Australia 1970

SUMMARY

The speaker instructs Australia's wild landscapes to die fighting like a wedge-tailed eagle: ferocious to the very end, lashing out with its claws and beak, angrily cursing those who try to capture it.

Australia should die like the tigersnake, hissing out utter disgust in its agony—a disgust so powerful it haunts its killer's dreams like unwelcome thoughts of suicide.

The wilderness should experience the agony of tough, dense trees being torn down by bulldozers. The speaker imagines the rich soil disappearing along with the tree, leaving nothing but barren ground.

Australia should die the way a soldier ant would, the speaker continues, unthinkingly true to the same cause for eons. Even as people taint the land with their mistreatment and abuse, Australia must remain stubbornly ignorant.

The speaker wishes all this because the people who have tried to dominate and tale Australia are just hurting themselves in the process, even more than a scorpion or snake would; they're killing themselves with the same poison they use to kill the landscape.

The speaker admires the lacerating dryness of the land, the dust blowing on the wind, the empty stream, and the ferocious animals because they keep fighting back against human invaders. It's only right, the speaker declares, that people are destroyed by the very thing they're killing.

THEMES

NATURE VS. HUMANITY

"Australia 1970" pits Australia's "wild country" against those who'd seek to tame it. The poem is specifically responding to Europeans' historical colonization of Australia. When European settlers first arrived in Australia in the late 1700s, they tried to conquer its rugged landscapes and transform them into a version of their own homeland. Since then, what was once an incredibly biodiverse and awe-inspiring environment, long stewarded by Aboriginal peoples, has been systematically eroded by industrialization, urbanization, and intentional de-wilding. Wright's poem celebrates the danger and ferocity of pre-colonized Australia, with the speaker rooting for *that* Australia to fight back against its oppressive invaders. More generally, it expresses deep anger and frustration at the way human beings dominate and destroy the environment—something the poem argues is self-defeating, as it will eventually result in humanity's *own* "ruin[]."

The poem's speaker, whom readers can interpret as Wright herself, repeatedly tells Australia's wild animals and landscapes to "die" ferociously—"like the eaglehawk / dangerous till the last breath's gone." In other words, they shouldn't give in too easily but rather should go out "clawing and striking, "cursing [their] captor through a raging eye." The speaker wants Australia's wild places to free themselves from human domination, or, if they can't, to make their anger felt on their way out. She thus roots for Australia to "stay obstinate" and "blind" to humanity's "corrupt[ion]": to remain stubborn and steadfast in the face of people's attempts to bend nature to their own ends.

The speaker clearly admires Australia's tenacious spirit and wants it to live on. She "praise[s]" the very things that her countrymen seek to dominate—"the scoring drought, the flying dust, / the drying creek, [and] the furious animal"—for opposing humanity's subjugation, for continuing to make life difficult rather than simply giving in. She doesn't want to see the Australia she knows and loves disappear and calls for the wilderness to remain "mindless and faithful to [its] million years." In other words, she wants to see the land live on as it always has, to resist the changes human beings try to force upon it.

The speaker ultimately argues that humanity's destruction of the environment isn't just cruel but actively harmful to humanity itself. "[W]e are ruined by the thing we kill," the speaker says. In cutting down trees, killing off wildlife, and endlessly expanding industry, human beings aren't just destroying the earth; they're destroying part of *themselves*. People depend on the land and need it to survive. Indeed, the poem suggests that it is humans who will "d[ie] of the venoms that we make." Humanity will pay the ultimate price for its cruelty.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

Die, wild country, ...
... a raging eye.

The speaker of "Australia 1970" begins the poem by addressing the "wild country" of Australia directly. This apostrophe turns Australia into a living, breathing character in the poem—one that the speaker desperately wants to fight back against its

human oppressors.

Some historical context is helpful to understand what's happening here. This "wild country" refers to the natural landscapes that European settlers in Australia began cutting away at almost as soon as they arrived in the late 1700s. Prior to their arrival, the landscape was rugged, dangerous, and untamed. Native populations lived in harmony with the land, but the settlers, missing the pastoral landscapes they'd left behind, were afraid of Australia's wilderness and sought to conquer it.

