)* and things are moving. Have a word with this old blackfella - tell him you're sorry, and make everything right. I'm a witness - and so's Nola. Look him in the eye and tell him your old grandfather was a shit, and be done with it.

Nola: I'm fed up with you! *(to MACE)* I'll ring Wangara.

Vin: *(to MACE)* Or will I tighten my grip? Give me the word.

Mace: No! *(MACE staggers back into the chair and grips his chest)*
Let it go - for God's sake!

(NOLA goes to MACE'S assistance)

Nola: Take a deep breath - that's it - he's only fooling - now calm yourself.

Vin: *(laughing)* Yeah, mate - look? Nothing - gone!

(MACE stands, holding his chest and wheezing)

Cheer up - the little old blackfella's gone.

Mace: My breath -

Vin: Yeah, that's all - nothing serious. Now let me in the bar - after all that I need a drink.

Mace: *(rallying)* You're barred - forever!!

Vin: I got him!

Mace: And no more butterflies! *(he sits holding the singlet against his chest)*

Vin: I mean the young Abo - I give him a belting up at the mine -

Nola: *(taking out her small bunch of keys)* He's heard enough of your sick jokes. Now leave him alone. *(She passes the keys to VIN)* It's the biggest one - get a bottle and clear out!.

Vin: *(Refusing the keys)* It's no joke this time - he was going to camp up there again, so I followed him.

Nola: Where is he now?

Vin: Still on the ground, I suppose.

Nola: You might've killed him! I'm going up.

Mace: Don't be hasty, Lovvie.

Nola: How else can I be! *(to VIN)* Give me that torch.

Mace: That belongs to the professor!

Vin: Smith must've pinched it.

Mace: You've king hit the professor.

Nola: So let's find out -

Mace: No, Nola - it's Vin's doing.

Nola: You're hopeless! I've wasted my life with you.

Mace: Sh! - the back gate! *(all pause looking into the darkness)*

Nola: Is that you, John?

Mace: *(whispering to VIN)* Hide the bloody torch!

*(VIN pulls out his shirt and thrusts the torch into his belt.
BRIAN enters and immediately confronts VIN)*

Brian: You were seen going up to the mine. I didn't think you were so stupid!

Vin: No way.

Mace: He is that stupid!

Nola: He attacked the professor.

Vin: It was only the blackfellow, Briannie.

Nola: I'm going to find out.

Mace: *(grabbing her arm)* It's nothing to do with us - it's police work.

Nola: Whoever is up there needs our help.

Brian: Pull yourself together, Nola. Mace could serve time over this.

Nola: You bastard!

Mace: *(to BRIAN)* None of this concerns me! I want you off the premises.

Brian: You played smart arse with the blackfellow and then got gutless. You turfed out the professor and hid his rocks.

Mace: I went along with that but I didn't bash anybody!

Brian: *(to NOLA)* Before you rush off rescuing people let me sort this out - and like it or not Mace will be involved.

Mace: Give him a moment, Lovvie - I think they've got me cornered.

Nola: You don't care that a man could be dying?

Mace: Lovvie, they'll involve me in what's happened *(pause)* I could serve time! *(to BRIAN)* Get on with it!

Brian: *(confronting VIN)* What did you hit him with?

Vin: A lump of wood.

brian: Where is it?

Vin: I dropped it.

Brian: Where?

Vin: Just near him.

Brian: Bloody novice! I'll find it, now get home - and get rid of that torch. No! I can't trust you. Wrap it up in your shirt, and I'll take it.

Vin: But it's my best shirt. Use Mace's singlet.

Mace: *(grabbing his singlet)* Not bloody likely!

Brian: *(to VIN)* Hurry up!

Vin: My missus gave it to me for my birthday. She'll notice it's gone.

Brian: That's the least of your worries. Tell her you lent it to me.
(VIN takes off his shirt and BRIAN wraps the torch)

Mace: I've heard none of this. Do you hear? - none of it.

Brian: Then keep it that way!

Vin: What'll I do, Brian? Eh? Tell me.

Brian: Put another shirt on. Try that for starters - and bury your shoes.

Vin: Eh?

Brian: We've got to work this to protect ourselves, especially if it's the professor.

Mace: It was Vin's mad idea so why involve the rest of us?

Brian: *(savagely)*. He's my brother - that's the bottom line. I love his kids and I like his wife. You dog on him and you're dead in Bindari.

Vin: What's going to happen, Briannie?

Brian: Go home! I'll handle this.

(VIN and BRIAN exit. MACE holds his arm out to NOLA but she rebukes him and exits quickly. MACE puts his singlet on and clutches his arms around his chest and shoulders.

LIGHTS

ACT 2 SCENE VIII

Mine edge: semi-darkness (moonlight). A figure drags against large rocks, then falls. Sound of dislodged smaller rocks rolling down a steep incline which indicates the closeness of the mine edge. The falling rocks disturb roosting pigeons which coo and flutter in one of the nearby mine shafts. A torchlight sweeps the rocks and the distressed figure (JOHN) attempts to hide. The torch light beams onto him. A voice (LIONEL'S) rises above the sound of the pigeons.

Lionel: Who's there? *(He moves closer)*

Who is it?

(JOHN rises and the light scans his bloodied face.

John: Don't - for God's sake!

*(LIONEL recognises JOHN'S voice and moves quickly to him.
JOHN braces himself for a renewed attack)*

No!!

Lionel: *(grabbing JOHN'S arm)* The edge is just behind you!

John: *(recognising LIONEL)* It was you? *(breaking free)* I'll leave -
it was stupid - I realise -

Lionel: It wasn't me! - you must've fallen.

(Sound of police vehicle)

John: No! - I remember a shadow and footsteps -

Lionel: But not me! *(he examines JOHN'S head)* It looks worse than
it is - a cut above your eye - I'll get you out of here -

(Police spotlight scans them)

Shit! It's that bastard. He only needs the smallest excuse.

John: Then go!

Lionel: It's too late now - *(the motor stops but the powerful fixed beam illuminates the two men and the surrounding rocks).*

Brian: *(off)* Stay there -!

Lionel: He'll get me now.

John: But you said you didn't -

Lionel: That won't bother him -

Brian: *(entering)* What's this little huddle?

John: *(rising)* I came for a walk - must've fallen.

Brian: *(to LIONEL)* Don't move, not even an eyelid! *(he moves around him warily)* You had your chance to move on.

John: Will you listen! - Lionel was helping me.

(BRIAN ignores this. He takes the torch from LIONEL and quickly checks him for weapons.)

Brian: *(to LIONEL)* Sit!! *(LIONEL hesitates and BRIAN prods him with the torch)* Now! - and hands behind your neck! *(LIONEL obeys and BRIAN examines JOHN closely with the torch)*

Lionel: He fell - you heard him!

Brian: *(to JOHN)* You've been clouted - a sharp rock - *(He beams the torch onto the ground)* or a lump of wood. *(he moves a few steps, searching for the stick)* It can wait. *(to LIONEL)* I'm taking you in! *(LIONEL attempts to rise but BRIAN restrains*

and handcuffs him) Can't have you flit off with the pigeons, can we! The Wangara Sergeant can have the worry of you.

John: There's no problem, constable! I'm pressing no charges.

Brian: I am! He's trespassing after being warned - and there's been an assault here.

Lionel: Bullshit. It's not going to be that easy.

Brian: Full of oats, aren't you? But all I had to do was wait.

(MACE and VIN enter. MACE is breathless and clutches the cardboard box. BRIAN is furious at this intrusion)

Vin: Lucky! Fuck me! *(moving towards JOHN)* You all right? *(he gives JOHN no time to respond. He laughs and moves towards LIONEL)*. And we thought the chicken catcher was smart!

Mace: *(to LIONEL)* I've been looking for you. When you weren't at the church I thought -

Brian: *(to MACE)* Enough of that! *(to VIN)* You were told to go home!

Vin: I hung around outside the pub checking on Mace. I've got a stake in this lot.

Brian: *(to MACE)* It's falling into place - you're not needed here. Go and talk to Nola real hard. *(to VIN)* Help the professor while I put the suspect in the wagon. *(MACE lunges between LIONEL and BRIAN)*.

Mace: We go nowhere until I settle things!

Brian: Listen! Bindari is relying on you. This is a bloody hornet's nest - don't kick it!

Mace: Take those bloody things off him!

Vin: No way! - he's a chook now, eh, Brian?

Brian: *(to MACE)* Move out of the way!

Mace: I've got something important here and I won't have handcuffs getting in the way. I want some dignity.

Brian: Then where's yours?

Vin: Do you want this coon laughing at us!

Mace: I've thought it through?

Brian: *(to VIN)* Walk him down the hill - see if you can manage that
(VIN takes MACE'S arm, but he breaks free)

Mace: I'm staying because I know things!

John: What do you mean? *(He shuffles towards MACE)* It was all so quick - a shadow - the sound of gravel. It wasn't Lionel - is that what you're saying?

Brian: He's saying nothing - reliable - he's hysterical. He's talking about another bashing a long time ago.

Mace: *(to JOHN)* You didn't see Lionel hit you?

John: No, I -

Mace: Of course you didn't! *(he takes out a handkerchief and presses it against JOHN'S head)*. Hold onto that - You and me are tougher than they think - bloody thugs - that's all you are!

(BRIAN seethes but takes comfort that MACE still holds back on condemning VIN for fear of implicating himself)

Brian: You've gone to pieces over that skull and fair enough - but remember, it's a worry both ways - think of all the white blokes - ordinary battlers out of work for months - then given a bit of hope *(pause)* Don't make it worse for them. *(pause)* Why do I care about the town - ask yourself?

Mace: You want my pub for peanuts, I know that much.

Brian: *(scoffing)* It's a heap of firewood -

Vin: -and I saw white ants.

Mace: Bullshit, you did!

Brian: I care about the town because unlike you I've got pride - that's why no television nigger struts in here and screws us.

Lionel: We'll have you in court, you bastard! We'll see who's smart then - get these things off me.

Mace: *(to BRIAN)* You only care about yourself - undo him!

Brian: Don't drag the town under with some arse-up thought about putting history right.

Mace: My mind's set.

Brian: *(changing strategy)* Just say I did let him go -

Vin: Like hell you will!

Brian: *(ignoring VIN)* What then?

Mace: *(highlighting the box)* We'll bury it - make a hole in the gravel - *(moves to LIONEL)* It's the only way - all our luck might change.

Brian: (to LIONEL) You'll go along with that?

Lionel: Only when we get the mine. You're all fucking mad!

(MACE drops to his knees and drags at gravel with his hands)

Mace: It has to be now! I can't wait until then -

Lionel: (moves towards him) No - If he takes me in tonight we might never find it - and if the bulldozers come -

(NOLA and RUPERT enter as LIONEL tries to reason with MACE. RUPERT moves across to comfort JOHN).

Nola: (to MACE) Get up, for God's sake! (MACE stands)

Lionel: Tell him the bulldozers might still come and take everything -

Nola: (to MACE) Listen to reason.

(MACE pushes her away and clutches the box)

Mace: My grandfather should've seen to it - and my father - and now me.

(RUPERT and NOLA notice LIONEL is handcuffed)

Rupert: Free this man - he attacked nobody!

Nola: (to BRIAN) You've got to be joking!

(MACE has gone to his knees and continues scraping out a hole in the loose gravel)

Nola: (shaking MACE) Have you gone along with this?

Mace: (standing) I haven't got around to it, Nola. It's complicated. Let's get the past sorted out first.

Nola: You're hiding in it!

Mace: No - I want to come out of it with this old fellow. (MACE *clutches the box and moves closer to LIONEL*) I'm sorry. He's waited a long time - and he won't wait any longer.

He burnt his clothes and painted himself and cursed everyone. Then he was blamed for lighting a fire against one of the shanties. Lots of others caught fire as it raced up the street. Someone said the fire was in him. They said he'd become a ball of fire. That fire stopped just short of my grandfather's beautiful hotel. Later on the men found the Billy Pogo sitting like a rock at the edge of the mine. Someone brought my grandfather to talk to him but the old fellow drove a crowbar into the big boiler and scalding water sprayed all over him. When it finished he just crouched there. This mightn't be right but my grandfather told Dad there wasn't a blister on him. The paint had washed off him but his skin was glistening. Everyone panicked and my grandfather went up to him with his rifle - and (MACE *stares vacantly at LIONEL*). The truth came out eventually but it was too late.

(*he moves closer to LIONEL*)

I can just remember my old grandfather. He had a big white moustache and spent most of the time sitting on the verandah at the back of the pub. He had an old ginger cat he'd nurse and talk to. He called it Rover. I thought that was real weird calling it a dog's name. One day my grandfather called me out to him and instead of nursing the cat, he had a small cardboard box on his knees. He whispered to me that it was his magic box but the magic flew away a long time ago like a butterfly does when it comes out of its cocoon - he called it the dilly-bag a grub weaves around itself. When he opened the box I got real frightened at what I saw, but he said I'd never have a hole like that in my forehead, and neither would he, because we weren't magic. He sat silent for a long time looking at it and then tied

the string back around the box. He died not long after, and the ginger cat sat on the chair and made a creepy sound in its throat. *(pause)* You didn't know any of that, did you, Nola?

Nola: It's all very sad but how are you going to put it right? - You missed your chance to do the decent thing earlier.

Mace: I was thinking of the town - of us!

Nola: No - your precious pub - the guilt of old publicans is all that drives you.

Mace: No - putting the past right - and our future. You and me.

Nola: That's very shaky *(to BRIAN)* Get this sorted out because I phoned Wangara - and you aren't the sergeant's favourite boy.

Vin: What did you say?

Nola: I told them what I know - and they're coming over - now.

Vin: You squealing bitch! *(he lunges at her but BRIAN restrains him)*

Brian: I'm not covering for you anymore!

Vin: I knew you'd run gutless!

Nola: Tell the professor about your lump of wood.

Vin: I know nothing! - *(looks to BRIAN for support but BRIAN is preoccupied)* Tell her, Brian!

Brian: *(checking his watch)* The chopper, or the wagons?

Nola: Could be both - now release Lionel. Vin's your problem.

Brian: All I know, is what I saw here!

Nola: Vin told you what he'd done!

Brian: He was drunk and I sent him home. That's all I know.

Nola: That's a bloody lie! Tell them Mace.

Mace: He came into the garden with a black butterfly.

Nola: The other part!

Mace: Yes - he hit someone. My breath had gone - I was concentrating on catching my breath.

John: *(to BRIAN)* If I'd been killed you'd have blamed Lionel.

Nola: If he thought he could've got away with it.

Brian: No - that's not right! *(to JOHN)* Let's talk this through before they get here - I could charge Smith - and you - for trespass but Vin and you *(he grabs VIN'S arm)* can work something out *(to VIN)* Go on!

Vin: *(approaching JOHN)* I - didn't know it was you. You were all hunched over. I thought it was him making a fire or something. I didn't want to kill him - just warn him off. You'll turn a blind eye won't you?

John: Why should I spare you?

Vin: I was worried about my boy!

Rupert: This was no way to help him.

Vin: No fucking parson was about to!

John: I could be dead for all you and Brian care.

Lionel: (to BRIAN and VIN) The days are gone when the likes of you can put in the boot and then say sorry if it suits you - or if it suits you better - put in a bullet. (to BRIAN) Take this shit off me! I'm making a statement to the Wangara sergeant - through a solicitor (BRIAN *is intimidated and takes out his keys.* VIN *grabs them and flings them into the darkness*)

Vin: Fuck you, Brian! I bet you'll help them lock me up! (*losing control, he turns on MACE*)

It was your fault! Tell them about the old black biddies crying on T.V. Tell them about the town being a grave - the pub - my house (to LIONEL) You're all right, chicken catcher - you've got the government tit - well fuck you!

(*He grabs the box from MACE and moves to the mine edge. He tears the box apart*)

Mace: (*advancing*) No!

Vin: Keep back - I've heard enough about your grandfather (VIN *places the skull onto the ledge and picks up a rock*)

Come on, Lionel Smith - Let's see how bad you want this old spook. (LIONEL, *impeded by the handcuffs, stumbles forward but BRIAN restrains him*)

Brian: No! (LIONEL *struggles but falls at BRIAN'S feet*)

Come down from there - don't be a bloody idiot!

(JOHN *moves forward sensing the gravity of the situation*)

John: Vin - give Rupert the skull - let him look after it. I'll drop all charges - nothing more will be said.

Nola: We'll say nothing.

Vin: Gathering around the blackfellows aren't you? You think this lump of fucking bone is worth more than me - don't you? Magic, eh -? Well what about me? I was a shearer - bloody good one - now I'm nothin'. *(looks up)* You hear that, Brian? - Could be that butterfly, Mace. *(the faint sound of a helicopter becomes discernable)*

If I smash this old spook the wings might fall off that butterfly. Hear it, Mace? *(he mimics the faint sound of rotary blades. LIONEL moves closer, still kept in check by BRIAN).*

Lionel: Vin! - I'll say nothing - no lawyers - nothing!

Vin: I don't trust any of you - not even my own brother -

Listen to that butterfly, Mace - more like a bloody big hornet *(he picks up the skull)* It's in here - trying to get out. It's in here!

(He lifts the rock above his head and MACE scrambles forward)

Mace: No - he's waited too long!

(The helicopter is louder and moving overhead. As VIN brings his arm down MACE falls into the rock's trajectory and is struck, his weight carrying him over the edge into the darkness of the mine-shaft. His loud cry and dislodged rocks are muffled by the machine descending lower to view the scene. The horror stricken figures are kaleidoscoped by the helicopter's flashing lights. NOLA goes to her knees at the mine edge and RUPERT retrieves the skull and moves towards LIONEL and embraces him. VIN backs from view. Light and sound fracture the scene - then blackout followed by abrupt silence.

END OF PLAY

CHAPTER 3: GRAPHICS

1. STATEMENT:

The primary focus of the Visual Arts component has been upon the archival photograph found at Quambi Museum, Stroud.

The photograph, titled 'King Billy Mogo' was handed into the local historic society in the 1970's.

In 1992 I made some enquiries in an effort to gather more information about the photograph. These enquiries proved to be fruitless.

The poetry sequence creates an imagined persona from the virtually anonymous source image.

It was my decision to name the fictitious Wiradjuri Wiringin, Billy Pogo. I did not want to impose my invented history upon Billy Mogo as I hope that one day the real text of his life might be discovered.

As the poetry sequence developed, images in certain poems, and preoccupations in the stage play, lent themselves to visual exploration of the source image through photo montage and double image exposure.

I attempted to place the enigmatic archival image in visually poetic situations through photographic techniques and superimposed drawing.

Ideally, it would be my wish to include a selection of these invented visual images with any future publication of the poetry sequence.

2. TITLES AND DIMENSIONS

DRAWINGS:

PLATE	1.	SERPENT FRAGMENT (56 x 43 cm)
	2.	PSYCHIC JOURNEY (56 x 43 cm)
	3.	SKULL JOURNEY (56 x 43 cm)
	4.	BLUE DRIFT (63 x 56 cm)
	5.	RETURN OF THE SPIRITS (61 x 77 cm)
	6.	WIRINGIN TRANSPOSED (70 x 77 cm)
	7.	EARTH IS WIRINGIN (56 x 43 cm)
	8.	LAST FEAST (56 x 43 cm)
	9.	TRANCE (56 x 43 cm)
	10.	STRANGE DOG (56 x 43 cm)
	11.	ETHEREAL BIRD (56 x 43 cm)
	12.	SANCTUARY (56 x 43 cm)
	13.	SERPENT (56 x 45 cm)

PHOTOGRAPHS

14. KING BILLY MOGO (ARCHIVAL PRINT)
15. BOGAN TEXT (40 x 50 cm)
16. JARRANBOWIE JACK
AS EARTH MOSAIC (30 x 40 cm)
17. JARRANBOWIE JACK
AND THORN TREE (30 x 40 cm)
18. JARRANBOWIE JACK
AND BOGAN TEXT (30 x 40 cm)
19. BILLY POGO AND BUTTERFLY (30 x 40 cm)
20. EARTH FACE AND FEATHER (30 x 40 cm)
21. BILLY POGO AND ORCHID (30 x 40 cm)
22. EARTH FACE AND LIZARD (30 x 40 cm)
23. PORTRAIT WITH FISH FOSSIL (30 x 40 cm)
24. OLD GOLDMINE SHAFT (30 x 40 cm)
25. RIM: BINDARI GOLDMINE (30 x 40 cm)



PLATE 1

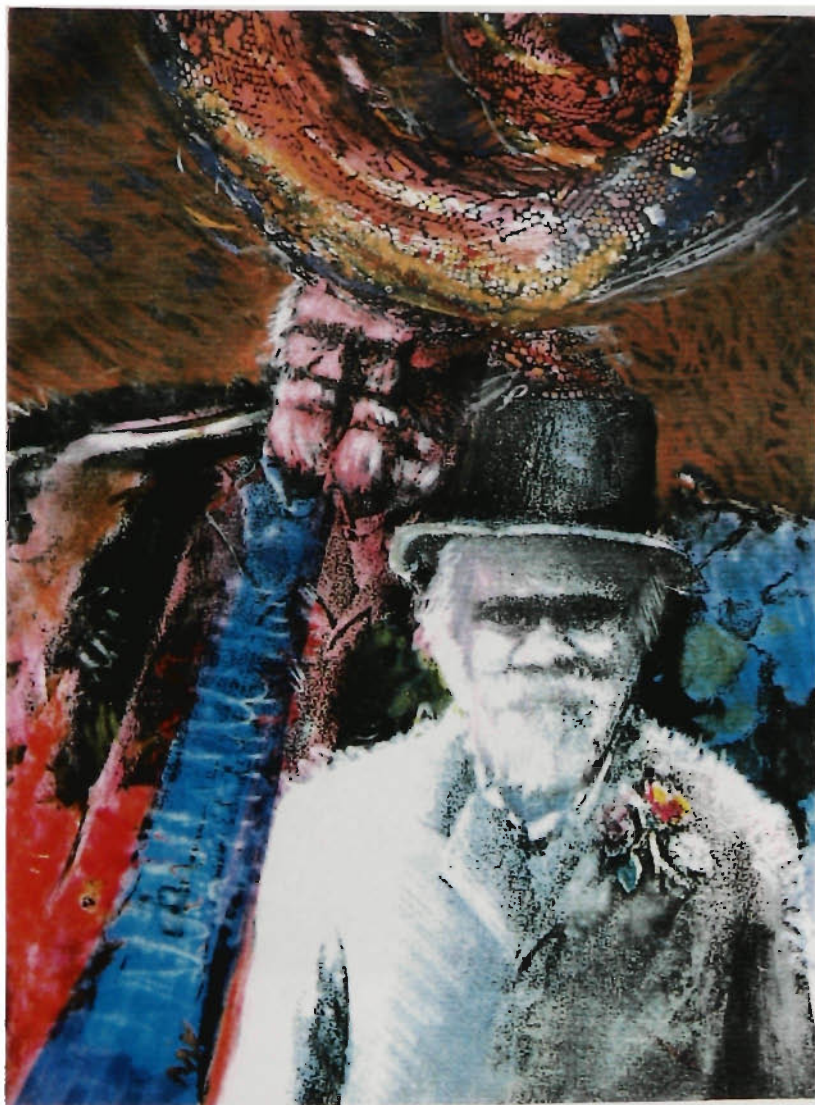


PLATE 2



PLATE 3



PLATE 4



PLATE 5



PLATE 6



PLATE 7

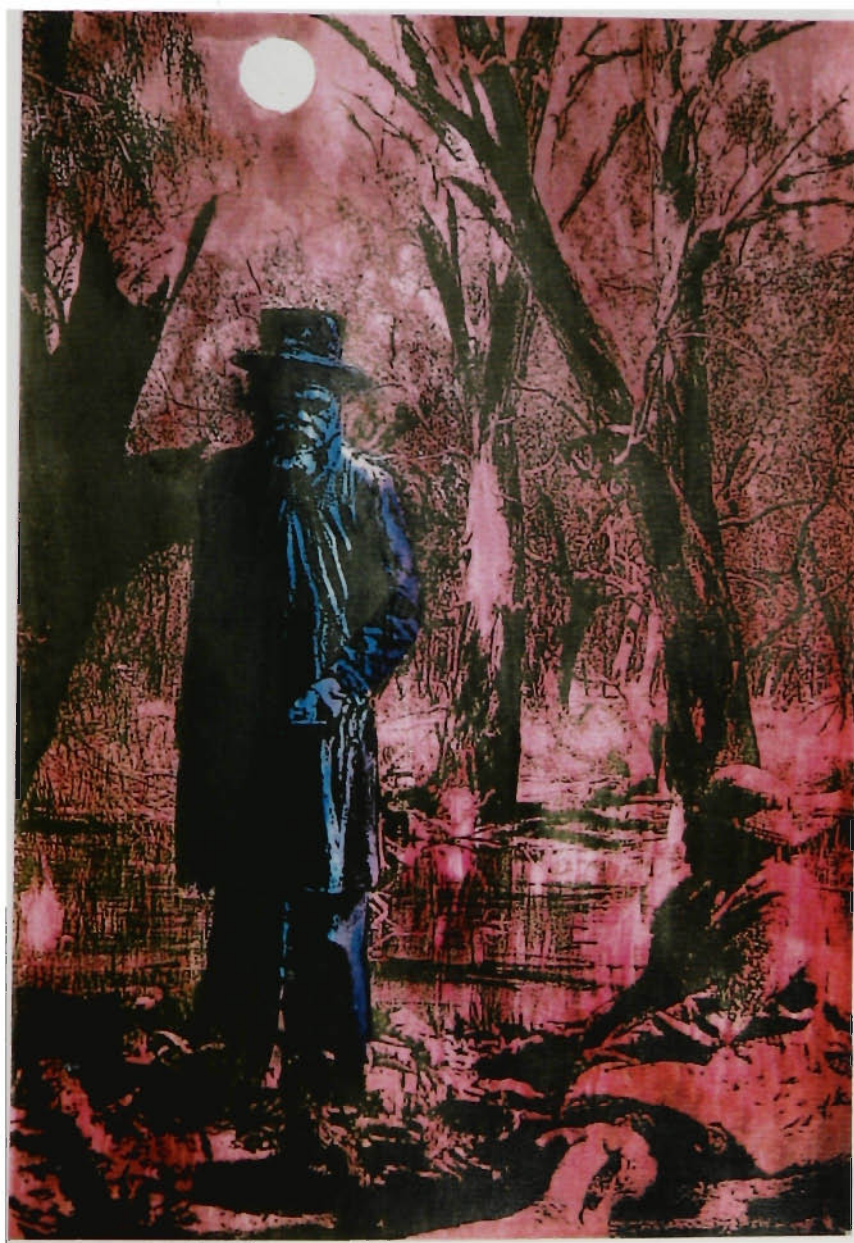


PLATE 8



PLATE 9



PLATE 10



PLATE 11



PLATE 12



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PLATE 13

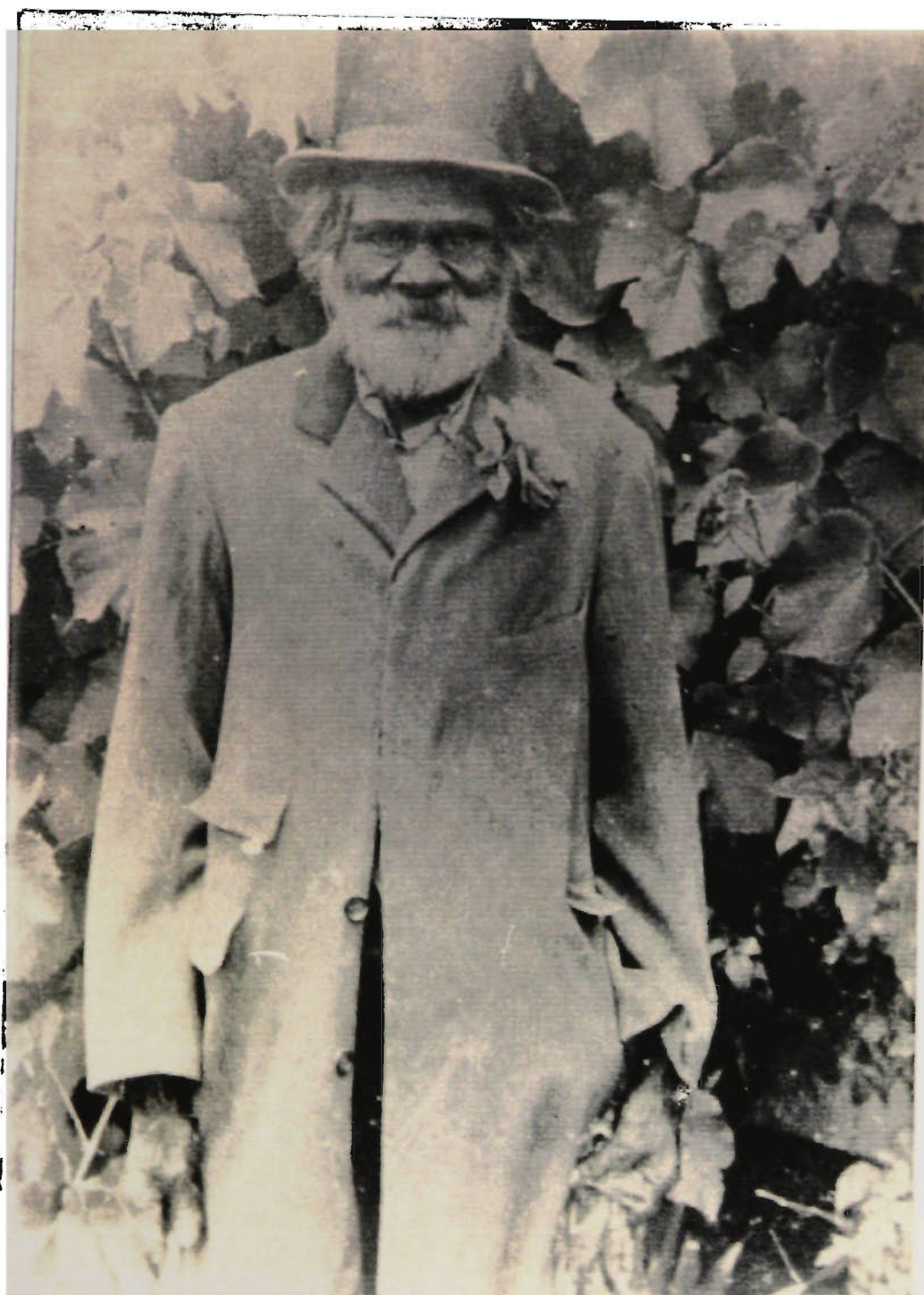


PLATE 14



PLATE 15



PLATE 16



PLATE 17



PLATE 18

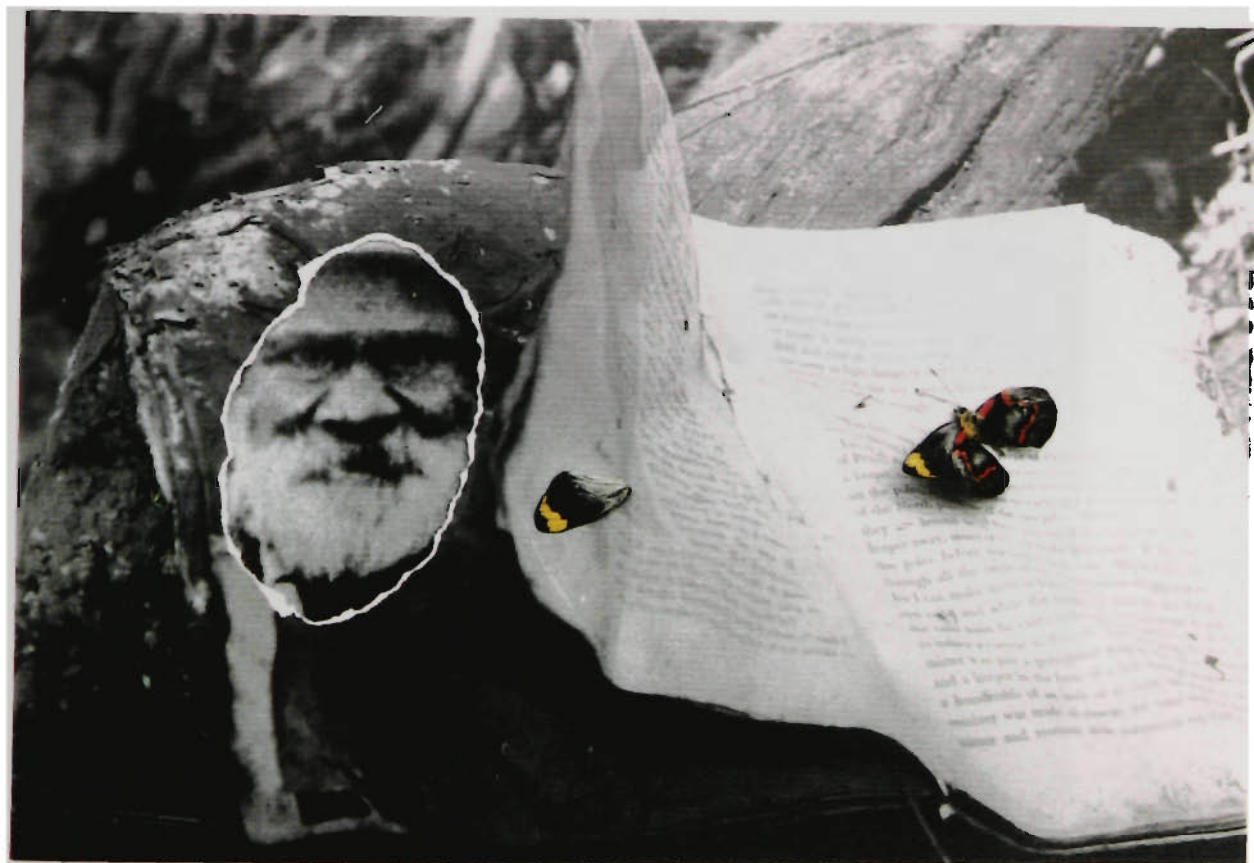


PLATE 19



PLATE 20



PLATE 21



PLATE 22



PLATE 23

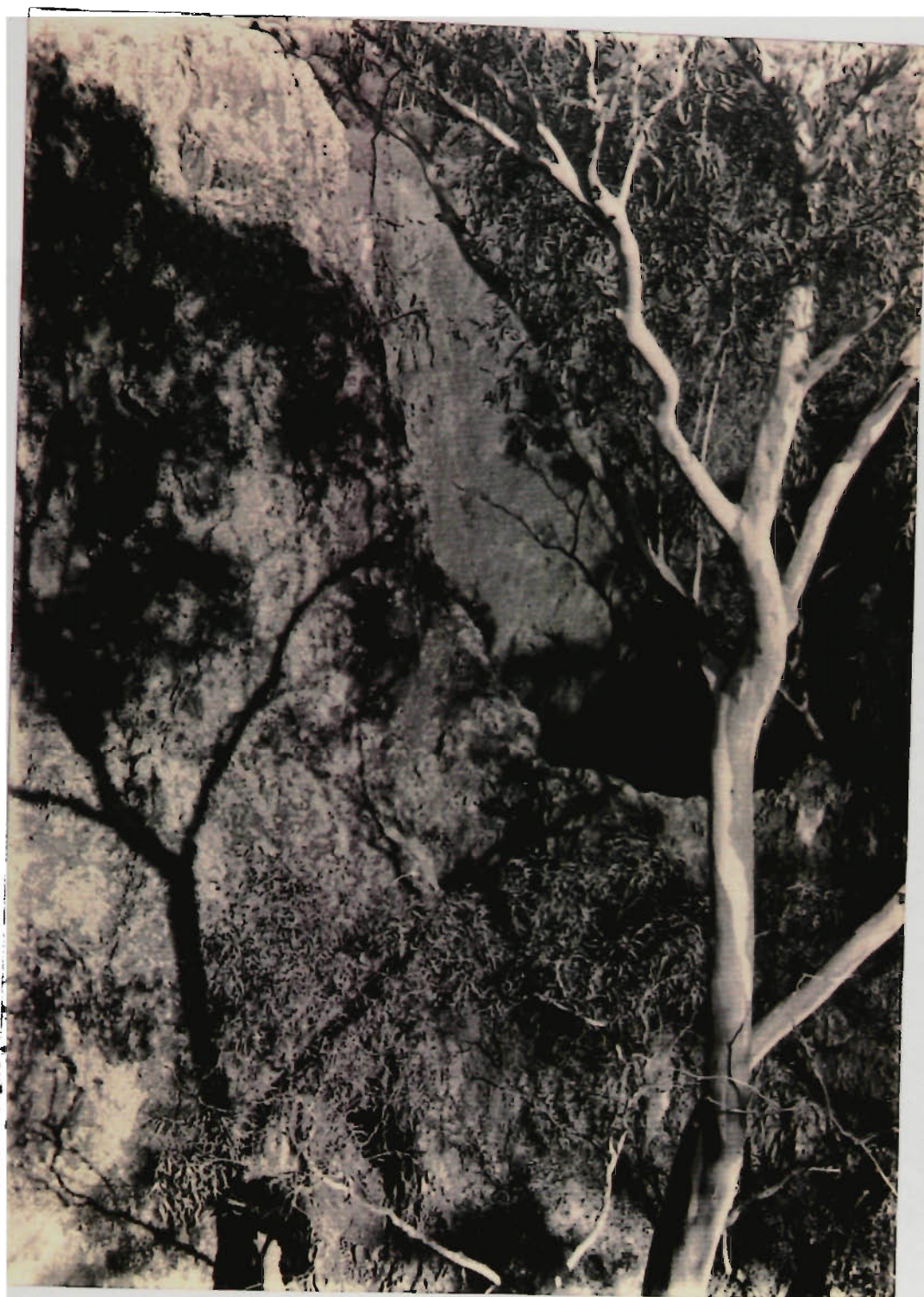


PLATE 24



PLATE 25



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BILLY POGO'S FIRE

**A CREATIVE ARTS PROJECT IN DRAMA, POETRY AND
VISUAL ARTS ON THE THEME OF AN ABORIGINAL
WIRINGIN OR CLEVER MAN**

VOLUME 2 of 2

of

a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS



from the

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

**Ken Stone M.C.A.(W'gong) B.A (New Eng)
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FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

1994

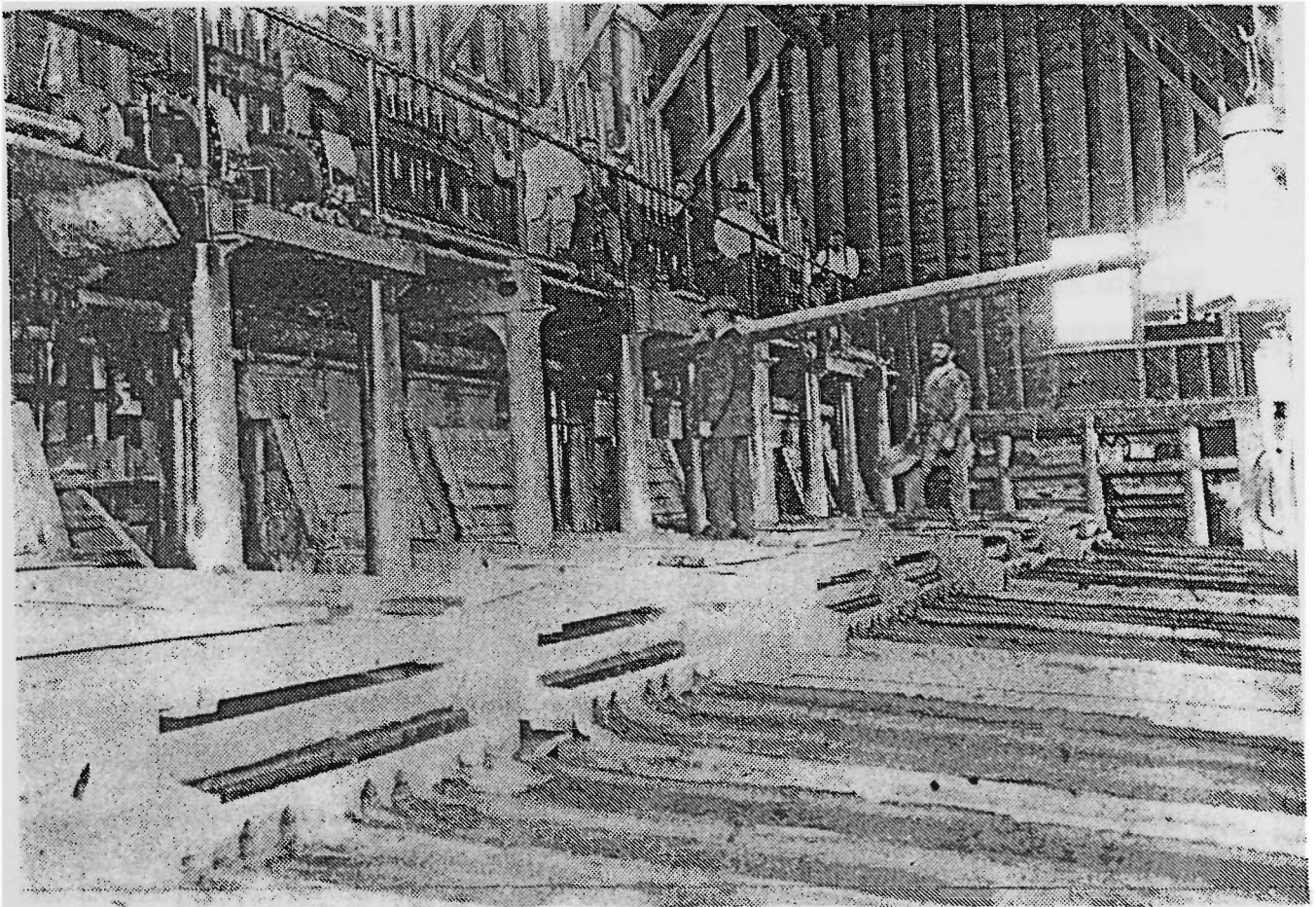
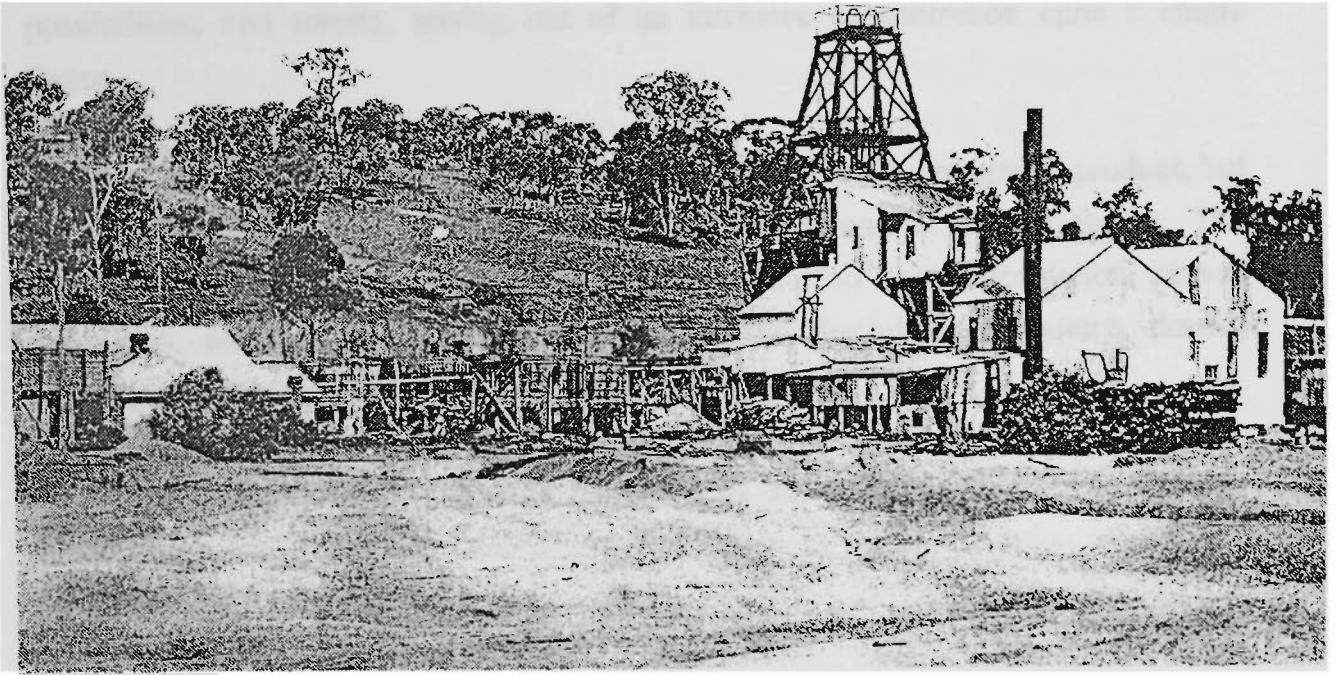
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Peak Hill Proprietary Mine



THE BATTERY ROOM

If the stampers stopped at night residents
woke up and complained of the silence.

INTRODUCTION

The broad aim of this Doctoral Thesis in the Creative Arts is to explore the inter-arts possibilities, and results, arising out of an intensive concentration upon a single theme.

The outcome of this concentration isn't intended to be a totally integrated product, but instead, display evidence of a creative process, centring on that selected theme. The process, rather than the end product, is collaborative in so far as information, stimuli and ideas, correlate and cross-fertilise the artistic disciplines of poetry, drama, drawing and photography.

Implicit in a single theme is artistic focus, which makes such a survey of creativity manageable.

Consider the following scenario:

A playwright, a poet, and a visual artist working in photography and drawing, are commissioned to visit a specified area - (a weaver, musician, novelist or sculptor, could just as easily have been invited)

Each of the practitioners is asked to create a work which reveals an important aspect of the area's past and/or present. These selected creative artists needn't work in strict isolation, but can share research, such as oral and written histories, or survey any other creative, or informative work, applicable to that location.

Such an artistic commission would, no doubt, be a challenging thesis for somebody interested in the creative process, and in documenting how several people utilise communally shared information, perceptions and ideas, and then set them down in particular art modes. The whole complex act of creativity would come into play - 'cool' information would link with 'heated' imaginings; research would distil into individual viewpoints, all tempered, and influenced, by past experience. No doubt, the documentor of this hypothetical event would discover as much about the creative act, as about the location itself.

The documentor, as well as sharing facts, would be eventually sharing that inner world of subjectivity, and also learn how much these so called, discrete art forms, have in common. Here, for example, might be a camera used poetically, distilling by

lens, or dark room, the most telling visual data; here might be a poem about a camera 'seeing', or a poem revealing images as sharply as a close focus lens; here is another poem whose mystery is in the aura, the blur beyond the depth of field. The playwright might visualise his or her scenes, like the poetic selection of so many photographic stills, put now to motion within a more contrived rendering of that location - the stage. The visual artist might look more directly at his or her photographs and rearrange images as poetic montage, capturing the essence of several photographs, heightening reality, and creating poetic and dramatic illusions.

These are 'ideal' outcomes, dependent upon each artist responding intellectually and emotionally to the location, and finding in it what each can give back in return.

Consider now, a scenario relevant to my situation: the documentor here, being also the creative artist, assuming skills in the art disciplines cited and moving from one to the other, utilising a body of information, associated imaginings and feelings, to create a poetry sequence, *WIRINGIN: BROTHER OF FIRE*, a stage play, *BILLY POGO'S FIRE*, and a collection of photographs and drawings on Billy Pogo and the Bindari Goldmine location.

One advantage that the "single creative agent" approach would seem to have over the group experience is that related ideas can interact freely with each discipline without the need of diplomacies associated with a group dynamic - the worry that one might be too influenced by ideas generated around the campfire, and that one or more of the group might resent being the initiator of ideas snapped up and then skilfully transposed into another's discipline. The photographer might begin to resent being the 'seeing eye' for the poet, or vice versa; the poet, conversely, might resent some of his best lines tripping off the tongue of the playwright's 'poetic' character.

Another advantage my approach has is that as the thesis documentor, creative writer and graphic artist, I have chosen a location with which I can intimately relate. I create within a known world which I feel deeply. Here is the difference between a commissioned art project, and an art work undertaken out of personal choice, and at its most pure, out of need.

My approach has its obvious downside. It is difficult enough being a poet, or a photographer exclusively, without trying to be both - or more. By being the documentor of the work I, no doubt, lack a critical detachment, no matter how hard I

try. I have relied, perhaps more than usual, upon outside assessment and criticism, to remedy this obvious problem.

Notwithstanding any reservations I might feel about presuming to range successfully across so many art disciplines, I want the documentation to focus upon the creative act, not from a theoretical viewpoint, but as a set of observations arising out of art practice.

I have endeavoured to isolate, and note, all the influences upon me which have made this study and associated practice possible.

My imagination taps into recent, as well as early personal memories of people and place, and I document this fully, because here is the preparation for later creativity.

The fictitious Bindari is, in part, the remembered town of my childhood, Peak Hill; enhanced by historical readings to give authenticity to the poem sequence and revisited on several occasions to give contemporariness to the stage play.

The Billy Mogo photograph was 'found' in another place close to my childhood - Stroud - my mother's birthplace. This photograph proved to be a creative catalyst, and for this reason I closely document its influence in all creative areas.

