

Classic Poetry Series

**Judith Wright**  
**- poems -**

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## Judith Wright(1915 - 2000)

Judith Wright was a prolific Australian poet, critic, and short-story writer, who published more than 50 books. Wright was also an uncompromising environmentalist and social activist campaigning for Aboriginal land rights. She believed that the poet should be concerned with national and social problems. At the age of 85, just before her death, she attended in Canberra at a march for reconciliation with Aboriginal people.

Rhyme, my old cymbal,

I don't clash you as often,

or trust your old promises

music and unison.

I used to love Keats, Blake;

now I try haiku

for its honed brevities,

its inclusive silences.

(from 'Brevity' in Notes at Edge)

Judith Arundell Wright was born near Armidale, New South Wales, into an old and wealthy pastoral family. Wright was raised on her family's sheep station. After her mother died in 1927, she was educated under her grandmother's supervision. At the age of 14 she was sent to New England Girls' School, where she found consolation from poetry and decided to become a poet. In 1934 she entered at Sydney University. Wright studied philosophy, history, psychology and English, without taking a degree.

When Wright was in her 20s, she started to become progressively deaf. Between the years 1937 and 1938 Wright travelled in Britain and Europe. She then worked as a secretary-stenographer and clerk until 1944. From 1944 to 1948 she was a university statistician at the University of Queensland, St. Lucia. At the age of 30 Wright met her lifelong partner, the unorthodox philosopher J.P. McKinney, 23 years her senior; they later married.

Most of Wright's poetry was written in the mountains of southern Queensland. Protesting the political policies of Joh Bjelke-Petersen, Premier of Queensland, Wright left her home state in the mid-1970s, and settled to a remote property near the heritage town of Braidwood, south of Canberra, where she wrote many of her later nature poems.

During her career as a writer, Wright did not reject to produce hack work, school plays for Australian Broadcasting Commission and children's books, for her living. She lectured part-time at various Australian universities. In 1975 she collected her addresses and speeches in *Because I was Invited*. Wright was appointed a foundation fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and an emeritus professorship of the Literature Board of the Arts Council of Australia. Wright's memoir, *Half a Lifetime*, covered her life until the 1960s, and appeared in 2000. Wright died of a heart attack in Canberra on June 26 at the age of 85. Her ashes were scattered around the mountain cemetery of Tamborine Mountain. Wright had owned a strip of rainforest nearby, which she donated to the state so it could be preserved as a national park.

Wright started to publish poems in the late 1930s in literary journals. As a poet she made her debut with *The Moving Image* (1946), in which she showed her technical excellence without burdens of fashionable trends. Most of the poems were written in wartime - in 'The Trains' Wright took the threat of the war in the Pacific as a subject. The main theme in the volume was the poet's awareness of time, death, and evil on a universal scale. With the following collections Wright gained a reputation as a wholly new voice in literature with a distinctly female perspective. The title poem from *Woman to Man* (1949) dealt with the sexual act from a woman's point of view. 'The Maker' paralleled the creation of a poem and the creation of a child. Several of her early poems such as 'Bullocky' and 'Woman to Man' became standard anthology pieces. Wright also wrote love poems to her husband. His death in 1966 and her increasing anxiety of the destruction of the natural environment brought more pessimistic undercurrents in her work.

I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust

the drying creek, the furious animal,

that they oppose us still;

that we are ruined by the thing we kill.

