

'An Entangled Kind of Haunting':

Judith Wright and *Uncanny Australia*

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Judith Wright (1915–2000) occupies a unique position in Australian poetry. Although not the first poet to react empathically to the situation of Indigenous peoples, she is the first poet to intuitively and philosophically address the broader implications of colonialism for the national and individual psyche. In doing so, she situates her own brand of postcolonialism within an intensely personal metaphysics informed by terrestrial and ancestral connections to Indigeneity. This paper will argue that Wright's poetic and autobiographical efforts to contend with her own hereditary ghosts pre-empt and critique Gelder and Jacobs' (1998) postcolonial perspectives of the Australian ghost story genre as 'an entangled kind of haunting, which gives expression to a sense of (dis)possession for both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people alike ... a structure in which sameness and difference embrace and refuse each other simultaneously'.¹ Gelder and Jacobs in turn provide valuable insights for Judith Wright criticism in their pursuit of entangled (dis)possession at the heart of the ghost story into contemporary national and cross-cultural debates, effectively tracking late-twentieth century outcomes of Wright's focal points as poet and activist. Underpinning this relationship is the question of poetry's role in representations of Australian sacredness and identity. While this question has already proved divisive, it may also offer the basis for a deeper investigation of the poetics of haunting and embodied (or avoided) resolution in Australian critical and public debates.

Uncanny Australia is a lively critique of 'how the Aboriginal sacred has been talked about' in late twentieth-century Australia drawing on the Freudian notion of the uncanny as being in and out of place at the same

time.² Ken Gelder's background in Australian colonial fiction and the horror genre coheres with Jane Jacobs' cultural and ethnographic perspectives to create an important critique of public discourses in the early Howard era. *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies* author Stephen Muecke (1999) recommends *Uncanny Australia* to anyone involved in land rights negotiations, while noting in his review that the uncanny also 'tends to take over as a methodological aim'.³ While Muecke makes no complaint about *Uncanny Australia's* omission of poetry from its 'theoretical grid', Wright biographer and critic Veronica Brady (2006) couples her dissatisfaction with Gelder and Jacobs' 'inability ... to empathise with Indigenous notions of the sacred, and thus understand properly what Country means to them' with the firm assertion:

It is here, in my view, that we need to take the 'delusional' course, to insist on the significance of metaphorical and symbolic, that is 'poetic language' ... Resisting incorporation into any line of reason, ethics or culture, poetic language both describes and enacts a movement across boundaries ... [producing] a sense of Country that brings us close to that of Aboriginal cultures. Poetic knowledge may thus be of crucial political significance.⁴

Prior to this, Brady (1999) remarks of *Uncanny Australia*, 'scholarly detachment is all very well. But it seems to me, especially in situations of this kind when two cultures confront one another that scholarship also has a public responsibility.'⁵ While Gelder and Jacobs favour Emile Durkheim's definition of the sacred as a social phenomenon, Brady prefers Rudolf Otto's 'famous and widely accepted definition' of encounter with the mysterious 'other' beyond reckoning. She observes that Gelder and Jacobs 'are clearly puzzled by the fact that the sacred also represents "an absence"', a theme which, as Paul Kane (1996) has shown, dominates Australian poetry from the ghost-rich negations of Charles Harpur and Henry Kendall.⁶