In calling for this "wild country" to die "like the eaglehawk," an aggressive bird of prey native to Australia, the speaker is calling for the country to go down *fighting*, to remain "dangerous till the last breath's gone." She doesn't want to see the wilderness just roll over and give up; the speaker doesn't know if Australia's natural landscapes will survive, but if they're going to die, they should at least die "clawing and striking." Indeed, the speaker wants to see the land "cursing [its] captor through a raging eye."

The sounds of these lines make them feel all the more ferocious, with the pounding /d/ alliteration of "die" and "dangerous" and the sharp /k/ alliteration of "clawing," "cursing," and "captor" (plus the consonance of "eaglehawk" and "striking"). Readers can hear the speaker's fury rippling off the page. The anaphora of the word "Die" also makes the speaker's words feel insistent and passionate.

This stanza establishes the poem's form: "Australia 1970" consists of quatrains (four-line stanzas). The rhyme scheme here is ABCC: the last two lines of the stanza rhyme with each other ("Die"/"eye"). The speaker will play with this pattern throughout the poem, keeping readers' on their toes.

Finally, while the poem's meter is ultimately inconsistent, there are lots of trochees (stressed-unstressed) throughout. Here, each line begins with a stressed beat: "Die," "dangerous," "clawing," "cursing." These pounding beats make the poem feel forceful and grant it a passionate, propulsive energy.

LINES 5-8

Die like the ...
... suicide's invading stain.

The second stanza begins with anaphora, the speaker again repeating the call to Australia's "wild country" to "die." Using another simile, the speaker tells Australia's natural landscapes to "Die like the tigersnake," an extremely venomous Australian snake, its dying "hiss" being the sound of "pure hatred." That hiss is so terrible, the speaker continues, that it haunts its "killer's dreams," infiltrating that killer's mind like unwanted, unshakable thoughts of suicide.

The motion of "suicide's invading stain" foreshadows the point the speaker makes at the poem's end: that in destroying the Australian landscape, people are really destroying themselves. At some point, humanity will be haunted by its choices to carve up the earth's natural spaces. Human beings are akin to a suicidal "stain" upon this wild country.

Once again, the poem's sounds make the speaker's rage all the more palpable for readers. For one thing, these lines are intensely sibilant, evoking the very "hiss" of "hatred" that the speaker describes: "tigersnake," "hisses," "suicide's," "stain." More general alliteration ("hisses," "hatred"; "pure," "pain"; "fills," "fear") and assonance ("Die like [...] tigersnake," "fills the killer's," "invading stain") add to the lines' intensity as well. Note, too, that lines 5-8 are all enjambed, creating building momentum that suggests the speaker's building passion.

While the first stanza followed an ABCC rhyme scheme, the second stanza switches things up: here, the second and fourth lines rhyme ("pain"/"stain") rather than the final two. While the poem is musical, it's not entirely predictable.

LINES 9-12

Suffer, wild country, ...
... to naked poverty.

This time, the speaker tells the "wild country" of Australia to "suffer" rather than die. And where the first two stanzas called on Australia to emulate some of its most ferocious animals, in this stanza the speaker tells it to suffer like "ironwood" (that is, extraordinarily hardy trees or shrubs).

Grammatically, the opening line of this stanza remains identical to the first line of the poem. This parallelism makes the poem feel dynamic while still emphasizing the same key idea: that humanity is destroying the countryside, and that Australia mustn't just lay down the red carpet for industry and expansion. Instead, it should be as rigid as the toughest of trees, so dense and solid that their wood jams up the "dozer-blade" (that is, the bulldozer blade) that tries to chop them down.

As this "ironwood" is uprooted, the "living soil" below it is also stripped away. It "ebb[s]" like the tide, leaving "naked poverty"—or barren, empty ground—in its wake. Literally, without the shelter of trees, the soil itself erodes and disappears; the land becomes arid and nothing new will grow. Symbolically, the loss of "living soil" reflects the loss of Australia's life force or essence. The earch is filled with rich resources; once these are gone, all those left will be livin gin a kind of "poverty.