To begin to create a complex persona from the photograph, I needed to thoroughly research the Aboriginal history and culture, and especially the Wiringin, or 'clever man' phenomena, within the broader social and spiritual context of the Wiradjuri people.

Creative preparation occurred also in the years of critical study, and skill acquisition, in the art forms now selected.

I have been writing poetry since early adulthood, and have studied it extensively at an academic level, as well as having had works published.

I have studied drama extensively and began writing for the stage in 1979, and my first play was selected for workshopping in that year by the Australian National Playwright's Centre. I have written five more plays since then. The creative writing component forms the main thrust of my doctorate however, my studies and practice in

the Visual Arts, since the late 1960's, have given me the confidence, and, I feel, the expertise, to include drawing and photography as part of this program.

I have worked extensively in photography during the past ten years, and apart from including practical works here, I have made an aesthetic study of the Billy Mogo photograph, as well as placing it in a politico-cultural context, while using it to stimulate creative thinking in the writing and graphics.

To work across artistic disciplines is a common enough practice. Within the literary arts there are many cases of poets becoming successful novelists. In the Australian context Rodney Hall and Roger McDonald come to mind. Patrick White, although more successful as a novelist, was a capable playwright, and in his early years had published poetry. He had a great love of painting and drawing, but had never become skilled in its practice to try his hand. It is less common for literary practitioners to move into visual arts areas, and vice versa. The leap in technical skills is greater. A painter is more likely to be a photographer than a short story writer; a poet more likely to be a playwright than a sculptor.

Yet with diversity of skill acquisition considered, there is still a commonality of thinking across the general arts which is appreciated by its practitioners.

Each art is a world by itself and as such, works with its own tools and means. It may attract different senses, appeal to a variety of feelings, provoke thought and reactions, but all art serves the same purpose: to heighten our feelings of existence, to challenge and distil, to give life meaning beyond the obvious, to make sense of senselessness - to build bridges.¹

Many artists are drawn to what can be seen as the general relatedness of the arts, even though they might restrict their own practice to a single discipline.

A painter might be inspired by the powerful imagery of a poem which expresses a universal truth about the human situation. This painter might translate such imagery across to the visual domain, restating it visually and enriching it via his skills and unique vision.

1 Sorell, Walter. The Duality of Vision. Thames & Hudson : London, 1970 p.27

A poet, conversely, might be inspired by the visual clarity of powerful images in a painting and be inspired to convert these images into words.

My study, through its inter-relating annotations, shows such a process at work. For example, an archival photograph, long neglected, inspired me to further photographs and drawings. The same photograph moved me to write poems about it directly, as well as create a context for it, which opened the way for further poetry, and a stage play.

For my part, I feel I have achieved a creative output, and associated understandings, beyond my expectations. I believe that this inter-arts approach works for me, and I shall use it, judiciously modified, for future creative endeavours.

CHAPTER 1: WIRINGIN, BROTHER OF FIRE:

A POEM SEQUENCE ON A WIRADJURI CLEVER-MAN

1.1 PREAMBLE

To enrich this thesis I found it poetically and dramatically evocative to elevate Billy Pogo to the status of a Wiringin, or 'clever man' and I've given a background to the 'Wiringin phenomena' in notes on **SYMBOLISM IN BILLY POGO'S FIRE**. [2.2]

The faded photograph of an unknown Aboriginal elder dressed in a frock coat and top hat is a disturbing image. The existence of an Aboriginal skull on the shelf in a hotel in the current philosophical climate is outrageously discordant.

The poem sequence is an attempt to place a mind in the skull. Purposely, I've not given Billy Pogo a tribal name. His tribal name would have been rarely uttered. To my mind it intensifies the poetic irony when a man given a toy name, and patronised on one hand, is in such control of himself, his fellows and his physical and spiritual world, on the other.

Most of the material used in the poem sequence is fictitious. I've absorbed selected background information on the basic beliefs of the Wiringin mind, but I am the first to concede that we know little of such minds as the bulk of information has been lost or was never offered. I therefore invent a Wiringin on the little information I've gathered and, in many cases, I confess to poetic licence and re-invent. As a poet, I feel comfortable with the 'Wiringin view of the world'. It is one rich with metaphor and acknowledges a duality in all things.

As I became more involved in the Wiringin phenomena, it occurred to me that I was exploring an ancient belief system whose myths and symbols, although superficially different from those of the European, still had, upon closer examination, spiritual similarities which strongly suggest our common beginnings.

1.2 MYTHOLOGY: THE SHADOW PLACE OF POETRY

In his insightful essay: The Exotic Flower : Yeats And Jung, James Olney examines the thinking of these two advanced European thinkers in the psychic domain:

Both of them gazed long and steadily into the deep and there found what became a principal subject for each: those elemental spiritual and

psychic forces or beings, whatever we shall call them, that inhabit the realm of the great unconscious and that can be called up and put to use by the adepts - whether magicians, poets or psychotherapists who know the fitting words and who understand the proper rituals.¹

To Olney's list we could justifiably add the names given to the relevant adepts of the numerous Aboriginal tribal groups of Australia. Specifically, to the Wiradjuri, such adepts were called Wiringin or 'powerful men'. They were also called Buginja, meaning 'spirit of the whirlwind', and at other times they were called Walamira, meaning 'clever person'.

According to Berndt:

Walamira meant not only clever in the sense of shrewd, but also intellectually clever and having the ability, through the help of spirit and psychic agencies to perform wondrous feats, in a way incomprehensible to ordinary people.²

The adepts believe that ancient residues of collective human knowledge can be received through dreams, fantasies, visions and hallucinations. This being so, the Wiringin is no longer such an exotic outsider, labelled as a 'primitive oddity', and little more.

I find rich poetry in the cultural diversity of Billy Pogo's thought processes, but I'm equally engaged by the richness of thinking which flows out of an ancient common heritage. It is this which unites us and makes us no longer strangers.

Olney quotes from a letter Jung wrote in 1932:

the broad, shining surface of things always interests me much less than those dark, labyrinthine, subterranean passages they come out of. Civilizations seem to me like those plants whose real and continuous life is found in the rhizome and not in the quickly fading flowers and withering leaves which appear on the surface and which we regard as

1 James Olney, *The Exotic Flower: Yeats and Jung* Yeats and the Occult ed. George Mills Harper (McMillan Press Ltd., London, 1976) 27.

2 Berndt, R.M. & C.H.: The World of the First Australians. (Rigby N.Y., 1982) 308.

the essential manifestation of life..... I almost believe that the real history of the human mind is a rhizome phenomena.³

Jung acknowledges amongst his spiritual ancestors Paracelsus, the alchemists, Plotinus, the Gnostics, Plato and the pre-Socratics. However, I'm sure that he wouldn't deny that our 'rhizome', or common root-stock, goes back to our palaeo-grandfathers.

As a poet dealing with myth and a richly symbolic language of ideas leaping cultural barriers, I expect access to that common 'rhizome', whether I be motivated upon that quest by one who happens to be Irish, Austro-Jewish or Wiradjuri-Australian.

Our enduring myths, with all their richness and cultural variety, were set down to explain our material and spiritual worlds, and the role that we and all other phenomena play in it.

The Aboriginal 'Eternal Dreamtime', although continuous in its own time construct, was still a distant period when all things were created. The Wiradjuri used the word, 'ngerganbu', meaning 'the beginning of all'. Those things created still continue to exist:

In a spiritual or non-material fashion, they and all that is associated with them are as much alive today, and will be in the indefinite future, as they were'.... (and later).... 'the Eternal Dreamtime which underlies the belief that the mythological past is vital and relevant in the present, is part of the future as well.⁴

This concept of the Dreamtime when all was created and laid down in a mythic continuum is not dissimilar to Plato's description of the Demiurge cosmic creation which in microcosmic terms is not unlike an alchemist at work with fire, air, earth and water, which when placed on a macro-cosmic scale, leads to the creation of a 'World Soul', rich with physical and psychic characteristics. Created Gods (like Aboriginal sky-heroes) set everything in motion, even time itself, and then attend to the creation of all living creatures. The elements of creation are not immutable, but are forever changing a concept I would imagine acceptable to traditional Aboriginal thinking.

3 Ibid p30.

4 Berndt R.M. & C.H. 229-230

Indeed, the whole Platonic cosmic event leads to what is viewed as a 'Living Creature' of which there are many living parts.

In the Living Creature, which serves as model, there are all the Forms or Ideas that will be realised in creation as genres or species, but the Living Creature, like its created image, is a unique and single being.⁵

In Aboriginal thinking this might equate with the Eternal Dreaming, when all was created and will always be. To my thinking, Eternal Dreamtime has all the attributes of real place, subsumed in a cosmic idea of Platonic proportions. It claims its own time scale which as a concept placed against 'ordinary' time, is timeless. Ordinary time can approximate or reflect it, and those mortal travellers in 'ordinary' time, through proper initiation, can glimpse it, and in privileged cases become part of it, but to most it remains a closed event for most of their lives. In keeping with Jung's 'rhizome' analogy, most of us live in the bright day of the withering flower and few of us tap into the deep eternal green of the mythic root stock.

In many of the following poems, I've attempted to create a mythoscopic landscape which I might begin to share with Billy Pogo, without feeling as if I'm self-consciously forcing myself into the spirit company of an 'exotic' other.

An earlier approach, now finally discredited, held that the Aborigines represented a distinct line of development: that they were a primitive survival, an anomaly in the modern world. Ruggles Gates took this view for a time. Several writers, such as Sollas, claimed that the Aborigines alone continued into modern times the ancient Pleistocene stock of Neanderthal Man. But even in the 1930's, Howells (1937:69) pointed out that this made too much of divergences between the Aborigines and other human populations. (See also Abbie, 1951: 91-100). Neanderthals in the broad sense, or Neanderthaloids, are now regarded as belonging to the category of *Homo sapiens*, but *archaic sapiens*.

Today, to put it briefly, there is general agreement that the Aborigines are members of the species *Homo sapiens*, to which all living races

belong. They are representatives of modern man, just as Europeans are.⁶

I seek to delve beneath the veneers of social behaviours and material appearance that seemingly separate us, and reveal areas of spiritual commonality which bring us closer as human beings sharing a similar ancestry as suggested by Berndt.

My interest in Billy Pogo is not concerned with historic objectivity, (whatever that means) or with what might be considered critically as a non-Aboriginal's presumptive attempt to place a late nineteenth century traditional Aborigine in an accurate tribal context with its subtle social interrelationships and behaviours.

Because of our ancient connections, I feel it is possible to suggest these mythic incarnations poetically, without disregarding ancient divergences in thinking, which I hope will give textual richness to the endeavour.

Shamanic ideas and behaviours are the domain which universally unites us, and J.E. Cirlot reiterates the rhizome connection when he says that

Jung observes that all the energy and interest devoted today by western man to science and technology were, by ancient Man, once dedicated to mythology. And not only his energy and interest but also his speculative and theorising propensities.⁷

Cirlot, a little later, provides cross-textual support for such ancient thinking by quoting the archaeologist and historian, Cortenau

Who maintains that the schools of soothsayers and magicians of Mesopotamia could not have continued to flourish without a definite proportion of correct prognostications.⁸

Cirlot directly follows this statement with Gaston Bachelard's insightful question:

How could a legend be kept alive and perpetuated if each generation had not intimate reasons for believing it?⁹

6 Berndt R.M. & C.H. 2

7 Cirlot, J.E., A Dictionary of Symbols. (Rowledge & Kegan Paul, London 1973) xli

8 Ibid, xli

9 Ibid, xlii

This propensity for legend making goes further than being a human inability to report events without resorting to hyperbole. Legend, according to Cirlot, is not a place of symbolic events, although it may contain symbolic matter transformed into legend and thence into history. Cirlot cites Mircea Eliade who sees the possibility of reconciling symbolic and historic events and says:

it must not be thought that a symbolic connotation annuls the material and specific validity of an object or action. Symbolism adds a new value to an object or an act, without thereby violating its immediate or 'historical' validity.... symbolic thought opens the door on to immediate reality for us, but without weakening or invalidating it; seen in this light the universe is no longer sealed off, nothing is isolated inside its own existence: everything is linked by a system of correspondences and assimilations. Man in early society became aware of himself in a world wide open and rich in meaning.¹⁰

The above statement is richly supported in the Australian Aboriginal context, and how they came to view their intimate relationship with the land.

Correspondences and assimilations between the spiritual and physical domains were intricately established, and all this had its beginning in the Dreaming where all things real and symbolic interfaced, were mythically substantiated, and ritually validated, as I suggested in the Platonic context earlier.

The great mythic beings of the dreaming established the foundations of human socio-cultural existence. They also attended to that environment, and in many cases were responsible for forming it. They created human and other natural species and set them down, as it were, in specific stretches of country. They are associated with territories and with mythic tracks, and in many cases were themselves transformed into sites where their spirits remain; or they left sites which commemorated their wanderings - in which case, part of their spiritual substance remains there. So, all the land was (and is) full of signs. And what they did and what they left is regarded as having a crucial significance for the present day. But more than this, they are considered to be just as much alive, spiritually, as they were in the

past. They are eternal, and their material expressions within the land were believed to be eternal and inviolable too. ¹¹

This great spiritual union with place is not exclusive to Aborigines. Folklore and legends of countless world groups attest to human confirmation of territory not only materially but spiritually. The great upheavals caused by dispossession of place are still with us. People don't only lose ancestral hills, rivers and fields; they lose the Elysian settings for their myths and poetry which clearly define them, and, if need be, reinforce the perceived sanctity of their souls.

I shall return to some of these considerations when I annotate some of the thinking behind OCCURRENCE, a pivotal poem of the developing sequence, where I attempt a few shamanic behaviours of my own.

1.3 THE CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUAL POEMS

With the previous considerations set in place I would now like to shape some of the annotations jotted before, during and after periods of creative writing upon the theme of Billy Pogo, a Wiradjuri Wiringin.

In the following documentation the poems are not in the order arrived at for the final sequence. The poems were certainly written with a sequencing in mind, but existed initially as 'free standing' poems each with its own title. Having written a sizeable body of work the sequence's structure began to suggest itself and demand attention. It was then that I dispensed with individual titles and began placing the work into what I hoped would be a free flowing numbered sequence. Obvious gaps would then reveal themselves and further 'infill' pieces would perhaps need to be written.

I shall return to the development of the sequence's final structure later and note any internal changes or abandonments. At this stage, I think it preferable to concentrate on particular poems and reveal the creative thinking which took place in each with the support of referenced readings.

HUNTING

In this poem the Wiringin is at the height of his special powers and is tracking the rainbow, which proves to be no easy task. A rainbow tracked to a waterhole is a triumph because it indicates the deposit of magic quartz from the sky-world. It is a variation on the old theme of a pot of gold at the foot of a rainbow. The 'primitive' world is not one of scientific thinkers like Isaac Newton. The rainbow was a fascinating phenomenon to all peoples and they found various ways of explaining it. To early Aboriginal people the rainbow was the effect of the presence of a special spirit rather than the spirit itself. A variety of legends attempt to explain its existence.

In the poem sequence I endeavour to show the powerful influence of natural phenomena upon Aboriginal thinking and belief. Most of nature is eventually dealt with metaphorically as a means of explaining it and the connection it has with human existence.

In HUNTING, the rainbow is establishing the link between the sky-world and the earth. The Wiradjuri people believed that the rainbow deposited special quartz crystals in waterholes and these had many powers, one being as a medium enabling

the Wiringin to travel to the sky physically or psychically and establish contact with sky-heroes.

In HUNTING, I attempt to show the Wiringin in complete control of his world. As well as an esoteric thinker steeped in the knowledge of countless centuries, I establish him as an adroit hunter. I begin the poem with a metaphor to which he would relate :

emu clouds nested on hills
as the rainbow crept down

Besides its obvious link with the rainbow serpent, I attempt to establish resonances with long extinct 'mega fauna'. Billy Pogo's distant ancestors would have hunted exotic beasts that have long disappeared but are still echoed in oral language, music and visual art.

In making an exotic creature of the rainbow, I attempt to give it rainbow attributes. Because of its evanescent character, it would creep rather than bound; somewhat like the snake, or the tail inverted kangaroo moving soundlessly on legs and paws.

It would tread lightly and be difficult to track, being associated with water vapour and sun rays.

The creature's feet were perfect light

This line is derived more from Newton and his prism rather than teasings from legend. I follow this with - 'the Wiringin's eyes strained to shape its spoor'. If a Wiringin had trouble tracking the rainbow, mere mortals would have no hope at all. Ordinary tribesmen were warned away from waterholes during rainbow sightings for fear of drowning. Thus were 'the clever men' able to maintain total exclusiveness to such significant events. Billy Pogo would appreciate such a worthy quarry as the rainbow. Wiringin prided themselves on being able to move ghostlike among their fellows, or their enemies. It was part of the belief of disembodiment.

In the third stanza, I attempt to describe the rainbow creature physically, rather than behaviourally, 'the swarm of raindrops' evoking the swarm of gnats and insects often disturbed by, or drawn to, the presence and mobility of a huge beast. I incorporate all the spectral colours in describing the beast's wondrous appearance.

Its ribs were bold yellow and green,
its neck blue, and soft violet

Billy Pogo is a superb hunter and perceiver but the rainbow's powers are greater. He is able to glimpse the rainbow with its head in the waterhole but it immediately senses him and disappears. Like most creatures, it is most alert when drinking, because this is when it is most vulnerable. The mere touch of bright sunlight on its shoulder is enough to startle it and make it disappear. Followers of Newton would say the scientific conditions for the appearance of a rainbow had changed. Billy Pogo's thinking was vastly different to Newton's.

With the disappearance of the rainbow creature, the poem now focuses on the real reason for the hunt. The focus shifts from rainbow to waterhole. The rainbow has left a quartz crystal and this is the prize:

A quartz crystal awaited him,
a talisman, but greater
held in the gentle grip of sand

This is more than ordinary quartz. Billy Pogo is able to use this quartz in special ceremonies:

making him one and many,
taking him above and below -

The poem ends with reiteration of the rainbow as a creature 'forever disturbed at its nervous drinking'.

RIVER

This short poem is comprised of two sections and shows the Wiringin working confidently within the ambit of established, and as yet, unchallenged belief structures. I refer to the power of the Wiringin eyes and will continue to mention them throughout the sequence.

Beneath the unkempt hair, above a naked body or one clothed in the white man's casts-off, and in an immobile face, shine shrewd, penetrating eyes - eyes that look you all the way through - the lenses of a mind which is photographing your very character and intentions. I

have seen those eyes and felt that mind at work when I have sought knowledge which only the man of high degree could impart. I have known white persons almost fear the eyes of a *karadji*, so all-seeing, deep and quiet did they seem. This "clever man" was definitely an outstanding person, a clear thinker, a man of decision, one who believed, and acted on the belief, that he possessed psychic power, the power to will others to have faith in themselves.

'You could always tell a medicine-man (*walemira*) by the intelligent look in his eyes', two Wiradjeri informants told R.M.Berndt, 'and great ones were enveloped in a peculiar atmosphere which caused people to feel different'.¹²

The first section of 'RIVER' shows the Wiringin's believed power over his environment. He believed he could be as one with the earth and sky :

Billy Pogo, a Wiringin man,
brought water down to the Bogan
or sent it back on a track
beginning in the circles of his eyes

He is an extension of the land and it and the elements move through him, but for control to be possible, ancient ceremonies were observed. He danced the water out of shadows and sang it into clouds.

First mention is made of the hastring, or sky-cord, which is used for sky journeys or quick movement to other earth places. This special cord is mentioned in later poems.

In section two of 'RIVER', the Bogan is misbehaving by withholding its water underground, something the western rivers actually do during a dry period.

I anthropomorphise the Bogan and liken its behaviour to that of a recalcitrant tribal member, or even an enemy tribesman. The Wiringin's remarkable perceptions and knowledge gives him control over the river. He knows what is to be done so he transmogrifies, and as a leech spits the Bogan back into daylight. Becoming a leech

would be the best way for Billy Pogo to become a syphon, but he goes a little further and makes his action appear also like an inversion of normal phenomena:

It was a cloud burst from deeper down,
it was magic not for ordinary men to
know, but the sign was there.

And what was the sign? To eat some of the kidney fat of an enemy was to consume the power of that person. In the 'making' of a Wiringin, the kidney fat of his predecessor was eaten. In so doing the knowledge and the power of the dead one would never be lost.

Billy Pogo would be aware of the Bogan's power - at one time to disappear and at another to invade the whole land (as it did in the 1990 flood of Nyngan). Ordinary tribesmen often would have noted water appearing and filling the river bed when there had been no rain. We would explain it as being water springs opening, or rain in the distant catchment meandering slowly as flood waters through hundreds of miles of still drought stricken land. Tribesmen, however, would listen to the Wiringin's explanation, would see the smear of grease on the speaker's mouth and for those who dared look closer into the Wiringin eyes, there would have been the dazzle of quartz: the same quartz crystal which was plucked from one of the Bogan's last water-holes and now the source of power that enables the Wiringin to control the Bogan itself.

This context receives added poignancy when considering water as the necessary fluid of the body, and seen as the vital mediator between life and death, and healing the dying land, a situation explored in the later poem, DROUGHT, where Meroo-Merah and his parched remnant move ahead of cattle rushing to 'the last sweet water'.

The 'circles' of the Wiringin eyes suggests the completeness of his power, and the ability, like the circle, to encompass all. The circle, also, in this context, symbolises the sun whose cosmic fire has the ability to transform water into air and soak it up, and then transform air into water and place it down.

RIVER sets out to suggest Billy Pogo's power to control water, a power he appears to have lost in DROUGHT. In RIVER, the man of fire who can dematerialise into a fiery whirlwind, can also transmute into the other elements, the ability these same elements have in the Platonic construct. Billy Pogo, in turn, can manifest himself as solid earth, the ethereal elements, fire and air, and as the transitional element, water.

The leech image, my own invention in this context, syphons the bodily fluid, blood (mainly water), and has the power to prevent coagulation and thus keep the 'bodily rivers' flowing. The leech, like the Wiringin, has great healing powers: the ability to draw the life fluid into the dry artery of the river.

TRANSCENDENCE

In the opening lines of TRANSCENDENCE, I attempt to show the Wiringin's elevated status, within his tribal group and the group's need for such a functionary.

James G. Cowan expresses it in these terms:

It is not possible for a culture to survive for very long without the charismatic presence of someone who acts as a custodian of magical lore to which the rest of the tribe adheres as a matter of course. Among the great religions, the priest, mufti, monk or brahman occupies such a position. Around such people a certain aura prevails - an aura born of sanctity and community respect. These men are responsible for the rites; they are healer of men's souls; they are often called upon to perform miraculous cures. As a result they are usually revered and sometimes even feared. Ambivalently placed, they inhabit two worlds - those of the spirit and of men. Yet they fulfil the role of drawing these two worlds together for the sake of both. Celestial harmony is as much their concern as the well-being of individual souls.¹³

The first lines of the poem show the tribe's view of the Wiringin by way of a metaphor. He is, in turn, water, calm, and storm. He then stands as a man in firelight and then in shadow.

In RIVER I have noted Billy Pogo's control over water, and in HUNTING, he dives into the special waterhole to retrieve the magic sky-crystal. This crystal can also manifest itself in liquid form. When Baiame appears to the initiand, he is recognised by light radiating from his eyes:

From his mouth he produces sacred water called *gali*, said to be liquified quartz crystal. This is said to fall on the postulant and enter him, causing feathers to appear some time after. As Baiaame departs these feathers turn into wings in preparation for his first flight in the company of the all-father. Later, Baiaame 'sings' a piece of quartz crystal into his head so that he will have x-ray vision. Baiaame also removes a sacred fire (*wi:meju*) from his own body and 'sings' it into the postulant's chest. His wings are then removed, and he is allowed to return to his guardians. The final rite involves the 'singing' into a postulant of a thick sinew cord (*maulwe*, or aerial rope) which is later used in magical practices. The man is now a fully fledged clever-man or doctor.¹⁴

Ordinary tribal members were warned to stay clear of certain waterholes which had spiritual significance. Such a pool might contain rock crystals, or be the haunt of Wawi, the serpent. To an ordinary tribal member the water's movement might suggest the Wiringin within its depths.

The 'pool's ripple' is used to suggest the 'Clever-man's' superior cerebration and the 'calm' suggests his still psychic centre. In these early lines I mention water, storm, fire, darkness. The Wiringin can manifest himself as any of these things. Storm is a combination of air, water and fire and all are elements closely associated with the Wiringin phenomena.

Storm is a universal symbol seen as a creative intercourse between these elements. The Wiringin can appear to his fellows as a whirlwind or as a pillar of fire.

The putting of the flame and the cord into the postulant's body equips him for his future activities of causing fire to run along cords produced from his body, or of travelling in a 'pillar' of fire which does not burn anything¹⁵

In the poem, I refer to light and darkness, and the powerful significance each holds for the tribal group.

The shadows shuffling could be seen as the dancers by the firelight.

14 Ibid (Books Ltd: Great Britain) 82

15 Elkin, A.P. 86

Frazer has noted the primitive often regards his shadow, or his reflection in water, or in a mirror, as his soul or a vital part of himself ¹⁶

These shadows also could be ancestral spirits, or in some cases, malevolent ghosts which makes the campfire a necessary protective haven, as well as a place for cooking and physical warmth.

Blood, like fire, is a recurring symbol in the sequence. Blood letting rituals are observed during ordinary initiation into manhood. Ritual washing of this blood from the body takes place before the initiate rejoins the tribal group.

'Blood was deep' suggests this sort of blood. This is not the blood providing the body's physical sustenance. 'Deep blood' is blood of ritual and myth. Such blood given in ritual and pain enables the initiate to gain spiritual awareness and associative powers needed to understand the great mythologies of the eternal Dreamtime.

The Wiringin is treated with fear, awe, unease and respect depending upon the context. Sometimes the Wiringin would have the role of sorcerer and avenger, and his activities would cause fear. In TRANSCENDENCE, he acts as shaman, or high priest, of mind and spirit. He is not understood by his people but his functions on this higher level are vital to the well being of the tribe.

At some stage the Wiringin steps aside to perform behaviours only he knows and understands. The 'flicker' of his thinking I use again to suggest the presence of Wawi, the magic serpent. 'Flicker' also suggests that illusive spirit world only a Wiringin can see.

I show the tribal dogs' sharp perceptions and develop this later in STRANGE DOG, RUBY WINDOW and CHURCH STREET.

According to James Cowan a dog, like the Wiringin, could perceive Dreamtime spirits. Billy Pogo's dog in CHURCH STREET becomes agitated when the Wiringin lapses into a trance, which denotes heightened spiritual awareness.

Fire has great importance in everyday Aboriginal life. 'Green thoughts' burning the day are the everyday activities of a firestick culture, 'farming' the land and encouraging prey down to new grass.

Unlike in some religious sects, the Wiringin is not given favoured physical treatment. During the day he plays his part in the normal activities of survival. It is usually at night that he becomes a special spiritual functionary. It is at night that we all look up and wonder at a vastness which exists beyond our understandings.

It is the Wiringin who has control over space and ordinary time.

The night was a gap
through which he could leave
and then return

In our contemporary, technological society we respect those unique thinkers, such as Einstein and Hawking, who range above us and begin to reveal the great complexities of the cosmos to us. Faced with such stupendous thinking, we acquiesce. Unlike them, we are 'the night's brief creatures illuminated, but unable to spark the crystal;' yet as the Aborigines needed their 'clevermen' out there 'firesticking the cooling stars', so we need our great spiritualists and scientific thinkers acting similarly.

TRANSCENDENCE is as much about an Einstein phenomena, as it is about a Wiradjuri Wiringin.

Throughout the sequence, I keep returning to the circle and the centre, be it the gimlet-eye, the crystal pool, the cosmic canopy or the centre of a log or stick, or a dog's eye. The circle is a universal symbol of Oneness:

To leave the circumference for the centre is equivalent to moving from the exterior to the interior, from form to contemplation, from multiplicity to unity from space to spacelessness, from time to timelessness. In all symbols expressive of the mystic centre, the intention is to reveal to Man the meaning of the primordial paradisiac state and to teach him to identify himself with the supreme principle of the Universe ¹⁷

The tribal campfire can be viewed as a conscious centre where the initiated members have been given enough insights to begin to wonder at that greater centre beyond 'the sky-gap'.

Those 'sung to a song's bleeding' have given 'deep blood' during initiation but their understandings are limited. For most of their lives issues of cosmogony are sealed from them. It is the Wiringin who has that vital spark (spiritual and intellectual) which can take him beyond mortal confines to that cosmic centre and into its 'depths of murmurings, and histories shaped from shadows'. This is the Dreamtime creation event itself. It is where the crystal first sparked and where Baiame, the All-father remains as custodian of the spark's continuing power.

Those at the mortal campfire and restricted by 'ordinary' time can only wonder as they stoke the log's collapsing centuries (and centre). The whispers of flame might hold the answer, but the listeners are unable to hear and decipher any meaning.

EARTH

Here I attempt to show the abiding relationship the Wiringin has with the land. There is an oblique suggestion that Billy Pogo needs the earth to re-inforce his beliefs. He will fold the quartz crystals into it and observe the wondrous rhythms of nature. I develop an image of the earth as a 'Great One' dancing with the hill 'shrugging its shoulder of cloud'. Billy Pogo hopes to find answers in the timeless motion of thunder, wind and rain. However, the metaphor of earth as Wiringin and perpetuator of a unity between past and present, earth and people, isn't allowed to develop. It appears that the earth has also received portents of discord.

The power of the storm reveals the ancient feast locations, the encrustings of middens having long ago been subsumed in rock and soil, or having become 'hillocky' and as one with the landform. There is only a brief image of the ancient accord between nature and tribal man when the rain appears to restore the eternal feast with its damp, mimicking lips.

Billy Pogo likens this act to the tribal spirits feasting again. He even hears laughter and his feelings of gloom lift momentarily. Has the great unity been reaffirmed? No. The laughter is sinister - cold and distant. It is water out of control, having severed its accord with earth and tribe, and engulfed the feasting site.

STRANGE DOG

I feel that 'STRANGE DOG' is immediately successful in showing the terrible tensions the Wiradjuri remnant was experiencing in the presence of the white invader. The intrusion into the camp of a gold miner's dog underscores this tension and makes the situation more poignant. Savage tribal dogs, and men once proud hunters and warriors, are reduced to impotence. The body language of the dogs tells how subjected this tribal camp has become to white dominance. The period denoted is not first contact but about thirty years later. The miner's dog shows how contemptuous it and its masters are of the Aboriginal presence :

The strange dog entered
the camp, cocked its leg
and marked the tribe.

Boundary demarcation can be established no more basically than this, and even though outnumbered, the miner's dog receives only token opposition. The tribal dingoes, like their owners, know it is best 'to diminish into grass'.

Humans use the sense of vision as a primary means of gathering information. By making the intruder into the campsite a dog, rather than its white owner, I am able to structure the poem via the sense of smell, and use my observations and knowledge of animal behaviour to create some fresh images. A hunter gatherer society, out of necessity, had keener sense development than more sedentary societies. The Wiradjuri group quickly smells Gubba and Gubba's horse on the dog and realizes care is necessary. Because the dog is a Gubba possession it must be given immunity, albeit tacitly.

The dingoes would sense the submissiveness of their owners towards the miner's dog so, instinctively, they acquiesce. The psychological state of the tribal group is assessed via the dog's sniffing and tension increases as the dog encroaches. It sniffs the 'nervous toes of the women' and this is enough to confirm the women's emotional state. The dog goes further and trespasses upon the thoughts of the old men. Normally this would be intolerable but the men only react by clapping their spears. They dare not destroy this intruder. By following the dog's nose, the physical and psychological setting is constructed for the reader -

The strange dog sniffed the fire's edge,

smouldering twigs, and emu bone,
sniffed whispering words flitting
into cold air, and sniffed
the squeezed cry of a child

The dog, however, encounters powerful psychological restraint when it moves close to the Wiringin. I return to the power of the Wiringin's eyes, and for the first time mention Billy Pogo's affinity with fire -

The calm Wiringin snared the dog's look,
a twig at the fire edge flared
and a darting flame encircled a log

It's as if the psychic heat from the Wiringin's eyes is enough to combust the campfire embers.

Elkin documents incidents showing the 'clever-man's' seeming immunity to fire.

During one display in western New South Wales, after the bull-roarer had been swung, thus creating a mystic atmosphere, for it is the voice of Baiame (the sky cult-hero), the men present were told to stare into a big fire on the sacred ground. As they stared they saw a 'clever-man' roll into the fire and scatter the coals. He then stood up amongst the men, who noticed that he was not burnt, nor were the European clothes that he wore, damaged. ¹⁸

Billy Pogo holds the dog with that powerful Wiringin eye, and explores the animal's eye which gives a vivid picture of the gold seeking invaders. The eye, illuminated by the flame's seemingly magical flare, shows scenes of a 'second wave' assault into Wiradjuri country. First contact had occurred about thirty years previously by roaming stockmen and their foraging herds, but their impact was mild compared with what was happening now with a gold-fevered rush of thousands.

The dog's dark pupil becomes literally the hole being dug for gold. Around it is the glitter of gold, an image intensified by the knowledge that the translucent eye would be reflecting the sudden campfire flame.

The dog frees itself from Billy Pogo's psychic grip and disappears into the night. Perhaps the Wiringin's remarkable concentration falters for a moment because of the horror of what he glimpses in the dog's eye. The group tries to relax and the tribal dogs try to re-establish territory, but the Wiringin now stares into the 'dog dark' and feels 'a shovel slicing through him and the centuries of his people'.

The last Wiringin is later to be made king at the mine's edge. It is at the same location that he will be destroyed; all at a place of gold, with its associative symbolic, as well as materialist connotations. Through gold I bring the Aboriginal shaman into contact with the invasive culture's destructive energies. The Bindari goldmine is symbolic of the vast difference between the two cultures. There is a poignant irony in the fact that Aborigines had no use for gold and placed no value upon it, but they were brought into its destructive ambit, as surely as were the Incas, who used the metal almost casually as a high grade craft material.

There are poems in the sequence showing Billy Pogo coping with the frenzied gold quest and the ructions it was causing to the Wiradjuri fragment. At an early stage, because the gold fever would be so manic, I wanted to take direct focus off Billy Pogo and concentrate on gold itself as symbol and commodity. In an ironic way I wanted to show how gold affected other cultures and how its symbolic significance was often overpowered by its material status. So what was its symbolic significance? It is 'the hidden or elusive treasure which is an illustration of the fruits of the spirit and of supreme illumination'.¹⁹ Such symbolic reference has efficacy within a myth such as that of the golden fleece where the symbolic union is strength of spirit and purity of soul, qualities distinguishing Sir Galahad, the medieval knight of the Holy Grail. Myth, however, also warns of the materialist downside of gold, as exemplified in the legend of Midas, King of Ahrysia.

CENTI GRADE 1063

This poem observes gold exquisitely crafted and then returned to the earth to be part of a Sumerian king's immortality, its very presence, because of its imperishability, assuring the king similar status. But if it did, then this king didn't wish to spend eternity alone with it. Gold is also symbolic of rank and power. What good would be eternity without 'lesser immortals' being there to gape, genuflect and envy? This might account for the thousands of bone fragments in the royal death pit.

In the end it was the craftsmen of the golden bull and goat who achieved a measure of immortality. The king might have doubted the certainty of his own because

Sumerian Royalty
hesitated to be alone
forever with that most ductile
of earth which for all its power
to stretch itself like the human mind,
might fail to enleaf the mortal
fracture in kings.

These cross-cultural poems dealing with gold and kingship, although diverging from the immediate theme of the last Wiringin and his trials at Bindari Goldmine, are still relevant because associative reference to them is picked up in subsequent poems. As well as this they broaden the text of shamanic and mythological concerns and, I hope, begin to give the sequence a universal focus. The trials and vicissitudes of kingship have been extensively noted by James Frazer²⁰ and I call upon some of his observations to give texture to the sequence. I shall have more to say about kingship when I annotate the large pivotal poem, OCCURRENCE. It suffices to say here that the king appears in ancient mythology as the symbol of the collective unconscious. The king was often a high priest so, as a shaman, Billy Pogo already has a kinglike status.

A king was vested with the attributes of father and hero and the people's health and prosperity were dependent upon his continuing vigour. As mentioned in my annotations on TRANSCENDENCE, the Wiringin reigns over a vast and ancient psychic kingdom. Most of this is closed off to ordinary people, but their spiritual health depends upon his continuing access to it. He is the keeper of the ancient esoteric metaphors, and without them the people (and The Dreaming) withers.

SAPA INCA

Universally, the king has been endowed with supernatural and magical powers. Immortality was also attributed to him through associations with Godliness. The Wiringin phenomena conforms to these aspects. When Billy Pogo is made mock king of Bindari, are his drunken champions unconsciously responding to an ancient ritual having sensed one amongst them with greater spiritual powers? An enduring symbol of kingship is gold and this is no better exemplified than with the Inca kings. In

SAPA INCA, I portray a society with a surfeit of gold, its king presenting himself almost as a golden ritual ornament. He is the living incarnation of the sun.

Gold is the image of solar light and hence of the divine intelligence. If
the heart is the image of the sun in man, in the earth it is gold ²¹

Gold in SAPA INCA, I would hope, becomes so pervadingly present that we search for some contrast. The spiritual here is totally subsumed in a gold crafted environment. It is through gold that the king conjures a new season, he dines off gold and recreates in a garden fashioned from it. His mummified ancestors still inspire awe, draped in golden finery and

In death, he too, would be
mummified and ensheathed
in a woven treasury.

Gold has reduced the Sapa Inca to the status of a bejewelled functionary. He has become gold's victim on a grand scale and Midas might pity him. Like the Spaniard on his horse, gold is dual-faced. Crafted beauty is counter-balanced by blood and terror.

LIVE-BIRD LEAD

I wrote this poem immediately after writing those works devoted to gold and kingship. The poem came spontaneously and had enigmatic qualities which immediately appealed to me.

Background reading had me pondering dream states, the unconscious mind, shamanic thinking and Jungian archetypes. The image of the 'sleeping man' in darkness at the end of a tunnel derived naturally out of this material.

'LIVE-BIRD LEAD' as title to the work came from the name of a section of the Peak Hill goldmine complex. The title itself appealed to me on several levels.

A lead or lode is a mining term denoting a metallic vein: in this context gold. A lode, in general terms, is a way or course associated with the lodestone and lodestar. The lodestone has magnetic qualities, and I have quoted Lawlor's views on traditional

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Aboriginal perceptive powers to tap into magnetic fields as part of the psychic experience. A lodestar is a star which leads or serves as a guide, especially the polestar.

At a mythological level, birds have been used to symbolise human souls and according to Cirlot 'birds, like Angels, are symbols of thought, of imagination and of swiftness of spiritual processes and relationships. ²²

The 'sleeper' in the lead tunnel is perhaps one who has taken spiritual flight, or in an entranced dream state, has left the rational level of his fellows. Has he discovered more than gold, in fact, the powers of the lodestone, to attune a new found psychic awareness?

He is not readily recognisable to his fellow miners because of literal darkness, but also the symbolic darkness of the unconscious mind has transfigured him and given him a strangeness. Has he found in psychic darkness 'a path leading back to the profound mystery of the Origin? ²³ It is through a trial of darkness that spiritual light can be achieved.

The miner is to be chided by his rationally awake fellows for seeming to shirk physical labour. They bring light of consciousness to him so that he might be roused, and once again, be part of it. As yet, they haven't realised he has achieved that ultimate sleep, death, which is the ultimate liberator of the spirit. In Greek mythology, death was the sister of sleep and the daughter of night. The miners are naturally uneasy at seeing one of their companions unconscious at such depth. For a miner there is an ever present tension that his work place might sooner or later become his grave.

The miners soon realise that the sleeper is dead and the image of sleep, and the associative bedding, take a macabre turn. The dust on the miner is no longer a warming rug, but instead, the first smear of the dead one's mortal dust:

Wait - there's a rug
more final upon him.
It is the first dust of him.

22 Cirlot, J.E., 28

23 Ibid 76

The miners' fears of smothering rock-fall dust becomes a poignant death metaphor. The dead man's face is clenched, but we don't learn what killed him. I reserve this fact, along with his anonymity, to enable the poem to work more at a symbolic level. To me, the face is now a mask devoid of particular and variant personality. The smeared dust, and muddled mixture of dust and perspiration decorate it. I see his clenched face as a mystery mask worn in a ritualised performance. (Thoughts return of the Sapa Inca's mummified ancestors, and the death pits at Ur).

The mask is a powerful image in myth and is loaded with symbolism.

All transformations are invested with something at once of profound mystery and of the shameful, since anything that is so modified as to become 'something else' while still remaining the thing that it was, must inevitably be productive of ambiguity and equivocation. Therefore, metamorphoses must be hidden from view - and hence the need of a mask. ²⁴

In the context of the poem the miners find it difficult to differentiate between sleep and death, and the motives of the fellow miner are equivocal at such a depth. Other than this there is no attempt on their part to decipher the dead man's face and provide enlightening insights. The 'clenched face' and the figurative depth of their fellow miner is beyond their understanding and instead they look to his 'clenched hands'. To them there is unequivocal meaning here - the material literalness of gold. The dead man might have achieved great spiritual wealth as he 'dreamed' towards death, but it is the physical wealth that he might hold that excites his rational peers. It is this physical wealth that would elevate him in their eyes and give him hero status.

Open his hands and if
there's gold in the grit of him
let it dazzle us

Grit is small rubble which is left over after the primary object has been achieved. Grit is waste material like the dead man's flesh and they look to this flesh for what it might conceal, not to his mind via his face, and to the essence of him.

These are men, like the conquistadores, concerned with acquiring golden rings and bangles, not the golden thoughts and golden spirit of a culture. When the dead man

fails to produce material wealth he is discarded. It is only the residue of Christianity in these European miners that prompts them to bring the corpse above ground for absolution and eventual ritualised burial in a usual grave amongst the ordinary dead.

DROUGHT

This is the first poem in the sequence where there is direct physical encounter between the Bogan River Wiradjuri remnant and the invaders. *STRANGE DOG* and *DROUGHT* are transitional poems. The tribal group had been barely coping with ever intensifying rural activity. The goldrush would now make traditional life impossible.

There had been bitter encounters and intermittent skirmishes from the 1850's with wandering drovers. The great mob in *DROUGHT* is much more. It is a metaphor for the goldrush itself:

A great mob from Nyngan
was an invasive ballad
of saddle and spur
and its whip cracks of thunder
channelled the river
like a storm-rush mirage
draining into stillnesses of air.

An incident over Bogan River water which occurred in 1842 provided the initial idea for the poem. In 'Background Notes to Place and People', I make brief reference to the conflict. It suffices to add here that drovers under head-stockman Roache had commandeered the last decent water in the vicinity for a huge mob of starving, thirsty cattle. A tribal group, dependent upon this last water and led by an elder called Meroo Merah, retaliated and several drovers were killed. Retribution was swift, although police records claimed the death of only three Aboriginal males. Major Mitchell's account might be more accurate. Where he had seen dozens of Aboriginal males in the late 1830's, he found none on a return journey to that area in 1846.²⁵

I have chosen to create a similar incident late in the century, but have preserved Meroo Merah as the Wiradjuri elder making a last defiant stand for the survival of his

people. Among the Aboriginal men is my fictitious Billy Pogo, whom I mention briefly as the one who is 'gimlet-eyed'. The other men mentioned were Aboriginal identities around the Peak Hill area into the Twentieth Century, but I have changed their names for the sake of poetic euphony rather than any intention to distort historic fact (I might stress once again that I'm inventing poetry, not recording a verbatim history) I would like to note in passing, however, that Tiny Ryan, who becomes "Tiny" Ribbons in my poem, fought and died in Flanders in WWI as Private Alfred Ryan of the A.I.F. (Such are the remarkable ironies of history). I make no other excuse for including Meroo Merah, other than to record his heroic defiance and project in a poetic context his euphonious name.

'STRANGE DOG' shows Wiradjuri unease at the multiplying non-Aboriginal presence; the stray dog being an emissary of dismissive contempt. The tribal group on this occasion shows remarkable constraint but in DROUGHT, Gubba contempt over-reaches itself. Water is life and Meroo Merah responds as a warrior:

He would not
run lame winged from Gubba
like a feigning bird

Nor will the plover feign a broken wing to draw an intruder towards it and away from the nesting site. Plovers are more likely to attack any intruder, using wing spurs to great effect. It is a bird with whom I associate the aged warrior:

Meroo Merah cursed with a plover cry
born of rain and fire scalding
Buree Techala, the burning mountain

I create the plover image to offset the marauding cattle and horses. The fiery plovers are hopelessly outnumbered, but they mount an instinctive defiance and become 'rips of sound in smothering air'.

The plover, behaviourally associated with Meroo Merah, suggests to me that the same bird could be his individual totem. This knowledge greatly enhances the plover imagery, although, in any case, it already has strong symbolic links with the river, existing at this level as its 'spirit protector'. If the onrush of cattle symbolises the

rampant energies of the invader, then the plovers become a metaphor for the Wiradjuri remnant instinctively clinging to the last waterhole for survival.

Metaphorically, Meroo Merah becomes the plover, and individual totemism strengthens this:

Only one person is involved in a special relationship with some natural species, or some particular member of that species. The relationship is a personal one, not usually shared or inherited, although there are cases of inheritance: a youth may be given a totem at his initiation, as among the Wiradjuri.²⁶

Meroo Merah's cursing plover cry is also associated with Buree Techala, taking totemism a little further, whereby a person or group become associated with a particular location, and draw spiritual strength and a sense of identity from it.

In DROUGHT, I associate the marauders with the ballad, the dominant nineteenth century Australia poetic form, especially where horses and cattle are involved.

Balladists such as Lawson, Paterson and Adam Lindsay Gordon have romanticised the white pioneer in the Australian bush using this idiom.

Clancy of the Overflow, Andy, and Saltbush Bill are archetypal drovers prevailing over the climate, and oppressive squatters, but an Aborigine is never mentioned. Saltbush Bill allows his starving stock to range off the stock routes into land, it would seem, only tentatively held by upstart squatters. There was never a moral dilemma presented that this might be Aboriginal land, and sheep and cattle were robbing native animals of sustenance, thereby making traditional Aboriginal life impossible.

In DROUGHT, I associate the ballad with the cattle drive, but attempt to 'de-romanticise' the balladic ethos:

A great mob from Nyngan
was an invasive ballad
of saddle and spur

I had begun this process many years earlier in *The Diaries of Christopher Eipper*.

I am Eipper of Wurtenburg
A tutor in gentleman's houses-
days filled with skirt swish and teething;
a pre-pubescent boy mumbling Byron,
a son and heir unsure as a sheep alone,
salvation only in adult ledgers
and the farting of rhythmic horses.

My days ferment in this tedious ballad-land. ²⁷

DROUGHT has all the makings of an heroic livestock ballad of pioneers battling the environment, except for the inclusion of Aborigines. The result of battling with them would be hopelessly one-sided and morally reprehensible. Exclusion of 'this primitive other' was the best policy.

DROUGHT denies the drovers any triumph. It insists upon viewing the event from the reverse side. It shows the cattle drive as a destructive imposition upon the environment, as well as the Wiradjuri people:

At dusk the branded onslaught
trampled plover nests at Bulgandramine

and later:

An incurved mob drank
muddied, broken water,
while balladic horses, the day's
rhythm souring their flanks,
rinsed the governing steel
of their mouths

The main players of the ballad : horses and cattle, are both governed and branded by their 'heroic' controllers. To make matters worse all are fouling the last waterhole. They break this last water like they break the plover eggs, and the drovers and Aborigines add to this destruction by setting out to destroy each other.

I end this poem with the balladic tradition negating itself, while instinctive nature, symbolised by the plover, manages to fly above it.

The balladic tradition, when closely examined, is more about pain: the pain of the stockwhip, spur, branding iron and rifle, rather than being about things noble. When scrutinised closely the balladic event collapses upon itself:

Flinching horses smelling death
trampled cloven dust and panicked
the metre bridled in rhyme,
as smoke palled on Buree Techala
and plovers flew high.

OCCURRENCE

The sequence now takes the reader into an existence forever changed by white contact. Billy Pogo is relegated to the status of clown-king and he struggles to survive physically as well as preserve his status as a Wiringin.

In OCCURRENCE, I have attempted to create a scene rich in universal symbolic meaning without neglecting what I see as rich fragments of local history.

During a period of intense concentration one evening not far from the edge of the Peak Hill (Bindari) goldmine, I scribbled the first draft in torchlight. I won't be so dramatic as to say I had induced a state of auto-suggestivity, but nevertheless, I gathered all my wits and senses to create a phantasmagoria of images. I wanted these images to go beyond the energetic recording of an imagined historic event. I wanted the occurrence at the mine, with its conjunctive and disjunctive images and symbols to suggest a myth. A timeless event taking place as if I peered through a kaleidoscope whose dissolving and reforming image had focused such a scene's many incarnations.

I wanted OCCURRENCE to be a replay of ancient energies and beliefs: the particular players might change, but their fitful shadows were to be eternal. I wanted to create a set of symbolic images, as in a dream, that went beyond the subjectivity of an individual.

OCCURRENCE had to be one of the most important works in the final sequence. It was to be the inauguration of Billy Pogo as clown-king and I didn't want to neglect an event where representatives from many nations congregated in an ancient ritual.

