

*Dragon Fly, Mareka and Lindy:
The Minority Child as Chooser in
Three Australian Narratives*

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I

I REMEMBER HEARING Patricia Wrightson speak about white Australians' attitudes to black aboriginal Australians. At one point she characterized the way that a white middle-class suburban family might respond while watching a TV documentary about a tribal group of outback aborigines. The picture shows a group of them at a campfire, she suggested. "The camera, of course, zooms in on a child."

Just so. As explorers in the territory of children's literature¹ we have cause to know that writers of literature or of TV or film scripts, amongst other artists, can tap a deep reservoir of feeling and outlook if they focus their central meanings through a child figure. In this paper I am interested in comparing three Australian narratives which (1) focus on a child who, in some sense, to put it loosely for the moment, must contemplate the gap between two cultures; and (2) give central significance to an act of choice by the child. To focus on the second point, one of the most telling questions we can ask about a story is: what kind of a chooser is the central character? In these three cases, the reader's grasp of the story's meaning depends on what we make of a child's choosing. Erase that element from the narrative and its semantic structure collapses. It will be necessary to grant, of course, that these three central child characters differ in their characterization and in the patterns of action and the context of action in which they are placed. Indeed, the very media of their narratives differ: one is a translation of a black man's oral speech

into a printed poem, another is a small novel about a Greek migrant family, and the third is a one-hour TV drama. All three are Australian; all focus on family relationships; but centrally, too, the reader's or viewer's sympathies and understanding cohere about a child's choosing.

Why does this theme of the child as chooser draw our interest? One answer, clearly, is that we have a daily personal concern with the problem of the freedom of the will in relation to the causes which determine its acts. How free are we to choose? Do we have the power to direct the outcomes of choices we make, or even to predict them? Such questions can become intensely salient — more urgently personal, not less — when they are focused through the figure of a child who is in some way like the one that each of us once was. And much can hang upon such a young and often vulnerable figure. As Peter Coveney and Robin Wood and Brenda Niall, for example, have shown, if we investigate the uses of child characters in narratives we are likely to be led not only to the individual artist's world-view but also to the condition of a literary and social culture. "The figure of the Child, in this reading," says Wood as he summarizes Coveney, "reflects the condition of civilization, its health or sickness, as projected in the values or aspirations of its art" (155).

There is a second answer. Personally, I begin to be disturbed by recent images of children or adolescents who are radically isolated and so must make decisions which agonize a reader or viewer. They are not my subject, and you will have your own examples, so I will quickly only mention three. Robert Cormier's terrorist boy revolts us in horror in *After the First Death* when he shoots that bus-driver girl at close quarters. Robert Swindell's *Brother in the Land* places a boy and girl in a post-holocaust England in which family and social cohesion is destroyed and loads the dice against their hopes of a relationship, choose as they might. Then, from a Hungarian film shown on Australia's splendid multicultural TV network, SBS, and translated as "Nobody's Daughter," comes a haunting third image. There is a naked seven-year-old girl who wanders the countryside, neglected, used, rejected, never allowed to keep the warmth of a relationship. Finally, in a grotesque extension of the fate of

Andersen's little match girl, she lights a fire to immolate herself. As Robin Wood wrote when looking in another direction: "The suicide of a child in a world that has nothing to offer it: it is difficult to imagine a more desolate culmination" (166).

Those three images occur in plots which sceptically question our chances for love under modern circumstances. The anxious probing of this problem is so insistent in modern writing that it can become a personal necessity to ask whether there are valid alternative outlooks.

II

Her grandfather teaches Dragon Fly how to choose

"Lalai (Dreamtime)" gives us words spoken by Sam Woolagoodjah to his granddaughter.² Sam Woolagoodjah is an elder of the Worora, a coastal people in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Essentially, as he speaks, he offers the girl an imaginative vision of the context within which she must make her life choices; and he does so with deep conviction and dignity and with an irrefutable personal authority.