Gelder (2006), for his part, derides Brady as representing ‘a small coterie of mostly Anglo-Irish Catholic commentators ... which has nothing at all to say to Australia’s religious diversity, and which is increasingly less well equipped [sic] to speak for the nation as a whole’.⁷ Her support for what Gelder calls David Tacey’s ‘spiritualist fantasy of equity’ is likewise excoriated, but at the centre of the standoff is not Tacey but poetry itself – Brady (Wright, Brennan) and Tacey (Wright, Neilson, Murray) consider it integral to discourses of Australian identity and sacredness, while Gelder and Jacobs, aside from minor references to Roland Robinson and Les Murray, tend to avoid it altogether. They even go so far as to dismiss Ross Gibson’s *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (1992) for its apparently ‘nostalgic’ uses Australian landscape poetry to approach the ‘enigmatic’, before launching into their own study of the Australian ghost story genre ‘in a very different way from the kind of poetry which Ross Gibson had privileged’.⁸ Ultimately, however, Gelder and Jacobs use their thinly-veiled irritation at Gibson’s approach to absolve themselves from having to talk about Australian poetry, Indigenous or otherwise, at any length and *Uncanny Australia* is the poorer for it. It might assist their construction of the Australian ghost story as a minor or marginal genre by making it all the more minor and marginal, but simply skipping poetry when poetry is such a formative part of colonial, Federation and post-war Australian identity is the critical equivalent of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. To give just one example, several decades before Gelder and Jacobs’ quasi-mythical starting point in Rosa Praed’s ‘The Bunyip’ (1891), Charles Harpur’s ‘The Creek of the Four Graves’ had already instigated a Australian poetic tradition of melding ghostliness and Indigeneity in the uncanny confusion of the bush, a theme which recurs in Ada Cambridge’s ‘By the Camp Fire’ (1875), Judith Wright’s ‘At Cooloola’ (1955) and Francis Webb’s ‘Eyre All Alone’ (1961), with Indigenous counterpoints in poems such as Jack Davis’ ‘John Pat’ (1988) and Samuel

Wagan Watson's 'for the wake and skeleton dance' (2000) to name just a few.

By avoiding poetry, *Uncanny Australia* also avoids the origins and echoes of this entangled poetics of haunting and its ramifications for postcolonial discourses of Indigenous sacredness. To exacerbate matters further, Gelder and Jacobs also jump from 1891 to Roland Robinson/Percy Mumbulla's 'The Bunyip' (1958) and again to films of the 1990s while barely accounting for the century-long shifts in national identity, Indigenous relations and notions of sacredness. Perhaps this is one example of what Muecke recognises as the uncanny taking over as a methodological aim, 'unsettling' the reader as it were, but it is also easy to see why Gelder and Jacobs' targets might bristle in response when the poetries, fictions and theorists they value are discounted so blithely. Yet rather than indulging critical stoushes, it is more productive to consider *Uncanny Australia's* marginalisation of poetry as a unique opportunity to examine what Judith Wright and Gelder-Jacobs might offer one another in terms of postcolonial approaches to Australian ghost stories and Indigeneity.

Terrestrial Connections: The Haunted Land and Town

Ghost stories, according to Gelder and Jacobs 'are traditionally about possession; one takes possession of a haunted house and is possessed in return; all this happens on a property which is usually imagined as malevolent and overwhelming'.⁹ This in turn informs the character of 'a modern Australian condition where what is "ours" may also be "theirs", and vice versa: where difference and "reconciliation" co-exist uneasily'.¹⁰ Growing up at the 'Wallamumbi' property in New England, New South Wales, Wright sensed a lingering Aboriginal presence that had been 'wiped out, uneasily driven from the minds of the occupiers' so that 'only a few dark shadows were visible occasionally on the fringes of our lives, part of the background of itinerant rabbiters, fencers, Gypsies, drovers and

wanderers that lay at the lowest level of the New England community'.¹¹ As one 'born of the conquerors' ('Two Dreamtimes'), there were at least two facets to Wright's intensely personal connection with this presence-absence that made spectres and shadows impossible to ignore.¹²

The first was the land itself, for New England with its droughts, floods, fires and dust resisted any notion of superimposed Englishness, just as the sons and daughters of empire who 'settled' there resisted any notion of non-Englishness, unable to make the 'impossible renunciation' of seeing the land in its own, or in Indigenous, terms.¹³ The driving out of the original occupants was, by Judith's time, a *fait accompli*, and one of its local manifestations was graphically represented in Wright's first poetry collection *The Moving Image* (1946):

The eastward spurs tip backward from the sun.
Night runs an obscure tide round cape and bay
and beats with boats of cloud up from the sea
against this sheer and limelit granite head.
Swallow the spine of range; be dark, O lonely air.
Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull
that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff
and then were silent, waiting for the flies.