I wanted to capture the vigour of a gathering of peripatetic men living a moment at the edge of what might be for them an Eldorado: here were men suddenly living claustrophobically near an ever widening and deepening hole with its labyrinthine tunnels reaching out like seeking fingers into the earth.

My first thoughts of the hole suggested a Judaeo-Christian hell-pit. This imported symbol would be lost on Billy Pogo unless Jesuit missionaries had already found his ear. Billy Pogo's hell was to be of the miner's making - the destruction of what to him, was him, and was eternal and sacred.

Such a hell-pit might await unabsolved Christians, but to Billy Pogo the loss of his traditional burial place would mean a sort of spiritual limbo, whereby his sky-spirit could not revisit the earth unless his bones were in their correct place. Only with his mortal remains in place could he complete his life cycle.

My Christian background has given me terrifyingly rich images of hell via the genius of Dante and Milton. Gustav Dore's hell-fire drawings illustrating Dante's *COMMEDIA* form in that aforementioned kaleidoscope. I have unconsciously, it seems, provided the hell-fire tubs, not emitting sulphur flames, but tiny flames of miner rum spittle. A smell of cyanide is in the air doing by day what it is scientifically meant to do - isolate and dissolve gold from parent ore that it might trickle down and attract zinc shavings, the zinc later removed in acid and the residue solution of gold placed in the crucible. What do I speak of here - modern technology or ancient alchemy? All that might be needed to arrive at the latter is ancient belief crucibled in runic incantation. Do I hear those drunken miners incanting at the edge of the pit?

If I go further back into human thinking, the hole need not be hell. This hole was useless to Billy Pogo and so was gold. A hole to him was a sky-gap only he as a

Wiringin could see : a hole making a skystring journey possible to the place of sky-heroes, including the greatest of all, Baiame.

The hole was more than a symbol of hell to the miners' deep ancestry. To the ancient Celts, it was a place into which sacrifice would be offered, and thus continuing tribal and earth fecundity, hereby ritualised, and praised with blood. Mummified Celtic maidens and warriors are still being discovered in what were once tar-pits.

At a spiritual level, and in keeping with Billy Pogo's thinking, the hole to many people symbolised an opening of this world into another: from the material domain into the spiritual. Primitive Indian peoples viewed the hole as the gateway of the world through which the soul passes to be finally released from the cycle of karma.

In my annotations of Symbolism in the stage play, Billy Pogo's Fire, I make lengthy reference to fire and what it means to the Aboriginal people generally, and to the Wiringin specifically. In the context of OCCURRENCE, I consider fire on various levels. Basically, it sets a mood for the poem. The poetic narrative literally lucubrates in the 'flicker-lit restiveness' of lanterns, tallow candles and fire-tubs.

I draw upon fire mythology which reaches into ancient times. The mythologies relevant to Billy Pogo are richly alive in him, but those enacted by the miners and teamsters are the unconscious stirrings of their ancient and forgotten past.

Solar mythology is implicit in the heat of flame which is associative with ancient concepts of life force and health (deriving from the ideas of body heat). All ancient peoples drew spiritual energy from fire and saw it as an agent of transmutation. This is actively referenced in the case of the Wiringin. He is referred to as a 'tested fire wizard' who 'had set his feet in embers to the count of ten'.

The miners, exhibiting undisciplined life energies at the fire tubs, seem to have responded at an unconscious, or deeply mythological level, to this mind over matter phenomena. Their rum-governed psyches transfer mock kingship from the educated, articulate Teddy Grace to one with superior spiritual powers. The 'mockery' is at a conscious level, but unconsciously the event is ritualistic and earnest. Devoid of rich, directing mythologies, the rum drugged, fire flickering mood of the night has them reaching into their unknown (or forgotten) depths for spiritual harmony. At Bindari goldmine Teddy Grace (a pun on King Edward VII) and Billy Pogo are, in turn,

elevated to kingship. To my mind the restive miners are unconsciously playing out ancient rituals which were once physically and spiritually life sustaining.

I make an energy metaphor of the fire and return to the symbolism of the circle. The lantern's vigour is perfectly contained in its globe, suggestive also of small suns, the miners huddle in 'circles of rumour around fire tubs, as if they all stand at curcumferences of light. J.E. Circlot describes circumference as

A Symbol of adequate limitation, of the manifest world, of the precise and the regular, as well as of the inner unity of all matter and all universal harmony, as understood by the alchemists. Enclosing beings, objects or figures within a circumference has a double meaning: from within, it implies limitation and definition; from without, it is seen to represent the defence of the physical and psychic contents themselves against the perils of the soul threatening it from without. ²⁸

The circle is seen as an emblem for the sun, the flame is a symbol of it and gold in the earth viewed by the ancients as subterranean sun. The Latin word for gold - aurum - is derived from the Hebrew word for light - aor. ²⁹

I attempt to unify sun, fire and gold in the description of the miners' faces as they stand in the fire circle.

Such light lent bright leafen
thinning to the sun hammered
skins of those who would kill
or suffer for gold.

I hope these lines reconnect the reader with the earlier discursive poems on gold, especially SAPA INCA.

Just as human life feeds off other life to invigorate itself, so does fire. The stoking of the fire by the ex-prisoner of Dartmoor is symbolic of fire's destructive side. It is his application of fuel which invigorates the evening after the harmless, yet vigorous music of spoons and concertina. This later fire, when it flares, humiliates the Wiringin and moves from his control.

28 Circlot J.E., 48

29 Ibid, 119

The stoker's thought of crowning the Wiringin as king is a destructive spark which at the end of the poem sequence sees fire as chaos and Billy Pogo destroyed.

The fire and the king ritual feed off each other. The ex-criminal's spark ignites a spiritually destructive fire.

The Wiringin, brother of fire, and in the context of this poem, seen as its high priest, loses control of it to another. Both Teddy Grace and Billy Pogo are shamed in its glare as it forms itself into a parodic throne.

Billy Pogo was a king in bellman thread
near a cackling throne of fire.

It is only when the crowd withdraws, that the Wiringin achieves some control over the fire. It is no longer an evil force, but merely a foolish creature which momentarily over-reached itself. I suggest the fire as dog metaphor used in BLIND WINNIE.

OCCURRENCE is a pivotal poem in that the Wiringin now has the insignia of the clown-king. It enables him to survive, but it compromises him. It is as if fire has sensed a new weakness in him and decides to challenge him. This inaugural fire to his mockery, portends the hotel fire, where he is selected as scapecoat. The final fire at the mine's edge shows a remastery of fire, albeit too late.

The edge of a goldmine proved to be an ideal location to create a king. To me, it is powerfully ironic that the Wiringin, in many ways symbolising universal or archetypal man, should be chosen clown-king by those who had long discarded unconscious or psychic thinking for the cognitive illumination of 'rational men', its high point being manifest in scientific thinking.

The king in ancient Europe was seen as a possessor of magic and supernatural power, as well as being one with a governing and supreme consciousness. Accompanying symbols to his power, among others, were sun and gold. The king in all ancient cultures symbolised the spiritual and physical health and wealth of his people, land and animals. The vicissitudes of kingship were bound up with these things and

today's triumphant king could become tomorrow's victim, and be discarded. I explore this aspect in the later poems of the sequence.

I portray this changed existence by means of a third person narrative but from the direct perspective of his beliefs and reactions as I understand or imagine them. In some poems Billy Pogo is interacting with tribal members e.g. BLIND WINNIE and CAGED CROW, in others he wryly observes European behaviour of GOLD DIVINER and TENT, and in others I document the decline of his powers in the face of the manic energies of the evergrowing mining community e.g. LAST FIRE and CROW MORNING.

GOLD DIVINER

This poem gave me an ideal opportunity to show gold fever at its height with the hysteria and greed which accompanied it. Ironically, the same whites, who would dismiss the Wirigin beliefs as pagan and primitive, are held in awe by Joseph Speed, the gold diviner.

The following excerpt from A History of Peak Hill and District provided the idea for the poem.

Gold was struck at the 'Golden Hole' by the New Chums who consisted of Messrs. Charles Cummins, Gustav Fisher, Joseph Inman, Andrew Anderson, Frank Roose, and Joseph Speed, on Wednesday September 11, 1890, when 7 1/2 ozs. was picked from the bottom of the shaft, the largest piece weighing 2 ozs 17 cwts. 3 grams. The wash dirt was seven feet deep.

Mr. Joseph Speed, who was credited with some powers in the use of the 'Divining Rod' received his share for advising the prospectors where to sink!

30

I imagine Billy Pogo closely observing the event, yet from a distance, the area most probably being out of bounds to him. Billy Pogo is loathe to acknowledge a 'white Wirigin' at work. He focuses more upon the divining stick itself and follows its every movement.

In TENT, Billy Pogo has some knowledge of the 'Nailed One', but he would be hesitant to give much credit to Joseph Speed and his kind.

Billy Pogo functions at the edge of this poem, but his image system is used to build it. I attempt some wry humour in tracking the Wiringin's thought processes. He must decide if it is Joseph Speed, who is about to increase mining activities and add to Wiradjuri torment. Or is it the stick? However, Billy Pogo is finally dismissive of it because it is obviously flimsy and randomly chosen :

Not a spear shaft shaped
in flexing fire for the set
of flint or bone.
This stick, mere flame stuff,
touted as magic -

Billy Pogo must have been finding the Europeans a contradictory race. On one hand scientific and matter of fact and now, on the other, engaged in a psychic quest with a stick as medium. In spite of their spiritual obeisances on Sunday to their 'Nailed One', a miracle maker and sky traveller, Billy Pogo had seen little evidence of any European spiritual union with the earth. Indeed, their physical union with the land appeared to be non-existent.

Billy Pogo is apparently satisfied that it is the stick which is in control of Joseph Speed, and with his growing knowledge of Christianity, he is happy to condemn it as a 'Judas Stick'.

I don't develop the notion, but Billy Pogo's belief system could easily explain the stick as an enemy Wiringin disguised - as are the crows in CROW MORNING.

It is ironical that Billy Pogo, devalued and concealed at the edges of this event, is a professed master of quartz crystal. He hears the distant gravel crushers and he despairs. He smells the stench of the cyanide tubs and he sees the scrambling greed of the invaders; 'the tobacco haze of believers'.

Billy Pogo focuses on the stick and his keen sight tracks its every movement. I use simple, strong verbs to describe the stick's actions e.g. 'jab', 'dig', 'dip', 'rear', 'balk'.

Joseph Speed obviously attributes no special qualities to the stick, because once it has jabbed the earth, he discards it. Billy Pogo appears to have made up his mind. He takes possession of the flung stick and snaps it. This destructive act tells us something of the emotional state of the Wiringin, the great frustration and feelings of inadequacy he must be experiencing. The gesture, I feel, goes further than this and some knowledge of 'contagious magic' gives the clue. This means that by gaining possession of an article owned by an enemy, with due ceremony, the Wiringin can inflict direct harm upon that enemy. Unfortunately I am unable to provide further details on Joseph Speed, and whether he continued to prosper on the new goldfield.

WAY OF THE POET

In this poem Billy Pogo is observed functioning on two levels. At one moment he is the clown-king entertaining the miners on the hotel verandah. Gone are traditional instruments and sacred song. It is enough here to play spoons on his knees and give his rendition of a frivolous English tune.

The audience is amused by him:

They joked at the sparrow thatch
of his whiskers, and at his spread nose
carved with a lazy knife

These lines develop the image of the marionette. Billy Pogo entertains the miners and continues to survive:

He gave the Gubbas a shallow song
from just behind his tongue.
They teetered at its edges, became bored
and back slapped inside to a painted
Wunderlich ceiling where he was illegal.

On another level the Wiringin retreats into the ancient world of his beliefs. When the opportunity arises, he escapes into his psychic centre and functions traditionally, away from those who parody his status. I now mention the magic sky-string and the existence of Wawi, the serpent, within him -

Wawi's coils loosened like the hank
of string, and stretched with it beyond

the blue shell of daylight

The poem's setting is the location of the faded photograph where a tribal elder in top hat and tails, poses in front of a grapevine. I transpose the scene to the back verandah of Bindari hotel. Now, in the poem, Billy Pogo is finally alone after entertaining his masters. I want to show him engaging his psychic powers to their extreme - the act of disembodiment.

Elkin compares this ability with the Yogis of Tibet who claimed such powers: the ability to leave the physical body and visit any part of the earth, or beyond it into the stratosphere.³¹ On this occasion, Billy Pogo doesn't become a 'fast traveller' with his physical body, but leaves his mortal self behind, as in a trance and spiritually journeys to the world of the sky-heroes -

Billy Pogo was now outreaching
green tendrils seeking lattices of air.
Whispering grape leaves jostled
their faces towards gaps of light
but the Wiringin was gone

The grapevine is a fast growing plant intent upon outreaching its physical domain, thus the mention of its tendrils aspiring to 'lattices of air'. I couldn't resist an opportunity to anthropomorphise the grape leaves. This mystic act of disembodiment must have an audience. It would be an event wasted on the tipsy miners, so an impressed audience of 'whispering' grape leaves jostled their faces towards gaps of light.

The Wiringin believed he could make contact with the spirits of the dead, so it would be spiritually comforting and mentally challenging for him to visit

the campfires of long ago
Wiringin and revise real song

The trivial spoon playing incident with the miners is used to off set the later events in the poem where the clown-king, disembodied, travels the galaxy to be in tune with cosmic rhythms. This event is made possible by having the command of thousands of years of special knowledge and a mystic union with Wawi, the magic serpent, who

also accompanies him. Wawi is free to spangle and forage with the stars. Elkin cites the belief that the black streak in the Milky Way, near the Southern Cross, is one of Wawi's ancestors. Little did the miners realise the remarkable thought processes of their 'stringed-puppet'.

TENT

In sudden gold mining towns the establishing of a school was often a vexed matter. Would the 'rush' endure, and therefore make the building of a permanent structure economically feasible. The government authorities, having seen too many false starts, usually provided a large tent, a few basic supplies and a teacher. Then they waited.

In TENT, I once again describe the events primarily from Billy Pogo's viewpoint. In this way I can enjoy working with fresh images. I am able to compare Aboriginal and European thought processes, as well as pick up on some of the energies of a gold town, which after the first euphoric months, must think as a settled community, and provide services spiritual, educational and economic.

Billy Pogo's traditional world needed little in the way of shelter, and he watches the erection of the giant tent with all the wonderment of a child watching the erection of a circus 'Big Top':

The tent stood braced
by spidery strings, and Billy Pogo shared
the puzzlement of small flowers
marooned in dim closure.
He felt the flit and panic
of insects nudging and prodding
drab borders in a quest for sunshine.

Moving through the poem is the untroubled assumption on the part of the mining community that this is now their environment. They move businesslike and with a God-given confidence that theirs is the one and only worthwhile existence.

Several sleeveless Gubbas arrived
with waxened tables and chairs,
two carried a large board baulking

the wind, and another wheeled
a barrow of books into the canvas mall.

Billy Pogo, the most perceptive and knowledgeable of his community, is struggling to keep up with the events literally unfolding in front of him. He attempts to incorporate the activities into his ever widening 'world view', but this event baffles him. He is an outsider, already a fringe dweller, patronised, but in the main, disregarded. He sees the white settlement establishing further demarcations where once his people had danced on wide-awake nights when the possum dropped down. This 'clever-man' who can decipher the meaning of all things is unable to read the simple, printed sign near the tent site and satisfy his curiosity. He uses images from his world to describe the sign :

what were these markings, neatly placed
like plover feet in mud?

He is resourceful enough to offer his own explanations for what he sees. He has noticed the quick erection of Churches and has formed the idea that Christ must be a 'white-fellow' Wiringin -

their Nailed One, a sky traveller
made great with dying
and the gift of return.

Because there is already a surfeit of churches, he dismisses this idea - and offers an insightful observation upon politicians -

Would Gubba politicians gather
in this tent to jig, and yell above
their dazzling rings and vest clocks?

Just as he is about to lose interest in these speculations and return to his secret world, the tent's purpose is revealed. He sees the military formation of a group of white children and he enquires further. The teacher is what we would expect and his answer is predictable, reinforcing the dominant attitude of English civilization. Barely established in his tent, the teacher is speaking of the traditions of brick and mortar, mottoes and English ways. Aboriginal children were not allowed into the school with

white children for several more decades. They were to be rounded up and instructed in a mission school several kilometres away.

Billy Pogo is puzzled at the way 'white children' learn and his puzzlement is current ninety years later -

So this was how young Gubbas learn -
Without sky, trees, or river;
without quartz, and the subtleties
of a lizard's ways.

Billy Pogo felt increasingly isolated. His belief system was the most difficult to subvert or abandon because it had been literally sewn into him. He had learnt and practised the ancient law and had communed with the dead. He survived in the company of the invaders, but functioned spiritually a world removed from them.

It wasn't the case with the younger tribe members who often abandoned traditional ways. This frequently caused tension and conflict with the elders who were despairing of the disintegration of the Wiradjuri language, customs and beliefs. Elders often died, refusing to pass on ancient knowledge to the younger generation.

In the case of the 'clever-men' the situation must have become desperate, because to be a Wiringin, commitment to a great endowment of knowledge had to be complete. Many Wiringin throughout the country would have seen as futile the dissemination of knowledge to those who might fail to be trusted custodians and sincerely committed practitioners. The effectiveness of the Wiringin phenomena was dependent upon tribal perceptions of it. White contact undermined the awe with which 'clever-men' were regarded, and therefore their authority diminished.

The Wiringin soon realised it was futile to train young men who had been spiritually contaminated. Rather than corrupt the integrity of their belief system, they often chose to die with it. I shall be discussing poems in the sequence which deal with this dilemma.

It mustn't be forgotten that many younger people valued their Aboriginality. It is to their credit that many beliefs and traditions have survived from generation to generation. It is a tragedy that so much has been lost forever.

CAGED CROW

This poem can be seen to function on one level as a narrative of an aged Wiringin suffering from despair and empathizing with the young crow caged at the doorway of a barber's shop. The crow 'knows some Gubba words. He juggles them on his tongue and the barber laughs'.

Billy Pogo, feeling great pity for the bird, tries to free it but the bird won't be freed, no matter how hard the Wiringin tries, and it isn't entirely the bird's fault - the wind, it would seem, thwarts him:

Billy Pogo throws young crow
to all the winds, but they in turn
gust him back onto the cage floor.

The powerful Wiringin eye engages the crow and shames it for trying to mimic a white man, but the more contact he has with it the more Billy Pogo pities the bird and identifies with it. The crow becomes a symbol of the Wiringin, himself - his spiritual wing clipped and the cage of white dominance impossible to escape.

At another level the poem is an allegory: the crow is a young Wiradjuri man trying desperately to assimilate into white society. He seems oblivious to his cage as he entertains the barber. The Wiringin challenges the youth who loses confidence when engaged by the old man's eye.

The Wiringin, at this allegorical level, attempts to win back the Wiradjuri youth. He tries to free him from European influence but the boy is unable to respond. His tribal spirit has been broken; the spiritual wing 'distorted by the scissor's shear'. Billy Pogo cries not only for the lad, but for himself when he sees this inability to soar free of the white invader.

BLIND WINNIE

With BLIND WINNIE, I set out to create a poem where Billy Pogo is seen interacting closely with a fellow tribal member. I also wanted to create a set of images incorporating fire and water, as well as emphasising the senses of touch and sight.

By making Winnie blind, I was able to accent her magical sense of touch and the accord that fish had with her 'special hand'. Winnie's power was expressed through 'sympathetic magic.' The fish, having long ago consumed her fingertip, were forever drawn to the hand itself. Also, by being blind, her sense of touch would be all the more developed. Furthermore, I used her blindness to offset the searching power of the Wiringin's eyes. This is best seen when both sit at the campfire.

I wanted to create some emotional engagement between these two elders, both remarkable in their special ways. I also wanted to avoid sentimentality and the projection of European behaviour upon them. I reminded myself that I was creating an encounter between two people whose ancestors had survived thousands of years as hunters and gatherers in a harsh land, and their behaviour reflected that heritage. To some extent males and females lived separate spiritual lives and social interaction was guided and directed by various taboos. The Wiringin's unique status allowed me to establish a detachment between the two, but I also had to remember that 'clever-men' for a great part of their lives lived 'normally' in their tribal groups.

In short, Billy Pogo and Winnie's encounter appears both behaviourally and emotionally different to an encounter between two elderly Europeans.

Blind Winnie is given one last exalted moment expressing her magic. The Wiringin assists her and his thinking wills it that she triumph -

He closed the gifted hand onto the line
and shaped his thinking into bait
at the end of it.

The catch is magnificent and its eye is filled with all the images Winnie can no longer see. Winnie, however, takes great delight in 'touching' the magical moment as she reels the twine onto her hand. But the event ends in anti-climax. The images in the fish eye disappear. The eye turns blank and we are drawn back to Winnie's blindness which at another level symbolizes the gloom of her spirit. The Wiringin makes contact with her by touching the magic hand and releasing the spent twine. This twine has limitations: it's not the magic sky-cord known only to the Wiringin. Winnie's magic is specific and not universal - away from the river she is vulnerable - mortal. The Wiringin is not so detached and esoteric in his thinking that he is devoid of human feeling. He considers Winnie's comfort, and images of water now become those of fire.

This will be our feast, he said,
now freeing a flame from tight circles
in a stick and letting it dance.

Winnie's fishing was portrayed ritualistically and so is the fire lighting; the spirit of life being manifest in all things.

Finally, we realise that each of these people belongs to a different spiritual world:

Having feasted she was ready
for the last journey, and she begged
him to lead her.
But this could never be
because he was a Wiringin
and must always travel alone
to places beyond the death of others.

Winnie can control water, but Billy Pogo is the overlord of fire and air. I liken the warmth of the fire to a creature wanting to follow its master, when Billy Pogo finally decides to leave the despairing old woman. This simile is allowed to develop into a complete metaphor; the warmth becomes a tribal dog, instinctively following its leader. Billy Pogo - rose and

the fire's warmth followed him like
a creature tamed.

The warmth metaphorically becomes a creature -

He ordered it back to the flames
but it cringed on the verge of cold

The 'warmth of the fire' is ordered back to the flames but the Wiringin must use all his powers to break the creature's instinct to follow him.

The 'serpent-flick' in Billy Pogo's eye reminds us of the mystic presence of Wawi. It is this totemic presence which gives the Wiringin his special powers and finally isolates him from his fellows.

Billy Pogo's telaesthetic abilities enable him to delve into Winnie's mind where he

saw all kind of darkness,
some warm, some cold;
and behind it the flickering shadows
of children robbed of names.

I attempt to intermix images of fire and water, light and dark, in the old woman's eyes. This would be literally occurring with the interplay of her tears in the reflected flames. There is an oblique reference to the deep river pool where the movement of fish suddenly silvered the shadows. But Billy Pogo sees no silvered shadows in her eyes. All he sees are the flickering shadow spirits of dead or never born children. These shadows are at the root of Winnie's blindness and despair. Her special magic has its limitations. She can't travel with the Wiringin beyond the death of others, but instead, must sit patiently for her mortal flame to die before she can be released.

CROW MORNING

This poem shows Billy Pogo in spiritual crisis, towards the end of his life.

In the first stanza the sun is personified as the supreme hunter, the image suggesting the Wiringin in his prime.

This is an image predating the clown-suit. The metaphor created is one of universal rhythm: the perceived relationship between earth and sun and the eternal union between hunter and land. It is a masculine image of the sun as hunter who has to travel great distances from the camp. This image of the sun fits comfortably into Billy Pogo's understanding of existence and his place in it. The old man, however, is unable to rise and move with the image once it has been stated. The second stanza shows the introductory image for what it is - nostalgia for a lost world. The great rhythm has been lost and here now, is an old man wishing and dreaming. As a young man, Billy Pogo had the immense confidence to identify his all ranging powers with the sun. But not now. The sun is still a supreme hunter well beyond the white invader's control (for the moment!) and Billy Pogo is merely a fringe dweller, his powers weakened and compromised. The Wiringin is left staring into the ashes of

what was his supreme element - fire. He doesn't curse the sun for excluding him but looks to a more reachable target upon which he can vent his anger.

The ashes of the campfire and the arrival of the crows are clearly death images. The crows sense that the old Wiringin's death is imminent. Billy Pogo's great perceptions and beliefs have been sullied by European contact. Alcohol has blunted his mental sharpness. The strong sun image is followed by one less clear. The crows are at once confused with Gubba, and traditional enemies, the Kamilaroi. The old man still expresses some defiance. The sun and Gubba are unassailable, but northern enemies disguised as crows can be apposed and vanquished. He isn't defeated: not yet!

As in the first stanza, he engages traditional thinking. His dormant magical powers will rouse and assist him. The presence of Wawi is evoked when 'snake flickering thoughts coiled in him'. The largest crow continues to curse, and we soon learn that the magic sky-string is hidden a distance away as if it is rarely used; the reason for this being that 'all the magic had withered along its length'.

All the crows encroach and Billy Pogo's pride refuses to have it that they are merely carrion birds. In his spiritual and physical confusion he wills their presence to be the magical work of an enemy Wiringin, now transfigured as the taunting form of the largest crow: a crow whose very blackness 'was stolen thunder'. It was Wiradjuri belief that thunder was born on a crow's wing and I previously allude to this in EARTH where 'thunder rolled off a crow's wing'.

Here is a worthy foe, a Wiringin whose magnificent transformation has stolen all the thunder born of crows. Billy Pogo would take this power by nibbling the caul-fat surrounding the kidneys of this disguised enemy, and in so doing further opposition would have the force of mere sparrows.

As an ironic note, I elevate Billy Pogo's hand and fingers to the status of hunters as if they act independently, not needing the brain which once co-ordinated them. It's as if the Wiringin has been detached from them and, like us, becomes a spectator to the grim act of crow slaughter. The words describing the killing act of the fingers are ritualised and rhythmic:

They tore his feathers which remained
crow feathers.
They tore his skin which remained

crow skin,
and blood rushed, but remained
crow blood.
And kidney fat?
None!

Billy Pogo, spectator, becomes aware that this is merely a half starved crow. This is no victory, merely the delirium of a deluded man. 'As poor as a crow' is an apt simile. This crow's kidneys are like acid pips.

The initial image of the sun as a great hunter rising to track the heavens and an old man wishing he could go too, dissipates into a final image of an aged Wiringin holding an emaciated crow body and coming to terms with harsh reality:

It was just feather upon feather
of endless crow.

The 'clever-men' phenomena in the south east part of the continent went into rapid decline from the middle of last century, although the story is quite different in Central and Northern Australia.

In the south-east section white contact was populous and proved detrimental to Aboriginal belief generally. To the few 'clever-men' of any one region the invasion was devastating.

Some lapsed into alcoholism while others despaired as they found the younger generation unwilling or unfit to receive their knowledge. The half-caste Badjigali, George Dutton, told me how, as a young drover, he had refused to take on the powers of a dying uncle. Riding home that night he saw the euro which was the old man's 'familiar' accompanying him along a stretch of road and then turning off into the darkness.³²

FAILED POSTULANT

The above statement prompted me to write this poem. Billy Pogo becomes desperate in his search for somebody to succeed him. Much concentrated learning, tortuous

self-discipline and prolonged ceremony were necessary before a chosen one could live fully as a Wiringin. Young men, in normal conditions, could be forgiven for refusing such a life. Commitment became even more difficult with white interference and a system of contradictory beliefs.

The poem is a tragic one. Easier to be the keeper of written texts than the custodian of an exhaustive oral tradition. The latter required total commitment. Billy Pogo has become the last of his tribe in guarding thousands of years of specialised knowledge. He feels the will to live slipping from him and if he wants his oral inheritance to continue he must pass his magic totem onto another:

To sing Wawi
into a new life
was the last green thought
to track before words
shrivelled and scattered
into the wind.

In desperation the old Wiringin considers a lad of mixed Aboriginal-Irish ancestry and decides against him:

The boy's bones were wrong.
His skin was bleached by more
than dusted clay -
and his blood was flavoured
by the bilge brine of an Irishman.

I enjoy this piece of reverse racism. The English and Irish having been disparaging and dismissive of Aborigines from the onset, are seen by this Wiringin as unworthy possessors of Aboriginal knowledge. The 'bilge brine' refers to the boy's convict ancestry. Many convicts developed intense hatred of Aborigines because while so called civilised men were chained and flogged, the natives of New South Wales were allowed to wander free - or so it seemed.

Billy Pogo notices that the part Irishman has lost the massive bone ridge - 'where magic made its camp'. The heavy brow is linked with the landform. This metaphor develops further when the skull is a cave sheltering sacred items, and images. In his district, Billy Pogo has become one of the few remaining with pure ancestry and of all

the vast Wiradjuri region he believes himself to be one of the last Wiringin. Only he had

this dying bone marrowing
the secrets of his people.

The old man decides to keep the contents of his skull secret. Indeed, he withdraws into his head's sheltering cave. He will seek comfort alone with his knowledge; the songs, poetry and visual images of his past. I've mentioned the crow and thunder connection before. The moon 'whittling to a thin bone' is an image I created after reading a beautiful poem-song from Arnhem land. The moon man when sick, thin and only bones, joins his sister, the Dugong, in the sea where he regains his former size and strength by eating lily and lotus roots.³³

FAILED POSTULANT ends with Billy Pogo's realisation that Wawi, his magic totem, must leave him soon.

Here is the crux of the tragedy : the end of a lineage of thinkers who elevated a small water snake to the realm of spiritual vastness. Such thinking, perhaps, has its seed at the beginning of all of us.

TRANCE

The Wiringin phenomena is coming to a conclusion, at least in Billy Pogo's tribal remnant. During initiation, he received much of his esoteric knowledge whilst in a trance. Heightened psychic states were induced by song and dance rhythms taking the participant well beyond perceptions derived from the usual bodily senses. Bodily application of blood and ochre also goes beyond mere decoration. Great mysteries were explored in ritualistic ceremonies involving blood and ochre: mysteries reaching back into the dreamtime when Aboriginal beliefs were laid down. This is when sky heroes exerted their cosmic energies and created all things.

The spiritual and physical expulsion of the mythic serpent, Wawi, and the relinquishing of the crystal's power, is tantamount to denial of The Dreamtime. Implicit in this denial is the destruction of self. The poem is one of despair. The Dreaming, inherent and vitalised in the concept of the initiated self, is losing its

necessary transferring agent. The Wiringin phenomena will end in this tribal remnant.

The 'sunless pulse of blood' is The Dreamtime which doesn't observe 'ordinary' (or solar) time. It's this 'mythic blood' which feeds the sinewed earth and bone and makes it breathe as one. I am suggesting the indivisibility of place and people. The Dreamtime is a complex concept involving a distant time but also is present, yet in a sense different from 'ordinary' time. In that same concept is the notion of place which is also the people themselves. Lawlor quotes how a Kakadu Aborigine expressed his idea of country:

I feel it with my body, with my blood... when the wind blows you can feel it. Same for country.... you feel it - You can look, but feeling... that put you out there in open space.³⁴

Lawlor follows this with an observation I pursue in the poem by way of metaphor.

Due to the mystical interrelationship of these two most profound realms of existence - the physical body and the extended body of the surrounding environment - the notion of possessing country or of land as a separate object has no place in Aboriginal consciousness. There are no words denoting possession in Aboriginal languages. A male Aborigine may speak of 'holding' his country, referring to obligations he has inherited for maintaining certain sites, but he never speaks of ownership. Like the human body, the country is considered nonsegmentable. There are distinguishable features such as thigh, abdomen, and chest, but they form integral parts of a continuous living being. An old Aborigine said of the ever-present barbed wire fences in rural Australia, "White man's fences strangle the music of the countryside, just as clothes strangle the music of the body."³⁵

Considering the poem from this aspect, Billy Pogo in his trance sings the mythological serpent and crystal from the body of the land itself, and to make matters worse, the spirits of the sky-world assist:

But now the song was trance

34 Lawlor, Robert. Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime (Inner Traditions, 1991) 237

35 Ibid 237-8

and Daramulans came with
 the faces and flit of ghosts,
 beckoning Wawi to leave
 the gritting place of crystal
 at its stanchion of bone.

The Daramulans, the sons of the All-father, Baiame, assisted in the education of the Wiringin. They now assist in the destruction. They have no part to play in the non-Aboriginal scheme of things - the 'vest clock time' where Wiradjuri children will be forced to 'calender thin days' and 'shape white rhyme'.

I make a distinction between 'ordinary' Wiradjuri time and the complex concept of time subsumed in The Dreaming. It is this 'ordinary' time which equates more closely with the European concept of a sequenced continuum and is now (in Bindari) given importance over The Dreaming which according to W.E.H. Stanner

conjures up a notion of a sacred heroic time of the indefinitely remote past, (but) is also in a sense still part of the present. One cannot 'fix' The Dreaming in time: it was, and is, *everywhen*..... Clearly, The Dreaming is many things in one. Among them a kind of narrative of things that once happened, a kind of charter of things that still happen; and a kind of logo or principle of order transcending everything significant for Aboriginal man. ³⁶

It is with this in mind that I show non-Aboriginal time taking over and giving added importance to the Aboriginal concept of 'ordinary' or 'social' time'

.... with children,
 dogs, life trackings and at night
 the resharpening of familiar stars

I acknowledge Stanner's use of 'everywhen' and use it in the poem in conjunction with place (or space) in an attempt to show the indivisibility of both concepts in the Aboriginal mind:

Time, when Dreaming,
 was the land's thoughts

feeling chosen ways with song,
and it was *everywhen*.

I attempt to continue the metaphor of the land as human body and vice versa. Perceptions and cognition are linked. The land's thoughts suggest it as a 'Living Creature', sentiently responsive. Songlines (along productive tracks and rivers) are suggestive of the synaptic fibres relaying information to and from the neural centre.

In this poem and others, I suggest heightened mythical awareness (through hallucination and trance) by way of synaesthesia, the mingling of the senses. This was exemplified earlier with the Kakadu man's concept of place by way of co-mingled sensations of touch, sound and sight.

Aborigines frequently make synaesthetic statements. In conversation with photographer Donald Thompson, a tribal man described his entrance into a vision. He said it began by his listening intensely to the sound of a humming bee. He reproduced the sound on the didjereedoo (long wooden flute) so that the bee's body appeared from the flute sound in its Dreaming form. The flute player then dissolved his own body so that it became the humming sound of the bee, thereby entering the bee's body and flying off inside him. Our perception of the tangible world depends on the distinct separation of the five sensory levels. The synaesthetic experience, which occurs in the deep neural system, marks our entrance into the blending, merging world of the Dreamtime.³⁷

The 'Song' in the context of the poem equates with The Dreaming. The singer, in 'ordinary' time is able to 'tune in' to the 'mythic song' by using various means. Through initiation the singer receives his entitlement to 'the song' and it is sacred to him and life sustaining. To lose 'the pattern of the chant is to lose the ability to call up that song. To sing out Wawi, the giver of mythic knowledge and intermediary to the sky-world, is tantamount to ritualistic disembowelment. The Wiringin believed Wawi was physically placed inside him to become his spiritual 'familiar' or totem. To view the spiritual self moving away aimlessly would be, to Billy Pogo, the ultimate horror.

Wailing sticks are sacred items and their repetitive sound sets the beat for chantic song and dance which induces changed mental states. With mention of blood and ochre there is a fusion of Aboriginal life with the earth:

The Aborigines consider the veins of ochre and iron to be the blood circulation system of the earth. In contrast we are so alienated from the earth that we no longer understand our deep interdependency with it ³⁸

In 'Voices of the First Day', Robert Lawlor also makes some interesting observations upon the earth's 'force fields' and how, to his mind, the Aborigines were still in tune with these 'invisible fields of force' or 'magnetic energies'.

Lawler develops some persuasive arguments which set out to explain the incredible perceptive powers of traditional tribesmen as having the ability to 'tune in' to earth vibrations and making it seem as though they has a 'second nervous system' that we, as Europeans, had long ago lost.

I don't wish to debate the scientific plausibility of such a claim because I realise our European 'mind set' has limitations and there is much about the nature of space and matter that we only begin to know. I find Lawlor's observations poetically evocative and this draws me to them as much as their scientific basis.

I read Lawlor with much interest after writing *TRANCE*. His findings enriched aspects of the poem for me, and 'ochre and blood' took on deeper significance:

Magnetism is an invisible web extending throughout the universe on every level, from atom to galaxy. Magnetic fields of influence integrate the universe, earth, and every living creature so that each communicates its rhythmic essence in resonance with all the others. Aborigines have always respected the force of magnetic energy, and they recognize the capacity of blood and red ochre to increase their sensitivity to it. ³⁹

Lawlor goes on to cite information given to him by an Aboriginal friend, Bobby McLeod:

38 *Ibid*, 141

39 *Ibid*, 101

'Psychic or spiritual fields are related to the material world in the same way that we conceive of a relationship of a magnetic field to its lodestone'. He also said, 'Living creatures are connected to the spirit or psychic fields through the blood flowing in their veins, while the earth's body is connected to these same fields, through its veins of magnetically sensitive minerals and crystals'.⁴⁰

Along with dance and song, and their power to induce psychic states, blood and ochre also play their part in assisting the participants to synchronise with invisible earth forces:

The Aboriginal name for red ochre is clay mixed with blood, and blood and the mineral pigment red ochre are interchangeable in Aboriginal ritual. The Aborigines would pound and bake the red ochre, thereby chelating its iron compounds and making them highly sensitive to magnetic fields. Both red ochre and red blood contain ferrous oxide compounds, which cause cells and molecules to line up parallel to the lines of force of surrounding magnetic fields.⁴¹

Billy Pogo, because of his extended initiation to become a Wiringin, became more sensitively attuned to the above mentioned earth forces long locked away to Europeans. Like us, he lived an exterior or conscious existence; a normal everyday life with 'children, dogs, life trackings and taboos', but unlike us he possessed a powerfully formed interior consciousness. We call this our unconscious mind and glimpse its manifestations only fleetingly in dreams or drug induced states of awareness. It is this 'inner consciousness' which is sharpened by years of physical and intellectual discipline that gives the Wiringin his powers and for countless centuries these powers were passed on. Postulants were chosen carefully and rigorous training began. Knowledge gained henceforth would be specialised and highly privileged. Billy Pogo like all the 'clever men' before him was 'made':

Billy Pogo in a trance
sings the serpent, feels blood
and sinew snap and sees
a boy of scars; the boy he was,
living in the death of the old Wiringin
until knowledge invaded silence

40 Ibid, 101

41 Ibid, 102

like a smell.

The great quest for spiritual knowledge was achieved through intense physicality. The postulant embraced his dead master and went as far as eating some of the predecessor's kidney fat. Magic quartz crystals and the old Wiringin's personal totem or 'familiar' had been transferred into the initiand by surgical means. I see the 'song' as the great burden of knowledge, and this wasn't given lightly. The old Wiringin was 'discarding this life. It wasn't an end. His spirit would remain as part of the cosmic pulse. He would go 'to the campfires of long ago Wiringin' as mentioned in WAY OF THE POET.

In TRANCE, Billy Pogo has reached crisis point. The tragedy is clear: there is no potential initiate worthy of the 'Song'.

The trance is a self induced hypnotic state which allows Billy Pogo access to what almost seems to be a 'second nervous system' which harmonises with the great patterns of existence right back to the dreamtime. It is in this state that the Wiringin is able to sing the serpent, Wawi, out of his life. The serpent is an all pervading force in Aboriginal cosmology:

the great Dreamtime Ancestors shaped the earth, its continents, mountains, oceans, and rivers, its lodestones and its veins of crystals, pigments, and metals. Their activities still resonate in the shapes and energies that bathe the earth and all life processes. These energies are often referred to symbolically as the Rainbow Serpent, which, like electromagnetism and all energy fields, exists as a spectrum of various colors, frequencies, or powers.

The rainbow Serpent is attracted to menstrual blood and will mingle with it to create life in the womb. The Rainbow Serpent is also attracted to rituals in which the tribal people are painted with red ochre. These rituals used the force of the serpent in their ceremonies to regenerate and increase the fertility of the dancers as well as the various plant and animal species. The Aboriginal myths of the Rainbow Serpent guide these rituals; the serpent is an energy figure symbolic of the sacred body of the earth and the preformative spiritual order of the universe. ⁴²

I have mentioned Wawi throughout the poem sequence and reiterate the influence its presence had upon Billy Pogo's conception of himself as a Wiringin. Robert Lawlor also refers to Wawi and the part this mystic serpent plays in the continuing education of a Wiradjuri clever-man:

The man of high degree knows he must dive into the water, where Wawi will appear to him and teach him a new song for ritual. The man must stay in these depths, repeating the song over and over until he has learned it. The song is a revelation of the mystery of life that he may bring back to his people. When the tribe sees him returning, painted red, they know he has been with Wawi. The plunge into the deep unconscious is comparable to the metaphor used in many shamanistic cultures. The shaman enters the creative preformative realm and returns with revelations about the recurring seasons of new life, growth, and fertility. In other myths, all of creation plunges into unconsciousness or a cosmic sleep before beginning a new cycle.⁴³

To be without Wawi is to forsake eternal knowledge: to sever roots with the beginnings of existence:

Now, in the loosening grip
of coil and chant,
Wawi leaves him
empty and cold
like a cave.

The old Wiringin searched for a likely initiate in FAILED POSTULANT but failed. Few Europeans could have appreciated the trauma being experienced at this spiritual level. At the time, sensitive Europeans would have been painfully aware of the devastation being caused by violence and disease, but would have had no inkling of the accompanying spiritual and intellectual destruction which I try to capture in TRANCE.

In the previous poems I've tried to establish creative connections between each work and also document some historical and contextual background to each. I intend to repeat this process with the remaining poems of the sequence, but also analyse

selected works linguistically and structurally, and show the process of change from one revision to the next.

RUBY WINDOW

Here I try to show how Billy Pogo might view a stained-glass window of Christ. Billy Pogo has already named Christ, 'the Nailed One'. I make reference to this in TENT.

A Wiringin, although functioning as a normal tribal member, spent a great proportion of his life at a spiritual level. I presume that he would have shown great interest in what would appear to him as a 'white Wiringin'.

Resurrection is a triumph over mortality and death. There are parallels here with Wiringin belief. The resurrection made Christ a 'sky traveller', both spiritually, and physically. The Wiringin believed, he too, could abandon his body and travel spiritually, but at other times his body could accompany his spirit, thus defying all earthly restraints.

Billy Pogo's description of Christ as 'the Nailed One' has further associations which I feel can be sensibly explained in the context of Wiringin thinking. Initiation procedures involved deprivation, degrees of pain, and blood letting. Ceremonies varied throughout the continent, tooth avulsion being most practised by the south-eastern tribes, along with varying degrees of cicatrization. Blood letting following arm ligatures, and circumcision was more widely practised in central and western Australia. Suffice to say, it would be the letting of the blood that would fascinate Billy Pogo and make him more curious of 'the Nailed one'. Christ, like the privileged Wiringin, suffered greater pain than his fellows, and triumphed over it. Intense pain concentrated one's perceptions upon the acquisition of great knowledge. Billy Pogo, no doubt, would have an understanding of God as an 'All-father' or 'Sky-culture hero', always present in a spiritual sense, as the Christian God was present during the Crucifixion and, indeed, was 'as one' with Christ, the son. Billy Pogo, more than any would see 'Christ's death' as a ritualised event: an event whose associated agony prepared the initiate for an esoteric life, setting him apart from his peers. Christ, like the initiated Wiringin, would be free of earth bondage.

Billy Pogo might see Christ as a rival, weakening his own spiritual authority, as well as seeing him as a fellow sky traveller, psychic healer and one who has triumphed over death.

Visual images reinforce the crucifixion and resurrection, the two events underpinning Christianity. To the illiterate, these images reinforced pain and blood letting: the vinegar-sopped torso wound and the bloodied palms or wrists. The blood and flesh of Christ symbolised in the holy sacrament as wine and bread have undoubted connections with sacrifice and cannibalism. Billy Pogo would see nothing wrong with eating the real flesh of this 'White Wiringin'. Consuming the caul-fat of worthy enemy was the means of subsuming his powers.

The installation of the great window at Bindari, shows Christ, the crucified and Christ, the Shepherd. Billy Pogo is not interested in, or aware of the latter reference. He sees the shepherd's crook as a divining rod, and this connects his experience with the gold diviner, Joseph Speed, who made great display with a wilga stick at the mine. I want the stained-glass window to be a spiritual focus in the church, and offset its presence with Billy Pogo's unique reaction. This, I hope, opens the poem's content to poetic ironies and fresh insights. In *TENT* and *DIVINER*, I've attempted to show Billy Pogo's intelligent curiosity to the non-Aboriginal activities around him. He isn't a detached observer in these poems. He is witnessing the destruction of his spiritual and physical world. His emotional and intellectual responses are central to each poem.

I want the crafted excellence of the window to add to the status of the church. The 'English bond' of the brick gives it a material presence usurping countless centuries of Aboriginal occupation. The light, however, beaming through the remarkable window gives an added spiritual authority to the building and no doubt intimidates Billy Pogo more than the regimented courses of brick.

The perceived superiority of the invader, not only physically, but also spiritually, is enhanced by a window worthy of the projection of celestial light onto the wax polished church interior. Many Gothic and Early Renaissance paintings show celestial light extinguishing earthly fire e.g. The Annunciation by the Master of Flemalle (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

RUBY WINDOW examines Billy Pogo's reaction to this unearthly light and the sense of awe he feels when the western sun 'amazes' the wall.

I want to document the development of RUBY WINDOW by comparing two drafts. The first draft was arrived at fairly quickly and the final draft, with a few minor later changes, was included as part of the Billy Pogo Poem Sequence.

The poem portrays the Wiringin as an intruder in the churchyard, but any real fear is factored out by his parodic demeanour. He is seen more as a nuisance than a danger. He is the community's clown figure, although there is a residue of unease concerning him, therefore certain restrictions have been laid down, one being that he keep away from the church. It's obvious that he has been showing intense interest in Christ, whom he calls 'the Nailed One'.

In the first part of the poem I try to keep the authorial voice aligned to the public's opinion of their clown-king. I objectively examine the church and the invasive swallow. I observe the activities of the man and dog with equal detachment. It is not until Billy Pogo enters the church that I refer to him by name, rather than the depersonalised, 'he'. I juxtapose the dog's territorial physicality outside the church and Billy Pogo's spiritual encounter with 'the Nailed One' inside the building. What is perceived inside the church is recorded directly through Billy Pogo's own emotional and perceptual observations and responses. e.g.

Billy Pogo saw the crooked stick.
Was this another diviner
not of gold, but light?
 Here was one who stared
 with painted eyes, yet smelt
 of earth and fire

At the beginning of RUBY WINDOW, Billy Pogo is viewed through dismissive public eyes.

They saw him at St. Stephen's
rubbing his palms on a sour coat;
his ridiculous coat; his trickster
fingers, the fiddlers of button and bone.

(First completed Draft)

They saw him at St. Stephen's
rubbing his palms on a travesty coat,
his trickster fingers, beguilers
of button and bone,
but the masters of fire

(Final Draft)

In the final draft I decided to dispense with 'ridiculous' and 'sour' in favour of 'travesty'. 'Ridiculous' picked up an internal rhyme with 'trickster' but I feel it fails to describe the coat adequately. 'Travesty' encompasses imitation and mockery. Billy Pogo's name is a mockery and so is the coat.

In the first draft I describe the coat twice, but in the final draft places more emphasis on fingers. The first draft is too dismissive and overly reinforces community bias. 'Travesty' contains moral implications not obvious in 'ridiculous'. In the final version, the fingers don't 'fiddle'. I decided that 'fiddlers of button and bone' trivialised what was being done to the button and bone. To me, 'beguilers of button and bone' elevated the activity. 'Beguile' has levels of ambiguity that I enjoy : in a negative sense, to delude and cheat, but also with the positive connotations of magic and charm.

The more elevated and layered meaning of 'beguiler' prepares the reader for the additional line of the final draft. These fingers have mastery over fire, and this mastery, to a non-Aboriginal watching fire being made in the traditional way, could appear steeped in magic itself. I include reference to fire to suggest a potential threat to the church or community generally. The community is reminded that the seemingly harmless and insignificant clown figure is in fact a tribal man, and the possessor of ancient skills.

The additional line denoting Billy Pogo's mastery of fire gains relevance inside the church when the curious Wiringin is confronted with a seemingly magical display of celestial fire.

By replacing 'sour' with 'travesty' I didn't lose the play on the fricative 'S' sound which moves through the early lines and is used to suggest community whisperings. These whisperings are overtaken by the alliterative explosiveness of 'b' in 'beguilers', 'button', 'bone', and 'but'. All these words sounding more linguistically aggressive.

I attempt some wordplay and make a pun on 'button and bone'. At one level it suggests 'buttons and bows', and plays on the garb Billy Pogo has been forced to wear. His outfit is seen to parody sartorial self consciousness. At another more literal level, it suggests the rags-and-bone man who traditionally walked London streets barrowing away any old clothing or sticks of furniture.

The button and the bone also have more fundamental connections. These are pre-plastic times and bone, ivory, metal and wood were used for making buttons.

