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Irruptions of the Dreamings in Post-Colonial Australia

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ABSTRACT

This essay is written round four 'funny stories' from Northern Australia. Metamorphosis instigated by a Dreaming is central to all four stories and this is why the stories are counted as 'funny,' and received with glee. The analysis illuminates a topic that has been attracting attention in recent contributions to Aboriginal ethnography: how Dreamings irrupt into contemporary histories and act in ways that have political significance, contesting whitefella paradigms and re-asserting the world-view of the original Australians.

*The brutal and swift transformations
Ovid paints so well in his Metamorphoses
show the uncanny presence of the gods in our world
(Jean-Michel Rabaté, 1986:66)*

This essay of interpretation is written round four stories rendered to me at different times during fieldwork in Northern Australia. I treat the stories together as companion stories because I discern in them common qualities of form and function and theme. To paraphrase the epigraph given above, each of the tales is a story of metamorphosis that bears witness to the uncanny presence of Dreaming Powers amongst us in the Australia of today. Metamorphosis makes the stories politically subversive because, in each of them, an original Dreaming Power seems to turn the conditions of existence topsy-turvy as it reasserts its dominance in the face of the whitefella occupation of the land. And stories that return power to age-old Aboriginal Divinities must surely be ranked as texts of cultural resistance.

Analytically speaking, my task will be to spell out the reasons that justify my treatment of the four stories as stories of a single and important type. But, at the outset, let me note that Aboriginal people in their ways of thinking generally reject unqualified conceptualisation of the world by way of establishing types to which observed manifestations are then said to conform. The four stories can, however, be held together in instant contemplation for one good reason that Aboriginal thought allows. All the stories are 'funny stories'. At its very middle, each has a moment of surprise made triumphant and hilarious because a

Dreaming Power announces itself and then acts to turn the world around. Hearing such stories, people are impelled to respond by chuckling and chortling on and on, laughing together in appreciation of that Power that suddenly has been revealed to them in its panoply of character and might. The stories thus have a quality in common to make them 'same'. But because one story is about the sign of a Buffalo Dreaming, another about a cyclone, the third about silent trading and the fourth about the advancing growth of Mimosa on the black soil plains, the stories are things locally to be regarded as: 'Same, but very different really.'

INNER REALITY AND OUTWARD APPEARANCE

In each of the 'funny stories' some Dreaming figure projects a message of vital truth. The message proceeds from a concealed and 'inside' place of essential verities into the 'outside' space of contingencies and surface appearances that are inherently deceptive. This is to remark that Aboriginal religion and epistemology are both gnostic. A major doctrine is that humans cannot live or move or come to knowledge of vital truths by relying on sense perception alone. So, when moving onto strange country, the traveller cannot know that the twelve ghost gums at the river bank are, in fact, twelve Left Hand Kangaroos. These twelve trees are Dreamings that once adventured in a mob across the countryside. Now they stand together, transformed, stationary but regenerate as a sacred grove and the realisation that one looks at a clutch of Dreamings and no mere stand of trees, can come to one only by way of informing speech. As Myers (1986:67) remarks: 'The information visible in the landscape is not sufficient in itself to illuminate the underlying reality'. The consequence is that one ventures onto land only after receiving the gift of words uttered by a local custodian who identifies the sacred in the landscape, drawing a mud map that features both the resource-rich places to visit and the forbidden Dreaming places to avoid.

In this vein, 'the Dreaming' is now generally used by Aboriginal people to stand for their experience and knowledge of the manifestations and the secrets of Divinity.¹ 'Dreamings' are the local or regional Powers who acted variously to found all things; who now continue to sustain all being within their respective countries; and who also participate, according to their locations and particular ambits of influence, in any latter-day transformations of the firmament. Dreamings thus preside over the three moments that are the creation, the maintenance and the transformation of the conditions for being in the world. Writing his essays *On Aboriginal Religion*, W.E.H. Stanner (1966) tells his readers that the Dreaming inheres in all things and partakes of all times. The separate Dreamings find their location by saturating time-space to the extent that Dreamings populate an *everywhen* — all the instants of being, whether completed or to come.

When Stanner developed a poetics to provide words that would translate qualities of the Dreaming into English, he was also concerned to issue a corrective. Among his predecessors there were authors who had privileged the creative moment of the Dreaming and had ignored or paid scant attention to the presence and activities of the Dreamings as Powers of maintenance and latter-day transformations of the world. Stanner thus worked to undo the prevalent misconception that Aboriginal belief was posited on the notion of a finished universe fashioned by creator Powers who retired into inaction once the age of primary genesis was done. This partial and mistaken view left humans to inhabit a perfected world in which they were fated merely to 'follow up the Dreaming' in cycles of never-ending repetition.

Stanner's placement of the Dreamings in the time-space he called 'everywhen' remains unchallenged.² But, like Stanner in his time, I have to write in protest against an end-of-century trend of modelling. Scholars of Aboriginal religion have been encouraging their readers to oppose two universes that exist in parallel. Thus, in two separate essays, Rose (2000:41 and 2001:95) begins discussion by citing Glowczwski's observation that: 'The Dreaming appeared to me not like a mythical time of reference but as a parallel space-time,

a permanency in movement, with which the Warlpiri (Aborigines of Central Australia) have a relationship of feedback.' For Glowczwski, Dreamings are accorded a universe of their own but are allowed to intrude every now and then into that second and parallel universe (or segregated time-space) that is left for mere humans to enjoy. In its dualism, this parallel universe formulation probably derives from the Cartesian cast of Western understandings. With its 'feedback' derived from cybernetics, Glowczwski's analytic model has no counterpart in the conscious conceptions of Australia's original inhabitants. Nor can feedback models that come of systems theory accommodate the analysis of agency, the transfer of agency, 'the transformation of subjects into objects' (Munn 1984)³ or the processes entailed in metamorphosis.

My point of ethnography is that Aboriginal people themselves speak not about one reality that exists alongside a second, but about a single supervening reality that has 'inside' and 'outside' truths and stories. They distinguish consistently between inner truths and outside appearances in all aspects of being. In doing so, they make Dreamings and people co-presences in one world, treating knowledge as the great discriminating and modifying force. Humans entertain partial and incomplete visions of being. The human vision is then progressively enlarged to the extent that a person comes into possession of esoteric truths concerning the inner nature of each object of attention. There are 'Clever Men' and 'Clever Women' who have been vouchsafed conspectual visions of those inner realities that are the day-springs of existence. Such persons of privileged understanding 'see right through,' their vision penetrating 'all the way' to the 'inside'. They come to discern reality as one encompassing field and remain conscious of the divides between inner and outer (or essence and appearance), not as limits to their own perception, but as divides that mark limits of understanding for those others who are less visionary than themselves. The relation between 'inner' and 'outer' realities allows each person to live a life of progressive revelations. With the unwinding years, any person who lives a fortunate life should come to participate more and more intimately in the unity of the Dreaming. In Aboriginal belief, the relationship between partial but expanding human perception and Divinity is a relation between biographically gained insights into truth and the totality of all truths which is assembled in the collocation of all the Dreamings.

Now and then, ordinary people have sudden and unasked-for experience of Dreamings in the course of their everyday lives. In making this observation, I am putting the revelations of Clever Men and Clever Women aside. Clever Men and Clever Women are unordinary and distinguished because they are specially called. In pursuit of their calling, large fractions of their lives are given over to communication with the Dreaming Powers they know. Inspired Songmen who bring lyrics and music to their communities are similarly people who enjoy the privilege of Powers, as do those few who dream the choreography for dances. I am also putting ritual out of consideration. To stage rituals, communities or cult groups work to bring participants into communion with the Divine so that experience of a Dreaming is a thing made proper to ritual participation.⁴ Perhaps the most unexceptional moment of significant contact with Powers on an individual's part, is in the Dreaming-inspired 'finding' or discovery of the identity of the conception-spirit of a child that is yet in its mother's womb.⁵ Then, most people come briefly to experience intimations — the knowledge that some absent but significant other has walked into danger or, otherwise, the premonition that some known and usually beloved person will either sicken or meet death. Dreams can be portents from the Dreaming. However, as Sylvie Poirier (1996) tells us, the portentous dream signals an impending happening of importance without indicating whether the coming event will be tragic or propitious. Dream portents thus leave the dreamer fearing the worst yet hoping for the best. The suspended mood of hopeful dread ends only with a culmination contained in an event judged out-of-the-ordinary and therefore held to be the happening that the dream presaged. Much to be feared, are moments when individuals 'tangle' with the Dreaming of a place or country. For their intended or unintended

provocation of the local Power, those who thus 'tangle' suffer either death or chronic bodily infliction that may be as mild as premature greyness of the hair, as crippling as arthritis or as vile as leprosy. In contrast to all these listed moments, is the instant in which some person (who is not recognised as a Seer) experiences the reception of clear revelations from a Dreaming whilst going about the ordinary business of the day. These moments are often the more marked because revelation has been sudden and unexpected. Such moments of revelation entail a Dreaming's irruption⁶ and they take two forms. One can be witness to a happening in which a Dreaming is made manifest; otherwise, one becomes party to a vital truth on hearing a story of reversal in which a Dreaming suddenly takes charge to reveal its character and power. By an act of irruption, a Dreaming works to defeat human misconception by bringing receptive humans to an enhanced understanding of the world. Irruptive Dreamings put things straight.

Three of the stories of irruptive Dreamings were vouchsafed to me during fieldwork in the Darwin hinterland in the mid-1970s. The renditions given here would disappoint Stephen Muecke (1999) who calls for the provision of unmodified, original text, accompanied where necessary by translations. I recount stories that were received without the aid of the tape recorder and were written down in field notebooks as soon as possible after each telling. Able to supply only my own accountings of their gist, I have to acknowledge that much of the style of their telling is lost in my substitute versions. The advantages, however, are that my renditions derive from actual situations and are renditions of stories that came spontaneously out of the flow of life. They are not products of the contrived interview in which people do not address a world of fellows, but speak instead to the interlocutor and the recording device and may perform only because they are to be rewarded with money. I am able, therefore, to discuss the presentation of each story in the receptionalist mode⁷ attending not only to each story's gist, but also to the audience and to the circumstances of the story's origination or re-telling. Overall, my interpretation is progressive and is contained both in some end-pieces of consolidation and in discussions given as codas between passages in which the themes of the stories are announced. The fourth story tells of the advance of Mimosa and is of more recent origin: I was first told it in 1993.

Governed by propositions concerning Aboriginal gnosis, my readings of the stories now lead me on:

to recognition of the Ovidian form of metamorphosis as the distinguishing characteristic of stories of irruptive Dreaming interventions;

to a discussion of Aboriginal totemism as distinguishing creed in multi-cultural Australia;

to an appreciation of holy laughter (expression of unmitigated glee being the proper way in which to receive news of metamorphoses);

to characterisation of the rebellious and subversive theme that unites the companion stories, namely, the victory of Dreaming Powers over whitefella presumption. (These are all to be discovered as stories of active cosmographical reassertion and revolt.);

to recognition of the political significance of the limits placed on the distribution of knowledge of story and experience in Aboriginal social formations; and, finally,

to comment on structures of remembering.

THAT BIGGEST BUFFALO TOILET

During the few last months before his death, ol Luke made frequent expeditions. He had just 'got all that compo'. Insurance money had finally been paid out to him because, years

ago, he had suffered injury in a car crash. Ol Luke put part of the compo money right back where it came from. He bought a newish 4WD. There followed a series of hirings and firings as ol Luke employed one youngfella driver after another, vainly trying to find a driving paragon who would 'listen' to all his behests and treat the vehicle as something 'really special'.

It was during the time that Neil was working as driver that the big thing happened. Actually, Neil drove to ol Luke's satisfaction. By origin, he was a Daly River man and so the olfella's true 'countryman'. He also tended well to battery, engine-oil and tyres. Neil's rapport with ol Luke is essential to the story I have to tell. Powers ordained that the big thing was to happen during those rare few weeks when a capable countryman was looking after ol Luke and the 4WD.

One day towards evening ol Luke and his party returned to the Darwin camp. Ol Luke's mob had been away for about six days and the home-campers stirred as the laden truck came in. We expected roo. It was a rule of the expeditions that ol Luke would take a rifle or two and bring bush beef home — which is to say the meat of kangaroo, buffalo or feral pig and not the meat of cattle. The truck drew people to it. Ol Luke was helped out and we noted that he was wearing only a pair of boxer shorts. He began to sing out for people to attend. Others took up the come-hither message. At the centre of a now-growing group, ol Luke stopped singing out. He stood and shook more and more with the laughter that had taken over and possessed him: 'We gotta tellim Neil, we gotta tellim.'

Ol Luke then gestured with his hands. He made a moulding movement, his palms tracing the shape of an invisible mound. Words had to compete with the laughter, but brief sentences in the end came out: 'I bin see; I bin see that biggest Buffalo toilet! That biggest Buffalo toilet! You tellim Neil.'

Ol Luke continued standing there, envisioning with gestures. He was a man caught up with the miming of encounter — this fellow is brought up short by the sight of an impossibly large heap of buffalo droppings.