At this point I have a need to reveal my own tentativeness in interpreting "Lalai" and two reasons for such uncertainty. First, the text itself is a translation at three removes from the original. For Sam Woolagoodjah's words were first written in a prose version by Michael Silverstein, then translated into English by Andrew Huntley, and then — in the version that I encountered — placed in an anthology of verse intended for Australian school and college students. In truth, though, these words were not originally a poem for publication to an audience; they were words said by the tribal elder to Dragon Fly, his granddaughter. So we are eavesdroppers with defective hearing. We come towards Sam Woolagoodjah's words, to which we were not meant to listen, thinking in the wrong language and with a fatal temptation to place the "poem" within an aesthetic convention which may not suit it. Further, as a Europeanized Australian I lack an intimate knowledge of the tribal experience within which these words are most authentic. If we belonged to the tribe, and felt

the rocks and gumtrees and caves and creeks and lizards of its territory to be totemic companions in our daily living, and knew in their hundreds the Worora tribal stories, and understood what the Worora people understand by Wuduu and Dreamtime, then we would comprehend how resonant the words are for Woola-goodjah and Dragon Fly.

The "poem" as it is, however, does offer luminous clues. Clearly, the elder passes to his grandchild a code of behaviour ("Don't take" is one of his gnomic sayings; "Give away" is another); and this is not just a personal code, or one that holds merely within a nuclear family, but it is, as he emphasizes, "for all the land, all the land" (168). What interests me most are the clues in the poem to the sanctions which underlie the code. Why should Dragon Fly obey this advice from her grandfather? Why should she be a good chooser on his terms?

I think we can identify three answers. First, if I interpret truly, the first half or so of this narrative is spoken quietly by the camp-fire as, we can conceive, the young girl sits on the knee of her grandfather. At times, he stretches his hands out over the fire and then gently touches various parts of her body as he lovingly talks to her.

At the fire I touch you —
I hand you the strength of Wuduu. (166)

Thus, in this laying on of warm hands he gives rules of behaviour to her with a personal, bodily authenticity. He hands on his wisdom indeed.

Second, it is not merely *his* wisdom which will sanction Dragon Fly's behaviour but the lore of the tribe.

He showed us the Wuduu we make —
He said "Wuduu, Wuduu".
Not just for one person
But for all the land, all the land. (168)

Thus in the second half of the poem the older man walks with the young person to the tribe's burial ground and tells the story of the burial rites that all must respect. As he does so, his "we" has a quiet confidence and suggests a collective power which is the tribal youth's inheritance: "We belong to this place" (168).

The third sanctioning force for the young person of the Worora is the most powerful. It is the spirit world alive in the landscape that the tribe inhabits. Indeed, Sam Woolagoodjah's words here are helpful to the outsider who seeks to understand the aboriginal reality that we translate as Dreamtime. Ronald and Catherine Berndt in *The World of the First Australians* put it that

this concept means that the beings said to have been present at the beginning of things 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. The term "eternal" has this connotation. "Dreaming," in contrast, is a rather unfortunate choice: but it is a direct translation of one of the relevant native words. Where the same term is used for ordinary dreams, as well as this particular time-perspective, this does mean that people cannot distinguish between the two. "Dreaming" does not refer to a dream in the narrowest sense; but just as a dream is real to the dreamer, so the doings of the creative beings are real to the believer. (187-88)

While this is true, the Berndts' judiciously distanced interpretation does not tap the power in Sam Woolagoodjah's communicated reality. They miss his feeling for the barely imaginable immensity of time past which is implicit in time present. They miss the intimacy, the tribal blood knowledge of the Wandjinas, those spirit beings of the first creation who are still a felt presence in the land, and are even visible in cave paintings in the Kimberley district where they left themselves on the rock walls. They miss the tension (which the tribal people can feel at their increase places) between past evils — still potent and dangerous — and the powerful good spirits like Namaaraalee, the creator, the punisher, the beneficent one who showed the people the right way to hold chaos in check. Most of all — to return to Dragon Fly and her grandfather — they miss the confidence in her own identity made available to the aboriginal child by a belief in personal spiritual continuity:

At its own Wunger place
A spirit waits for birth . . . (169)

It is not in my competence to judge whether such a world view, the lore of the tribe, can retain its power for modern

aboriginal people as they become increasingly detribalized. Perhaps Alan Garner was right to worry about whether aboriginal skills and ethics could remain useful when the people had to adapt to twentieth-century civilization dominated by European ways of living.

The Pitjantjatra live in Australia, now: but technologically they are 20,000 years in our past. Their ingenuity of survival in a desert where we should not last a day is a product of the application of *Aljira, Illud Tempus*, inner time, myth, to their environment. The numinous quality of Man is dominant in them.