In the context of this sequence I see the buttons of the coat as being bone. I don't suggest they are human bone, I merely allow the word 'bone' to generate its own connotations. Billy Pogo, as a Wiringin, placed great importance on bone. Many tribal regions throughout Australia used bone as the instrument of projective magic. Bone pointing was a means of psychologically, and then physically destroying an enemy or law breaker. Bone had great power and was often used as a charm against one's own death. Trucanini for example, made a bone charm from the arm of her friend, Tippoo, who died in 1860. It was suitably important to traditional Aborigines that they be buried in their own country. Their souls could then freely transmigrate from sky-world to earth.

Before I had Billy Pogo encounter the window, I wanted to establish the physical presence of the church. Apart from being the invader's spiritual centre, it also incorporated the materialist brick and mortar of Empire, the tangible symbols of colonial power and authority. In the final draft I included this fact:

the engagement of feather and clay
intruding on English Bond,
such is the will of nature
and tolerated.

The clay and feathers, although in this case resulting from the swallow's procreative energies near the eaves, are symbolic of so called primitive cultures and how they were Eurocentrically viewed. Ochre and feather featured importantly in Aboriginal life. Ochre collection created song lines and inter-tribal linkages. Mythical narrative was shared. The riches and stability of Aboriginal society were not founded on fortresses of brick and mortar. To the European powers, material structures were an integral part of self-concept and status. Military order and discipline were exemplified in regimentally layered brick. English bond equated with English rule.

Antithetical to all this was a perceived corroboree of discordant figures bedaubed with mud and feathers. Empire disregarded such performances, and set up its citadels.

The lines of the poem would usually be inverted to:

The engagement of English bond
intruding on feather and clay

The 'will of nature' was tolerated, but this needs to be qualified in the light of later twentieth century technology. It must be remembered, however, that at the beginning of this century, the chronological setting of the sequence, the Australian landscape was being ruthlessly altered and many animal species were already extinct or facing extinction.

The adaptable swallow was fortunate in being able to quickly utilise and integrate the invader's materials to its advantage, be they feather of sparrow or discard eider down.

Billy Pogo's entry into the church is seen as an invasive event. He is observed trespassing, even though he had been previously 'warned'. In the first draft, I say the 'brass distorted his hand' by way of showing him about to grip the highly polished door-knob. I changed my mind, however. I wanted community distaste to persist. His hand dulled the brass' is an assumptive expression of racial prejudice, rather than accurate reportage. The authorial voice has become implicated and frees itself with the conjunctive, yet satiric statement, about the hollyhock. It's as if the hollyhock were a sensitive voluntary church worker and community member who has been both rudely interrupted and personally affronted. The authorial voice has decided to mock the community's preciousness right at the church door, but inside the building, ignore local repressiveness, align with Billy Pogo, and sensitively interpret his responses.

At this point I'd like to return to the hollyhock. In the first draft it 'paused' at its work of flowering but in the final draft it 'palled'. I felt that 'palled' kept the image of brightness and dullness working. 'Palled', to me, suggested a draining of colour, the trespasser literally sapping the flower's energies. At another level I used 'palled' for its association with funereal ritual: a pall being a black, white or purple cloth spread over a coffin. A pall is also the square of white cloth placed over the chalice during the Eucharist. The wine, of course, is symbolic of Christ's blood. Hollyhock flowers are white, red and purple, so the image of the 'palled' hollyhock has rich layers of meaning. Blood imagery is forcefully experienced at the window itself.

Billy Pogo's 'making' involved the letting of blood and close association with death as mentioned earlier.

I intentionally chose the hollyhock, or holy mallow, because of its symbolic associations with Bethlehem. Its abundant flowering at the church door preempts the celestial flowering of the ruby window inside.

I say 'stack of flowers' to suggest a stack of precious texts, perhaps literally, 'a stack of bibles'. A 'stack' in a library is a special place reserved for such exclusive texts.

I juxtapose brass and hollyhock to suggest both the material and spiritual richness of the church. The vigorous dog instinctively territorializes the south-east quoin, while Billy Pogo endeavours to understand an awesome spiritual opponent.

In the first draft I had the dog sniffing outrage on terracotta, but in the final draft this outrage is 'ranked in mortar', and the dog sets about negating it. Initially I used 'locked in mortar' but 'ranked' appealed more because it built on the earlier image of 'English bond' as a method of laying bricks to give maximum unity and strength. 'Ranked,' to me, suggested English obsessiveness with military hierarchy. 'Ranked' also incorporated the sensory meaning of the word: that of rancid smell, not only of alien dog and cat, but suggesting the pervasive odour of Englishmen.

While the dog sniffs outside the church, Billy Pogo uses the highly developed sensory awareness of a hunter to assess the church interior. His perceptions are doubly sharpened because this is a strange place out of bounds to him.

Inside St. Stephen's Billy Pogo
smelt bee's wax, eau de cologne
and the fall from grace
of Sunday's roses

(First Draft)

'While in St. Stephen's Billy Pogo
breathed waxed cedar, eau de cologne,
and the faltering of Sunday's roses'.

(Final draft)

In the final draft 'waxed cedar' implies bee's wax, but extends the image of material richness. I dispense with 'fall from grace of Sunday's roses' I rely on the connection here between the roses' decline and 'Our Lady of Grace', the image being distinctly Roman Catholic, whereas I want St. Stephens to be High Anglican. I think the preferred phrase tells more about Billy Pogo's thought processes and how I, as the writer, endeavour to translate them.

Billy Pogo is cleverly isolating various perfumes lingering in the enclosure. I try to categorize these as minimally as possible and in so doing suggest his mental state. Firstly, he breathes in the material richness of the building, a place off-bounds to him. Secondly he identifies the recent presence of white women who are also off limits to him. This fact is expanded in CHURCH STREET. Finally, the faltering roses are suggestive of death and he is quick to receive this information. At another level this 'faltering' suggests his own unease at being alone in the building.

When finally confronting the ruby window, Billy Pogo sees its obvious artistry and craft. The painted eyes don't fool him, and the crooked stick is explained from his own experiential viewpoint; the recent incident with the gold diviner.

The Wiringin's powerful sense of smell, however, isolates something more disturbing - the smell of earth and fire. Billy Pogo is obviously ignorant of the stained glass technique. He is unable to explain away these smells so out of place in the calm enclosure with its perfumes of wax and flowers. Those painted eyes cannot be easily dismissed after all.

The outreaching hand is the cause of further wonderment. A piece of ruby crystal is seemingly imbedded in the 'Nailed One's' palm. (I have previously documented the power of the special sky-crystal, integral to Wiringin belief).

The crystal I have in mind as part of the window and an intense focal point of solar fire, is a glass glob, rather than a glass jewel, which has a more deliberately crafted shape, being flat at the bottom, and its raised form being convex, multifaceted or pyramidal. Globs are small humps of glass varying in size and colour and are made by melting down glass pieces until they form into a melted beads, or globes.

In the final draft, I prefer 'proffered hand' because of its linguistic similarity to 'prophet hand'. 'Proffered' is more archaic and literary. An 'offered hand' suggests

one, being held out to be shaken in greeting, whereas a 'proffered hand', in this context, is one presented as a gift: the gift of Christ's crucifixion.

I replaced 'pink palm', suggestive of innocence, with 'etched palm', suggestive of Christ's active engagement with the trials of the world. 'Etched' also picks up engravement and acids in the crafted glass process. The ruby crystal appears to be 'studded' into the palm of the hand; the stud in this context suggesting the head of a large nail and the crucifixion. The shadows are suggestive of ghosts or spirits slipping down the church wall and the swallow's dream of flying reorientates our thinking to the resurrecting Christ, and the sky-travelling Wiringin.

The poem's conclusion, to my mind, is stronger in the final draft: I draw Billy Pogo closer to the event. He waits and sees, and like the west wall, he is amazed. The light on the west wall goes further than being sunlight: it kindles the glass to fire. It is a magical moment. The 'hurt', 'studded' hand, seems to wince. Celestial fire appears to burn and animate it. The same fire appears to reliquify the glob of glass. The event becomes symbolically charged; molten glass becomes blood. What was a 'coagulated' glob, unclots and bleeds afresh in this magic fire.

CHURCH STREET

This poem seemed to naturally follow RUBY WINDOW. Billy Pogo bursts from the 'God-spell' of the stained-glass into the world he knows and understands. This is a world of metaphors crafted in the Dreamtime and lovingly revised down the centuries. I carry the glass imagery outside, where the day is described as 'crystal'. Glass and crystal become interchangeable: Glass as craft, and glass as magic. The dragonfly wings are so magical, that they manifest themselves as Wirigins of air.

The beginning of this poem was troublesome. The final version worked best for me because I took focus off the church and re-aligned with Billy Pogo. I was once again participating in his sensations and not being detachedly authorial.

1. The church was Gubba's centre,
but out in the spinning day
where dandelions are famous,
dragonflies were winged air.

2. The church was Gubba's centre,
gospelled in burning glass,
but out in the spun day
where dandelions listened,
dragonflies were slivers of air.
3. The church was a gospel of glass
but out in the spinning day
dragonflies were slivers of air:
4. Intimidated by radiance
in a gospel of glass,
he moved into the crystal day
where dragonflies were Wiringin of air.

The encounter with the Nailed-One has keened Billy Pogo's perceptions; he has been intimidated, but now he is outside and views his world clearly. He despairs because he and his people are losing their mystic contact with it.

Billy Pogo wants to be a confident Wiringin again, but incidents like the one in the church, and the way he is being treated generally, erodes his self confidence. He rips the coat button and seems to parody his belief system.

Shuffling through the Churchyard
he paused, and ripped
a button from the laughable coat
and conjured its bone.

Billy Pogo has an intense moment of self pity and despair. He withdraws into his mind which still has a powerful psychic centre. The dog senses this.

The dog cringed, knowing
the human mind is a fearful place.
It waited at the Wiringin's feet;
waited a moment, or a century,
in the eternal now.

The dog is left in time present where animals are supposed to exist, having no concept of past or future. The dog, no doubt, would be happy with its work of 'outranking' usurpers. It's not so easy for Billy Pogo. He moves back into the centuries of himself in search of peace. His present is troubled, his future doubtful.

I don't say how long the Wiringin absents himself from the conscious present. It must be gauged from the deepening of the dog's eye. Like a clear pool shadows have lengthened across it.

Upon his return to the present, Billy Pogo reconciles himself to his diminished status. He becomes the clown-king 'on the scrounge'. The spiritual worlds of Christ and Wiringin are now replaced by a secular and temporal one. The road dividing the two is literally and figuratively crossed.

Across the road are the miners' wives: the same wives who observed Billy Pogo trespassing into the church. Billy Pogo has smelt eau de Cologne in the church. The same perfume, mixed with female perspiration, now reaches him. I want this section of the poem to contrast with the poem's beginning. Billy Pogo is spiritually and psychically aroused upon leaving the church, but across the road he becomes sexually aroused by the plump wife in tafetta. He checks himself, however. These kitchens, 'were a taboo of white women'.

I contrast the window of the church with the kitchen window, but even when observing the kitchen, Billy Pogo describes some of what he sees from a spiritual perspective.

He paused at a drapeless window
and saw a drop-slab room
covered with paperings of words -
On a bleached board, flour
was roused and sifted through soft
fingers dancing like ghosts
on scrubbed pine.

His questing intellect notices the Gubba words, and his intense spirituality interprets the fingers as white ghosts. At early conquest, many tribes saw the English as the returning white spirits of the Aboriginal dead.

'Rousing' of flour by 'soft' fingers suggests the activating of sexual desire. This develops further with the 'pouted' scones and the 'startled blue eyes'.

These eyes contrast sharply with the 'painted eyes' of the Nailed One. Billy Pogo might have feelings of sexual arousal but the wife reacts with fear and anger. Her apron billows at the window as if she is chasing away an animal. The more basic human drives, those of thirst and hunger, prevail over any others. The old man begs 'plour and wine'.

Initially, I wrote 'plour and 'bacca' but 'plour and wine' suggested the sacrament, and had resonances with RUBY WINDOW.

The line most suggestive of Billy Pogo's carnality: the observation of the woman's damp underarms is positioned separately for emphasis. Preceding it is the woman's alarm and anger, and following it is Billy Pogo's wise retreat to the spiritual side of the road. The action, however, doesn't have the expected sublimatory outcome. The tom-cat, 'beatific on the rectory steps in RUBY WINDOW, is now preening its genitalia. Billy Pogo's sexual desire states itself, then subsides in this image. The dog assumes an aggressive stance for the cat's benefit while Billy Pogo withdraws, still savouring the kitchen's receding flavours.

The final poems for placement in the sequence are intense with fire imagery. CONFLAGRATION describes the burning of the great hotel and this event sets off a chain reaction culminating in LAST FIRE, and the Wiringin's destruction.

In the pivotal longer poem, OCCURRENCE, fire is a pervading image. In this poem, fire abandons Billy Pogo and mocks him. I previously show the Wiringin in perfect control of fire, a control no better instanced than in STRANGE DOG when the fire flares at his glance so that he might read future events in the animal's life.

After OCCURRENCE, fire becomes recalcitrant. In BLIND WINNIE, although Billy Pogo remains dexterous at 'conjuring' fire from a stick, the poem ends with the fire's warmth attempting to disobey him and abandon the sorrowing fisherwoman.

Fire as a universal symbol of spiritual energy begins to abandon the Wiringin and this is exemplified in CROW MORNING where the greatest flame of all, the sun, rises

early and abandons its beseeching agent. It seems that whatever power it chooses to transmute is by way of the energetic crows. The Wiringin is left helpless at a place of cold ashes which symbolises his spiritual state.

CONFLAGRATION

The destruction of the hotel could be seen as fire realigning itself with the Wiringin and at this last moment attempting to oust the invaders who have kept it imprisoned in lantern globe and fire-tub. It is my intention in the sequence to place CONFLAGRATION directly after TRANCE. Such placement would be sadly ironic, the Wiringin having sung his mythic totem, Wawi, from his life, and now at his lowest ebb.

I wanted the poem describing the hotel fire to contain a complex architectural inventory. This hotel was to be a centre of white commercial domination and a bold display of colonial power. Just as the survey record of Bindari township is rich with colonial naming, so is the hotel and its component parts. I initially note its construction phase in A LETTER TO MOTHER and its commercial functioning in WAY OF THE POET. I offset its construction with the earlier shanties which we now realise are being quickly replaced by more permanent structures mimicking the distant Imperial centre.

The hotel's presence suggests time passing. It is an assertive structure like the church and post office, and appropriates space which has been previously, and conveniently, deemed Terra Nullius. This building, had it survived, would have remained off limits to Aborigines for another sixty years.

All the grammar of Conflagration is the action of fire as anarchist e.g. seething, blistering, crackling and snapping. Such words act destructively upon an orderly richness of architectural names - baluster, newel-post, finial and corbel. These are status names reflecting European skill and refinement: names reflecting an imperialist culture confident of its usurping attitude, dress and abode.

In the poems following CONFLAGRATION, the mining community, led by the outraged publican, changes its feelings towards Billy Pogo. Benign contempt turns to fear. An Aboriginal belief system, mockingly tolerated up to this point, is now perceived as having sinister implications. Rumour quickly gathers upon itself the encrustings of irrationality and prejudice. The Bindari figure of fun is quickly converted into an agent of malignancy.

SCAPEGOAT

In this poem I attempt to create a situation which contains ancient, yet universal human behaviour, which irrationally seeks out a victim.

In Aboriginal society it was often the Wiringin's role to seek out the magical cause of trauma and malady. Such causes were usually attributable to a malign human agency, especially if the event is unexpected. In SCAPEGOAT, 'men of all nations' are seen acting in this so called 'primitive' way, allowing their misconceptions and prejudices to dictate to reason and fairness.

Such 'primitive' behaviours of those gold mining sons of 'civilised' Europe evoke for me the Roman Saturnalia. The clown king chosen unconsciously to represent Saturn's beneficence at Bindari, however, has brought destruction in the form of the great fire and must now be destroyed. The Wiringin, who was mockingly created a festivity king at the fire tubs, is now reduced to the wild man in rags. In SCAPEGOAT, Billy Pogo is totally dehumanised. The miners and the publican, who never allowed themselves to understand him as a fellow human being, now view him as the personification of fire at its most destructive level.

Use of fire at this destructive level is equated with pre-human, or at least sub-human, behaviour. Aboriginal fire making technique is distorted to diminish any thinking process and reduce it to instinctive behaviour. To make the fire, rumour said he 'chafed the joinery with his gimlet eye'. Rumour also said 'monkey flames' erupted from his coat. This is another dehumanising attitude towards him, and I extend this to the spoon playing, which once enjoyed by the mob, is now designated as spoon 'chattering'. The community insists on the total simplicity of such an act. Such a community is quick to place him in a cave, set him apart not only disdainfully, but now with real fear.

JUDGEMENT

The publican's mind still burns with the image of his destroyed material world. The great hotel chimneys, to my mind, have a totemic force showing how flimsy the so called mighty structures of Western Civilisation are when assaulted by the elements.

In this poem, I try to contrast the publican's material preoccupation with the troubled spirituality of Teddy Grace. While the publican laments the demise of 'cups and plate', Teddy Grace has been dreaming into his own spirit at river dapple. There is a

suggestion that he has been in contact with the hunted Wiringin and now comes forward to defend him. Teddy Grace, the apotheosis of an Englishman, suffered great physical ignominy in OCCURRENCE. I imagine him having experienced a spiritual awakening after been stripped of his material garb and its implied Englishness. It has given him direct insight into the suffering of Billy Pogo and the Wiradjuri people. The humiliating incident has opened his mind to what it really means to be human. Having been stripped of all physical identity and dignity, he has been willing to rebuild himself spiritually.

Towards the completion of the sequence it became evident that I should devote a longer poem to Teddy Grace and place it directly after OCCURRENCE. This is a midway point where the Wiringin has suffered an outward loss of identity as a tribal man and has been frock-coated in mockery as a clown king. Teddy Grace, too, for all his eloquence, and because of it, is also seen, and treated, as an outsider. Here is a man who, ironically, had fallen from grace at the Centre. I use this fact to explain his presence in Colonial Australia.

RESPLENDENCE

I allow the reader more knowledge of Teddy Grace because it is the Town Crier who attempts to defend the hunted Wiringin later in the sequence. In RESPLENDENCE, I present a short history of a man who as a youth had been instilled with superior notions over those both racially and socially different, but the same man offended his social class and was expelled from it.

... You glimpsed
the canker of Empire,
ran foul of by-laws and decorum,
which sent you down with rumour
below Plimsoll and family,
to New South Wales.

The 'Widgeons of Empire' in Australia are to Teddy's society, the Aborigines, and the miners at Bindari goldfield are 'the common lot', the 'great unwashed' in their everlasting serge.

The stripping from him of the English coat, and of all that it stands for, makes Teddy Grace confront his own humanity and reach out fumblingly to another whose dignity, appearance and language have been crudely denied. In 'tasting' the sound of the

Wiradjuri language, Teddy Grace reaches out for the essential human qualities that might unify us all.

SEARCH

In this poem the authorial voice aligns determinedly with the Wiringin whose oneness with the environment is offset by the clumsy manoeuvres of the police. The mining community becomes increasingly uneasy and is totally discordant with nature.

The stars above the fire-tubs
seemed colder and an owl
was shot for its moon-glow.
(It was Peter Gormley who panicked
when he heard it calling)

I hope that this physical and psychological unease will prepare the reader for the violent community reaction in *LAST FIRE*.

In *SEARCH*, Teddy Grace is given another privileged glimpse into Aboriginal spirituality. The great snake subsiding into the river invokes the totemic serpent, Wawi. By having the 'scarred man' rise immediately out of the same water, I attempt to suggest that the Wiringin has taken the serpent within his being in a last act of defiance against the assault on his belief system.

Billy Pogo is prepared to return the coat to its original owner and defy the edict which demanded he wear it always. The coat, however, is now greater than the complement of its threads. It was my early intention to have Teddy Grace destroy the coat as an act of atonement, but decided to have the Wiringin destroy it in *LAST FIRE* with the alarmed mining community as witness.

It seemed more poignant to have Teddy Grace finally recoil from the coat's meaning: its terrible status as a symbol of colonial oppression. Just as importantly, and on a spiritual level, Teddy Grace believes that the garment is now imbued with the mystic power of its wearer. It has the power of a prophet's coat when it had been previously the garb of a strutting Englishman. In refusing what he now sees as a magical coat, Teddy Grace unwittingly sets the Wiringin on a path to the mine edge where the tribal elder ceremoniously burns the garment before being destroyed by fearful onlookers.

RESERVE

LAST FIRE must be a poem of total desperation, therefore the poem, RESERVE, is intended to exacerbate the situation. Arising out of the hotel fire and the futile search for the assumed culprit comes the official approval to forcefully move the tribal remnant to an enclosed reserve or in later twentieth century terminology, to a concentration camp. From a tree-lined ridge, the Wiringin watches his people being loaded onto a wagon. Jarranbowie Jack's attempted escape, and confinement in the watch house, is enough to set off the events in COMMOTION, where Billy Pogo in emotional turmoil spikes the Poppet Head boiler. It is an act of magical defiance viewed by the miners

The old spoon clapper
has spiked the boiler
at Poppet Head and there's
not a blister on him.

I return to the image of fire, but in this case couple it with water, not forgetting an earlier poem where the Wiringin exercised magical control over the Bogan River.

The gutting of the boiler is seen by many as tantamount to an attempted gutting of Empire and the Wiringin's fate is sealed.

The unworn coat is still on hand for the LAST FIRE and in COMMOTION, I attempt to draw further imagery from it.

And men drew close
as if to praise a priest of fire,
or scoff, or bray for blood.

Each in his own way's telling
would snatch a thread
and weave hyperhole from it.

FINAL POEMS - ESCAPE, LAST FIRE AND SKULL

It is the poem, ESCAPE, and the death of Jarranbowie Jack in the watch house which seals the Wiringin's fate. ESCAPE is an ambiguous title when considering its context. At one level the Wiringin escapes the ropes binding him to the wattle tree, but at a more lamentable level Jarranbowie Jack, through his death, escapes from the

watch house cell. Jarranbowie Jack is hanged in custody. I neither say it is suicide, nor do I suggest it is police action.

Jarranbowie Jack has been a friend of Billy Pogo from when Meroo Merah led the Bogan remnant against the cattle drive. Actions in LAST FIRE are not only those of anger against the invader, evoking thoughts once again of the courageous Meroo Merah, but are also rituals of great sorrowing. This would explain the self mutilation of the Wiringin in LAST FIRE when he

became a corroboree of mouths
red with song

Non-Aboriginal viewers of LAST FIRE, having no knowledge of Aboriginal custom, would not realise the full meaning of the Wiringin's self mutilation. These observers might see it as anger turned to madness through loss of country and identity. This would be partly true, but the real reason would be the sorrowing for a dead tribesman and friend, in this case, Jarranbowie Jack. It is difficult for contemporary readers to understand such physical torment against self.

Elkin cites the dying of a tribal man whose friends gashed their arms and thighs. Later when the man had died

The same scene was re-enacted, though more frantically; the men and women rushed about cutting themselves with knives and sharp-pointed sticks -44

The tragedy of LAST FIRE, for me, is that what the mining community sees as an aggressive act towards it is in fact, a ritualised event of intense sorrowing.

Here is an instance of two cultures in conflict at a spiritual level. The miners are intent upon preserving their material world, but it is the spiritual chasm between them and the Aboriginal remnant which is far wider than the goldmine can ever be. Different beliefs, customs and language divide the two communities, but it is Teddy Grace who through language, or at least the reduction of it to one illusive word: atonement, who tries to intervene and save the Wiringin. I attempt to engage as an extended metaphor the act of speech, and the act of mining the earth. Teddy Grace, the skilled fossicker of language, offers a precious word to the miners, who, because

their minds are 'latched' upon material gold, will never crucible such a word and value its brightness. The act of self mutilation out of sorrow for others connects with earlier observations in the poem, UNGILDED. Here was a people -

their only adornment
a timeless mythology
cut into their blood.

While the mining community is so fastened by a 'golden latch' of materialism, it will never appreciate a spirituality which needs little of Bindari's material world. This community of miners will never appreciate the spiritual fire embedded in Billy Pogo's eyes. From their own cultural perspective they neglect the most basic Christian principle - compassion. Although they have built a church in which to worship, they have little feeling for 'agony and psalms', let alone any appreciation of a complex spirituality which long predates Christianity.

Teddy Grace would be viewed by the colonial establishment as one of the Empire's failures : an Englishman denied by (and denying) England, but his intercession on Billy Pogo's behalf is done out of feelings of genuine decency and compassion towards a fellow human rather than compliance with English law and its double standards. I have attempted to show a spiritual awakening in Teddy Grace in the poems preceding LAST FIRE.

In LAST FIRE all eloquence is reduced to the possibilities contained in one word freed of the nip and dab of ink. Atonement must free itself from its bible of intent and become an action. Teddy Grace tries and fails, but at least he was there 'running counter to the prevailing mood' as he had as a youth at Oxford.

The continuing metaphor linking the act of language and gold mining is taken further in the final poem to conjoin the ancient language and belief system of the Wirigin with his skull, and through this to the land itself. The skull is the structural equivalent of the land and language has been a vital force defining it..

Who would warm this cold bone
where blood and words once bloomed?

Who could explain this bone
once layered with thought

and carved by language into coherent pathways, and complexities of sound?

Through language, the land is intellectually and spiritually shaped and intimately known. At the point of equilibrium all things are interactively sentient and all are synonymous with the greatest being of all - the earth.

In SKULL, I attempt to evoke the magical unity that the Aboriginal mind had developed with the land. The extended question of this final poem begs the universal language of the earth to be taken up once more. Through magical ritual and a vitally metaphoric language, those who identify with the land might once again be part of its 'bright spawnings of words' and truly hear, and dance to, 'its complexities of sound'.

I hope that when reading this final poem, the content of earlier poems in the sequence will resonate. Those early poems of Billy Pogo in union with the earth and its elements should come to mind e.g. water on tracks 'beginning in the circles of his eyes', the 'dazzle of quartz' in his eyes, and his tribal companions comparing him with fire, storm, and water.

In EARTH, the land is viewed as an 'all powerful Wiringin' and the metaphor prepares the reader for the bone and rock images of the final poem. SKULL is evoking the earth's calcified depths as much as it is lamenting Billy Pogo's remains. Billy Pogo's 'real name' is synonymous with the immortal Aboriginal spirit which extends to the beginning of time when all things were made, and all knowledge began.

While the Aboriginal mind might harmonise with the earth, the European goldmining culture is seen as exploitative, but not without some symbolic residues which are also ancient, and perhaps even from common stock.

In making Billy Pogo their clown king, I suggest an unconscious ritual being enacted by the mining community. Billy Pogo becomes a sacrifice to gold and his bones in a pit of gold are not unlike those in a Sumerian death pit or the dead Incas sheathed in mummified splendour. To my mind, if gold had been corn at Bindari, then Billy Pogo

might have been sacrificed as a harvest god. In the context of the sequence he becomes a scapegoat for fire, following the destruction of the grand hotel. He also becomes a scapegoat for earth following the unexplained death of the miner in Live Bird Lead. He also becomes a scapegoat for the establishment, Teddy Grace being the most likely candidate here, but narrowly escaping, (or so it seems).

In the light of reason we might dismiss the million wings of magic 'quivering as one' but is such belief easily dismissed? The goldminers at Bindari are early twentieth century Europeans and grandchildren to an age of reason, yet they flock to the gold diviner, and are awe-struck by Billy Pogo's control of fire. They also have their church which has not expunged itself of magical connotation still clinging to its ceiling. Billy Pogo has had no problem in identifying Christ as an opposing Wiringin.

SKULL is in attempted coda to the sequence. It is an elaborate question freeing itself from the specific storyline and plot. It exists almost as a thought provoking epilogue, providing some optimistic note to a tragic event arising out of prejudice and fear. Assuming that this was a set of questions being asked in the socio-political climate of 1908 it would seem to be merely rhetorical, begging the luxury of interested listeners let alone being acted upon by anybody with serious answers. Only after another eighty years of earnest neglect have answers appeared which seem possible.

1.4 INITIAL SHAPING OF THE SEQUENCE

I eventually selected from all poems written on the topic, a list of forty poems which I placed in the following order after inserting four additional pieces which I'll discuss later.

Poem	1	River	21	Caged Crow.
	2	Cloud Burst	22	Tent: 1902
	3	Hunting	23	Way of the Poet
	4	Transcendence	24	Gold Diviner
	5	Currajong Hill	25	Ruby Window
	6	Bindari	26	Church Street
	7	Wild Bee	27	Blind Winnie
	8	Strange Dog	28	Failed Postulant
	9	Drought	29	Crow Morning

10	Earth	30	Trance
11	Centigrade 1063	31	Live Bird Lead
12	Sapa Inca	32	Conflagration
13	Ungilded	33	Scapegoat
14	Production	34	Judgement
15	Warden's Court	35	Search
16	Dance	36	Reserve
17	Letter to Mother: 1895	37	Commotion
18	Occurrence	38	Escape
19	Resplendence	39	Last Fire
20	Photograph	40	Skull

What commenced as several narratised incidents began to suggest the possibilities of a plot, which could dramatically interconnect the developing work. I wish to avoid summarising poems already discussed at some length. It is my purpose here to give a brief rationale for the sequence's structure, and why poems appear in a particular order.

I decided upon a linear structure: a pristine beginning showing the Wiringin in shamanic control of his traditional life, leading to intensifying contact with the Bindari goldmine community, and its destructive influence upon the Wiringin's spiritual and physical well being.

After four poems showing Billy Pogo in control of his spiritual and physical environment, poem 5, CURRAJONG HILL incorporates insidious mention of the invader. 'Stands of pine destined to be rafted' is the first line suggesting a physical change to the environment. It is by reference to the native fauna that I suggest an approaching spiritual change. Ensuing images are charged with Judaeo-Christian symbolism and associated naming in the form of the Methuselah Cod and the apostle birds (who group in flocks of twelve, or thereabouts). With the mention of the wedgetailed eagle, a bird of prey whose hovering shape is already appropriated as an allusion to the Christian cross, comes the implication with the addition of 'taloned', that Christianity, at its onset, wore a crown of thorns, and is never easy. Those Christians viewing the eagle as a sign of the cross might have viewed it as a miracle

in air, but for someone like Billy Pogo it would prove, in this context, to be a predatory force destroying his ancient mythologies.

After introducing some Christian images pre-empting its conquest of the region, I decided that poem 6, BINDARI, should be one describing the aggressively physical acquisition of land through measured survey and naming. (It would not have occurred to the surveyors that they were renaming).

The calm of the preceding poem is quickly 'impaled' on a perfect spike of gold and the previous reference to the 'taloned cross', I hope, gives this subsequent image added force. I also use basic sexual imagery to describe the mining community's union with 'that auriferous outcrop' by way of rough foreplay and mating between a shovel, and a mattock. Birth imagery is maintained and the surveyors are presented as midwives assessing and measuring the 'geographical' infant, Bindari. All events are procedurally English and ritualised. The intruders are three crows, birds at one level looking for titbits, but at another level, dispossessed Wiradjuri men. I return to the crow image in late poems, such as CAGED CROW, where the intent is allegorical.

Poem 8, STRANGE DOG is an early poem of confrontation between two cultures, but I use the miners' invasive dog to represent, as if by proxy, the miners themselves. It is a poem where I want to suggest Wiradjuri tensions being roused by a second wave white invasion. Their tolerance towards the blatantly intrusive dog suggests old fears over riding tribal dignity.

STRANGE DOG also shows the Wiringin using his psychic powers merely to survive rather than engage his ancient mythologies.

Poem 9, DROUGHT, is a replay of the first wave invasion of wandering drovers and great mobs of cattle. In this poem, a cattle drive to nourish burgeoning Bindari results in the death of the courageous Meroo Merah. Traditional life has become impossible and like other things the Wiradjuri remnant, after being rounded up will be 'named' and totally subjected European values.

Poem 10, EARTH, was selected for its position in the sequence because after the trauma of losing tribal members at Bulgandramine, Billy Pogo would be doubting his own powers to survive.

In EARTH, the Wiringin calls upon the land, that eternal 'clever-man', to show him a sign, but the earth's prognosis isn't good. Having subsumed all the harmonious Wiradjuri past it will continue unabated, relying upon its powerful elements, wind, fire and water, to cast off any invader, but this is long term, and of little comfort to the struggling Wiradjuri people.

I decided to include a couple of poems at this stage about gold generally, and its influence upon past cultures, such as the Incas and Sumerians. In these poems, I stress the terror and the beauty of gold, finally stressing gold's unimportance in Aboriginal culture.

These poems take emphasis off the Wiringin for a while and help set the scene of a manically energetic, gold obsessed community which will not be a happy one if history's account is to be generally believed.

Poem 17, LETTER TO MOTHER: 1895, takes the form of a letter giving an English woman's account of developing Bindari. It expresses a brief yet sensitive concern for the Aborigines. This letter shows how the English quickly adapted and strove to replicate the distant Centre in attitudes, manners, fashion and Architecture. Bindari in 1895 is still a shanty town, but it strives for permanency and status. First mention is made of the grand hotel which is destroyed in a later poem.

At this stage, I felt a pivotal longer poem was needed to formalise the mining community's attitude towards the Wiringin. Up to this point, Billy Pogo has been part of his tribal group, a fringe dweller whose psychic and musical abilities were being noticed.

In poem 18, OCCURRENCE, I wanted Billy Pogo to be deemed Bindari's clown king, and a frenzied gold seeking community to act out, albeit unconsciously, ancient rituals of their own race. This was an opportunity to introduce the 'fallen Englishman', the archetypal intellectual, who as frock-coated town crier and bellman, was already the unofficial clown king of the community, and in fact a parody of the later King Edward VII.

This poem's event would bring notoriety to the Wiringin. It would set him apart and make him a target and a potential scapegoat, but it would also provide him with a supporter in Teddy Grace. Here was the potential for growth in a character, and possibilities for dramatic interaction.

I wanted to present the mine as a hell hole visited by failed humans desperate for physical status, and (unconsciously) searching for spiritual meaning.

Poem 19, RESPLENDENT, gives a history to Teddy Grace and ends with him reaching out to Billy Pogo in the first stages of knowing him as a fellow human being rather than dismissing him as a 'flint hurler' and 'exotic featherer'. I wanted more to be known of Teddy Grace so that the reader would sympathise with his later actions.

The poems following OCCURRENCE until the advent of poem 32, CONFLAGRATION, show the Wiringin making contact with representatives of Bindari as well as interacting with a young Aboriginal male in CAGED CROW, poem 21, and with an old Aboriginal female in BLIND WINNIE, poem 27.

The Wiringin comes into contact with the tent school and its teacher. He plays spoons on the hotel verandah and is amazed by the activities of the gold diviner.

Poem 24, GOLD DIVINER, and poems 25 and 26 involving Bindari church, show Billy Pogo in conflict with the community's belief system - or when not in conflict at least making some effort to understand.

Billy Pogo begins to despair for the viable continuation of his own ancient beliefs. In poem 28, FAILED POSTULANT, he gives up all hope of finding somebody to replace him as Wiringin.

In CROW MORNING and TRANCE, poems 29 and 30, Billy Pogo is brought to a state of spiritual despair. At his lowest spiritual ebb the dead miner is found in LIVE-BIRD LEAD, poem 31, and in CONFLAGRATION, poem 32, the much admired hotel is destroyed by fire. In a time of relative prosperity at the mine edge, Billy Pogo is made king and now, at a time of disaster, that king's powers are questioned: the clown king becomes scapegoat.

The seven poems which follow CONFLAGRATION express acts of incrimination and pursuit. The Publican and the miners turn against Billy Pogo, although there is no proof that he burnt the hotel. It is Teddy Grace who becomes his staunch defender.

When the community fails to apprehend the Wiringin, they hasten tribal incarceration into the approved Aboriginal Reserve.

In poem 37, *COMMOTION*, Billy Pogo out of anguish and anger, destroys the boiler at New Poppet Head. Fear and prejudice intensify. In poem 38, *ESCAPE*, I use the death of Jarranbowie Jack to make even more dramatic the tragic events of poem 39, *LAST FIRE*. Poem 40, *SKULL*, the final poem of the sequence, is an extended question, begging answers to a situation in 1908 which seemed totally insoluble.

1.5 NARRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

The narrative's authorial voice, although highly sympathetic to the Bogan Wiradjuri people, and particularly to the fate of its (supposed) last Wiringin, pretends no familiarity with the Wiradjuri language as it remains sadly depleted today. Although I know, and have access to, many Wiradjuri words and phrases, I see no point in pretending any closeness to it, and making inclusions poetically. I see nothing to be gained, either, in including direct speech pretending to be late nineteenth century Wiradjuri English, which used clumsily, achieves no more than parody, and I include a 1907 Peak Hill Express report on King Cubby by way of example -

Black Cubby - went to the waxworks on show night and eying
Quinlan, remarked 'That pfeller boodgery bad, kill 'em woman... by
cripes, he bad'un... will I hit him' '45

If I could show somebody in the sequence such as Teddy Grace making a mishmash of the euphonious Wiradjuri language, then perhaps my attitude might be different.

I have Billy Pogo only directly utter 'plour and wine' and I remain uneasy about it, but have retained it.

It is enough that I pretend to be an omniscient, omnipresent observer into the thoughts of others. I realise that I work within a European construct in developing such a fiction. Traditional Aborigines, such as Billy Pogo, would have recognised as true only the enduring stories of the Dreamtime and verifiable immediate histories of the people and events. After two or three generations the most memorable of the latter would have been subsumed into the Dreaming, and made forever true. What I call a fiction deriving from my

imagination, traditional Aborigines would dismiss as lies. I am prepared to acknowledge, yet live with, this cultural difference.

I want the narrator to appear as an immediate reporter of events, a sensitive insider already possessing a Post-Colonial viewpoint, but withholding any temptation to become polemical. For the sake of art, the narrator, like the photographer, retains some moral detachment, although I don't conceal the narrator's pro-Aboriginal position, especially throughout the latter part of the narrative, and its tragic chain of events.

The narrator never reports from a first person position, and it is the continuing third person reportage which helps maintain a personal detachment.

To add some variety to this third person reportage, I have given the reader direct access to the postmaster's wife's letter to London. Another example of this is the letter from the Aboriginal Protection Board. I decided to present this variation in italics form to differentiate it from the narrator's text.

I use the same technique when the narrator includes the direct speech of others to enliven his reportage and give it immediacy.

In *RESPLENDENCE*, the narrator addresses Teddy Grace in second person in e.g.

'so here you are, your remittance long gone'

I use this technique, not only for textual variety, but also to show the narrator becoming more emotionally involved in the events.

The narrator's sensitivities have been horrified by the events of the preceding poem, *OCCURRENCE*. At the beginning of *OCCURRENCE*, the narrator now treats the hapless Englishman more seriously, and allows us access to his life.

The short poem, *PHOTOGRAPH*, (poem 16), uses the same technique. The poem obviously takes place soon after the incident detailed in *OCCURRENCE*. The narrator, rather than viewing events from a distance, as in *TENT* and *CAGED CROW*, is in the direct company of Billy Pogo and the photographer.

It is one of the rare moments that the narrator finds himself pitying the Wiringin. I hope that the metaphor of sun and camera is powerful enough to avoid any sentimentality.

OCCURRENCE gives the reader a clear verbal account of the Wiringin now wearing the frock-coat and hat. The community's clown king is captured soon after as a photographic image recorded for posterity. For me, this is a poetic moment within the sequence, and within the creative work as a whole. The photograph has, I hope, inspired a complex body of work, but the imagined moment of the photograph's creation is captured succinctly with a metaphor drawn from Billy Pogo's apprehension of the world.

The photograph is taken mid-way through the sequence. The Wiringin's Aboriginality has been literally draped with a new identity, and he carries the burden of this imposed persona to the end of the sequence, where he powerfully destroys it.

Another variation on third person authorial reportage is direct address throughout by another party e.g. the miner's extended question in *LIVE BIRD LEAD*, (poem 27), and the shorter infill poem, *DANCE*, where a miner's voice calls upon the little magician (the Wiringin) to be apprehended, and be made dance for rain so as to make continued mining possible.

1.6 FINAL ADJUSTMENTS TO THE SEQUENCE

I selected four further numbered pieces, increasing the sequence to forty poems, as listed. I chose three other works to include by way of introduction. These prefigurative pieces would be left unnumbered, and I shall discuss them now, along with the numbered additions.

Because I had included no actual Aboriginal language in poetic form, I decided upon some beautiful phrases which were sung by the Kattang people, and were included in William Scott's childhood recollections of the Port Stephen's area in the mid nineteenth century. I also include Scott's supporting comment on the song phrases because it pre-empts the terrible loss expressed in the final poem of the sequence itself.

The second prefigurative piece is my own poem, SPEARMAN, published in 1981 by Randolph Press. I have renamed the poem, BAIAME, and have made only slight alterations to its content. I chose it as a prelude poem, because it invokes the Aboriginal Dreamtime when the Bindari region was created.

The poems DROUGHT and LETTER TO LONDON make mention of the Bogan being dry. I decided to include three new numbered pieces preceding the latter poem, which would emphasise the state of continuing severe drought, and how it was affecting the progress of the mining community. I wanted to give the reader more information about the mine, and tensions growing out of lack of water. These additions would (partly) explain the violence which erupts in OCCURRENCE. These poems following UNGILDED (poem 13) intensify and make ironic that poem's content which speaks of a great ocean and of swamp later drifting as cloud. Time, too, has danced here, and its dance, like that of Wiradjuri people, has dusted the ground.

THE BINDARI TIMES REPORT, 1896, immediately placed after GILDED, shows the incredible yield possible from the area, if only rain were regular.

BINDARI WARDEN'S REPORT, directly following, shows the pressures being placed upon the mining community. It is also a piece of involved, soul-less bureaucracy when considered alongside DANCE, which pops up after it, and is a direct appeal to an agent of magic to end the drought. The Court report's dialogue structure provides some variety to the sequence.

Although governed by court procedures deriving from English law, members of the white community are just as ready as the Wiradjuri people to look to the supernatural for favour. DANCE does this simply, and readies the reader for the darker events documented in OCCURRENCE.

A final infill poem was WILD BEE which I decided to place between the establishing of the gold mine, BINDARI, and the intrusion upon the Bogan people of a second invasion, STRANGE DOG.

WILD BEE shows, in simple terms, the differences between the miners, and the Wiradjuri people. The Aborigines use a subtle, yet gentle craft, to harvest the honey

of the wild bee, whereas the mining community dislocates nature with a blunt song, totally discordant with the environment.

To enhance the text visually, I decided upon the inclusion of the Billy Mogo photograph. I hope that a future publication of the sequence might include a selection of the graphic works. I decided against making any selection here, preferring to leave all visual pieces in their relevant thesis section.

CHAPTER 2**BILLY POGO'S FIRE
A STAGE PLAY IN TWO ACTS****2.1 A BACKGROUND TO ITS PLACE AND PEOPLE**

Peak Hill, with a population of approximately fifteen hundred people, is the model for Bindari. Although fictitious, Bindari is much smaller and unlike Peak Hill, which has two hotels, the third recently gutted by fire, Bindari has only one.

I created Bindari in about 1979. A short story featuring little Bindari rail siding is still a favourite. A shell shocked war veteran known as The Colonel arrives at the siding daily, and waits for a train which he never bothers to board. Mac, the young siding attendant, and keen railway gardener, is disconcerted by the enigmatic Colonel, but humours him -

Mac busied himself. He was learning to ignore the Colonel. Mac was going to plant Bindari firmly on the map: he was going to win the Annual Railway Garden Award. Mac was energetic, but he loathed trains.... between the confusion of trains he tended the siding garden. It was early November and the cosmos at the northern end were emitting their red, yellow and orange signals; the rose centre pieces either side of the building were splendid, and the portulaca were indulging the bees.

The Colonel sat, and a large medal with a ribbon bloomed on his chest.¹

Peak Hill has been always part of my consciousness. My paternal grandparents moved there from Cookamidgera, near Parkes, just after World War 1. I lived in Peak Hill until I was ten years old, a schism in the family following the death of my grandfather resulting in my immediate family leaving in 1954. My parents returned in the late 60's, and lived in Derribong Street until my father's death in 1987.

My father left Peak Hill school in 1938. He was fourteen and couldn't wait to spend each day on the family farm, seven kilometres east of the town. My Grandfather's property, 'Sunnyside' was aptly named because a few kilometres further east are the

1 Ken Stone (1981) Hilltop Journal. Randolph Press. (p44)

Harvey Ranges upon which the sun perches each morning before drifting skyward into the heat of the day.

My father supplemented his share of the farm's income working casual days (between shearing and cropping) for Tommy Rice of Waterford, who made his fortune in wheat, sheep and real estate. Waterford, well positioned along the Bogan, neighboured Bulgandramine, a huge pastoral holding of the pre-war years, which was greatly diminished in the late forties due to the government's Soldier Settlement policy.

The Aboriginal mission was at Bulgandramine, and my father, on his Malvern Star bicycle, occasionally passed Aboriginal people on furlough from the mission, and wandering into town. The children scampered far ahead, and discarded mission shoes at the roadside would be collected dutifully on the return journey. It's a wonder these people bothered walking that hot distance considering the restrictions the town placed upon them, but a chance to walk into Peak Hill seemed to give them great delight; perhaps it gave them a false illusion, just momentarily, of being free.

In 1951 the remnants of the local Wiradjuri people left Bulgandramine and some effort was made to assimilate them into the township, or to be more exact, 'assimilate' them at the edge of the town. Aboriginal housing continued to be a dilemma for over twenty years until it was conceded that they should live in houses just like white people, and in streets also occupied by whites. From early settlement Peak Hill's treatment of the Aborigines was no different to anywhere else, but the establishing of the gold mine in 1889 brought a frenzied onrush of white settlers. Peak Hill suddenly had more than 6,000 casual occupants with little interest in the remnants of an earlier, invaded people. From the 1860's roaming pastoralists had impacted disastrously upon the Wiradjuri tribes, bringing disease and violence. The onrush into the 1890's saw the remnant diminish further, and greater should be the tribute to those who survived to the present day.

Koories were unlawfully dispossessed of their lands and their birthright. Koories were driven from their homes, their traditional grounds, their ceremonial and sacred sites. To take possession of the land faster, Europeans tried to commit genocide against the owners of the land. They tried to wipe out Koorie existence for they believed Koories had no right to exist. But Koories resisted the invasion of their lands, they fought for their lives and their right to exist. Koories

stood bravely against overwhelming odds, for the spear was no match against the gun and the racist attitudes²

'STRANGE DOG', a poem in the Wiringin Poem Sequence, reveals the sense of foreboding and despair being experienced by the tribal fragment of the late 1880's. They have succumbed fully to white domination - even the tribal dogs cower in the presence of the one stray miner's dog. The miner's dog, like the white man himself, was to be allowed to trespass into their lives, because these people had learnt the futility of protest many years before. Many of the older members would have remembered the massacre on the Bogan forty years earlier:

In the drought of 1842 a mob of 1200 Bulgandramine cattle was moved down the Bogan in search of water.

At the Bogan north of Nyngan, a waterhole was found and the drovers camped nearby. Aborigines were also camped and no doubt did not relish the idea of the now 900 head of cattle sharing their meagre water supply. One old native, Meroo-Merah, shook his fist at the head drover, Roach, who gave him a taste of the whip. Roache's offsider Carr, did not like the look of things when the Aborigines returned next day without their chief, Meroo-Merah.

Sensing an attack, Roach arose early next morning and rode out of camp. Hours later, he returned and found that only one man had survived a native attack. He took the wounded man back to Wellington and reported the massacre. Retribution was swift. Troopers and settlers rode out and caught up with the Aborigines fifty miles from the camp.

'We killed three natives' the police report stated, but no men of that tribe were ever seen again.³

By the mid 1950's the last remnants of the local Wiradjuri people were living as best they could in the vicinity of the long abandoned gold mine. The road heading east past the golf course, and towards my grandfather's property, cut through the foothills, south of the mine. As a child I could see small humpies built of flattened kerosene

² Coe, Mary. Windradyne: A Wiradjuri Koorie. Aboriginal Studies Press Canberra, 1989

³ Chappel, Charles (Ed.) A History of Peak Hill and District (Peak Hill Centenary Book Committee, 1988) 16

tins and rusted roofing iron. These were hidden by trees only a hundred metres or so above the road. To the north of the mine is the town's garbage dump. This was the last resting place for many discarded pre-war cars: Buicks, Chevrolets, Austins, and even my grandfather's first car, his father's 1928 Willy's Knight.

The bogey man of my childhood, Jacky Peelar, lived in one of these car bodies for many years. He was one of the last 'full-blood' Wiradjuri men. He had been initiated as a tribal man early this century, but whenever asked about his tribal scars he'd only confess to having fallen on a broken bottle. In the early 1960's Jacky Peelar, because of advanced age, and ill health caused by alcohol, was coaxed out of his Buick home to become a permanent guest at Peak Hill hospital which had established a hospice section for the infirm aged, and dying. Jacky Peelar, however, kept on escaping, each time discarding his hospital pyjamas and slippers, and stumbling naked towards his much loved 'hill'. He was usually found huddled in some mothering crevice of the mine.

One of the first poems I ever wrote dwelt upon the sorrows of Jacky Peelar.

It is more than likely that Jacky Peelar's birthplace was Bulgandramine, and that his father had been employed on the same property, willingly or otherwise. Bulgandramine means Aboriginal warrior with a boomerang, and its original boundaries almost reached Narromine.

