

Spring 2006

Interpreting Nature in Australia Through Poetry: A Personal Anthology Written Within the Erosion Caldera of Northern New South

Kyla Allon
SIT Study Abroad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), and the [Natural Resources and Conservation Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Allon, Kyla, "Interpreting Nature in Australia Through Poetry: A Personal Anthology Written Within the Erosion Caldera of Northern New South" (2006). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 326.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/326

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

**Interpreting Nature in Australia Through Poetry:
A Personal Anthology Written Within the Erosion Caldera of Northern New South
Wales**

Allon, Kyla

Academic Director: Brennan, Peter

Project Advisor: Young, Quendryth

Connecticut College

Creative Writing, English

Australia, Northern New South Wales

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Australia: Sustainability and the
Environment, SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2006

**Interpreting Nature in Australia Through Poetry:
A Personal Anthology Written Within the Erosion Caldera of Northern New South
Wales**

Allon, Kyla

Academic Director: Brennan, Peter

Project Advisor: Young, Quendryth

Connecticut College

Creative Writing, English

Australia, Northern New South Wales

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Australia: Sustainability and the
Environment, SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2006

Section 1: Abstract:

My Independent Study Project (ISP) involved traveling within the erosion caldera of northern New South Wales, mainly WWOOFing (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) and writing environmental poetry about the places where I lived and worked. I began by researching past Australian environmental poets so that I could have a strong basic understanding before commencing my own writing. I lived in four different locations within the erosion caldera and strove to form a strong sense of place that is reflected in my poetry. Ultimately, I produced an anthology of poems that capture my responses to the natural environments that I experienced.

This project was important to do because I interpret my surroundings by writing about them and the process of writing environmental poetry led me to form a deep connection with nature. I hope to communicate the bonding I formed with the natural environment by sharing with others the poems I wrote.

For this project, I concentrated on balancing my experiences—working on farms, exploring my natural surroundings, observing nature—with writing poetry about these experiences, which ultimately led to an anthology of nature poems. This anthology of nature poems documents my changing relationship with my environment and thus illustrates the deep connection I formed with nature.

1.1 ISP Topic Codes:

Journalism 109, Language and Literature 217, Environmental Studies 537

1.2 Key Words:

Environmental Poetry, Creative Writing, Sense of Place, Environmental Studies

Section 2: Table of Contents:

Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Background of Australian Environmental Poetry.....	8
Methodology.....	23
Poetry Anthology.....	32
Time Management Recommendations.....	92
Ideas for Further Research.....	93
Conclusion.....	94
References.....	96
List of Contacts.....	98
Appendix.....	100

Section 3: Acknowledgements:

I would like first to thank my parents for without their support I never would have been able to come to Australia. They have given me a wonderful opportunity.

I would like to thank my advisor Quendryth Young and her husband Owen Young for welcoming me into their home. Quendryth made this project possible for me by providing me with a wonderful library of environmental poetry books, giving me guidance and assistance with my writing and always being supportive and loving.

I would like to thank Peter Brennan for his guidance and support and for allowing me to attempt a new project that had never been done before.

I would like to thank Rod, Tanya, Owen and Ryan Bruin for welcoming me into their lovely home, teaching me about farming and creating a balance with the earth and showing me all the secret places on their farm that provided me with such great inspiration for my poetry.

I would like to thank Erwin and Adrienne Weber for having me stay with them in their beautiful house and filling my head with so many new ideas and ways of looking at the world.

I would like to thank my friends Ryan and Tim for putting up with living with me in that little caravan on the Bruin's farm. Ryan—thank you for always keeping me laughing and Tim—you really helped me to look at the world differently and I thank you for all you have taught me.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the mountains, streams, rivers, birds, waterfalls, trees, leaves, stones, clouds and everything else from nature that filled me with a love for my environment and inspired my poems.

Section 4: Introduction:

4.1 Justification for Study:

People learn to appreciate nature and the environment in different ways. I interpret my surroundings by writing about them. I have always connected to the aesthetic quality of nature, a beauty I observe that inspires me to write. This has led me to respect and appreciate the natural environments that I have lived in and visited. It also leads me to connect with my natural surroundings on an intimate level. While spending time in Australia I have connected to my new surroundings by writing about the natural environments of the places I visited. This in turn led me to develop a new attitude towards my environment, which took me to a different level, where I worked intensely with natural elements. During my Independent Study, I was farming the land, and writing each day of my impressions. My poems reflect on these my experiences working with nature, as well as observing nature through writing poetry. I believe that my poems may convey my connection and appreciation of the natural environment of the Northern Rivers area of northern New South Wales in which I lived and worked, and will in turn lead readers to appreciate and respect their natural environments. Although I believe it is important to learn about the ecosystems, flora and fauna of every environment one visits, I also believe that this way of thinking can sometimes leave out a sense of love for the land, and often is void of emotion and creativity. Ultimately, I felt that this study needed to be done in order to convey a passion for Australia's natural environment, a passion that is full of sensitivity, empathy, and perception.

4.2 Study Goals:

To help inspire an appreciation for the natural environment of Australia through nature poetry that captures its value and beauty.

To help form an understanding of the history of Australian Environmental poetry through reading about Australian Environmental poetry, reading Australian Environmental poetry from all time periods and lastly from speaking with Australian

Environmental poets and finding out their opinions on Australian Environmental poetry through its different stages.

To form a sense of place in Australia so that I am able to write about the natural environment here by constantly paying attention to my surroundings, talking to local people in the areas I visit and trying to understand the sense of place they have formed in those areas and constantly reflecting through writing on my surroundings.

To become more in tune with the natural environments I live in by spending time in nature reflecting on what is going on all around me, understanding the natural processes of where I am living by talking to the local people or reading books about that environment and becoming more attune with the land by working with it on farms.

To make sure not to be discouraged when things do not go as planned by making the best out of situations and viewing each experience, whether planned or not, as a learning experience.

To enjoy myself by finding a balance between working and experiencing by making sure I do a certain amount of writing or reflecting each day and not feeling pressure to be constantly writing by also seeing the value of having first hand experiences and simply mentally reflecting upon those experiences.

4.3 Definition of Terms:

WWOOFing- Willing Workers on Organic Farms. This term refers to work done on organic farms from between 4-6 hours a day in turn for free room and board.

Line Breaks- Where a line of poetry ends. Line breaks can be used to create rhythm and rhyme, and they can be used to suggest meaning and produce a particular appearance.

Lyric Poetry- a type of emotional songlike poetry, distinguished from dramatic and narrative poetry.

Environmental Poetry- Poems mainly written about the natural environment.

Deep Ecology- the central idea for deep ecology is that we as humans are part of the earth, rather than apart and separate from it.

Section 5: Review of Current Knowledge: A Background of Australian Environmental Poetry Leading up to the Present Day

The first poetry in Australia was the oral communication of Dreamtime stories by the aborigines. The following is a replication of a section of “an Aboriginal song-cycle which was, of course, not a written poem, but one handed down orally through tribal ceremonies” (Kramer 1991, p.xii). The song cycle is entitled *Wonguri-Mandjigai Song* and is translated from the Wonguri by Ronald M. Berndt:

The people are making a camp of branches in that country at Arnhem Bay:
With the forked stick, the rail for the whole camp, the Mandjigai people are
making it.
Branches and leaves are about the mouth of the hut: the middle is clear within.
They are thinking of rain, and of storing their clubs in case of a quarrel,
In the country of the Dugong, towards the wide clay pans made by the
Moonlight.

(Kramer 1991, p.1)

The British settlement of Australia began at Sydney Cove in 1788. Colonists from Britain brought their English language and cultural heritage with them. Thus, “the earliest verse written by white settlers is the large group of ballads which developed out of the traditional ballad forms of Britain ...” (Kramer 1991, p.xii). The first Australians were mostly convicts and they brought a spectrum of poetry with them ranging in style from the later 18th century cultured poetry to the songs and insurrectionary ballads of the Irish convicts (Dawe 1984, p. 5).

Culturally in Australia there exists a divide between those who patronize high culture, including poetry, and those who patronize popular culture. The readership for serious written poetry in Australia has historically been very small, and interest shown in poetry has at times been seen as an indication of snobbery (Dawe 1984, pp. 5-6). In Australia there has been a much larger readership for popular poetry, which takes the form of sung or recited ballads (Dawe 1984, p. 6). These two strands of poetry, the literary and the popular, began with the first settlers in 1788. In the early days of the colony, Australian poetry was firmly based on English models. These English models took different forms, ranging from local addresses in heroic couplets and thoughts on the strangeness and wildness of the new land, or songs and ballads recounting the defiant

convicts' struggle with a brutal authority. Later on, in the 19th century, both of these forms of poetry became nationalistic. During this time period poets stuck to the English models in verse form but began to change their writing from these English models in both the material and the attitude of their poetry. Australian poets were trying to create an Australian identity through their poetry, which in part meant being anti-British in their writing. In addition, much of the beginning Australian poetry was about the harshness of life in the Australian bush (Dawe 1984, pp.5-8). "The first substantial poet was a first-generation Australian, Charles Harpur..." (Kramer 1991, p.xii). Harpur, like many Australian poets who would come after him, wrote about the Australian environment. In his poem *The Creek of Four Graves* he writes:

Into the wilderness - went forth to seek
New streams and wider pastures for his fast
Increasing flocks and herds. (Heseltine 1984, p.55)

As defined by the Australian Bush Poets Association, Australian Bush Poetry is "poetry having a good rhyme and meter, written about Australia, Australians and the Australian way of life" (Raftis 2006). Australian Bush Verse has been written since the settlement of Australia. Its language is often colorful, and reflects the vernacular of the bush and describes life in the bush as well as in the towns (Raftis 2006). In his poem *In Defence of the Bush* Andrew Barton Paterson, better known as Banjo Paterson, describes the natural Australian bush:

You would find them mighty rivers with a turbid, sweeping flood.
For the rain and drought and sunshine make no changes in the street,
In the sullen line of buildings and the ceaseless tramp of feet;
But the bush has moods and changes, as the seasons rise and fall,
And the men who know the bush-land—they are loyal through it all.
(Paterson 1975, p.40)

Paterson "loved the Australian outback, and combined in verse both action itself and the landscape of action" as well as the humor and philosophy of the bushman "constantly faced with drought, heat, flies and dust ..." (Paterson 1975, p.7).

Other well known bush poets beside Banjo Paterson are C.J. Dennis, Mary Gilmore, Adam Lindsay Gordon, Caroline Carleton, Charles Harper, Henry Kendell, Henry Lawson, Dorothea Mackeller, John Neilson, John O'Brian, Vance Parmer and many more (Young 2006, pers. Comm., 2 March). In the early days when bush poetry

was becoming popular, there existed a rivalry between Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson. *The Bulletin*, a newspaper circulated in Sydney at the time, published bush poetry, and whenever one of the men submitted a poem that was published in this paper, the other man sent off his poem in response (Young 2006, pers. Comm., 17 March). Many of these poets wrote about their love for this land of droughts and flooding rain as captured so eloquently in Henry Lawson's poem *Ballad of the Drover*:

Then every creek and gully
Sends forth its tribute flood-
The river runs a banker,
All stained with yellow mud.

(Mackaness and Mackaness 1959, p. 102)

Dorothea Mackellar sums up many Australians' early impressions of this new land in her poem *My Country*:

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of rugged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.

(Mackaness and Mackaness 1959, p. 143)

In *The Song of Australia*, Caroline Carleton expresses a love for the natural land of Australia instead of the usual struggle expressed in many bush poems towards the strange natural environment. She writes:

There is a land where summer skies
Are gleaming with a thousand dyes ...
And grassy knoll and forest height,
Are flushing in the rosy light,
And all above is azure bright
Australia Australia Australia.