But take a tribal Pitjantjatra and expose him to our technology, and he dies. He is no longer tribal, he has no co-ordinates. An individual who can cross the Dead Centre of Australia naked, cannot cross Sydney alone. (Garner 137)

I am not convinced that the process is as inevitable as Alan Garner claims. In any case, it remains true that Sam Woolagoodjah's words offer Dragon Fly a set of moral imperatives resonant within a vitalized imagination; and his gift comes to her with a strong, unambiguous, personal, and tribal endorsement. It is still open to test whether such a moral orientation will hold firm for her in the circumstances she will meet.

The next two narratives are more like each other than they are like Sam Woolagoodjah's words to Dragon Fly. First, both Nadia Wheatley's novel *Five Times Dizzy* and the TV drama "On Loan" come to us in the conventional form that their authors presumably intended; they have not been reformed. Second, both stories have more identifiably urban and contemporary settings than "Lalai" has. And third, it is more true about their plots that they give structural significance to an act of choice by a likeable protagonist who is caught in a cross-cultural dilemma. After all, where we only know Dragon Fly as a *potential* chooser, there are choices made by Mareka and Lindy which focus for us their author's cultural attitudes. Moreover, whereas Dragon Fly is not shown to be conscious of the impact of white Europeanized culture upon Australian aboriginal mores, Nadia Wheatley's Mareka (as a Greek-Australian) and Lindy (who is a Vietnamese girl adopted by an Australian family) in "On Loan" acutely feel the tension of their double identities.

III

Mareka decides that her Yaya needs a goat

In her first five chapters Nadia Wheatley prepares the ground for Mareka Nikakis to come to the decision which she makes at the end of Chapter 5:

A goat, a *goat!* It was like a bell ringing inside her.

She'd get Yaya a goat, and that could be her job! Yaya could be a goat-herder again. There'd be milk for the pups, and when they grew up and didn't need it Yaya could make cheese and they could sell it in the shop. And if Yaya had a goat she'd be out and about, out of that room, leading the goat to pasture and milking her and everything! With a goat in the yard Newtown *would* be just like home. (37)

This is the hectic enthusiasm of a first hope, unfulfilled as yet. In fact, it takes the remaining eight chapters and an epilogue to see her choice realized and its consequences developed.

Mareka is an eleven-year-old Cretan Australian girl whose family migrated to Australia three years before and now run a deli in Newtown, an actual inner suburb of Sydney. Just under a year ago Mareka's grandmother — her Yaya — also migrated and joined them. What creates the need for Mareka to choose is a double problem. Partly it is her perception of her grandmother's unhappiness at being dislocated from her Greek roots and at moving from her village life, in harmony with nature, to a Sydney suburb where one sees more concrete than grass. This is the problem laid upon our feelings in the first incident of the novel, in which Mareka comes home from school to find her grandmother — as she thinks — dead.

One Friday last May in the suburb of Newtown, Mareka came home from school. It was a day just like any other day.

"*Yia sou*, Baba! I'm home, Mama!" But her parents were flat out serving and barely noticed her.

She ran through the shop, through the lounge, through the kitchen, along the passageway and into Yaya's room, and suddenly the day was dark and different. The blinds were down, the light was off, and the black shape of Yaya was propped up in front of the dressing-table mirror; she was so still and stiff.

Mareka had once found a dead cat in the street and it had looked like her grandmother did now: heavy somehow, and frozen, with its paw stretched out as if it had been about to pounce on something when it had suddenly just died. It hadn't been run over or anything; there wasn't a mark on it. Yaya looked like that now; like that, or like one of the people buried at Pompeii.

"SHE'S DEAD!" (1)

This becomes a resonating symbol. Estranged from her vital past life, from her identity within a village community, the grandmother could wither into virtual death. "Back there in the village in Crete," Mareka worriedly ponders,

Yaya had been busy and strong and happy — a sort of cross between a mountain and a queen and a hawk. Back there, being a grandmother and wearing black was a source of respect and power; here it just seemed to make you weak and cut off. (5)

The second element in the problem which Mareka confronts concerns herself. As both a Greek and a girl, her place in this Australian suburb is not an unambiguous one. Her identity within her family is secure; but she catches from the challenging nickname of the neighbouring children a reflection of herself as "the Greeka freaka" and, although Nadia Wheatley gives the Newtown community a warm, homely, communal quality, her Mareka is not at the start certain where she belongs within it. This element is admittedly underplayed. To an extent much less urgent than her feeling for Yaya, Mareka feels her own difference from the Newtown crowd and stands a little apart.