My play, 'Albie's Song' is set on a huge pastoral holding that I call Budgeribong. Although the story of the play is fictitious, I modelled the play's setting and general ambience upon Bulgandramine. I'd heard about Bulgandramine all through my childhood. I was able to empathise with it, and feel its presence. 'Albie's Song', although imagined in a vast rural setting, deals with some of the town issues raised in 'Billy Pogo's Fire'. The half demented grazier, Albert Buchanan of Budgeribong, is intent upon laying to rest the ghosts of his past. He is determined to disinter and relocate the bones of old Griffin, an archetypal Aboriginal elder and head stockman. Albie feels that if he can do this he will assuage some of his guilt, and the guilt of his family, especially that of his Uncle, Peter Buchanan, who accumulated his wealth at the expense of the tribal people.

Lionel Smith in 'Billy Pogo's Fire' becomes obsessed with the skull of a Wiringin, or magic man, and is determined to bury it in sacred land. Albie Buchanan is equally determined to rebury Old Griffin with his people along the Bogan. He feels that this

might make amends for some of the horrors of the past. Each, in turn, finds it is difficult to undo the past and establish a clear new way.

Any background information to place must initially acknowledge the Wiradjuri people's ancient contact with the Peak Hill area, both physically and spiritually.

Early local writers on the area, such as Joseph Jackson, held a distinctive Eurocentric viewpoint:

The beginnings of civilisation hereabouts will doubtless be shown to be the original tracks of the explorers John Oxley and Thomas Livingstone Mitchell.⁴

Jackson only briefly acknowledges a previous race's existence in the region. He notes the existence of marked 'burial trees' near the Bogan and piles of river worn rocks which had served as fishtraps.

Charles Chappel in 'A History of Peak Hill and District'⁵ records some interesting snippets from the Peak Hill Express newspaper. I include selected pieces to show the paternalistic attitude shown towards the remaining Wiradjuri people of the region early this century.

Peak Hill Express, October 27, 1905.

For many years about 25 Aborigines - the last of their tribe - have been camped about Tomingley, and it has now been decided to reserve for them a permanent village within the boundaries of which they will be able to discuss local government matters and reflect upon the past glories before the advent of the white man.

With this object in view, Sub-Inspector Kenny and Sergeant Brayne selected a fresh reserve between Tomingley and Bulgandramine about a mile from the Bogan River. We understand the Government will supply wire netting with which to enclose the reserve, thus enabling the dusky Australians to cultivate the soil and make a permanent home.

4 Jackson, Joseph. Historical Notes on the Earliest Days of Peak Hill and District. (1939, No publisher noted)

5 Chappel, 13 14

By the way, the blackfellow does not look upon the rabbit as a curse, but rather as a blessing undisguised.

December 19, 1905

This district has to lament the loss by death of the last of its kings. The said king, commonly known as "One-arm Jimmy," was well known about Tomingley and McPhail. He was the sole survivor of a long race of monarchs who ruled over this district in the happy days of long ago. He was buried at Tomingley on the 30th September by the remnants of his sorrowing tribe and in the presence of a large number of his white admirers and friends

August 2, 1907

The Reverend H.G. Wiltson visited the Blacks' camp at Bulgandramine and baptised some of the children. At Sunday night's service he made an appeal on behalf of the blacks for old clothing &c. Parcels left at the vestry will be sent on to the camps and will be gladly received by King Cubby.

December 11, 1908

It is a fact that 'Cubby' has been elected king of the blackfellows now living on the banks of the Bogan near Bulgandramine. 'Cubby', who speaks fairly good English, is very proud of his iron castle erected by a so-it-should-be Government, and while the gins are away catching fish or rabbits, he spends his time ruminating on visions of what might have been before budgerees Captain Cook discovered the land of Australia. Being elected 'king', it is beneath 'Cubby's' dignity to do harder work than squatting on the throne.

The enforcement (and parody) of English Monarchical values upon Wiradjuri elders, such as the incident reported in the Express, has been taken up by me in the Wiringin Poem Sequence.

The Carrington Hotel, Peak Hill, is the model for Mace McNamara's hostelry in the play. It's a late Victorian-style structure, although built about 1913. It is two storied with filigree lacework bordering a wide lumbering balcony. The balcony juts to the street curb, the street being a domesticated interval of the Newell Highway. This jutting balcony shelters the footpath, and is supported by chamfered posts being forever repainted. Hitching rails disappeared in the early forties, but on most winter evenings a phantom Cobb and Co coach could lumber past without encountering the twentieth century extrusion of 45 degree, rear parked Fords and Holdens. Real or imagined equine traffic, however, would need to be vigilant of marauding Macks and Kenworths rubbering the bitumen.

The Carrington is directly in front of the mine which is about a ten minute walking distance away. Feral pigeons from the mine roost on the Carrington's ridge capping each morning before scavenging crumbs from last night's loaf, or swooping into the pub's backyard where a parrot congested aviary spills generously with sunflower seed.

Even though I've visited Peak Hill many times, I've never stayed at the Carrington, although as a newly enfranchised adult in the early sixties I was the willing victim of many a 'shout'. The publican of the day whose name eludes me, wore a brown waist coat and was a clone of George Ross of Mullengandra, made immortal by Russell Drysdale in 1950. Like George Ross, this sixties publican of the Carrington had a licensed beer gut, strapped keg-like below 'a business as usual face'. I imagine Mace McNamara, the publican of Bindari, to look like him, but all comparison ends there. Mace rolls out his prejudices too freely. George Ross, I'm sure, said only what was necessary. His God given mission was to keep the pipes clean, and all glasses full.

It seems to me that too many contemporary, inland publicans are city bred and have little appreciation of myth and legend. They're often ex-golf club managers from Wallsend or Guildford.

There are few third generation publicans like Mace McNamara whose grandfather would have dipped the future licensee's dummy into a decent Napoleon brandy.

How can a hotel forever changing hands from freehold, to lease, to management and back, become an establishment knowledgeable for real or figurative skeletons in the cupboard? Hotels like this become so perfunctorily operated that eventually the only

occupants in the dozen or so bedrooms are misshapen, maladjusted mattresses complaining of arthritis, and the lack of a good airing.

George Ross of Mullengandra was well met, but I mostly modelled Mace on a real publican I discovered twenty five years ago in the upper Hunter Valley. Here, where a wonderful river springs, also sprang a memorable hotelier upon my consciousness; here in mountain folk terrain where men breathe mist all year, and are centrally heated with Bundaberg rum.

In this high country hotel autumn scatters on the front verandah, and a dog culls fleas for winter. The Carrington at Peak Hill could never provide such ambience but the publican of the Upper Hunter is gratefully acknowledged because some of his attitudes, gestures, and turns of phrase are respectfully borrowed and lent to Mace.

As my ideas for the play developed, the hotel, initially described as 'falling around Mace's ears', began to take on a higher status. It is 'over-built' for the present size of Bindari, but Mace's grandfather had big dreams, like his miner customers. To his mind Bindari was going to be another Kalgoorlie and he planned accordingly. There are lots of hotels, churches and business houses in Western New South Wales which are becoming architecturally overstated due to diminishing commercial and spiritual demands upon them. It occurred to me that the great hotel might feature more in the play as an additional location under threat; in this case the non-Aboriginals being ready to also exploit one another, thus providing some dramatic relief from the clear racial conflict over the goldmine.

A publican can never be one without customers, otherwise he (or she), would be a bank manager without borrowers, lean and pathetic. In my memories of the Carrington spread across thirty years, I have to acknowledge the presence of Titch Collison. He didn't find his way into the play, but he helped me imagine the bar. He'd been the smallest man in the A.I.F., and in those post-war years before 'he died of liver', this distinction grew gargantuan, so much so that upon his death, it relaxed into myth. These days many a local lad would impressionably argue that Titch Collison was three feet six inches tall, a pre-metric midget who saved Australia.

Down the years is it possible to distil one or two notable characters from the hundreds who each quaff a hurried middy at the bar, and depart like wraiths. Are those denizens of the hotel who succeed in boring the most willing listener, little more than

cardboard cutouts, placed there to offset immortals like Titch Collison whom we remember eternally along with Falstaff?

The theatre audience has paid for two hours of dramatic engagement. They've also paid for the plausible distillation of many hours, weeks, indeed years, of another's experiences. The publican, shearer, local policeman, visiting academic, and politically active Aborigine need to be compounded into a structure allowing movement through tension and conflict. It is only then that the audience moves along on a dynamic, imagined journey, and fails to notice at the end of two hours that the theatre's chairs are hard.

In July 1991 I decided to stay at the Carrington Hotel. I initially contemplated a journey to Mullengandra. Drysdale's George Ross is no doubt gone. Or has he? Such a dedicated publican would've managed a genetic replacement. Is young George pulling beer like his father- or was it his Grandfather?

I reserve that speculative journey for the future. Now I sit in the Carrington. I think of hotels and theatres. I think of a stage mimicking a hotel. What do I see - a simple bar, a couple of stools, a few shelves, a dartboard, and a broken fan?

My reveries are broken by the resident pub dog who comes to the door, decides I'm not one of the regulars, scratches his ribs, snorts, and lumbers out. I glance around the bar, and search for the eloquent eccentrics of my youth. The hotel on this occasion is eerily empty of mythic characters.

Drysdale placed a lumbering publican in front of a no nonsense hotel. George's huge forearms were his minders, his shrewd head and copious girth were, in turn, his prosperity and sociability. But I think that. Was the real George Ross of Mullengandra mean splenened and quick to short change the village idiot? Did he cower behind the parlour curtain while his thinly heroic wife straw broomed away any altercation. I said all this too and I don't believe it. Drysdale, the artist, has given us the apotheosis of the inland publican. Drysdale photographed, drew, painted, and drank with this man, all the while appraising him with one working eye. We don't hear George Ross interacting with others, but the painting is coded sufficiently to satisfy us that here is a man in charge of himself and his world.

On stage a mimetic rendition of George Ross would include movement, voice and a set of attitudes and values. The real George might be too stolid; too boring to be

worthy of a playwright's attention. There mightn't be a conflict situation worth focussing for two hours. Mace McNamara, the stage publican of Bindari won't be allowed to shortchange or bore us. A painting of him near his hotel isn't the artistic discipline here. We are expected to enter his world for two concentrated hours of looking and listening. Drysdale managed to present a powerful three dimensionalised illusion in paint. In theatre Mace has to become three dimensional through dialogue, action and interaction. He might need to have his prejudices tempered to remain entertaining, his foibles can be allowed to mirror our own and jolt us as an audience, but if it's overdone it might only succeed in alienating us.

In the artifice of theatre, Mace can serve flat cola as brandy, but we have to believe it's real if he says it is, and the actor customer being served doesn't react otherwise. If the colour of cola approximates brandy, and it is received as brandy, we are satisfied. What concerns us most is the verity and consistency of voiced actions; the dynamism of interaction, and an illusion of progress towards the resolution of a carefully crafted conflict situation.

We can return and continue our appreciation of the Drysdale painting anytime. We are able to build our attitude towards it in a disjointed way. We aren't expected to give it our unflagging attention for two hours of continuous time as in drama (scene changes and intervals being an integral part of the event).

If you're merely passing through a town like Bindari, you're better off buying a can of Toohey's Blue - and sitting under the silky oak in the municipal park, and wondering at the energy of sparrows. If, on the other hand, you want to stay a while, and infuse yourself with local dialogue, it's best to find a corner of the hotel's public bar which doesn't have signs, saying, 'Neville Sits Here', or 'Wally's Place'. If you are confronted with such warnings it's best to enquire diplomatically as to what time of day Neville or Wally actually ensconce themselves. With these protocols observed, along with some sensible reference to the weather, you're ready to order a full strength, locally preferred beer, and enjoy the civilised radiance of the nearby pie warmer. You might even order a pie if it doesn't have that crumpled look of the eternally patient. You might then check the creme de menthe whose bottle always appears to be half empty. I have an untested theory that ingenious barmaids use half the contents as beer glass detergent while leaving the remaining half to suggest exotica. If the morning is slow, they can escape vicariously to Acapulco.

Soon, you must look beyond the froth of your glass. A dart board has to be found somewhere in this last male bastion. There has to be the not so subtle symbolism of spear and arrow. An absence of dartboard means the pub has lost its sense of community. Conversely, if the dartboard is there, but lacks an expansively pock-marked nimbus on the wall, then it means the beer is watered, or the constabulary overly officious.

I'm not interested in hotels that have Pub T.A.B., assorted 'high tech' card machines, and Sky Channel. Establishments such as these are suffering identity crises and should be called gambling emporia. Real pubs, like shearers, are facing extinction. Only very old people will be able to tell you about them. With senile dementia on the increase, some immediate oral histories should be set in place.

Inland pubs should still have photographs of prize winning rams, and legendary footballers caught in the scrummage of their prime. Proudly displayed local ribbons and trophies have all but disappeared. Sadly, and grotesquely, the reminders of past sporting prowess have been replaced by teak mounted skulls of overgrown Murray Cod. I noted three at the Post Office Hotel in Forbes, a couple at the Royal in Parkes, one at Bogan Gate, and several at Peak Hill. The region's amateur taxidermist (for the want of a title) is regarded with the esteem reserved in Ancient Egypt for the skill and wizardry which preserved Tutankhamen.

Having established a pub, and idled with some initial thinking upon a publican, my next task is to consider shearers.

Albert Buchanan, the owner of neglected Budgeribong in 'Albie's Song' often thinks about the energies of an immense woolshed, and in particular, its shearer's cook.

Albie says -

'It's been over five years since I last walked into the big shed. All the sheep had gone. What was the use of sheep? Now I picture that cavernous interior : the smell would be still in the boards; the smell of wool grease and shit. Sometimes I see the big chief cook sitting at the far end of the shed. He plays his violin, and there's gravy stain on his singlet. His belly is huge with cooking. He plays Loch Lomond, and then tosses back his head and laughs'.

Albie, in his final hours, relives the halcyon days when the kelpie, indeed, did rule.

At seven years old I was going to be a shearer. I'd clear off from my grandfather's neighbouring property, 'Suvla', where we lived, and I'd run the two kilometres to 'Sunnyside'. My father and his brothers would be bringing in the merino flocks. Shearers would be at their stands; the classer would be skirting a fresh fleece, and the rouseabout would be busy with the broom. Various dogs would be darting about with drooling tongues. (It's the closest a kelpie comes to laughing).

'Billy Pogo's Fire' had to include a shearer, and unfortunately it turned out to be Vin Glasson, whose father would've been in his prime when I was a boy. The 1950's were prosperous years. Vin, however, is a contemporary shearer, unemployed and bitter. He has little tolerance for Maoris taking the best sheds, Aborigines claiming land rights, and visiting academics speaking well formed sentences. Things are bad when a near 'ringer' looks forward to a future on a bulldozer.

During my sojourn at the Carrington, I hoped, perchance, to reacquaint with an assortment of shearers. One might be there, a prototype, still in his navy blue singlet, and the smell of tar on his boots; the sort of shearer whose grandfather was immortalised by Tom Roberts. But shearers in the nineteen nineties are thin on the ground like sheep. Where do old shearers go? I know old soldiers fade: You can tell that because their medals by contrast seem to grow bigger and brighter - but old shearers? Many of them were soldiers also - I concede that. You can always pick a shearer in an Anzac day suit. And what of the rest? Have they drifted into a sheepless, shedless world to play lawn bowls, push shopping trolleys for ailing wives, and when the time is right, prune roses?

I look for younger men in Navy blue singlets. I sniff the air for lanolin : Nothing! Where do potential shearers go? Are they set adrift in cities to become juniors in long established Real Estate Agencies? Do they become cat burglars, apprentice butchers, or hack poets throttling guitars? I confess to hyperbole.

I did, while domiciled at the Carrington, drink with some aged shearers, and one slightly younger, who was receiving compensation for having fallen heavily across a hyperactive shed dog. I didn't ascertain whether the offending dog had been one of the new exotic breeds, but we can rest assured it wasn't a kelpie. If I know anything

about kelpies I'm sure they lament the demise of sheep - and if anything, are overly protective of the nation's last shearers.

So, where are the clench-backed 'ringers' of my youth? 'Hey, that was a fair while ago', I'm answered; and I learn that most of them are resting beneath bowls of plastic hyacinths. Most shearers, it seems, don't live to achieve three score, let alone a biblical increment of ten. It's either the shed, 'full on' with Grandma's scone enhanced smokos, or the unflocked, unkelpied paddocks of eternity.

Alas, Vin Glasson, red headed, belligerent and disillusioned, will have to do.

Now what of Bindari's policeman? Brian Glasson, brother of Vin is typical of some small town police who 'rule' solely as the officer-in-charge. I've studied a few such officers, myself having once been closely associated with a one-policeman, one-teacher, one-publican, one-horse, town.

These officers, each in his turn, grew paranoid about outside interference. The closest sergeant was usually their *bête noire*, and to have to call in a squad car from the next big town was tantamount to admitting failure. If several bikies throttled into town, and caused a disturbance at the pub, the ruling officer would arrive in full make up, as if a film camera crew were scanning his every cosmetically chiselled movement.

At other times, the same officer might lurk up in the hills, and be at the ready for potential gun runners, bird smugglers, cattle duffers, white slavers and political subversives of the red kind (obviously outdated now). I'm sure one officer dreamt of bringing in Leonid Brezhnev for political espionage in the Barrington Tops. The job would be one for ASIO and various military and para-military bodies, but he'd act unilaterally for fear of losing face in the village.

Many of these diligent officers were clones of Attila the Hun, but answered congenially to Brian and Bob. You always knew where you stood with them, as long as you weren't Aboriginal, foreign or hirsute.

The more one thinks about a playwright presuming to create dramatic dialogue and situation for breathing, moving, thinking people, the more one realises what an impossible task it is. My speech signature is on whatever I write, but I move confidently from shearer, to publican, to black activist, and to scientist. I don't merely mimic snippets (or slabs) of their speech. I recreate them via their 'life view' which is clarified through individual utterance and movement. I presume to achieve character demarcation without characters having to brandish an identification sign. So, how is it achieved - or is it? Is theatre really a quirkish convention where a group of adults who could be more gainfully employed, capitalise the time of a larger group who has come in from a world of the real to a place where the real is pretended? There are those in that contrived enclosure who would suggest that the pretended real is the surest way to know, and experience the real.

Is the successful playwright one who can convince us that each of his characters is autonomous and not merely a convenient larynx for the writer's voice?

This is compounded when the audience expects the playwright also to 'have a voice'. This all encompassing voice is the reason the play is written. It is the writer's 'world view' or philosophical viewpoint. This 'voice', however, is not to manifest itself obviously, and usurp the created voice of each character.

How does the playwright create a believable character who will help advance its creator's 'world view', but not blatantly mouth it?

Stock characters arise when the writer's 'voice' short-circuits the development of real, feeling, and thinking individuals. We resent the playwright haranguing us from a soapbox, whereas we can be coaxed into the world of a cleverly three dimensionalised character voicing many of the same concerns.

How can the writer begin to create a 'real' character? There must be an understanding of, and an empathy with, the character's intellectual and emotional life - what drives and motivates that character? Some plays are beyond the writer, because he might never be able to begin to identify with the characters required. I feel 'comfortable' with shearers, farmers, artists and teachers. I would prefer to create a character from these rather than one who is a merchant banker, or an astronaut.

When I thought of creating Lionel Smith and Narella Fielding, I realised the immense deficit in my experience. I have never lived life from the Aboriginal perspective, and

I never will. There will be always a wealth of background knowledge denied me; there will be a domain of feelings, longings, aspirations and desperations shut away from me.

All this duly acknowledged, I do profess some understanding of Aboriginal people. I've had contact with them since childhood. I taught Aboriginal children for many years at Redfern, and I still have contact with Aboriginal adults at the tertiary education level. All this said, I acknowledge no great intimacy with their unguarded lives....

Writers - particularly playwrights - are adept at coaxing much out of little : a word here, a hint there; conversations in pubs and markets; 'big house' gossip exchanges around the kitchen fire. It's the trick of the trade to appear an insider.⁶

I don't assume a great knowledge of the Wiradjuri people of Central Western N.S.W. Conversely, I've never been in conflict with them, and I've always appreciated the immensity of their struggle.

Having left Peak Hill in 1954 when I was ten, I visited the town regularly for the next thirty years.

Georgie Robinson was one of my friends in third and fourth class. He was bright, and continued school through to the Leaving Certificate. In the Peak Hill School Centenary book there's a photograph of him with the same group I was part of in lower primary school. Georgie left school in 1961 and drifted in and out of casual employment. In the late sixties, after the referendum, I'd have a drink with him at 'The Middle'. By the time he was well on the way to being an alcoholic, having 'whispered up' too many flagons at the back of the pub before the advent of legal Aboriginal drinking inside the hotel.

Georgie was always pleased to see me again, and was forever bright with memories of when we sat together in Mr. Rhine's fourth class. On the last occasion I spoke to him, Georgie had the appearance of one watching the person he'd been, or had hoped to be, drift further from reach. He told me he would not be around for much longer because he had no soul. What else could I do but listen? We had no access into each

6 Allen, David, Rev. of William Shakespeare: A Life. by Garry O'Connor. The Weekend Australian. Feb 29-Mar 1, 1992

other's adult life. Our friendship reached its zenith when we were pirates under a peppercorn tree in the school playground. Georgie had reached the nadir of his life in two and a half decades, while my life still crowded with options.

I've had to use all the tricks of the trade I could find to create Billy Pogo's Fire. It's a political play with a strong Aboriginal focus. In attempting to achieve a three dimensional Lionel Smith, I've thought of Georgie Robinson. He could have been an activist if he'd been a young man in the mid-eighties. Like Lionel Smith, he could have secured his past, and in so doing, make more sense of the present and future.

What makes a person, so carelessly it seems, abandon his life in the sticky depths of a muscat jar, while another of similar background, fights determinedly to re-establish his people's self respect, and in so doing finds his own shadow.

Georgie Robinson is stroked by the empowering flint of knowledge, but fails to be ignited by it. The reason for this I'll never know. It is as complex as Freud. The Lionel Smith of 'Billy Pogo's Fire' has to be Georgie Robinson empowered, and able to push aside the lure of the easy muscat jar. He'll go in delegation to all parts of the world and bring back the stolen remains of his people. He'll debate on television, and, if necessary, he'll straddle an inland church, having first draped it with banners of protest. Ultimately he will confront his deepest fear : Black death in custody.

Was Lionel Smith's father the patient, shy limbed fellow waiting in a queue in Ziedler's Butchery, Peak Hill, 1965 when the local policeman came in to collect his own weekend order? I was waiting in the same queue, and saw the constable reach across and tap the Aborigine on the shoulder, and growl in a deadly whisper - "out!". The tapped man left without protest. I was twenty, newly educated and, I hope, half civilised. Why didn't I, or any of the other whites, protest on the victim's behalf. All I did was move quietly forward one space, while daring a sideways glance at the law enforcer who had abused his office and made victims of us all.

Is this play my belated protest? Why couldn't I have spoken out then and cleansed myself and all the others of iniquity?

A thought arises which is macabre, and I should fight it: what if the policeman's victim had been Georgie Robinson? Would the eight year old pirate I had once been

have left enough residual courage in me that I would instinctively defend the fellow mariner of my imagination - or would I have let Georgie walk away undefended in the grim reality of Ziedler's Butchery? Those sliced offerings on display at the chilled window bay symbolically become more than remnants of a fatted calf. Such thoughts as these, snippets though they are, arouse anger and outrage in me, so that's why I submit to them. How else could I find, and then begin to feel, the anger Lionel Smith carries with him?

As well as being angry, Lionel needs to be obsessive. He must need to go to all lengths, if necessary, to secure Billy Pogo's skull. He has knowledge of who Billy Pogo was and this drives him. Billy Pogo's skull is to be the dominating symbol of the play, it means different things to each character, but it is Lionel who empathises with it - and is prepared to die for all that it signifies.

In Christian terms the Billy Pogo leit-motiv could equate with the pervasiveness of the Christ figure. Many of the accompanying symbols are there - fire, serpent, skull, hill-top. These are to be viewed firstly from the Aboriginal perspective, but they can transfer across to the Judaeo-Christian domain. Rupert is quick to appreciate the spiritual significance of the Billy Pogo incident and presents its narrative with spiritual wonderment. As he details the event to his atheist brother he revels in the mysticism and magic of the incident. As well as being a custodian of Christian myth, Rupert is willing to 'legendise' the recent Aboriginal past. I want to treat the Billy Pogo symbol later, and as a separate section to the play's development. It's enough to say at this stage that the tangible presence of a Wirigin's skull inspiring a latter day disciple could be juxtaposed dramatically with the concerns of the custodian of the town's Anglican church. At the other extreme are the custodians of the 'material' Bindari symbolised by the crumbling hotel.

Thoughts of the Christian presence in Bindari led to the first thoughts upon Rupert Fielding, a man committed to the well being of both white and black parishioners, but doubly bound to the Aborigines, via his much loved foster daughter.

Rupert and John Fielding are both educated men, and their scenes help alleviate the 'low life' claustrophobia of a small town pub. Their presence gives another dimension to the political issues causing ruction in the town.

It was only after some initial thinking about Rupert that I was able to see the sort of person I wanted Narella to be. It has been difficult creating a twenty year old

Aboriginal female. I have no intimate memories of any, and this no doubt has been my loss. A closer liaison, I'm sure, would've made me aware of innermost feelings and attitudes otherwise denied. The young Aboriginal women with whom I have professional contact are too guarded in an academic environment to reveal much of their 'real' selves, but I've been able to observe them in more relaxed studio situations over the years, and have a fairly clear understanding of their unique and diverse qualities.

I've attempted to create a natural, mutually caring relationship between Rupert and Narella. She doesn't self consciously display her Aboriginality. She's trying to be an ordinary person. It's only the political situation compounding in Bindari, and her close contact with her tutor, that has brought a new found indignation into play. Lionel, who is politically committed, makes her face Aboriginal concerns squarely for the first time. She hasn't had to live in tin humpies and cope with inter-family squabbles and racial conflict. Lionel's reactions to her many white attitudes, and her reaction to his dominant Aboriginality, have been devices used to three dimensionalise her. Much of her 'anger' has been acquired, even cultivated, at university, rather than 'felt and lived' at the riverbank and fringe. Lionel has 'lived' Aboriginality, whereas Narella 'does' Aboriginal Studies. She strives for commitment, but it comes rather half heartedly, and needs some vigorous reinforcement from an often angry Lionel.

Narella, no doubt, is infatuated by Lionel, but I avoid any romantic overtones because the plot is complicated enough. In an effort to three dimensionalise her I've included anecdotal glimpses into her childhood. Narella has some conflict with her identity and background, but ultimately she has the maturity to isolate the real enemy, after some initial trauma arising from her foster father's political ambivalence. She is secure in the knowledge of Rupert's affection towards her, although conflict arises when he becomes too paternalistic.

In 'Billy Pogo's Fire' I envisaged an Anglican minister as a countering force to the material preoccupations of Bindari. Because he is a major character, the minister had to be more than a stereotypic 'dithering parson'. I wanted Rupert Fielding to be compassionate, but, to some degree, to be a 'clown' of God, and give me an opportunity to satirise the church for the role it was playing in the political and racial dilemma facing Bindari. Rupert Fielding is faced with personal spiritual uncertainties, these being exacerbated by a desire to be fair to both black and white parishioners, and compounded further by his emotional attachment to Narella.

Fielding, with some prompting from Narella, has conceded that much of the Old Testament is out of kilter with late twentieth century thinking. To some extent he has resolved to modernise his presentation, even though the fire and brimstone content still fascinates him. He spends a lot of energy on what many would see as irrelevancy, even though he vigorously attempts to play a positive role.

I attempt to satirise the church as being out of touch with the real world. The defective pulpit design, and Rupert's dilemma with the mouse, are attempts to show this humorously. Rupert is a decent human being, but he has allowed himself to be impounded in his 'Anglican acre' and it takes someone like Lionel to realign him with harsh reality, and the vigorous role the church could be playing. Rupert can be seen as a custodian of church legend, and no matter how digestible he makes his performances, the content will continue to be irrelevant. Rupert plunges into the Billy Pogo story with religious zeal. He and Lionel make the skull relevant and tangible. The skull is almost a 'living' entity, and even the ignorant Vin has occasion to be moved by it. Rupert speaks of the one who turned into a butterfly, with the same degree of awe as he evokes his God's eyes of flame and feet of fine brass. The irony is that he has never acted upon the reality of the skull. He is even vague about its location in the hotel. He is vague when reference to it goes outside the borders of myth. He leasures in it as a good story, having biblical overtones. It takes Lionel to open his eyes to its real meaning.

How do I create a Rupert Fielding? I'm an agnostic and wary of all creeds. But I like churches: I enjoy staring up into their rafters. Do I expect to see somebody perching there - somebody significant?

I have no abiding memories of Peak Hill's churches. Actually, St. Stephen's Anglican Church is rather bland and I can see why the parish took almost twenty five years to complete building it. Then again it's the second building - the original St. Stephen's was a Les Murray 'Weatherboard Cathedral' prototype, built in 1896 with zealotry, homemade nails, and little regard for termites. Prior to this-

Early records show that church services were held in the most convenient premises available. Services were taken by Archdeacon Nield and Oats, and the Reverends William Cowan and Gordon Tidy.⁷

Of the above listed, it is Gordon Tidy who appeals to me. One would never dare name a rector in a stage play, 'Gordon Tidy' unless, of course, you were Ben Jonson. Only he would have the satiric panache to get away with it.

What sort of preacher was Gordon Tidy? 'Talented yet somewhat inhibited', is that what Archdeacon Nield would report to the Bishop of the Diocese? The critical Archdeacon would say this only if he didn't realise 160 pounds per annum had to stretch as far as Dandaloo. And what of the building itself; over one foot out of plumb because of a Peak Hill dust gale, and multitudinous nibblings? Termite enzymes toppled many timbered mansions and cathedrals before the devil gave us dieldrin. Did Archdeacon Nield know that? Cosmic doubts can arise when one genuflects and prays in an askance church. Is God telling you something in his mysterious way. Is he saying 'My church is perpendicular, it is you who are out of alignment with the world'

I forget the name of the Anglican minister who provided my model for Rupert Fielding. Each fortnight he visited my Small School forty miles north west of Coonamble. He punctually presented himself on the concrete steps of Ellimeek School, having first parked his 1961 powder blue Zepher under the only decent wilga tree. Out of an inbuilt politeness to address a visitor by name, I'll christen him, 'Gordon Tidy'. I remember his clear blue eyes, and this was a location where it was easy to be dismissive of blue: it was everywhere, and clouds were rare, half hearted intruders.

I vividly remember that clergyman's hand shake. It had the firmness of one farewelling you from a life-boat; the shaker having received the last space in the life-boat, and the shaken having no option but to decline like the ship. To be fair, this Reverend Tidy would've descended into the great brine with style, and to a chorus of angels.

So there he was, on my school step, twinkling like the Christmas star, and fiftyish; an eloquent man, intoning rather than talking. Unlike Rupert Fielding all his eloquence was about Jesus. He was a truly New Testament man and I'm sure he was often on the brink of stigmata. I often bled at Ellimeek, but it wasn't spiritual : my trauma was heat induced nose bleed. The Reverend Tidy, like Jesus, would never be so mortal as to bleed from the nostrils.

I remember 'The Reverend' climbing into his blue zepher and the children peering out the windows of the school room with faces subsiding into the ordinariness of all that is secular. I recall one occasion when he wondered, under the wilga tree, why Christ had never been painted laughing in the company of children.

These are vivid memories from which I would endeavour to create a dramatic character, and call Rupert Fielding, Anglican Clergyman of Bindari.

In this brief preamble I have attempted to establish a physical setting where a dynamic of people might interact upon one or more of the well tested themes that inevitably draw people into conflict. A central conflict in **BILLY POGO'S FIRE** is over the land itself. Some small towns eternally slumber, or so it seems, but don't be fooled - there's always the potential for drama. Idle whispers, or a mumbled word, might rouse the slumberers. Old animosities bloat like toads, alliances form, collapse and reform. And place is always there: Place as setting and even place as player.

2.2 SYMBOLISM IN BILLY POGO'S FIRE

2.2.1 The Skull and Wiringin

In 1980 I discovered a photograph with the label, 'King Billy Mogo' in Quambi House Museum at Stroud on the lower north coast of N.S.W. In 1988 I sought permission from the Stroud historic society to photograph items from its collection. This was how I obtained my copy of Billy Mogo. I was unable to gather any further background information so the image remained anonymous, albeit enigmatic, until I decided upon the fictive Billy Pogo who grew out of the frock coated figure found at Stroud. It is most likely that Billy Mogo was either a member of the Gringai people of the Dungog region, or one of the Kattang people of the Port Stephens region. It was the image itself which captured my interest : here is a middle aged Aborigine in formal English dress staring out at the camera. He wears a rather limp flower in the coat lapel, and a flourishing grapevine is the only background. It is my guess the photograph was taken early this century. The facial expression of the subject is at once all knowing and sad. There is also a bemused air of detachment. Billy Mogo, it strikes me, is being made play the clown king. There is no sense of protest, merely a slightly bemused resignation to the ways of the white man. Billy Mogo, I suspect, is

happy enough to be part of a physical parody just as long as his secrets are still intact. The image has come to me devoid of any narrative. What is the real story? Who is the man in top hat and tails who acquiesces to his white masters? Having been dubbed a king, his aristocratic attire is the next best thing to royal plumage. In this case he has been spared insignia on a breast plate with chain. (Refer to Chapter 3 for more information on the source photograph)

King Billy Mogo of the Gringai or Kattang people was a real man playing his part in a real drama. The invaders most probably never heard Billy Mogo's real name. They were offered Billy, Jacky or Cecil before a tribal man would offer his real name for the trespass of a white tongue. Contagious magic could be done to an initiated man via his name, so names were only whispered into trusted ears. But a toy name like Billy Mogo? It was nothing : it had the importance of a clown suit.

I invent my clown king and call him Billy Pogo. All that follows is fiction. But BILLY POGO'S FIRE is a stage play about people in conflict over land : such conflict is a powerful and enduring fact, in this case, wedged firmly between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia.

In the play it is important to Lionel Smith that Billy Pogo's skull be returned to its rightful burial place. Lionel is outraged that his ancestors' remains are museum pieces in various parts of the world and he fights actively for their return.

I decided to use Billy Pogo's skull as a pervading symbol in the play. It was to be my way into the psyche of the Aboriginal characters. As a non-Aboriginal, it would be my way into a conflict situation where I had to 'feel' the tragedy set in place two hundred years ago. The skull in the hotel bar had to mean something to me before I could share some of Lionel's commitment. Billy Pogo made a final protest at the rim of the gold mine; the place now emptied of the spirits of his people. He lit his last fire and discarded the clown suit and was sacrificed in his effort to redeem his people. It seemed to me that Billy Pogo had to be 'significant'. Commitment could take on the heat of obsession if the cause is great. So, in my mind, Billy Pogo became the last Wiringin, or 'clever man' of his tribe. I use A.P.Elkin's preferred term, "clever man" to avoid the negative connotations attached to "magic-man". This latter term denigrates the Wiringin's role to that of trickster or sorcerer and underrates his psychic powers, and range of esoteric thinking.

I draw heavily for background material upon A.P. Elkin, especially his work, 'Aboriginal Men of High Degree'.⁸ I'm aware that many of Elkin's findings are now contentious amongst some contemporary anthropologists and Aboriginal writers, and I return to this in Chapter 3.

In 'Aboriginal Men of High Degree', however, I found material I felt comfortable enough to use and defend by way of building the Billy Pogo persona. Reference to his being a Wiringin is made by various characters in the play and in so doing I attempt to build an 'aura' around the skull in the cardboard box. It enabled me, I feel, to create some strong dramatic moments and give special poignancy to the final scenes of the play.

In keeping with the inter-arts thrust of my studies I set about creating a sequence of poems upon a Wiringin which illustrates his various powers and ends with his last protest at the mine. I don't profess to know the ways and thoughts of a Wiradjuri Wiringin. I'm sure the Wiradjuri people themselves know very little of them. These men died taking their secrets with them.

At the completion of the poem sequence, I was able to write dramatically about the skull in a way that I could have never previously imagined. I began to feel what the skull really meant to a spiritually aware character like Lionel Smith.

I found it liberating to explore figurative language from a different viewpoint, especially where cosmos and being can be, in metaphoric flourishes, welded into one.

The 'clever man' - acquired wonderful powers through direct contact with the beings of the Dreamtime: the rainbow serpent; the sky gods; the spirits of the dead. He has come to this state through a long and rigorous apprenticeship and an initiation of terrors and ordeals beyond those that ordinary men undergo. He is what Elkin calls a man of high degree and his experiences have changed him utterly. He has died and come alive again; his entrails have been taken out and replaced; he has been swallowed by the rainbow serpent and regurgitated; magic crystals have been put in his body; he has acquired an animal familiar that dwells within him. As a result of such experiences, the medicine man can fly and travel over the ground at great speed; he can anticipate events and knows what is happening in faraway places. He can cure

8 Elkin, A.P. Aboriginal Men of High Degree. (Unl. of Queensland Press, Second Ed., 1977)

and kill mysteriously. He can make rain. He can ascend to the sky world on a magic cord that emanates from his testicles. He can roll in the fire without hurt; appear and disappear at will. ⁹

The most poignant poetry I've read which borrows from the above context is that of Les Murray. Towards the end of 'The Boys Who Stole the Funeral' Murray has a section where his protagonists have an enchanted interlude with two half crazed Irishmen who intermittently experience slight name change and become a pair of tribal Blacks. These 'clever men' take Forbutt and Reeby, with the aid of magic crystal, on a sky-cord journey to a higher plane of awareness.

This is the grit that sparks the pearl, chants the Birroogun ¹⁰

(and later)

they go up above the great land, holding on to their cords, they go up higher above the Divide's embraced erosions ¹¹

The more I sought to empathise with Billy Pogo, and the more I created him in the image of a Wiringin, the more I appreciated the significance of the skull in the hotel as a powerful symbol. Here was a skull violently emptied of thousands of years of esoteric thinking, and this thinking cannot be devalued, for to survive through millenia, we need not only the dexterity of the body: we survive equally through the constructs of the mind. Through an ancient and continuing belief in psychic displays; including telaesthesia, telepathy and Tibetan comparisons of mind over matter, we have a being experiencing sublime control over himself, his fellows and his world.

This becomes no ordinary skull, even though the human skull, generally, is rich with symbolic connotations. Its mere appearance on stage is powerful (Shakespeare attests to that).

In the context of 'BILLY POGO'S FIRE', I want the skull to be viewed as a receptacle which once held a people's past, present and future. Lionel Smith sets out on a dangerous quest to reclaim it. His journey to Great Britain to reclaim Aboriginal remains had none of the dangers which awaited him at Bindari's hotel.

9 Jeremy Beckett, preface, Aboriginal Man of High Degree. by A.P. Elkin. (Uno. of Queensland Press, 1977) ix

10 Murray, Les The Boys Who Stole the Funeral(Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1982) 63

11 Ibid, 64

Lionel Smith values the skull as a symbol, not of death, but of a rebirth of Aboriginality, if he is first able to claim it and then bury it with dignity.

The skull means many things in the play, depending upon individual viewpoint. To Mace it has the potential to be the central object in a political power play which has ramifications for Bindari's economic future. Eventually, the skull becomes more to Mace, as he begins to face the horrors of the past, and the part his family played in it.

Vin never understands the skull beyond it being the remains of one less evolved. He doesn't allow his prejudices to shift and his reaction to it is gawkish and ignorant. He perpetuates the abuse of history by pouring wine into the skull and drinking from it. He could never appreciate the irony that many a last Wiringin lost his magnificent perceptions through alcohol.

By making Billy Pogo at one time a spiritual leader of his people, I endeavour to have the skull viewed as a symbol of the desecration of the Aboriginal spirit. Because of its continuing presence in the hotel bar it signifies injury in perpetuity. The essence of Aboriginal belief binds mortal remains and spirit to sacred land, so the claim upon the skull, and its country, are inseparable.

The continuance of the skull in the hotel symbolises white control, and there is added irony in the fact that to many black drinkers (as well as numerous whites) alcohol is tantamount to a bullet in the forehead.

When legal drinking came to the black population in the late 1960s the skull was removed not out of respect for Aboriginal sensibilities, but out of economic expediency. The newly legalised drinkers would have heard rumour of a skull on a shelf and their imaginations would have baulked at it. Undoubtedly many of the younger generation would have been ignorant of the skull's significance, nor would they have cared. It would be a mark of how far they had drifted from cultural awareness.

In the final draft of the play Mace has never displayed the Wiringin's skull in the bar. The McNamaras have kept it a family secret and for some unknown reason have never been able to throw it away. The skull has remained for over eighty years in the ceiling of the rambling hotel, and it is only when a former Aboriginal employee discovers (or senses it), that interest is aroused amongst Activists in Sydney. In the

final draft Mace, for political reasons of his own, endeavours to deny any knowledge of the skull. By making the skull something secret, I feel I was able to increase its status dramatically, especially by concealing it most of the time in a cardboard box.

Narella sees the skull quite differently to Lionel. To her, it is an object of the violent past, and has no great relevance. She is more concerned with the welfare of her new found Aboriginal family up north. As the play progresses Narella commits herself to the skull's retrieval, but it's only to protect Lionel who is her hero, rather than Billy Pogo. The Wiringin has come into her life academically, rather than spiritually. Up north she has heard unfavourable stories of the old Kadaitchi men from her aunt. This negative reportage angers Lionel who is consumed by the Wiringin phenomena.

To the local policeman the skull becomes mere bait to finally apprehend Lionel and neutralise his political activities. Lionel almost falls into Brian's trap when the policeman appears to 'kill' Billy Pogo again with the baton. Lionel narrowly avoids violent engagement with the policeman who becomes increasingly determined to apprehend Lionel on a substantial charge.

John Fielding's scientific objectivity and ambition make it difficult for him to abandon his own activities and join Lionel in his quest. John views the skull with the dispassion he would view a fossil, until Vin's outrageous behaviour stirs some anger in him. Rupert attempts to make John view the skull at a religious level. John, however, clings to knowledge at an academic level, and is unable to make a selfless commitment.

Rupert, suffering spiritual inertia, and some personal insecurity concerning his relationship with Narella, is ready to attribute mystic qualities to Billy Pogo and he is ready to legendise the Wiringin's death. The Billy Pogo incident appeals to Rupert on the level of myth, yet he's done nothing down the years to clarify rumour and ensure the skull be taken from the hotel and buried with dignity.

2.2.2 Fire

I intended fire to be a pervading symbol in the play and wanted to make sustained reference to it without it becoming too intrusive. I wanted fire to symbolise the spiritual energy of Billy Pogo. Mace McNamara, the publican, refers to Billy Pogo as having been the 'brother of fire'. The Wiringin 'clever-men' in dazzling displays, showed their awe struck fellows how they, through their special 'making', had become

immune to fire and controlled it. I wanted some spiritual fire to be present in the play and for the audience to feel its presence. The heat hasn't gone out of Billy Pogo's last sacrificial act of defiance at the edge of the mine. Myth has kept the embers of the burnt Struggle Street smouldering. The skull remains to burn into the conscience of Mace McNamara, while Lionel Smith has become the custodian of the Wiringin's spiritual fire and his commitment burns brightly.

Fire played a vital part in Aboriginal life. The Aboriginal firestick changed the appearance of the continent. Aboriginal occupation of the land involved active management of grasslands with fire. The hunter society didn't follow the whim of their prey: they actively controlled its distribution and dispersal by planned seasonal burnings. The firestick was a vital part of the campsite. The campfire cooked food and provided warmth and illumination. At night there were shadow spirits to keep at bay. Fire comes into narratives, song and visual art works:

The most common theme which pervades Aboriginal legends is that fire was discovered by a bird or other animal who hid it secretly until other creatures forcibly stole it away in order to share the most precious commodity amongst everyone.¹²

Lionel Smith lights a fire in the traditional way up at the mine. He relates the experience with pride to Narella:

I watched smoke struggle out of the grass and suddenly a flame jumped up and seemed to dance. I saw its shadow on those rocks.

The flame brings Lionel closer to the spirit world of Billy Pogo. The element manifesting itself as a quick flame, and seemingly magical in itself, is anthropomorphised into a brilliant dancer, symbolising the once free, celebratory Aboriginal spirit of the Bindari location. I attempt to evoke the eternal presence of Billy Pogo and his kin. Fire is a vital possession of the living and it is through the medium of Lionel's skilful hands that the living flame of the Wiringin's spirit is manifested. The spirit is brought to life in the quick flame, but the shadows of the dead cannot be escaped either. Lionel sees these shadows on nearby rock.

12 Isaacs, Jennifer (Ed.) The Australian Dreaming: 40,000 years of Aboriginal History. (Lansdowne Press, Sydney, 1980) 102

When it lit I was so glad that I yelled to those pigeons. I heard more than their wings - I heard laughter. You think that's crazy, I suppose, but I get a different feeling here - the way the light shapes all those rocks and the way the trees reach out above it all. Is it stupid to think like that?

Lionel's fire isn't intended to ward off uneasy spirits. It invites and propitiates them.

The fire at the mine hasn't gone unnoticed by the villagers. To Mace and Vin it has signalled the arrival of a stranger and a growing sense of unease. Lionel's fire will illuminate the controversial mine long after the ashes have cooled. The police officer, weighty with his authority, kicks apart the ashes and brings Lionel back to harsh reality. What to Lionel had been a magical act is now deemed illegal. Lionel is reminded that he trespasses and the irony isn't lost on him. Brian mouths local government by-laws and the spiritual status of the mine location is trivialised.

The non-Aboriginal controllers of Bindari have created their own myth about Billy Pogo and fire. The audience is offered snippets of this myth as the play progresses. Myth collapses into grim historic fact at the play's conclusion when Mace reveals the Wiringin as a scapegoat. To add to the horror of fact, it was Mace's grandfather who had put the bullet hole in the Wiringin's skull.

Drunken behaviour, no doubt, was the cause of the Struggle Street fire. Billy Pogo's death was caused by a mixture of fear and greed. Mace's grandfather, a civilised, discerning man, believed what the miners had told him. This 'brother of fire' had to be destroyed before the magnificent hotel suffered the same fate as the shanties. And what about the punctured boiler - had the Wiringin been impervious to its scalding effects or had the water only been luke warm? A conflagration below the mine and a display of magic, real or imagined, at its very rim would be enough to seal the defiant Wiringin's fate. White myth grew upon fact, and concealed it. Sam Stubbs, on his death bed had a different myth, the presence of a black butterfly; the manifestation of Billy Pogo's fiery spirit still haunting Bindari hotel and patiently awaiting justice.

It is only when he is faced with a great moral dilemma that Mace comes out of the side of truth and decency. He will not have Lionel implicated in John's death. Vin and Brian's actions with the skull comes as a catalyst. Mace's motives are not entirely selfless until then. The aura which has grown around the cardboard box throughout the day, and Lionel's staunch activism, conjoin in Mace's mind. His defence of Lionel

is inseparable from his rambling defence of Billy Pogo. A fire has been lit in Mace's spirit and only justice will extinguish it. He does this knowing that he will be 'finished' in Bindari.

The Old Testament quotation beginning the play and used to show an Anglican priest comically 'out of touch' with real concerns, takes on greater significance, I hope, as the play develops. The Wiringin had moments in his life where his actions were viewed as supra-natural. He wasn't treated like a God, but he certainly had powers which set him apart from ordinary men. The later fire imagery picks up resonances of the Old Testament quotation. The revelatory dialogue of fire and Billy Pogo's death near a place of furnace fire and gushing water recalls the biblical passage Rupert practised the previous evening:

His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow and his eyes were the flame of fire.

2.2.3 The Bindari Goldmine

The disused goldmine is a central focal point of the play. To the Aborigines it is a sacred place and the subject of a land claim.

I try to make it clear that it is not entirely an open cut chasm, but that it still has a substantial vicinity intact, and that this will be bulldozed if the company is allowed to reopen it. The white population of Bindari sees the mine as the chance of economic and community renewal. To working men like Vin it will provide employment, even though it can never replace the noble act of shearing and the balladic romance of the great sheds. In the first completed draft of the play I didn't include the mine on stage, and although I had various characters refer to it, I decided its dramatic mood setting potential needed to be exploited. I was losing the chance to show directly the Aboriginal spiritual centre: the 'timeless land' itself, exploited and defaced.

While establishing a political impasse concerning the mine, I wanted someone to be still chipping away at it and for some direct focus to be placed on that person. I decided, therefore, to complicate the issue further by having a zealous palaeontologist be that person. I was now able to consider the scientific rationale for access along with the economic and the spiritual. To press the complexity even further Mace makes passing, ironic reference to animal liberationists and 'greenies' being likely to interfere. Many of us, idealistically at least, might succumb to a spiritual necessity

over a material one, especially when the claimant once had the entire continent and now wishes to have merely a spiritual fragment set aside. The terrible irony, however, is that the sacred place sits on a pot of gold and in an economically harsh time even idealists hesitate.

Many might remain idealists and place the human spirit ahead of monetary gain, but what about free access to human knowledge? What if the mine becomes a powerful repository, even symbol, to our evolutionary past?

Those who favour the spiritual prerogative might think again when told that unfettered access to the location might result in great scientific discoveries previously undreamed of.