(Axiom 1996, p.2)

Her poem illustrates how, to the early Australian settlers from Britain, it always seemed to be summertime in Australia and for Carleton this warm, blue-skied land provided her with poetic inspiration. Of course though, as C.J. Dennis reflected in his poem *Respite*, there could be too much of a good thing, and in Australia the constant summer weather and blue skies could turn into a period of terrible drought:

The drought that came in ninety-two. Full half the countryside to blast.
I seen agen the dyin' stock. The paddocks bare, the trees burned black ...
I seen full plenty laid to waste. By arid wind and savage sun ...

(Axiom 1996, p.16)

The early bush poets of Australia were trying to make sense of their natural surroundings, and their poetry reflects both a love for their new land as well as a struggle to survive in such an unpredictable climate.

Bush poetry can be interpreted as the first form of environmental poetry written in Australia, as it focused on the natural environment. By the middle of the 19th century bush verse had become a major part of the colony's literary tradition. "Patricia Rolfe comments that bush verse 'had antecedents in the bush songs ...'" and that "many song writers in folk, country and popular music fields have put music to the works of 'bush' poets" (Haynes, 2000, p.9). Since many of the original bush poems were written to tunes it is "very difficult, if not impossible, to draw the line between 'bush verse' and 'bush ballad'" (Haynes 2000, p.9). This background music, to which many bush poems were written, explains the measured rhythm that is present in bush poetry.

Around this time, in the late 19th century, other rhymed verse also became popular and was considered an Australian style. Rural lifestyles and traditional values were often represented through rhymed verse. There were other poetry movements in Australia, such as the *Jundyworobaks*, which concentrated on incorporating Aboriginal thought into poetry, but for the most part rhymed verse has been the most popular Australian poetry style leading into the present day (Dawe 1984, pp.5-8).

In her website Mareya Shmidt explains that Australian bush poets were originally drawn to interpret a land which was unfamiliar, and in doing so they acquired a new artistic identity for the nation (1998). Shmidt goes on to say that "the hazy mists, the brilliant colors and the exotic creatures need analogous concepts and language to enable their beauty and their strangeness of light and form to be defined" (1998). Shmidt comments that all Australian poets "were preoccupied with encapsulating the Australian uniqueness" (1998) and they did so through interpreting the strange beauty of their natural surroundings.

By the end of the Second World War the strong sense of nationalism found in Australian poetry had passed, and Australian poetry in general had lost its xenophobia. At this time Australian poets began to assimilate to the style of other modern poets around the world (Dawe 1984, p.8).

Furthermore, as white Australian culture imposed itself upon aboriginal culture, some aborigines learned how to write, differing from their usual oral tradition, and began to create written poetry. Aboriginal poems reflect a strong sense of identity. They concentrate on aspects of their own culture, such as viewing the land as mother, their creation story and their Dreamtime ancestors. For example, as an aboriginal poet Hyllus Maris writes:

I am a child of the Dreamtime people
part of this land, like the gnarled gum tree.

(Mafi-Williams 1993, p. xi)

Many of the aboriginal poems capture harmony with the beasts of the earth, the sounds of the aboriginal people and the desecration of their land and sacred sites by the white people. W. Les Russell from his poem *A Ballad in Tears* writes

The reason you cry: they've taken your soul, babe
The reason you cry: they've stolen your land.
The land you're a part of back since the beginning.
That's why you cry, babe,
you cry for your land.

(Mafi-Williams 1993, p.xiii)

According to Lorraine Mafi-Williams, written words allow aborigines "to lay bare the truth, to reveal the anger, the frustration and the determination of our people" (1993, p.xiv). All aboriginal poetry is not, however, about the destruction of their land. Some write about hope for a better future. In her poem *Visions*, Evan Johnson writes:

There's hope in our tomorrows.
Our love must show the way.
Let our children's words be spoken
From our visions of yesterday.

(Mafi-Williams 1993, p.xv)

Some Aboriginal poets even write about a hope to be able to combine their world with the white world. Jack Davis, in his poem *Integration*, writes:

This is ours together
This nation-
No need for separation.

(Mafi-Williams 1993, p.1)

The aboriginal people's spiritual connection to their land is also clear in their poems. There are feelings for nostalgia for the traditional ways of life, for things such as hunting,

which is not possible any more because the animals have left since the white men arrived. There is a clear and deep bonding with the land that has been broken and will forever be mourned (Mafi-Williams 1993, pp.xi-xv). These poems can be appreciated as poems written by the true inhabitants of Australia—written by the people who knew, understood and respected the land in a way that European Australians did not. Thus, in a sense, their writing can be seen as the most genuine environmental writing. One well-known aboriginal poet is a woman named Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal (formally known as Kath Walker). In her poem *We are Going*, Oodgeroo mourns her people's loss of their land:

we are nature and the past, all the old ways
gone now and scattered...

(Mafi-Williams 1993, p. 27)

She continues by writing:

we are the strangers here now, but the white tribe
are the strangers.
We belong here, we are of the old ways.

(Mafi-Williams 1993, p. 27)

There is sadness and a sense of loss in her poems that puts a different perspective on how to view the land and how European Australians have abused the land. An interpretation of the natural environment can be found in almost all aboriginal poetry since their way of life is one that is deeply connected to the land.

Modern environmental Australian poetry has expanded from traditional verse and gone to free verse and even haiku and haibun. Just as bush poetry created a large subculture in Australia and was able to be enjoyed by the general public in newspapers such as *The Bulletin*, modern environmental poetry has a large following as well. In the area of northern New South Wales groups such as *Dangerously Poetic*, *Bangalow Writers*, and *Fellowship of Australian Writers* meet regularly to discuss and edit members' poetry, and to combine poetry to put out publications, or at *Live Poets* and *Bush Poets* to read their works aloud in a performance style, or at *cloudcatchers* to write and read haiku together (Young 2006, pers. Comm., 17 April).

The diversity of groups leads to new styles of poetry achieving prominence, and over time becoming more frequently used. In the early days of poetry the favored style

that spread among Australian poets was the bush genre. Now haiku and haibun, originally Japanese styles of poetry, and already popular in America and the United Kingdom, are becoming increasingly utilized among Australian poets. Haiku, originally written in Japanese, is traditionally three lines long, with the first line being 5 syllables, the second 7 syllables and the third 5 syllables. However, this definition of haiku does not translate into haiku written in English since the English language differs so greatly from the Japanese. The Haiku Society of America has worked to develop a definition for those trying to write original haiku in English. They define haiku as “a poem recording the essence of a moment keenly perceived, in which nature is linked to human nature. Usually a haiku in English is written in three unrhymed lines of seventeen or fewer syllables” (Gurga 2003, p.2). This definition points out how haiku links the individual with non-human nature. Three main aspects characterize most haiku written today: “a brief form, a seasonal word and the technique of ‘cutting’”(Gurga 2003, p.2). The idea of ‘cutting’ has to do with either a comparison or a contrast of images that is present in all haiku poems. For in each haiku there should be two images that either compliment each other or contrast each other (Young 2006, pers. Comm., 14 April). Furthermore, haiku is not a reflection of ideas but rather a statement of images that reflect the significance of a single moment keenly perceived. The seasonal awareness represented in haiku “allows us to gain perspective on our lives in a way that will increase appreciation both for the significant moments in our lives and our relation to the world around us...” (Gurga 2003, p.3). This seasonal word that is present in all haiku poems is known as a kigo. There are specific kigo that were used to represent different seasons in original Japanese haiku (such as the word *snow* for winter or *leaves turning* for autumn).

In Australian haiku, however, there is presently a movement to stray from this specific list of Japanese season words and to use instead words more specific to Australian seasons. John Bird, an Australian haiku poet, has come up with a temporary list of kigo words that are specific to Australia. Words included in his list are things such as *burning cane* for spring, *bottlebrush* for winter, *cyclone* for summer and even well known Australian holidays such as *Anzac Day* for autumn and *Australia Day* for summer. There is a need for kigo specific to Australia because the climate and seasons in Australia

differ greatly from those of Japan and thus the original list of kigo does not work for Australian haiku (Young 2006, pers. Comm., 14 April).

Graham Nunn is a modern Australian haiku poet whose poetry exemplifies the connection to nature that haiku achieves. He writes:

old wallpaper
my daughter reaches
for the butterfly (Nunn 2005, p.7)

in the tangle of curtains
april moon (Nunn 2005, p.7)

beneath my feet
the loose crunch
of leaves (Nunn 2005, p.14)

winter dawn
steam from the kettle
mixes with sunlight (Nunn 2005, p.20)

mountain stream
the steady flow
of autumn leaves (Nunn 2005, p.50)

arching her naked body
crescent moon (Nunn 2005, p.55)

Each of these haiku has a certain connection to nature and the seasons of Australia found in words such as *butterfly*, *april moon*, *crunch of leaves*, *winter dawn*, *autumn leaves* and *crescent moon*. Another modern Australian haiku writer, Christina Kirkpatrick, writes:

surprise storm
the taste of raindrops
in my cup

from the bare branch
a white owl's silent journey
across the moon (Wessman et al. 2004, p.7)

Here the observation of a rainstorm and the moon are both kigo for the autumn season in Australia.

A *haiku sequence* comprises 8-11 haiku written together with a common theme connecting them (Young 2006, pers. Comm., 15 April). A group of haiku poets may go together on a ginko, which is a silent nature walk where each takes notes of observations and then later uses these to write haiku, which are read aloud among the other participants (Young 2006, pers. Comm., 14 April). Quendryth Young's *Out West* is an example of a haiku sequence:

dry lightning
foliage crackles
underfoot

sun-baked creek bed
the would-be angler casts
a long shadow

keening wind
a crow plucks at
the sheep's ribcage

dust haze
kids on bikes race
roly poly glass

gathering clouds
a water dragon
lifts its head

parched paddock
the scent of ozone
with this first drop

breaking storm
first splashes
disappear

soaking rain
green shoots between
sodden cotton bolls (George 2005, p.18)

In this haiku sequence there is an ongoing theme of an approaching storm and the observations made around that storm.

Another form of environmental poetry now being used in Australia is haibun. Haibun combines prose and poetry, or rather prose and haiku “(HI-BUN; *hai*, from the word haiku, with bun=writing, composition or sentences)” (Reichhold 2002, p.143). Using prose along with haiku makes haiku less brief and the haiku included among the prose demands more attention to a small detail that sticks out among the smooth flowing prose (Reichhold 2002, p.144). The prose in haibun sometimes simply explains the writer’s experience and inspiration, and is traditionally some sort of journey, describing the way the writer got from one place to another (Young 2006, pers. Comm., 14 April). The following is an example of an Australian haibun written by Catherine Maire. It is called *Katikati*:

This morning the trees are loaded with cicada song just as the air is heavy with heat. In the rest home the old lady fastens a cotton gown over her new bathing suit. The women crowd around her with their walkers. ‘Going swimming. You lucky thing!’

crested the wavelet
her white bathing cap-
my 92 yr. old mother

The beach is fringed with sea grass. Even after bathing in the cool water, her hand is warm as I guide her through the shallows. From the car to the changing shed I gather her train of dropped clothing. ‘I’m the luckiest woman in the world,’ she says. (George 2005, p.4)

This haibun shows the journey of an older woman going swimming. It of course connects to nature and the seasons through words such as *cicada*, *heat* and *sea grass*.