What kind of a chooser does Nadia Wheatley think that Mareka Nikakis is? The answer becomes clear if we enquire further into the context of her choice, and into its mode and its outcomes. The aesthetic context for Mareka's choice is very fine: the balanced judgement of this author is apparent on every page. The setting is carefully focused, with the Nikakis delicatessen the centre of a briskly paced action which moves — usually not very far — along the nearby streets, into Mr. Willoughby's shop or the laundry of the house of Mr. Mac who breeds greyhounds, out to the sports oval, on towards the church. The omniscient angle of narration allows us to enter the mind not only of Mareka but also of her grandmother (a crucial relationship, this one),

of other children like Patricia and Rowley Wilson, and even of adult neighbours such as grumpy Willoughby the news-agent. This necessary manoeuvre, by not imprisoning us within Mareka's perceptions, ends by showing us how balanced she is. For one of the delights of this book is the poised, mature tone which surrounds and endorses this protagonist. A good-humoured, often subtle, irony governs each move in the plot. Thus, for example, Nadia Wheatley's dialogue amusingly suggests the minor frustrations a girl like Mareka may feel in her bilingual home. Yaya is speaking:

"... Oh, she was a good goat, my Poppy, a good goat, of course you wouldn't remember but..."

It was like a record. Mareka knew it off by heart.

"What's a goat?" she heard Costa asking. He said it in Greek but his knowledge of Greek was a bit wonky these days, like his knowledge of goats, and Mareka heard Mama translating the question into proper Greek so that Yaya could understand, and then translating Yaya's answer back into baby-English so that Costa could understand.

"A goat," Mama tried to sum it up for Costa, "a goat is... it's like a ship."

"*Sheep!*" Mareka yelled back from the lounge-room, not able to help herself. "Not ship!" Mama's English wasn't crash-hot either.

"A sheep," Mama corrected herself. "You know, you see it in the country."

"A *Skippy!*" Costa screamed triumphantly.

Mareka gave up. (5-6)

And later in the book Mama, in full flight asserting the family's Greekness to her husband, is undercut by the subtle placement of just one Japanese word:

"And as we are Greek too, and not Ned Kelly," Mama added for good measure, "we will now have a glass of wine and hear some good Greek music and drink to the success of Mareka's fete." Mama snapped off the television. "Barbarian rubbish!" she muttered to the fading image of John Laws. She slipped a tape of Greek music into the little Sanyo cassette player. (67)

Nowhere, however, is Nadia Wheatley's careful crafting of the circumstances of her main character's choice more clear than in the symbol of the Haunted House.

Ghosts inhabit haunted houses and the danger for Smith Street, Newtown, is that people like Yaya and Mareka may become only ghosts of their truest selves. When "the empty house" (19) is introduced in Chapter 3 Yaya sees that it is littered — like the house that Huck Finn sees adrift down the Mississippi — with the jetsam of civilization; inhabited no longer, it is a mysterious manifestation of a sinister alienness. Later, when Mareka is troubled by her inability to make Yaya happy, she broods alone "Hunched up in the back of the deserted house, nearly hidden by a clump of oleanders and creepers" (28). The house is both a magnet for her inner negation and a symbol of communal emptiness. Such a house, Mareka and her Yaya both feel in a shared intuition, could drain your identity:

Mareka glanced up at the top windows. They were like eyes up there watching the street; those little gable roof things were the eyebrows. Sometimes the door looked as if it could gobble you. Yaya followed Mareka's glance and tightened her grip on Mareka's hand. There was indeed something wrong about the place; Yaya could feel it; though it probably wasn't anything as simple as a ghost.

"Houses are like people," Yaya said. "They start to smell of death when they get lonely." She suddenly felt the place oppressing her, like a cold grey cloud. (35-36)

Mareka's glance here prefigures her two dreams to come, which Nadia Wheatley uses to resonate the dangerous emptiness linked to the problems that Mareka must solve. Mareka's first dream, which interestingly shows the dreamer trying to direct the plot of the nightmare that threatens to engulf her, suggests essentially the desolate isolation which may occur even in a crowd (48-49). The sequel dream "of the city of identical derelict houses, of the eyes and the watching and the terror" (67) significantly takes the turn that Yaya companionably appears in it and laughingly outstares the menacing deadness. She does so with a courage which Nadia Wheatley unemphatically suggests is derived from religion.