Ol Luke's body is bloated, his limbs are swollen and enlarged, his cheeks are puffed out and his eyes are in retreat. Doctors tell him his ailment is called diabetes. On this evening of return, ol Luke laughed so that visible flesh heaved and wobbled. Whenever words could surface, he'd gasp out his pronouncement of incredulous realisation: 'That biggest Buffalo toilet!'

The scene shifts. Ol Luke has been settled down in his favourite place in camp with a red blanket tented about his naked torso. His family has been ranged on one side of the fire that is alight and smoking. Neil is perched on a four-gallon drum that separates ol Luke's group from the rest of us. We have all found places to sit. Now and then, ol Luke, the protagonist, utters, still either laughing or giving forth his phrase. We are readied for a telling. And Neil then gives us the details of his vision of the journey.

Ol Luke had decided to catch up with people on the Mary River side. That is, to progress eastwards from Darwin over black soil plains that are flooded in the Wet and then to travel on further eastwards to the edge of Sickness Country. The journey was to stop only where Stone Country begins (at the East Arnhem Land escarpment) because Stone Country is country with which ol Luke has no associations, no business.

Along the way, the party stops at camping places known to ol Luke from his buffalo-shooting days. They stop over with those few surviving olfellas and with the younger countrymen who once went buffalo shooting together with ol Luke. Ol Luke joins with erstwhile companions to evoke the past, telling sited stories first in this place, then in that. And there is a lot to tell. Buffalo shooting was a risky business; men were wounded, there are scars to show in witness to story and, leaving no traces behind them, 'whole lotta fellow bin die.'

Back in the Darwin camp all these things are told over again by Neil who is aided by the assenting chorus of those who returned with him. Ol Luke wants all the stopping places to be registered. His part in the telling is limited but pointed. Growingly, he pulls Neil up if

the name of any place that featured in the journey of pilgrimage is left out: 'You bin jump right over that Mount Bundy!'

We are brought place-by-recalled-place to the moment of culmination. Near home, just down the track and outside Humpty Doo in black soil country where buffalo can make wallows aplenty, the home-bent travellers happen on the sign.

In the middle of the bitumen road, standing high and steaming with freshness, is the great Buffalo deposit. Driving along, Neil has no need to be told. He brakes to a respectful stop and everyone tumbles from the vehicle to stand and gaze. Big ones like this biggest one have architecture. Big ones like this one are uncanny models of the curious and sudden rock piles emplaced upon flat land that is otherwise innocent of outcrops. As the Dreaming story has it: a gargantuan Buffalo once walked about, pausing to leave droppings which were then to petrify and become antique in the landscape.

When ol Luke's party make their finding, they all know that this is no ordinary buffalo deposit. It is obvious to them as prototypic turd. This countryside is haunted by the Dreaming that oh, so long ago, excreted the rocks of the formations. So when ol Luke who spent a chunk of life shooting, skinning, gutting and quartering buffalo sees this giant deposit, he knows it for what it is. During the telling back in Darwin, Luke takes over from Neil to say in witness: 'I bin seeim. Everybody bin seeim. That biggest Buffalo toilet!'

In steaming immensity, that 'biggest Buffalo toilet' is sign of the Buffalo Dreaming. By its freshness, it is given as a thing for ol Luke's party and none other to find. These are people who have been singled out. And all in the party know that the sign of the Buffalo Dreaming has been put down for ol Luke to come upon. It's his car, it's his journey of pilgrimage and he's boss for the trip. Ol Luke's wife Ada, who commands Dreaming knowledge that befits her years, knew from the very moment of sighting all those things that this sign betokened. However, the portents and meanings of this sign remained to be brought out. Nor could they be defined by those primary witnesses who had travelled on the truck. Rules that govern the proper reception of story dictated that Neil's telling and ol Luke's formulaic witnessing had been presented to transfer the onus. Having received the story, the listeners in camp:

- (1) Had laid upon them the obligation to recognise (or fail to recognise) 'that biggest Buffalo toilet' for sign of a Dreaming and
- (2) Had then to determine the reason why a particular person had been set up to 'find' the sign.

By cultural convention, a division of labour obtains. Prime witnesses are distinguished from interpreters, those who experience and report the (alleged) facts from those who judge them for veracity, authenticity and import. This division of labour requires that the work of bringing meaning to a story of discovery must oscillate between two phases of activity. The first phase is prime witnessing — reporting what was experienced and seen. The second is the business of interpretation and interpretation is done by the members of an independent audience who deal with received particulars in order to set them in a larger matrix of understandings. Interpreters invoke and confirm among themselves relevant principles of logic or belief. To their work they also bring further facts concerning persons, events or things. Usually, there is physical separation of the parties. (Now and then during the work an interpreter may return to the party of prime witnessing to 'check up la detail.') The interpreters work until they have a completed story which they then bring to the party of prime witnesses for those witnesses to assent in. Everyone can then finally agree in a story that is perfected to posit discovery and to determine what the ratified finding means.⁸

Discovery of a sign was thus entered by ol Luke's party as a claim to a Dreaming encounter. Before we can go on to see how this claim was treated, there is need for an aside.

Culturally encoded meanings (obscure to the outsider) are packed into ol Luke's mantric phrase: 'That biggest Buffalo toilet.'

SCATOLOGY AND DREAMING INFLICTIONS

Aboriginal English remains a lingua franca and tongue of first recourse for those Aborigines of Darwin and its hinterland who historically worked as members of the 'cattle station mobs'. Its major use is in communication between Aboriginal speakers. In consequence, words of English, the original lexifying language, have been transmuted to become idioms that are born of customary Aboriginal forms and ways.

Aboriginal English has received all the obscenities of the Standard English lexicon. In everyday speech, these words are used frequently and express a generalised demotion of all things⁹ and a disinclination to accord either distinction or deference until expression of distinction or deference is made imperative. However, it is fighting talk to use any of the received expletives in a pointed and individualising way. In propriety, one may exclaim: 'Oh shit!' However, one never allows that a named person shits. Nor is the sexual behaviour of either oneself or of designated and named others properly referred to by saying 'fuck'. It's a dog or some other animal, but never the undenigrated human, that is allowed to fuck or shit or piss.

So we come to ol Luke's announcement: 'That biggest Buffalo toilet!' If excrement truly has to be mentioned, 'toilet' is the word for one's own faeces or the faeces of known and respected humans. By speaking of a 'Buffalo toilet' and not a bloody old pile of bull-shit, ol Luke all the while was proclaiming Dreaming status for the deposit the Buffalo had left behind. 'That biggest Buffalo toilet' is to be read straight off as label for a sign of the Dreaming. I have thus all the while been conceding Dreaming status to that capital 'B' for Buffalo who deposited the sign for ol Luke to discover on the road. From the time of first mention of a 'Buffalo toilet', people of the Darwin home camp put themselves to consider an alleged sign of the Dreaming.¹⁰

Illness had visited massive embarrassment on ol Luke. Often, so very often, he had himself to 'go for that toilet'. The man's great size made each of his moves towards evacuation a punitive expedition. He had to be helped to his feet, guided to the edge of the domestic circle and then released to complete the last part of the journey on his own. Those who looked after him attended for as long as he was away, listening lest he be heard to stumble or call out for help. Each evacuation posed a testing question: would the olfella be able to heave his great bulk and get to his feet after squatting?

Night-time visits were the most debasing. Noise and the light of his torch drew attention to the afflicted man's necessity. People would wake up and check that the nocturnal commotion was unthreatening and to moral purpose — nobody 'sneaking' to attack or to steal either goods or sex. When it came to pain and bodily discomfort, ol Luke was stoic. He did, however, complain about the relentless surveillance: 'All the time lookin out after mefella when I go for that toilet.' Such complaints were voiced in the context of a culture that did not traditionally hide the naked body, but made acts of evacuation most defensively secret — a 'very private business'. One's faeces are stuff the malevolent sorcerer can use to direct magic onto one, diminishing one's living being even unto death. In the matter of ol Luke, we confront a lifetime habit of defensive secrecy now coupled with the humiliating physical inability to act with routine discretion and so preserve a threatened self. Enduring public affliction, a man was at odds with his world.

Whatever the doctors called ol Luke's ailment, everyone knew that, in fact, he suffered 'a problem' and not a sickness. Three grades of bodily unease are to be distinguished. Minor acute ailments such as colds and coughs or the injuries of the walking wounded put people out of sorts and make them 'a bit crook'. 'Sickness' is the word reserved for acute and life-threatening conditions that require onlookers to rally and proffer immediate and

life-saving attention (see Sansom 1982). Then there is the range of visible and chronic disorders that diminish ability or modify appearance. The list includes arthritis, premature white hair, rheumatic pains, gross obesity, loss or diminution of sight, persistent coughs, leprosy, shortness of breath, impairment of hearing,¹¹ unremitting pain, visible growths, tics, recurrent fits and any other infliction that makes a sufferer 'crippled up'. Such insults to the body are counted as 'problems'. They are attributes of persons and, quite often, visible problems are registered in nicknames. Finally, one notes the ontological status of chronic problems. These are afflictions for each recognised problem has been visited on a sufferer through an act of a Dreaming. While Dreamings bring affliction as chronic illness, there has also been Dreaming participation in any woundings that leave scars, in all injuries that debilitate or diminish physical capacity or maim.

STING OF THE HORNET

A 'biggest Buffalo toilet' belongs to the Dreaming story of the great Buffalo that creatively and eternally stomps about the Sickness Country (see Keen and Merlan 1990:50) eastwards and southwards of Darwin over towards the plains of Kakadu. Buffalo was brought to his end when he encountered a Hornet with a prodigious sting. For no good reason, the cranky Hornet stung Buffalo. Buffalo collapsed onto the ground. Part after part, Buffalo's body swelled up until he was hugely bloated. Buffalo did not recover and he finished up right there where he had suffered. Then he went into the ground, leaving behind at the place of his last passion that huge rock formation of unmistakable contour and form - the 'biggest Buffalo toilet' of them all.¹²

When ol Luke struggled down out of the cab of his 4WD to view a 'biggest Buffalo toilet' on the road, he began at once to laugh in recognition. He saw what he had been vouchsafed: here was a simulacrum of that Buffalo Hill. He then brought his phrase and his laughter back to camp. Others were left to find words to express all the significance ol Luke had instantly comprehended in his sighting.

Ol Dolly told the story of Buffalo and Hornet. Others of her generation who had experience of the eastward country lent assent. Drover Rogers told of Sickness Country in general and the talking then went on to deal with the buffalo-shooting camps and times. Buffalo were killed in great numbers: 'We bin shootin that biggest lot.' Many people came maimed out of buffalo-shooting and the Sickness Country. There was Peg Leg for living witness and people like Peg Leg had got their lot straight away. Then there was delayed infliction. Sometimes a Dreaming can 'catch up' with a person after years and years. Nor does one have to go back to the country of that Dreaming to be stricken by its powers after a lapse of time. (And why do Dreamings strike? The answer — a general one which I take from other conversations — is that people 'come up against' Dreamings and 'tangle' with them. There is confrontation of some sort. The Dreaming decides to take things amiss and to reply, sometimes out of justified affront, sometimes out of wanton crankiness as mad, angry Hornet did in his dealings with that Buffalo.)

After years and years, the Dreamings of the Sickness Country had caught up with ol Luke. His swellings had their like in the swellings of Buffalo in the Dreaming story. It is characteristic of Dreamings to follow ways that turn the world of humans inside out or upside down. Thus, Dreamings follow tracks left invisibly on stone or on hard ground rather than imprinted on receptive sand. Like owls, Dreamings see best in the dark. In deep waters, Dreamings grasp float-stones that, instead of sinking, soar up like life jackets carrying their burden to the surface of the waters. Humans work to deposit faeces most secretly. It's a Dreaming quirk to vaunt droppings and then to piss in streams or billabongs or rivers or the sea and so turn the waters salt and tangy. Buffalo joins with other land-based Dreamings in making so very public and evident his piles of distinctive faeces which petrify to serve as his memorial.

LIKE THAT BUFFALO

Heretofore ol Luke's toilet expeditions, and especially those nightly disturbances, had not only been a demeaning of the sufferer, but an embarrassment to all. While all of us were in the know, we had to pretend that dignity was unimpaired. Cheeky children had to be told not to comment, to hold their peace and to suppress the wicked nickname they had invented in mockery of the old man's problem.

Buffalo reversed things. Taking the plight of ol Luke to his own being, Buffalo allowed this elder to be public and unconcerned about his duties. The pretence of maintaining secrecy was put aside. No more was there reason for Luke to hide body product in case a sorcerer could snatch it away. Ol Luke (together with the rest of us) had been given the intimation that his fate was fully and finally determined. 'You watch,' ol Dolly said, 'Thatfella gonna **BE** that Buffalo.'