Some well known modern poets who concentrate in writing free verse about the natural environment of Australia include Judith Wright, Judy Johnson, Catherine Stewart, Jean Ringland, Norma Balzar, Edwin Wilson, Les Murray, Joan Timms, Vera Newsom, Graham Nunn, and Quendryth Young. Many of these poets have been shaping Australian poetry by redefining aspects of nature that are only found in Australia by referencing the indigenous animals of this land or describing Australian seasons and weather patterns (Young 2006, pers. Comm., 2 March). The adoption of haiku and haibun in Australia illustrates an example of how Australian poets have adopted another genre and made it their own. The style of free-verse, however, has always been written

in English and therefore is in some ways more natural for Australian poets to write in. One of the best-loved, well-known free verse Australian poets is Judith Wright. The most notable quality of her poetry is “her deep interest in finding a way to express the special quality of the Australian environment” (Kemeny 1972, p.5). More than half of her poems are preoccupied with nature, “dealing with birds ... trees, plants, vegetation, other animals, the elements, the landscape” and all of “these facets of nature are observed and expressed for their significance or relationship to human life. Thus she shows a connection between all forms of natural life and Man” (Kemeny 1972, 12). In one of her most famous poems *South of My Days* she writes beautifully of the natural environment in which she lives:

...of bony slopes wincing under the winter;
low trees blue-leaved and olive; outcropping granite—
clean, lean hungry country.

(Wright 1985, p.11)

In another one of her poems, *For New England*, she compares the harsh northern climate of Australia to the cooler southern region of the country. The poem demonstrates an understanding of the different climates throughout Australia with eloquently written verse:

Your trees, the homesick and the swarthy native,
blow all one way to me, this southern weather
that smells of early snow. And I remember
the house closed in with sycamore and chestnut
fighting the foreign wind.
Here I will stay, she said; to be done with the black north,
The harsh horizon rimmed with drought—

(Wright 1985, p.13)

Other modern free verse poets such as Catherine Stewart also write about the natural environment of Australia. Similar to Judith Wright, Stewart’s poetry connects with Australian landscape without the surprise that the early Australian bush poets expressed. Stewart writes:

The drier earth I mainly saw in summer,
Was a settled place-
And the hills were close to the heart.
Later I learned how cold we’d been spared in
winter could frost the grass-

(Stewart 1998, p.19)

Or, quite lyrically, Quendryth Young writes in her poem *Bars of Grass*:

Over us the flight
of singing patterns of unfocussed dreams
are seen through fern strong hands of fingered fronds,
like sun-flecked light on insect wings.

(Young 2004, p.46)

Jean Ringland describes the colors of Australia as the

colors of the sand of endless beaches,
color of dust on endless plains,
of waiting paddocks, of lonely roads,
parched creeks and ragged mountains,
earth colors for a land
that we have known well.

(Ringland 2004, p.9)

As Australians' relationship with the land changed, their poetry in turn changed to reflect their new connection with their land. Edwin Wilson is a well known modern environmental poet. Although he is Australian-born, he is only second generation Australian and claims that he often feels like a "foreign weed...a stranger to the land" (Wilson 1984, p.7). This feeling of being an outsider, and relating to the plants that are invasive to Australia, shows up in his poem *Heritage Park*:

Along Durroughby Road, ferns still
Clutter and delight; while
Camphor laurels, those arrant
Weeds, are the new hedgerows.

(Wilson 1984, p.19)

His poetry shows a connection to a land that is not quite his own, and illustrates his struggle to find a sense of place in a familiar yet foreign environment.

Les Murray, another modern poet, writes with more confidence and familiarity about his environment, often throwing a bit of humor into his work. In his poem *Two Rains* he writes about the droughts he endured on his farm, using a rhyming scheme:

Our farm is in the patched blue overlap
between Queensland rain and Victorian rain
(and of two-faced droughts like a dustbowl tap).

The southerly rain is skimmed and curled
Off the Roaring Forties' circuit of the world.

(Murray 1990, p.11)

Murray's poem highlights farming, which is a feature of the rural Australian lifestyle. Many immigrants came to this country to farm, and although they encountered many problems due to the infertility of the soil and the droughts and flooding rains, they also gained a connection to the earth through working so intimately with it. Norma Balzer grew up and still lives on a farm in Dunoon, New South Wales, Australia and like Murray she reflects upon her farm work through poetry. Her book *Once Upon a Farm* is a collection of short poems about the intimate relationship she formed with the natural entanglements of a farming life. In her poem *The Sun Slants Long on the Long-Made Hills* she writes:

The sun slants long on the long-made hills,
And lights the long-made spurs in gold,
Negates the smaller works of men,
And leaves the fences all untold.

(Balzer 2002, p.34)

In her poems Balzer illustrates the balance gained from working with, yet not destroying, the natural environment. She goes on in other poems to describe a sadness for the complete loss in some places of natural habitat. She mourns the change of the rural landscape with which she connected so deeply, to the modern towns and cities that have taken over an increasing amount of the land. In her poem *Once Upon a Farm* she writes:

Shining wires catch the morning sun
Instead of leaves.
Poles go straight to touch the sky
Not reaching trees.

They print their ads across the sunset scene.

A kerbed and guttered road runs down
Where water stormed and grass in summer rain,
And where white herons waited in the grass
White survey pegs await the peopled street.

(Balzer 2002, p.10)

Murray also recounts the change of the natural environment to one of infrastructure with a bit of anger and remorse in his poem *Sandstone Country*:

Bleached rusting country, where waterfalls
reanimate froth and stripped-out cars
in hills being cleft for shopping malls.

(Murray 1990, p.93)

Some modern poets, such as Judy Johnson, responded to changes that came from man-made accomplishments differently, and view them as a way to get closer to nature, to experience it in a way that was not previously possible. In her poem *Diving the Westralian Coast* Johnson writes:

Off the Houtman Abrolhos, you descend to a place where all
motion frays.
Fish and corals waver...
You dive deeper, and your body is hit with the dull wrecking-
ball
of pressure. There is something irrecoverable at the margins of
man-made adaptation...

(Johnson 2004, p.44)

Some modern poets, like Geoff Page, find a balance between humanity and nature. Page neither seems to mourn a more wild country nor concentrate solely on the man-made nature of the present scenario. In his poem *Hora Sfakion* he writes:

First restina of the day
enveloped by a blue of sea and sky
so clear two fishing boats
are moored in air...

Evening returns us
to tables and chairs:
the sea and sky
drain slowly to one color.

(Page 1991, p.20)

Page is able to make man-made things such as *fishing boats*, *tables* and *chairs* flow easily with the *sea and the sky*, creating a meeting point for man and nature.

Les Wicks, another modern day poet, reflects in his poem *Tide* on the present programming to see, even in nature, images from an urban setting:

The immediate gut-peace on contact
with the sea, still
my feet rest in steel, words connect
webless urban imagery:
round paintballs of purple coral, fingerlings

slice like machines across a Sanskrit of naked sand.

(Wicks 2000, p.12)

All Australian poets, whether they be bush poets, Aboriginal poets, haiku and haibun poets or modern day free verse poets, interpret their natural surroundings and convey a sense of place through their poetry. For bush poets this sense of place was one of confusion and awe of a challenging situation, whereas Aboriginal poetry conveys a much deeper and longer connection with nature, illustrating their understanding of the environment and their spiritual connection to it. Modern poetry, including haiku and haibun, has become more daring in both its language and structure, straying from the original ballads and traditional verse. This poetry conveys a new relationship with the land as well as a sense of belonging that can only come from centuries of living in Australia.

Section 6: Methodology:

I chose my ISP topic early in my semester in Australia, which was crucial for two reasons. First, it allowed me to speak with two local poets, Quendryth Young and Norma Balzar, about environmental poetry. Second, I began writing early in my stay, so that I developed a mindset of observing nature and then reflecting on it through poetry.

For the actual ISP part of the project, I traveled within the erosion caldera of northern New South Wales. The writing of environmental poetry is a very portable occupation, so I could have traveled anywhere, but I felt it was important to become connected with one general area, especially when trying to form a sense of place. I chose my specific area within the caldera for a number of reasons. First, during the time I had already spent in Australia, I had become closely connected to the environment within the erosion caldera of northern New South Wales. Second, I felt I would be most comfortable writing there since I had already begun to form an affinity with these surroundings. Third, the eroded basalts in this area have produced fertile farmland below a backdrop of mountains, which I felt would provide me with great inspiration for my poetry.

The first place I lived for my ISP was at the home of Quendryth and Owen Young in Alstonville, New South Wales. Quendryth is a published poet who writes mainly about her natural environment. I lived with the Youngs from April 13th until April 18th. During that time I was able to access Quendryth's library of Australian Environmental, Aboriginal, haiku and haibun poets as well as access information on the internet. Having access to all this information allowed me to write up an extensive background section on Australian environmental poetry. This gave me an excellent base to start from, before I went out on my own to experience my natural environment and write about it.

Quendryth also helped me become familiar with how to write haiku and haibun. We went on a ginko (a haiku walk) and I subsequently wrote a number of haiku, which she helped me edit. This was essential for me because I had never written haiku and Quendryth's guidance and advice allowed me to understand the process of writing both haiku and haibun, which I was then able to continue doing throughout my ISP. I found writing haiku was a difficult process for me, because it differs greatly from the other

forms of poetry that I have been trained in writing. Mainly, I struggled with avoiding cause and effect, using the short-long-short pattern for line breaks, keeping myself (the “I”) out of the main subject of the haiku and creating either a connection or a contrast in my haiku. I also found it was difficult to write poetry on the same day as writing haiku because the two forms of poetry use very different mindsets. Haiku, I found, was best written directly after the “haiku moment”, while the other free verse environmental poetry came out best when written a while after it was experienced, giving me time to meditate and mentally form a poem about my experiences. This ultimately makes sense because in general, free verse poetry takes much work and thought while haiku is more instantaneous.

I finished all of my background research while staying at the Youngs’ during that first week of ISP. I felt, although I had a thorough background section, I could have benefited from more books on aboriginal poetry as well as more commentary or modern environmental poetry.

Quendryth also introduced me to the tightly knit community of writers that live within the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales. Members of this group often write about the environment, especially through haiku and haibun, and if I had had more time for ISP I would have attended some of their poetry readings and meetings where they edit each others writings.

After researching and writing a thorough background of Australian environmental poetry as well as getting Quendryth’s advice and assistance on my own writing, I left her to begin WWOOFing at the home of Rod and Tanya Bruin in Tyalgum, northern New South Wales. I had decided that the best way to form a sense of place in a new environment that was strong enough for me to write about it, was to work directly with the earth. The logical way to form this relationship was through organic farming.

Rod and Tanya’s property proved to be a perfect working environment for me. Their home is located directly at the base of Mount Warning. In the mornings I worked on their farm, which was surrounded by mountains. I harvested herbs, lettuce and sweet potatoes. I weeded, or planted new crops. I became close to the Bruin family, and their sense of place was so strong in their home (Rod having inherited the farm from his

father) that they helped me to respond to the land myself, and to see their wonderful home through their eyes.

I arranged to perform farm work and experience my surroundings in the morning, and from lunch onwards I spent time reflecting on my perceptions and writing poems about the natural environment that I was living in. I also jogged around the roads surrounding the Bruin's property every afternoon, to further explore and connect with my surroundings. The biggest problem I faced while living with the Bruin's was that sometimes I had to give up writing and reflecting on my experiences to work longer days, harvesting on the farm or selling the Bruins' produce at markets. I often wondered if it were better to have more inspiration and less time to write or less inspiration and more time to write. Ultimately, I believe that having more inspiration—the Bruin's beautiful farm—led to more quality poems, so that had I lived somewhere else, where I had less connection to my environment but more time to write and reflect, I would have written less.