(from 'Australia 1970')

Wright's poetry was inspired by the various regions in which she lived: the New England, New South Wales, the subtropical rainforests of Tamborine Mountain, Queensland, and the plains of the southern highlands near Braidwood. A new period in Wright's life started in the mid-1950s: "The two threads of my life, the love of the land itself and the deep unease over the fate of its original people, were beginning to twine together, and the rest of my life would be influenced by that connection." In *The Two Faces* (1955) she took Hiroshima as an example of man's power to destroy even the cycles of nature. Wright's activism on conservation issues led her to focus on the interaction between land and the language. According to Wright, "the true function of art and culture is to interpret us to ourselves, and to relate us to the country and the society in which we live." She started to see that her mission was to find words and poetic forms to bridge the human experience and the natural world, man and earth. "Poetry needs a background in which emotional, as well as material values are given their due weight; and the effect of this shallowness of roots is easily traceable in Australian writing, with its uneasy attempts to solve or to ignore the problem of its attitude to the country." Alienation from the land meant for Wright crisis of the language. She criticized the education system for failing to teach students the pleasures of poetry, and promoted the reading and writing of poetry in schools. Realistically she also expressed doubts about the power of poetry to change the scheme of things.

In the early 1960s Wright helped to found Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland. She fought to conserve the Great Barrier Reef, when its ecology was threatened by oil drilling, and campaigned against sand mining on Fraser Island. In her passionate poem 'Australia 1970' Wright expressed her feelings of disappointment and anger, seeing her wild country die, "like the eaglehawk, dangerous till the last breath's gone, clawing and striking." *The Coral Battleground* (1977) was her account of the campaign to protect the "great water-gardens, lovely indeed as cherry boughs and flowers under the once clear sea." In *The Cry for the Dead* (1981) Wright examined the treatment of Aborigines and destruction of the environment by settlers in Central Queensland from the 1840s to the 1920s.

As a literary critic Wright enjoyed a high reputation, and edited several collections of Australian verse. She was a friend of Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal, whose work Wright helped her to get published. *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1965) was Wright's pioneering effort to reread such early Australian poets as Charles Harpur, Adam Lindsay Gordon, and Henry Kendall.

Wright received several awards, including Grace Leven Prize (1950), Australia-

Britannica Award (1964), Robert Frost Memorial Award (1977), Australian World Prize (1984), Queen's Medal for Poetry (1992). She had honorary degrees from several universities. In 1973-74 she was a member of Australia Council.

# All Things Conspire

All things conspire to hold me from you –  
even my love,  
since that would mask you and unname you  
till merely woman and man we live.  
All men wear arms against the rebel –  
and they are wise,  
since the sound world they know and stable  
is eaten away by lovers' eyes.  
All things conspire to stand between us –  
even you and I,  
who still command us, still unjoin us,  
and drive us forward till we die.  
Not till those fiery ghosts are laid  
shall we be one.  
Till then, they whet our double blade  
and use the turning world for stone.

Judith Wright

## Blue Arab

The small blue Arab stallion dances on the hill  
like a glancing breaker, like a storm rearing in the sky,  
In his prick-ears, the wind, that wanderer and spy,  
sings of the dunes of Arabia, lion-coloured still.

The small blue stallion poses like a centaur-god,  
netting the sun in his sea-spray mane, forgetting  
his stalwart mares for a phantom galloping unshod;  
changing for a heat-mirage his tall and velvet hill.

Judith Wright

# Bora Ring

The song is gone; the dance  
is secret with the dancers in the earth,  
the ritual useless, and the tribal story  
lost in an alien tale.

Only the grass stands up  
to mark the dancing-ring; the apple-gums  
posture and mime a past corroboree,  
murmur a broken chant.

The hunter is gone; the spear  
is splintered underground; the painted bodies  
a dream the world breathed sleeping and forgot.  
The nomad feet are still.

Only the rider's heart  
halts at a sightless shadow, an unsaid word  
that fastens in the blood of the ancient curse,  
the fear as old as Cain.

Judith Wright



# Bullocky

Beside his heavy-shouldered team  
thirsty with drought and chilled with rain,  
he weathered all the striding years  
till they ran widdershins in his brain:

Till the long solitary tracks  
etched deeper with each lurching load  
were populous before his eyes,  
and fiends and angels used his road.

All the long straining journey grew  
a mad apocalyptic dream,  
and he old Moses, and the slaves  
his suffering and stubborn team.