There was another dimension to relief. Whitefella doctors said that ol Luke suffered from late-onset diabetes. The illness had come upon a man who had been a star rider at the rodeo, a boss of cattle camps, champion buffalo shooter and a fighter to fear. To the end, he was an artist with a whip. His illness came as a sudden striking down. The doctors told him to give up cigarettes and told him also to give the grog away. And these two things he did. But then he was instructed to follow an exacting diet and ol Luke's wife Ada was charged to manage it. The patient did not take to the required foods and, unsurprisingly, there was a new fractiousness in ol Luke's relationship with Ada. Every now and then ol Luke would find ways to get big bottles of forbidden 'lolly water'. He would ostentatiously gurgle litre bottles down in acts of public defiance. Knowing that diabetes was epidemic among his age-mates in the Top End, ol Luke would tax me: 'So, Basil, you tellim me, what this bloody DIABETES?' His true concession to whitefella medicine was that he obediently took a clutch of prescribed pills whenever Ada produced them.

Buffalo turned ol Luke's complaint back into blackfella business. Were not his symptoms consonant with those of Buffalo? No matter when ol Luke had 'tangled' with the Dreaming of the sickness country, Hornet's poison had been put in him somewhere, some-when. Buffalo had then witnessed ol Luke's suffering. As, again, ol Dolly was to say: 'Buffalo bin seeim that one, poorfella'. Out of pity, Buffalo had acted to tell ol Luke what ailed him and so also to inform him of his fellowship in the passion of a Dreaming. 'Same like that one, Dreamingfella, bin finish.'

A man who in his last months and days is known to be afflicted 'same like that one, Dreamingfella', has no worries about openly and noisily making expeditions for that toilet. In this, ol Luke was given great release. Like a Dreaming, he could be public and noisy about evacuation. 'Dreamin gottim' and thus seized by a Power, ol Luke was released to be larger than life. The olfella was given comfort of another sort. He came fully to a comprehension of his own affliction. Maybe whitefella medication could give some relief but what ailed him was no whitefella DIABETES. His was a problem that comes of the Dreamings of the Sickness Country. Whitefella doctors do not understand (or pretend not to understand) the work of Dreaming Powers. Ol Luke firmly rejected the restricted diet advocated by the doctor, encouraged by the nurse and monitored by the health worker. Whitefella medicines are one thing but, with regard to 'takin tucker,' he now knew better. The best thing to do would be to eat bush food all the time.

BUSH TUCKER BREAKFAST

Once the message of the Buffalo toilet had been made a 'word', its meaning given as a public and attested fact, we lived with the implications and so, knowing that we were in this general state of understanding, ol Luke arranged a happening. There was to be a grand bush tucker breakfast. There was mystery to it and a spirit of profound insistence from ol Luke.

A congregation 'like that company for ceremony' was to be transported to a particular billabong not so very far from Darwin. Selected men were to come to the billabong to eat breakfast.

On the appointed morning, five vehicles laden with human cargo reached the billabong to which ol Luke had repaired the day before. Something had been provided for us all to witness and to marvel at. Stretched out in front of ol Luke's camping place was the headless body of the biggest snake in Australia. With gleeful encouragement from ol Luke, I measured the great python to report: 'Well, that longest thing! It's twenty-six feet.' Having been visited with sight of that biggest pile of dung Ol Luke had now, by a sort of cunning, produced 'that biggest snake' as counter-hugeness to the revelation. For a while we new arrivals went about marvelling while ol Luke laughed and chortled, now and then shouting out with glee: 'Long time, long time, I bin savim up this ol fella. I bin savim up this one, oh ho, long time!'

During that day all who listened to ol Luke discovered that he had a relationship with this snake and billabong that went back years and years through the droving times and the times spent buffalo shooting and times when ol Luke turned up at the billabong just on walkabout. Washing in the billabong one day in times long past, he had met up with this snake. He decided not to pursue and kill it, but to 'leave it' to live on. For ol Luke, the billabong became a favourite spot to visit. And he would talk to the animal which, in the manner of great reptiles never stopped growing longer and thicker, increasing through all its years. People came to know this snake as the property of ol Luke. A crowd of fellas who once worked the black soil country, most of them now dead, had respected the serpent as owned property. And ol Luke had saved up his snake till now. (I never found out how he and his team had caught and dispatched the snake, nor did I discover the destiny of the missing head.)

The body of the great snake was cut into lengths. These were given to the headmen of parties and then the segments were cut into steaks to be handed to individuals to cook and eat. Men went round in celebratory expectation of the meal to come. 'This gonna be that special feed. Good tucker.' When I settled down to eat my portion, a companion beside me quietly remarked: 'Better have your shirt off for this one Basil.'

I looked about. All the others were, of course, bare chested. It is by baring one's chest or, better still, by wearing only a cock-rag, that one exhibits one's particular embodiment whenever one knowingly confronts the holy. (Remember how ol Luke came into camp on his day of discovery stripped off down to boxer shorts and so ready to make an announcement concerning the Dreaming?) By pointing to the irreverence of my shirted torso, my companion told me that our eating was to be counted as something 'dear'. In a very special way, the prodigious snake incarnate was consubstantiate with 'that Python Dreaming'. Our eating of it was communion. Only men had come as guests to breakfast on that 'ol fella' — this word of multiple referents stands for great snake, male organ, male principle and a men's cult. There is more to note about the feast on snake. However, further comment is best postponed until the event can be considered against story number two which is another tale of provisioning.

FISH OF FIRST CONTACT

In this story we again encounter ol Luke — this time as narrator, not as main actor in a tale. Ol Luke was to recite a myth and his telling was provoked by the mood in camp.

Campers had come home from the pub all discontent. This had been a bad Friday night in the bar. As parry or riposte followed sharp verbal challenge, there was an instant when it became clear that the risky exchanges were no longer stand-off encounters between this drinker and that. The pub crowd had divided, blackfellas 'pool [-table] side', the rest in a huddle in the space we called 'other side'. Challenge became racial. (An anomalous white, I was drinking 'wrong side'.) An all-out brawl started once whitefella verbal abuse of Abo-

iginal women could no longer be ignored. The wisely craven got the women away and fled. Rash brave hearts stayed on to bash, to be bashed and to be arrested once the police responded to the publican's call. Someone remarked that we should all have left much sooner. The pub that night had been crammed with out-of-town truckies, rig-owning battlers who drive hard to raise the cash to redeem the extravagant mortgages which allow them to claim ownership of their customised prime movers. Together, these independents promote an ethic that posits 'real work' as the sole condition for 'being a real man' — and few who do not truck do any sort of work that is to be counted as real as trucking. A collectivity of truckies, drinking on a night of turn-around, is embodied battler challenge.

Punished men returned as stragglers to camp. A few had been charged and would face court on Monday. (The women, safely removed, had suffered only verbal abuse.) Not a few men nursed bad cuts and contusions. There were absentees. Of our mob, two had been crowded into an ambulance together with other protagonists with injuries serious enough to warrant hospital attention. The night had been debacle. 'Bloody whitefellas pickin on us!' Above all, the fighting had been a whitefella/blackfella encounter 'for no reason'.

Responding to discontent, misery and resentment, ol Luke (who no longer frequented pubs) called for his fire to be stoked up. He made the bid that his place should become camp centre. Soon he was ringed with the audience he had summoned. 'I gotta story,' said Luke. And then he told it.

It's olden days down in the river country. A man comes up quickly to his mob. From the riverbank on this side, he has seen whitefellas coming, but on the opposite bank of the river. Everyone moves off together to go and see. At this time, the locals have heard about whitefellas and their ways but they have yet to see them. They arrive at the bank and see a party of whitefellas on the other side. People begin to signal. They want tobacco, sugar, flour and tealeaves for they have heard that these are the goods that the whitefella brings with him to trade. They make signs of eating, drinking and smoking, signs of enjoying a sweet thing (the way people show enjoyment after tasting sugarbag). The whitefellas signal in return. They agree to exchange their goods for fish. After a while, the whitefellas bring boxes and packages to the riverbank and leave them there. The white men depart. Everybody waits and watches. When sure that the whitefellas truly have retreated, two men cross the river and bring back the goods. The people do not know what to do with the flour and the tealeaves. They enjoy the sugar and smoke tobacco. Meanwhile, a man has speared a fish. It is a large barramundi. A youngfella is told to swim over the river to the opposite bank and leave the fish there for the whitefellas to find. The young swimmer then returns, his mission completed. People hide and wait and watch. Soon a whitefella comes along and finds the fish. He picks up the fish. The watchers see the man start (in disgust) and make a face; the fish is stinking. The whitefella holds out the fish at arm's length. Bits drop off the fish and onto the ground. (The bits of fish fall to the ground like the putrescent flesh that falls from human corpses that have been put onto tree platforms to decompose after death, the first stage in traditional mortuary practice.) The whitefella throws the stinking fish down on the riverbank. You see: Rotten fish! Rotten fish! Oh, oh! Rotten fish!

The story is received with laughter. As the laughing subsides, someone says: 'Rotten fish!' The laughter starts up again. People leave ol Luke's fireside to go to their own camping places and they move off with chuckles and further renewals of laughter in response to calls of 'Rotten fish!'

Ol Luke told stories in two ways. When he vouchsafed a traditional Mallak Mallak story, he would give the story 'in that Mallak Mallak' and require an interpreter to render the story into English. Ol Luke would never translate the laws and traditions of his people. He was a living repository of the law and he gave out the law in its original and canonical form. He also listened to the translations to check them. He would indicate whenever the translator needed help with a passage he hadn't got quite right. As lawgiver, ol Luke thus required the presence of at least two translators to witness proper redaction. But ol Luke did not give this fishy story of first contact 'in language'. Instead, he told it in his form of English, releasing it

for all to hear. He said, further, that the story belonged to all the river people and to no language group in particular. There is a further fact to remark. 'Rotten fish' became a reminiscent punch line in the local repertoire. It was a phrase to bring out in face of experience of problems with whitefellas — lack of co-operation, hard dealing, nastiness and the rest.

With regard to the location of first encounter, the story places emphasis on swimming from riverbank to riverbank. This implies that the Dry Season event (the river is not in flood) did not take place at one or other of the famous Daly River crossings. I asked ol Luke at what site the events of first encounter had happened. His reply was a disclaimer: 'The ol people, they never bin tell us that.' The site of the definitive rotten fish encounter is thus lost to history — perhaps even withheld from history. Placelessness makes this a story of the riverbank entire. Presentation of the story straightaway in Aboriginal English similarly releases this tale from ethnic ownership. And, thirdly, ol Luke refused to give the Aboriginal purveyors of suspect barramundi any local affiliations — they were 'blackfellas' of no named language group. Nor would ol Luke give the line for this story's transmission by naming his sources. This, he said, was a true story that was 'free'. Thus made free, the story has the form of a paradigm tale that characterises the quality of first encounter between all whitefellas and all Aboriginal people of the North.

I was puzzled by the laughter, its unanimity, its prolongation and the capacity of speakers further to evoke yet more laughing with the call of 'Rotten fish!' Was the celebrated *schadenfreude* of German jokes — that delight in the public discomfort of another — also a dominant motif in Aboriginal jesting?

There was a further line of questioning to pursue. Was that barramundi intendedly given as a rotten fish? Then, in the local corpus of stories, there was a conspicuous theme of delay. An eternal slow goanna spoils the futures of others by showing up, not belatedly, but all too late, bearing the essential message or the redemptive gift as a thing now tragically long past its use-by date. But delay was not relevant for I was to confirm that a fresh barramundi was transported expeditiously across the river. And the whitefella got smartly to the barramundi left for him on the riverbank in this exchange of historical first trading. The putrefaction was thus unordinary, a quick decay, not part of expectation, but some sort of coup. I could push enquiries no further. 'Jus you wait, Basil; sometime you gonna see!'

I can now explain that such pauses on the way to enlightenment are standard moments in the Aboriginal pedagogy of the North. Quite often, the grounds are laid for further revelation which is expected to come either out of the flow of life or when time makes things right to stage a further teaching session.¹³ To bring me to full appreciation of the story of first encounter, no special pedagogy was required. Ol Luke was sure that sometime soon I would become witness to the trend of action that put wisdom (rather than the crudities attendant on slapstick hilarity) into the laughter that is the knowing person's response to 'Rotten fish!'

THE PLAINT OF RIVER BANK AND BEACH

In the Australian North, there is a habitude of whitefella fishermen, whether amateur or professional. Routinely they defile riverbank or beach. The stink and evidence of their leavings is part of one's experience of the boat ramps and the docking places. In recent times, the detritus of whitefella fishing has been subject to an official clean-up campaign. The saltwater crocodile (previously a hunted animal that yielded leather for fashion-house handbag and shoe) became a protected species. No longer legally shot, crocodiles have increased in numbers to become an ever-present and lethal threat to those humans who use the waterways. Fish offal on boat ramps attracts the great predators to precisely those places where people may be found wading as they tend their boats. Yet fishermen persist. They leave behind them rotten fish.