The longer I lived with the Bruins the more tricks I found for keeping notes and writing while working. For instance, I carried a notebook to jot down pieces of poems that came to me while I was toiling away.

Consequently Rod Bruin told me about some ancient Chinese farmers who would take a break every day from their work to gather round a pole where they would all write poetry. They don't do it any more because they don't have the time, since their modern day lives have sped up too much for any pause for reflection on their situation. Upon hearing this I felt new determination to make time to reflect, through writing, my experiences with my natural surroundings. It was about now that I began reading Judith Wright, an Australian environmental poet from the New England area of New South Wales, and found myself enthralled by her eloquent word usage.

While at the Bruins I started drawing my surroundings. I drew trees or leaves and found that doing so led me to look more closely at what was around me, and to observe the details in nature (the veins on a leaf, moss on the bark of a tree) instead of only writing about nature on a broader scale through describing landscapes.

I had the opportunity of climbing Mount Warning, which was very important to me, since this is the highest place on the east coast of Australia, catching the first sun of

daybreak and is also the plug of the erosion caldera that I was traveling through. Up to that point I had been writing about living below Mount Warning (often referring to it in my poems as the mountain with the jagged peak) and therefore climbing this mountain put a whole new perspective on my experiences and my writing.

After living with the Bruins from April 18th until April 24th I left their farm for Byron Bay where I spent two days before traveling to Chillingham, to WWOOF once more.

When I first arrived in Byron Bay I felt an extreme separation from the earth and was afraid I would be unable to write about my environment if I were not working close to living things. The sidewalks, roads, stores and people that filled the town seemed to separate me from the natural environment. So I spent this time reflecting on what it was about living at the Bruins' that inspired my poetry.

I found that up until that point my main inspirations had been the mountains that surrounded the caldera, watching the balance organic farmers have with the earth and watching children interact with nature. Pinpointing these revelations and then re-reading the poems I had thus far written led me to realize I was having a lot of trouble removing people from my poems. I seemed to write a lot either about my personal interactions with nature or reflect upon the experiences others had with their natural environments. To me this felt egocentric and I hoped that, maybe through haiku, I could better describe nature without connecting it to human beings.

I made the most of the time I spent in Byron Bay and found myself riding a bike through the bit of rainforest there, or walking along the beach, so that I could get a sense of the natural environment of the area. I felt a slight change come to my writing, as I began to look at things from the perspective of the earth rather than how the natural environment made me feel. I realized that what I was witnessing was often too much to take in and writing about it was my way of interpreting its magnificence. At this point writing about nature helped me to form a deep relationship with my natural surroundings. I did not want to be a conqueror and was instead filled with a desire to be an observer. The natural world had become my muse and because of that I felt I was in tune with it. I felt a deep sadness for the destruction that, as a human, I knew I had inflicted upon it. I also tried to look at things anew, without rallying the scientific facts I had learned, like

the height of a mountain or the depth of a lake, because those facts only put up a barrier between my surroundings and me, making it hard for me to write.

This new way of thinking really helped me to take in the details of my environment on my last day in Byron Bay. In a park in the middle of town I watched a caterpillar eat a leaf or a butterfly fly in circles around a tree, and began to feel thankful for the portable nature of poetry, for I was realizing that the natural environment was everywhere and thus I could write about it wherever I went.

Next, I traveled to Chillingham in northern New South Wales to do some more WWOOFing at the home of Erwin and Adrienne Weber. Similarly placed to Rod's farm at the base of Mount Warning (the mountain with the jagged peaks), the Weber's home was below Mount Springbrook, which I referred to in my poems as the striped mountain. I used this name because, from their house, it appeared to be striped where waterfalls had eroded away the mountain rock.

Erwin and Adrienne talked a lot to me about Deep Ecology, and I came to understand that it would be a good field to study, for it seemed to be the mindset I was taking on through my process of writing environmental poems.

I found that writing nature poems was no longer forced but instead a natural part of my daily events—like eating or sleeping—and in turn I was seeing the earth differently, constantly feeling conscious of changes, connections and beauty in nature. In the book Ecopsychology Restoring the Earth Healing the Mind in an essay by Laura Sewall entitled *The Skill of Ecological Perception* she writes, “We begin to care for that which we see, and ideally, we find ourselves loving the material world, our Earth. Because love alters behavior, honoring sensory and sensual experiences may be fundamental to the preservation of the earth” (Roszach 1995, p.203). This quote fit perfectly with my experiences for I had found through writing I was learning to love the earth. James Hillman adds that, “We are aesthetically or sensually numb, and that the soul longs for a reawakening of pleasure and beauty” (Roszach 1995, p.203). In addition, he believes it is a “moral imperative to refine our aesthetic sense, and in so doing, we begin to feel a deepened sensuality and a relinquishing of boundaries that separate” (Roszach 1995, p.203). Upon reading this I realized that before beginning this project I was very disconnected with my surroundings and now I was forming a relationship with

the earth through working with it and living in harmony with the surrounding trees, mountains, streams, rivers and so forth. I found that when I left the natural environment I became lonesome for it, as if I really did love the earth, for as Sewall says, “when viewed by beauty and sensuality, our relationship with the visible world may move our hearts” (Roszach 1995, p. 209).

It was during this time, at Erwin and Adrienne’s, that I began to have trouble with my sense of place. I began to question whether I was forcing the connection I felt towards the mountains, streams, birds, valleys and clouds and creating an artificial relationship with nature because I needed something tangible to write about. To create a more genuine bond I felt I needed to leave the comfort of my own head and write from the perspective of the streams, mountains, trees, birds, valleys, clouds, leaves and all the rest of the natural environment I was living in.

Adrienne Weber showed me her poetry that she had written while on Fraser Island and I found through her writing that she had been totally immersed in her surroundings, seemingly only made of sense, and thus able to observe nature constantly. This was very inspirational for me and I decided that to awaken my senses I would try to take observational time every day to experience my surroundings more deeply. I did an observational experiment of sorts with Mount Springbrook where, from sunrise on, I consciously observed the mountain and how it changed visually throughout the day. To help with this I did two paintings of the mountain. I became very aware of the constant movement of clouds over the mountain and how the sun revealed or hid different parts of the mountain throughout the day.

Adrienne also introduced me to a new poetry magazine called Pinnacle Perspectives, which consisted of poems written about the Tweed Valley. I found that many of the people were deeply attached to the area where I had been living. In a personal essay, Adrienne Weber wrote, “how far I have come to find my spiritual home below the rhyolite cliffs, amongst the basalt boulders of the Border Ranges to find again the creek of my childhood, that river of rocks.” I also found that many of these writers, like me, wrote about Mount Warning. The following is another poem by Adrienne Weber:

Mount Warning

The first grey hint of morning
defines earth and sky.
Cool, fresh scented,
glistening with birdcalls.
The first breeze ruffles the sky with pink
staccato kookaburra calls
declare the new day.

(Cottle 1997, p.13)

Furthermore, I found in the poetry I read by local writers in Pinnacle Perspectives that many of these poets, like me, focused their writing on such things as the Border Ranges, farm work and children's love of nature. Reading from this magazine of writers living in the Northern Rivers area was very reassuring for it made me feel as if I had spent my time wisely and was choosing the correct things to write about.

I stayed at the Webers' home in Chillingham from April 26th until April 30th, and then I returned to the Bruins' farm. Returning to the Bruins' farm was wonderful because of all the places I had lived it was the one place where I felt most connected to the land and the people and thus it gave me the strongest sense of place. This deep connection to the natural environment helped my writing become more genuine.

I noticed that again my poetry was changing. Sometimes one simple thing in nature would inspire a poem and then the poem would spiral into a story. This style is a diversion from traditional lyric poetry but I felt this story form of writing best documented my experiences. I became more aware of manipulating the line breaks in my poems to highlight the nature aspects of the poem.

Upon returning to the Bruins' property I felt more comfortable and spent time exploring and writing about what I found. It was during this time that I came upon a waterfall and I began to write haiku again.

I walked up the hill to the area where I worked every day on the crops and observed this area with new eyes, making sure to notice the details and changes that took place. I tested my senses by sitting with my eyes closed to register what I could hear and smell, and then, on opening my eyes, I became more aware of my sight—the different shades of green that stood out from the trees in the mountains, the way the sky changed throughout the day, the white cockatoos flying from a tree.

At night I looked at the same stars, but in my poems I tried to describe them in different ways. In some respects I felt I was always writing about the same things but in another sense I acknowledged that the natural world was dynamic, and the mountains, streams, trees, leaves and stars that were all around me were constantly changing and were new and different every moment. I accepted the element of human presence in my poems against the backdrop of the valley. I wrote about my surroundings and then wove in human interactions—a boy playing guitar, a man weeding a row of herbs, children playing in a stream—I found, and then wrote about, the ways people seemed to harmonize with nature. So at this point writing had turned into a process of awakening my senses, which forced me to be more in tune with my natural environment.

Things began to connect. The caldera I had been traveling through came to life, for not only did I know the scientific history of the area but I began to feel as if I fitted into this history. The journey I had been on really came to life and I felt ready to write haibun.

At the Bruins' I had formed a relationship with the people as well as the land. I was given guidance by them, and their friends, of places to visit for inspiration for my poetry—the waterfall below their house, Mount Warning, the Natural Arch. This allowed me to see the natural world through the eyes of people who had formed a deep connection with it, opposed to the eyes of a visitor. I was able then to experience all these places that I was told about with fresh eyes and then write about my experiences there.

It was at this point that I became frustrated with the language I used in my poems. For I had acknowledged that the world was constantly changing and each moment was new but I kept repeating the same words in my poems (mountains, streams, waterfalls, leaves, trees, birds, etc.). I felt I needed new words to describe every morning, every type of cloud, every color and shadow on the mountains, to avoid becoming repetitive and thus missing the essence of the beauty that was all around.

On my last day on the Bruins' farm, I reflected on how I had made a home for myself there—how I had become used to being the one to harvest parsley and listen to the kookaburras laughing in the trees. I spent time reflecting upon the exact place I stood within the caldera and all the mountains, rivers and oceans that surrounded it. I also

reflected on how much I hadn't seen in this area, how much I had left to explore and write about. The sense of place I had was strong but nothing compared with what it could be. I had only looked at the mountains that surrounded the Bruins' property from afar and I would have loved to walk through those mountains, to experience this area from that perspective. I had only worked and written about autumn, which greatly influenced my poems but there were three more seasons that would entirely change the natural environment of the farm and I longed to experience and write about those seasons as well. Farming is strongly affected by the seasons, with the crops changing with the seasons, and while I lived on the farm my poems reflected autumn. I felt that in this way the physical work I did, harvesting and planting crops, had become one with my poetry.

Section 7: Poetry Anthology:

7.1 Poems written while traveling through northern New South Wales before the start of the ISP period:

Lismore

I wonder if they notice
the spider webs in tall grass-
threads unraveling in the morning light.

We drove until the baby was asleep
then peeled back the windows
as a galah flew by,

colors rising above.

Sunrise

Arms outstretched
I run copying
the birds with white feathers
on their wings.

One foot tracing the other
the first sounds of morning
come from the fields-
the frogs, the rosellas
the rain on my cheeks.

The wind makes the trees talk
whispering secrets between their leaves.

Then

the sun rises all around

In the city

it rises in the west

but here its more gradual

melting clouds off the hills

unweaving the spider webs

reflecting gently in streams.