I choose John Fielding to represent this viewpoint, and provide him with some understandable ambition to enforce it. In the first draft I make John more a scientific voice rather than a complex human and it becomes difficult to sympathise with him.

John:the earth doesn't give up its subtleties willingly. It often holds them in a secretive fist - and when it opens you have to be there to grab what you can.... (and) ... I had been shown the fossilised gift of the first fish.

This is rather stilted dialogue and I abandon it in Script 3 for a verbal exchange which is more human. John's reaction to the mine, and its gift, is almost joyfully childlike.

John: I wanted to show you this. I've hardly slept.

(He passes it to RUPERT)

Rupert: *(flatly)* It's a fish - or rather was a fish.

John: *(grabbing it)* Look closely! It's almost perfect, and the most primitive antiarch I've seen. I'm working on a hunch it's the most primitive anyone has ever seen.

(RUPERT laughs) What's wrong.

Rupert: Scientists are passionate after all -

John: Of course they are.

Rupert: As well as being compulsive and obstinate.

John: I plead guilty to the lot (*referring to the fossil*) See the delicate imprint of the hinged paddles. What simple, honest shapes.

Rupert: God made us all different.

John: No, seriously! They're like a child's drawing, and I have you to thank.

Rupert: Steady on! Don't spread that around the town.

John: How else would I have found Bindari? You need to be fortified either by Christ or a bottle of rum to stay for more than a night.

John here, has abandoned any formal scientific discourse. He is like an enthusiastic child reading the fine tracteries of our beginnings. These are more than dry scientific records in rock. They reach into the realm of magic. John shows Rupert a creature which swam in Bindari's sea 350 million years ago. The mine, for John, symbolises the earth's evolutionary past and its relevant stratas are beckoning him into Devonian times. John tries but is unable to give Lionel's land claim priority over his own interests even though he acknowledges the spiritual importance of the mine to the Aborigines, and incurs the wrath of Vin by saying so.

To Lionel the mine symbolises the spirituality of his people. The great chasm is a symbol of the dislocation inflicted upon the bodies and souls of the Wiradjuri people. To Lionel the chasm's vicinity is a symbol of hope : the chance of spiritual relocation. Bulldozers must be prevented from totally destroying the site. It's to the mine location that he would like to take and bury Billy Pogo's skull and the other Wiradjuri remains of the area taken overseas as scientific specimens. This is an ironic situation which deflates John's scientific defence.

To Lionel, the Wiringin skull with its bullet hole, equates with the land. The chasm is the land's bullet hole. Lionel makes his attitude to the land clear to Narella when he relates what he felt when high above it in an aeroplane:

I was an old fellow down there with tribal scars and rivers carved in me. I saw my old face with its cheekbones and forehead jutting. I saw a scrag of a neck and old hands.

To Narella, as a child, the mine also had magical significance. She and her non-Aboriginal cousin, Jeannie, enriched it with an imaginative fairytale construct:

Narella: We were certain it all opened up down there into blue sky and green meadows like a fairytale. Jeannie imagined all the pigeons lived in a special golden palace that only they and children could see'.

Narella, through Lionel, begins to discover what the mine means in Aboriginal terms and that securing it will be difficult:

We don't have the mine and the bastards down at the pub still have your Billy Pogo. He'll always be a prisoner and so will we.

In the play I have tried to state what the mine means to each of the relevant characters and to show how complex the issue really is.

2.2.4 The Church and Hotel

The church represents the spiritual centre of the town's dominant white male culture. It seemed to be an effective strategy to offset the spiritual with the secular (even profane), so what better location than the public bar of the town's only hotel?

The mine, symbolic of Aboriginal spirituality, is placed between church and hotel and becomes the central focus of conflict.

The church should, no doubt, involve itself in spiritual concerns generally, but to make sure of this the Anglican priest is made foster father of an Aboriginal girl, now a University student and making her first serious journey into her Aboriginality. The Bindari Anglican church symbolises the failure of Christianity to meet the needs of Bindari's people. Vin and Brian are economically aware but spiritually impoverished.

The Church gave Mace some spiritual solace when it officiated at his father's funeral but his spiritual confusion is highlighted by the way he responds superstitiously to the Billy Pogo myth.

I don't see the Bindari Church as being relevant to the needs of the community, and I endeavour to gently satirise it. Rupert is suffering spiritual inertia but is making some effort, albeit comically, to modernise his approach - particularly to Sunday School:

Rupert: A bit of novelty like on television (*excited*) I had the infant group enthralled last week. I brought along a snake in a bottle. It gave a bit of excitement to Genesis.

In the first draft the Church is more resistant to change, and happy to be locked in with hell fire. Rupert became too much of a stock Anglican parson and lost much of his dramatic force.

I focus most of the satire directly upon the pulpit. It becomes, through its physical inadequacy, a symbol of a broader spiritual disfunction. Rupert's almost manic energies around the pulpit show how parochial and self centred he has become. He is concerned about the mice invading the base of his pulpit:

..I'm fed up. I've lost two prayer books and I'm sure they've been shredded and put under here.

Eventually the atheistic John helps him attach a board to the structure but this one productive act comes after much deliberation.

Rupert: Whoever designed this extravagance left a gap at the base.

John: A niche for doubt?

Rupert: No, merely a place for mice to live and shit. There I go - swearing in here again.

Lionel has a cynical and dismissive opinion of the church and he quickly assesses Rupert's uneasy relationship with it:

It has lots of fancy stained glass and high ceilings but I get the feeling it became your gaol.

Rupert has to overcome the restrictive influence of the church hierarchy before he can freely look outward to the real world.

The grand church, and architect-designed hotel, symbolise Bindari's promising beginnings. Mace's Grandfather saw Bindari as 'another Kalgoorlie' and built accordingly. The dominant culture was here to stay and they built structures befitting them. The design of the Church has been flawed from the beginning. The pulpit is not as perfect as it seems and pestilence invades. The hotel has become an empty shell also - that is real disaster! Fly specks muddy the ceiling and the fixtures have become antiquated. Vin and Mace place their futures upon economic revival, but dream of halcyon days when the romance was wool and 'kelpies ruled'.

Vin's words ring hollow in the public bar:

We'll get them big raffle nights going again. You'll be able to paint this joint - get a few swivel chairs like at the club at Wangara.

In the final draft of the play I made the hotel more significant. I gave it a story. Once it was a symbol of plenty - now it symbolises a false start; its looming presence almost embarrassing in a small town.

It occurred to me in the final draft that the hotel was Mace's spiritual centre. He is a third generation publican and to uproot himself would be a trauma. He clings on doggedly with a large mortgage. To take some emphasis off the mine conflict, I show some exploitative white male behaviour. Vin, Mace, Brian and John all behave this way and eventually turn upon one another. I try to show that no issue is 'cut and dry'. Even Lionel Smith is ready to exploit Billy Pogo's skull as a symbol to capture media interest, much to Narella's disgust.

The skull, the mine, the church and the hotel all mean different things to different characters. One man's sacred burial site is another's bulldozer opportunity; one man's mystical skull becomes another's improvised drinking bowl.

2.3 SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT OF BILLY POGO'S FIRE

2.3.1 Preamble

It is my intention to discuss the creative development of the play, and for sake of clarity, I've settled upon three separate working scripts, acknowledging, however, that much rewriting and restructuring occurred before each script presented itself.

The first script, to my mind, is quite unfinished compared with the third. The rewriting between scripts one and two was more extensive than between scripts two and three, although even at this stage I created a new character and changed the ending entirely.

The final script has benefitted from the evolutionary process implicit in the drafts preceding it, and creative assistance received along the way.

I succeeded in having the scripts assessed formally by the Australian National Playwrights' Centre or by a professional theatre assessor, and also informally by actors and writers whose opinions I respect. Coupled with this process was my own continuing critical analysis of the play, and how I might improve it from one draft to the next. Outside assessment can be enlightening, but also contradictory. The play must finally remain the writer's, even though a zealous assessor might want to rewrite it, or conflicting opinions might confuse the issue to such an extent that the writer might feel like abandoning it altogether. In short, one must try to survive a labyrinth of well intended, but often contentious advice.

2.3.2 Script 1- Summary, Assessment Report and New Directions

The first major script was 'raw', but I wanted some critical response so I forwarded it to the Australian National Playwrights' Centre. Being a member of the Centre and having had previous plays accepted for workshop treatment and rehearsed readings, I knew what to expect. It would be interesting to see if the shortcomings I suspected the script had would be confirmed, and if there would be points raised that I had not yet considered.

The first completed draft of BILLY POGO'S FIRE fared better than I imagined. It made the first short list of twenty four plays but missed out on the final acceptance of twelve plays. The 1991 Conference was to have an Australasian flavour so plays

were accepted from as far as New Zealand. The Centre usually assesses over 150 plays, so I thought for a 'raw' script it had fared reasonably well. Leading directors, writers, actors and theatre academics are appointed as script assessors, but the reports are returned to the writer anonymously.

Before including a comprehensive report on **Script One**, a structured outline of the play is necessary.

SCRIPT 1 : BILLY POGO'S FIRE

CHARACTERS:

Rupert Fielding:	An Anglican minister about sixty years old.
John Fielding:	Rupert's younger brother. An academic and palaeontologist about fifty five years old.
Beatrice Fielding:	John's wife. Voluptuous and well groomed, about fifty years old.
Narella Fielding:	Rupert's adopted Aboriginal daughter about twenty years old.
Lionel Smith:	An Aboriginal activist about thirty years old.
Mace McNamara:	Bindari Publican - about fifty five years old.
Vin Glasson:	An itinerant shearer and local larrikin about thirty five years old.
Gordon (Twinnie) Glasson:	Bindari's policeman and Vin's unidentical twin brother.

SUMMARY OF PLAY

Billy Pogo's Fire is set in a small town in Western New South Wales. The set has three distinct areas -

Hotel bar, Hotel lounge and Anglican church.

The main concern, and conflict focus are upon an Aboriginal claim of a sacred burial site, which includes a disused goldmine about to be re-opened by the mining company.

The local publican has an ancient Aboriginal skull on display in the bar, and conflict arises over it.

Two aging brothers, one the local Anglican minister, and the other an academic, clash over the proposed reopening of the mine. The Anglican minister comes into conflict with his adopted Aboriginal daughter, and the academic and his wife are experiencing marital tension, much of it arising out of the academic's involvement of the mine.

Lionel Smith, an Aboriginal activist, arrives, and his resolve to demonstrate in the town brings the various conflicts to a climax.

SUMMARY OF SCENES

The play consists of two acts, Act I consisting of six scenes and Act II, seven scenes.

Act 1. Scene 1 (Hotel Bar)

After a night of racial conflict in the town's main street, Vin barges into the public bar prior to opening time and relates the previous night's events, and his part in them to Mace MacNamara, the publican. Vin has been at the centre of the brawling and now wears a large wad of cotton wool over his left eye.

The local policeman arrives and pressures Vin to behave.

Conflict between Mace and Vin arises over Mace's concern for the safety of his hotel. Vin and Twinnie clash because Vin's riotous behaviour is threatening Twinnie's reputation as a law enforcer. Because they are brothers, Twinnie feels he is being compromised by Vin's behaviour.

Example of Dialogue

Vin: Sorry about last night, Twinnie. Thanks for putting in a good word for us white blokes.

Twinnie: You're my brother, but don't push your luck.

(TWINNIE pulls the plaster pad off VIN'S eye. VIN cries out)

That's a nasty cut. Look Mace - isn't that nasty looking.

Vin: Let me go - I'm bleeding. I won't do it again.

Mace: He's got the message. I don't want any more trouble.

Twinnie: And neither do I. *(He places the plaster pad back onto VIN'S eye)*. You and your no hoper mates made a fool of me.

Vin: I got the message, Twinnie. It doesn't look good when Wangara cops have to be called in.

Twinnie: *(straightening VIN'S collar and patting his hair)*.

I won't get a promotion that way, will I? That big Wangara Sergeant hates me, doesn't he - and he'll pedal shit about me to the Inspector? You're lucky that big moose sergeant wasn't here last night - then your big brother couldn't have helped you. You'd have been a little red rooster locked up with a flock of black crows.

Act 1. Scene II (Hotel Lounge)

John Fielding, on sabbatical from University of Edinburgh, has returned to his childhood town in search of fish fossils at the disused mine. What was to be a relaxing return to Australia for a few weeks has turned to boredom for Beatrice. She comes into conflict with John over his involvement with an area of land which is sacred to the Aborigines.

Beatrice: You just can't ignore what's happening.

John: It's nothing more than a few drunks brawling. They'll go away.

Beatrice: No they won't!

John: I won't be intimidated. It's all politically motivated by a few stirrers.

Beatrice: Well, I'm doing some stirring. I think we should return to Edinburgh and enjoy it. Forget about publishing or perishing and do some old fashioned teaching. I'd like to move out of here at the weekend.

John: No! - that's too soon -

Beatrice: Then I'll meet up with you in Sydney.

John: But I need your support!

Beatrice: All you'd like me to do is hold the torch - there's no point sneaking down at night - they'll discover you and what then?

John: I'll risk it. There are real signs in this last lot of rock. Come on - I'll make it up to you.

Beatrice: But you're digging in a sacred place -

John: It was a gold mine. Everything was dug up, crushed and carted away years ago.

Beatrice: You just can't dig where you like anymore.

Act I Scene III (The Anglican Church)

Rupert is rehearsing a lesson for Sunday school when Narella enters. They are in conflict over black activists and John's provocative presence at the mine. Narella tells

Rupert of Lionel's arrival in Bindari. She urges Rupert to become more involved in Aboriginal concerns, rather than mulling over his inability to communicate with John.

Narella: Talk to him before he gets hurt.

Rupert: But it's not easy - he delights in questioning my beliefs.

Narella: Just shrug it off.

Rupert: But he's such a committed non-believer.

Narella: And that worries you more than what he's doing down at the mine?

Rupert: I failed him when we were boys. This might be his last sabbatical - I have one last chance to reach him.

Narella: Little Johnny this, little Johnny that. Blood's thicker than water isn't it?

(NARELLA *moves towards the door*) Don't bother yourself on my account. We'll use other ways to bring him to his senses.

Rupert: I won't have them hurt him - I'll speak to him, but it's not easy.

Act I Scene IV (Hotel bar).

Lionel enters and receives an aggressive reception from Mace and Vin. Lionel asks for the skull and Mace makes a joke of it, confusing the request with the fish head trophy near-by.

Vin, now drunk, becomes abusive and Beatrice enters and attempts to mediate.

To add insult to injury, Mace, acting upon so called principle, offers to sell the human skull to Lionel. Lionel, of course, is outraged at this suggestion, and Beatrice makes matters no better by offering to pay the money to Mace so that the matter can be resolved.

Beatrice: Stop it!! I'm calling the Wangara police. They'll sort this out.

Mace: Don't do that! We'll be civilised about it.

Lionel: That's a laugh.

Mace: I'll do a deal - I just can't give it to you. I've got my reputation. I'll have every bugger in here wanting things - Animal libbers will want my fish trophy.

Beatrice: That's entirely different.

Mace: The principle's the same.

Vin: Yeah.

Mace: *(to LIONEL)* I'll sell it to you.

Lionel: No way!!

Mace: Fifty dollars - It's a bargain, and it takes care of honour.

Beatrice: *(fumbling with her bag)* I'll buy it for you.

Lionel: No! We don't buy back our people -

Beatrice: I'm sorry. I thought -

Vin: He's itching for a punch up *(to LIONEL)* Come on, fella - I'll fight you for it.

Mace: Back off! *(to LIONEL)* All right - We'll keep honour out of it - and it is a bit damaged - ten dollars.

Beatrice: Don't be a fool.

Mace: *(angrily)* There are ways of doing things out here.

Lionel: *(to MACE)* Stick your money! *(he moves to the doorway)* That old fellow would spew up any thought of us if he knew we bought him. You had a chance to give him back - now we'll use other methods.

Act I Scene V (Hotel lounge)

Rupert has arrived and talks to Beatrice about his conflict with Narella. John arrives with more rock samples and both brothers argue. Rupert tells the story of the arrival of the large snake in the lounge after the old Aborigine had been murdered years ago. John, the scientist, mocks this mythic tale and makes little of the story of Billy Pogo's murder.

Rupert: Then somebody looked out the window and discovered a beautiful skin woven into the grapevine. There were several cuts along its length.

John: What did they do with this magical skin?

Rupert: When the publican went to untangle it next morning it had gone.

John: That figures. You legend makers have been never big on evidence.

Rupert: On the night that the publican left the skin in the grapevine, it is said an old black man sat around a little fire at the edge of the hole. His name was king Billy Pogo. He had discarded his ragged swallow tail coat and top hat. He'd play the clown-king no more. He became a threatening warrior, proud of his initiation scars, but next day, as with the serpent skin, there was no sign of him.

John: *(laughing)* It's a fairy tale about the same old mad Billy who was the bogie-man when we were kids.

Rupert: Perhaps - but the real man had disappeared many years before.

Beatrice: To turn up eventually as a skull in this seedy pub.

Rupert: It is assumed -

John: - but never verified.

Act 1 Scene VI (Hotel bar)

Twinnie orders the drunken Vin home and then orders Mace to close early each day until matters dealing with the mine are settled. Vin encounters Lionel outside the bar and drags him in to impress Twinnie. Twinnie and Lionel clash over Lionel's presence in town. The policeman tries to prompt Lionel to violence so he can arrest him. Lionel doesn't respond to this ploy and Twinnie has to let Lionel walk free. In so doing he loses face with Mace and Vin. Twinnie suggests that Vin follow Lionel and sort him out. It is Vin's turn now to be ridiculed when he shows reluctance. Twinnie goes so far as suggesting something might happen to 'the old professor' so that Lionel might be incriminated.

Mace: It's the way he tried to stand over me that got up my nose.

Lionel: You smart arsed about it, and then wanted money.

Twinnie: (to MACE) Not even a pinch of compassion?

Vin: (lurching at TWINNIE)

That's crap! You've switched sides.

Twinnie: Sit! (to MACE) This is how I see it. You give nice Mr. Smith his old relation and he leaves town. (to LIONEL) Straight away - along with any of your agitating mates who might be hanging around.

Mace: And I'm to be the loser so you can look big with the top brass in Wangara.

Twinnie: *(holds the skull and strokes it)*

Our publican is a cynical man, Mr. Smith. I wonder how long it will take him to be decent and part with poor little Billy - a month of early closings - the loss of his liquor licence?

Mace: You can't do that!

(TWINNIE sits the skull back on the counter)

Twinnie: Watch me! You'll understand then that I control this town - not you. *(to LIONEL)* Now let's do each other a favour.

Vin: *(Standing and kicking the stool to one side)* You've turned into a blackfella - you're no brother of mine!

Mace: Wait! I can't afford any more breakages. *(He takes up the skull and offers it to LIONEL)*. Take it!

Twinnie: *(Grabbing the skull)* I'll give it to you, and then you leave town.

Lionel: I never said that -

Twinnie: Eh?

Lionel: I want Billy Pogo to be at peace, but I also want that mining mob to clear out - that's our sacred land. What's the point of burying it there if he's going to be dug up again?

Mace: *(Laughing)* Not easy to satisfy is he, Constable?

Twinnie: What a pity. I thought we could do business.

(He places the skull on the counter and taps it gently with his baton)

It's a shame that violence is the only way to do things. Billy Pogo - was that his name? Sad - A lot of stories dribbled out of that bullet hole - centuries of legends, I'd say.

Lionel: Be careful copper! You can't get away with that anymore.

Twinnie: He got ideas, I'd say - and ideas and legends don't mix - not then and not now either. I wonder what Lionel Smith's skull will look like when it turns white like Billy Pogo's. Will it have a neat little bullet hole or will it be in little pieces - like this! (TWINNIE *suddenly slams the baton on the counter close to the skull. LIONEL thinks he has actually hit it and reacts accordingly*)

Lionel: Fuck you!

(TWINNIE *assumes a combative stance*)

Twinnie: Nothing broke - not yet. Come on - do something silly!

Act II Scene 1 (Church)

Rupert continues to muse upon his own failings and his inability to communicate with Narella. John arrives and Rupert pleads with him to stop his activities at the mine. John, however, wants Rupert to mediate with Lionel.

John: I'm sorry about what I said earlier. I need to be more tolerant.

Rupert: Beatrice sent you?

John: I'm still capable of independent action.

Rupert: So you've realised that there are things more important than fossils. You're going to look under rocks somewhere else?

John: In Australia - how can I? They're turning the whole country into a sacred site. The truth is I want a few more hours down there and I'll be done.

Rupert: I should've known better.

John: Talk to that young activist. He's made such a big impression on Beatrice. I can't get any sense out of her. Tell him I'm from Edinburgh University - he'll know about all the remains we've returned. He might look at it as a trade off. Tell him I've put a lot of effort into what I'm doing and I'll finish it soon.

Rupert: We'll both talk to him!

Act II Scene II (Hotel bar) night)

Mace counts the meagre day's takings and Vin and Twinnie arrive. Vin has been to the mine and has bashed John, acting upon Twinnie's half-ironic plan to incriminate Lionel.

Vin panics because he thinks he might've killed John. The brothers begin blaming each other.

After much confusion, Beatrice knocks on the internal bar room door which has been locked. Vin is concealed and Beatrice is finally admitted. She reports that John has stumbled from the mine after being assaulted. Twinnie gathers courage and takes an official stance, his line of questioning working towards the incrimination of Lionel.

Twinnie: I'll need to question him.

Beatrice: But not now - He's waiting for me.

Twinnie: He's been attacked in a cowardly way. This incident just can't end with dettol and half a dozen band-aids. This needs to be followed up.

- Beatrice: *(looking for MACE)* I don't like your aggressive tone - I'm hardly dressed for this - and it's late.
- Twinnie: Just as it's very late to be fossicking or whatever your husband is doing? Why the cover of darkness?
- Beatrice: All right then. Just lately he's been going to the mine at night - with a torch. I told him he was crazy, but the Aborigines -
- Twinnie: Aborigines? Oh, I see. Your husband's been attacked by Aborigines.
- Beatrice: I didn't say that.
- Twinnie: He's been attacked by an Aborigine, hasn't he?
- Beatrice: I don't know - he hasn't said. I refuse to continue with this.
- Twinnie: So who was it - an owl, a possum with a knife?
- Beatrice: Don't be frivolous.
- Twinnie: You're protecting someone aren't you?
- Beatrice: Yes - my husband. I want him to get some rest.
- Twinnie: So he hasn't identified anyone in particular?
- Beatrice: Ask him in the morning if you must.

Act II Scene III (Hotel Lounge)

Having been interrogated by Twinnie, Beatrice now assists John. John is outraged at the attack and wants justice. Beatrice can't believe Lionel would have done it and suspects Twinnie's involvement following her treatment downstairs. Twinnie, now confident, comes upstairs to question John. Beatrice realises that John is about to be manipulated into thinking it was Lionel who assaulted him. Beatrice insists that John

make a full statement next day rather than at the heat of the moment. Twinnie can barely control his anger at Beatrice's calm opposition.

Twinnie: *(to JOHN)* You're all right, then?

John: *(standing and furious)* No, I'm not all right! I've been attacked and I could be down in that pit bleeding to death. What sort of a town are you running here?

Twinnie: Without Blacks and Greenies - a perfect town. Peaceful as the grave - that's what Bindari used to be called.

John: A perfect figure of speech if I'd been hit a little harder. It's certainly not the town I remember.

Beatrice: Please, John - let it wait until morning.

John: *(pushing her aside)* Someone's got to answer for this.

Twinnie: It's better we talk now.

Beatrice: I just told you! It can wait.

Twinnie: I'm asking him.

Beatrice: He didn't see his attacker. It was too dark.

John: I'll talk to you tomorrow.

Twinnie: Don't let your wife rule you - you're the one bleeding.

John: No - she's right. It can wait -

Beatrice: We'll call Wangara police if we have more to say.

Twinnie: *(coldly)* I wouldn't do that!

Beatrice: Why!

Twinnie: It's better to let me handle it.

Beatrice: I disagree.

Act II Scene IV (night)

Lionel calls on Rupert, telling him that he'd like to protest on the roof of the church. Narella enters, having received a phone call from Beatrice reporting John's assault at the mine.

Narella begins to lose courage but Lionel goads her to action, and commitment. Narella and Rupert clash over the proposed demonstration.

Lionel: It's too easy to walk away. I'll never forget those stinking tin humpies near the river and nowhere else to go.

Narella: You were lucky - You had your real family. You knew who you were.

Lionel: We thought we were water rats when it flooded. Don't go on at me about a real family - My father and his mates sitting around all muddy arsed and pissed, their futures screwed up in the next flagon they'd beg some white bloke to bring out to the back lane. I was only a little fellow, and I asked Grandma why Dad couldn't walk into the pub and buy what he wanted like ordinary white people. She shook her head and said it was changing, but it all depended on little kids like me. We were the blackfella future, that's what she said. She put a lot of faith in me and I've come real close at times to stuffing it up but not this time - we've come too far for that.

Narella: We all aren't as brave as you.

Lionel: I'm bloody terrified. I'll have to come off the roof sooner or later and they'll arrest me - and they'll put in the boot. This local copper's one of the worst.

Act II Scene V (Church early morning)

Lionel sits near the pulpit. He is apprehensive about going onto the roof and calms himself with church wine he has found.

He has become contemplative about his childhood and the stories he was told about Billy Pogo. Narella insists they look to the future and not dwell upon the past but he insists upon relating tribal folk lore concerning the old Wiringin's death. Narella prepares another protest banner.

Narella: We're both scared. Let's get out of here. You expect too much from yourself.

Lionel: I've got to do it now - or I'll be gutless forever. I have to make a stand like Billy Pogo.

Narella: Forget him! Look at you - you're shaking - put your shirt on.

Lionel: I'm not cold - I'm shit scared and I don't want to be. I've already put up the banner we made last night. Come on - get the other one started.

Narella: No! - you can't do this alone.

Lionel: I am! Billy Pogo did.

Act II Scene VI Church (same)

Rupert rushes in as Narella prepares the final banner for the church roof. They reach an uneasy peace, each trying to understand the other. It is 6.30 a.m. Lionel is on the roof and Rupert wakes the town with bell ringing.

Act II Scene VII Church (same)

Twinnie rushes in with a small parcel which he places to one side. He confronts Narella, hoping that her fearful response will bring Lionel from the Church roof.

Rupert hears the commotion and comes from the belfry to assist Narella. In his zest to protect Lionel he confesses that family malice led him to attack John.

Twinnie dismisses this. He has come to arrest Lionel.

John and Beatrice arrive and Rupert tries to maintain the pretence of being John's attacker. John denies being attacked by Rupert or Lionel. Twinnie begins to lose the initiative, so he grabs the parcel and threatens to smash the skull if Lionel doesn't come down quietly and be off the roof before the Wangara police arrive.

Lionel has already come down into the church and he confronts Twinnie. He offers to go quietly if the skull is passed over to Rupert's safe keeping. Twinnie agrees, but Narella protests bitterly, realising the danger in which Lionel has placed himself. The skull is now secured but the handcuffed Lionel is led away amid the remonstrations of all concerned.

Twinnie: If Smith comes quietly I'll leave the skull here.

Lionel: Do you mean that?

Twinnie: I don't care where it ends up just as long as you're locked up and not perched on that roof when the Wangara boys arrive.

Narella: *(Rushing at TWINNIE)* I'll kill you!!

(He pushes her and she falls heavily. BEATRICE assists her. RUPERT and JOHN restrain Lionel. TWINNIE stands poised for combat, moving the skull from one hand to the other).

Twinnie: Let's turn this old blackfellow into a thousand bits.

(LIONEL struggles)

- Beatrice: Lionel - don't. He's a madman.
- Narella: Let him break it *(to TWINNIE)*. Go on, but then you'll have to drag all of us out of here.
- (TWINNIE raises his arm to throw the skull onto the floor).*
- Lionel: No - don't!! I'll go with you.
- Narella: Billy Pogo doesn't matter. He's not our future.
- Lionel: You don't understand. *(He taps his chest)*. When we bury him I'll feel my future in here. *(He holds out his hands to TWINNIE)* Get on with it.

The preceding synopsis gives some idea of character content and dramatic thrust of the play in its early stages of development. It is my hope that the following assessment comments and my own developmental notes will make sense in light of this precis. It is not my intention to burden the reader with any appended script other than the final one. On-going external assessments, and my own deliberations supported by extracts, should suffice to show the play's dramatic evolution towards that text finally settled upon.

The following assessment was received on Script One and I include it as received:

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PLAYWRIGHTS' CENTRE - READER'S REPORT
TO PLAYWRIGHT

1. (TITLE) Billy Pogo's Fire 2. (SCRIPT) 91/49
3. (ASSESSOR'S OPINION OF THE PLAY)

Straight off, let me say that I like this play a lot. It has terrific energy and drive, and there is a confidence and skill in the way you handle both character and incident which leads in places to fizzingly exciting

dialogue. For example, after the slightly over-the-top and melodramatic opening, the first exchange between Mace and Vin takes off like a jet plane, and holds the tension even through some rather obvious bits of exposition. The play has a complex and sophisticated structure - more about this below - and adds dramatically (ie appropriately) to the debate on the issues you raise (though it veers just a touch towards the polemical).

Having said which, I think it still needs a lot of work. Firstly, I think it is just one degree too complex - you have got one too many storylines and characters for verisimilitude, and you are starting to bash the audience over the head with plot contrivances. To change the metaphor, you are riding too many thematic horses at once, some of which are redundant to your main theme. Does John, the scientific pedant, have to be such a naked male egoist, and does he have to have a wife to balance him who is an end-stopped artist with a mystical understanding? Does nice Lionel have to politely fancy Narella, and by way of balance does nasty Twinnie have to sexually molest her? The superfluity of the first mentioned (John and Beatrice) is clear throughout scene 2: the pacy and punchy dialogue of scene 1 turns into a stilted and laboured debate, couched in extremely elaborated and formal language code, of the sort which husband and wife who have been picking over this bone of contention for many years would never use in a fit (ie expository plonk, contrived for the audience only). Every time Beatrice comes on the tension drops, and I am unsure what she contributes to the substance of the play at any point. I'd suggest losing her entirely, and working on John to make him less of a conveniently stereotypic (and therefore totally unsympathetic) character. Give the audience a real dilemma by showing some contradiction in his character, and some empathetic quality - it is too easy for them to write him off as the enemy. This is what I mean about a polemic: you feed the audience the correct ideological standpoint, rather than inviting them to pick their way through the conflicting evidence of contradictory people's actions.

The characters on the edge, like Mace and Vin, have plenty of colour, and your central protagonists have the potential to be very good. Rupert already is: though his conversion to the cause is a bit glibly

quick, his tortuous and suffering - and conflicting- mixture of poetical grasp and religious floundering is very moving - especially in his monologues, which work structurally because they work in human terms. The beginning of Act 2 is especially vivid. As yet none of the other characters have the same roundness or authenticity, perhaps because they don't give the audience enough dilemmas. Closest is Narella, who does indicate intellectually something of the person caught between two worlds, but needs a little more fleshing out. Lionel is a bit too blandly nice, and Twinnie too unrelievedly unpleasant (cornily brutal yet fearful pig cop stereotype), to form the nub of the conflict that they should, personally and thematically. It is still a bit too easy, morally, to know which side we should be on. Either round them out, or use more humour.

The other criticism I have relates to this. The characters are all rather too knowing about their situations, and too ready to expatiate on it at the drop of a hat eg p. 53 - 'I read it somewhere - it's called the reconstruction of belief'; or p. 34 'it's a spirit place - I'm into that, remember?' All these many moments sound like the playwright talking and not the characters. Characters, like people, live their lives not fully understanding each moment, talking about what they are doing not why they are doing it - the meaning comes over well enough, from their actions. Spell the implications out more than that and you are patronising your audience. Take a knife to the play and excise any moment where the characters are being over-explicit or examining their navels - a main part of the tension for the audience is making sense of half heard thoughts and half realised actions, gradually piecing them together without being told by those characters.

This play is well worth the trouble of such rewriting.

This report confirmed some of my own thinking:

1. John and Beatrice

This relationship wasn't working. I had already decided in a rewrite to dispense with Beatrice and the assessor's opinion confirmed this decision - I had Beatrice appearing in scenes where John's presence would be more

affective dramatically, after all it was he who was taking the fossils from the mine. Debate over John's agenda could be covered more affectively between the two brothers. Rupert had more at stake than Beatrice who was reacting to John out of boredom as much as a growing interest in Lionel and his struggle. Rupert, on the other hand, was at the centre of conflict because of Narella. He might stand to gain her respect if he were able to convince John to cease work at the mine.

The exclusion of Beatrice would open up new possibilities for structure. Why not, having dispensed with the hotel lounge, include the mine and set some scenes at its rim? The goldmine could be placed centrally to the bar and pulpit and its spiritual significance to the Aborigines could be juxtaposed with the pulpit of the Anglican Church. Besides providing scope for dramatic staging, the mine could remind the audience continually of the play's central issue which is the land as a spiritual place or as the source of material wealth.

2. Narella and Rupert

This relationship was not yet based on a story of years shared together. We see Narella too angry too soon. She is moving out of Rupert's life and understandably so, because I give her no reason to stay. Rupert is too much a 'religious posture' rather than a father. Because of this Narella is unable to be seen as a young person with positive feelings towards him. She is little more than an angry voice dismissing a dithering fundamentalist. This isn't what I wanted. I wanted their relationship to be real but I choked it with expository dialogue and polemic. As the script progresses Rupert certainly shows a human side; his need for love and his perceived failings, but it's usually delivered as a pulpit monologue and not to the one whom we suspect would be moved to hear it.

The political situation must be a real one and it will be more believable if it involves well rounded people not only capable of anger but also of love, humour, regret and the ability to compromise and forgive. The audience will warm to them if this is the case and the political situation will be felt and be part of people's lives rather than objectively delivered set speeches.

3. Rupert and John

Without Beatrice, John could be emotionally free of a disgruntled wife in search of a function: a character in search of a role to play. Freed of marital discord I might have increased scope to develop a brotherly relationship which could contain fresher dramatic possibilities - particularly a relationship between two men so diametrically opposed. Once again a human quality must be introduced rather than formal exchanges between an atheist scientist and a fundamentalist Christian. In this first script Rupert is too fey, too much the fool of God to cope, and John is too much the ambitious academic mouthing the qualified joys of being a palaeontologist. It seemed a good idea to have two brothers locked in conflict in a small town, and it still does. What is needed is more depth to their relationship, much more sense of humanity, compromise and deprecating humour. In an effort to create conflict I was falling into the trap of creating angry chatter spouting from two talking heads.

4. Vin and Twinnie

Twinnie was too gratuitously violent and too similar to Vin whom I had conceived as a rough edged, quick tempered shearer. I wanted Vin to be capable of course country humour, but ultimately not very intelligent and therefore unable to negotiate his changed situation peacefully. In the first script Vin is very much the violent country yokel. I decided I must raise the stakes for him and if he had to be violent, then make it plausible. I also wanted him to be a little more aware; capable of some ironic engagement with John and Lionel.

Twinnie, in the first script, is too erratic and too much a caricature of the bull necked country police officer. Brian, the rewrite of Twinnie, has to be more aware, shrewder, and his violent nature to be more controlled. Brian, I decided, would exercise more subtlety in his dealings with community members. It would be more dramatic if a veneer of self control shattered. I wanted to preserve the hotel scene where he goads Lionel into a violent reaction. I wanted this scene to be the one where Brian shows his true nature.

Twinnie's behaviour in the first script is too overstated, particularly his physical harrasment of Narella in the church. The new Twinnie, now Brian,

might fantasize such behaviour but he'd be too cunning to act it out, especially with Rupert close by and likely to walk in.

5. Lionel and Narella.

In the first script a romantic relationship is hinted at. I wanted to avoid this in a later draft. I also wanted Narella to be more than an emotional reactor to Lionel's actions. In a rewrite I wanted to see Lionel more clearly as a character. I wanted to develop more of a narrative around him.

2.3.3 Script 2- Changes, Spread Sheet Summary of Script 1 and 2. Creative Developments and Assessments

The play began to settle into its final structure in the second major script. It differed markedly from the initial draft in the following ways:

1. The exclusion of Beatrice Fielding, John's wife. The hotel lounge also disappeared and all action at the hotel occurs only in the public bar.
2. The presence of the mine. In Act 1, Scene III, Brian Glasson challenges Lionel for camping there. He accuses Lionel of trespassing and 'advises' him to leave town.

In Act II, Scene I, Narella joins Lionel at the mine and they commiserate at the loss of the land claim and Narella questions Lionel's motives.

3. Mace's role is enlarged. His relationship with Vin and Brian deteriorates. In the final scene of the play he arrives at the church with Billy Pogo's skull and plays a leading part in the play's climax and resolution.
4. A greater effort is made to develop the relationship between Narella and Rupert.

Act II, Scene VII, is included as a scene of reconciliation between them.

5. Rupert is given a scene at the hotel bar Act II, Scene III, where he tries to secure the skull from Mace. I attempt to give him a more definite part in propelling the action.
6. Narella and Lionel appear in the church together in Act 1, Scene V, in an effort to develop their relationship and reveal something of Narella's feelings towards the church and her father.
7. Police officer Twinnie Glasson is now Brian Glasson, Vin's slightly younger brother.

The appended spread sheets summarise the structural differences between Script 1 and 2.

ACT 1

SCENE I	SCENE II	SCENE III	SCENE IV	SCENE V	SCENE VI
<u>Script 1 Hotel Bar</u> Land claim discussed Mace and Twinnle pressure Vin to behave.	<u>Hotel Lounge</u> Beatrice and John in conflict over John's involvement at the mine.	<u>Church</u> Narella and Rupert in conflict over black activism and John's involvement with the mining company.	<u>Hotel Bar</u> Lionel requests return of the skull. He clashes with Vin Beatrice arrives and tries to help. Mace offers to sell Lionel the skull. Lionel is outraged at this suggestion and leaves empty handed.	<u>Hotel Lounge</u> Rupert arrives and speaks with Beatrice about Narella. John arrives and the brothers clash over the mine, and past events.	<u>Hotel Bar</u> Twinnle orders Vin to go home. Lionel enters and Twinnle threatens to destroy the skull. This play to prompt Lionel to violence fails. Lionel withdraws. Vin and Twinnle clash over what Vin sees as Twinnle's weakness in failing to arrest Lionel.
<u>Script 2 Church (night)</u> Narella arrives, having left Lionel up at the mine. Rupert has prepared dinner for them. Family tensions surface over John's involvement at the mine, and the ongoing land claim.	<u>Hotel bar (next morning)</u> Vin confident of work at the mine celebrates. He & Mace talk of an Aboriginal stranger at the mine Lionel's letter asking about the skull is mentioned. Mace prepares some strategies. Vin views the skull which is concealed when John arrives. Conflict between Vin and John over the mine claim.	<u>Mine (about 11 a.m.)</u> Brian confronts Lionel for trespassing. He recognises Lionel as a black activist and just stops short of ordering him out of Bindari.	<u>Church (later)</u> Rupert clashes with John over John's presence at the mine and expresses concerns over Narella. Narella arrives and confronts John. She clashes with Rupert for his inaction regarding Aboriginal justice. She leaves angrily. John agrees to meet Lionel.	<u>Church (later)</u> Lionel and Narella discuss the mine claim and family Narella questions Lionel's motives and his preoccupation with the past. She expresses fears for his safety.	<u>Hotel bar (mid-day)</u> Vin is drunk. He and Brian play darts. Lionel arrives and asks about the skull. Brian and Vin confront him. Vin goads him into a fight but Lionel withdraws. Brian tries to establish if Mace does have the skull. John arrives with an announcement about the mine which Vin misinterprets as victory. Vin drinks wine from the skull. John is pressured to say nothing about the skulls existence.

ACT II

Scene I	Scene II	Scene III	Scene IV	Scene V	Scene VI	Scene VII	Scene VIII	Scene IX
Script 1 Church (night) Rupert speaks to John about his concern for Narella. He tries to establish some common ground with John.	Hotel (later) Twinnie and Vin come into the hotel after closing time. Vin has bashed John at the mine in an attempt to incriminate Lionel. Twinnie panics. Vin is hidden. Beatrice enters & reports the assault. Twinnie questions her.	Hotel lounge Twinnie questions John in an effort to establish a charge against Lionel. Beatrice is suspicious and thwarts Twinnie.	Church (late evening) Lionel and Rupert meet. Lionel gets a commitment from Rupert to assist (the roof protest)	Church (early morning) Lionel musters courage to go onto roof. He and Narella clash over his egotism and reckless unilateral behaviour.	Church (same) Rupert and Narella make peace. Rupert will wake the town with bell ringing.	Church (same) Twinnie is alerted. He arrives and confronts Narella. Rupert assists her. John and Beatrice arrive. The skull is put at risk. Lionel comes down and offers his freedom in exchange for the skull.		
Script 2 Mine (afternoon) Narella and Lionel clash over Lionel's quest and its dangers. Lionel decides to get help from John and Rupert.	Church Lionel and Narella arrive. Lionel works at getting support from John and Rupert. Unable to comply John leaves. Narella clashes with Rupert and leaves. Rupert gives a commitment to Lionel.	Hotel (bar) Rupert tries to secure the skull from Mace but fails.	Hotel (bar) Vin arrives and the stalemate leads him to take matters into his own hands.	Church John suffers pangs of guilt over his stance on the issue. Rupert convinces him to find Lionel and discuss the situation again.	Hotel (bar) Vin has brought Lionel back for a final show down. Brian tries to make Lionel respond violently but fails and Lionel withdraws. Vin mocks Brian for weakness. Mace realises things are out of hand and he and Brian clash.	Church (evening) Narella and Rupert talk and settle their differences.	Hotel bar (evening) Vin is admitted to the locked public bar by Mace. Vin reports that he has bashed Lionel at the mine. Mace discovers that it must be John. Brian arrives and strategies are made to incriminate Lionel. Mace wants no part of it.	Church Mace has panicked and is unwell on arrival at church. He has the skull and wants to give it to Lionel. Brian arrives to report John's bashing, and arrest Lionel. Mace won't go along with the frame up and exposes Vin. Brian bullies and blusters but is defeated.

Development of Script 2

1. The Fielding Family Sub-plot

Act I Scene II of Script 1 now becomes Act 1, Scene 1 of Script 2. The scene is less polemical and expository and I keep it in place in Script 3. This first scene begins to develop a sub-plot which meshes with the main plot of the skull quest at the hotel. The relationship between Narella and Rupert in Script 1 is very undeveloped. In Script 2 I try to present them as real people experiencing the complexity of personal motives, aspirations and feelings. The relationship between Narella and Rupert needed to be a real one based on care and love. Rupert has encouraged Narella to reunite with members of her displaced natural family, he shows fatherly concern over her progress in Sydney and her annoyance at his close questioning makes him no different to any other overly concerned parent who suddenly feels isolated from his child's adult life.

Unlike in Script 1, Rupert now is looking forward to meeting the Aboriginal activist from Sydney. Tension does rise, however, when John is mentioned, but it is a smoulder rather than a sudden blow up.

The audience, I hope, will view this as a relationship which is working under pressure and is founded on mutual concern.

John, freed from the hotel lounge sub-plot of his failing relationship with a disgruntled wife, is treated as a closer family member who is given a chance to interact with Narella as well as Rupert in stating his case. He isn't the sudden enemy of Script 1, and Narella views the fossil sample with interest, and tries to get her conflicting ideas into perspective. This isn't the single line activist of Script 1, but a more mature person trying to sort some sense out of a complex situation.

In Script 1 Rupert is too preoccupied with religious mouthings and becomes the stereotyped parson. In the renewed scene his opening biblical quotation is underscored with the humour of the water gargling sound effect, suggestive of 'God's many waters'.

Rupert has also killed and prepared a rooster and later cooked it to celebrate Narella's homecoming. The chicken incident is related with a mixture of anxiety and humour which would have been beyond the Rupert of Script 1.

The family concerns of the sub-plot give the audience a deeper understanding of each character and make us care more for their welfare and wishes when the sub-plot meshes with the main narrative. I hope they are now more than 'types' in a political 'them against us' encounter where they could easily become mere 'talking heads' expressing conflictual ideas - a point accurately noted by the drama assessor.

The turning point in the family sub-plot arrives in Scene IV of Act 1 when the pressure of John being at the mine coupled with Rupert's hesitant stance on Aboriginal justice becomes too much for Narella and she reminds them that they aren't her real family and exits. It is a statement which deeply wounds Rupert and tension between father and daughter is palpable until the heirloom reconciliation later in Act II.

The Fielding sub-plot is another means of bringing Lionel into closer association with the 'white spiritual' side of Bindari, as opposed to the political and economic centre which is the hotel - Mace with a failing business and Vin almost manically desperate for work.

The spirituality of what is seen as a failed church can be offset against resurgent Aboriginal spirituality, and a need to reunite with ancestors and the land itself.

With the added presence of John, the local white community is broadly represented and John's role in the family sub-plot gives us a chance to examine the scientific imperative against both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spirituality.

2. The Main Plot

Lionel's skull quest becomes the major storyline issue when linked with the Aboriginal land claim. Bindari community opposes the land claim and looks forward to the mine reopening and invigorating the region. The skull becomes the political catalyst in the clash of opposing forces. The skull's status is elevated in Script 2, becoming an object of mystery and concealment, rather than being a museum piece or on casual display. The skull quest becomes the clear focus of Lionel's visit to Bindari, unlike Script 1, where a pending demonstration in response to racial clashes seemed to be the central concern.

Having briefly mentioned the mine claim, John's fossil search and Lionel's arrival in Scene I to arouse audience interest, I centre Scene II on the main plot concerns at the hotel. I attempt to blend rough country humour with rising aggression by way of establishing the following points.

1. The depressed economic situation and high unemployment.
2. The political sensitivities in a mixed racial town.
3. The arrival of strangers at the mine.
4. Lionel's previous letter to Mace.
5. John's controversial activities at the mine.

Act 1, Scene III at the disused mine completes the main plot set up. The aggression at the hotel is reinforced by an unsympathetic, racist police officer. Brian Glasson is determined to establish his authority in Bindari and curry favour with his superior officer in Wangara. Brian barely conceals his prejudice and aggression, although he is more restrained than Twinnie of Script 1.

In his quest for the Wiringin skull and protection of Aboriginal interests at the mine, Lionel will have to deal with the white male egocentricity of Vin, Brian and Mace. By the end of this third scene the antagonists have made their intentions clear and Lionel knows what he is up against.

Act I, Scene III is, I feel, a positive step forward in the play's structure. The mine in Script 1 is discussed, but now it materialises, opening interesting possibilities for staging. This mine scene gives an opportunity to view an Aborigine encamped on what he views as his natural birthright but one which has been desecrated.

The scene provides a less expository and more direct way of dealing with the land claim issue, and the Aboriginal skull at the hotel makes the issue dramatically poignant. I try to develop some real tensions between the police officer and activist, and present information through action and reaction without preaching to the audience a liturgy of racial injustice.

Despite being warned for trespassing, the mine and the unexploited land around it, become Lionel's identity place and refuge in the same way as the antagonists have their hotel and Rupert has his church. I use the mine later in the play as a place where Lionel can freely reveal his hopes and poetic imaginings. Lionel sees the skull quest with its burial at the mine region as the continuation of Aboriginal renewal out of the horrors of the past.

Act II, Scene IV brings the main plot and sub-plot together with John's appearance at the church.

The tension arising out of John's main plot involvement are explored, and Narella's arrival sees these tensions played out in open conflict, ending in her emotional rebuttal of her 'white family'.

The following short scene of Narella and Lionel in the church sees Narella reassessing her family, as well as questioning Lionel's actions and trying to fathom his single mindedness in the face of personal danger. For my part, this scene is an effort to place Narella between two distinct worlds and reveal her inner conflict.

Act II, Scene VI sees Lionel's visit to the hotel and his request for the skull denied. It is the script's first major turning point. The achievement of Lionel's goal is thwarted by the three antagonists. The dramatic barrier necessitates a major rethink of strategy on Lionel's part which will bring about a dramatic reversal.

Lionel's success in escaping arrest brings conflict between Vin and Brian to a high point, and the appearance of John and the heated discussion over the skull, highlights how desperate the antagonists, especially Vin, have become.

The stakes are raised for all when another barrier, the injunction, is set in place and political strategies have to be reassessed and reaffirmed.

Vin's desecration of the skull with wine hardens John's attitude towards the antagonists and has Mace beginning to express reservations about his own actions.

Act II, Scene 1 is a new scene exploiting the dramatic presence of the mine. The scene explores Lionel's thinking after his failure at the hotel and sees him reaffirming his determined Aboriginality. His positive outlook is accented by Narella's defeatism.

To overcome the barrier prevented at the hotel, Lionel's reaction is to approach John and Rupert for assistance and commitment. This is a dramatic ploy on my part to align the sub-plot with the main narrative. Rupert's reaction to Lionel's request will have interesting repercussions upon the family sub-plot and put further dramatic pressure upon his already tense relationship with Narella.

Act II, Scene II explores Lionel exerting pressure at the church as a means of driving the main action and refocussing his goal.

John is faced with the dilemma of supporting the Aboriginal cause to the detriment of his scientific achievement. Family harmony will be re-established if he aligns with Lionel, yet this decision will mean returning the fossils to the mine as part of a mediated event, or at the least, bring about the angry withholding of the fossils at the hotel by Mace.