Did we not know their blood channelled our rivers,
and the black dust our crops ate was their dust?
O all men are one at last. We should have known
the night that tidied up the cliffs and hid them
had the same questions on its tongue for us.
And there they lie that were ourselves writ strange.
(*'Nigger's Leap, New England'*)¹⁴

Here the outrages committed in the annexation of land reach a new level of horror, namely genocide, but not concluding with genocide, for an eternal consequence persists as the murdered tribe are physically synthesised into the land so that 'their blood channelled our rivers ... our crops ate... their dust' and the new occupiers literally farm and feed from the murdered

dead, who, perhaps most tragically, are 'ourselves writ strange'. The last line's terrible oscillation between sameness and difference is an essential provision for Gelder and Jacobs' flourishing of ghosts, and the poem's sense of belonging and unbelonging in and out of time coincides with their gestures towards 'the uncanny implications of being in place and "out of place" at precisely the same time'.¹⁵ The future in 'Nigger's Leap' is a haunted one, but who enacts this haunting? Although the implications of sameness are psychologically devastating in 'Nigger's Leap' it is not so much the spectres of massacred Aborigines as the spectre of night which beats boats of cloud up from the sea, swallows the range, sounds no warning or bell, hides the victims but keeps 'the same question on its tongue for us'.

Across forty years of Wright's poetry from *The Moving Image* to *Phantom Dwelling* (1985), themes encountered in 'Nigger's Leap' continue in desecrated or vengeful landscapes wreathed in 'accusing dust' ('Dust'), 'haunting silence' ('The Bones Speak'), 'storms of darkness' and 'ancient terrors' ('Song') as well as the environmental scars of a vanished people ('Bora Ring').¹⁶ In 'The Dark Ones' Aborigines come to represent, as Shirley Walker (1991) notes, 'the shadow side of the self; to deny them is the same as denying a part of the self ... like the Jungian shadow, the Aborigines must be brought up into the consciousness and accepted before the shame and guilt of the white race can be healed'.¹⁷ Wright's depiction of Aborigines as the shadow with which the Australian ego fears a union is significant, and despite Kane's concerns that 'Jungian psychology is itself a powerful and systematic mode of interpretation and we should be wary of using it superficially' he adds 'what Wright's engagement with Jung does indicate is her quite understandable need to find adequate terms for an abundant "inner world."¹⁸ Yet as a self-described Jungian, Wright also constructed the inner life of the Australian black-white relations in a country town in terms of a Jungian standoff:

A shudder like a breath caught
runs through the town.
Are *they* still here? We thought ...
Leave us alone.
(‘The Dark Ones’)¹⁹

As ‘ourselves writ strange’ once more, the Aborigines ‘gliding’ like ‘mute shadows’ through town on pension day expose the townsfolk to the ghost in themselves, the lingering shadow of guilt and shame which prevents them from making Australia, as Patrick White put it, ‘our real spiritual home’.²⁰ Wright’s spectre of night, in keeping with Gelder and Jacobs’ ghosts, crosses the nocturnal-diurnal divide into the day via the enduring, if marginalised, presence of Aboriginal people:

The night ghosts of a land
only by day possessed
come haunting into the mind
like a shadow cast.

Day has another side.
Night has its time to live,
a depth that rhymes our pride
with its alternative.

While ‘Nigger’s Leap’ evokes the spectre of night in Indigenous absence, ‘The Dark Ones’ combines the spectre of night with Indigenous presence and endurance. The trauma of corporeality in the Indigenous ‘bone and skull / that screamed falling in flesh’ (‘Nigger’s Leap’) is reflected back upon the non-Indigenous ‘shudder like a breath caught’ as ‘Something leaks in our blood / Like the ooze from a wound.’ Their ‘faces of pale stone’ likewise reflect the ‘sheer and limelit granite head’ of ‘Nigger’s Leap’. While it may appear as though Wright is paradoxically granting presence to Aborigines by removing their voices, bodies or their agency, there is deeper set of relations at play. Between the two poems, Wright is confronting one psychic structure (the individual and even national ‘babble of shamed relief’) with

the thriving spectres of that psychic structure, pre-empting Gelder and Jacobs' analysis of:

A structure in which sameness and difference solicit each other, spilling over each other's boundaries only to return again to their respective places, moving back and forth in an unpredictable, even unruly manner – a structure in which sameness and difference embrace and refuse each other simultaneously: this is where the 'ghosts' which may cause us to 'smile' or to 'worry' continue to flourish.²¹

Wright's ghosts of course inspire little smiling, but the worrying is borne as a whole by those born of the conquerors in 'The Dark Ones'.

A kind of 'soliciting' also transpires through Jung's notion of *projection* whereby:

all the contents of our unconscious are constantly projected into our surroundings ... Unless we are possessed of an unusual degree of self-awareness we shall never see through our projections but must always succumb to them, because the mind in its natural state presupposes the existence of such projections.²²

In 'The Dark Ones', the non-Indigenous ego's fear of its other (under its skin and consciousness) is projected onto the Indigenous other to distance the Jungian shadow while imposing upon the Indigenous other attributes of an (unbearable) screen – passive, two-dimensional, temporal, dependent, inanimate, Cartesian, silent, blank. By contrast the non-Indigenous ego positions itself as the creator, projector, source of light and (national) image, a more willing audience to distractions and deflections from self, other and fear of shadow than *to* self, other and shadow themselves. In this sense, the spectre of night that interrupts their day 'haunting into the mind / like a shadow cast' is cast by the townsfolk themselves, their projecting *away* of the past. Gelder and Jacobs begin to consider such notions individually rather than collectively in the cinema of Tracey Moffat's *BeDevil* (1993) and Margot

Nash's *Vacant Possession* (1996), but the Jungian, rather than neo-Freudian, framework is distinctly Wright's.

'The Dark Ones' also pre-empts Gelder and Jacobs' 'postcolonial racism' which 'sees modern Aboriginal people as lacking (which produces sympathy and "guilt") and as gaining (which produces anxiety and resentment) simultaneously: "rudimentary" and "gross"', a racism repositioned around opposing stereotypes of late-twentieth-century Indigenous difference.²³ Wright's depiction of this double-trauma is less sophisticated, but the early signs of a 'postcolonial racism' are evident. Aborigines, having endured dispossession, appear in town for pension day: their very survival, their renewed presence, despite their silence and transience shocks the town to its own mortified silence and feelings of impermanence ('Are *they* still here? We thought ...'). While colonialism has failed as an absolute, its *others* remain both like and unlike the coloniser's descendents, in and out of place. The uncanny and its ghosts thrive, and as Wright concludes 'the bargaining goes on'. Indeed, the bargaining has since manifested at a national level with land rights cases and legislative responses, much of which Wright observed herself as a land rights activist, but *Uncanny Australia* covers with a greater degree of specificity in its detailed analysis of the Wik, Hindmarsh and Jabiluka cases and their various players and commentators. It is in this manner that Gelder and Jacobs can assist Wright studies by tracing the interplay of Australian environmental and Indigenous discourses into a period when Wright (b. 1915) was less prolific as a poet and activist.

Ancestral Connections: Inheriting the Haunted Colonial House

Just as the 'pale stone' of 'The Dark Ones' recalls an earlier poetic experience, so does the 'shudder like a breath caught' which directly relates to the second facet of Wright's connection with Indigenous presence-

absence, that of family, in which the centrality of (dis)possession and the presence of recognisably Indigenous spectres are brought to the fore:

Albert [Wright's grandfather] began to understand that this was where the danger lay, the mortal wound that the blacks had known how to deal in return for their own dispossession. 'You must understand us or you must kill us,' they had said; an understanding would have meant – something beyond the powers of the white men, some renunciation impossible to be made ... He imagined a whole civilization haunted, like a house haunted by the ghost of a murdered man buried under it. The thought recalled to him suddenly the day when he had seen – or imagined – that tall warrior standing on a plain where no warrior could have been, beckoning him across to nothing but a low tussock and the teasing heat-waves of shimmering air. He was overtaken by a deep shudder at that enigmatic memory. Yes, they were all haunted – his generation. Perhaps his sons would be able to forgive, to lay [to rest] that ghost in themselves; perhaps it would remain forever at the root of this country, making every achievement empty and every struggle vain.²⁴