Finally the shadows turn

into promises of morning

and the hills

wake up again.

Walking Lessons

We learned to grow roots quickly

through the hardwood floors

when he told us

that breathing with the trees

becomes easier

if you close your eyes.

Soon I am standing

under a spider web

in green sunshine

imagining the simplicity of movement

when turning

with the curve

of the earth.

Here, I feel a detachment

from the ground,
the way my feet respond
to gravity-
as if I may fall off
because I do not yet belong.

Today my teacher
turns a leaf over
in his palm
and tells me
I cannot write
about a place
that is only temporary-
a place I have barely walked on.

I watch the leaf in his fingers
and think of being five
and sitting on my father's shoulders-
him holding my ankles.

The trees were taller then
and the light
through the leaves
made diamonds
on my arms.

Here, the light falls differently
through trees
and I wonder
if I will ever learn to walk
with my arms outstretched

and the sun
leaving new pictures
on my skin.

In Their Valley

Mostly, we watch the hills
as Warren holds his babies
and clouds settle into the valley.

Once I watched his children
ride their horse
all around their land-
measuring laughter in the distance
between their heels
and the ground.

Barefoot they explore their fields
their feet hard from wandering
and always returning
before the light
leaves their valley.

Dancing Barefoot Near Nimbin

I sleep tangled in dreams
of home
pushing past the sheets
of this February summer.

In the days
I stare into fields
and think of dancing barefoot near Nimbin

in an old barn
that smells of cows and sweat.

Even now I can hear our feet
pounding into the floor
as we dance through the dreaming hours
of the night.

In Footsteps

It was a Tuesday that we walked
up perpendicular steps
to the lighthouse, stopping
only for water
and to watch the sun sink
slowly, lengthening our shadows.

I will remember the way the ocean
looked from the top-
rippling between rocks
and curving slightly
with the earth.

I followed your path
on the way down-
measuring a new world
in the space
between your feet.

Mostly, I watched the way
vines grew all around trees
and birds caught bugs in their beaks,

going through the rhythms of evening
in their last moments
with the sun.

Sunset at Byron Bay

Standing barefoot on rocks
as the sun set
into the waves

and the clouds
became mountain peaks
with the light from the lighthouse
breaking through
the gradual collapse
of the day.

Ripples

Barefoot, we skipped stones
counting each time
they balanced on water.

Later, I watched a dragonfly
collide with a window
and for hours wished
I could free him.

I only know you
in the way we quietly watch mountains
settle into dusk
or the way you talk to birds
as if they will understand.

But for now we can walk
as quiet settles in
and the ocean
brings new rocks
to the shore.

7.2 Poems written on an excursion to Tasmania before the start of the ISP period:

Driving Through Tasmania

I watch the hills grow
before entering autumn.

The trees grow horizontally here
moss covered
and slippery with dew.

Below the Tallest Trees

Please don't be angry
with me when I lean
backwards against trees
or think of the sky
as falling horizontally
to the ground.

In a valley
with curved leaves
I realize
you'll never know
the width of my fingers
or the spaces

between my shoulders.

In the forest I walk
empty, arms outstretched
catching flecks of sun-
moments of warmth
filtered through branches.

These days you're far away
and I only lean on you
for balance
on tree trunks made slippery
by the water flowing beneath.

Broken Peaks

Speaking in jagged words
I want nothing more
than to listen
to the secrets found
in lakes between valleys,

the whispers of rocks
reflected in morning.

On Height

There were moments
when birds balanced on branches
waiting for the sky
to return.

Sometimes the wind

left scars along the bark
or else it murmured
between autumn leaves,
carrying them back
to the earth.

Today children stretch
their palms around the base-
measuring years in the spaces
between their fingers-
the way their bodies feel
against so much height.

for e.e. cummings

he's whispering of roses
and its early in the morning
somewhere.

there were days
when his curved sounds
blinked in my ears-
watching his childhood
through the tinted windows
of his old house.

even now, walking
through the quietest forests
i can still hear him
whispering of the rain.

The Sound of Your Feet in Autumn

Sun dulled by eyelids
on skin made brown.
Forgetting the silence of snow
or the way fallen leaves collect.

For months home
has been understanding
the height of trees
and the way sand rises in dunes.

Watching my shadow stretch
under a new sky
I climb mountains
with one foot
following the other-
as if walking
will make me whole again.

Today I'm lonely
so we walk to the east
and I let my feet dangle
above the ocean
listening to the waves collide
with the ground.

Tree Dwelling

Fire hollowed trees
now covered with moss-

I imagine living within

their crumbling bark
pieces of sun
along my face.

7.3 Poems written on an excursion to Fraser Island before the start of the ISP period:

The Density of Water

This is floating

breathing with water
that reflects the edge
where pieces of sand collect.

Listening,

I am listening
to the sound of depth,
to a fish darting
between branches
that fell from trees long ago.

Somewhere above there is sun
painting reflections-
drawing trees across the surface.

Renaissance

You remind me
to change often-

the way I look
at this world-

these trees
those mountains

and feel so lonely
and lovely

when I understand.

7.4 Poems Written in Alstonville, NSW during the start of the ISP period:

Before Leaving

Drawing maps on my forearms
I'm waiting to paint

green

for the fringes of your shirt
and so many leaves.

I'm lonesome for the paths
that led us to a rocky ocean
where we skipped rocks
along the still places
in water.

Now, you are leaving
in so many directions
and I-
I am climbing trees
to find words
walking beside streams

where the water moves
between my fingers.

I am trying not to see
this place in the abstract-
melting the colors
of mountains we climbed
and watching rocks crumble below.

Maybe we are young
and that is why I feel a sadness
as I listen to birds sing,
swooping down
from within branches.

For a New Earth

After dinner
the television flashes war-
burning cities selfishly forgotten

in hills surrounded
thinly by barbed wire and mountains.

The pain in dying eyes
bandaged and bleeding
was left on paths close to the sky
with trees
that made me feel small
and whole
all at once.

So I work with the earth
to bury what is beyond

this new valley that is familiar
like a childhood memory
or a forgotten dream.

There are mountains on the television
but the silence there is not beautiful
but tense
with fear.

Yet, I am still thinking about the stillness
of a lake
with an island of birds
and a branch resting
against the surface.

So for now I'll watch them climb
in a rotting silence
in mountains
so far from here.

Forgotten Way

There is this world
opening (open your eyes)
into the tangle of sky and branches.

Behind this tree
a spider's home
is caught in the morning light.

There are paths everywhere
(but we are scared and young and our feet do not know the way)
but only a few
who watch their breath exchanged
with the spreading branches of trees,

a few who are not lost
among vines and fallen leaves.

A lizard pauses
with yellow on its back
blurred by his swiftly moving tail

marking time in the dirt
it overturns on the forest floor.

Where the Road Slants
the ants crawl
in the cracks of the sidewalk

avoiding the mountains
of my toes

as they search
for pieces of food

or gather around
the still body of a bee.

Breakfast

There are still such simple moments
of jam spread across
two uneven pieces of toast

with morning sunlight
across our fingers
and the taste of wine
between midnight sheets

catching your dreams
of tide pools with still water
caught between stones
in the quiet before waves

and a single fish
swimming lazily in circles.

**7.5 Poems Written during my first stay at the Bruins' Farm in Tyalgum, NSW,
during the ISP period:**

Mirrored Path

Today it smells of basil
as I pile the earth
gently into mounds-
my back turning brown
in the sun.

Later, at a pond
where fish jump
towards the sky

I watch dragonflies hover
above the water-
their wings reflecting.

In Forward Motion

He spun a globe
against his palm
as on the hill
herbs grew in the sun.

Later, we followed a path through water-
the boys laughing
at the way their feet stuck in the mud.

Up the stream
in a place overgrown with weeds
we found their secret spot
where water collects in pools.

They had grown
since the last time they'd come-
noticing how the water
barely reached past their knees.

The Rotation of the Sun

I try not to think of you
early in the morning
when there is still sleep
in the corners of my eyes
and clouds that form lakes between the mountains
rising slowly

with the heat of the coming day.

Then the trees appear again
lifting the clouds back to the sky
where they turn orange with the setting sun.

I run with those orange clouds
down new roads and over streams-
going further each day
but always turning back into the mountains
that curve strangely at their peaks.

Then it's night again
and I can feel the quiet
and loneliness returning
among the faint echo of the wind.

In the Shadow of Mount. Warning

They say some come here to heal
and return to the earth.
15 years ago their father fell
from a car and came, still broken
to wake in the early moments of day
and weed a path
until two even rows spread behind him.

Years later a boy
separated from his wife and baby girl
sat by the waterfall
playing guitar for hours,
letting the sadness seep in.

I'm drawing leaves instead of trees
and as I trace their veins
Tanya tells me I'm getting closer to the earth.

I watch her hands become leaves
and lorikeets with red bellies swoop
between the branches of her arms.

She stands with her branches reaching
towards the sun
as we climb the mountain
all the way up to its jagged peak.

From the top
the land spreads in so many directions
away from the simplicity of fallen leaves
turned red with autumn
and rain that flows into the valley
making roots grow deeper with each drop.

From the top its clear
that the healing comes from below the mountain
with work that leaves fingers stained
brown from dirt
and the smell of mint leaves all around.

In New Light

(seeds with miniature roots hold tightly to the dirt below)

He wakes early

to water the fields
and feels the quiet
that exists between his hands
and the earth.

(over the hill the sun's rising again)

She's walking ahead of him
picking basil and mint
as he watches her bend
into the curving earth.

She treads lightly on the surface
swiftly moving between rows
and I do not know how she walks beyond
these hills
only that once you stand in the misty autumn morning
between mountains
there is a strangeness all around
and growth can only be measured
in the rows that spread behind.

For Mount Warning

They used to climb you
only when the children
were old enough-

but now so many feet
recklessly walk up your spine
only caring about the view
from the top

and noticing the stones
that fall behind their feet,
slowly chipping your great height away.

You are chained now
at your peak
and each person who walks up
pulls at you
because they are not strong enough
to climb without conquering.

So there will be a day
when your trees have fallen,
the steps along your back crumbled

and the people will be left to wander
at your base.

7.6 Poems written during the two days I spent in Byron Bay during the ISP period:

In Distance

She walks lost
through city streets
aching for dirt to be drawn
along her fingers
and mountains to spread
all around.

In dreams she's playing songs
she's never known
on an old guitar,

fumbling with the foreign strings.

In the days she escapes
riding a bike
through a rocky coastline
behind a boy
who has pieces of the sky
behind his ears
and is learning through the sound of his own breath
his connection to every ant and mosquito
that crosses his path.

But soon she's lost again
drinking tea on a wooden table
without a past
and longing for the trees
that spread their roots above the soil
fading only when the sun sets.

In sentences that spread evenly across a page
she reads of a woman
who sees brilliant colors in the leaves
and feels everywhere the pain
of breaking branches
(and her world crumbles so easily).

She's waiting for a stream
that promises yellow leaves shaped like boats
and sounds like the wind
between branches.

But even then
there is a distance in her language
and thoughts only bring her further
from connecting

to those trees

that water

and every single insect

out there.

Drowning

The water rose
to the beach's end
washing away sand castles
built along its edge.

So we must mold our minds
and let the rocks flood in the mornings
with only the moon guiding them.

Along the water
the grains emerge again
ground finely
from so much distance.

So he walks a path
ancient with mountains
that have long since washed into the sea.

The sun still rises in the east
and the wind's blowing from the south
brining a rain that hums softly
into the sea.

We've lost those islands
in a green storm
trying only to see the
 red, yellow, purple, blue
of life below
a mirrored surface.