John is tardy in reassuring Lionel that the skull is at the hotel, much to the disgust of Rupert whom he has already told. When the truth finally comes out Narella accuses both of a conspiracy with the antagonists. It becomes the nadir in the father and daughter relationship.

John falls short of being able to overcome his personal ambitions, but Lionel is more successful with Rupert. I attempt some humour in developing Lionel's approach to Rupert for commitment. Rupert is brought to realise his inaction, and his reflex subordination to his bishop. Lionel raises the stakes for Rupert who must be seen to take sides, and publicly oppose the church hierarchy by consenting to the church roof protest.

The placing of pressure upon John and Rupert is a means of developing their character through action. John is given a dilemma which he is unable to overcome. Rupert, however, is prompted to visit the hotel and act as intermediary between Mace and Lionel. Later in the play he is made stand firmly in the face of danger and support Lionel when Brian is desperate to make an arrest.

Having reacted in a forceful way to overcome the barrier set in place at the end of Act 1, Lionel has renewed his hopes of goal achievement.

The final turning point, Act II Scene VI, arrives after three short scenes.

Scene III. Rupert's visit to the hotel and his failure to secure the skull.
Mace's resolve to withhold it is weakened further.

Scene IV. Vin's decision to over-ride Brian's official authority and propel events his way and organise a final show down with Lionel.

Scene V. John's reluctance to forsake his discoveries, and his decision to finish his project by torch light, sets the rationale for his bashing at the mine by Vin, and Brian's subsequent strategy to accuse Lionel.

The turning point of Scene VI occurs at the hotel when Vin arrives with Lionel to settle the dispute. Vin's determination to drive the action rattles Brian who tries to regain the initiative by attaching various provisos upon the skull's release. Brian loses control of the situation and tries to tempt Lionel to a violent engagement which Lionel adroitly avoids. The barrier is still in place but Mace is repulsed by Brian's violence and sees nothing more to be gained in withholding the skull. Following Lionel's quick exit, Vin and Brian try to intimidate Mace, but Mace's survival instinct, and basic decency, dismiss the clumsy, bullying tactics of his associates.

Act II Scene VII is a short scene resolving the conflict between Narella and Rupert and a scene which begins focussing the main plot upon the church roof.

Scene VIII relates events following Vin's reported bashing of Lionel at the mine. The whole incident becomes a fiasco when Mace discovers that John is the victim. While Vin realigns with Brian for protection, the gap between these two men and Mace widens. Brian is driven by family obligation to protect Vin, and his own reputation, while Mace is driven by a combination of self preservation and decency.

Act II, Scene IX is the climax where Mace brings the skull to the church and resolves to make peace with Lionel. To save Lionel from being blamed for the bashing, he reveals the truth, realising that his action will mean his ruin in Bindari. Brian is expelled and must face the reality of having to arrest his brother.

It has been my intention in this summary of Script 2 to focus upon dramatic action driving events and character. I think I have begun to see the dramatic spine or

'through line' more clearly, and I've managed to develop more believable characters who have been forced to grow out of action and interaction.

Assessment of Script 2

Having completed this second script I decided to offer the work out for further critical assessment. I posted the script and the Wiringin Poem Sequence to Mudrooroo Narogin (Colin Johnson), a writer whose work I admire. In a covering letter I asked if he might read and comment upon the work, especially with regard to its Aboriginal content.

I was very pleased to at least receive a response from Mudrooroo, and I include his letter in its entirety:

I have read 'Billy Pogo's Fire with, let's say, quiet enjoyment. It reads well, sustains interest and is well plotted.

As for the Aboriginal, or should I say Wiradjuri content, I find nothing offensive about it; though as I am a Nyoongar and it is not my country or community, I am really not in the position to say that there are, or are not, offensive things in the text; although, it seems straight forward enough. However, I would hate to think how much sacredness is left in a site after it is mined. It would be a matter of theological debate.

The poem sequence is extremely interesting; but again as it is Wiradjuri, I don't know what might be considered offensive, or not. I suppose it should be left up to Billy Pogo, A Wiringin, which I assume corresponds to a Maban, to make his wishes known in this matter.

Thanks for letting me read the manuscripts.

Mudrooroo

Murdoch University,

Perth.

3 Sept. 1992

I also forwarded a copy of the script to Father Brian Bailey, the resident priest of St. John's Anglican Church, Stroud. Father Bailey, prior to entering the clergy, had

lectured in Communications at a University in Sydney. At our first meeting he revealed a lively interest in, and knowledge of, Australian drama. He had read the script closely and had annotated helpful points on the character of Rupert Fielding, the play's Anglican priest.

I include his notes verbatim:

Character of Rupert

Must he be an Anglican? To my mind he comes across more plausibly as a Uniting Church Minister. If Rupert is to remain an Anglican, the following features seem to me implausible:

- a) His use of 'shit' (pp 17 and 19) and 'fuck' (p47) - albeit under pressure and to his brother - but not in a 'sacred' building.*
- b) The business of the Mudgee wine hidden in the pulpit - what is the point of this? Communion wine is always locked in a cupboard in the vestry. Most Anglicans would regard the comment 'Christ's blood' (p 18) as blasphemous in this context.*
- c) His willingness to have Lionel use the roof of the church for a protest.*
- d) The 'hanging' of Christmas puddings in the church.*

Anglicans are very conscious of the 'sacredness' of consecrated buildings. If Rupert is willing to allow the church to be used for 'profane' purposes, this change of attitude will have to be more fully explained if the audience is to be convinced e.g. Is the distinction between sacred and profane to be one of the themes of the play? (and shown to be false?)

The dialogue between Rupert and Mace (Act II, Scene III) worries me a bit. It skirts issues - death, justice, politics of small towns - without achieving any depth. Surely the quote from Rupert's funeral sermon 'We gather today....' ought to be more truly memorable if Mace can recall it after all these years?

I also forwarded a copy of the revised script to retired Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr. Charlie Parsons. Mr. Parsons, whose boyhood was spent in the Tamworth district of N.S.W., began his working life as a shearer before joining the police force in the 1950's. His early career was spent in small western towns with Aboriginal populations.

Mr. Parsons isn't a subscriber to live theatre, but he knows much the drama of human interaction at its most basic level: the everyday conflict resulting in assault and battery, rape, theft, fraud, molestation and murder. Mr. Parsons spent enough time in racially mixed communities to know about racism at its various levels.

Mr. Parsons admitted to working with, and amongst, shearers and police not unlike Vin and Twinnie and in some cases he had known men more 'red-necked' and violent than Vin, and more cunning and power obsessive than Twinnie (Brian).

The Script was read also by the playwright David Allen, whom I had met briefly through the Australian National Playwright's Centre. As well as being a successful writer for stage and television, David Allen is an experienced dramaturg. His comments are as follows: -

Dear Ken,

Sorry to have taken so long to get round to reading your play, but things kept cropping up. Anyway, I have now finished it and here it is, returned.

Obviously "Billy Pogo" is a reworking from another perspective of some of the themes from the other play of yours that I have seen. Certainly it's the same territory and landscape. Off the top of my head I'd say this piece is more accessible than the other but lacks some of its poetry and mystery, which, in terms of theatrical presentation, may or may not be a good thing.

There's no doubt that "Billy Pogo" comes - as they say - right off the page and clearly would read and perform well. Also, what it has to say about human/race relationships, Aboriginal rights, the complexities of the Australian identity/dream/dreaming etc., are worth

saying and examining dramatically. The dialogue is excellent, wonderfully crafted, well paced and gritty.

At the same time - and I hesitate to write this, not wishing to be misunderstood - the presentation is almost too smooth, too pat, too satisfying. It is like a very good piece of television. Heightened realism with an intrinsic message. Your characters are not stock; they are individuals with lives of their own. But there is a stock aura about them that I find a little too predictable, if not in their ultimate actions, then at least in their immediate responses. Again, this is not necessarily a fault. In certain dramatic genres, particularly social realism we need a familiar narrative structure to identify with. I just feel that I would have liked things a little more open-ended, less neat, less slick, more art less matter....

It may be naive of me but I was also expecting something more theatrical - something darker and deeper - thrilling - that manifested the tragedy of the human condition as exemplified by the situation you present. But then, that may not have been your intention... although I suspect it is one of your concerns. Instead you offer solutions - albeit difficult ones - and a kind of happy ending.

And why not? We're just talking preferences here. I wanted Lionel on the church roof. I wanted Billy Pogo manifested. I wanted storm and blasted heath. I felt rather cheated. And the device of John being mistaken for Lionel, clobbered and abandoned just didn't work for me, which doesn't mean it doesn't work... if you follow..?

It's a good play, it should be done. The emotions it arouses in me, I think, are evidence of this. Technically, there's nothing to say really. So I won't.. I doubt if any of this is helpful, but thanks for letting me read it. I genuinely enjoyed it.

David Allen.

The script was accepted to be one of six plays treated by the Griffin Theatre Company at the Stables Theatre, Darlington, as part of their 1992 Playreading Network program.

The script was workshopped by director Kate Wilson in consultation with the theatre's artistic director, Ros. Horan. Several of Sydney's leading actors were engaged over a four week end period, culminating in a 'moved reading' to a full audience at the Stables.

The critical comments were encouraging and the entire process gave me an opportunity to visualise the play as a stage production freed of text.

The play was also assessed by John Senczuk, stage director and academic, who took over responsibility for the play's progress in its final stages at the University of Wollongong.

Comments from all the people mentioned proved to be very helpful in the final revision of the play.

2.3.4 The Development of Script 3

Preamble

Having set aside Script 2 for several weeks to consider my options in the light of reader reactions and comments, as well as my own deliberations, I decided to introduce a new character, Nola, who would create a greater dilemma for Mace, and help drive the play's action towards a more dramatic conclusion.

Beside the restructuring necessary with the inclusion of Nola, I saw the need to focus more sharply the developing poetic mood, which I refer to as the 'mystic fire' of Billy Pogo. This refocus would only be successful with greater attention placed on the mine. The conclusion of Script 3 would be at the mine's edge where all that the land means could be illuminated in poetic, as well as dramatic terms.

For a summary of structural differences between Script 2 and Script 3 see the following spread sheets.

T1

Scene I	Scene II	Scene III	Scene IV	Scene V	Scene VI	Scene VI
<p>Script 2 Church (night)</p> <p>Narella arrives, having left Lionel up at the mine. Rupert prepared dinner for them. Narella tensions surface over Lionel's involvement at the mine, and the ongoing land claim.</p>	<p>Hotel bar (next morning)</p> <p>Vin confident of work at the mine celebrates. He & Mace talk of an Aboriginal stranger at the mine Lionel's letter asking about the skull is mentioned. Mace prepares some strategies. Vin views the skull which is concealed when John arrives. Conflict between Vin and John over the mine claim.</p>	<p>Mine (about 11 a.m.)</p> <p>Brian confronts Lionel for trespassing. He recognises Lionel as a black activist and just stops short of ordering him out of Bindari.</p>	<p>Church (later)</p> <p>Rupert clashes with John over John's presence at the mine and expresses concerns over Narella. Narella arrives and confronts John. She clashes with Rupert for his inaction regarding Aboriginal justice. She leaves angrily. John agrees to meet Lionel.</p>	<p>Church (later)</p> <p>Lionel and Narella discuss the mine claim and family Narella questions Lionel's motives and his preoccupa- tion with the past. She expresses fears for his safety.</p>	<p>Hotel bar (mid-day)</p> <p>Vin is drunk. He and Brian play darts. Lionel arrives and asks about the skull. Brian & Vin confront him. Vin goads him into a fight but Lionel withdraws. Brian tries to establish if Mace does have the skull. John arrives with an announcement about the mine which Vin misinterprets as victory. Vin drinks wine from the skull. John is pressured to say nothing about the skulls existence.</p>	
<p>Script 3 (Hotel (night))</p> <p>Same as Script 2 except time of day changed plus a little more about Billy Pogo</p>	<p>Church (night)</p> <p>Same as Script 2</p>	<p>Mine (morning)</p> <p>Same as Script 2</p>	<p>Mine (morning)</p> <p>John and Narella</p> <p>(New Scene)</p> <p>Interaction between Narella and John independently of Rupert. What the mine meant to her as a child and what it means to John After John exists, Lionel and Narella reappear. A speech by Lionel on his family, and what the mine means to him.</p>	<p>Church (morning)</p> <p>Rupert and John and Narella</p> <p>(Scene IV in Script 2)</p>	<p>Hotel-verandah area</p> <p>John, Mace, Nola, Short appearance of Vin. (New Scene)</p> <p>Nola and Mace's relationship developed. Her determination to leave and his obsessive need to cling to his grandfather's architectural showpiece of the past. Nola developed as independent thinker - dismissive of Vin and Brian.</p>	<p>Hotel (mid morning)</p> <p>Mace, Vin, Lionel, Brian and John</p> <p>(Scene VI in Script 2)</p> <p>Plus brief appearance of Nola early in scene before major conflict.</p>

ACT 2

Scene 1	Scene II	Scene III	Scene IV	Scene V	Scene VI	Scene VII	Scene VIII	Scene IX
Script 2 Mine (afternoon) Narella and Lionel clash over Lionel's quest and its dangers. Lionel decides to get help from John and Rupert.	Church Lionel and Narella arrive. Lionel works at getting support from John and Rupert. Unable to comply John leaves. Narella clashes with Rupert and leaves. Rupert gives a commitment to Lionel.	Hotel (bar) Rupert tries to secure the skull from Mace but fails.	Hotel (bar) Vin arrives and the stalemate leads him to take matters into his own hands.	Church John suffers pangs of guilt over his stance on the issue. Rupert convinces him to find Lionel and discuss the situation again.	Hotel (bar) Vin has brought Lionel back for a final show down. Brian tries to make Lionel respond violently but fails and Lionel withdraws. Vin mocks Brian for weakness. Mace realises things are out of hand and he and Brian clash.	Church (evening) Narella and Rupert talk and settle their differences. Lionel responds to Mace's arrival at the mine. Mace discovers that it must be John. Brian arrives and strategies are made to incriminate Lionel. Mace wants no part of it.	Hotel bar (evening) Vin is admitted to the locked public bar by Mace. Vin reports that he has bashed Lionel at the mine. Mace discovers that it must be John. Brian arrives and strategies are made to incriminate Lionel. Mace wants no part of it.	Church Mace has panicked and is unwell on arrival at church. He has the skull and wants to give it to Lionel. Brian arrives to report John's bashing, and arrest Lionel. Mace won't go along with the frame up and exposes Vin. Brian bullies and blusters but is defeated.
Script 3 Hotel (early p.m.) Vin, Brian, Mace and Nola New Scene Brian and Vin set out to exploit Mace for his hotel. Nola arrives and clashes with Brian and Vin. Mace tells her of the skull's existence and their plan to withhold it.	Mine (later) Lionel and Narella Scene 1 in Script 2 However, scene is shorter, some of its content moved to Act 1, Sc IV.	Church (later) Rupert, John, Narella and Lionel Scene II in Script 2	Hotel (later) Mace, Vin, Nola, Narella New Scene Narella initiates some independent action. She fails to get the skull but Nola protects her from Vin and pressures Mace who finally decides to return the skull to Lionel.	Church (later) Rupert, John, Narella Scene V and Scene VII of Script 2 integrated Rupert's peace making with Narella. John's resolve to pursue his research and work at mine at night.	Hotel Rupert, Mace, Vin, Lionel, Brian Scene III and Scene VI of Script 2 integrated Rupert tries to secure the skull and fails. His continuing presence adds risk and tension to the showdown between Brian and Lionel.	Hotel (verandah) Mace and Nola Vin and Brian New Scene Nola and Mace are at peace but the bashing of John by Vin, and Brian's arrival and implication of Mace leads to further conflict and Nola's disgust with Mace.	Mine (night) John, Lionel, Vin, Mace, Nola, Rupert New Scene Brian is arresting Lionel for John's bashing. Mace looks to the past and resolution of the skull. Nola drives the action to secure justice for Lionel with tragic results for Mace.	

The Hotel sub-plot

The creation of Nola McNamara sees the reintroduction of a second female character. It seemed to me, initially, that the presence of Beatrice in Script 1 gave a potentially strong female presence to the male dominant hotel location. Her interactive presence, along with Narella might avoid any criticism of phallocentricity. At this early stage I had an eye on possible production of the play and the need for gender balance.

With the exclusion of Beatrice, I had only the somewhat immature Narella to state the female viewpoint. Although I had strengthened Narella in Script 2, she was still reacting to the dominant males and not initiating any independent action. I intended to develop her further in Script 3, but a strong older female character had to be created to counter the male egoism unleashed at the hotel.

Because my early thoughts on the rewrite were pointing to a more definite personal journey for Mace, it seemed logical that he should have a wife with a mind of her own pressuring him, and goading him to react against the cold intent of Brian, and the rough belligerence of Vin.

Nola McNamara had to be a forceful woman used to dealing with shearers, farmers and seasonal workers in a public bar environment. At this stage of her life, having spent her last years helping run the McNamara family's oversized hotel, she is ready for a lifestyle change on the coast.

Despite the rough male clientele of the hotel, Nola is refreshingly free of prejudice and has an emphatic sense of justice. She is stronger than Mace, yet remains fond of him because he is basically decent. Mace rises above the normal hotel denizens because he has some aesthetic sensibilities and a disposition which has developed into a melancholia for the past. Those halcyon days excluded Aborigines and even to this day he is uneasy dealing with them. The reason for this is founded, perhaps, on the great family crime: his grandfather's murder of Billy Pogo. The continuing existence of the skull has been a family secret withheld even from Nola. Without making it too obvious, I wanted it to equate with the Ancient Mariner's albatross. The McNamara family has been burdened with guilt for three generations and release will come only with self knowledge and justice achieved. Mace speaks of a family curse and longs for a much needed change in luck.

It is only with the hotel sub-plot, the relationship between Mace and Nola, that Mace can be pressured into revealing his inner most thoughts.

"Nola - believe me. I want to get it right. I should've done something when I was a kid. I was a decent kid. I knew it wasn't right but Dad was the boss - he decided to keep it hidden and forget, I'm not the only kid who's grown up and forgot but I'll get it right, just as long as you don't get drastic and leave me. (Act II Sc. IV p.58)

The Nola/Mace sub-plot examines a relationship coming under stress for several reasons:

- I. Mace obsessively pursuing a failed business.
- II. Vin and Brian holding Mace to his dangerous strategy of denying Lionel the skull.
- III. Mace being pressured into commandeering John's fossil cache and expelling him from the hotel.
- IV. The economic situation making Mace vulnerable to the predatory intentions of Brian and Vin and still acceding to their presence in the hotel despite Nola's gutsy intervention.
- V. Mace interfering with the course of justice over the bashing for fear of being implicated.
- VI. Mace being bullied by Brian into protecting Vin and being tardy at the mine in protesting Lionel's innocence and exposing Brian and Vin for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

I use these aspects to drive the main plot. They place Mace between the vehemence of Nola expecting honesty and justice, and Brian's criminal act in protecting Vin at the expense of Lionel's freedom.

The Mythic Fire of Billy Pogo

As part of these annotations on the evolution of the play I have included a section on symbolism where I examine the Wiringin phenomena, fire, the goldmine, the hotel, and church. I want to leave these notes intact, acknowledging them as part of an ongoing process commenced before the final script of the play was completed.

It is my intention now to make some additional notes on the skull as it appears in the final script.

The skull as a physical object appears in various ways through the evolution of the play. It is given an historic context in turn by Mace, Rupert and Lionel. In Script 2 it was given its first emotional charge by Lionel who separates the living man from it.

Lighting a fire at the mine was an emotional moment for Lionel and he has to wait until the beginning of Act II to relate it. This seemed the appropriate time, however, because the seemingly insurmountable barrier to his quest appeared at the end of Act I, and being thwarted he needs some mythic uplift to reorientate his quest.

Lionel uses the fire, and the magical shadow dancers it invokes, to renew his spirit and raise the defeatist Narella out of despair. To overcome his implacable antagonists, Lionel will need some of the magic of Billy Pogo's fire to burn in him. He takes this spiritual fire to the church and works at securing assistance of John and Rupert and he'll need it when he confronts his antagonists for the second time.

In the final script, I feel that the more emotionally charged Mace brings a mythic aura to the hotel which was previously undeveloped. Vin unwittingly abets this by intimidating Mace with the butterfly imagery, which disturbs Mace's psychological equilibrium with family guilt and surfacing boyhood fears.

I hope the audience begins to react to the skull at a psychological level, and is prompted to empathise with Mace's guilt feelings and superstitious fears.

Lionel and Nola's pressure on one hand, and Vin and Brian's on the other, make Mace view the skull at a deeper level than mere political ploy. Mace's emotionally charged psyche succumbs to the historic family horror implicit in the skull, which begins to take on a power unrealised in Script 1. Vin is first to sense the skull's power over

Mace and uses it as means of control, especially as a way of preventing Mace giving the skull to Rupert.

Early in Act II of Script 3, Mace is almost ready to abandon his political strategy and hand the skull over to Lionel. This is the moment that Vin realises he can check Mace.

Vin: Do you reckon his ghost could still be around here somewhere. It's all a bit spooky, eh?

Mace is not so keen to take the skull from the safe when Vin follows up with the following separate observations:

That butterfly down the backyard - could it be Old Billy's soul waiting to get even with a shivery bloke like Mace?

and

A fellow in the sheds told me once, when blackfellow bones get back into the ground terrible things can happen - it could be they come alive again and send certain white fellows mad

Vin has stumbled upon an effective drunken game to control Mace, who becomes fearful of further action to help Lionel until the final scene when his own survival, and the horror of the situation, prompts him to action at the mine edge.

The skull is an object which will lose its dramatic impact if overused. It is revealed at the major turning point at the end of Act I and then again at the turning point later in Act II when Brian mimics smashing it.

The butterfly imagery is a more potent way of playing the psychic power of the Wiringin and freeing the phenomena from inert bone.

I have built Vin's drunken game upon ancient local rumour that the Wiringin remains a butterfly at the back of the hotel until his skull is returned to the ground. Rupert has already related the story to Lionel at the church, so the audience has been prepared. What begins as anecdote at the church is taken up by Vin as a psychological device to intimidate Mace. Later in the play the butterfly, cupped in Vin's hand, seemingly

bursts from the hotel's backyard darkness to accost Mace. This event occurs only after some suspense - a strange rumbling sound suggesting a supernatural presence. Mace, however, tries to fight these thoughts and insists that it might be a cat. I return to the cat image when Mace speaks of his grandfather's cat, at the end of the play.

Vin, with adrenalin high after two days drinking, and recent violent action at the mine, plays his butterfly joke to the extreme.

Vin: I'm on the job, and things are moving! Have a word with this old blackfella. Tell him you're sorry and make everything right. I'm a witness and so's Nola. Look in his eye and tell him your old Grandfather was a shit and be done with it.

Vin only half realises the effect his performance is having on Mace. I use this scene to exacerbate Mace's later behaviour at the mine when he tries to bury the skull and be finished with the past, and what he sees as an enduring family curse.

In the final scene at the mine, although the skull is present, Vin in his stupor, and fear of arrest, plays out the butterfly metaphor and finally associates it with the fluttering of the approaching police helicopter.

Billy Pogo believed himself to be a sky traveller both psychically and literally, and here now are contemporary sky travellers who are hopefully bringing justice to the mine edge.

Rather than force magic and myth upon this final script with anecdotal dialogue, I have attempted to emotionally and psychologically present a situation where magic and myth meshes with character, driven by action and incident.

Delineation of Character: Some Subsequent Developments.

In the final script, I feel that all characters have arrived with distinctive personalities and motivations. The three antagonists - Vin, Mace and Brian are clearly differentiated and I've attempted to make their character grow out of need and dramatic action.

Vin has always known what he wants - access to the mine as employment for himself and his family. The land is seen as a resource to be utilised, the physical labour generated resulting in prosperity and working class dignity. Part of Vin's malaise comes from unemployment and an increasing loss of purpose and identity. The land claim to him is the potential blockage of renewal of life as he prefers to live it.

Aboriginal activism has intensified Vin's racism which is magnified when linked with education and city attitudes to the environment. Vin can co-exist with Aboriginal shearers and chicken catchers, but the presence of an educated Aborigine is immediately opposed. Vin makes banter out of John's esoteric quest, and professional demeanour, but when these are aligned with the Aboriginal cause, Vin perceives John as an enemy.

Vin believes in 'white supremacy' and sees Brian's role in society as enforcing this credo.

Brian's few attempts at even-handedness are viewed as weakness; pragmatism is seen as capitulation and these perceptions focus the conflict between the two brothers. The more complex Vin became, the more I saw the need to accent him as the primary antagonist and maintain his manic presence right to the end of the play. Vin's increasing loss of control not only endangers Lionel, but also Mace, John, and finally, Brian. I wanted to give the scheming Brian the concluding dilemma of having to 'save' his erratic brother. Vin and Brian harry Mace to such an extent towards the end of the play, that he becomes Lionel's fellow protagonist.

Vin and Brian turn the somewhat flawed Mace into a tragic figure, whose final effort to put the past at rest ennobles him.

Vin, through the developing stages of the play, becomes more articulate and this, I feel, makes him more dramatically effective, and gives relief to his earlier, singular reliance upon physical violence. An 'Ocker' male physicality, coupled with a shearing shed eloquence smarting at the lack of education, along with a provocative sense of humour, makes Vin, for me, a dramatically satisfying character.

Brian, unlike Twinnie of Script 1, is more circumspect, and understatedly cunning, but not as perfectly as he imagines. Brian realises that the contemporary constraints placed upon law enforcers make it impossible for him to use physical violence to achieve results. Brian restrains his naturally violent nature, and tensions grow within

him, making the pretended skull smashing of Act II Scene VI an explosive event. The added earlier presence of Rupert in this scene fuels Brian's frustration and anger. Unlike the earlier Twinnie, Brian would not allow himself to reveal his violent nature, in front of the gentler citizenry of Bindari.

Brian is as racist as Vin, but he conceals it under a thin veneer of officialdom. He is, however, manipulative and ambitious, and not beyond exploiting the financially troubled publican.

In Script 3, I try to make the relationship of the antagonists more ambivalent to avoid a simplistic 'White against Black' situation, with its associated political correctness.

Mace's early strategy to withhold the skull undergoes immediate revision with the appearance of Lionel. Vin and Brian bully Mace into maintaining it as strategy and marks up their racist inflexibility, and in Brian's case, a power complex, whether it be over the local amenable publican or insistent Aboriginal activist.

Brian's pretence at political nous and his over-ruling of Mace's better judgment, create a barrier which to be overcome, moves the play into more complex areas of human interaction and postpones conflict resolution.

Mace is the character who has a definite dramatic journey in Script 3, a journey somewhat tentative in Script 2, yet discernable.

Mace is the keeper of the Wiringin skull and it has fallen upon this third generation publican, under pressure, to bring both family and community history to account.

Before allowing resolution, I create dramatic scenes which prompt Mace on a final journey to the mine. Prior to the arrival at the mine edge with Billy Pogo's skull, Mace has been dramatically confronted by all the characters. Nola, discussed fully in the Hotel sub-plot section, is at Mace's emotional centre and challenges him morally.

Opposing Nola, are Vin and Brian, who drive Mace to consider the economic survival of the town, and its white dominance.

Lionel counters Brian and Vin with the Aboriginal need for justice, while Rupert and Narella visit the hotel, and plead reconciliation and justice.

I've mentioned the roles of Narella, John and Rupert in the Fielding family sub-plot annotations and although they are minor characters compared with Mace, Vin and Lionel, I've tried to give them all a vital part in the plot. Lionel is the catalyst to action and his presence in Bindari ostensibly to visit the hotel, broadens to reach the white spiritual centre of Bindari by way of the Anglican church, via the supportive yet anxious presence of Narella.

Through Narella, I have explored aspects of Aboriginality which would have been difficult to reveal in the mainplot schema. Through Narella, Lionel is revealed as a person rather than an intense political agent on a quest. The racist attitudes of the hotel are balanced by the Narella and Rupert relationship.

In Script 2, Narella was merely reacting to Lionel's activities. In Script 3, I give her a strong conflictual scene at the hotel, away from the protective influence of her family and Lionel.

I decided to exclude Narella from the climactic final scene at the mine. In the earlier scripts she is present and supportive of Lionel, yet little more than reacting emotionally to his predicament.

With the inclusion of Nola, I found a strong female presence not only reacting to male actions, but capable of redirecting them and driving them towards resolution.

The Final Scene at Bindari Mine

In Script 1, the mine is referred to, but is not a dramatic location. This script has its conclusion at the church, but the dramatic pitch falls in the absence of Mace and Vin.

Twinnie is relied upon to meet Lionel in a final confrontation but it is unconvincing. Twinnie, as police officer, is too gratuitously violent, firstly to Narella and then in the presence of Lionel and the Fielding family. Twinnie's pretext for arresting Lionel is flimsy. John has been assaulted, but is quite recovered and to date has pressed no charges. Twinnie's only reason for violent official action is Lionel's protest on the church roof for which the activist has gained the eventual approval of Rupert. The scene ends with Lionel giving himself over to Twinnie's custody as a means of saving

the skull from the policeman's destructive grip. Narella and Rupert follow the police officer and Lionel, and offer vague threats of justice.

Script 2 benefits from character development and the conclusion, still at the church, is more convincing.

The presence of Mace provides an emotional charge lacking in the initial script.

Brian is a more complex and subtle police officer given a real dilemma when he discovers Mace has arrived at the church with the skull, and is ready to expose Vin for bashing John.

The weakness is still the unresolved plot device of having John bashed at the mine and playing no further role, indeed his welfare being so disregarded that the situation becomes implausible. Rupert would want to be there and if all the others, including Vin, could be there too, then the emotional pay off would ignite.

Mace is more convincing in Script 2, but he hasn't journeyed enough in relationship to the skull and all it means. He still appears to be acting out of self interest rather than being primarily driven by the horror of past events, and by an obsessive need to put history to rest.

Mace reveals too much last minute information, as if to force his emotional state to a dramatic height, rather than some of this information having been divulged in earlier scenes under dramatic pressure, thus priming Mace, as well as the audience, for the finale.

His arrival at the church should see him keening from the day's dramatic events. There would be less need to have him suffering chest pains after a panicky walk from the hotel.

In summary, compared with Script 3, it lacks the following-

1. Location - Bindari mine at night and the mythic associations of the Australian landscape.
2. A more believable treatment of John's bashing, and better dramatic use of this occurrence leading to the arrest of Lionel.

3. The inclusion of Nola, who drives the scene towards honesty and justice, and keeps Mace emotionally primed.
4. The inclusion of Vin. Along with the menacing presence of Brian, the two antagonists are still a force to contend with. Brian has been gradually losing control of the situation, and his brother, all day. Vin now becomes a danger to all parties.

The final scene of Script 2 is enclosed for comparison with the concluding scene of Script 3 (See text)

SCRIPT 2

ACT II SCENE XI

Church (later)

NARELLA *has a pair of scissors and is cutting and tearing linen sheeting to make a banner. RUPERT shakes a tin of black paint. There's a brief knock at the door and MACE enters breathlessly carrying the cardboard box which is wrapped with string.*

Mace: Where's Lionel Smith?

Narella: Why?

Rupert: *(recognising the box)* So you've thought it over? *(he sits the paint to one side)*. It's the decent thing *(he moves to MACE)*
You won't regret it.

Mace: *(wiping his brow)* It's getting to me, I think - I'd almost forgotten about it but now, what with all this talk of magic - it's got me rattled *(pause)* No. The night air's gone to my head - that's all - *(flustered)* I wanted to give it to the young bloke personally - should've answered his letter *(pause)* Where is he?

Narella: He'll be back soon - This will make him happy - he's been worried about it.

Mace: *(agitated)* Worried? I've got all the worries *(passing the box to RUPERT)* I want to be rid of it. *(RUPERT takes the box)* It's there - I'm not fooling. I've done with that.

Rupert: I'd like to check - You understand? *(he looks to NARELLA who brings the scissors. RUPERT opens the box)*.

Mace: I've done with looking at it - don't lift it out!

(RUPERT looks in at the skull)

Rupert: It's terrible when you think about it. We disregarded him - everything he believed in. He was treated like a clown.

Mace: *(edging across for a final look)* It scared hell out of me when I was a kid. Dad told me it was a wizard who wore a long hat and could bring hundreds of rabbits out of it. I thought about it for ages and made up games about it, then I grew up and forgot. It beats me why someone never threw it away.

(he staggers) What made us hang onto it?

Rupert: *(steadying him)* Are you all right? *(He helps MACE to the chair)*

Narella: *(softly)* He's drunk.

Mace: No - just a couple of stiff brandies. I'm not too fit - I walked along the back lane *(taking out his handkerchief and wiping his brow)* I didn't want anybody to see me here. *(standing)* You - haven't heard anything?

Rupert: In what way?

Mace: Never mind. I wanted to see Smith - to let him know I've done the right thing *(pause)* So you've heard nothing?

Rupert: Why - What's wrong?

Narella: *(alarmed)* Has Lionel been to the pub - Where is he?

Mace: *(snapping)* I don't know - how should I know? *(He holds his chest and sits)* It's a dog's life running a pub. The professor's not about anywhere?

Rupert: No - but I have a good idea where he is.

Mace: *(stumbling)* Oh - where's that?

- Rupert: Up at the mine. Do you think you could change your mind about all that rock of his?
- Mace: We'll talk to Smith. We'll all be reasonable. *(He moves closer to RUPERT)*. I saw one.
- Rupert: Pardon?
- Mace: A black butterfly. I've lived in that hotel for sixty years. It's the first time I actually noticed one. It was sitting on a geranium flower. I've never seen anything so perfect. I mean, it was only a butterfly, wasn't it?
- (LIONEL enters)* So there you are - what a day. What a hell of a day.
- Lionel: Something's happening. People are walking up to the mine with torches and lanterns. I saw the police wagon going up there earlier.
- Rupert: John! I hope he's all right. Do you think something has -?
- Mace: No! - It was quiet enough when I left the pub. A couple of sticky beaks might've seen a light - that's all - And Brian just likes being a policeman. *(He forces a laugh and moves close to LIONEL)*. I can't stay long - *(He turns and picks up the box)* I'm making my peace with you.
- Lionel: *(accepting the box)* I wish you'd done that earlier.
- Mace: It's been hard. All sorts of things crowd in your head. I'm just a publican trying to survive. I don't want any trouble *(unwittingly)* And now the professor -
- Rupert: What about him?
- Mace: Nothing - I mean, evicting him like I did. I like him. He sees things different to all of us at the pub - but he worked hard -

fossils are so important to him - beats me why. *(to LIONEL)*
Will you let me give them back to him without your people
causing a stir?

Lionel: We won't trouble him.

Mace: You're a reasonable bloke - I've worked that much out too late.

(A loud knock at the door)

That might be the professor!

(NARELLA goes towards the door but Brian flings it open)
He checks the occupants and his eyes settle on LIONEL).

Brian: You stay put! *(He sees MACE'S presence as a danger)*

Why are you here?

Mace: *(fighting panic)* I - all I did was bring the box. I want to make
peace - I want to make things right with everyone. I'm free to
do that.

Brian: *(regaining his composure)* Of course you are. I guess you want
to be on your way now.

Mace: *(sitting)* I'll rest for a moment *(to RUPERT)* You don't mind?

Rupert: I'll drive you down if you like?

(to BRIAN)

You've seen John.

Brian: I'm sorry - I have bad news.

Rupert: John?

Brian: He's fallen.

Rupert: I told him not to go! Where is he now - the ambulance?

Brian: It's worse than that.

Rupert: No!!

Brian: It was dark but I picked up signs of a struggle.

Narella: What are you saying?

Brian: (*eying LIONEL*) It wasn't an accident - that's what I'm saying. Where have you been.

Narella: You can't just come in here and suggest -

Brian: I'm suggesting nothing. The fact is he fell at the deep end - and we know how deep that is. There were drag marks down to the safety fence (*to LIONEL*) just near where you lit that fire last night.

(*LIONEL moves towards him*) No further!

Lionel: I lit a fire there last night.

Brian: You've been up there again today.

Lionel: That was earlier!

Rupert: Stop it! Are you saying he's fallen through the safety fence? No!! That shaft drops forever. He wouldn't go near there!

Brian: I checked as closely as I could. The rescue team from Wangara will be here soon. I left the ambulance up there. Nothing more can be done. (*to LIONEL*) Come on. I want a full statement down town.

Narella: Lionel wouldn't! He's been with us most of the time.

Brian: Most?

Narella: And with friends! You've made up your mind already, haven't you? You want it to be more than an accident!

Brian: Stop your shouting. I found a lump of wood with blood on it.

Rupert: He had no reason to harm John.

Brian: Are you blind to the politics going on around you?

Narella: This is ridiculous! You can't just barge in here and accuse him.

Brian: I've been bumping into your boyfriend all day - every time the same word follows him TROUBLE.

Narella: No!

Brian: Control the girl! It's a terrible thing that happened and it's not easy having to tell you.

(RUPERT places his arm around NARELLA but she breaks free)

Narella: *(hitting at BRIAN)*. You bastard - No!! You aren't going to destroy him.

Brian: You'll come, too if that's the way you want it.

Narella: Talk to him, Lionel - Convince him.

Rupert: Let's be calm. I'll vouch for this man.

Lionel: *(touching RUPERT'S arm)* You don't have to do that. *(to BRIAN)* What point is there in talking to you? You've got to

prove all this - Days are gone when you could just put a bullet in me.

Brian: I've heard enough! Come on! (*LIONEL moves towards the box near MACE but BRIAN slides it to one side with his boot and takes possession of it*)

This comes with me until a few things get sorted out.

Mace: (*standing*) I've given it to him! I've made my peace. Give it to him!

Brian: Go home. This is a police matter now.

Mace: Don't stand over me! (*He lunges at BRIAN and struggles for the box*) I won't be cursed! (*He falls against BRIAN'S leg but has a grip on the box*).

The old fellow in here has waited a long time and he won't be fooled about with any longer. He burnt his clothes and painted himself and cursed everyone then he was blamed for lighting a fire against one of the shanties. Lots of others caught fire as it raced up the street. Someone said the fire was in him. They said he'd become a ball of fire. That fire stopped just short of my grandfather's beautiful hotel. Later on the men found Billy Pogo sitting like a rock at the edge of the mine. Someone brought my grandfather to talk to him but the old man drove a crowbar into the big boiler and scalding water sprayed all over him. When it finished he just crouched there. This mightn't be right but my grandfather told Dad there wasn't a blister on him. The paint had washed off him but his skin was glistening. Everyone panicked and my grandfather went up to him with his rifle - and (*MACE stares vacantly at LIONEL*). The truth came out eventually but it was too late.

Brian: I'll take you down town with me - Get to bed and sober up.

Mace: I'm not drunk!! You've gone too far with this one. This lad isn't Billy Pogo!

Brian: We'll go now!

Mace: I have more to say. *(standing)* I want them to hear some new facts I've got.

(BRIAN stares at him menacingly)

Brian: Fuck you!!

(He grabs MACE but checks himself and moves away. MACE moves closer to RUPERT for protection)

Mace: *(panicking)* His half-wit brother did it - he thought it was Smith he was wacking.

Brian: Bullshit!

Rupert: *(to MACE)* How do you know this?

Mace: Vin came to the pub. He thought he'd belted Lionel but he had John's torch. Then Brian came.

Brian: *(Shaking MACE violently)* Listen to me you old idiot - Listen! Just because you're fucked up in the head with guilt doesn't mean you drag Vin in with your lies.

(to RUPERT) He's broke. He's about to lose his father's hotel. You knew his father. He was a real publican. Mace is a rat bag - he can't run a proper chook raffle let alone a proper business.

Mace: I saw a red torch. I heard Vin! He lies!

Brian: You're a sick man. *(to RUPERT)* He's been begging me to buy a share in the hotel - but it's hopeless. That's why he's saying all this rubbish.

Rupert: (to BRIAN) You wouldn't accuse an innocent man? -

Mace: Of course he would to save his own brother - the bottom line, eh Brian. What really happened at the mine - tell them. Go on!

Brian: You're dead in Bindari. (to LIONEL) Come on, you!

Rupert: No! (He stands between both men) He's not going anywhere.

(BRIAN grabs the skull from the box and holds it head high)

Brian: He'll be a thousand pieces! (He throws his handcuffs at LIONEL'S feet)

Make up your mind! Show us how much it means to you.

(LIONEL picks up the handcuffs)

Narella: No! It's you who matters - let him break it. Please - let him!

(LIONEL snaps on the handcuffs)

Lionel: I'll come with you - but Billy Pogo stays.

(BRIAN takes LIONEL'S arm)

Narella: No!

Lionel: He can't hurt me.

(BRIAN places the skull in the box)

Narella: I'm going with you.

Rupert: And so am I!

Lionel: (to RUPERT) Look after Mace. He could be all I've got.

(BRIAN, LIONEL and NARELLA exit. RUPERT *squats near MACE who is distressed and breathes falteringly*).

Rupert: Take it easy for a moment. It's a decent thing you did.

Mace: I'm finished in Bindari but I don't care. I've seen a lot of terrible things. Blackfellows never mattered here (*pause*) It's suddenly cold in here. It's as if a big cold hand has grabbed my chest. *He doubles up in pain*)

Rupert: Mace! (*He checks MACE'S pulse*) Your heart is still strong. (*RUPERT takes off his jacket and folds it into a pillow*) Lie here for a while. (*He helps MACE onto the floor and begins to rub warmth into MACE'S arms*).

We'll get you warm again. (*He drags the linen banner across, and tucks it around Mace's legs and while doing this he hums a nondescript tune. Both men look at each other for a moment in silence and then RUPERT speaks softly as lights fade*).

His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow and his eyes were the flames of fire.

Mace: (*startled, half sitting*) What's that? I've never heard that one before. Those blokes told lies about Billy Pogo! They looked after themselves.

Rupert: Don't worry. Those were just some tired old words I know.

BLACKOUT.

Conclusions

The final scene of Script 3 had to be a matter of logistics: who to plausibly locate all characters, except Narella, at the mine for a clamactic conclusion.

Lionel has identified with the mine location as a spirit place. Two scenes present him at the mine - an early scene with Brian ordering him off limits. Early in Act II Lionel returns with Narella to the mine and reveals his inner fears and hopes. He has also sensed an ancestral presence at the mine, so it's not implausible that he might return next evening.

Lionel also knows that John has been working at the mine and having failed to secure John's support earlier, it's likely that he might search him out and speak to him again.

In Act II, Scene V, the audience has been prepared for John's planned visit to the mine at night to secure fossils, having had the bulk of his work commandeered by the hotel.

Vin knows that Lionel has been camping at the mine, but he wouldn't know that John has decided upon some nocturnal fossicking.

In Act II, Scene VII, Vin comes into the hotel backyard and reports the bashing of Lionel to Mace, Nola and Brian.

Mace and Nola recognise the torch and are convinced the victim is John.

Because of Nola's caring nature, the audience would assume she would contact the church, either in person or by phone. She and Rupert eventually arrive together, so it can be surmised she has walked or driven to the church.

Mace is in a state of panic. He would assume Nola would bring Rupert, and perhaps Lionel, back to the mine. Mace is about to be incriminated in the bashing so he would want to see the extent of injury to the victim. Because John has been to the church, Mace might still think it is Lionel after all who has been bashed.

Mace knows Vin is somewhere. Mace wants to give the skull to Lionel, and also he wouldn't leave it unattended at the hotel. (Vin does have access to dynamite!) Whether Mace anticipates Lionel being at the mine or not, it is my opinion that he would still take the box with him - and after all it is now his psychological albatross.

Vin, upon arrival at the mine with Mace, lets it be known why he's there. He has much to lose and is keeping both Mace and Brian in view.

I feel that all the abovementioned characters can be logically present and accounted for, and each has a role to play. As mentioned previously I've omitted Narella. Nola would have mentioned nothing of Lionel at the mine to prompt Narella to be present. It was effort enough to accommodate seven players at the mine rim, so I hope that number eight isn't logically and dramatically missed.

The mine location provides immediate dramatic stage effects - torchlight on the ever present rock outcrop and mine rim, the sound of awakened pigeons, the arrival of the police wagon with its rotating beam and fixed searchlight which targets unblinkingly upon the scene. Here is a stark contrast to Lionel's recounted fire lighting and the magical flame dance of the previous night. The helicopter at the end of the scene completes the contrast and gives the opportunity for a phantasmagoria of light (or fire).

With the immediate situation now created at the mine, Brian can more logically and predatorically confront Lionel and incriminate him. Lionel has only recently convinced John that he wasn't his (John's) attacker, but with all that achieved the incident is ready made for a 'frame up', and Vin is quick to appreciate it. Everything has fallen into place for Vin and Brian, but they don't account for Mace who is emotionally ready for a resolution to the day's events. Ironically, Vin hasn't helped with the previous butterfly/Wiringin scene in the hotel garden, which has psychologically primed Mace for the climactic events which follow.

Mace gives enough clues to alert John to Vin's involvement. I want an ambiguity of intent to exist in Mace's hesitancy to openly condemn Vin at this stage. Is Mace still looking to his own survival, or is he totally preoccupied with settling history first? Brian realises he will have to humour Mace if he wants him to continue holding back on Vin's involvement in the bashing-

Brian: Don't drag the town under with some arse-up thought about putting history right.

Mace: My mind's set.

Brian: (*changing strategy*) Just say I let him go -

Vin: Like hell you will!

Brian: (*ignoring Vin*) What then?

Mace: (*highlighting the box*) We'll bury it - make a hole in the ground
- (*moves to Lionel*) It's the only way - all our luck might
change.

Vin doesn't appreciate Brian's manoeuvre here to mediate with Mace in the hope of securing his silence over the bashing. However, Brian's strategy collapses with the arrival of Nola. From then on he attempts to distance himself from Vin, as Nola challenges Mace to right a present injustice. Her forceful hectoring of Vin to confess his own guilt tragically results in the death of Mace.

To me, there is an ironic justice achieved as if some supernatural force, after all, is at work at the mine - Mace, the grandson, in an effort to preserve the Wiringin skull, dies in lieu of the grandfather who had been the Wiringin's destroyer. This of course countermands the adage that the 'sins of the fathers shouldn't be visited upon the sons', a coinage given the authority of a dictum by those opposing compensation as an integral part of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

In these notes on the evolution of the play I have recounted its content only by way of revealing what I hope has been the dynamic process of making a piece of potential theatre. In the theatre the script will no doubt undergo further creative changes and this is to be expected.

The publication of this script will give it the format of a literary text offering, primarily, tracts of dialogue to be utilised by actors on a living stage. The script is potential theatre. It is only in the theatre that the text has the chance to succeed, or fail, at what it ultimately aspires to be.

CHAPTER 3: BILLY POGO'S FIRE: PHOTOGRAPHY AND GRAPHICS

3.1 BILLY MOGO: A GENERAL SURVEY OF A SOURCE IMAGE

The discovery of the Billy Mogo photograph at Quambi Museum, Stroud (See further notes: Symbolism in BILLY POGO'S FIRE), prompted me to use the image as the imaginative focus of a body of creative work, involving a fictitious poem sequence as the centre piece.

The photograph on exhibition in Stroud came with no textual support other than its title: King Billy Mogo. The image, small, and randomly displayed amongst pioneer farmers and timber workers, is obviously a first generation print in reasonable archival order, apart from the usual patina of time and handling. Because the photograph has been inspirational in the evolvment of a folio of visual images, besides the related literary component, I'd like to examine it as a source image and place it into an historic social and ethical context. Initially, I'd like to elaborate upon what I perceive as being the image's visual grammar.

The image is that of a standing, full frontal figure cropped at mid-thigh with only part of the right hand visible. The left hand is in full view because the wrist is slightly curved. This hand holds a large handkerchief. The figure is frock-coated and the left lapel displays a flower, perhaps a rose or carnation. The lower part of the coat is unbuttoned. The male, middle aged Aboriginal figure is also wearing a top-hat which appears to be in better condition than the coat. The background is a unified pattern of grapevine foliage. What struck me initially was the intense focus of the subject's eyes upon the camera. The face gives no clue of emotion, other than a slightly quizzical air. The left hand gripping the handkerchief gives the only clue to any suggested unease or tension in the figure.

The first questions arising are when and why the photograph was taken. The viewer seeks a context. The photograph was probably taken early this century, during the Edwardian era, if the style of the attire is to offer any indication. The photograph appears to be one of a genre where so called primitives were elevated to a noble status, even kingship, with either parodic intent, or clumsy overtures of good will. Billy Mogo in this case has been spared the inscribed brass breastplate.

An incongruity still exists between who the man was and the garb he is encouraged, or made, to wear. Events which led up to, and followed the setting of the image, can be only speculative. The 'still' image is a slice of time past, but endures as an event in

itself. It is a 'trace' of reality, seemingly defying time, while the print lasts archivally. Multiple reproduced images of the source image, in published book form particularly, will ensure extended longevity of the photograph. The cultural importance of an image will help secure that image's longevity, especially if an accompanying text for the first time discovers it and helps build its status.