This haunting operates on a number of levels: a haunted civilisation, a haunted generation and its descendents, a haunted vision, a haunted memory, a haunted corporeality (the 'deep shudder'), a haunted logic ('where no warrior could have been'), a haunted soul or psyche (the 'ghost in themselves'), a terrible interplay between possession and dispossession that undermines the achievements of nationhood until a generational reckoning, a combination of restoration and exorcism, can relieve the paradox of guilt and retribution now found at the heart of Gelder and Jacobs' 'postcolonial racism'. The seeds of Gelder and Jacobs' 'entangled kind of haunting, which gives expression to a sense of (dis)possession for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people' have already matured here, more so when one considers parallel Indigenous constructions of British invaders as ghosts (engaged for example in Mudrooroo's *The Master of the Ghost Dreaming* [1995]) and the often-fraught land rights process.²⁵

The relationship ‘whereby one inhabits the other at one point, disentangles itself at another’ Gelder and Jacobs term ‘soliciting’.²⁶ Thus a reading of Wright through *Uncanny Australia* might ask how Wright interprets the uncanny, how she ‘solicits’ or represents such ‘soliciting’. In ‘At Cooloola’ Wright directly engages her grandfather’s testimony of the Indigenous apparition:

Riding at noon and ninety years ago,
My grandfather was beckoned by a ghost –
a black accoutred warrior armed for fighting,
who sank into the bare plain, as now into time past.

White shores of sand, plumed reed and paperbark,
clear heavenly levels frequented by crane and swan –
I know that we are justified only by love,
but oppressed by arrogant guilt, have room for none.

And walking on clean sand among the prints
of bird and animal, I am challenged by a driftwood spear
thrust from the water; and, like my grandfather,
must quiet a heart accused by its own fear.
(‘At Cooloola’)²⁷

This shared vision has a seemingly different, but ultimately mutual, effect upon Albert and his granddaughter. Albert, who spoke Kamilaroi and Nulalbin dialects, had an epiphany which seemed to contradict colonial spiritual prejudices, ‘if they had ghosts, they must have souls’.²⁸ It can be shocking for a twenty-first century audience to be reminded that in early Australia, Aborigines were not only constructed as non-humans but even non-humans without souls.²⁹ This is a fundamentally important moment of colonial ‘soliciting’ on Albert’s part, although Wright is also ‘soliciting’ Albert by writing for and from him. Another possible explanation for Albert’s vision – hallucinations (and projections) aside – is that he witnessed the trick or power of a ‘clever man’ or man of high degree, which Wright, who studied under the anthropologist A.P. Elkin (author of *Aboriginal Men of*

High Degree [1945]), fails to consider.³⁰ ‘Challenged’ like her grandfather, Judith’s philosophical standpoint is clear: ‘I know that we are justified only by love, / but oppressed by arrogant guilt, have room for none.’ The ‘justified only by love’ of ‘At Cooloola’ is as groundbreaking as her ‘there they lie that were ourselves writ strange’ of ‘Nigger’s Leap’, but it has also moved from recognition of the sameness-strangeness of the decimated other to the vital terms for co-existence, a reconciliation both with the decimated other and the intergenerational guilt and fear that fuels ‘postcolonial racism’. Over time, this concept of dynamic, unifying love emerges as Wright’s primary tool for countering the colonial-ancestral legacy of a haunted society in poems such as ‘Two Dreamtimes’ and ‘Shadow’.