In Chapter 5, with a nicely enacted dawning realization, Mareka sees that she must find a goat for her Yaya and so renew her relation with nature and the community. What Nadia Wheat-

ley asks us to admire in this choice is again neatly suggested through the Haunted House. In the climax in Chapter 13 people in the local community come together in the Smith Street fête, a way of raising money to buy Yaya's goat. The large empty house is then reinhabited; significantly, children and adults have worked co-operatively to make it a scary funhouse, one of the fête's drawing cards. Mareka and her Yaya mobilize the local folk and turn the house's evil magic to good. They create "a street of dance and life" (78), a venue out beyond the empty shell of a house, where Greek people and their culture can be a vital part of an Australian festival. There is much to celebrate. Mareka's choice, indeed, becomes the basis for a miracle: Yaya is no longer alienated, no longer alive only in her memories of the past, but instead she connects her Greek memories into the vital new present in Australia. Even — a greater miracle — the provincial bigot, grumpy Mr. Willoughby, is given cause to remember his boyhood on a farm and to begin to warm towards his neighbours.

So Mareka chose to obtain a goat for her grandmother; and, despite her darker intuitions and the difficulties of the enterprise that she tackles, and with the support of her parents, the lovely creative relationship with Yaya, as well as co-operation from other friendly adults, she succeeds. At the end, on her walk with Yaya, the seemingly dead house burgeons:

They lead Poppy down to the Haunted House to relieve herself and Mareka hops out a little candle dance as they wait. "Look, the flowers are coming out."

"It's spring, *paiithi mou*."

A great bank of heady white jasmine is beginning to spill down over the flaking timbers of the old terrace. The first wistaria trail clings down the rusting drainpipe and the borage and basil and rigani and mint that Yaya planted a couple of months ago are now bursting up among the bush-roses in the rockery down the side. No owner or estate agent has turned up yet, so the Smith Street kids have taken the place over. (85)

IV

Lindy says "No" to one of her fathers

One of the ways that the TV drama "On Loan" differs from the two narratives already discussed is in its structure. "On Loan"

has a more dialectical swing, more tension between opposing ideas and emotions. *Dragon Fly* is only a potential chooser; Mareka makes her significant decision early and then most of the story details its realization and outcomes. Rather differently, most of the plot of "On Loan" develops a compounding dilemma for the central character, so that her crucial choice comes as the story's climax and only at the virtual end.

Lindy's dilemma concerns her cultural identity. At thirteen, she knows — or believes — that she is a Vietnamese orphan who was adopted when she was three by a childless Australian couple, Geoff and Marj Baker. Early scenes in the film establish how contented she is in Australia within her loving family, which now includes a young brother, the Bakers' natural son. The element which disturbs this calm existence is a letter which suddenly arrives from her natural father, Le, in Thailand. He tells her that her real name is Mai, that he has searched for her for years, and now at last wishes to travel to Australia to see her. When he comes he most caringly tells her about her natural family and asks her to return to it.

The forces in tension in such a situation are perhaps predictable, and early in the film they are conventionally developed. For example, Lindy's assurance that her Australian parents love her is compromised when she learns that they had kept from her the name of her mother. Then, too, under the emotional stress from the possible loss of their daughter a rift opens between Geoff — who protectively seeks Lindy's best interests and so does not oppose Le's visit — and Marj, whose opposition to the Asian man's coming has a jealous vehemence which she cannot control. As well, of course, the new revelations of another source of Lindy's identity — such as the photograph that Le brings which shows her as a baby cuddled by her Vietnamese mother, now dead — complicates the idea that she is simply Geoff and Marj's daughter. Two mothers, two fathers; is she Lindy or is she Mai? Geoff and Marj had guessed a birthdate for their orphan; but now that Le reveals her real birthday, what are her obligations to him?