There are several reasons for the persistence of the fishers' habits of disposal and all have to do with the imperative culinary preferences of whitefella fish-eaters in Australia. Firstly, all whole fish are gutted before removal. Second, we may note that most amateur

fishers favour fillets over whole fish or steaks, treating the considerable residue left after filleting as rubbish to be dumped. Then there is the 'by-catch'. The by-catch is made up of all captured fish that are either below target size or not of a target species. Fishing with hook and line or, more spectacularly, fishing with nets, yields a by-catch of fish of unwanted kinds and sizes. Some of the unwanted or undersized fish live to be returned to the water. In net fishing, the weight of the by-catch can exceed the weight of the catch of target species. Unwanted and unfortunate dugong, dolphin and turtle also fall victim to nets. In all, the production of tons of dead aquatic animals that are surplus to requirements, is part of whitefella fishing practice and routines. Fishers take home a fraction of the total take. (In humane response to all the carnage, some rod-and-line fishermen nowadays only catch fish 'for the sport'. The catch is unhooked, given a kiss [if not a shark] and returned to the water. The practice has earned a scornful response. One can buy a mocking sticker to glue to the transom of one's dingy. The sticker reads: 'Real men kiss girls not fish.')

Whitefella fishing practice bangs up against Aboriginal fishing custom and belief. This is a repeated encounter, the collision of two distinct folkways, each folkway a persistent cultural expression, resilient on its own account. The sites for perpetual re-enactment of whitefella insult to Aboriginal sensibility and religion, are riverbank and beach. And this is encounter in which whitefella habitude is largely unconscious of itself. With only rare exceptions, whitefella fishers do not know that they offend. The one-sidedly perceived collision of folkways concerning fish provokes what I shall call 'the plaint of river bank and beach'. This is the cry of Aboriginal objection and hurt. It is repeated along the coastline and voiced also by the riverside.

Yanuwa people know and own parts of the coastline in the vicinity of the delta where the McArthur River and associated creeks empty into the South Western waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria. John Bradley reports the plaint of a senior Yanuwa woman thus:

Yes, I went to my country and the country of my mother — (for 'country' she used a word that can also mean sea — [the country of my mother] was full of the stench of rotting fish, of dugong. I was crying. I saw all those stinking fish and dugong and was crying. These fish, these dugong — we have to care for them; that is our job. We have to keep them safe... The whiteman is ignorant about these things. (cited in Williams 1999:58)

In evidence given during the St. Vidgeon Native Title Claim,¹⁴ Hazel Farrel enunciates the law concerning waste: 'You're not allowed to waste food from the land.' (TRS:1322) She then goes on to discuss the use of nets by Aboriginal fishers of the billabongs:

Today, people got throwing nets, and - they use on the billabongs, which is not good. I don't think it's good... because if you catch too many, and there is only few people there, you might waste the fish.

Q. What does your law say about wasting of fish?

A. You're not allowed to waste fish, or you share if you get too many. Take it back to your families. (TRS: 1314)

Remarking that it makes her 'upset' and 'sad' to see wasted crab returned to the river by visiting fishermen to 'rotten,' Hazel Farrell renders her version of the plaint against whitefella profligacy:

I know there is lots of European people don't like any other fish except barramundi ... they go for barramundi. They don't go for catfish. They chuck that behind their back. The main fish is barramundi, but they don't use the barramundi proper-

ly. The head, and the tail, and the bone in between, jut throw them anywhere along the banks. We blackfella, we gajim, we garr, we dagat, bone and all. (TRS: 1324)

I shall now return to my questions about the story of first encounter.

When I first heard the tale of 'Rotten fish!', the plaint of riverbank and beach had not yet entered into my repertoire of received speech acts. But ol Luke knew that, soon enough, I would hear one person or another responding to the sight and smell of stinking by-catch or some filleter's now rotten leavings. And, indeed, some two months after the night of story telling, I heard a version of the plaint. It was given stridently by Lily, a saltwater woman and an angler of great skill. We were camping on the banks of the Adelaide River. Lily responded to the remains and stench of rotten fish at a fishing place located just above the jetty where the tourist boats took off to go out looking for crocodiles. 'Look these bastards what they bin leavin here la bank...'

The plaint of beach and riverbank is integral to the story of first encounter. The plaint depends from the last words of the story as an essential yet silent conclusion. 'Rotten fish!' is an indicative quotation — it signifies the enunciation of some version of the detailed plaint, the sounds of which, though all the time unheard, are conjured by implication. The story's indictment of the white man is effected by a broadly given hint. Actual and detailed arraignment of the whitefella is no part of the story itself because words of specified accusation belong to the registration of a discovered instance of the oft-repeated wrong. It follows that understanding of the story thus requires an act of completion on the hearer's part. The plaint of beach and riverbank has to be brought to the tale to finish and perfect it. Unvoiced in the telling of the tale, the plaint describes that archetype which is intended as the story's destination: the image of the whiteman always acting the prodigal in his catching, wasting and wrongful disposal of fish.

Once plaint is appended to story, 'Rotten fish!' becomes a great phrase of metonymy. 'Rotten fish!' stands for a governing reality: all too often events show forth the truth that the whitefella has no law. There is thus an equation: 'Rotten fish!' = Being without law. And this is why the tale of 'Rotten fish!' is a tale to be told on a night when the delinquent whitefellas brought to attention are truckies who provoke fights with men and abuse women, all for no reason. Stand at the roadside tomorrow morning. Watch those monster trucks as their drivers gun them out of town: 'Rotten fish!'

COUP IS MADE GESTE

I had looked for the cause of the decay of the great barramundi in delay. This was a search to find cause in human agency — dilatory delivery, delayed collection or, perhaps, the malicious prestation of a rotting gift. None of these alternatives answered. All else having failed, there was no recourse but to turn to religion.

Barramundi is one of the most frequently encountered Dreamings of the riverine regions of the north. And Barramundi was not confined to waterways. Barramundi moved cross-country between the separate waters, leaving behind him ridged quartzite protrusions to be recognised as sparkling dorsal fins standing proud upon the land. The sharp rocks signal overland passage and the ability of Barramundi to plunge into the world of the 'inside' or under-earth, only to re-emerge further on along the line of his Dreaming progress. Passing along watercourses and tracking over the land, Barramundi's traces catch up the country.

At the time of first encounter in the Top End, the whitefellas stepped into a country in which Barramundi's presence was pervasive. In return for tobacco, sugar, flour and tealeaf, the Aboriginal participants in the pantomime of first contact deliver up whole fish. They render as their gift a body that participates in the pervasive Dreaming of their region. The next occurrence is irruption. A donated barramundi of the river becomes Barramundi of the Dreaming. This particular type of transformation is not unusual. And, in any case, the most

prodigious local representatives of species — the biggest roo, the greatest croc, the oldest fish-eagle — are more than roo or croc or eagle. The specimen-prodigious are, each in their turn and after their kind, instantiations of the Dreaming. And prodigy has three dimensions. These are: presence, size and age.

When the whitefella received the barramundi into his hands, there was metamorphosis. A fish its donors had given as just a fish became an instantiation of the Dreaming. And the act of the fish-become-Dreaming was instantly to go rotten, dropping gobbets of putrescent flesh upon the ground. As noted above, the flesh dropped like that of the human dead installed on their platforms. Such droppings are the stuff of portents. Dropped flesh of the Barramundi Dreaming portended and instituted the nature of a relationship destined to be eternally re-enacted. The symptom of whitefella presence in the land was to be carnage upon carnage as creatures of the Dreaming were intemperately and excessively put to death — an expense of spirit in a charnel waste. Expense of spirit because the whitefella never will acknowledge the spirit in created things that, through spirit, participate in the Dreaming. For all the uncaring ignorance, 'Rotten fish!' is sign and badge.

When the proper referent of a story's punch line is discovered in the plaint of beach and banks, that story is revealed as a story of institution, foundation or putting things in place. It shows forth and defines the quiddity of whitefellas in their essential nature or actual being. The story presents a verity out of the Barramundi Dreaming. Instant rotting is a definitive Dreaming geste. By it, Barramundi signals and defines the nature of the invaders. The Dreaming is brought into discerning acknowledgement of the coming of the colonist.

Implicitly, a further point is made. This concerns the relationship between Dreaming and the animal that participates in the Dreaming particular to its kind. The animal is host. As host, the animal participates in the holy to greater or lesser degree. When killed for human food, the animal should be given the respect of treatment not as 'rubbish' but as substance to be returned to its origins. For the animal as host, there is a rule of total consumption. 'Careful that fish: that fish gotta be somefella's Dreaming.'

In this vein, one can better appreciate the meaning of the breakfast on Python that ol Luke arranged. It is not often that one comes to receive the meat of such a host. For ol Luke himself, there was a further more intimate significance. The Dreaming track of the Python marches alongside that of the Buffalo. Through communion with Python, ol Luke was, at one remove, in communion with Buffalo at a time when his own age and the age and greatness of the snake brought them all together in nearness to the finalities of the Dreaming.

MAN SHOTS FISH

In a brief essay written to discuss 'Aboriginal Humour', Stanner includes a fishy story that he tells against himself and his friend Charlie Dargie, returned serviceman and owner of one of the peanut farms on the northern bank of the Daly River. The story belongs to the 1930s.

Then there was the day my old bush friend Charlie Dargie and I went hunting. We did not see even a lizard all day. We came home out of spirits and rather grumpy. Charlie suddenly found a solution. 'We'll go and *shoot* a barramundi' he said. The barramundi is the best-eating fish in Australian waters fresh, salt or mineral. We walked some miles to Bamboo Creek, a slack tributary of the Daly River, where barramundi often lie sunning themselves a foot below the surface. We stood on the top of the steep jungle-covered bank and sought our quarry. Charlie soon pointed to a fine fat fish faintly swishing near the surface. He shot like a Bisley marksman, swift and true, and the stunned fish floated to the top. We had it, in imagination, almost sizzling in the pan when a shrill '*yackai*' came from a nearby bush and then the face of Jarawak, a Magdnella man, thrust out. 'What's the matter you Charlie',

he cried, 'you try stealim fish belonga me?' We had touched the depths. To *shoot* a *caught* fish *tied up* to the bank by a string. Jarawak saw that the tale spread. The blacks never forgot it. To this day, half a lifetime later (i.e. in 1952), they still laugh. When I go fishing with them, someone is sure to say in an innocent tone: 'You got plenty bullet?' (Stanner 1982: 42–3, emphases original).

What sort of joke is this? In his essay, Stanner leaves the story to stand alone, his brief verdict is a verdict on what seems to be self-evident: 'We had touched the depths (of absurdity?)'. However, Stanner's story can be given a different and inter-textual reading if we invoke the 'Rotten fish!' of first encounter.

On the day of misadventure, Stanner went hunting with one of the few whitefellas he would acknowledge as a true friend in Daly River country, that 'rotted frontier, with the smell of failure, vice and decadence' (Stanner 1979:80). On the day of days, the two companions did their thing whitefella way, unaccompanied and unaided by any blackfella tracker. And having failed in the hunt (obviously because the whitefellas had tried to hunt unassisted by any Aboriginal guide), Charlie Dargie is taken by a mad idea to shoot a fish. When he comes to shoot, he shoots a fish that is tied up in a blackfella icebox to make sure that it will be fresh, unsmelly and undecayed when brought in to be cooked. Together on the riverbank, Stanner and Charlie Dargie revert wholly to racial type. 'Rotten fish!' Their relationship with Jarawak's catch is deranged three times over. There is the mispraisal of wrong means, the appropriation that is theft and the work upon a tethered animal, the captive and live entity that is the opposite of a caught fish gone bad. Whitefellas just can't help it. Even the best among them can't.

From the standpoint of Daly River people, repetition of the Stanner story is not the repeated memorialisation of *schaudenfreude*. Rather, it is hilarious reconfirmation of a Dreaming verity. The event becomes part of Stanner. Its attachment is in the questioning phrase that clings to the fisherman-anthropologist with the tenacity of the Homeric epithet. What in the original action was so funny was demonstration by grotesque surprise – Bill Stanner and Charlie Dargie, after all, run true to racial type. These accomplices act out the myth of origination which posits derangement in the relationship between whitefella and fish with riverbank for scene. Original 'Rotten fish!' attaches to the white man just as tenaciously as original sin cleaves to the Bible-bound Christian believer. Now and then, by mediation of the Dreaming, the verity of origination may be re-announced in crazy, madcap ways. There's a headline for this story: **Usually Reliable Whitefellas Shoot Captive Barramundi**. The story is pendant from the tale of 'Rotten fish!' with misdirection of the .303 and the pungency of gunsmoke to betoken the 'immemorial misdirection' that locates the whitefella in Daly River mythology.

As told by Stanner, the story has the form of Ovidian metamorphosis. A rifle of .303 calibre with its military origins is a 'man killer', not a hunter's gun. Used 'wrong way', a sniper's relict rifle from World War One (yet another carnage)¹⁵ mediates transformation, returning us all to re-assertion of the archetype of the whitefella who grasps a rejecting and putrescent barramundi on the shore of first encounter.

KILLING THAT WHOLE LOT

We come now to the theme that joins the fishing story retailed by ol Luke with the story of ol Luke's own discovery of a Dreaming sign. In the days of the buffalo hunts, the hunters 'bin killim that whole lot'. In frontier America, there was massacre of bison on the prairies by frontier pioneers. The same in its motivation and excess, the killing of buffalo on the black soil plains of the Top End matches the American slaughter. As in America, the Australian buffalo were killed for hides while their flesh was left to rot.

