

The new element replacing the device of metre appears to consist of repeated cadence or variations on a cadence rhythm.

Editorial p. 1, quoting A.D. Hope, *Directions in Australian Poetry*, p. 28.

This observation is necessarily a product of hindsight; nevertheless, it is a valuable one. The working poet's response, where this demonstrates explication of or challenge to awareness of prosody, should find voice within calling distance from the germinal expression. Graham Rowlands' essay, "Performance poetry — The Oldest Profession" (No.3, p. 16-25), for example, gains a dimension in relation to the above quotation.

There is both a need and a place for a journal of poetics —perhaps as an occasional supplement to an established literary publication. The poem related to the critical idea by the poet's statement, would generate debate by and for both critic and poet —in an Australian voice. In its present form, as it encompassed also the idea of a poetry journal, *Germinal* attempted a too far-reaching resonance.

DAVID WHITTINGHAM

Banumbir Wongar, *Karan*. Melbourne: Macmillan, 1985. \$24.95. 248pp.

Karan is the second novel of Wongar's trilogy about the impact of nuclear technology on tribal Aborigines. The book is written from the Aboriginal point of view, describing vividly the effects white man has had on their way of life. Language and imagery effectively evoke the beauty and harmony of Aboriginal life.

An Aborigine called Anawari Mallee is the major character. He has been brought up from birth among white men and much of the narrative comprises his meditations about his tribal heritage, the meaning of the strange markings cicatrized across his chest, and the possibility of the land's freeing itself from the whiteman's destructive influence. Anawari's tribal beliefs conflict with his white upbringing. Throughout the book he is trying to break these bonds of white civilization.

Karan is written in the third person, and the omniscient narrator technique leaves Anawari at a certain distance, so that he remains finally unknown and unknowable. He is, however, brought within sympathetic distance through his meditations and reflections.

Through Anawari's engagement to a white researcher he has access to the computers of the Tribal Research and Assimilation Centre. The computer analyses and attempts to reproduce the body chemistry of the Aboriginal men, women and children who were trapped in the now dead wastelands after they were exposed to immense amounts of radiation. The computer is used to detect the element in their 40,000 year old body chemistry that has enabled them to survive the nuclear testing. Anawari is seeking the Karan, the spirit of his tribal country where there is no place for nuclear testing, or for the whitemen who will never accept him.

Anawari is trapped in a personal and social conflict. He cannot decide in himself which thoughts to trust: the Aboriginal or the white-man's. One voice says to follow his heritage and his ancestors' ways of thinking, the other tells him that he owes his station in life to the whitemen: his heritage did not get him his job, his whiteman's training did. His social conflict is even more intense. He desperately wants to help his fellow blacks but also wants to be seen as more or less loyal by his white superiors so that he can retain access to the computer to expose the reservations for what they really are: a nuclear experiment station using blacks as guinea pigs.

Then comes a logical and chilling deduction: that the blacks were misled or not even informed that nuclear tests were to be carried out on their lands. That is, they were deliberately kept in the danger zone. This could perhaps explain the catching of the Aborigines who are running loose. The computer predicts the general area where the Aborigines are trying to exist. A helicopter is sent to the area with oranges, some of which are poisoned and some drugged, the Aborigines needing the food and moisture usually eat the oranges unless they have previous experience of what the oranges can do. One group of oranges is full of tranquillizer, the other group contains a quickacting poison resulting in death. If the Aborigines are too irradiated, the poison filled oranges marked P-15 are used, otherwise the tranquillized ones, D-15, are used.

Anawari fulfils an archetypal fantasy. He is the hero searching for an elusive goal. It takes time for Anawari to realize that the only person that can find the Karan is himself. This is also true of the Aborigines. Anawari does not realize that he is their last vestige of hope and through his actions their race can perhaps survive.

The novel is not as outlandish as it seems, although one does not wish to surmise that there is more fact than fiction in the story. The archetypal fantasy element — an integral basis of the story — is found elsewhere, for example in Tolkein and mythological science fiction.

Anawari perhaps does find the Karan, or spirit of his country, by becoming one with it. The decisive ending gives credit to this. Upon his

metamorphosis into a tree, the drought breaks, washing away the foundations of white civilization based there. This apocalyptic flood is perhaps the end result of the nuclear testing. The rain washes away the dust, which remains outside the natural order of things, and is essentially the residue of white civilization. In Wongar's writing, for example in the poem "The Dust", dust is not an element from which anything can be created. At the end of *Karan*, the river cleanses and the land slowly greens, and the scars left behind by white men are gradually healed.

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DRAMA ROUNDUP

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