LINES 13-16

Die like the ...
... obstinate; stay blind.

The speaker again tells Australia to "Die," this time "like the soldier-ant." A "soldier-ant" is an aggressive hunter, so the simile again suggests the speaker's admiration for fierce, untamed wildlife. Like the ant, the speaker wants the countryside to remain "mindless and faithful to [its] million

years": existing as it has for eons, unthinkingly devoted to its cause.

The humming /m/ alliteration of "mindless" and "million" highlight this image for readers. The speaker isn't insulting nature by calling it "mindless"; instead, she's contrasting the way nature has evolved over millions of years to exist in harmony with the way humanity constantly schemes and meddles with its environment. Humanity's twisted, "torturing mind" tarnishes nature; people "corrupt" nature's inherent perfection.

Note that the speaker includes herself among those who "corrupt" the earth. Judith Wright was of Cornish heritage and a fierce advocate for Aboriginal land rights; she uses the words "we" and "our" here to acknowledge that her very existence in Australia is a legacy of European colonialism and white settlers' attempts to tame Australia's "wild country."

In response to these attempts at corruption, the speaker tells the earth to "stay obstinate; stay blind." The anaphora of "stay" makes the speaker sound more emphatic and forceful as she calls on the land to remain stubborn and unyielding—to refuse to even acknowledge humanity's tortuous influence.

LINES 17-20

For we are ...
... die of us.

In the fifth stanza, the speaker shifts focus from Australia's "wild country" to humanity itself. Human beings (and in particular, those settlers who have violently altered and destroyed Australia's natural landscapes) are "conquerors and self-poisoners / more than scorpion or snake." People are even more dangerous than the most dangerous creatures in nature.

The sibilance of lines 17-18 fill the poem with a threatening hiss, one that mimics that of the "snake" mentioned:

> For we are conquerors and self-poisoners
> more than scorpion or snake

People, the speaker continues, make our own metaphorical "venoms" (for example, pollution) that seep into the world around us. The land "dies of us": our presence is deadly, poisonous. But we are also "self-poisoners": we can't live without the earth, and thus if we destroy it, we destroy ourselves.

Once again, the speaker doesn't exempt herself: using the pronoun "we" throughout this stanza acknowledges her complicity in the destruction of the land she loves.

LINES 21-24

I praise the ...
... thing we kill.

The speaker is rooting for Australia's "wild country" and spends this stanza praising the very things that make its landscape so difficult for people to tame. Things like "the scoring drought" (i.e., the intense dryness that makes the earth crack and split), swirls of "dust," parched creeks, and "the furious animal"—these are all ways that Australia stubbornly "oppose[s]" those who try to turn it into something it's not. The speaker honors Australia's "wild country" for refusing to give up, for "still" making life hard for people—for refusing to be conquered.

The sounds of these lines add intensity to the speaker's words. The /d/ alliteration pounds out like a drumbeat ("drought," "dust," "drying"), while the fricative /f/ sounds and hissing sibilance evoke hiss of the wind through this dry, harsh—yet, to the speaker, majestic—landscape ("flying dust," "furious," "us still").

In the end, the speaker even actively roots for humanity's demise: she "praise[s]" the fact "that we are ruined by the thing we kill." The earth grows barren and lifeless because of human interference, and this will spell the end of humanityWhat people seem to often forget, the poem implies, is that our fate is tied up in the fate of our environment. The earth can survive without people, but we can't survive without the earth.