Then in his evening camp beneath  
the half-light pillars of the trees  
he filled the steeped cone of night  
with shouted prayers and prophecies.

While past the campfire's crimson ring  
the star struck darkness cupped him round.  
and centuries of cattle-bells  
rang with their sweet uneasy sound.

Grass is across the wagon-tracks,  
and plough strikes bone beneath the grass,  
and vineyards cover all the slopes  
where the dead teams were used to pass.

O vine, grow close upon that bone  
and hold it with your rooted hand.  
The prophet Moses feeds the grape,  
and fruitful is the Promised Land.

Judith Wright

# Drought Year

That time of drought the embered air  
burned to the roots of timber and grass.  
The crackling lime-scrub would not bear  
and Mooni Creek was sand that year.  
The dingo's cry was strange to hear.

I heard the dingoes cry  
in the scrub on the Thirty-mile Dry.  
I saw the wedgetail take his fill  
perching on the seething skull.  
I saw the eel wither where he curled  
in the last blood-drop of a spent world.

I heard the bone whisper in the hide  
of the big red horse that lay where he died.  
Prop that horse up, make him stand,  
hoofs turned down in the bitter sand  
make him stand at the gate of the Thirty-mile Dry.  
Turn this way and you will die-  
and strange and loud was the dingoes' cry.

Judith Wright

# Egrets

Once as I travelled through a quiet evening,  
I saw a pool, jet-black and mirror-still.  
Beyond, the slender paperbarks stood crowding;  
each on its own white image looked its fill,  
and nothing moved but thirty egrets wading -  
thirty egrets in a quiet evening.

Once in a lifetime, lovely past believing,  
your lucky eyes may light on such a pool.  
As though for many years I had been waiting,  
I watched in silence, till my heart was full  
of clear dark water, and white trees unmoving,  
and, whiter yet, those thirty egrets wading.

Judith Wright

# Failure Of Communion

What is the space between,  
enclosing us in one  
united person, yet  
dividing each alone.

Frail bridges cross from eye  
to eye, from flesh to flesh,  
from word to word: the net  
is gapped at every mesh,

and this each human knows:  
however close our touch  
or intimate our speech,  
silences, spaces reach  
most deep, and will not close.

Judith Wright

# Five Senses

Now my five senses  
gather into a meaning  
all acts, all presences;  
and as a lily gathers  
the elements together,  
in me this dark and shining,  
that stillness and that moving,  
these shapes that spring from nothing,  
become a rhythm that dances,  
a pure design.

While I'm in my five senses  
they send me spinning  
all sounds and silences,  
all shape and colour  
as thread for that weaver,  
whose web within me growing  
follows beyond my knowing  
some pattern sprung from nothing-  
a rhythm that dances  
and is not mine.

Judith Wright

## Late Spring

The moon drained white by day  
lifts from the hill  
where the old pear-tree fallen in storm  
springs up in blossom still.  
Women believe in the moon:  
this branch I hold  
is not more white and still than she  
whose flower is ages old,  
and so I carry home  
flowers from the pear  
that makes such obstinate tokens still  
for fruit it cannot bear.

Judith Wright

# Legend

The blacksmith's boy went out with a rifle  
and a black dog running behind.  
Cobwebs snatched at his feet,  
rivers hindered him,  
thorn branches caught at his eyes to make him blind  
and the sky turned into an unlucky opal,  
but he didn't mind.  
I can break branches, I can swim rivers, I can stare out  
any spider I meet,  
said he to his dog and his rifle.

The blacksmith's boy went over the paddocks  
with his old black hat on his head.  
Mountains jumped in his way,  
rocks rolled down on him,  
and the old crow cried, You'll soon be dead.  
And the rain came down like mattocks.  
But he only said,  
I can climb mountains, I can dodge rocks, I can shoot an old crow any day,  
and he went on over the paddocks.