The most open and literate account of the Top End killing enterprise, is provided in the

journals and letters of Tom Cole collected as *Riding the Wildman Plains*. Cole ran a killing plant and in the 1930s would mortgage himself to the bank, contracting to supply one thousand hides in a shooting season. Loans made the plant-owners desperate to achieve their stipulated targets, making the mood of enterprise frenetic. In the shooting camps, Aboriginal women washed, salted and prepared the hides. The men formed shooting and skinning teams, stalking the buffalo which were then run down by shooters on horseback at more than a little risk. Unmentioned in Cole's diaries is the fact of carnage, which is to say all the discarded meat. The bulk of each buffalo carcass was left on the plains to decompose. The annual assault on the buffalo created a Dry Season countryside of circling buzzards and the stink of rotting flesh.

In the 1930s, ol Luke hunted buffalo for Mr Gaydon, a friend of Tom Cole's. The Second World War deprived all would-be buffalo-shooters of both munitions and supplies. When shooting resumed, ol Luke hunted with another team. After a while, he returned to stock work on stations and to droving. He gave away buffalo hunting because of the danger and because he could now get a job heading the stockmen on a station. But, for years, ol Luke had been a killer. Killing, killing, killing for no other reason than salt hides.

Fishing for barramundi and hunting buffalo have been whitefella enterprises in the Top End. Whitefella conduct of both these activities of procurement maintains essential difference. The difference is that between the wasteful whitefella procurement of animal product for export and indigenous fishing and hunting which is done by those who kill unwastefully to eat at home and, all the time, concede spirit to the prey.

Was it a culpable action that led ol Luke to be visited with an infliction from the Dreaming? The answer to this question was evident to those who interpreted the sign of the 'Buffalo toilet' on the evening of ol Luke's return. Ol Luke had joined with whitefellas to take part in enterprise. This was a mistaken commitment. Out of the black soil country made over into a killing ground, ol Luke has been struck. And those who come to an appreciation of this nexus which joins wasteful slaughter to an angered Dreaming's reply, were all themselves (whether woman or man) also one-time members of the buffalo-shooting mobs.

Ol Luke's affliction is part of a much larger story of human diminution. In the 1970s, most of the survivors of the buffalo-shooting times are now elderly men and women who have failed to produce children to survive them. Ol Luke himself produced no heir and the people recognise a generalised human sterility that comes, paradoxically, out of country that is still hugely productive of magpie geese and other wetland species — including great quantities of snakes. Further, the breeding magpie goose is a symbol of triumphant and fecund domestic arrangements. The typical breeding pattern is for an older male bird to nest with two females, an older and a younger partner, this threesome living in co-operative simulation of a desired human arrangement — Aboriginal polygyny. It follows that eggs of the magpie goose (collected at risk of exposure to snakes and crocs) are the proper prestation for an aspirant son-in-law to give to the father of the bride that he desires. The black soil plains thus hold the symbolic earnest of human fecundity. Yet this country has denied heirs to those born to inherit it. It has denied heirs also to those others who, like ol Luke, were born to other country, but likewise joined the killing mobs to turn the black soil plains into a place of carnage. Those who commented on the meaning of 'that biggest Buffalo toilet', brought ol Luke's own infliction to a body of greater misfortune in which they all already shared. They had become a generation of the afflicted, their maladies and their denial of progeny visited on them singly but similarly for participation in the harvesting of great animals for their skins alone. In this, they had also entered into peculiar relation with the white man.

The stories of Buffalo and Barramundi, both assert the potency of Dreamings in colonial and post-colonial times. Both implicitly refer to materialistic whitefella exploitation of inspired species. The two stories then challenge us to arrive at an appreciation of contem-

porary totemic realities as these are expressed in the sets of relationships that obtain between Aboriginal people, whitefellas and the Dreamings. There are people of the Dreamings on the one hand. On the other hand, there are the people who treat all animals as fauna (distinguishing the wild from the domesticated) and all plants as flora (distinguishing cultivars from the wild) and assign use-value to each distinguished species. By and large, Aboriginal people have not joined with whitefellas in operating either the commercial or the amateur fisheries of the North. The native observer who retains independence and is hurt and disturbed by intrusive practice of the cultural other thus utters the plaint of riverbank and beach. With buffalo shooting, things have been otherwise. Here was a most thorough integration as Aboriginal men and women were recruited to join the whitefella plant-owner and work together with him as his team in the buffalo-shooting business. In consequence of unholy alliance, relationships between the people of the Dreamings and a Dreaming quarry were put at issue.

WHITEFELLA RATIONS *VERSUS* BUSH TUCKER

There seems to be spiritual neutrality when people of the Dreamings choose to exchange their services either for the rations of whitefella provisioning or for the flesh of those animals the colonists brought to Australia. After spells of sustenance wholly unrelieved by any consumption of bush tucker, Aboriginal people will complain and say that they need items of bush tucker to restore bodily well being. An unrelieved diet of whitefella food produces perceived deficiency disorders. In whitefella understandings, an analogy with a body in need of a vitamin or mineral supplement seems quite apposite. People are not harmed as they enjoy sugar, flour and tea but neither are they fully sustained by the whitefella proven-der. To make deficiency good, people institute regimes of dietary alternation, going bush for bush food when sated with whitefella rations. Nor, in most of the classic forms of employment, does the service Aboriginal workers perform for their employers entail too much in the way of work upon indigenous fauna.

So far, the interpretations I have had to put forward have been based on straightforward assertions made by Aboriginal countrymen in or with reference to the situations I have described. Now, however, I have something of my own to add. In the story of 'Rotten fish! I think that the dropping of putrescent flesh was not only a portent of the whitefella's eternally wrong and problematic relationships with animals of the Dreaming. I think that the story has Barramundi refusing also to be commodified by being exchanged for the uninspired, inert and dead rations that whitefellas bring to trading relationships. This is to point up a problem. Aboriginal people can operate in two separate worlds so long as they do not attack, pervert and commodify the animals of the Dreaming in the service of whitefella enterprise. Furthermore, the bovine 'killer' animal that is slaughtered to provide meat on cattle stations, does not participate in Dreamings. Like the white men who brought them, cattle as members of a species that comes from abroad, have 'got no Dreaming' (Stanner 1979). Dingo scalping; culling roos or shooting these animals for pet food; the commercial crocodile shooting of historical times, emu farming, commercial fishing, and historical buffalo shooting, these are all activities in which creatures of the Dreaming are not taken for tucker in adequate number by those who put them to death. Death instead is dealt wholesale, either for trade and gain or to deplete some countryside of a species originally put into it by deed of a Dreaming Power. It's a wrong thing to give away a barramundi with inert sugar, flour, tobacco and that tealeaf touted as recompense. And this, by metonymy, is a verdict on participation in all the grand appropriations and wastings of the totem plants and animals of the Australian continent.

When a stranger enters in upon your land, the right way to proceed is to introduce that stranger to the Powers of the land and give the stranger knowledge of the Dreaming prohibitions that belong to the use of country. Then the incomer can set out to hunt or fish on his own behalf not for profit but for tucker.

CYCLONE STORY

There was this old fellow who took his wife from Borrooloola to see the city of Darwin. In Darwin, the old fellow and his woman stayed in the Aboriginal settlement at Bagot. There the wife met a Darwin man. She went off with this man, joined him in his house at Bagot and said she had become a 'Darwin girl'. She would not return with her husband to Borrooloola. Only magic does this to a woman, making her change over suddenly like that. The husband went back home. He was very angry. He was angry for that woman and that man. One day he sat down and began to sing up that Whirlywind. He was going to kill both of them, kill them both finally. He sang and sang. (He used clapsticks to give the beat for his singing.) He sang the Whirlywind down the river over from Borrooloola and out into the sea (off the South-Western portion of the Gulf of Carpentaria). He turned the wind and made it go upward over the sea towards the North. He sang the wind past Groote Eyland. He went on singing. He sang the wind past the Gove Peninsula and there he made the wind turn West. He sang the wind on towards Croker Island. He was holding the wind, holding onto the wind all the time as he sang. Then the wind, that Whirlywind, said: 'Oh, what's that?' Whirlywind had smelt another wind coming from somewhere roundabout. This was a Young Girl Wind and the first wind smelt her underarm smell. The Young Girl Wind was coming from the West. Whirlywind started to chase after her. Smelling that smell, he went really mad. Chasing, chasing after the Young Girl Wind, the oldfella Whirlywind caught up with her. They stayed together in one place; they were over Darwin that whole night.

And that's the way you got all these houses smashed up and those people killed, what whitefellas are calling that Cyclone Tracy.

But the whitefellas got the wrong name; wrong name really! Two wind! And all the time the whitefellas were thinking 'One wind' and got the wrong name, that Tracy.

That wasn't Tracy. That was the oldfella Whirlywind that was sung up from Borrooloola and the Young Girl. Two wind!

The narrator brings his story to its close with expressions of great glee interspersed with repetitions of: 'Two wind, that was two wind really!' He went on to laugh the more. Then he mentioned tee shirts. In the aftermath of the cyclone that devastated Darwin on Christmas Eve 1974, lines of tee shirts were produced for survivors and rescuers ruefully to wear. One carried the legend: **Darwin — Gone with the Wind**. But Dennis Daniels, narrator of the true Cyclone Story, cited another inscription: **What a Night I Spent with Tracy**. 'This one was half right, half right. Some whitefella got it half right. But, really, there were two winds: oldfella Whirlywind and the Young Girl.' After the laughing, he says: 'Darwin really got wasted. Wasted. I've been looking round. And all those fellas were killed!'

In the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy, I arrived in Darwin to do research as soon as civilians were allowed to re-enter the city. Dr. Colin Jack-Hinton, Director of N.T. Art Galleries and Museums, kindly allowed me caravan space in the garden of his property. This host also found room to accommodate Dennis Daniels on a day that Dennis passed through Darwin on his way home to Ngukurr from Canberra. In Canberra, Dennis had been attending a meeting of the Council of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies (AIAS). I held an AIAS fellowship and, as a member of Council, Dennis Daniels had approved my research proposal. While Dennis was not exactly my employer he was very near to being my boss. Joying in the relationship, Dennis gave me pointers and tips to prepare me for my first venture into Aboriginal society. At the end of the evening, he presented me with a gift. His gift was the Cyclone Story. He said that his story would be the first thing in my field notebooks.

Dennis positioned himself to speak as an elder of Ngukurr, a settlement on the Roper River some 1,000 kms South-East of Darwin. His Cyclone Story comes out of the jointure in ceremony of the settlements of Borrooloola, Hodgson Downs, Ngukurr and Oenpelli that creates one of the strongest ceremonial complexes in the Top End. Part of his message was that all about and around Darwin, the ceremony life was gone and finished up. Working

around Darwin, I would be in country where the religious life had long ago come to an end, leaving an emptiness. Darwin is a place outside the law where surviving Aborigines no longer command traditions.

The Darwin of Dennis Daniels is a place of the mixing of Aboriginal populations with a consequent confusion of languages, conflation of systems of kinship and of marriages entered into without regard for the rules that define permitted and unpermitted spouses. The man from Borroloola sang the Whirlywind up into a sink of iniquity — a sort of Nineveh or Sodom. And Dennis has no trouble with telling about a Dreaming that starts off under command of a man of ceremony but then veers off into wilful self-expression. What was intended to be a precision raid guided onto target from Borroloola, ends up as indiscriminate carpet-bombing. Darwin probably deserved its fate. Had Darwin been a place of strong ceremony, the incoming winds would have been deflected. Active local Powers would have stopped Whirlywind and his paramour, preventing them from making so free with local air space.

THE PATTERN FOR METAMORPHOSIS

Ezra Pound wrote cantos that self-consciously depend for their form on the pattern of Ovidian metamorphosis to become a twentieth century exponent of a classic but generally neglected form. And Pound discussed poetics with his father, addressing letters from out-cast Europe to his home in the U.S.A. Pound explained to his father that the Ovidian form is to be represented thus:

A>B>C>D...

X*

...D>C>B>A

A set of processes and relationships concerning humans are in narrative motion (A>B>C>D...). An intrusive entity (X*) then enters unexpectedly into the story. By its acts, qualities and presence, the intruder turns things round, the result being an inversion or reversal (...D>C>B>A), accomplished in a moment of metamorphosis which yields a superseding scene. In the shift, 'the everyday (and ephemeral) world approximates to the "divine or permanent world"' (Merchant 1971:87).¹⁶ The movement is from human action to the play of the sacred, from the stuff of history to that of myth, from immanence to transcendence.