SYMBOLS

AUSTRALIA'S ANIMALS AND LANDSCAPES

The ferocious animals and landscapes mentioned throughout the poem symbolize the fierce, indomitable spirit of Australia's "wild country." Australia is dangerous and fierce as the "eaglehawk," deadly as the "tigersnake," tough as "ironwood," and steadfast as the "mindless and faithful" soldier-ant. Its harsh, dry, dusty lands and "furious" wildlife represent the country's wild, untameable heart—a heart that stubbornly resists humanity's attempts to "corrupt" it. They're a reminder that nature won't give up without a fight.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-3:** "Die, wild country, like the eaglehawk, / dangerous till the last breath's gone, / clawing and striking."
- **Lines 5-6:** "Die like the tigersnake / that hisses such pure hatred from its pain"
- **Lines 9-10:** "Suffer, wild country, like the ironwood / that gaps the dozer-blade."
- **Lines 13-14:** "Die like the soldier-ant / mindless and faithful to your million years."
- **Lines 21-22:** "I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust, / the drying creek, the furious animal,"

POETIC DEVICES

SIMILE

The poem uses a series of similes to illustrate the tenacity of Australia's "wild country." In the first stanza, the speaker tells the landscapes to "Die [...] like the eaglehawk." An eaglehawk is an Australian eagle known for its aggressive behavior. With this simile, the speaker is telling Australia to fight back to the bitter end against those who would try to tame it—to remain "dangerous till the last breath's gone, / clawing and striking." In other words, Australia's countryside shouldn't die without doing everything it can to hurt its enemy (that is, humanity) in the process.

Likewise, the speaker tells the "wild country" to "Die like the tigersnake," an extremely venomous Australian snake. The snake's painful, dying hiss is the sound of "pure hatred"—a sound so haunting, the speaker says in another simile, that it will "fill the killer's dreams / with fear like suicide's invading stain." The sound will haunt its killer, seeping into their mind like unwanted yet unshakable thoughts of suicide. This dark image foreshadows the point the speaker will make later in the poem: that in destroying the earth, humanity is destroying itself.

In the third stanza, the speaker tells the "wild country" to "Suffer [...] like the ironwood / that gaps the dozer-blade." Just as the toughest trees jam up the bulldozer's blade, nature should refuse to give in peacefully. Instead, it should "Die like the soldier-ant / mindless and faithful to your million years." The ant is unthinkingly steadfast, driven by millions of years of evolution; it won't be led astray by humanity's "corrupt[ion]."

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-3:** "Die, wild country, like the eaglehawk, / dangerous till the last breath's gone, / clawing and striking."
- **Lines 5-8:** "Die like the tigersnake / that hisses such pure hatred from its pain / as fills the killer's dreams / with fear like suicide's invading stain."
- **Lines 9-10:** "Suffer, wild country, like the ironwood / that gaps the dozer-blade."
- **Lines 13-14:** "Die like the soldier-ant / mindless and faithful to your million years."

ANAPHORA

Anaphora makes the speaker's calls to Australia sound more passionate and intense. Note how many lines begin with the word "Die":

- "Die, wild country, like the eaglehawk,"
- "Die / cursing your captor through a raging eye."
- "Die like the tigersnake"
- "Die like the soldier ant"

This repetition is emphatic, even desperate. Repeating the word "Die" in particular also highlights the relentless nature of humanity's exploitation of the earth.

There's more anaphora in line 16, when the speaker tells the wilderness to "stay obstinate; stay blind." The repetition again conveys the speaker's passion as she calls on the "wild country" to "stay" stubborn in the face of humanity's foolishness.

The anaphora in the poem's closing lines create a sense of completion or finality:

> that they oppose us still;
> that we are ruined by the thing we kill.

The speaker is grateful that the land "still" resists humanity's attempts to dominate it—and that those attempts to dominate the land will ultimately spell humanity's doom.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Die, wild country"
- **Lines 3-4:** "Die / cursing your captor"
- **Line 5:** "Die like the tigersnake"
- **Line 13:** "Die like the soldier-ant"
- **Line 16:** "stay obstinate; stay blind."
- **Line 23:** "that they oppose us still;"
- **Line 24:** "that we are ruined by the thing we kill."

ALLITERATION

Alliteration (as well as occasional assonance, consonance, and sibilance) adds intensity to the poem, helping to convey both the speaker's anger and the harshness and wildness of the Australian landscape.