Precedents and Resolutions

In *The Generations of Men* the origins of ‘postcolonial racism’, ‘entanglement’ and the haunted house image are so clearly mapped out it seems almost incongruous that Wright does not appear in *Uncanny Australia*. Furthermore, in ‘Nigger’s Leap’, ‘At Cooloola’ and ‘The Dark Ones’ her linking of Jungian tropes of ego and shadow to the Australian national psyche and its relationship to Indigenous Australia is in many ways ahead of Gelder-Jacobs’ Freudian uncanny, which could have easily shifted to a Jungian model had they expanded their argument (why, after all, should the uncanny itself ‘settle’?). Wright’s absence also highlights the stature of other purveyors of Australian uncanniness necessarily omitted from a co-authored one hundred and forty-five pages. Conversely, *Uncanny Australia* contributes in its own way to Judith Wright studies in its construction of the Australian ghost story as an entangled structure of (dis)possession and simultaneity informing concepts of ‘soliciting’ and ‘postcolonial racism’. As this contribution has been examined at length, this paper will conclude with some solutions which Wright offers *Uncanny Australia’s* construction of Australian haunting.

What exactly do Gelder and Jacobs offer the twenty-first-century? Certainly their critical innovations and rigorous scrutinising of late-twentieth century Australian public affairs are positive contributions. Their final suggestion that ‘an uncanny experience of democracy’ might need to be built into postcolonial narratives is deliberately left open but remains problematic – isn’t democracy, and indeed nationalism, a product of uncanny experience to begin with, or an agent which can reconfigure that experience?³¹ Do Wright’s proposed and partly enacted solutions to the ongoing cycle of (dis)possession conceive a different future to Gelder and Jacobs’ uncanny Australia, ‘where one’s place is already another’s place and the issue of possession is never complete, never entirely settled’?³² Although Wright may be situated within *Uncanny Australia* as an unacknowledged founder of its postcolonial thesis, she may equally operate outside the text to extend and critique its arguments. Thus, when Gelder and Jacobs refer to ‘the conventional colonial distinctions between self and other, here and there, mine and yours’ *The Generations of Men* might serve as a bridging work to the past which show that although such conventions might have been proposed, at the colonial frontier, on the *ground* as it were, such monolithic notions were from their inception subject to challenge, hauntings, madness and chaos from the ‘other’ as a shadow or spectre of self and surroundings.³³ The ‘colonial fantasy’ of *terra nullius* which Gelder and Jacobs envisage as having ‘operated through the frame of a postcolonial racism’ in John Howard’s response to the 1996 Wik ruling can therefore be seen as a triple fantasy, firstly to suppress the challenge of the uncanny, and secondly to propose that colonialism was something more than a fantasy itself, and thirdly to ensure the legitimacy (post)colonial fantasies into the future.³⁴ Furthermore, when Gelder and Jacobs call ‘postcolonial racism’ an ‘unstable form of racism’ one need only to refer to ‘Nigger’s Leap’, ‘The Dark Ones’ or ‘Two Dreamtimes’ to be reminded there is no psychologically or socioculturally ‘stable’ racism.³⁵

These are just some examples of how a present-absent Wright can variously haunt postcolonial discourse in *Uncanny Australia*, while also suggesting a poetics of resolution. Gelder and Jacobs conclude:

The aim of this book has been as follows: to contemplate the possibility of producing a postcolonial narrative which, rather than falling into a binary that either distinguishes 'us' from 'them' or brings us all together as the same, would instead think through the uncanny implications of being in place and 'out of place' at precisely the same time.³⁶

This implies they may seek no resolution at all to being in and out of place in such a manner. Yet given the enormous sociocultural implications of Indigenous and non-Indigenous (dis)possession and entangling identified the Australian ghost story, is a contemplation of this state enough, is it (as Brady suggests) an abrogation of responsibility, or is it in fact *more* satisfactory than Wright's proposed recourse to love and psychic unity?