In the Dennis Daniels story from Ngukurr, a man vectors a wind onto a Darwin house in order to kill the two delinquents it contains. Underarm smell (X*) of the wandering and nubile female wind is the intrusive entity. There is transformation and general destruction as Whirlywind joins his discovered companion. The original human delinquents survive their intended deaths. They endure only a night of terror during which other townsfolk are randomly and gratuitously made victim to the passion of the winds. In the story of ol Luke, there is intrusion of that biggest Buffalo toilet. Recognised for what it portends, this sign by its mere presence changes the mysterious DIABETES of the medical establishment into a comprehensible infliction of the Dreaming. In the 'Rotten fish' story, proposed exchange at first contact is transformed when a wrongly donated fish wholly becomes its own Dreaming. By the act of instant rotting (X*), the Barramundi Dreaming prophesies the carnage that is to come. The Barramundi Dreaming also indicates the impossibility of dealings in which native foods are to be exchanged for exotic whitefella products. Unequal exchange of Dreaming-foods for goods that are inert or un-inspired is ruled out because there is no Dreaming for that tealeaf, nor for tobacco, nor for flour, nor even for sugar — despite its sweetness. (So intense a flavour, sugar-sweetness, should, according to an Aboriginal grammar of the senses, really be sign and token of some Dreaming presence.)

In the stories of metamorphosis, each mediating presence has a pungency of its own.¹⁷ This principle belongs generally to Northern Australia and, in our stories, it is pungency that labels each mediator as essential Dreaming manifestation. Those who voice the plaint of riverbank and beach remind us that rules of respect require that the stench of piscine mortality either be put away in earth or be cleared by fire. The last rites for sea-creatures cancel the sending forth of post-mortem stench as people attend to the last agentive act of the dead quarry. Stench signals that a death is, as yet, not a death that is 'finished' and complete. A corpse yields up all subjectivity finally to become 'quiet' (and object) only when its noisome stench no longer sends a message of attenuated demise or death-in-life.¹⁸

In significant stories of metamorphosis in Aboriginal Australia, the irruptive mediating character or quality must always come of a Dreaming. In consideration of Ovid, Rabaté (1986:66) remarks that the movement in stories of metamorphosis is one in which the intrusive or irruptive forces 'mediate between archetypes and contingent examples'. In this vein, the story that links ol Luke with Buffalo is a return to the archetypal; 'Rotten fish!' is itself an ur-story, its theme the bringing into being of the whitefella archetype which comes out of contingent first encounter. In the third instance, an event of destruction whimsically designated 'Cyclone Tracy' by the Government Meteorologist, is returned to proper and distinct identity. This was Whirlywind in his affair with the Young Girl from the West, both of them passionate and uncaring either of human lives or the whitefella's 'built environment'. The proper Cyclone Story gives Dreamings as still those terrible and wilful Powers who, moved by their own priorities and their private, self-centred calculi of desire, would often do enormous things. An eternal attribute of Dreamings is that, disdaining the presence of humankind, they may be wholly driven by their endogenous Dreaming relationships and concerns.

In his end piece to the Cyclone Story, Dennis Daniels mentioned waste. When we have both the story of 'Rotten fish!' and the programme of carnage on the black soil plains for precursors, the Cyclone Story makes sense all the more. Here is a progression towards disaster, now also to be appreciated as a narrative of mystical retribution. In its movement from the contingent to the archetype, the Cyclone Story finds its destination in yet a further message of metamorphosis: **The Wastrels Have Now Themselves Been Wasted.**

RARE IN AUSTRALIA

The patterning of either social action or narration on the form of Ovidian metamorphosis is a rare thing in Australia. Further, I hold that the emergence of the irruption story as a story type that is evoked by (and singularly appropriate to) the expression of social confrontation between blackfella and whitefella, marks a new moment in the historical development of both experiential and narratological forms. My argument is that a novel emphasis on the Ovidian form is to be historically located in colonial and post-colonial Aboriginal discourses in which Powers of the Dreaming radically confront the attributes, works and practices of the invader.

Stories and analyses published by Stephen Muecke allow one to show forth the difference between **classic transformations** and Ovidian metamorphoses in narratives of the Dreaming. Here, Muecke transmits a Paddy Roe (1983) story about Lardi, a Clever Man or *maban* of the country around Broome:

Lardi and two young men are camping together near a water trough. The young men want to shoot brolga who come to drink. Lardi tells them not to. Then Lardi leaves. When a brolga comes in, the young men shoot it, cook it and eat it all up. Lardi returns. He predicts that the young men will get sick and he leaves again. The young men vomit up and defecate the brolga meat. Lardi returns once more. He cures the young men. 'He reveals that he had transformed himself into the brolga and they had eaten him.' (Muecke 1992:81)

Muecke (1992:83.) points out that: 'Lardi transforms *himself* to teach the young men a lesson, but he doesn't make them sick, they make themselves sick by eating the brolga.' The story of Lardi illustrates the order of transformation generally encountered in Dreaming stories. This 'is always reflexive, never transitive.' (Muecke *ibid.*)

The Lardi story has a happy resolution, celebrating the healing powers of the *maban* who is able to bring the boys back out of sickness and restore the *status quo ante*. But stories of classic transformation also deal with radical and irreversible shifts of character and being. In particular, there are stories of the origin of species, of the emergence of an animal out of a proto-world that once was populated by beings that were all human. In this vein, here is the Daly River story of the origin of the dingo. (Again, I was given this story by ol Luke.¹⁹)

Passing through country unknown to them, travellers dig up an unfamiliar tuber. It is a cheeky yam. The people are aware that this yam requires special preparation and has also to be cooked, but they know neither how to make fire nor how to leach the poison from the yam. They send a messenger to acquire the needed arts from a nearby mob. The messenger returns to behold a spectacle. His people sit panting and drooling. Their tongues loll out of their mouths and they no longer sweat. Bereft of speech, they now only growl or howl or bark. Caustic in the unprepared cheeky yam has scarified their throats. **Wrong food!** Their swollen hands bear great blisters and have become paws. Trying to kindle fire with sticks, they have furiously been rubbing pieces of **wrong wood** together.

Muecke's point is made over again. By succumbing to **their own** food-lust and to **their own** impatience, the people have turned into dingoes. These actors are caught up in what Stanner was to characterise as the instant of 'immemorial misdirection' on which Dreaming stories of origination often turn. The story teller says explicitly that those who devoured cheeky yam suffer their irremediable transformation from wrong food, wrong wood. But note also that this party of wanderers is **wrong-footed** from the start. What are they doing out of place in an unfamiliar country without either the permission of its owners or the provision of a guide? From the very beginning, the act of trespass — 'Wrong country!' - is implicit, signalling a doom-laden burden for this narrative to bear. This dingo story is a morality story. By trespass, the trespassers challenge the unknown and bring their fate upon themselves.

We may now turn to general consequences. 'Because transformations in Aboriginal narratives are reflexive (people transform themselves rather than magicians turning people into frogs), a distinct world-view is presented, one which sees people as having a permanent relationship with an otherness which is discursively constructed as 'the Dreaming'' (Muecke 1992:83-4). Muecke frames a further consequence in terms in which Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski would, as functionalists, have taken great delight. He writes that such narratives can be used to didactic purpose and 'invoked as a kind of personal power [as in the story of Lardi] that, through transformation, marshals a structural demonstration of "the Dreaming" as a justification for the rule of elders' (*ibid.*). In its moral dimension, the story of the dingo's emergence can be read as a warning against trespass.

By its nature classic transformation is self-reflexive, serving conservative and didactic social ends. Things are otherwise when narrative turns on mediatory interference, on that transforming irruption which bumps Ovidian metamorphosis onwards to complete its switch of agencies replacing the human, historical and immanent with that which is numinous, eternal and transcendental.

GNOSIS AND ATTENDANT GLEE

In his ardent life story, C. S. Lewis finds the Christian believer's most intense reaffirmation of faith in those moments when the Holy Spirit acts. Then, in the course of mundane living, the believer all of a sudden is *Surprised by Joy*. From Lewis, I abstract a behavioural pro-

gression. First, in response to a sudden sign of the living Spirit there is the startle response. Brief alarm is followed by relieved appreciation. The believer then is unable to greet the numinous with any expression other than holy laughter, taking delight in a knowing participation in the Divine. Next, the believer must decide whether and how to relay experience of Divinity to others. Some Psalms of the Hebrew Scriptures begin thus in holy glee.

In Australia, we encounter an Aboriginal conspectus in which Dreamings and humans may unexpectedly intersect, always in revelatory ways. Then comes the startle of surprise. An instant revisioning informs one's world anew. All this relies on the division of consciousness between the mundane order of sense perception and the order of a heightened access to some Dreaming's agency and intent. The orders are brought to interpenetrate expectedly at conception, birth, death, during high moments in rites, in sickness, in chronic illness, in acts of violation or desecration of things sacred and in special moments during sleep. But some aspect of the Dreaming can envelop one in a moment of special revelation.²⁰ This is a time first to startle or 'take shock' and then, recovering, to laugh in gleeful recognition of a 'trick' by which verities of some Dreaming instantly have been revealed. In recognising a Dreaming 'trick' for what it is, one is made party to a Dreaming act or presence and thereby becomes cognisant of a Dreaming's desire and intent. In such a moment is rare vantage and a peculiar conjointness.

Essential to the proper reception of each story of metamorphosis was the hearer's recognition of a Dreaming's 'trick'. There was, in sum, a 'shock' followed by a 'laughing at that trick from the Dreaming'. This progression can fairly enough be glossed to yield those phases of unexpected gnosis that C. S. Lewis has subsumed in the title for his book. And the 'catching' (i.e. apperception) of a trick from the Dreaming is experienced as an instant of special reaffirmation in the life of any person who lives out that life in terms of Dreaming beliefs. There is gnosis in getting the point of a Dreaming story just as much as there is gnosis in experience of its primary revelation. In stories of deliberate and maintained incompleteness, the intense cathexis is in that moment in which the story finds its complement — as when the story of 'Rotten fish!', either at first hearing or at some later time, is brought to its proper destination by addition of its essential referent which is the plaint of river bank and beach.²¹ Kessler comments on 'Kierkegaard's use of "joy" in his commentary on The Prodigal Son,' writing that: 'the word [joy] involves *arrival*, the coming together of experience and its transfiguring meaning.' (Kessler 1979:191, emphasis original.)

When people laugh together, they generally have come to an immediacy of shared perception and they laugh instantly together **at the same thing**. Authentic laughter is possibly the greatest expression of a comity of understanding. Its production is the earnest that — cancelling all potential for discrepant perceptions — a set of disparate minds have been brought together in affirmation of a delight similarly comprehended, similarly evaluated and unanimously registered in laughter's uncontrolled applause. Shared glee implies delight in that rare and precious thing — conjoint and unstinting participation in the premises from which the joyfulness derives. Sharing in laughter is immediate, involuntary and more intense than sharing together in words, even though received and accepted words may instigate the mirth.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE ADEQUATE TAKE

Receptive glee in response to each of the stories of metamorphosis so far retailed here is based on a common understanding. This is each hearer's recognition of the doctrine of the adequate take as integral to world order. The doctrine is enunciated in two ways. 'Waste not' is one. More trenchantly, there is the second and positive formulation: 'We takin for tucker [and no more].' Knowledge and observance of the principle distinguishes indigenous Australians, setting them apart from members of the settler population.

Recently, David Horton (2000:131) has challenged proof of the principle in action. In

the desert, hunters were reported to let remaining and available kangaroos go once they had shot a few. The hunters then paid verbal tribute to the doctrine of the adequate take. 'Leave that roo, we don't need that one, poor thing.' (see both Newcombe [1983] and Bennett [1980]) Horton remarks that such acts of apparent mercy could be put down to rational self-interest — to the conservation of energy and to a husbanding both of petrol and of bullets. Nor is there any way to establish which calculus of desire serves in such instances as motive force.

With fishing things can be different. When the fish are running, the take whether in net or trap, or on lines with serried hooks, can easily exceed sufficiency. The fisher then has to work in order to return surplus fish unharmed to the waters. Riverbank and beach thus become sites for demonstrable proof of observance of doctrine. There must neither be rotten fish to attest to the existence of an uneaten by-catch nor any left-overs to signal that some edible part of a fish has been cast aside.

The importance of doctrine as emphasised doctrine, that is, as culturally inculcated principle, is to be established by pointing to evidence of the cultural institution of what one may call the chatechistic site and performance. The doctrine of the adequate take is also a doctrine of pity. It is taught to all children as soon as they become mobile and develop a toddler's dexterity for killing the small yet perfected creatures that inhabit childhood's own world of miniatures. In this childhood world, there is one ubiquitous and didactic morsel of a creature with which children are never allowed free play.

THE CHILDREN'S GOANNA

A tiny lizard belongs to Northern Australia. It finds its most favoured haunts in vertical channels that groove the bark of a common eucalypt. Endemic and well-distributed, the lizard is a familiar of most camping sites. Announced by eye-catching movement, its active presence makes this lizard a temptation. It could feature so well as the catch in mimetic hunting games. Adults take the larger goannas opportunistically, bringing them in to be thrown on the campfire and cooked whole. Children could easily capture the tiny inhabitant of the bark canyons to use it playfully, enacting the goanna-catcher's part. However, the harming of this small creature in the slightest way is banned. This is a creature that must not be made a toy. It is protected by taboo — one of the earliest avoidance taboos that all children have both to learn and most assiduously to observe. Attacks on the lizard by toddler-hunters are sharply fended off and, when witnessing this activity of prevention, one will also hear the corrected child's instruction in the reasons for according this small creature more than ordinary respect. Children who harm the lizard bring sickness and misfortune on their mothers. Brief admonition can thus be a mere: 'Leave that thing! You wanna killim mother?'