In the first two lines, for example, the booming /d/ alliteration of "Die" and "dangerous" makes the speaker's call feel firm and forceful, pounding through the poem like a drumbeat. The /k/ alliteration (and consonance of "striking") at the end of the stanza is harsh and biting, evoking the sharpness of those "claws" and the rage the speaker describes:

> clawing and striking. Die
> cursing your captor through a raging eye.

In the next stanza, huffing /h/ sounds, fricative /f/ sounds, plosive /p/ sounds, and hissing /s/ sounds convey the speaker's spitting rage while also mimicking the threatening, angry "hiss" of that tigersnake:

> that hisses such pure hatred from its pain
> as fills the killer's dreams
> with fear like suicide's invading stain.

General sibilance ("tigersnake," "hisses") and internal rhyme

("fills the killer's") add to the effect: the sonic intensity of the lines mirrors the intensity of that snake's "hatred" and "pain." The alliterative sibilance and sharp /k/ consonance of lines 17-18 work in much the same way, filling the lines with another sinister hiss:

> For we are conquerors and self-poisoners
> more than scorpion or snake

Finally, forceful alliteration in lines 21-22 hammer home the speaker's love for nature's danger and wildness, its untamable, unbreakable spirit:

> I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust,
> the drying creek, the furious animal,

Again, consonance adds to the effect: listen to the sharp, biting sounds of "scoring" and "creek" as well as the sibilance of "scoring," "dust," "furious," and "us still." Overall, the poem uses its sounds to make its message—and anger—palpable for the reader.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Die"
- **Line 2:** "dangerous"
- **Line 3:** "clawing," "Die"
- **Line 4:** "cursing," "captor"
- **Line 6:** "hisses," "pure," "hatred," "pain"
- **Line 8:** "suicide's," "stain"
- **Line 14:** "mindless," "million"
- **Line 17:** "self"
- **Line 18:** "scorpion," "snake"
- **Line 21:** "drought," "flying," "dust"
- **Line 22:** "drying," "furious"

APOSTROPHE

Throughout the poem, the speaker directly addresses Australia's "wild country": the fierce, dangerous, untamed parts of Australia that existed long before European settlers arrived. She tells the land to "die" fighting, to make humanity suffer as it suffers, to spit "pure hatred from its pain" and remain "faithful" to the same cause it's upheld for a "million years." She tells Australia to "stay obstinate; stay blind": to stubbornly resist and ignore humanity's attempts to "corrupt" it.

All this apostrophe makes the poem more dramatic and emotional: the speaker talks to Australia as though it were a living, breathing being engaged in an epic battle against humanity. The relentlessness of the speaker's commands to "Die" and "Suffer" also echo the relentlessness of the violence settlers committed against the continent. As she calls out to Australia, the speaker reveals her deep admiration and respect for its lands and wildlife in the face of such disrespect. She's not interested in talking to other human beings; instead, she devotes her energy to empowering her country. She expresses a heartfelt desire for nature to persevere, or, if it can't, to at least go down fighting.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Die, wild country,"
- **Lines 3-4:** "Die / cursing your captor through a raging eye."
- **Line 5:** "Die like the tigersnake"
- **Line 9:** "Suffer, wild country,"
- **Lines 11-12:** "I see your living soil ebb with the tree / to naked poverty."
- **Lines 13-16:** "Die like the soldier-ant / mindless and faithful to your million years. / Though we corrupt you with our torturing mind, / stay obstinate; stay blind."
- **Line 20:** "even while you die of us."

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker personifies Australia's "wild country" throughout the poem, addressing it directly as though it were a conscious entity capable of taking the speaker's advice. In the first stanza, after using a simile to compare the wilderness to a fierce "eaglehawk," the speaker tells it to "Die / cursing your captor through a raging eye." The speaker envisions Australia's natural landscapes as a furious prisoner trying to break free. This image suggests the power humanity yields over its environment and casts the conflict as a drama in which the speaker (and most likely the reader) are rooting for the underdog.