When he came to the end of the day, the sun began falling,  
Up came the night ready to swallow him,  
like the barrel of a gun,  
like an old black hat,  
like a black dog hungry to follow him.  
Then the pigeon, the magpie and the dove began wailing  
and the grass lay down to pillow him.  
His rifle broke, his hat blew away and his dog was gone and the sun was falling.

But in front of the night, the rainbow stood on the mountain,  
just as his heart foretold.  
He ran like a hare,  
he climbed like a fox;  
he caught it in his hands, the colours and the cold -  
like a bar of ice, like the column of a fountain,  
like a ring of gold.  
The pigeon, the magpie and the dove flew up to stare,  
and the grass stood up again on the mountain.

The blacksmith's boy hung the rainbow on his shoulder  
instead of his broken gun.

Lizards ran out to see, snakes made way for him,  
and the rainbow shone as brightly as the sun.

All the world said, Nobody is braver, nobody is bolder,  
nobody else has done  
anything equal to it. He went home as easy as could be  
with the swinging rainbow on his shoulder.

Judith Wright



# Lyrebirds

Over the west side of the mountain,  
that's lyrebird country.  
I could go down there, they say, in the early morning,  
and I'd see them, I'd hear them.

Ten years, and I have never gone.  
I'll never go.  
I'll never see the lyrebirds -  
the few, the shy, the fabulous,  
the dying poets.

I should see them, if I lay there in the dew:  
first a single movement  
like a waterdrop falling, then stillness,  
then a brown head, brown eyes,  
a splendid bird, bearing  
like a crest the symbol of his art,  
the high symmetrical shape of the perfect lyre.  
I should hear that master practising his art.

No, I have never gone.  
Some things ought to be left secret, alone;  
some things – birds like walking fables –  
ought to inhabit nowhere but the reverence of the  
heart.

Judith Wright

# Magpies

Along the road the magpies walk  
with hands in pockets, left and right.  
They tilt their heads, and stroll and talk.  
In their well-fitted black and white.

They look like certain gentlemen  
who seem most nonchalant and wise  
until their meal is served - and then  
what clashing beaks, what greedy eyes!

But not one man that I have heard  
throws back his head in such a song  
of grace and praise - no man nor bird.  
Their greed is brief; their joy is long.  
For each is born with such a throat  
as thanks his God with every note.

Judith Wright

# Metho Drinker

Under the death of winter's leaves he lies  
who cried to Nothing and the terrible night  
to be his home and bread. 'O take from me  
the weight and waterfall ceaseless Time  
that batters down my weakness; the knives of light  
whose thrust I cannot turn; the cruelty  
of human eyes that dare not touch nor pity.'  
Under the worn leaves of the winter city  
safe in the house of Nothing now he lies.

His white and burning girl, his woman of fire,  
creeps to his heart and sets a candle there  
to melt away the flesh that hides from bone,  
to eat the nerve that tethers him in time.  
He will lie warm until the bone is bare  
and on a dead dark moon he wakes alone.  
It was for Death he took her; death is but this;  
and yet he is uneasy under her kiss  
and winces from that acid of her desire.

Judith Wright

# Naked Girl And Mirror

This is not I. I had no body once-  
only what served my need to laugh and run  
and stare at stars and tentatively dance  
on the fringe of foam and wave and sand and sun.  
Eyes loved, hands reached for me, but I was gone  
on my own currents, quicksilver, thistledown.  
Can I be trapped at last in that soft face?

I stare at you in fear, dark brimming eyes.  
Why do you watch me with that immoderate plea-  
'Look under these curled lashes, recognize  
that you were always here; know me-be me.'  
Smooth once-hermaphrodite shoulders, too tenderly  
your long slope runs, above those sudden shy  
curves furred with light that spring below your space.