The long version of the case for preserving and protecting the small lizard is instructive. The lizard is too small to cook up and eat, poor thing — it turns into a crisp cinder in the fire. It cannot be taken for tucker and the rule is that 'We take [only] for tucker'. Because we must not kill 'for no reason,' there would be no purpose in putting this scrap of a thing to death.

Among goannas, this lizard is too small to have a Dreaming. This means that the lizard has neither a story nor a proper name, poor thing. People have a label for the little fellow, but this tag is but a nickname, unconnected with essential realities and not given to human knowledge by deed of a creator Dreaming. So the creature's name is not a name really, poor thing. The little lizard 'missed out' during the creation and therefore it is only right that people should all 'sorry' for it.

I have remarked that, within species, presence and prowess and size — qualities that allow creatures to vaunt themselves — point to the immanence of enhanced Dreaming presence in particular individuals. Among goannas, the little lizard is too small actually to be a

true exemplar of the species that it diminutively and accurately resembles, but from which it fatefully is distanced by its lack of fat and length and girth. Unlike the animal that is too small for tucker, real goannas are good to eat. The little lizard is anomaly. It is, after all: 'Notta goanna really, poor thing.'

Just about any statement about the little lizard attracts the suffix of pity as obligatory appendage, poor thing. In adult speech, the little lizard continues in its didactic function that serves to rescue it both from toddler depredations and from obscurity in the human conspectus of living things. The nameless lizard is made pity's own object lesson. In its tiny and fragile frame, it embodies the doctrines of adequate take and killing only for (good) reason. The taboo that prevents the lizard from human harm is seamed into the human's experience of growing up. Further, the knowledge that harming the little lizard harms one's mother has no elaboration. While the creature has no story in the repertoire of stories given to humankind, it commands and has for character a single attribute. This stands as an unsupported but accepted proposition in which an apparently minor cause wreaks massive and irredeemable effect. A mystery thus surrounds the tiny anomaly with no name. (Anthropologically, one could proffer the notion that a mother, as the child's source of unstinting and gratuitous care, is forever responding to infantile pathos, conscientiously answering all that is pathetic in her infant's cry. The very fount of pity is then wounded when her own child fails to pass pity's test. By harming a tiny lizard, any remorseless child refuses to give what in abundance it diurnally receives. In justice, the child's own prime human source of pity is then diminished or removed. To explain a sanction, I have thus provided a Maussian calculus that fits nicely with the universals of the general theory of reciprocity and the gift. However, this calculus is no explicit part of the ethnography.) One might also think that pity's object and emblem was never deliberately and knowingly brought through adult human act to harm. This is not so. There is an extreme situation in which a children's lizard is taken and put to death.

With reference to the Unambal of the Kimberley, Lommel (1997) discusses the ritual resolution of an intense dilemma of loyalties and retribution. A group of men discover that one of their close countrymen has done gross evil for he has killed within his patriclan. This murder contradicts all family feeling. The perverse act has to be met with equal contradiction for the law itself requires inversion of normality — that revenge killing be done within the group. Men of the homicide's own clan must kill their natural companion. Distraught, the men find a children's goanna and take it to a quiet place. There they put the name of the offender upon the little lizard that has no actual name. Next, all acting together, they reverse the taboo of their childhood, pounding the little name-bearer to death in a ritual of collective overkill. These men have killed no lizard. They have put pity itself to death. An executioner can then be appointed from among the number of those who joined to kill pity and commission the necessary work.²²

Readers may well have noticed that the rite that undoes pity has the form of metamorphosis. A countryman moves against a victim within his own group and unrightfully kills him. Working towards retribution, men take a lizard (X*) and, putting the homicide's name upon it, they act against taboo to cancel pity. An exonerated countryman then moves against the homicide rightfully to put him to death. In this, the executioner embodies the Law, which comes of the Dreaming. Again, there has been movement from the contingent (a murder, sprung from human desire) to the archetype (the condign retribution demanded by the 'hard law' of the Dreaming). When humans rather than irruptive Dreamings take the initiative and enter into those rites that bring about reversals or inversions, there is a difference to remark. Of their own volition, humans responding to contingency must seize the mediatory entity (X*) appropriate to their task. They then bring it in its mystery to the rite that transfers action from quotidian performance to make of it a sacred deed.

Taking only for tucker and wasting no flesh are, indeed, doctrines. It should by now be clear that the two doctrines are aspects of pity, the value that requires extension of compas-

sion to mortality, the value from which the doctrines both derive. Having no pity for the living things of creation is the same as having no Dreaming. And having no restraining pity allows the existence of a morally unbridled capacity to kill largely, wantonly, and with contempt. Ignorance removes whitefellas from acknowledging the totemic relationship: 'Careful that fish; that fish gotta be somefella's Dreaming.' They are therefore set apart from a structure of feeling in which pity's bred. This is the axis for a spiritual separation of two categories of human being in Australia, a separation that remains a defining aspect of the post-colonial scene.

HOLOCAUST OF THE BUFFALO

In the late 1970s the government decreed that all the buffalo of the Top End would be killed. This Shao'a of the Buffalo was instituted in the name of commerce because certain countries will not accept meat as an import if the meat comes from any place in which either of the two bovine diseases brucellosis²³ and tuberculosis (TB) are endemic. Because there was disease among the buffalo, their continuing existence was said to endanger the status of the herds of Territory cattle. So it came to pass that a final solution was proposed. *Bubalus bubalis*, a species, no more, no less, was to be cleansed from Northern Australia.

By 1973 helicopter mustering had been established in the North, a rationalisation of industrial practice that was to deprive Aboriginal workers of traditional seasonal employment and a valued identity as stockmen. Ex-stockmen regarded the helicopters with an unfriendly eye. And these machines were further turned to dubious use. To rid the country of brucellosis and TB, the muster-helicopters were contracted to serve as gun-platforms for shooters. (For some of the helicopter pilots this was reminiscent use — these were the veterans of the Vietnam war.) A by-line of further justification for the programme of shooting was that the buffalo, as an introduced species, had altered the pristine ecology of its adopted ranges. There was the botanically educated opinion that, without the buffalo, these ranges would revert to an original climactic expression.

The slaughter was accomplished and the years passed. Especially on the plains about the Wagait Reserve, Mimosa (X*) advanced across the grasslands. This scrubby tree grows at a prodigious rate, forming dense thickets that rapidly colonise the land, producing a wild hedging so vigorously dense that it blocks out sunlight to the extent that all undergrowth is precluded. Mimosa takes countryside to itself alone. In the Western country of the black soil plains, there is now a 'Mimosa problem' — some would say a Mimosa plague. There is also an instituted Mimosa eradication programme. And the advance of the Mimosa is directly attributable to removal of the herds of buffalo.

But, then, not all buffalo fell victim to the months of fusillade. There were survivors and those buffalo that survived became beasts of special cunning. Part of their cunning is that they and their progeny have taken to nocturnal ways. Their wallows are evident, but the buffalo emerge to use them after dark and with noses acute to the stalker's presence. These buffalo have also become creatures of the thicket. There are notably among them rogue beasts, oldfellas with horns of great span. Such prodigies are instantiations of the Dreaming and they are very, very dangerous. All the surviving buffalo now live in alliance with thick bush and they live, of course, in a dung-based symbiosis with the Mimosa that provides them with bowered hides for daytime refuges.

In these parts, Aboriginal peoples traditionally are called after the type of tree that is the dominant cover characteristic of their countries (for example, the ethnic label Marathiel designates 'People of the Paperbark Country'). Advance of the Mimosa thus represents radical and total transformation, a making over of countryside into Mimosa-land with a strengthened and cunning breed of buffalo for its inheritors. The holocaust of the buffalo has had unintended outcomes because irruptive Powers got to work. In this story of a resurgence following the carnage-by-helicopter, one discerns something familiar — the pattern

of Ovidian metamorphosis. Scented Mimosa (X*) mediates between two states of being, habit and distribution of *Bubalus babuli*.

Those parts of the black soil plain not subject to annual inundation are the ridges and those high flats and mounds that are islanded each year during the inundation of the Wet. Ridges, high flats and mounds have become habitat of Mimosa. A new myth of helicopter gun ships, Mimosa and buffalo-recovery accounts for the coming-into-being of a state of countryside. This myth will continue as a lasting story. Its words are co-eternal with the advance of that rampant arboreal cover for which its narrative gives cause, accounting both for the origin of Mimosa in the land and for its evident take-over of the countryside.²⁴ The story of Mimosa and Buffalo is a Dreaming story that belongs to everyone. It is relayed widely for it has become integral to the business of 'reading the country'. Further, the 'trick' in this story should be evident. Joining together, Mimosa and Buffalo survive to take back the country and so, with a new invasion, they defy the schemes and plans of the invader.²⁵ In terms aptly applied by both Povinelli (1993:33) and Rumsey (1994:128), the story of Mimosa and Buffalo is now 'inscribed' in the country and there it waits to be 'retrieved' for a telling in response to the newcomer who exclaims: 'Look at all that stuff growing there!'

DIALECTIC: ETERNAL SACRED AND THE IRRUPTIVE HOLY

There is an apparent contradiction between the eternal sacred and the irruptive holy, between institution and scripted re-enactment on the one hand and the antics of holy impulsion on the other.²⁶ Humans can get on with life because the properties and behaviours of created things are *sui generis*, regular, fixed, constant or manifest as cycles. For most of the time, the Powers in their immanent and concentrated form participate in the flow of life only inasmuch as humans and animals and plants and places and artefacts and heavenly bodies are hosts to the various Dreamings that inspirit them. All this adds up to an implicit compact of due seasons and regular performances as people 'follow up' the Dreaming.

Strangers who enter on the land are apt to challenge emplaced Dreamings by proposing their counter-realities that ostensibly account for the grounds and purposes of being. The challenge can be strong enough to implant uncertainties in those who were born to bear the names of the very Dreamings that inspirit them. To undo uncertainties, Dreamings reassert themselves and, by irruption, show forth their continuing relevance and truth and sway. With irruption, that which is numinous — the holy — confronts and amazes the human witness to create new facts. Agency switches as the unsolicited Dreaming volunteers its acts, snatching the initiative away from human subjects. Dreaming irruptions are thus entered into the fabric of contingency and the Dreaming ventures its interference in historical time. So it was with Buffalo toilet, fish of first contact, the two wind cyclone and the compact that joins Buffalo with Mimosa.

RESPONDING TO DISCREPANCIES

Stories of irruptive Dreamings are self-limiting in that they are not set in place as is foundation myth to be co-eternal with some local countryside. Acts or stories of irruption come from the cultural need to reply to the imperious counter-realities established by invaders in the land. They are responses to discrepant doctrine, produced when indigenous doctrine confronts the imported challenge. And I hazard that such stories last only for as long as some challenge calls insistently for reply.

Returning to Darwin for a stint of fieldwork in 1988, I tried to reminisce about ol Luke. My rememberings were dismissed as people turned away, refusing to listen. It seemed that the story of the biggest Buffalo toilet continued to exist for this anthropologist alone: it was firmly excluded from the local conspectus of permitted memories. Explaining the finality of mortuary ceremony, one man recently remarked: 'We hold that ceremony so we can forget

that fella who bin pass away.²⁷ Dreaming encounters that yield personal rather than group relevancies generally die with the person who was central to the experience. They can suffer even earlier demise. If removed from witnesses (either by distance or because potential witnesses have died), a person becomes the silent bearer of the untellable. This is the story still held in individual memory but past permitted use. It is no story to bring out because one can call up no second and independent voice to vouch for its authenticity.

The Two Winds Cyclone Story retailed above is political and therefore compromised. It was told to extol the capacities of men of ceremony who belong to the ritual congregation of the complex about Borroloola, Hodgson Downs and Ngukurr. In its time, the story celebrated the prowess of a set of living 'owners' and 'managers' of the ceremonies of the Whirlywind and its cognate Dreamings. In Dennis Daniels' rendition of the story, the instigator who sang the Whirlywind is anonymous. However, to those with regional knowledge, the singer is clearly one of a restricted set of men about Dennis Daniels, the teller of the tale. To those further in the know, the singer's identity is evident for he is verily that man of ceremony who is senior among those who claim an inherited association with the Whirlywind Dreaming. Given in praise of known and living men of ceremony, The Two Winds Cyclone Story was not destined to outlast them.

A second Cyclone Story comes out of the country round Turkey Creek in Western Australia. To trace the destiny of this story is further to confirm that histories of the irruptive, latter-day acts of Dreamings do not ordinarily endure.