An audience may find Lindy's turbulent uncertainty about who she is and what she should do a little unconvincing at first. However, her dilemma is rendered at greater depth once Le ap-

pears on the screen — and still more so when he arranges for her to visit the Viet family of her uncle in Sydney — for Le, Lindy's natural father, is played with an impressive, calm dignity by Quang Chinh Dinh. No conveniently dislikable villain, this character has a deep need for his daughter and yet a selfless care to discover and serve her true "well-being": his regard for family unity is, we feel, equal to Geoff's. Then, too, we plumb Lindy's feelings still deeper when she finds a warm welcome in her uncle's family and a natural affinity with her sixteen-year-old cousin Minh. This beautifully created relationship is the crucial one in the film. For Minh not only opens an easily negotiable doorway for Lindy to see into and understand her Viet cultural inheritance, but she also suggests the way through the dilemma.

One thing that the film asks us to do is to grieve for the Vietnamese victims of war. There is a moving scene, simple and authentic, in which Lindy (or is it now Mai?) and Minh whisper together as they share the same bed, their heads near each other in close focus, and Minh relates how her sister died in a bombing raid on a school. As she speaks, unsobbingly and with clear eyes, she weeps; as Mai listens she quietly weeps too. It is a scene which is echoed later when we see Le weep in dignity as he looks from his lonely hotel room out to the dark city, and it is not merely a personal loss that his tears suggest; he weeps for his people.

In these circumstances, for Lindy to reject either of her families would be to make an unhealable rip in her being. So the film makes us feel relieved that her final choice is a compromise. She is an Australian and so she will stay in Australia; but although Le must return to Thailand without her, she will keep good relations with her Vietnamese uncle's family in Sydney, her bond of love with Minh is undissolvable, and she plans to visit her father in Thailand when she is older. Who knows? He and her brothers and sisters might migrate to Australia eventually.

V

The central thread which draws these three narratives together is the wise innocence in the artistic minds which created them.

The writers of all three would be invulnerable to any claim that they wrote in a jaded or disillusioned or cynical mood or with a poisoned imagination. Where there is irony, as in *Five Times Dizzy*, it is an irony not without bite and yet conceived in cheerfulness and at the service of a positive social vision. Where there is trauma in relationships, as in "On Loan," it is a knot to be wrestled with and untied, not tightened. I think, you see, that these three stories could be used as the beginning of an argument that the image of the child in Australian writing for children is more likely to be clear-lit and sunny than shadowed and bleak.

Don Edgar, who is both the director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the husband of Patricia Edgar who is director of the Australian Children's Television Foundation, claimed two years ago that

This "new audience" of children is more sophisticated, more challenging, more demanding than we have faced before. We owe it to them to do our best to offer a window on the world that opens up their capacity to control their lives rather than one closed to both the realities they live and the hopes they dream. (Edgar 22)

If we approach the creation of stories with such an aim then the aim will be more likely realizable. The three young women whose acts of choice are at the centre of the three Australian narratives I have mentioned not only image a will which is unimprisoned, they urge action towards it.

NOTES

- ¹ The "we" in this paper refers to a readership of adults who read children's books bi-focally, with one part of the lens focusable on the child reader as our sympathies and memory reach back to our own childhood, while the other sees from the perspective of the present adult.
- ² See Appendix.

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APPENDIX

Lalai (Dreamtime)

Recounted by Sam Woolagoodjah, elder of the Worora people, north-west Australia. Translated by Andrew Huntley from the prose version of Michael Silverstein.

Dreamtime,
 The first ones lived, those of long ago.
 They were the Wandjinas —
 Like this one here, Namaaraalee.
 The first ones, those days,
 shifted from place to place,
 In dreamtime before the floods came.
 Bird Wandjinas, crab Wandjinas
 Carried the big rocks.
 They threw them into the deep water
 They piled them on the land.
 Other Wandjinas —
 all kinds —
 She the rock python,
 He the kangaroo,
 They changed it.
 They struggled with the rocks,
 They dug the rivers.
 These were the Wandjinas. They talk with us
 at some places they have marked.
 Where the sun climbs, over the hill and the river
 they came,
 And they are with us in the land.

We remember how they fought each other
at those places they marked —

It is dreamtime there.

Some Wandjinas went under the land,

They came to stay in the caves

And there we can see them.

Grown men listen to their Wandjinas.

Long ago, at another time,
these Wandjinas changed the bad ones
into the rocks

And the springs we always drink from.

These places hold our spirits,

These Wunger places of the Wandjinas.

There a man learns

who his child really is:

Its spirit comes when he is dreaming

and tells him its name.

Then the man has been given his child:

It has its own name

beside the landname of its father.