No, I have been betrayed. If I had known  
that this girl waited between a year and a year,  
I'd not have chosen her bough to dance upon.  
Betrayed, by that little darkness here, and here  
this swelling softness and that frightened stare  
from eyes I will not answer; shut out here  
from my own self, by its new body's grace-

for I am betrayed by someone lovely. Yes,  
I see you are lovely, hateful naked girl.  
Your lips in the mirror tremble as I refuse  
to know or claim you. Let me go-let me be gone.  
You are half of some other who may never come.  
Why should I tend you? You are not my own;  
you seek that other-he will be your home.

Yet I pity your eyes in the mirror, misted with tears;  
I lean to your kiss. I must serve you; I will obey.  
Some day we may love. I may miss your going, some day,  
though I shall always resent your dumb and fruitful years.  
Your lovers shall learn better, and bitterly too,  
if their arrogance dares to think I am part of you.

Judith Wright

# Northern River

When summer days grow harsh  
my thoughts return to my river,  
fed by white mountain springs,  
beloved of the shy bird, the bellbird,  
whose cry is like falling water.  
O nighted with the green vine,  
lit with the rock-lilies,  
the river speaks in the silence,  
and my heart will also be quiet.

Where your valley grows wide in the plains  
they have felled the trees, wild river.  
Your course they have checked, and altered  
your sweet Alcaic metre.  
Not the grey kangaroo, deer-eyes, timorous,  
will come to your pools at dawn;  
but, their tamed and humbled herds  
will muddy the watering places.  
Passing their roads and cities  
you will not escape unsoiled.

But where, grown old and weary,  
stagnant among the mangroves,  
you hope no longer – there on a sudden  
with a shock like joy, beats up  
the cold clean pulse of the tide,  
the touch of sea in greeting;  
the sea that encompasses  
all sorrow and delight  
and holds the memories  
of every stream and river.

Judith Wright

# Request To A Year

If the year is meditating a suitable gift,  
I should like it to be the attitude  
of my great- great- grandmother,  
legendary devotee of the arts,

who having eight children  
and little opportunity for painting pictures,  
sat one day on a high rock  
beside a river in Switzerland

and from a difficult distance viewed  
her second son, balanced on a small ice flow, drift down the current toward a  
waterfall  
that struck rock bottom eighty feet below,

while her second daughter, impeded,  
no doubt, by the petticoats of the day,  
stretched out a last-hope alpenstock  
(which luckily later caught him on his way).

Nothing, it was evident, could be done;  
And with the artist's isolating eye  
My great-great-grandmother hastily sketched the scene.  
The sketch survives to prove the story by.

Year, if you have no Mother's day present planned,  
Reach back and bring me the firmness of her hand.

Judith Wright

# Sonnet

Now let the draughtsman of my eyes be done  
marking the line of petal and of hill.  
Let the long commentary of the brain  
be silent. Evening and the earth are one,  
and bird and tree are simple and stand still.  
Now, fragile heart swung in your webs of vein,  
and perilous self won hardly out of clay,  
gather the harvest of last light, and reap  
the luminous fields of sunset for your bread.  
Blurs the laborious focus of the day  
and shadow brims the hillside slow as sleep.  
Here is the word that, when all words are said,  
shall compass more than speech. The sun is gone;  
draws on the night at last; the dream draws on.

Judith Wright



## Sonnet For Christmas

I saw our golden years on a black gale,  
our time of love spilt in the furious dust.  
'O we are winter-caught, and we must fail,'  
said the dark dream, 'and time is overcast.'  
-And woke into the night; but you were there,  
and small as seed in the wild dark we lay.  
Small as seed under the gulfs of air  
is set the stubborn heart that waits for day.  
I saw our love the root that holds the vine  
in the enduring earth, that can reply,  
'Nothing shall die unless for me it die.  
Murder and hate and love alike are mine';  
and therefore fear no winter and no storm  
while in the knot of earth that root lies warm.