The fishermen would laugh
at life on land
but he's struggling with empty hands
and cursing the unsteady floor
below his feet.

"Leave this land" she said
"leave it for the sea"

but she was lost
before she left

and the tide rose
all around.

Breaking Moulds

Sometimes I think the world is breaking...

but then there's the rain again
and the shadows that stretch
far in front.

Am I a writer
or lost somewhere between fallen leaves?

Mostly I am running
trying to find roads
that never end,

measuring forever in a darkening sky
and thinking about riding a bike
with my hands in the air
and branches spreading like fingers
all around.

I'm finding inspiration in mountains
and this one road
I collect fallen leaves from

trying always to capture
the instant a child
looks past his reflection in a stream

and sees so much life

below.

Rotations

A butterfly with uneven spots on her body

spreads her wings for balance
as the wind blows through them.

A child skips
next to her mother
saying goodbye to every tree she passes
while a caterpillar weaves a cocoon
with a steadiness I have not seen before.

The butterfly leaves
drawing invisible circles
below the branches of a tree

and the child grows older
forgetting how to talk to trees
and seeing only the brightest colors

no longer the simple shades
in the sky, leaves, grass
and dirt that surround her.

Now new children climb in the branches,
laughing as the tree holds them
in the shade of an afternoon.

Formations

I will take pieces of the wind
through palm leaves
while lying on my back
letting the shadows spread
across my face.

Pieces of the rain
on my window
in the last moments before drifting
into dreams.

I will take the mist in the mountains
in the orange light of sunrise
and the earth under my fingernails
from planting herbs
I can smell for days.

I will take the whip birds
who are always singing to each other
and the cool autumn evenings
with the clearest skies
holding stars that spread in jumbled patterns.

And then I will give it all back
because it is not mine

not now

not ever.

**7.7 Poems written at Erwin and Adrienne Webber's home in Chillingham, NSW,
during the ISP period:**

Metamorphosis

(or a healing story)

We struggle with the earth

crying when our skin peels
and falling
because we have climbed too high
worked the land into dust.

A boy takes a hammer
to the dry earth
and watches it split
jagged like lightning
through an old riverbed.
But he's forgotten the water
that ran through
and only wonders
why the stone is so soft.

In the morning
there are waterfalls that stripe the mountain
and clouds
that never leave its valley.

The boy's drawn the mountain
a thousand times
trying to capture the way it turns red at sunrise
and is shadowed
by dusk.

Each time it changes
he realizes the mountain
is more alive than he is

and his paintings crumble

into the dust that surrounds him.

So they start from the beginning
planting trees and vines
that slowly attach to the roof.

The birds are the first to return
and the boy learns their names-
his hands already grown rough from planting.

Now he paints trees
because they are always changing
and filling in the empty spaces
below the mountain.

Withered

I feel compassion
for a rose cut
and placed in an old bottle
filled with water
to delay
the ugliness of death.

New Winds

On a darkening path
we feel autumn on bare shoulders.

Over a coast crooked with rocks
the rain moves
in from the east.

There are whispers of frost
in the valley
but on the hill
vegetables will be planted in the morning
and the sun
still warms the earth.

Windswept

A boy questions the way she's connected
to the light that reflects in mountains
and her old disconnect fills her-
a greyness settling into the corners.

In the night she wakes
and walks into the darkness
seeing a map of the past
in ancient pinpricks of light.

In the day she leaves
running until she finds a stream
at the bottom of a rocky mountain
where water smoothes the rocks
as parrots rise with brilliant red above.

In letters she writes
about the way mountains form
and the stars that spread above-

measuring love in dreams
that fade in a confused morning
with a new horizon

that faces towards the south
sending cool autumn breezes
that spin her world around
like a compass without poles

and the earth is lost again in endless circles...

until

an old couple with wooden floors
and a ceiling made of vines
tell her of their past-

sculpted by wind
in ancient forests
watching light reflect in braided streams
under a twilit sky

that is forever changing
yet always the same.

About Simplicity

The cool breath of a night
the way a vine
wraps all the way around a tree.

Bits of blue sky through fronds.

A wallaby bounding across a path before dusk.

Parrots eating seeds off the porch.

Husking corn-pale green peeling into yellow.

Sunlight warming the veranda.

Calm

and then

a breeze through the leaves.

Starry nights.

A stream at the bottom

of a mountain with striped rocks.

Sore shoulders from digging

holes into the earth.

A fallen yellow leaf.

Laundry drying in autumn sunshine.

A ladybird curled into coriander.

A hidden path through the forest.

The bending branches of dying trees without leaves.

Poems written into the night.

Mirrored Image

Once in a stream I lost myself-

the plaguing guilt I feel

on limbs grown heavy with age.
Oh I was light
and could dance with the cool water.

Now I dream of a new stream
hidden at the bottom of a path
and surrounded by smooth rocks
and cool, moving waters
that make circles
around my ankles
taking with them
that broken sense of self
I have wasted so much time on.

(So she came to the place
where water meets land at the bottom of a mountain
grown thick with forest
and gathered the branches round her like a blanket
only uncurling when the stars spread above.)

In New Strands

Shirtless you cut your hair
grown long in these foreign months
and the birds take strands for their nests
weaving the pieces between straw and branches.

In the morning you speak
in broken poems of mountains
that rise through clouds.

Here, we move slowly

trying not to break the earth
but we come from a conquering people
with pale skin and heavy boots
that crush the plants below
into a dust
that will not rise again.

But here they speak of another dust-
a healing ash
spread across broken faces

and when the moons pass
trees grow up
from a burned stump.

For the Child

From within the child awakens,
at first only seeing colors-
where green meets blue,
forming a line that parallels his eyes.

Next shapes fill him-
the oval of a leaf,
cylinders of tree trunks
the pointed peak of a mountain in the distance
seemingly smaller than his hands.

When he moves
the colors blend
and he loses the shapes
in a rippling pond

where a catfish swims
always out of reach.

One Day, Mount Springbrook

In the morning we sat on the porch
and painted the mountain
as it changed with the coming day.

And the whole day went like that-
 leveling the earth
 into symmetrical squares
 until our hands ached
and we returned to the new mountain
changed from clouds moving all around it-
patches of yellow light
finding tops of trees
and blue holes coming
and disappearing
with the wind.

Late in the afternoon the rain came
hiding the mountain in a thick fog
leaving us
with only a small painting
to remember.

(But do you recall the last sunrise
when the birds were laughing softly
and orange clouds pierced
what sky lay above?)

Eclipse

She picked an orange from a tree
and watched the world spread
from those tiny seeds
into an ancient forest
where the creek dried up years ago
and moss now covers the stones.

Then the rain comes
returning the blue green waters
where catfish laze in the heat of the day,
their whiskers moving gently
with the tide.

So they built a house
and watched the vines climb all around it.
Every morning the sun rose orange
and the mountain came and went with the seasons

in the endless circle of the sun.

7.8 Poems written at my second stay at the Bruins' Farm in Tyalgum, NSW, during the ISP period:

Autumn Wind

The days passed
with the sun setting early
and the branches scraping
against the roof.

She let him in slowly

and their days spread evenly
with his music playing
all the way into the night.

The wind blew all around
taking the leaves
turned yellow and scattering them
along the road.

In those days
they never danced
for their feet were tired from work,
but they sat with their children
around a square rug
telling stories without endings.

Sleepless in the nights she would walk
under a canopy of stars
feeling the stillness
in such small points of light.

And the wind blew all around
taking the words from his songs
and spreading them through the fields
so every time they harvested food
his music would seep into their hands.

And in the nights
their children heard them singing again.

Ripples

The water carves these rocks
in jagged circles
falling over edges
into still pools below.

The sky pales
next to the green water
where the trees hold back their leaves.

But it's autumn now
and fallen leaves find their way
into the water
holding tightly
to the rocks below.

In the nights
the wind gathers in the valley
but the days are calm
with only the sound of water
moving through rocks.

The Sound of Hills

There is music
in these mountains
as the boy walks
through new fields
and makes them his own
(the kookaburras laughing at him
from the branches of a fig tree).

Soon the mountains sing back

in shades of green
that change as the sun sinks
behind them.

And the leaves of the fig tree spread
like fingers to the sky
as the mountains fold them into creases.

In the branches
a moth with yellow wings
flies around pieces of the sky
until the night comes
bringing quiet to the hills.

New Words

I have a friend who blends easily
with the trees
and in the mornings we work
below the fig leaves
but in the afternoons I loose him
to the sad songs
he plays to the mountains.

I am trying to write stories without endings
that follow an ancient path through this valley,
with the rain
wearing away the earth.

These are stories without people
of trees grown from stumps
and leaves turned red in autumn

(and no one, not even the trees, are old enough to remember).

I listen for the ghosts of rivers
that flowed through this mountain
(but only the stars have witnessed these waters and I do not yet speak their language).

But I keep getting lost
in those sad songs
confusing the notes
with the language of trees
until the music comes with the wind,
scraping against the roof.

Of Layers

More fallen leaves
and the afternoons are cool and quiet.

I write while you listen
with your eyes closed
to the sky
and the places where water comes from.

Below the hill
I hang laundry in the morning
and watch it dry
in the fading sun
(pieces of light on our shoulders).

One day she saw her life
in the wings of a dragonfly
and followed those roads in the night

to his farm-
waking at dawn
to a new world
 in a valley
 below the greenest mountains
(and they worked until their feet were the color of the earth).

We came here only as travelers
and to find a balance with the earth
but we took the leaves
from fig trees
and tried to make them our own
like so many who came before.

But soon the valley began to change us
in forgotten memories
(and their hair grew long and they forgot about shoes
because the dirt felt so lovely between their toes).

For a moment the wind quieted
and she watched the stars
from a broken window
as he told her stories
of the world of ants
 and she looked closer
 losing herself in that new world.

The stream grew strong
falling from great heights-
the fish learning to jump
in still pools of water.

And in the cool autumn nights
they lit a fire
(but the hills were calling him
and she watched him slipping away each morning).

In the afternoons
he'd play the saddest songs
as she collected fallen leaves.
Then one day he left
and her world turned to pieces-
 broken spider webs
 that dangled from branches
(for she had never learned the language of the leaves
and the trees held their secrets).

New Home

So he left to where branches spread
and cover up the sky
 and sat
 quietly waiting
 for the loneliness to pass.
Then night came,
each star providing a new comfort
(and when he slept he dreamt of a river with smooth rocks and cool water).

The morning was green sunshine
and leaves shaped like diamonds-
reminding him of his child's eyes.

The floor below spread
with fallen branches

that were old and moss covered
with ferns growing all along the edges.

So he built a home from sticks
and the sun came and went
rising just out of reach
(the branches bending too far forward).

First colors became sharper-
each spot on a ladybird
an endless black swimming in the richest red
and green leaves separated
in brilliant shades
(even in the night the moon filled
the sky with a white and yellow light
that darkened the shadows).

Then the days shortened-
the leaves falling red and orange
all around.

Relapse into Tomorrow

The days were fading
and she felt herself slipping
into the old ways of disconnect.

So he told her about the beauty
that was all around-
how every moment was new
and always changing.

So she reached for light
reflecting in autumn leaves
and saved a drowning spider
from a pool of sunlit water

but then the distance returned
and she felt such separation
from the roots she pulled
from the ground
that they tangled
and fell out of reach

(where was this beauty? She wondered if she had dreamed up the world
and was just now waking up).

So he told her about compassion
and she ached to see the world anew
(the clouds spreading above from a paintbrush).