Wandjina children were playing:

Plucking out his feathers

They stuck in sharp, long blades of grass

To see him use his new wings.

They did this to the first owl,

Whose name is Dunbi.

They fooled with him

They fooled with him,

They bounced him up

They bounced him up,

They tossed him up again;

But then he went over the clouds.

Namaaraalee lifted him

And he became a Wunger

For all places.

Don't take.

'Wuduu, Wuduu':

At the fire I touch you —

I hand you the strength of Wuduu,

Don't let yourself be turned.

Here on your ankle
Here on your knee
Here on your thigh,
Stay strong.
Don't let your forehead swell
(wait, wait)
Don't say the words of the men,
Don't go begging, granddaughter.

Namaaraalee is highest, he made it all,
We must keep those ways he pointed out.
Now that I have told you
We are walking to the place his body was cradled.
He is in the sky.
This half moon we will go to him.

The children who fooled with Dunbi owl
were laughing;
Then they heard the roar.
The angry Wandjinas sent a flood
And the water reached them all.

But in the wave
One man, one woman,
grabbed the tail of a kangaroo.
They clung to its tail as it swam
And it reached the rocks.
Here, on this side, they climbed up,

So that we were born,
So we go on being born.

Now you see nothing is made up,
Each father has been told what happened:
How Wandjina Namaaraalee made it all
How he sent the flood
How he said no.
Then he showed us the Wuduu that we make
for the little boys and girls:
The men who know still touch them
So each day they learn to grow.

Her two thighs, her two legs, her fingers —
The words are put there
that the Wandjinas gave us.

They said to keep on
 And until today these words have lived.
 The Wuduu touching will not stop,
 It is our strength.
 They threw spears
 They killed him.
 Wunumbal, Ungarinyin, were fighting
 Killing each other
 Living no more.

All the spirits told me then: 'Do that':
 I am going back
 To the place the Wandjina made for me.
 All ways, do not forget,
 Give away, give away.
 The first one, Namaaraalee, came from the Awawarii tribe.
 He had been in many fights
 before he came to this land.
 Here he saw the woman he wanted to keep;
 But the Wandjinas all looked, then each one tugged at her.
 Backward, forward — hotter and hotter —
 At last they flung spears that fell like rain —
 And Namaaraalee felt one drop down his side.
 Then they had killed him.

These rocks are Wandjinas
 Marking the fight.
 When they saw he was dead
 They carried him over the creek.
 'Djir' — for the first one
 They made that dry sound on their tongues.
 Then he was laid on a fork stick cradle
 High off the ground;
 Now, Namaaraalee lies
 in his cave on top of the rocks.

They speared him in this water,
 This water is Namaaraalee.
 They carried him along here,
 They laid him up there.
 We belong to this place,
 Strangers must stay away.

I am going there now.
We are coming to you —
To see you alone.

*Are you listening?
That is what you wanted —
Namaaraalee, will you always lie down?*

*We have come to you,
He wanted to meet you.
We have always heard about you,
Even how you have destroyed.*

*That is what you wanted —
You even killed people far away.
You killed many people
When you chose to, Namaaraalee,
You have always done as you wanted to do.
And you chose to stay here:
You planned this as you planned your own death.*

He showed us the Wuduu we make —
He said 'Wuduu, Wuduu'.
Not just for one person —
But for all the land, all the land.
Not only for us —
Wuduu is for everyone to make.
This one is the Wandjina.

Here is a man of the Aruluuli.
He was one of them
and they brought him here —
This place belongs to him.
Those who have died are brought to the caves,
They are carried in and stay here.
A man, like this, dies at last in his cave,
His spirit is free
To leave him and wait at its Wunger place.
All his cave belongs to the Aruluuli.
We do the same when a man dies
As the Wandjinas did for Namaaraalee
When they had killed him.
That is the way he taught us what to do,
And the way he chose to teach all other people.
He started it for everyone.
We do the same as the Wandjinas —
And Namaaraalee made this way
For all kinds of men.

At its own Wunger place
A spirit waits for birth —
‘Today, I saw who the child really is —’
That is how a man
Learns to know his child.

Namaaraalee made him,
No one else,
No one.
But not all things are straight
in this day.

As I looked at the water
Of Bundaalunaa
She appeared to me:
I understood suddenly
The life in our baby —
Her name is Dragon Fly.