Judith Wright

## South Of My Days

South of my days' circle, part of my blood's country,  
rises that tableland, high delicate outline  
of bony slopes wincing under the winter,  
low trees, blue-leaved and olive, outcropping granite-  
clean, lean, hungry country. The creek's leaf-silenced,  
willow choked, the slope a tangle of medlar and crabapple  
branching over and under, blotched with a green lichen;  
and the old cottage lurches in for shelter.

O cold the black-frost night. The walls draw in to the warmth  
and the old roof cracks its joints; the slung kettle  
hisses a leak on the fire. Hardly to be believed that summer will turn up again  
some day in a wave of rambler-roses,  
thrust it's hot face in here to tell another yarn-  
a story old Dan can spin into a blanket against the winter.  
Seventy years of stories he clutches round his bones.  
Seventy years are hived in him like old honey.

Droving that year, Charleville to the Hunter,  
nineteen-one it was, and the drought beginning;  
sixty head left at the McIntyre, the mud round them  
hardened like iron; and the yellow boy died  
in the sulky ahead with the gear, but the horse went on,  
stopped at Sandy Camp and waited in the evening.  
It was the flies we seen first, swarming like bees.  
Came to the Hunter, three hundred head of a thousand-  
cruel to keep them alive - and the river was dust.

Or mustering up in the Bogongs in the autumn  
when the blizzards came early. Brought them down; we  
brought them down, what aren't there yet. Or driving for Cobb's on the run  
up from Tamworth-Thunderbolt at the top of Hungry Hill,  
and I give him a wink. I wouldn't wait long, Fred,  
not if I was you. The troopers are just behind,  
coming for that job at the Hillgrove. He went like a luny, him on his big black  
horse.

Oh, they slide and they vanish  
as he shuffles the years like a pack of conjuror's cards.

True or not, it's all the same; and the frost on the roof  
cracks like a whip, and the back-log break into ash.  
Wake, old man. This is winter, and the yarns are over.  
No-one is listening  
South of my days' circle  
I know it dark against the stars, the high lean country  
full of old stories that still go walking in my sleep.

Judith Wright

# The Bull

In the olive darkness of the sally-trees  
silently moved the air from night to day.  
The summer-grass was thick with honey daisies  
where he, a curled god, a red Jupiter,  
heavy with power among his women lay.

But summer's bubble-sound of sweet creek-water  
dwindles and is silent, the seeding grasses  
grow harsh, and wind and frost in the black sallies  
roughen the sleek-haired slopes. Seek him out, then,  
the angry god betrayed, whose godhead passes,

and down the hillsides drive him from his mob.  
What enemy steals his strength - what rival steals  
his mastered cows? His thunders powerless,  
the red storm of his body shrunk with fear,  
runs the great bull, the dogs upon his heels.

Judith Wright

# The Company Of Lovers

We meet and part now over all the world;  
we, the lost company,  
take hands together in the night, forget  
the night in our brief happiness, silently.  
We, who sought many things, throw all away  
for this one thing, one only,  
remembering that in the narrow grave  
we shall be lonely.

Death marshalls up his armies round us now.  
Their footsteps crowd too near.  
Lock your warm hand above the chilling heart  
and for a time I live without my fear.  
Grope in the night to find me and embrace,  
for the dark preludes of the drums begin,  
and round us round the company of lovers,  
death draws his cordons in.

Judith Wright

# The Killer

The day was clear as fire,  
the birds sang frail as glass,  
when thirsty I came to the creek  
and fell by its side in the grass.

My breast on the bright moss  
and shower-embroidered weeks,  
my lips to the live water  
I saw him turn in the reeds.

Black horror sprang from the dark  
in a violent birth,  
and through its cloth of grass  
I felt the clutch of earth.

O beat him into the ground.  
O strike him till he dies-  
or else your life itself  
drains through those colourless eyes.

I struck again and again  
Slender in black and red  
he lies, and his icy glance  
turns outward clear and dead.

