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## Poems

Richard Kelly Tipping

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## Poems

### Abstract

MANGROVE CREEK, MANGROVE CREEK REVISITED, FRIDAY – THE RIDGE, BOWERBIRD, THE ARTISTS' CAMP

# Richard Kelly Tipping

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MANGROVE CREEK  
(for Neil Taylor, Sue & Crystal)

1.

Bare-breasted in stinging sun  
(from wrap around verandahs  
of the only house for hours —  
a painter's piece of heaven)  
to follow the creek's slow  
yawning swerves  
unwinding down a bark-  
flake track of smoothskin eucalypts  
naked, stepping from the clothes  
around their ankles. The bush flies  
flirt, loud-mouthed as Saturday.

2.

Valley of nesting plovers cry  
while whip-birds crack  
the pheasant pigeons coo-coo-coo  
and startled cows  
the dogs send thumping  
cross-swamp, wide-eyed;  
the black snake rolls  
red belly round, S-  
curves through dung.  
One bull's gone puff-eye blind  
and thuds dread circles.

3.

Dharug, the people, gone. A name.  
Cliffs can't stop weeping.

The National Park starts there  
on the ridge, beyond the tucked-  
away ruins of farmers,  
the skeletal edges of cast-iron beds  
grown through with gums.  
The gravestones are losing their tongues  
for palm trees and roses,  
chimneys and cattle runs.  
'You who come my grave to see  
Prepare yourselves to follow me.'

4.

Our children sapling young  
amaze the creek, such tight-  
formed bodies, the water dragons  
leap past logs — under a hot  
blue sky, exuberance of wattle —  
raucous tiny flowers  
from fern-sprung grass  
the hillsides peak: Spring tips  
on sombre green. A lone blue wren  
tip-tails and goes. Make love  
among mosquitoes; no one knows.

## MANGROVE CREEK REVISITED

Wet Christmas — the frogs cheer.  
Goanna, sniff-tongue, gripping a dark branch  
in bellies of cloud:  
all the little clues come home  
with a proud yell — dogs yelp  
the ducks into flight, a circle  
of casual but formal energy —  
the handwriting of each tree  
layering blocks of pattern  
as the van bumps, skids, splashes  
us back. My drawings; your poems.

I wanted to read Japanese poetry  
by the creek, time-sitting you, Kai,  
with a long yellow rope across  
shallow sandbar water, set up  
haul, fish and splashing games  
for one — me in the brimming shade  
not to be called to crocodile rescue squad  
by your bright-eyed shout  
but relishing the bilateral spark  
and so missed half of what  
you did, too late. Time's repeatable  
isn't it? Sorry, mate.

#### FRIDAY — THE RIDGE

Carried Kai alltheway up, through scratching,  
tough rocks, Maze copping a splinter, antbite,  
& Jedda, always in the way (panting old Blue  
Pointer) with Jock the Labrador (ex Robin Gibson)  
and Henry the Red Setter panting too, up and  
past — 'Yow-w' says Black Feather the lean  
ball-pop tabby cat, came along too, right to  
the lumpy ridge (sparkling ochre sandstones)  
run by Banksia Men and Secret Places, Sacred  
Flowers. Maze couldn't hack it, essentially, only  
SO much tolerance, but still did (complaining,  
shouting) climb to the middle of Nowhere: to  
look down on the slow sweep of valley floor,  
swamp and riddles of shape and date. Climbed  
down through a squadron of weeping 'native  
pines' and delicate unknown bushyness, deadly  
little blackberry shoots infesting crevices  
and nooks of moss, to the hand-deep creek, where  
we all stripped off and lay, bushy-tailed and  
vivid, in the cool, meandering water, Mangrove  
Creek, so called.

BOWERBIRD, THE ARTISTS' CAMP  
(for Tim Storrier)

1.

i miss you in this river full of stars  
as the moon starts banging branches  
and kingfishers stir in the paperbarks  
i'm restless as the earth is, still  
in time's slow ways ...

Tim yells from the fire's circle:

'i can smell goanna piss!'

and whacks on another song — gone.

Frank slices celery, brushed with salt  
'an aperitif?' and smiles into flames —  
a deck chair full of painter.

Stories of the punch-ups for Art,  
the fists full of brain, rolling off  
surface, colour, texture, shape —  
did you walk into a bus? Today  
Hal Porter's in critical, hit by a car  
and Jack Newton chopped by a plane,  
reported by radio, twelve hours ago;  
a day full of conjunctions, flashes  
extremely concentrated: we're making  
what we make here, alone  
somewhere on top of the world.

2.

Walked for hours along the wide, white  
sandy riverbed: spiky-headed pandanus palms,  
tiny purple-mouthed yellow orchids bursting from  
between the river stones; pools of striped fish  
racing shadows. Climbed through suburbs of snake  
track and spiderweb, tracked along  
under the towering ancient ochre cliffs: weathered  
metamorphics, dream fragments.

Arnhemland is a wilderness of silences  
shattered

by black cockatoo, by bronzewing, by you

among burst-pod flowering gums, needle  
spear grasses, flies that bite; all the stones  
are rusting.

Listen.                      Soak up

the inhabitedness  
of this rare earth, this chance to feel  
two thousand million years as a flash  
of feathers, a bright exit.

PATRICK BUCKRIDGE

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## Colonial Strategies in the Writing of David Malouf

This paper is divided into two parts. In the first part I describe in a certain amount of detail a thing which I'm calling a grammar of composition in Malouf's writing. In the second part I try to place this 'grammar' in a political perspective, giving it a particular significance in the framework of post-colonial writing.

Some of the most interesting recent work on Malouf — I am thinking in particular of articles by Peter Pierce, Laurie Hergenhan and Martin Leer<sup>1</sup> — has concentrated on elaborating the significance of a relatively small number of ideas, images and oppositions which seem to recur throughout Malouf's writing. Pierce's discussion revolves mainly around interdependent relationships between individuals, Hergenhan's around moments of imaginative transcendence and transformation, and Leer's around edges and maps. Malouf's writing surely invites this kind of 'motif-analysis', and the author himself has invited it on more than one occasion, most explicitly perhaps in his talk at the Warana Writers' Weekend in 1983, where he identified a set of specific oppositions —