Slowly things became clearer-
the moss patches on the bark of a tree that held three dead leaves-
their crumbling bodies
still holding on to the branches

as if they were alive,

until one fell
into the wings of a monarch
and a calf ran in circles
through its mother's legs
with the rain spreading
in an arch of colors

and finally she saw
where those mountains were pointing.

For a Dying Leaf

Torn at the tip
your point dangling a jagged yellow,
you grip with an old brown step
to the smooth bark

but death whispers in the wind
and even the sun
leaves you brittle

until brown and stiff
you fall
into the earth.

Returning

A warm night
for the end of autumn
and the dawn was rust
with lakes of clouds in the valley.

They picked herbs
until their fingers ached
and he saw each passing moment
while she forgot all she used to know

and the birds came in pairs
while the children

had mud fights in the stream.

They left their bodies
by the pile of stones
they'd collected under the waterfall
(and the wind scattered their ashes and new life grew from that dust).

In a patch of weeds
 a single flower
 with a purple center grew
 and she carried that secret
 with her all day.
(walking down the hill, they compared their earth stained hands,
following the creases the dirt had settled in).

In the mornings
she found new roads
where a calf walked feebly by its mother
below a mountain
and behind a sharp fence
 that tore the world into pieces of belonging.
(Once these hills rolled fluidly like the ocean,
and the trees spread above
never growing too high.)

During the days
he forgot how to speak
because the earth was so deep
spreading out in all directions.

So instead he walked

without shoes
over the hills
and grew into an old fig tree
with roots like the gnarled fingers of his grandfather
(and in her dreams she could still hear him
walking noisily on the gravel road
that led to their house).
Once he had told her
that the world was beautiful
as the mountains turned blue
and the moon rose half full
in a fading pink sky.

Fluidity

I flowed through that water
feeling only gravity
for there is no body in water
 no ending
 or beginning
only clarity
magnifying the rocks
that are wearing away
(with the trees bending towards my edges,
their leaves hovering just above the surface).

With water there is no story
only moments of ripples,
fish hovering at the surface
and dragonflies
that feel the cool mist rising.

The sky takes and returns to the water
in an endless cycle
(the rain making circles overlap
in the swiftly moving stream).

Moon Song

And I shrank
into a million tiny pieces
that scattered with the wind.

The moon rose so full
that the mountains shone like shadows
as we drove
laughing while the dust made clouds
like the real clouds
that we watched change every morning
forming and reforming
with the wind.

In the forest
The night spread cold
and in their home
they burned a single log
and sat by the warmth of that old tree
long into the night.

Leaving

One day she realized
her family was broken
so old for her years she left
and in the morning light of a new home

wondered if they woke everyday new
below these mountains
only seeing the shades of green
that change every single day.

So she sang to herself on roads
looking only at the sky
and spreading her arms wide

so thankful to be alive
in this changing world.

7.9 Haiku Section

Haiku written while traveling through northern New South Wales before the start of the ISP period:

mist
after dawn-
the baby wakes.

Kaleb sleeps
the trees above
hold koalas

rain
against the roof-
summer's end

far from home
the darkness
of a night

Haiku written in Alstonville, NSW, during the start of the ISP period:

hillside lookout-
a city
in the mountains

driving home-
full moon
behind clouds

at the top
mountains stretch

in a rainforest
stories of snow

televised war
cities burn-
an autumn breeze

monastery bombed-
waning moon
through windows

dead men
on the television-
april moon behind clouds

crossword at breakfast
coffee steam caught in the

sunlight through windows

Haiku written during the two days I spent in Byron Bay, NSW, during the ISP period:

sun on my face
during a rainstorm-
steam from a teacup

the sun moves down-
with the breeze
pigeons fly by

Haiku written during my second stay on the Bruins' Farm in Tyalgum, NSW, during the ISP period:

the sound of wind
through distant leaves-
midday haze

a spotted calf
stands near its mother-
afternoon sunshine on the barn roof

from a hilltop
clouds settle thickly
in the valley

a single fig tree-
cockatoos fly
between branches

nearly full moon-
blue mountains
along the horizon

sun on our backs-
wingbeats from magpies
flying overhead

weeding basil-
the sound of wingbeats
from magpies

7.10 Haiku Sequences

**Haiku Sequence written on a ginko near Alstonville, NSW, during the start of the
ISP period:**

Widjabul Walk

rainforest path
canopy broken
by sky

sunlit path
a spider web hangs
between vines

bees swarm
fallen leaves
gather

falling leaf-
a mosquito sings
in my ear

a single rock
among fallen sticks-
strangler fig

ash leaf
on a spider web
autumn sun

resting moth
palm leaves
in the breeze

a beetle lands-
green moss covers
a patch of bark

Haiku sequence written on a trip to Brunswick Heads, NSW, with Quendryth and Owen Young during the start of the ISP period:

Driving to Brunswick Heads

side road
tree shadows
across the gravel

barbed wire fence

a dove holding
grass in its beak

parked car-
houses over the site
of his old home

the trees
are blurred-
rain on the windshield

light rain
on the windows-
hum of the motor

flooded road
a family of ducks
swimming

red soil
trees grow out
from the steep bank

scattered leaves
dark clouds
after rain

**Haiku sequence written at the home of Erwin and Adrienne Weber in Chillingham,
NSW, during the ISP period:**

Morning Sun

clouds between sunlit spider webs-
steam from tea
blows in the morning breeze

cool morning
sunlight reflects
on the edge of a teacup

sunlight in the east
a mountain shaded
by clouds

leaves move
in a morning breeze-
spots of sun on shaded branches

clouds layer mountains-
a sunlit canopy
of leaves

abandoned spider webs
broken by sunlight-
kookaburras laughing in the trees

a house made of trees
above a ground
thick with leaves

a cloudless morning-

chicken-wire casts octagonal shadows
on eucalypt leaves

woken by sunlight
across my face-
cold feet in the early morning

**Haiku sequence written by a waterfall on my second stay at the Bruins' farm in
Tyalgum, NSW, during the ISP period:**

Below a Waterfall

below slanted palm trees
water falls
into a still pool

light shines on moss
water falls
onto rocks

fallen leaves float
in a rippling pool-
branches move in the breeze

shadows move-
the sound of water
through rocks

a dog catches fish
a mosquito lands
on his leg

shade under a waterfall-
a bird flies
through the canopy

a spider climbs
over my foot-
the water reflects fallen leaves

pieces of the sky
reflect in pools
of moving water

7.11 Haibun

Haibun written after arriving in Australia, before the ISP period had begun:

New Sky

To get to Australia I flew in airplanes for so many hours that the days were confused with the nights and my world became an endless ocean. On my last flight I was put in an isle seat but somewhere half way between Los Angeles and Brisbane I leaned over the sleeping girl next to me to look out her window

mountains
of clouds
over a curving horizon

**Haibun written during my second stay on the Bruins' farm in Tyalgum, NSW,
during the ISP period:**

Reflections

I sit above this waterfall in a valley below Mount Warning, watching the way bubbles float on the surface of the water all the way down through the rocks. Here, my days start early with the rising sun and for the first time I am made aware of the slowly changing seasons - the way a few more leaves have turned red each morning and how the mint grows more slowly as the days become cooler. So when the farm work is done and I feel tired, I come to listen to the moving water, where the sun comes through the leaves

yellow
reflected in circular ripples
of water

In Daylight

I wake up at dawn, putting on thick layers of clothing for these late autumn mornings and walking up a hill into sunlit mountains and hours of working the fields. I stand at the base of Mount Warning and pick mint - making sure to keep my bunches big enough and removing the small leaves at the bottom of the stem. Then I weed a row until the baby spinach leaves show through again

two rows
of small green leaves-
the dirt freshly turned over

In the afternoon I run because leaving a place makes it feel more like my home when I return. And the moon's already out, even though the sky is still a pale blue. Cows graze along the road and over a stream

trees line the road-
fallen leaves
are under my feet

and back at the farm, the sky is darkening.

In Search of a Stream

After the hard work today my shoulders ached and I left to walk through sharp bushes that snagged at my pants. I left myself then and listened for the sound of water running through rocks, walking with my eyes closed until the ground was smooth and cool below my feet.

autumn afternoon
water flows
between stones

Finding Home

I sit curled and new, looking at trees glazed with afternoon sun and the cockatoos calling outside. I have worked on this farm now for two weeks and I know the way the soil feels under my feet and how to cut parsley and mint into perfect bunches. I know how to walk through the thickening trees, following the sound of water flowing, until I come to the waterfall.

in a clearing
water falls
into green pools

In my time here I have followed the two boys to their secret spot, slipping and losing my shoes in the sticky mud while getting scraped by lantana, until we stopped

water parts-
a single rock
warm in the sunshine

Standing by that single rock I understood how many levels of beauty there are and the wonderful simplicity of childhood that I so often forget.

At the end of every day here I go on a long run

in the valley

mountains surround

the roads

Then today when I came back from my run, Tanya was giving her boys haircuts and she offered to cut my hair as well. So I let her cut off all my long hair, all those years of growing it, and the pieces fell to the ground and the wind came

strands of cut hair

scatter in an autumn wind

As those pieces blew away I thought of all the birds that would use my hair in their nests and felt I had made a home for myself in this farm below the mountains.

Section 8: Time Management Recommendations:

If someone else were planning on writing environmental poetry either in the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales or anywhere else in Australia I would have a few strong suggestions for them. First, it is essential to form a strong bond with your natural environment and in order to do that it is important to spend as much time as possible in one area, preferably one single location. There is much beauty to be seen everywhere, but if you stay in one place you will form a connection with that area and really see how it changes daily, which gives great depth to poetry. It is also important to interact with your surroundings and not simply observe them. I found equal amounts of inspiration from the farm work I did as I did from just sitting by a waterfall and observing it. It is not imperative that one does farm work in order to write environmental poetry, but it is necessary to interact in a sustainable way with the natural environment daily in order to form an intimate relationship with it. Although it is important to keep notes of experiences, inspirations and poems, it is also important to take breaks from writing and simply let your environment sink in. I did this while working on the farm, or even just by watching or listening to my surroundings. Painting also helped me to open up my senses to what was around me, but there is no doubt other ways of observing, rather than writing, could lead to poems.

Section 9: Ideas For Future Research:

There are a few different directions this project could go if there was more time to do it in. The first is that I could become more connected with the different local poetry groups by attending different meetings (i.e. Bush Poets, Dangerously Poetic, Live Poets), submitting poems to different magazines and contests and basically becoming connected to other poets in this area of northern New South Wales. This would provide me with peers who, as writers, could give me further ideas for environmental poetry as well as help to edit my poems.

Another direction this project could go is to live in more homes than just the Young's, Weber's and Bruin's in the Northern Rivers area of northern New South Wales. To continue the theme of farming and writing about those experiences in this area, over a longer period of time I could WWOOF at a number of farms, possibly spending about a month in each location in order to form a sense of place in that location. I could get these WWOOFing contacts either from Rod and Tanya Bruin or from simply talking to people at the organic markets where I helped the Bruins sell their produce. WWOOFing at other homes within the erosion caldera would give me an even deeper understanding of this area and thus really add depth to my poetry.

The last place I can see being further researched for this project is in the field of deep ecology. From speaking with Erwin and Adrienne Weber and reading just a bit in books about deep ecology I found that this eco-philosophy really fits with the mindset I was falling into through writing environmental poems, and it would be interesting and beneficial to the project to explore deep ecology and other similar eco-philosophies further, to help mould my mindset while writing environmental poems.