In 'At Cooloolah' Wright, identifies generational guilt as a major obstacle to the ability of her concept of love to overcome colonial haunting. Rather than simply explore the manifestations of this guilt as Gelder and Jacobs have done, Wright found solace in her love for her philosopher husband Jack McKinney. Love poems such as 'Woman's Song,' 'All Things Conspire,' 'Our Love is So Natural,' 'The Flame Tree,' 'For a Birthday' and 'Interplay' are expressions of a justifying, transcendent love within what their daughter Meredith McKinney calls 'the joint project they were engaged in ... at the core of this vision for them both was Love, that transcendent experience that reaches beyond the isolated "I" to embrace the other and ultimately the world itself'.³⁷ Jack McKinney identified a weakening solicitation in Western philosophy between the progressive analysis and 'the world itself' which created a despairing sense of being both in the world and out of the world, a Western intellectual form of the *uncanny*, or as Wright later described it 'we Western peoples have lived out the life of the intellect, and it has resulted in a deep and schizophrenic imbalance, which we do not

know how to correct'.³⁸ For Wright, this imbalance fostered genocide, ecological devastation, capitalist exploitation and the atom bomb. Transcendent love and activism were two paths to personal and national reconciliation, but the threat of the international other remains at large in Wright's last collection *Phantom Dwelling* (1985), where the cycle of possession-dispossession is wrenchingly revealed:

We were always part of a process. It has expanded...
What sort of takeover bid
could you knock back now if the miners,
the junk-food firms or their processors want your land?
(‘For A Pastoral Family’)³⁹

One solution for Wright is to seek to be the ‘in the world’ by restoration of land and custodianship in her activist role combined with a union with the Jungian shadow in her poetic role:

Now I accept you, shadow,
I change you; we are one.
I must enclose a darkness
since I contain the Sun.
(‘Shadow’)⁴⁰

Though the Jungian shadow is only one aspect of the ‘other’, it is, as in ‘The Dark Ones’ particularly relevant to Australia’s haunted colonial legacy. Wright proposes not so much a uniformity as a vital linking of the interplay between sameness and difference to humanity and ecology. Her duty to resolve the terrible impasse witnessed by her grandfather is undertaken by recording the remnants she discovers (‘Nigger’s Leap’, ‘Bora Ring’) and publishing the confusion about the Indigenous sacred from her ancestor’s diaries (‘At Cooloola’, *The Generations of Men*). Importantly, this process does not include appropriating Aboriginal legends in the style of the Jindyworobaks (one of whom, Roland Robinson, Gelder and Jacobs use

without qualification) and even to her ‘shadow-sister’ Oodgeroo Noonuccal Wright only claims a sorority of dispossession:

If we are sisters, it's in this —
our grief for a lost country,
the place we dreamed in long ago,
poisoned now and crumbling.
(‘Two Dreamtimes’)⁴¹

Finally, conscious that even their dispossessions should not be compared (and thus Noonuccal’s very dispossession appropriated), she adds ‘trust none – not even poets’.

Gelder and Jacobs did not avoid the words of a single Australian poet for this reason and have thus creating a need for poets to be read into or in conjunction with *Uncanny Australia*. They even avoid postcolonial Indigenous poets such as Lionel Fogarty who also offers much in his uncanny absence. This, in fact, is the first major query of a Wright-based critique: Where are the poets? The immediate follow-up question, which Wright herself intimates in ‘Two Dreamtimes’, is of even greater relevance – where *aren't* the poets? One answer is in *Uncanny Australia*. Wright, like Gelder and Jacobs, refuses to remain within the binary ‘them’ and ‘us’ she sees in *The Generations of Men* and ‘The Dark Ones’ yet at the same time, as she makes abundantly clear in ‘Two Dreamtimes’, the transcendent unity she seeks is less a gesture towards a utopian sameness than one towards the interconnected humanity too unbearably tragic to deny. Ghost stories carry such tragedy between ‘them’ and ‘us’ like messengers of a broken accord. A mutually entangled reading of Wright and *Uncanny Australia* operates in a similar fashion by moving between haunting and its deathless messages to show that while solitude reveals the ghost story, it is no one’s story alone.

Toby Davidson is a lecturer and researcher at Deakin University Warrnambool who has recently completed his PhD thesis titled ‘Born of Fire, Possessed by Darkness: Mysticism and Australian Poetry’

which traces the influence of Western Christian mysticism in Australian poetry from 1828 to 2007 focusing on five major poets, including Judith Wright. This paper was accepted for and delivered at the 2005 ASAL 'Spectres, Screens, Mirrors' conference at the University of Western Australia.