An elderly woman tangled with the Rainbow Serpent who caused the vehicle in which she was travelling to crash. The woman was victim to the crash. She then appeared to Paddy Jiminji, a local Seer. She came to him as a wandering spirit, before finally going away to sleep. The woman wandered with a familiar. One day this spirit took her up above the town of Kununurra from which vantage the two spirits together looked to the north and watched the Rainbow Serpent take the form of a great wind and destroy Darwin. Reporting this story, Christensen (1993:34) remarks that the 'mention of Darwin ... provides a demonstration of the potency of the spiritual agents whose lives and actions continue to have an impact upon the human world.'

Paddy Jiminji dreamed the Rainbow Serpent Cyclone Story in 1975, shortly after Cyclone Tracey struck on Christmas Eve, 1974. He worked to provide lyrics, music and dance for the story to be celebrated as a ceremony, called *Gurirr Gurirr*, which would deal with the full sequence of awful acts perpetrated by the angered Rainbow Serpent. Christensen explains that it was with great difficulty that Paddy Jiminji managed to recruit a troupe in order to stage the premiere performance of *Gurirr Gurirr*. Once performed, the ceremony increased in fame. It was taken to Perth and performed there during the Aboriginal Arts Festival in 1984 (Ryan 93:129). By the time Christensen published his report on the *Gurirr Gurirr* ceremony in 1993, Paddy Jiminji was elderly and his health was failing. It seemed unlikely that the *Gurirr Gurirr* would ever be staged again. There is no evidence that the ceremony as a whole exists anywhere but mentally in the keeping of the impresario who dreamed it. Experience of the holy is given to sets of consociates in their own respective 'times'. With the death of witnesses to a 'time', stories of encounters with the Dreaming die. In its aspect of holy, instant and irruptive force, a Dreaming shares in the mortality of those whose lives it modified by irruption.

We have noted before that the story of 'Rotten fish!' has the attributes of myth. It is released into Aboriginal English as a Dreaming story that is unsited and neither given by location nor by native language to the people of any particular country. 'Rotten fish!' deals with a major shift in social structure that institutes new categorical relations that will condition all future actions for all Aboriginal people of the Top End. In Pintupi country there was the surprise discovery of a single site that yielded a whole palette of colour in sedimentary rock. In its strangeness, this site was easily assimilated to the local Dreaming story of a hunted Kangaroo. The variously coloured rock was interpreted to become

deposited stomach substance left behind when hunters of the Dreaming gutted their kill. Given the capacity of the Dreaming to assimilate significata to itself, I suspect that the human story of the latter-day finding of the site will not be relayed to future generations (see Myers 1986:64–6).

Merlan (1998) deals with the discovery of a stone Catfish Dreaming by people living on the outskirts of Katherine and considers 'the conditions under which the production of place can occur' (Merlan 1998:223). In Merlan's judgement, this new-found Dreaming place could not enter into regional mythology for two reasons. Its relevance for justifying ownership and use of country belonged to too small a group of interested parties. Nor did this Catfish site slip easily into a locally established Dreaming story: "With Catfish resemblance was apparently all the people had to work with" (Merlan 1998:2240).²⁸

I propose that irruptions of the Dreamings exceptionally live on in story when one or other of three sets of conditions is fulfilled. Contingency is necessarily taken to archetype and memorialised:

1. To account for a truly historical adjustment in the structure of categorical relations (such as the counterposition of Aborigines and settler populations) or,
2. To explain why a new and emergent ecological regime has altered a known countryside, not gradually and imperceptibly, but in a manner by which landscape evidently and obviously is remade or, otherwise,
3. To provide a mythical charter for changes of Aboriginal ownership of land held under regimes of traditional tenure.

These are the conditions that can overcome two orders of customary resistance. The first is the relegation of history to the life span of those who were witness to it. The second derives from parochial oppositions. Stories are contained because they are associated with local centres of power. Because people of one locality will not attend to the stories that vaunt the Dreaming-associations of their neighbours, local stories are not ordinarily allowed to transcend the places of their production. Stories of land transfer must endure for as long as there is the memory that today's historical inhabitants are people who have replaced an original Aboriginal population.

The documentary film *Exile and the Kingdom*²⁹ recounts Injibarndi and Ngarliema history. These were peoples much subject to forced removals and re-settlement. Their final forced move is from their original inland countries to the coast. They move into a region that is empty for none of the original Aboriginal owners survived the killing times. (The film takes the viewer to mourn at a site of massacre on the sea shore.) The immigrants are plagued by a Sea Snake that brings violent storms. This is the local spirit of place who knows by smell that the newcomers are usurpers. Injibarndi and Ngarliema live in the fear that the storms will overwhelm them. But their own great Dreaming Snake travels down river from the inland to do battle with the Sea Snake. It triumphs over and displaces the Dreaming that contended a people's right to find a new home on the coast. The teller of this story ends by saying: "We really bin lucky to have that Snake."³⁰

UNMEMORY AND AGENCY

I finally remark the bearing of these reported stories of Ovidian metamorphosis on an important discussion of the last decade that was carried in the pages of *Oceania*. That discussion dealt with the myth/history opposition and its relevance to Aboriginal realities and treated the work of Turner (1988) as a guide to comparative analysis. Turner (1988:244) wrote that:

The operative principle in 'historical' as opposed to mythic consciousness ... is an openness to contingency, an awareness that the existing social order emerges as the effect of particular actions and events even as it contains them. History, then, is rooted in a consciousness of creative social agency as a property of contemporary social actors.

The form of Ovidian metamorphosis deals with contingency and human pretension (or with vaunted human agency) by treating instances of human initiative as a call for the reassertion of Dreaming verities and Powers. There is a putting down or 'rubbishing' as any emergent counter-order of human devising is returned to archetype. In this, the story of Ovidian metamorphosis is always sub-script to the major Dreaming realities it is structured to defend. The irruptive, sub-script stories, serve a purpose in their brief time and have no great capacity to survive in social memory. They are more the stuff of the corrective 'secondary elaborations'³¹ by which closed belief systems are enabled to survive all challenge, than celebrations of contingent human action to be embraced in structures of remembering. I would argue that the timelessness of Dreaming manifestations is a quality gained (in part) by service of Ovidian metamorphoses which, by re-assertions of mythical agency over contingency, work to kill any significant 'consciousness of creative social agency as a property of contemporary social actors'. And the cultural response to relegations of human agency and the death of history is glee. It's the way that Ovid's collected stories of metamorphosis themselves once worked; counter-historical and anti-rational, they served as the restorers of awe and dread and mystery and delight, maintaining the enchantment of the world.

NOTES

1. In my use of 'Divinity,' I follow Lienhardt (1961). Morton (2000:577-8) provides a succinct account of the notion of the Dreaming in current usage in Australia.
2. Thus in his continental survey of Aboriginal religion, Swain (1993) agrees in Stanner's view that Dreamings are pervasive in the cosmos. However, Swift favours the term 'ubiety' over Stanner's 'everywhen' to express universal location.
3. A major difficulty with the writings on parallel realities is that the authors do not conscientiously maintain the distinction between analytic models and folk models of reality.
4. Myers (1996:viii) writes that both dreams and rituals mediate between the 'human sphere' and the Dreaming. This phrasing implies the existence of a separate Dreaming sphere and is similar to the parallel universe formulation.
5. In the North-West Kimberley the spirit child often joins the potential father before this man's marriage to become a spirit familiar deciding at some later stage to become human by transferring itself to the man's wife (see Mowaljarl and Malnic 1993).
6. This word is given in the OED as: 'The action of bursting or breaking in; a violent entry, inroad, incursion or invasion, esp. of a hostile force or tribe.'
7. The receptionalist makes 'a place for affective meaning, insisting on the reader's participation in, or even co-creation of, the work of art' (Foley, 1991:40). I am able to discuss reception of story by actual hearers rather than having to posit and construct an 'implied reader'.
8. The process of checking on detail and bringing an attested story into being is discussed at length in Sansom (1980).
9. The demotion is complex. Proper naming of things is given by Dreamings in an appropriate language. Aboriginal English is a substitute language that is not of the Dreaming and its nominalism is secular rather than sacred making it a compromised register where expression of respect is concerned.
10. Ol Luke's countrymen regard the buffalo they hunt as an animal native to Australia even though, according to whitefella history, it was introduced to Australia by whites at Port Essington in 1829. The British attempt to set up a military outpost at Port Essington on the northern coastline failed as the Europeans succumbed to sicknesses vectored by naval supply ships that delivered Asian diseases along with the rations. There was a withdrawal from Port Essington and the Port Essington buffalo were released. Independent of human control, they multiplied and colonised those parts of the Australian North in which they could find both feed and wallows. In whitefella perceptions, buffalo are feral animals. For northern Aborigines, buffalo are wild creatures and never were domestic. Buffalo meat therefore counts as 'bush tucker,' not as 'whitefella beef' (see Altman 1982). There is a Buffalo Dreaming with supporting myth, sacred sites, song, ceremony and a spectacular Buffalo dance that has been performed on a regular basis for tourists.

11. 'Deafness' stands for inability to apprehend the injunctions that define the moral order and is also given as 'that fella just can't hear'. Physiological impairment of hearing is thus not deafness but 'bad ear' and other appellations that signal a physical and not a moral deficiency.
12. Hornet and Sickness Country feature in the mythology briefly reported by Keen and Merlan (1990).
13. The story that has a dangling ending and awaits its completion, deserves to be recognised as an important story type. People are joined in a knowing conspiracy and maintain the silence that leaves completion of the story to the life experience of each hearer. The point is not to tell in the mode of didactic revelation, but to allow completion to occur by waiting for the person who carries the uncompleted narrative to come to a moment of 'finding' its proper destination. Such 'findings' are moments of gnosis. A lot of the teaching in the context of men's ceremony presents dangling endings.
14. Federal Court of Australia, Northern Territory District Registry, General Division, Olney J., No. DG 6001 of 1997: Warndarrang, Alawa, Marra, Ngalgakan people and Northern Territory of Australia and Others.
15. For Aboriginal people of the Top End, rifles stand for the carnage of massacre.
16. Stephen Muecke (1999) remarks that many Aboriginal stories end in 'metamorphosis', instancing a finalé in which the eggs of an emu become petrified and so continue as features in the landscape. Following Munn (1984), I would prefer to call such simple events in which subjects become objects 'transformations' and reserve the term 'metamorphosis' to describe Ovidian metamorphoses with their tripartite narrative movement.
17. These are Buffalo manure, putrescent flesh and underarm smell. In the story of 'Man Shoots Fish' there is the pungency of gun smoke. On the principle among Yanyuwa see Kirton and Timothy (1977):.
18. Flesh is associated with the female contribution and bone with the male contribution in processes of gestation.
19. In another version of this Daly River story (published by Ronald and Catherine Berndt [1985:395–6]), Dingo keeps company with Little Chicken Hawk and Big Hawk.
20. Sudden revelation is not the only instance of such unasked-for irruption of Dreaming Powers. The work of the sorcerer depends on negative use of Dreaming powers.
21. Those who vouchsafed stories to Jeremy Beckett (1994) would laugh from time to time during narrations. Beckett remarks the laughter but cannot account for it. My suggestion is that narrators often punctuate stories with the laughter of gnosis and holy glee. They thereby register their own moments of special perception and invite the hearer to respond to the laughter as cue — 'you should appreciate something special here.'
22. While Lommel describes the rite of putting the lizard to death, he does not present the native rationale that subtends its performance
23. The disease caused by the bacterium *brucella abortus* (known also as ungulant fever) can infect many mammals including humans. In cattle, the primary symptom is abortion.
24. Povinelli (1993) reports that people of the Cox Peninsula (Beluyen) attribute the advance of a tussocky grass across a particular countryside not to the intervention of a Dreaming but, rather, to the neglect of a Dreaming by those who once served it. In the absence of human attention, the Dreaming has now withdrawn or 'gone inside' and the withdrawal of Dreaming influence accounts for the degeneration of countryside.
25. The story of the take-over by Mimosa was first given to me in 1993 when I worked with Warai people on lands of the Wagait Reserve, assisting in a land dispute.
26. This dialectic belongs to all religions of foundation. In one particular expression, it exercised those Christian theologians of the 1950s and 1960s who worked to reconcile God the Lord of History with Bultmann's Christology that treated both Christ and history as experiential realities of the here and now. See Wright (1952:131ff.).
27. I have written at length about the obligation to kill memory, treating it as a defining parameter of Aboriginal cultural expression (Sansom 1980 and 1995).
28. My summary reference does little justice to Merlan's extended and detailed argument concerning processes that lead to 'the production of place' (ibid. 223).
29. *Exile and the Kingdom*, 1993. Produced by Frank Rijavec. Lindfield, NSW: Film Australia.
30. Povinelli (1993), Merlan (1998) and Myers (1986) have all reported stories in which Dreamings respond to events that require adjustment or reassertion of historical Dreaming dispositions that have implications for land ownership in systems of Aboriginal customary tenure.
31. I use this term in the manner of Evans-Pritchard (1938) who transferred it from the individualism of Freud's psychology to apply it to the collective manifestations studied by anthropologists.

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