Section 10: Conclusion:

10.1 Reflection on the Process:

The process of writing poems about the natural environments I lived in changed me more than I could have imagined. It forced me to form a deep connection with my natural surroundings and although I often struggled for a sense of place in a new country, I was able to form an intimate bonding with this area within the erosion caldera of northern New South Wales.

I feel as if I spent my time well during the ISP period, for no matter where I traveled I tried to connect to the natural environment through writing. I ultimately found that living in one place and forming a strong association with that place leads to the most genuine creativity, for in that situation I was able to open my senses completely and acknowledge my surroundings and how they are constantly changing. For me, the place with which I formed that relationship was the farm of Rod and Tanya Bruin. During the relatively short amount of time I spent there I was able to establish a profound connection to my habitat, which led me to experience and write about it in a very intimate way.

It was fascinating to watch the way my writing changed over time, as I became more comfortable with the natural environment around me. This process really showed how writing nature poetry changed my perception and appreciation of my experiences.

Finally, I hope that my poems are able to influence people to feel as connected to nature as I do from the process of writing.

10.2 Fulfillment of Study Goals:

In a personal reflection on reaching my study goals I feel as if I chose those goals well, and was able to visualize my project before beginning it, for I feel that I reached nearly all of my study goals. I have an understanding of the history of Australian poetry from the books I read and local poets I spoke with. I formed a sense of place to the best of my ability for the short period of time I was in Australia, from constantly paying attention to my surroundings and talking to local people in the areas in which I lived, in

order to understand their sense of place. I became much more in tune with the natural environments I lived in by spending time in nature reflecting on what was going on around me and through the farm work I did. One place I fell short of my study goals was in understanding the natural processes of where I was living and working. I think I could have talked to more local people or read more books about the areas I was living and working in so that I was not only going off on my observations to form an understanding of my natural surroundings. I tried not to become discouraged when plans were changed, by making the best out of new situations that came my way and staying open to my surroundings so that I was always finding inspiration for writing. Lastly, I enjoyed myself by finding a balance between working and experiencing. Every day I made sure to write or reflect on my experiences but I also made sure during the day to simply live in the moment, and take in my natural surroundings instead of constantly taking notes and writing about those surroundings.

10.3 Fitting into a Larger Context:

It is important to understand how the poems I wrote during the ISP period fit into the whole of Australian environmental poetry. I found that themes for my poems resembled much of the poetry I read about the Northern Rivers area of northern New South Wales and thus could fit into anthologies and local poetry publications produced in this area. With environmental poetry, each experience is unique and personal and adds a new perspective on the interpretation of the natural environment. Thus, putting my poetry out there to be read by others will allow them insight into how I interpreted my surroundings.

After researching the history and progression of Australian environmental poetry, I feel that I have a good understanding of this genre, and can confidently say that the poems I wrote during the ISP period fit in with the modern environmental poems, haiku and haibun that I studied.

Section 11: References:

- 1) Axiom (Publishing Company). 1996, Australian Bush Poems, Axiom Publishing, Australia.
- 2) Balzer, Norma. 2002, Once Upon a Farm, Watson Ferguson & Company, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.
- 3) Cottle, Lee (ed.). 1997, Pinnacle Perspectives, published by Lee Cottle for the Pinnacle writers group of Murwillumbah, NSW, Australia.
- 4) Dawe, Bruce. 1984, Selected Poems, York Press, Essex, England.
- 5) George, Beverley (ed.). 2005, Yellow Moon, Snap Printing, Hornsby.
- 6) Gurga, Lee. 2003, Haiku a Poet's Guide, Modern Haiku Press, Lincoln, Illinois.
- 7) Haynes, Jim. 2000, An Australian Heritage of Verse, ABC Books, Sydney, Australia.
- 8) Heseltine, Harry (ed.). 1984, The Penguin Book of Australian Verse, The Dominion Press-Hedges & Bell, Victoria, Australia
- 9) Johnson, Judy. 2004, Nomadic, Black Pepper, Melbourne, Australia.
- 10) Kemeny, P.G. 1972, Notes and Commentary on Judith Wright's Poetry, Angus & Robertson, Western Australia.
- 11) Kramer, Leonie (ed.). 1991, My Country Australian Poetry & Short Stories Two Hundred Years, Ure Smith Press, Brisbane, Australia
- 12) Wicks, Les. 2000, The Ways of Waves, SideWALK [Poets] Collective Inc., Australia.
- 13) Mackaness, Joan S. & Mackaness, George. (ed.) 1959, The Wide Brown Land, Halstead Press, Sydney, Australia.
- 14) Mafi-Williams, Lorraine (ed.) 1993, Spirit Songs: A Collection of Aboriginal Poetry, Omnibus Books, Norwood, South Australia.
- 15) Murray, Les. 1990, Dog Fox Field, Collins/Angus & Robertson, NSW, Australia.
- 16) Nunn, Graham. 2005, Measuring the Depth, Pardalote Press, Tasmania, Australia.
- 17) Page, Geoff. 1991, Geoff Page Selected Poems, Collins/Angus & Robertson, NSW, Australia.

- 18) Patterson, Banjo. 1975, Poems of Banjo Patterson, Kyodo Shing Loong Press, Singapore.
- 19) Raftis, R. February 2006, 'Australian Bush Poetry, Verse & Music,' <http://www.bushverse.com/history.html> (6 February 2006).
- 20) Reichhold, Jane. 2002, Writing and Enjoying Haiku, Kodansha , America, Inc., New York, NY.
- 21) Ringland, Jean, 2004, Among Talk Trees, Bangalow Writers' Group, Bangalow, NSW, Australia.
- 22) Roszach, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (ed.) 1995, Ecopsychology Restoring the Earth Healing the Mind, The University of California Press, The United States of America.
- 23) Schmidt, M. July, 1998, 'The Jindyworobak Movement,' <http://avoca.vienet.net.au/~0217/edit9831.html> (13 April 2006).
- 24) Shore, Laura J. (ed.) 2006, To the Edge, Poetry from Byron Bay and Beyond, Dangerously Poetic Press, Byron Bay, NSW, Australia
- 25) Stewart, Catherine, 1998, Oasis Parchment, Totally Board Publications, Lismore, NSW, Australia.
- 26) Wessman, R., Reeves, L., Marwood, L., Rockel, A., Winfield, L. & Wynne, W. (ed.) December 2004, Famous Reporter 30, Walleah Press, Northern Hobart, Tasmania.
- 27) Wilson, Edwin. 1984, The Dragon Tree, Woodbine Press, NSW, Australia.
- 28) Wright, Judith. 1985, Judith Wright Selected Poems, Griffin Press, Australia.
- 29) Young, Quendryth, 2004, Naked in Sepia, Pocket Books Productions, Goonellabah, NSW, Australia.

Section 12: List of Contacts:

Balzar, Norma: Environmental Poet, Author of Once Upon a Farm

Address: 91 James Street, Dunoon, NSW 2480

Home Telephone Number: (02) 6689-5206

Bruin, Rod and Tanya: WWOOFing contact for Summit Organics

Address: 776 Tyalgum Creek Road, Tyalgum, New South Wales 2484

Home Telephone Number (02) 6679-2012

Hallet, David: Poet, runs a group called Live Poets that meets in Lismore at the Rous Hotel

Home Telephone Number: (02) 6688-6485

Work Telephone Number: (02) 6689-1559

Northern Rivers Writers' Center

Telephone Number: (02) 6685-5115

Located upstairs in the community center in Byron Bay

Contacts there: Jill Edington or Rebecca

Rebecca's e-mail: bek@nrwc.org.au

Nunn, Graham: Haibun specialist living in Brisbane, runs Queensland Poetry Festival, author of Measuring the Depth

E-mail: geenunn@yahoo.com.au

Ringland, Jean: Environmental Poet

E-mail: Jeanr@nsw.quik.com.au

Ryan, Max: Environmental Poet, Author of Rainswayed Night

Home Telephone Number: (02) 6686-3105

E-mail: maxpoetry@hotmail.com

Shore, Laura Jan: Environmental Poet, head of the poetry group known as *Dangerously Poetic* that puts out publications of local poets

Home Telephone Number: (02) 6680-1967

E-mail: Lshore@Linknet.com.au

Stewart, Catherine: Environmental Poet, Author of Oasis Parchment

Address: 15 Esmonde Street, Lismore, NSW 2480

Home Telephone: (02) 6622-7451

Weber, Adrienne and Erwin: WWOOFing contact

E-mail: solarhomes@mullum.com.au

Home Telephone: (02) 6679-1439

Wilson, Edwin: Environmental poet and author of The Dragon Tree

Address: 59 Burlington Street, Crows Nest 2065

Young, Quendryth: Environmental Poet, Author of Naked in Sepia

Address: 5 Cedar Court, Alstonville, NSW 2477

e-mail: quendrythyoung@bigpond.com

Home Telephone Number: (02) 6628-3753

Section 13: Appendix:

Inspirational Quotes from Judith Wright:

From *Nigger's Leap: New England*:

“Now we must measure our days by nights,
our tropics by their poles, love by its end
and all our speech by silence” (Wright 1985, p.8).

“Dancing like the shadows
of saplings in the wind” (Wright 1985, p.8).

From *The Idler*:

“The islands ran like emeralds through his fingers” (Wright 1985, p.6).

“till he turned truant, cleared the heads at dawn,
and half forgot the seasons,
under that sky” (Wright 1985, p.6).

From *At Cooloolah*:

“knew that no land
is lost or won by wars
for earth is spirit” (Wright 1985, p.83).

“I know that we are
justified only by love” (Wright 1985, p.83).

From *Landscapes*:

“Every brilliant leaf that lives by light” (Wright 1985, p.84).

“men and trees and grasses daily falling
make that veil of
beauty for her” (Wright 1985, p.84).

“Now we weep for eyes whose look
is closed on landscapes loved, and at last known” (Wright 1985, p.84).

From *Camphor Laurel*:

“Here in the slack of night
the tree breathes honey and moonlight” (Wright 1985, p.25).

From *The World and the Child*:

“Out of himself like a thread
the child spins pain
and makes a net to catch the unknown world” (Wright 1985, p.27).

“No net is strong enough to hold the world” (Wright 1985, p.27).

From *The Cycads*:

“Round them the rising forests of the years” (Wright 1985, p.29).

“Among the complicated birds and flowers
they see a generation carved in stone” (Wright 1985, p.29).

“And with their countless suns the years spin on” (Wright 1985, p.29).

“We are turned to a great tree” (Wright 1985, p.29).

From *The Killer*:

“The birds sang frail as glass” (Wright 1985, p.33).

From *Falls Country*:

“Trees were their thoughts
she hid in her paintings,
clothed, clouded in leaves” (Wright 1985, p.175).

“her piano
scattered glistening notes
of leaves in sunlight” (Wright 1985, p.175).

“What does the earth say” (Wright 1985, p.175)?

“There is
there was
a country
that spoke in the language of leaves” (Wright 1985, p.175).

From *This Time Alone*:

“and I found the world that does not die” (Wright 1985, p.146).

From *The Morning of the Dead*:

“Out of the sky that is always astonished by dawn
move the enormous unconscious clouds,
blindly becoming, being, undoing their being” (Wright 1985, p.126).

Inspirational Quotes from To The Edge

From *Waiting With My Father* by Max Ryan

“The Space between two stars” (Shore 2006, p.74).

Inspirational Quotes from Pinnacle Perspectives

From *In Silence* by Adrienne Weber

“In the silence of the forest my mind stills” (Cottle 1997, p.16).

“The minute cycles of life” (Cottle 1997, p.16).

“The ancient fabric,
of wilderness and time” (Cottle 1997, p.16).