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- ¹ Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 42.
- ² Gelder and Jacobs, ix, 23.
- ³ Stephen Muecke, 'Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation (Review)', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 34.3 (November 1999), 477.
- ⁴ Veronica Brady, 'Sacred Ground: An Exploration', *Journal of Australian Studies* 86 (January 2006), 93, 95.
- ⁵ Veronica Brady, 'Truths, Illusions and Collisions', *Australian Book Review* 211 (June 1999), 24.
- ⁶ Brady, 25. See Paul Kane, *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- ⁷ Ken Gelder, 'When the Imaginary is not Uncanny: Nation, Psyche and Belonging in Recent Australian Cultural Criticism and History', *Journal of Australian Studies* 86 (January 2006), 167.
- ⁸ Gelder and Jacobs, 28, 30.
- ⁹ Gelder and Jacobs, 32.
- ¹⁰ Gelder and Jacobs, 138.
- ¹¹ Judith Wright, *Half a Lifetime* (Melbourne: Text, 1999), 33.
- ¹² Judith Wright, *Collected Poems 1942-1985* (Pymble: Angus and Robertson, 1994), 315.
- ¹³ Judith Wright, *The Generations of Men* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965), 162.
- ¹⁴ Wright, *Collected Poems*, 15.
- ¹⁵ Gelder and Jacobs, 139.
- ¹⁶ Wright, 23, 53, 96, 8.
- ¹⁷ Shirley Walker, *Flame and Shadow: A Study of Judith Wright's Poetry* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1991), 190.
- ¹⁸ Paul Kane, *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1996, 162.
- ¹⁹ Meredith McKinney and Patricia Clarke (eds.), *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*, ed. Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2006) 216. Wright, *Collected Poems*, 354.
- ²⁰ Patrick White cited in Veronica Brady, *South of My Days: A Biography of Judith Wright* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1998), 220.
- ²¹ Gelder and Jacobs, 42.
- ²² Carl Jung, *Dreams*, tr. R.F.C. Hull, (London: Routledge, 2002), 52.
- ²³ Gelder and Jacobs, 65.
- ²⁴ Wright, *The Generations of Men*, 162.
- ²⁵ Gelder and Jacobs, 42. See Mudrooroo, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (Pymble: Angus and Robertson, 1995). The controversy over Mudrooroo's identity is chronicled in Maureen Clark, *Mudrooroo, A Likely Story: Identity and Belonging in Postcolonial Australia* (Brussels-New York: Peter Lang, 2007).
- ²⁶ Gelder and Jacobs, 138.
- ²⁷ Wright, *Collected Poems*, 140.
- ²⁸ Wright, *The Generations of Men*, 92-93; Judith Wright, *The Cry for the Dead* (Curtin University: API Network, 2004), 159.
- ²⁹ Wright, *The Generations of Men*, 33.
- ³⁰ See A.P. Elkin, *Aboriginal Men of High Degree: Initiation and Sorcery in the World's Oldest Tradition* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994). Wright studied under Elkin at Sydney University in 1935-36 and subsequently remained in contact with him (Brady, *South of My Days*, 54).
- ³¹ Gelder and Jacobs, 138.
- ³² Gelder and Jacobs, 138.
- ³³ Gelder and Jacobs, 138.
- ³⁴ Gelder and Jacobs, 136.
- ³⁵ Gelder and Jacobs, 65.
- ³⁶ Gelder and Jacobs, 139.
- ³⁷ Meredith McKinney and Patricia Clarke (eds.), *Equal Heart and Mind: Letters Between Judith Wright and Jack McKinney* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004), 11.
- ³⁸ Wright cited in Walker, *Flame and Shadow*, 10.
- ³⁹ Wright, *Collected Poems*, 407.

⁴⁰ Wright, *Collected Poems*, 292.

⁴¹ Wright, *Collected Poems*, 315.