But nimble my enemy  
as water is, or wind.  
He has slipped from his death aside  
and vanished into my mind

He has vanished whence he came,  
my nimble enemy;  
and the ants come out to the snake  
and drink at his shallow eye.

Judith Wright

# The Old Prison

The rows of cells are unroofed,  
a flute for the wind's mouth,  
who comes with a breath of ice  
from the blue caves of the south.

O dark and fierce day:  
the wind like an angry bee  
hunts for the black honey  
in the pits of the hollow sea.

Waves of shadow wash  
the empty shell bone-bare,  
and like a bone it sings  
a bitter song of air.

Who built and laboured here?  
The wind and the sea say  
-Their cold nest is broken  
and they are blown away-

They did not breed nor love,  
each in his cell alone  
cried as the wind now cries  
through this flute of stone.

Judith Wright

# The Sisters

In the vine-shadows on the veranda;  
under the yellow leaves, in the cooling sun,  
sit two sisters. Their slow voices run  
like little winter creeks, dwindled by frost and wind,  
and the square of sunlight moves on the veranda.

They remember the gay young men on their tall horses  
who came courting; the dancing and the smells of leather  
and wine, the girls whispering by the fire together;  
even their dolls and ponies, all they have left behind  
moves in the yellow shadows on the veranda.

Thinking of their lives apart and the men they married  
thinking of the marriage-bed and the birth of their first  
child,  
they look down smiling. "My life was wide and wild,  
and who can know my heart? There in that golden jungle  
I walk alone," say the old sisters on the veranda.

Judith Wright



# The Surfer

He thrust his joy against the weight of the sea;  
climbed through, slid under those long banks of  
foam--

(hawthorn hedges in spring, thorns in the face stinging).  
How his brown strength drove through the hollow and coil  
of green-through weirs of water!  
Muscle of arm thrust down long muscle of water;  
and swimming so, went out of sight  
where mortal, masterful, frail, the gulls went wheeling  
in air as he in water, with delight.

Turn home, the sun goes down; swimmer, turn home.  
Last leaf of gold vanishes from the sea-curve.  
Take the big roller's shoulder, speed and serve;  
come to the long beach home like a gull diving.

For on the sand the grey-wolf sea lies, snarling,  
cold twilight wind splits the waves' hair and shows  
the bones they worry in their wolf-teeth. O, wind blows  
and sea crouches on sand, fawning and mouthing;  
drops there and snatches again, drops and again snatches  
its broken toys, its whitened pebbles and shells.

Judith Wright

# The Trains

Tunnelling through the night, the trains pass  
in a splendour of power, with a sound like thunder  
shaking the orchards, waking  
the young from a dream, scattering like glass  
the old mens' sleep, laying  
a black trail over the still bloom of the orchards;  
the trains go north with guns.

Strange primitive piece of flesh, the heart laid quiet  
hearing their cry pierce through its thin-walled cave  
recalls the forgotten tiger,  
and leaps awake in its old panic riot;  
and how shall mind be sober,  
since blood's red thread still binds us fast in history?  
Tiger, you walk through all our past and future,  
troubling the children's sleep'; laying  
a reeking trail across our dreams of orchards.

Racing on iron errands, the trains go by,  
and over the white acres of our orchards  
hurl their wild summoning cry, their animal cry....  
the trains go north with guns.

Judith Wright

## To A Child

When I was a child I saw  
a burning bird in a tree.  
I see became I am,  
I am became I see.

In winter dawns of frost  
the lamp swung in my hand.  
The battered moon on the slope  
lay like a dune of sand;

and in the trap at my feet  
the rabbit leapt and prayed,  
weeping blood, and crouched  
when the light shone on the blade.

The sudden sun lit up  
the webs from wire to wire;  
the white webs, the white dew,  
blazed with a holy fire.

Flame of light in the dew,  
flame of blood on the bush  
answered the whirling sun  
and the voice of the early thrush.