Later, in stanza 4, the speaker tells the earth to "stay obstinate; stay blind." This personification grants the wilderness will of its own. The same is true of the personification in the final stanza, where the speaker praises the land and animals for continuing to "oppose" human beings. Such personification conveys the speaker's deep admiration for nature. Nature isn't just some unfeeling object waiting to be dominated, the poem implies; instead, this personification puts Australia's "wild country" on the same footing as humanity itself, presenting the land and its creatures as inherently worthy of autonomy and respect.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

VOCABULARY

Eaglehawk (Line 1) - A large Australian eagle known for being aggressive.

Captor (Line 4) - Someone who holds someone or something else prisoner. Here, the word refers to those people who seek to tame and dominate Australia's wilderness.

Tigersnake (Line 5) - An extremely poisonous snake that lives in Australia.

Ironwood (Line 9) - A tree with very hard, dense wood.

Gaps (Lines 9-10) - To make holes in.

Dozer-blade (Lines 9-10) - The blade of the bulldozer.

Ebb (Line 11) - Gradually disappear.

Soldier-ant (Line 13) - Also known as army or warrior ants, "solder-ants" are larger and more aggressive than worker ants and are responsible for finding and killing prey.

Corrupt (Line 15) - Alter something in negative ways; debase; contaminate.

Obstinate (Line 16) - Stubborn.

Scoring (Line 21) - To "score" something is to scratch it or cut lines into it. Here, the word implies that the arid climate cuts lines into the land (or, more metaphorically, cuts its inhabitants).

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Australia 1970" contains 24 lines broken up into six quatrains (four-line stanzas). The poem's language is impassioned and its imagery intense, but the poem's form is relatively controlled and measured. This make's the speaker's rage feel all the more pointed: the poem's boiling anger doesn't feel chaotic but rather razor-sharp and laser-focused.

METER

The poem's meter is irregular and unpredictable, for the most part. The speaker is more focused on conveying her passion than sticking to a steady beat.

Still, there are some noticeable metrical patterns in the poem. For example, many lines here begin with trochees (poetic feet that follow a stressed-unstressed pattern) or spondees (two stressed beats in a row). Frontloading lines with stressed beats like this makes them sound more forceful and emphatic, as readers can hear in the first stanza (note that "wild" might be scanned as having one syllable, "wild," or two, "wi-ld"):

> Die, wild
> Dangerous
> clawing
> cursing

Many of the poem's lines also fall into iambic (unstressed-stressed) rhythms entirely or after these opening feet, as with line 7 and lines 13 and 14:

> as fills | the kill- | er's dreams
> [...]
> Die like | the sold- | ier-ant
> mindless | and faith- | ful to | your mil- | lion years

Iambs create a confident, marching rhythm that helps to evoke the country's stubborn power.

RHYME SCHEME

"Australia 1970" contains plenty of rhyme, but its rhyme scheme isn't entirely predictable (much like its use of meter). Generally speaking, the last two lines of each stanza rhyme ("Die" and "eye," "tree" and "poverty," etc.). The first stanza establishes this rhyme scheme of ABCC.

However, stanzas 2 and 5 deviate from the pattern. In the second stanza, lines 2 and 4 rhyme with each other ("pain" and "stain") while lines 5 and 7 don't. The pattern is thus ABCB. And in stanza 5, lines 18 and 19 rhyme with each other ("snake" and "make"), creating the pattern ABBC.

The poem is thus musical but not strict; it retains some "wildness," resisting the poet's established rhyme scheme much like the landscape resists humanity's attempts to tame it.

SPEAKER

Readers can assume that the speaker of "Australia 1970" is Judith Wright herself. Wright was a passionate advocate for both the environment and Aboriginal rights. Here, she expresses her fury at her countrymen's attempts to dominate and tame Australia's "wild country." She calls on the land to go down kicking and screaming, and she event roots for it to "ruin" the thing killing it—that is, other people like herself.

Importantly, Wright, a descendent of Cornish settlers, considers herself among the "conquerors and self-poisoners" who are "corrupt[ing]" Australia. She's not literally bulldozing her surroundings, but she accepts that she's part of the harmful legacy of European colonization that's threatening to destroy the land she loves.