The source image itself has been changing only slightly due to environmental conditions, and intermittent handling, but its meaning, in our culture at least, refuses to be fixed. In this changing meaning abide the moral and ethical considerations which now, perhaps more than any time this century, need to be voiced. If the image comes to us as a fragment, or piece of reality of time past, its meaning refuses to be fixedly subsumed in this condition: its meaning continues to be dynamic and multiple, having fed on subsequent time, rather than abiding archivally (and statically). The image, locked away for most of the century in an anonymous private album was offered up for public scrutiny to a small folk museum. The print, as revealed to me, was obscurely displayed, and with no revealing text. With permission of the museum, it was my decision to photograph the source image and place it at the centre of a fictitious text which I hope is culturally sympathetic, and, as far as I can objectively judge, morally true.

It has long been my view that photography is one of the most democratic of the arts by its mere accessibility to all who can afford its technical machinery and master the rudiments of its use. In collusion with this technical device and sufficient light, its practitioner can imprint fragments of the world and move on in relative freedom.

The portrait painter has to engage the subject for a longer more personally interactive period of time. The result is usually 'interpreted reality' rather than a photograph's slice of life imprint at its most basic (but not dismissing the camera's interpretative propensity when used skilfully and sensitively).

I don't detect any subject resistance in the Billy Mogo photograph, but I do cede to the camera's invasiveness which in some cases makes its democratic scope range into the realm of the predatorial.

The Billy Mogo photograph has an historical context part of which is lost to us. What is lost is what was particular, or anecdotal, to the event which endures before us. I have considered the surface actuality of the image and can only make guesses guided

by history as to what caused the image to be 'taken', ¹ and what the prevailing attitude to it was. It is up to the viewer to intuit beyond its usually coded surface. Whoever views it will walk away with a set of understandings depending upon his or her value system, and aesthetic skills, if the image is to be judged as an art object.

3.2 APPROPRIATION : A CURRENT CULTURAL DEBATE CONSIDERED

I doubt, however, whether the photographer was consciously creating a work of art. The more I examine the work, the more I am convinced of the photographer's documentary intent. It is an occasion, and Billy Mogo is at the centre of it, but whatever interpretation I place upon his attitude to this occasion will draw me into a post-colonial debate, with all its political and inter-racial implications.

I can see nothing to gain in suppressing images like Billy Mogo, even though its initial intent might have been parodic and demeaning, and the photographer's invasiveness might have ignored (or been ignorant of) the Aboriginal concept of self.

The primitive notion of the efficacy of images presumes that images possess the qualities of real things.... primitive people fear that the camera will rob them of some part of their being²

Billy Mogo would have believed in contagious magic. For example his footprint could provide an opportunity for his enemies to act upon it and do harm to his person. What his thoughts upon seeing this image were we can never know. If it caused him fear and sleepless nights we must sympathise with him. To have the photograph destroyed might have been his greatest fear because to him this image equated with his own reality. To 'bury' Billy Mogo's reality in a photograph album is no way to acknowledge his continuing reality (and humanity). And who could confidently come forward in the late twentieth century and aspire to be his image's custodian and do what is right. Will it be a member of his family, his tribal group, or a fellow Australian? And does this fellow Australian have to be Aboriginal. It would have to be conceded that Billy Mogo had friends and enemies who were both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal but must we assume that the photographer is an enemy? The person with the camera might well have been recording for posterity an event he deplored.

1 Ansel Adams urged people to say a camera 'made' rather than 'took' an image, believing it to be an instrument of love and revelation rather than a predator. This argument is expanded by Susan Sontag 'On Photography' Penguin Books NY 1980 (123)

2 Sontag, Susan On Photography (Penguin Books N.Y. 1980) 158

There is a vast visual documentation of man's inhumanity to man and it is a repressive mentality which would destroy this adverse historic record.

It is ironic that if the subject were an esteemed member of his tribal group, even a Wiringin, as I state Billy Pogo as being, then it is the equivocal photograph which remains to do its magic: an image projecting itself into the consciousness of its viewers. Its meaning transmutes into succeeding generations, even though its image appears to be eternally 'fixed'. It is poetically ironic that the magic of this 'clever-man' exists in a photograph which has inherent qualities (and powers) enabling it, in turn, to appear cropped, magnified and multiplied, or with skilled sleight-of-hand in darkness transmogrify into part lizard or eagle.

Because of time, the first generation print of Billy Mogo has acquired a magical aura that recopied prints cannot immediately have, and perhaps never possess. However, put to the power of light again and to skilled manipulation of chemistry, the reproduced copy can strengthen and brighten what might have faded in the original. This is not unlike rock art being over painted to strengthen the spirit in it. It is my belief that having overcome the initial fear of some danger being done to his valued reality, Billy Mogo would be amazed and flattered at his multiplying and transmogrifying self. Such images would reinforce an ancient belief system whereby he could be one and many with the dead and the living. Manipulating light in darkness makes all this possible with his enduring image. His ability to be one and many with the living and the dead, derives added efficacy in manipulated photographic light and dark, whose result still puzzles the perceptions of those untutored in photographic methodology. Billy Mogo's reality, still seen to exist in this aged photograph, should not be hidden and rendered powerless. It was the 'clever-man's' vocation to work his will and belief system in the minds of others, just as contemporary Aborigines have settled their ancient unease between reality and image and are not backward in utilising the camera and its related electronic manifestations to further their causes, and highlight their individual presences in the political and social landscape.

It seems to me, that while many politically active Aborigines would deny Aboriginal content to non-Aboriginals, because that is all they have to withhold in a land appropriated from them, many, on the other hand, accept a more interactive process where the end result must be a just and shared humanity. This is the position I have adopted. I accept the criticism levelled at my forebears but as a sixth generation

Australian I have no other land than this, and my own mythologies are well entrenched here. I refuse to wince with guilt over the behaviours of English colonists.

Since childhood I have interacted positively with Aboriginal people and I have always taken a great interest in their mythologies and their visual arts, as well as their progress towards achieving justice and equality. As human beings we continually appropriate the lives of one another. When this is done positively and interactively it satisfies the impulse for intellectual and emotional growth, which achieves its apogee and sublimation in the creative arts. When a society is disregarded by creative artists as a source of inspiration and creative interaction, then that society is deemed moribund, or dead. This can never be said of Aboriginal culture, although it did suffer Eurocentric disregard in the nineteenth century. There is a rich heritage to explore here, interculturally, and cross-culturally. To seek appreciators, indeed consumers, of one's culture, but then to place a caveat upon any creative response from that consuming cross-culture is futile. The sponge soaks up, and then the sponge is squeezed.

Les Murray, known for Aboriginal content in his work, expresses his view of the appropriation debate quite forcefully:

It will be a tragedy if the normal processes of artistic borrowing and influence, by which any culture makes part of its contribution to the conversation of mankind, are frozen in the Aboriginal case by what are really the manoeuvrings of a battle for political power within the white society of our country, or by tactical use of Third World rhetoric.... Artistic borrowing leaves the lender no poorer, and draws attention to his riches, which can only be depleted by neglect and his loss of confidence in them; these cause them to be lost. Borrowing is an act of respect which may restore his respect for his goods, and help to preserve them. And he is at all times free to draw on them himself with the benefit of his own superior understanding of his treasures.³

The Billy Mogo image, for my part, has a talismanic allure which prompts me to wonderment and curiosity. Because of the absence of an explanatory text, it exists enigmatically in the realm of untapped possibilities : it draws upon the imagination because there has been no written referential burdening, much of which, when it does

exist, comes to us as historic distortion; an unchallenged, privileged Anglocentric viewpoint weighing upon the events.

It is granted that the photographic record can be manipulated, but after careful scrutiny I would trust its information before much of the written history filtering through time as fact. Most of the photographs passing down to us from the mid-nineteenth century are not works by professionals with manipulative political and social agendas. Early photographers were buffs and zealots of a new technology which they could afford and indulge. The light was still innocent; the chemicals still honest. I'm sure that Billy Mogo was photographed by a capable amateur or a travelling commercial practitioner taking a break from middle class family portraiture.

A drawing of Billy Mogo at this period would have been another matter. Despite the attire, there is still a dignified presence in the photograph. A drawing of the same image could have easily distorted all dignity and rendered it as buffoon, thus aligning it with pejorative written assumptions and prejudices of the period.

Through the interceding decades, this photograph would have been received (and interpreted) in ways dependent upon prevailing attitudes to Aborigines. There would have been periods in the 1930's and 1940's when the image would have been dismissed with a mere glance. Aborigines were the forgotten people and played no part in the consciousness of 'main stream' Australia. It's interesting that as the 1970's marked a period of restorative interest in our heritage buildings (Quambi Museum was acquired and saved from demolition during this period), so the same period was the community awakening to Aboriginal Australia. The Billy Mogo photograph would have been presented to the Stroud Historical Society around 1975. It's a wonder it survived, because many Australian families had already thrown away their photographic family records, along with old style cedar furniture and antiquated meat-safes.

Few written colonial texts and artisanal records can achieve the objectivity of the photograph. The photographic record included in Nigel Parbury's 'Survival: A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales.⁴ shows Aboriginal physical appearance and life style which we would have reservations about trusting were they in the form of paintings or drawings. It must be understood, however, that not all

4 Parbury, Nigel. *Survival: A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales* (Min. of Aboriginal Affairs N.S.W. : 1986) 26,32

paintings and drawings have intentionally set out either to romanticise the 'exotic other', or demean and lampoon the 'primitive dispossessed'. The highly skilled photography by Henry King and Thomas Dick included in Parbury's text gives indigenous and non-indigenous Australians a visual record which is neither racially idealised, nor culturally demeaning. Many contemporary Aborigines in the absence of supportive traditional oral texts and the loss of access to that primary text, their country, have no doubt used the visual reality implicit in photography to help sustain, even forge, concepts of self-hood, and in some cases rely on it heavily in the re-creative process of acquiring a distinct cultural identity.

The photograph provides sustained incriminating evidence of racial dismissal and associated injustice. Such images can be quickly disseminated into public consciousness through media acceptability enhanced by a post-colonial cultural context willingly accommodating and debating it. Post-colonial Australia will become a reality when Aboriginal Australia is given its rightful status, in a multicultural polity.

I acknowledge, (and can lament) the absence of the rich supporting oral and written text to Billy Mogo's life. The garment he wears is an imperialist symbol concealing his real (and diminished) self. The 'naked savage' is given a mock veneer of English nobility and gentility. Upon closer examination the grapevine is an invasive barrier as impenetrable as if it were English bonded brick blocking him from access to his country and its ancient metaphors. This so called 'illiterate savage' unknown to most of the ethnocentric colonists possessed a rich iconographical and oral text. Under the coat, initiation cicatrices were signs of privileged access to that most ancient text, the land itself, and permitting complex 'readings' of it back to its creation.

In a way, the coat's meaning; its symbolic text, is a defacement of hard earned tribal access and a denigration of it through colonial ignorance and ethnocentricity. The coat is an attempted blotting out of that privileged access to a complex belief system and its supporting mythologies. Just as the grapevine builds an obliterating wall across the land and conceals its meaning, so does the coat and hat attempt to conceal Billy Mogo's Aboriginality and force upon him a Eurocentric way of perceiving himself and others.

Stephen Muecke in 'Textual Spaces' cites Paul Carter in describing how the colonisers quickly filled the Australian landscape with their own textual references, via their language and structures:

Ownership tended to proceed de facto through the practice of renaming, of 'writing over' the original names of the country. In many cases these names were retained - Woolloomooloo, Gundagai, Parramatta, Oodnadatta - for different reasons (perhaps romantic, so that the 'original' name is in fact a re-bestowal). But in many others the place-names glorified early pioneers - Burke, Warburton, Fitzroy Crossing, Forbes - or attempted to transpose a lifestyle through using an English place name such as Brighton, Greenwich, Newcastle, New England.⁵

The above observations prompts comment on the photograph's title.

Aboriginal males and females were often renamed like their land. Although they were never officially enslaved they were 'owned' by the system and to those landholders granted custodianship of them. Renaming was a way of destroying Aboriginality but in many cases English names were bestowed because tribal people placed great value upon their tribal names, and were loathe to divulge them even inter-tribally because of magical implications. Contagious magic could be invoked through the possession of one's name.

Colonists were disdainful of Aboriginal languages and found it easier to bestow English names, often 'pet' or 'nick names', such as Granny Wishbone, Cubby or in the context of the photograph being discussed, Billy Mogo.

Paul Carter takes the act of naming further than mere nicknaming when considering the assortment of names offered for census by authorities for the remaining Tasmanian Aborigines on Flinders Island; names such as Achilles, Leonides, Napoleon and Neptune. In this context Carter also cites the names 'Nobody' and 'Little Nobody' as names for two Lake Macquarie Aborigines in 1833.

In calling an Aborigine 'Napoleon' or 'Macquarie', the namer is, in fact, testifying to the impotence of his historical paradigm to locate these people. The Aborigines who bear these names, the namer implies, bear no resemblance whatsoever to their names. No dialectical relationship binds the Aborigine to the cultural genealogy suggested by

5 Muecke, Stephen. Textual Spaces. New South Wales University Press Ltd: Kensington N.S.W. 1996 p.6

his name. Carter goes on a little further to draw the conclusion that from the point of view of the census, there was no reality beyond the names. So long as there were names, it made no difference whether nobody was present or absent. He had been accounted for. As a result, history was free to go on without him.⁶

How I have used the photograph, and changed the accompanying title, has been my decision. To be considered 'politically correct', in some quarters, I should have abandoned the entire academic and creative program of offering the image of a frock-coated Aboriginal male up for public scrutiny, and going a step further and offering, along with it, a poem sequence of imagined events, as well as a stage play and graphic work on the same theme.

No matter how I tried, I wouldn't get full endorsement for the work as it is interpreted and presented. This is to be expected, and I'm prepared to be criticised both artistically and politically.

The main thing to me is that I remain free to make my creative contribution to the debate. I don't believe in cultural and political apartheid, no matter what racial or ideological side it comes from.

3.3 THE SOURCE IMAGE AS PERSONAL CREATIVE STIMULUS

Having assumed the freedom to respond to the photograph creatively and, I hope, sensitively, I would like to consider the image's direct influence upon my subsequent creative work. I am convinced that without the photograph existing as a visual prompt, the sequence would not have evolved the way it did, or perhaps would not have occurred at all. I would go further and call the photograph a visual 'landmark' impacting upon me as significantly as the great earth void which is all that remains of Peak Hill goldmine. And when I refer to the photograph as a 'landmark', it goes well beyond the fortuitous discovery of a 'good idea' stimulant, although some element of that response is no doubt true, when faced with an image capable of provoking an emotional or intellectual after-shock. More than this, however, I feel that the photograph stimulated an emotional response in me which has its beginnings in my childhood.

6 Carter, Paul: *The Road to Botany Bay* (Faber and Faber Lon. 1987) 330

I made brief reference to Jacky Peelar in 'Background Notes to Place and People'. Over the period of years since discovering the Mogo image I believe it has linked inseparably with my childhood memories of Jacky Peelar, the last traditional tribal man of my childhood's country, Peak Hill. Jacky Peelar became synonymous with infancy's 'bogeyman'. Many children of the period were faced with the threat that 'Jacky Peeler would get them' if they misbehaved. Many inchoate memories of this last tribal man still surface in my mind - his ragged coat, his quick shuffling walk and whisker-sharp face. My peers and I never spoke to him, and avoided eye contact as he shuffled past while we waited outside 'Talkie' Chappel's Premier Theatre for the commencement of the matinee session on Saturdays.

I believe I was emotionally primed over forty years ago to respond to the Mogo image. Wiringin it seemed was just another name for bogeyman. Nobody during my childhood took the effort to 'explain' Jacky Peelar to us, so that we might begin to place him in a socio-historic context so that we might begin to value him as a human being. Jacky lived up near the rubbish dump across from the long disused goldmine. Other than that he had no context, in that prosperous rural setting of the early nineteen fifties. He was neither disliked nor feared - he just existed - a fixture tolerated when he came begging cigarettes and sherry at the back of the hotel. He survived by being a non-threatening, slightly clownish, 'Other'.

During the process of writing the forty poems influenced by a still image which was once the complex dynamic of a real person, I increasingly equated it with the vague distortions of child memory, brought now into clearer focus through the disciplined thinking placed upon the tangibility of this photograph.

And I say 'this' photograph so as stress the specificity of its affect on me. Having perused hundreds of photographs, there have been those few particular ones which have aroused deeper emotions and keener cognitive reactions in me. This is what I believe Roland Barthes means by *punctum* as opposed to what he terms *studium*: *Studium* being a kind of study involving a general interest, and enthusiastic commitment towards a photograph but without 'a special acuity'.

It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in *studium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions.

It is this second element, *punctum*, which 'will break (or punctuate) the *studium*'. Barthes continues:

This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me⁷

If I am to consider *punctum* working upon me in the Mogo image, it is located in the 'empowered' eyes literally denying subjection: these eyes which detailed (snapped) the photographer, but now engage me, the replacement in the photographer's void. *Punctum*, for me, is also in the slightly curved left hand holding the handkerchief - a hand even more confined by the closure of soft English fabric rather than the hard clasp of steel. This is what Barthes means when he says some images take time 'to speak', and if the intended (or unintended) message reaches us, it gains by its subtlety rather than clouting us visually -

Ultimately, photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks⁸

The Mogo image acted as an inspirational landmark rousing submerged thoughts in me. It became the locus where personal knowledge and feelings could merge with what I recognised as creative potential: a potential which could manifest itself as verbal or written narrative, a poem sequence, a stage play, or as a visual portfolio utilising, exploring and developing that perceived potential. This is the way art appropriates the world of objects, turning them into 'events' and forcing them onto a new level of apprehension - and I use 'force' unconditionally. The creative act is never passive. Myriad responses releasing creativity are verb rich.

It is unavoidable that art derives parasitically from the 'host' object, nourishing and shaping it into art subject. And the host object need not be denigrated (or compromised) in the process. In most cases a symbiotic relationship has been established: the object, now art subject, is brought into a prominence which was dependent upon an act of art being achieved and then displayed, (ritualistically offered up), for scrutiny. Endorsement of what has been achieved will be dependent upon a variable set of paradigms not only aesthetically anchored. I am anticipating

7 Barthes, Roland *Camera Lucida* (Flamingo: An Imprint of Harper Collins. Lon. 1984) 26-7
8 Ibid :38

here the cross-cultural political discourse which might influence receivership of any art based on the Mogo image. Just as the art work is 'spotlit' for assessment and judgement alongside perceived realities, so is the source object brought into sharper focus and recognised. In the case of the Billy Mogo image it is perhaps really noticed and valued for the first time. It is ironic, however, that the value and status that I might give to the Mogo image could provide the fuel for the appropriation debate to ignite against me. The normal processes of art scrutiny might be inverted against me, appropriating my creative input to politicise an image erstwhile fading in relative obscurity.

As poetically just as this above situation might seem to some, it does refocus attention upon what I have presumed to be a 'source object' and motivator of art activity and should be viewed as a positive outcome.

Susan Sontag presents elegant observations linking a photograph co-substantially with reality.

No one takes an easel painting to be in any sense co-substantial with its subject; it only represents or refers. But a photograph is not only like its subject, a homage to the subject. It is part of, an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, or gaining control over it. ⁹

I find this observation plausible, to a degree, but as I engage the photograph's so called reality, I perceive major and obvious absences. My creative imagination would fill these perceived absences with further images.

In the Mogo image there is a narrow focus limiting reality to a confining nineteenth century space closure. I could be convinced more of real space if the photograph were presented using the later stereoscopic format. I have experienced far more advanced technology for imaging the real, but know too well that there are still shortcomings. Even our latest mind bending efforts at creating co-substantiality with the real, fall short and are prefixed, 'virtual'. How can the Mogo image equate with the real when it is so sense deficient? It offers very little to the visual, having predated deep spatiality, colour and movement, let alone providing any information regarding sound, taste, touch or smell.

With all these shortcomings considered, I acknowledge the time enhanced mystery which gathers upon a first generation photograph such as the Mogo image. It is this mystery which spurs my thinking.

Sontag poetically acknowledges a sense of mystery inherent in a photograph:

Between two fantasy alternatives, that Holbein the Younger had lived long enough to have painted Shakespeare or that a prototype of the camera had been invented early enough to have photographed him, most Bardolators would choose the photograph. This is not just because it would presumably show what Shakespeare really looked like, for even if the hypothetical photograph were faded, barely legible, a brownish shadow, we would probably still prefer it to another glorious Holbein. Having a photograph of Shakespeare would be like having a nail from the True Cross.¹⁰

It occurs to me that what might, or might not be art in the above context, cedes to a macabre fascination with accessing the real. Such a photograph might serve archaeology or anthropology more than art; the imagined photograph equating with a relic and being more suitably placed in a museum along with Shakespeare's skull, rather than being placed in an Art context, as would be a newly discovered folio of Shakespearean sonnets. What the skull and photograph might say about Shakespeare's body, wanes when viewed against the imaginings of his mind.

It is a human mind which I have attempted to explore, via the Mogo, turned Pogo, persona, and if the poetry is successful it will create an emotional and cognitive field upon which the photograph had pre-existed as a visual sign. The photograph exists also inertly as a medium for further art activity.

In his text, Nigel Parbury includes David Boyd's painting 'Trucaninni's Dream of Childhood'.¹¹ I am sure he has studied existing photographs because there is an interpreted 'likeness' obviously taken from such a photograph. I am also sure that Boyd would have read background material to Trucaninni's life, so that he might begin to empathise with her trials, fears and suffering. The painting achieves what existing photographs can only hint: the complexity of the human psyche. Having

10 Ibid: 154

11 Parbury, Nigel: 43

received this painting, it would be impossible to view a photograph without transferring the painting's interpreted emotions across to a strictly posed portrait of an elderly Aboriginal woman dressed in a sensible late Victorian crinoline gown, her hands respectably placed on her lap and her closed face revealing nothing of the troubled history behind it.

It is this effect that I hope my creative efforts might elicit from the Mogo image. While I take from it, what I see as its tangibility as a starting point, and its implied set of historic and anthropological references, I also want to give back to it a heightened context, and a worthy text that might empower it, so that it no longer moulders in obscurity. I want my own works to arise out of the mystery of absence I sense both in and around the Mogo image.

3.4 THE SOURCE IMAGE : ITS INITIAL INFLUENCE ON THE POETRY SEQUENCE

Having already studied many anthropological texts, including the works of Elkin, R.M. and C.H. Berndt and Stanner, and having acquired a broad general reading on Aborigines by Aboriginal writers and others, I felt ready to begin writing poetry on the theme of Wiradjuri Wiringin caught in great cultural change in the disruptive dynamic of a late nineteenth, and early twentieth century, goldmine setting. Specifically, I concentrated upon the Mogo photograph and wrote several 'free standing' pieces with no sequential narrative plan in place at this formative stage.

The first completed poem Way of the Poet, (Poem 23) derives more than any other from the surface appearance of the photograph and establishes the tone of subsequent works. Rather than stress the outward socio-political nature of the image, I reveal Billy Pogo's spirituality as being powerfully alive despite all blatant attempts at the physical demeanment of a tribal elder. I establish my position as empathiser assuming a degree of privileged insidership - more than the photographer who with his subject's approval (tacit or otherwise), and within the limits of available technology, placed before us a figure which now exists without extra textual support.

Having chosen to 'investigate' such a life and place my findings (readings, imaginings and feelings) by way of my particular poetic style, I willingly acknowledge only a limited understanding of my complex subject.

After studying the photograph for relevant images, I integrated them with knowledge I found poetically evocative and had decided to trust. All I could hope was that my poetic insights and selected readings might begin to explore a rich inner life closed off to the camera. My general knowledge of Wiringin belief, garnered mainly through anthropological readings, becomes the basis of my 'assumed authority', and one which the reader of the text might decide to accept or reject.

By making Billy Pogo a Wiringin, I immediately broaden the spiritual scope to be poetically explored. The photograph becomes immediately more significant; the hat and coat more of an outrage. The 'clever-man' or shaman, the keeper of ancient (and eternal) texts, is reduced to mockery and the stakes have been raised in any subsequent narrative because there is more to lose if the shaman is destroyed.

I don't know whether Billy Mogo was a shaman or not, but he has a powerful 'gimlet-eye' engaging the camera. The lenses of his eyes, like a camera, are able to record with photographic accuracy every detail of his country. I use this precise photographic eye of the Aborigine as a way of detailing images and focusing attention onto the Wiringin's visual powers. I have detailed in the annotations on the poetic text how in 'Strange Dog' (Poem 8) the Wiringin 'reads' the dog's eye of its recorded images. It's as if the information were detailed cinographically on the animal's eye and Billy Pogo spools through it for relevant images. The dog's retina (and brain) can be 'read' like the land and like a photograph where no detail is neglected. A reading from Paul Carter supported my efforts to link thoughts on photography with the detailed Aboriginal way of seeing. Carter quotes Leichhardt who had noticed Aboriginal exactness for detail -

trees peculiarly formed or grouped, broken branches, slight elevations of ground - (all) seem to form a kind of Daguerreotype impression on their minds, every part of which is readily recollected.¹²

It is this way of seeing (and thinking) which prompted me to write -

Billy Pogo, a Wiringin man
brought water down to the Bogan,
or sent it back on a track
beginning in the circles of his eyes.

This ability to visually 'fix' the country as if it were now indelibly part of them and vice versa was recognised in Aborigines and used by explorers:

- the Aborigines are to the explorers what the camera was to later travellers - but with this difference, that the 'views' which the Aborigines recognise are not picturesque components, but simply signs and clues composing a recognizable path.¹³

It is the capability of these eyes to 'read' place, as well as the psyche of his fellows, that I explore in Blind Winnie. Here, the Wiringin eye projects onto Winnie's blank retinas and 'sees' -

- all sorts of darkness,
some warm, some cold
and behind it the flitting shadows
of children robbed of names.

He psychically 'reads' the troubled landscape of Winnie's mind.

In Way of the Poet, I attempt to release the 'still' image with words and associated sound images that the listener (and reader) might begin to visualise cinematically. The frock-coated figure breaks the trance stillness of the source photograph and moves from its closure into layerings of 'verbal space', offering sound and evoking new sights, textures and smells. It is my attempt to retrieve those absences I perceive in the photograph.

The grapevine of the original photograph is imagined as part of the hotel verandah where the frock-coated figure now plays the spoons and sings to tipsy miners. The grapevine, a visual barrier in the photograph, now plays its part in a mystical event:

Billy Pogo was now outreaching
green tendrils seeking lattices of air.
Whispering grapevines jostled
their faces towards gaps of light
but the Wiringin was gone.

Most importantly, in Way of the Poet I take from the source photograph the actuality and narrative potential of the hat and frock-coat and develop them as a leitmotiv.

Just as Pogo reserves his sacred tribal songs and survives by offering the Gabbas one of their own 'shallow' tunes in the company of spoons, so he uses the coat to his own advantage. It cloaks the magical potency of his being, the presence of the mythic serpent deep within him, and the sky-cord at readiness for a cosmic journey beyond the spiritual confines of the miners.

The surface appearance of the photograph, which presents a pathetic, clown-like figure, is textually reversed in the poem to evoke a complex and superior spirituality surviving under great physical pressure, but still in control. While the tipsy miners amble into the bar, the one they have patronised and scorned, is on the verandah cancelling one of their most fundamental concepts - their notion of time.

Although the *punctum*, the emotional and intellectual 'sting', was in the eyes and the curved hand, it was the coat which I initially studied for meaning. The frockcoat (and hat) could be more readily decoded for its politico-cultural meanings. It exists as a symbol of repression; a stultifier of its wearer's Aboriginality and his unique tribal status.

The nascent written narrative could easily develop Billy Pogo externally as the victim, fitting naturally into the broad and familiar discourse of colonial repression. Until a major mind shift takes place this discourse will pre-occupy writers and artists and all those concerned with indigenous justice and equity.

The work of the poet and of the critic is above all in the realm of discourses. They will continue to tell the story of Aboriginal repression over and over because it must indeed be the case that the repressive forces operating in our society are very well entrenched and a lot of work will have to be done to overthrow them¹⁴

I am resolved to take part in this discourse, but will attempt to couple it with some internalisations, both spiritually and mythologically. Thus the coat, in my invented text, is a symbol of English hierarchy in a goldmine setting where there is a sudden gathering 'of men of all nations'. The coat, as I perceive it from the photograph, is not only a suppressor of Aboriginality but also a symbol of 'The Establishment' and its

'born to rule' mentality. The irony is, however, that Bindari is on the verge of anarchy, as the nation itself has been on a few occasions e.g. The Rum Rebellion, Vinegar Hill, and Eureka Stockade. The 'English coat' has not always been in control and has not always offered just leadership generally. It is the underlying scorn directed at the coat, and the irony of 'exalting' Billy Pogo in it, which motivates the poem, 'Occurrence', (Poem 18). This poem is the first in the sequence where the coat appears.

The hierarchic Anglo-coat is stripped from the most ostentatious Englishman on the goldfield. It is Teddy Grace, the 'Clarion of Empire', whose name suggests royalty, who is accosted and stripped of his status. The mood is set with disgruntled working men mocking the most basic institution of Imperialism. I have suggested in another context that it might be an unconscious claim for spiritual leadership: Teddy Grace aping style, rather than understanding substance, and Billy Pogo, on the other hand, perceived half in fear as a man of great spiritual potency.

In this way, and many others, the coat's narrative reality born of the photograph, both conceptualises and contextualises, until Billy Pogo, in despair, offers it back to Teddy Grace who refuses it. Teddy Grace, now Pogo's champion, links the Wiringin's spiritual power and the coat as one. The hierarchic materialism implicit in the coat has been replaced; the town crier now seeing it more as a prophet's gown:

It was a trackless man
who stooped and offered
the town crier an old coat -
And there was a light
on and through its thousand threads.

Teddy Grace recognised,
but denied it and cried out,
because resonance was his
daily bread. (Poem 35)

I don't wish to comment specifically on the poetry in this section. Where I have mentioned particular poems, it is by way of acknowledging the photograph's influence on the written text.

Barthes and Sontag scrutinize photographs for meanings and build complex layerings of ideas, both linguistically and philosophically, to the extent that they might be interpreted as revealing (or attempting to reveal) the complexities of their own thinking, rather than clarifying what a photograph is. The photographer, called 'the operator' by Barthes might be more accepting of the mechanical and chemical act which has taken place.

I would suggest that the only statement that ever can be safely made of a photograph is that it is a two-dimensional abstraction of reality, made possible by the action of light on a sensitised material and, depending on the reproduction process, at least twice removed from the reality it seeks to depict.¹⁵

To contemplate (and attempt to substantiate those 'removed realities') might be best left to poets and philosophers. Rather than become linguistically knotted in a search for definitions, however, it might be better to partake of photography's effects: to enter into its illusion.

Towards the end of *Camera lucida*, Barthes frees himself of opaque language layerings to accept and enjoy almost naively, the photograph of his mother as a child.

There she is! She's really there! At last, there she is!" Now I claim to know - and to be able to say adequately - why, in what she consists. I want to outline the loved face by thought, to make it into the unique field of an intense observation; I want to enlarge this face in order to see it better, to understand it better, to know its truth (and sometimes, naively, I confide this task to a laboratory). I believe that by enlarging the detail "in series" (each shot engendering smaller details than at the preceding stage), I will finally reach my mother's very being. What Marey and Muybridge have done as *operators* I myself want to do as *spectator*: I decompose, I enlarge, and, so to speak, I *retard*, in order to have time to *know* at last. The Photograph justifies this desire even if it does not satisfy it.¹⁶

I include the above extract as an entry into the final part of this set of annotations which will proceed to document the graphical and drawn images, while referencing

15 Zunde, Reimund *Photography* (Ed. Department of Victoria. Introduction by Tony Perry (xii))
 16 Barthes, Roland: 99

the source Mogo image, as well as interacting with, and cross referencing the poem sequence and stage play.

Like Barthes, I have outlined a discovered face with thought, in an attempt to understand it, and in my case, I have sequestered a diversity of thoughts and associated emotions, and used them multi-textually.

If there have been 'removals from reality' which the photographer, as operator, might willingly cede as limits to photography, and 'removals' which Barthes and Sontag, as spectators, might have to ultimately concede, albeit out of beguiling richnesses of language, then I find it creatively challenging to co-join such 'qualified' reality with illusion. There are those who would allow little or no distinction between the two, emphasising that both are the result of the subjectivity of human perception.

And what of science - the empirical domain where many would place photography as a technological and chemical process? I am persuaded by Bede Morris who says

Science and Art have a binding commonality in creative and interpretive thought, craftsmanship, technique and communication. Because science is a human activity and is, like art, exposed to personal bias and subjectivity.¹⁷

A second or third removal from reality, must no doubt, put great strain upon the concept, 'real'. What is deemed 'real' is the manifestation of our limits (or strengths), as a species, and, specifically, reality varies within each of us. We all respond to a photographic image differently, depending on our varied experiences which have in tow our 'world view', with its multiple attitudes, beliefs and understandings:

What is seen and remembered is conditioned by what has been seen and remembered before. While each experience changes the point of view of the viewer, each memory recalled is not the memory of the event alone but the memory of a memory. These memories are not fixed but are evolving over time within the mind in relation to other memories; fading, becoming more vivid, more fanciful, less urgent, more embellished, less accurate, more confused.¹⁸

17 Morris, Bede: Images: Illusion and Reality. Australian Academy of Science, Canberra 1986 (Jacaranda Pub. ACT): 2.

18 Morris, Bede: 5-6

When I perceive the Mogo image, and then walk away from it, it has already become part of my brain's multitudinous 'archive'. But in this archive it is not persistent, and seemingly immutable, like the discovered image imprinted on a small sheet of photographic paper. Instead, it exists now in a 'neural mixture' - resurfacing by way of a verbal prompt, or just suddenly being there, to disappear again or to fractionate. It might one day juxtapose in a dream with disjoint, or related images, which startle or confuse. From this 'neural mix' might come, by the act of concentrated thinking, a poem or drawing, featuring Mogo with other chosen images, while some images, although surfacing, were ultimately rejected, and cast back like the act of selective fishing.

For some, the Mogo image might be perceived, but mentally disappear, motivating no interactive response which might allow later creativity to occur.

Our eyes work as cameras to record what we perceive visually as reality, and our brains decipher and provide storage, but it's not this simple.

Through our eyes we register, transmit and record within our memory store, tetrabytes of information during a lifetime, each remembered piece being recalled each time as a visual image of something seen perhaps years before and never seen again. The visual system has this extraordinary capacity to distinguish the patterns of light which characterize an object, a face or a scene and, having recognized this pattern, to record and store its essential detail for recreation at another time. The reality of the recalled image is an illusion.¹⁹

3.5 GRAPHIC IMAGES RESULTING FROM THE SOURCE PHOTOGRAPH

I shall annotate the development of my 'graphical illusions' and attempt some connections with the written texts. To keep the study focused, especially considering the range of creative disciplines undertaken, I have primarily aligned photographs, and what I'll term 'photo-montage derived drawings', closely with Billy Pogo, as he is revealed in the poem narrative. The dominant visual image connecting with the stage play is the skull which I shall also discuss.

My initial contact with the Mogo image was that of securing a photo negative. I subsequently printed several 'regenerated images' of varying sizes and then using a plain paper copier, I printed several A3 sized copies. The very early poem, 'WAY OF THE POET', provides a written text for some of the rich images I had derived from anthropological readings, especially Wawi, the mythic serpent encountered in Elkin, and later readings of Lawlor (See Poetry Annotations). My early 'cut and paste' drawings were to explore visually the spiritual preoccupations of the first Wiringin poems.

The first completed visual work, 'SERPENT FRAGMENT', (Plate 1) incorporates a large swirling serpentine shape against a black void at the top enclosure. Below the serpent, yet touching it, is a fractionated image of the frock-coated figure. This is the Wiringin, having played to tipsy miners, moving physically (not psychically as in the poem) into the sky-world, in the company of Wawi, his mythic totem or 'familiar'. The Wiringin was capable of physical fast travel and I've documented this and the Wiringin phenomena generally in the annotations on the poem sequence.

Besides referencing the frock-coat and accenting its buttons and lapel flower, I have multi-imaged the grapevine while leaving it anchored at the bottom of the design. I've attempted to animate its presence as indeed happens in the poem when

whispering grapevines jostled
their faces towards gaps of light,
but the Wiringin was gone.

Despite their animated presence they are still firmly attached to the corporeal world, where the Wiringin has recently 'cancelled Gubba Time'.

The swirling serpent body at the top of the design is suggestive of the cosmic firmament: the skyworld, 'where Wawi spangled and foraged with stars'. The blackened rectangle and the superimposed straight sided (roughly triangular) snake skin fragment provides a geometric contrast to the organic upward movement. I see the rectangle as a symbolic opening into the Wiringin's body and the snakeskin fragment, the abstract of Wawi's mythic presence. This smaller rectangular field within the greater rectangle of the design is the perfected Dreamtime, its immutability virtually geometricised; the serpent fragment the pure idea of the Dreaming.

The corporeality of the gut has been replaced by a mythical entity, and that same gut is now a spiritual centre. It is this centre which the frock-coat normally conceals (and would destroy). The parodied tribal man is now in command of his spiritual world.

I'm unable to document Aboriginal belief, but the rectangle to ancient European and Asian peoples came to symbolise the secure and regular:

this is explained empirically by the fact that, at all times and places, it has been the shape favoured by man when preparing any space or object for immediate use in life.²⁰

The slight curve of the snakeskin fragment within the rectangle is, I hope, a subtle counterpoint to the multiple roundness of the Wiringin face, and the whirling circularity of the serpent above. The circle is associated with celestial symbolism of sun, the heavens, perfection and eternity. The circle is used extensively in Aboriginal paintings and can denote numerous things, such as Dreaming centres, campfires and waterholes.

I realised that the psychic occurrence on the hotel verandah had scope for further invention. PSYCHIC JOURNEY (Plate 2) was the result of setting the event slightly earlier, and shows the Wiringin in a trance, the manifestations of his mind beginning to unfold behind and above him. I have attempted to give the figure of Billy Pogo a wraith-like appearance by imparting to his face and clothing a pale chalkiness and allowing threadlike white lines to erupt beyond the fixed shape of the frockcoat. In so doing I endeavour to suggest that the figure is so energised that it is on the verge of dissolving or dematerialising.

To connect the pervasive skull of the stage play with the visual works, I decided to juxtapose it with the frock coated figure. The poem sequence ends with an evocation, via the Wiringin skull, and the play, whose setting is eighty years later, is that store of spiritual energy made tangible as dramatic conflict.

As a variation upon SERPENT FRAGMENT, I superimpose a large skull image against the rising fragmented figure and the black rectangle.

SKULL JOURNEY, (Plate 3), attempts to evoke the unity of death with life in Aboriginal belief. Billy Pogo, as an initiand, first travelled the psychic vastness of his

20 Cirlot, J.E. A Dictionary of Symbols. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; London 1973): 272

own mind at the instigation of select elders responsible for his 'making'. During initiation, he came in direct contact with the corpse of the old Wiringin. I refer to Billy Pogo's 'making' in *TRANCE* (Poem 30), where he now sees

a boy of scars, the boy he was
 living in the death of the old Wiringin,
 until knowledge invaded silence
 like a smell.

I have documented Wiringin belief extensively in the poetry annotations, but suffice to say here, death was merely the beginning of dying, when the soul was readied, with due ceremony, for another state of existence.

At the time of death, the ego soul of the deceased is believed to be greatly distressed by its separation from the living, and a concerted effort by the entire class is necessary to return the spirit to its home of origin.²¹

In the play I suggest that Billy Pogo exists as an 'uneasy' spirit who hasn't been allowed return to his home of origin because of how he was destroyed, and how his remains were not allowed to return to his spirit country. Billy Pogo has a continuing psychic presence in Bindari which has manifested itself as shadow play and butterfly, gaining efficacy in rumour.

In those works where I feature the skull, it is the obvious reminder of outrage dealt to a people, but also it serves as the symbol of a powerful spirituality, which has its externalisation in ordinary time, and internalisation through to a Dreamtime reality which has at its centre the concept of 'cyclical being'.

In SKULL JOURNEY two physical presences, the skull and the man, can be seen as symbolising that man's spiritual potency gained through an 'initiated dying'. Billy Pogo, as a shaman, has achieved power over death and transcends it. In *BLIND WINNIE* (Poem 27) the old woman asks him to lead her into death, but he reminds her that as a Wiringin, he 'must travel alone to places beyond the death of others'. As a Wiringin he has also travelled beyond the lives of others because of his psychic and intellectual powers.

I allow the skull and Wiringin to fuse in the design. Countless generations of skulls have been the receptacles of a great mystery and have passed these mysteries on one to the other. Young men have ritualistically 'died', while the old have given all during a state of spiritual transition. The young, through the act of ritualised dying, rouse finally with the knowledge of origins and are spiritually reborn.

In SKULL JOURNEY the cavernous eye sockets and nasal cavity lead up to the patterned arc of the serpent. The black rectangle has part of the skull impinging upon it, alluding to the reality of the Dreamtime, beyond mortal death.

In BLUE DRIFT (Plate 4), I explore the ascending, dividing figure a little further. I dispense with all references to geometricality and the collage, and added drawing is fused with colour passages of blues, browns and reds. I've used pastel, charcoal, ink and acrylic paint to achieve a divided figure grouping which appears to have been torn from earth anchorage. In a dominating blue space, the earth exists as a fragment of browns and red in the bottom left hand corner. The treatment is looser and more Abstract Expressionist in treatment; the drawing being almost subsumed in the paint work.

RETURN OF THE SPIRITS (Plate 5) is a larger, freely abstracted drawing suggesting the intense spiritual world of the Aboriginal people. I attempt to animate the Abstract Expressionist surface with suggested figurative presence. To the Aborigines, spiritual energy is seen as all pervasive and provides a timeless linkage between earth and sky, past and present.

It is this energy, evoking human presence, that Lionel Smith sensed when he lit a fire at the mine edge.

I lit a fire last night like the old people did - just with speed and friction... When it lit I was so glad that I yelled to those pigeons. I heard more than their wings - I heard laughter.

WIRINGIN TRANSPOSED (Plate 6), is the 'fast travel' to the cosmos realised. In a myriad of blues interspersed with swashes of vermilion, the top-hatted figure is part silhouetted on the horizon. Wawi, the serpent, describes a painterly arc in the foreground. The work is more accurately a colour design on paper but the images have evolved out of the preceding collage drawings of the dividing figures and comes

as close as I could to the poem image which denotes Wawi as spangling and foraging with stars.

I have created further drawings which I feel visually evoke the Wiringin's spiritual world. EARTH IS WIRINGIN (Plate 7) arrived first as a photomontage drawing and then gave me the impulse to write the poem of that name (Poem 10).

The design for the drawing came from the double negative photograph, JARRANBOWIE JACK AS EARTH MOSAIC (Plate 16). Above the partly concealed face I superimposed a hovering hawk. Although the poem makes mention of 'thunder rolling off a crow's wing', I reserve the hawk for a later poem (38), where Billy Pogo gazes beyond the gaol wall and sees Jarranbowie Jack's hawk 'familiar', or totem, hovering ethereally in the sun.

I return to the hawk motif in ETHEREAL BIRD (Plate 11). The large scale of the skull in relationship to the perched bird suggests the skull as an outcrop of the earth itself.

The evocation of earth as a living entity, or with human qualities, is explored in SANCTUARY (plate 12). The design takes up the presence of Wawi and Billy Pogo sheltering in the cave-like 'earth skull' which is also a metaphor for the Wiringin's own massive brow ridge. I make mention of these physical attributes in poem 28 when the Wiringin critically examines the Gubba shaped skull of the hybrid boy. At the conclusion of this poem Billy Pogo withdraws into his 'deep Wiringin brow where he revises ancient rock markings and scrapings of song'. I take up this skull/earth metaphor once again in the final poem of the sequence.

The surrounding terrain of SANCTUARY is suggestive of the gold mine location. Billy Pogo's face sheltering within the bone outcrop is picked up by Lionel Smith in the play when he likens the topography of the country from the air to the physiognomy of an ancient warrior and then imagines that same being as signifying himself. (Act II Scene II, Vol I p. 132)

I incorporated corroborree images from W. Blandowski's engraving 'Native Festival', undated but most probably completed in the 1850's.

The painted warriors are integrated into the design to appear dancing upon the great earth skull in which Billy Pogo now shelters. These dancers are to become the later

earth spirits suggested in RETURN OF THE SPIRITS (Plate 5). Poem 10 of the sequence is also evoked:

Earth shuffled on dancing feet,
with ochre and charcoal markings
and with rock as bone.

Closer examination of the earth skull in SANCTUARY shows that it is broken, just as the goldmine symbolises the land desecrated and despoiled.

The great reptile, Wawi, who rose magestically with the Wiringin during his psychic journey to the stars, is now curving below the skull to subterranean depths. This portends the return of Wawi to the Bogan waterhole and the demise of the Wiringin belief system:

Now, in the loosening grip
of coil and chant,
Wawi leaves him
empty and cold
like a cave.

TRANCE (Plate 9) and SERPENT (Plate 13) are further visual explorations into the Wiringin phenomena and the part which Wawi plays in that psychic life (see Vol II, p62).

STRANGE DOG (Plate 10) found its creative impulse in the poem of that name, (poem 8). Throughout the poem sequence, I mention the Wiringin's 'gimlet eye' and it's no better shown working upon another creature than in this poem. Several poems make mention of dogs, but this is an alien creature bringing unease to the tribal group. It is an invasive dog portending doom and the slash of red paint is to be viewed as a violent mark - a mark of destruction.

The dog which appears in LAST FEAST (Plate 8) is at one level a tribal dog, but on another becomes the metaphor for warmth which attempts to accompany the Wiringin when he takes his leave of the dying fisherwoman. At this level the dog symbolises the spiritual heat of the Wiringin and would depart with him to a domain beyond Winnie's reach. Although Winnie and Billy Pogo share a feast, they are separate spiritually and I attempt to show this fact through colour.

During the period of this doctoral program I visited western New South Wales several times with close attention being placed upon the Peak Hill goldmine and its vicinity. The result of these field trips was a growing folio of documentary photographs, some of which were more distinctive than others and had the potential for further visual manipulation.

I wanted the final selection of photographs to have a creative relationship with the drawings which gained their impulse from the Billy Mogo archival print, and selected documentary photographs.

LAST FEAST (Plate 8), for example, as well as being a drawing derived from the archival print, (Plate 14), incorporates two photographs of the Lachlan River near Forbes.

The Aboriginal stockman, whom I call Jarranbowie Jack, had a distinctive appearance and the negative had a tonal sharpness which lent itself to a double negative exposure.

JARRANBOWIE JACK AS EARTH MOSAIC (Plate 16) is an example of this double negative technique and relates to the poems RIVER and CLOUDBURST of the sequence.

I used the partly concealed face of Jarranbowie Jack in the design of ETHEREAL BIRD (Plate 11).

The discovery along the Bogan River of a silt covered book, downstream from a small domestic garbage tip, was an accidental discovery, nature having obliged with some visual manipulations of her own. The fine tracery of mud, twigs and insect tracks is very much an Aboriginal earth text superimposed upon a discarded high school science textbook.

The most successful use of this photograph is in BILLY POGO AND BUTTERFLY (Plate 19), the Wiringin face appearing as a vignette through a torn hole in the silt patterned section of the book, and the butterfly and its broken, scattered wing, strewn across a section of unmuddied printed page.

I feel there are visual correspondences here which pick up many of the observations expressed in the sequence. For example, in TENT (1902), Billy Pogo likens a printed

'Gubba sign' to markings 'neatly placed like plover feet in mud' and in CHURCH STREET he observes 'a drop-slab room covered with paperings of words'.

This Bogan text invades nature, but given time the elements will obliterate it. However, such a text was totally different to Billy Pogo's belief system and set about nullifying him and all he knew. The broken butterfly is an image of intense spirituality which is dislocated and strewn across a rationalist text discussing electricity and magnets. The butterfly image in this design prompted me to introduce it into the play. Rupert Fielding relates an old rumour that the Wiringin is to remain a butterfly at the back of the hotel until his spirit is released into his rightful country. I develop this rumour dramatically, later in the play, when Vin uses the butterfly image as a means of frightening Mace and making him comply to Brian's demands (see Act II, Scene V, p155).

The archival photograph of Billy Mogo is slightly out of focus and tonally soft, but I attempt to make use of this fact in EARTH FACE AND FEATHER (Plate 20) and EARTH FACE AND LIZARD (Plate 22). I spread ochre and found objects over the photograph, obliterating all sign of it except for the spectral face. The 'found' images, I hope, have totemic, spiritual overtones, the discarded feather suggesting dislocation, as with the previous butterfly image.

EARTH FACE AND LIZARD is a more enclosed design. I want to create a feeling of ritual with the careful placement of leaves and pebbles and the sideways compliance of the lizard towards the ambit of the face.

BILLY POGO AND ORCHID (Plate 21) involves the use of three photographs, the dominant image being the floor of the abandoned abattoir between Forbes and Parkes. The tonal grid falling upon the floorboards and introduced face and orchid, is the shadow of window fenestration and the jagged remains of glass. I try to express through photo-montage the enclosure of Billy Pogo physically and spiritually.

In conclusion, the visual images chosen here are those which, for me, best integrate with the poetry and stage play. Images developed in the poetry and script have in some cases gained strength and/or refinement from the graphic discoveries. Many of the graphical images, in turn, have found poignancy in relation to the written text if, indeed, they weren't originally born of it.

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