I think of this for you.  
I would not have you believe  
the world is empty of truth  
or that men must grieve,

but hear the song of the martyrs  
out of a bush of fire-  
'All is consumed with love;  
all is renewed with desire.'

Judith Wright

# Train Journey

Glassed with cold sleep and dazzled by the moon,  
out of the confused hammering dark of the train  
I looked and saw under the moon's cold sheet  
your delicate dry breasts, country that built my heart;  
and the small trees on their uncoloured slope  
like poetry moved, articulate and sharp  
and purposeful under the great dry flight of air,  
under the crosswise currents of wind and star.  
Clench down your strength, box-tree and ironbark.  
Break with your violent root the virgin rock.  
Draw from the flying dark its breath of dew  
till the unliving come to life in you.  
Be over the blind rock a skin of sense,  
under the barren height a slender dance...  
I woke and saw the dark small trees that burn  
suddenly into flowers more lovely than the white moon.

Judith Wright

# Trapped Dingo

So here, twisted in steel, and spoiled with red  
your sunlight hide, smelling of death and fear,  
they crushed out your throat the terrible song  
you sang in the dark ranges. With what crying  
you mourned him! - the drinker of blood, the swift death-bringer  
who ran with you so many a night; and the night was long.  
I heard you, desperate poet, Did you hear  
my silent voice take up the cry? - replying:  
Achilles is overcome, and Hector dead,  
and clay stops many a warrior's mouth, wild singer.

Voice from the hills and the river drunken with rain,  
for your lament the long night was too brief.  
Hurling your woes at the moon, that old cleaned bone,  
till the white shorn mobs of stars on the hill of the sky  
huddled and trembled, you tolled him, the rebel one.  
Insane Andromache, pacing your towers alone,  
death ends the verse you chanted; here you lie.  
The lover, the maker of elegies is slain,  
and veiled with blood her body's stealthy sun.

Judith Wright

# Turning Fifty

Having known war and peace  
and loss and finding,  
I drink my coffee and wait  
for the sun to rise,

With kitchen swept, cat fed,  
the day will quiet,  
I taste my fifty years  
here in the cup.

Outside the green birds come  
for bread and water.  
Their wings wait for the sun  
to show their colours.

I'll show my colours too.  
Though we've polluted  
even this air I breathe  
And spoiled green earth;

though, granted life or death,  
death's what we're choosing,  
and though these years we live  
scar flesh and mind,

still, as the sun comes up  
bearing my birthday,  
having met time and love  
I raise my cup -

dark, bitter, neutral, clean,  
sober as the morning -  
to all I've seen and known -  
to this new sun.

Judith Wright

# Woman To Child

You who were darkness warmed my flesh  
where out of darkness rose the seed.  
Then all a world I made in me;  
all the world you hear and see  
hung upon my dreaming blood.

There moved the multitudinous stars,  
and coloured birds and fishes moved.  
There swam the sliding continents.  
All time lay rolled in me, and sense,  
and love that knew not its beloved.

O node and focus of the world;  
I hold you deep within that well  
you shall escape and not escape-  
that mirrors still your sleeping shape;  
that nurtures still your crescent cell.

I wither and you break from me;  
yet though you dance in living light  
I am the earth, I am the root,  
I am the stem that fed the fruit,  
the link that joins you to the night.

Judith Wright

# Woman To Man

The eyeless labourer in the night,  
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold,  
builds for its resurrection day---  
silent and swift and deep from sight  
foresees the unimagined light.

This is no child with a child's face;  
this has no name to name it by;  
yet you and I have known it well.  
This is our hunter and our chase,  
the third who lay in our embrace.

This is the strength that your arm knows,  
the arc of flesh that is my breast,  
the precise crystals of our eyes.  
This is the blood's wild tree that grows  
the intricate and folded rose.

This is the maker and the made;  
this is the question and reply;  
the blind head butting at the dark,  
the blaze of light along the blade.  
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.

Judith Wright