SETTING

Given the title, readers can assume that the poem takes place in Australia in 1970: two centuries after European settlers first came to the continent and began to tame its wild landscapes. The speaker alludes to this history in telling the remaining parts of "wild country" to "Die" fighting—that is, to push back against humanity until the bitter end.

The "wild country" the poem depicts is harsh, dangerous, and decidedly unwelcoming to human beings. It's the home of the aggressive "eaglehawk," the venomous "tigersnake," and the stubbornly marching "soldier-ant"; of "ironwood" so dense it jams up bulldozer blades and "drought" so intense it seems to

"score," or scratch, the earth; of dried-up creek beds and swirling dust storms. The speaker praises these "furious," ferocious landscapes for refusing to bend to humanity's will. Much of Australia's "wild country" remains "wild," for now at least.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

The Australian author Judith Wright (1915-2000) published over 50 books in her lifetime. In addition to her work as a poet, Wright is also known for her short stories, literary criticism, and activism on behalf of the environment and Aboriginal rights. Her poetry often explores the tensions between humanity and the natural world as well as that between Australian settlers and First Nations People.

"Australia 1970" appeared in Wright's 1970 collection *Shadow*. Though it is clearly about a very specific time and place, it also belongs to a wider tradition of poems that address humanity's destruction of the natural world. In this way, it builds on the legacy of earlier Romantic and Victorian poets like William Blake ("London") and Gerard Manley Hopkins ("Binsey Poplars"), who responded to the industrialization of their own eras by writing poems lamenting the destruction of nature and the misery of urban life. More modern poems that explore the dramatic effects of humanity's destruction of the earth include "For a Coming Extinction" by W. S. Merwin, "Sea Change" by Jorie Graham, and "Once the World Was Perfect" by Joy Harjo.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Wright's poetry was the product of the time and place in which she lived. She was inspired by the beautiful landscapes of southern Queensland, Australia, where she spent most of her life. At the same time, Wright lived through World War II and was horrified by the way human beings ravaged each other and the environment alike.

More specifically, she witnessed the devastating effects of British colonialism on Australia's native peoples and landscapes. European settlers landed in Australia in 1788 and quickly went to work trying to tame the inhospitable wilderness that bore little resemblance to the pastoral landscapes they were used to. In doing so, they marred Australia's unique biodiversity and destroyed the delicate balance between the earth and First Nations People who had been living in sync with nature for thousands of years.

The speaker of "Australia 1970" identifies as one of these "conquerors and self-poisoners," reflecting the fact that Wright was of Cornish ancestry. Wright spent much of her life fighting for the land rights of First Nations People as well as for environmental conservation. She famously campaigned for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef against harmful oil drilling and also contributed to the founding of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, one of the earliest conservation efforts of its kind.

Though she wrote extensively about these issues in her poetry, Wright believed that art, unlike activism, didn't necessarily have the power to *change* the world. Instead, she argued that "the true function of art and culture is to interpret us to ourselves, and to relate us to the country and the society in which we live."

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- A Reading of the Poem — Listen to a reading and short analysis of "Australia 1970." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfF5tP9Qpec)
- Who Was Judith Wright? — A brief biography of the poet. (https://www.arts.qld.gov.au/judith-wright-centre-brisbane/who-was-judith-wright)
- Two Fires Festival of Arts and Activism — The website of the Two Fires Festival, an arts and activism festival held in honor of Judith Wright's "twin passions." (http://twofiresfestival.org.au/home-2014/home/inspiration/)
- Judith Wright the Activist — An article discussing Wright's role as "an activist poet who was ahead of her time." (https://theconversation.com/judith-wright-an-activist-poet-who-was-ahead-of-her-time-178422)
- A Brief History of Environmentalism in Australia — A look at how the European colonization of Australia led to widespread environmental collapse. (https://conservationbytes.com/2020/06/29/a-brief-history-of-environmentalism-in-australia-since-european-invasion/)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER JUDITH WRIGHT POEMS

- Request to a Year

HOW TO CITE

MLA

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