

Introduction

In the past, the spirituality of the Australian Aborigines has often been characterized as a collection of superstitions and primitive myths that were deemed incapable of supporting a genuine religious life. For two centuries observers have been looking at Aboriginal beliefs anthropologically in order to detach them from their roots in the culture itself. This has led to a subsequent diminution of the flame among Aborigines themselves. Messianic Christianity in the form of well-intentioned missionaries sought to undermine Aboriginal spirituality even further in the belief that Aborigines had been 'living in darkness' prior to the advent of Jesus Christ in their lives.

As a result, the Aborigines found themselves the victims of cultural genocide. Not only were they destroyed physically as a race, but they looked on with impotence as their traditions, their way of life and their beliefs were swept aside. Without treaties to protect them, without even official acknowledgement of their humanity (as late as the 1950s Aborigines had few civil rights under the law), they were left to live out their lives on the fringe of European settlement — a disenfranchised race of nomads doomed to extinction. It was assumed by many that they had no will to live anyway, since they had taken to self-abuse by way of alcohol and disease. Indeed, the twilight of their existence as a race was seen as a necessary but rather unfortunate transition. When Aboriginal poet, Kath Walker, wrote her book, 'We Are Going', during the 1960s, it aroused little interest among administrators, and was assessed from a literary rather than a cultural standpoint.

Thus an exquisite jewel was about to be erased from the face of the earth. That spiritual abode known as the Dreaming was about to be pulled down in favour of a new edifice built around the idea of assimilation, European-style housing projects and the incursion of geologists preaching mineral wellbeing. The Aborigines, moreover, were given little say in

their fast diminishing destiny. They were asked instead to give up their old ways, cease their nomadism, relinquish their totems and learn to adjust to the emptiness of a material existence foisted upon them from outside.

Yet the strength of this remarkably resilient race rests in their refusal to lie down and die, in their refusal to give up the old ways. In the early days they resisted the European invaders by force; in more recent times they have become politicized. Today, Land Rights is the banner under which they wage war against indifference and apathy. They want to survive, if only because they still believe in the power of the Dreaming as a way of life. The mystical tradition so profoundly linked to the events of the Dreaming is an important bulwark for them against the threat of extinction.

This book endeavours to focus attention on little-known aspects of the Dreaming. I have not attempted to explore in great detail the diversity of myths, nor the variety of ritual practices that individual tribes might regard as their spiritual heritage. This is not the place to do so. Instead I have tried to highlight the similarities that exist with other great religious traditions so that the Dreaming can be seen for what it is: the metaphysical expression of primordial truths that trace the birth of the world and man's place in it. I have tried to show that the Dreaming is not an alien place populated by unrecognizable spirit-beings, but a place of metaphysical repose for the Aborigine.

The Dreaming, moreover, is a fragile place. It remains to be seen whether it will open its gates to a world increasingly inured to the idea of 'enchantment' as a prefigurement of grace. For it to weave its spell again, men and women of all creeds and beliefs will need to throw off the cloak of logic and ratiocination, and accept the mytho-poetry of the Dreaming as a supernatural reality. They will have to recognize also that the Aborigines have made the 'face of the earth' their Bhagavad Gita, their Torah, their Bible or Koran. Indeed the Dreaming is the Aboriginal Ark of the Covenant which they have been carrying about the

Australian continent since the beginning of time.

During the course of researching this book I was fortunate enough to meet with a number of knowledgeable Aborigines — men such as Toby Gangale of the Mirarr Kuwjai:mi tribe, Big Bill Neidjie of the Bunidji tribe, and Idumdum of the Wardaman tribe in Northern Australia. These men and others spoke to me in detail about the metaphysical aspects of their culture. In doing so, they allowed me to enter into their world and partake of certain experiences that contributed to a deeper understanding on my part of Aboriginal spirituality. I must emphasize, however, that I did not undergo any tribal initiation ceremony, nor did I feel this was necessary. Instead we shared the excitement of discovering areas of commonality derived from our respective traditions and beliefs; areas that served to bind rather than separate us as human beings.

Indeed, more than anything, I learnt to respect the Aboriginal people for their essential humanity. So often did I encounter the uncluttered wisdom of their thought that I began to marvel at their ability to derive so much spiritual knowledge from what appeared, on the surface, to be an uncritical respect for tradition. I soon learnt to understand that the source of their inner knowledge was not an uncritical respect but reverence. For Aborigines, the numen is embodied in all things manifest. This in turn yields a concept of sanctity more complex, and more far-reaching than any that we might find in the universal religions.

At the same time, my Aboriginal friends taught me a great deal that was immediately practical in terms of my own life. They taught me how to respect and understand landscape. They taught me the importance of ritual. And they taught me to value the initiatory process as a means of realizing inner knowledge. I am grateful to them for simplifying my ideals in a way that made gnosis possible.

What I recall most about my journeys among these people, whether they were among tribesmen of the North, or among those I met in the North-west of Australia, or among the fringe-

dwellers around outback towns in New South Wales, was their willingness to communicate metaphysical realities. I gained the impression that Aborigines are a unique race because they are utterly possessed by the Dreaming. The Dreaming means more to them than political or social issues because it is the only unsullied possession left to them. Everything else has been taken from them; thus they have been forced to make a choice between travelling down two forks in the road: that of assimilation and cultural oblivion, or re-affirmation of the Dreaming as a metaphysical reality and the long road back to re-discovering their cultural identity.

Nights spent in the open under starscapes pregnant with hiero-figures from the Dreaming; days spent wandering along spiritual paths through the landscape; hours spent in caves under the watchful gaze of Spirit-beings — so many experiences have gone into the making of this book. It has been a gift of the Aboriginal people, both past and present. Hopefully any new insights of mine gained during the course of my wanderings may help to clarify their world of the Dreaming for others.

Some of these chapters have appeared in journals such as *Temenos*, *Studies in Comparative Religion*, *Connaissances des Religions*, *Avaloka* and *Parabola*. I would like to thank my friend, Dr Kathleen Raine, for her encouragement and to all those Aboriginal friends who have enlightened me over the years. Their wit and humanity, their sagacity and complete lack of bitterness have made it possible for mutual respect and understanding to grow up between us. I only hope that I have been able to render with some degree of veracity the extraordinary luminosity of their spiritual world for others to enter as I have done.

J.C.
Sydney, 1988

CHAPTER 1

Spiritual Discipline and Psychic Power

In any living tradition there must always be cultural exemplars who reflect a condition of primordiality which acts as a link between the natural and supernatural worlds. Such men (and occasionally women) possess certain qualities of behaviour and, more properly, a presence that others may recognize as being distinctively different. Among indigenous cultures such as Aborigines or American Indians these cultural exemplars are men who have undergone a ritual initiation that sets them apart from other members of their tribe. Yet this initiatory activity is separate from those rituals normally associated with the passage from adolescence into manhood. In the context of Aboriginal society the making of a *karadji*,¹ or clever man, is a vocation like any other spiritual discipline; few men are called to it and even fewer survive the psychic terrors that are so often inherent in its attainment.

To a great extent the words 'clever man', 'sorcerer' or 'medicine man' are 19th century pejorative expressions designed to demean the role of the *karadji* within the context of Aboriginal society. He was looked upon by many observers, including a number who were ostensibly sympathetic to the Aborigines, as at best an eccentric figure capable of beneficent acts of medicine; and at worst, a trickster or charlatan. This opinion lingered on for a long time into the 20th century, so that the *karadji* himself soon found his position within his tribe undermined by the community's encounter with modern medicine, the Church missionary system and the corrupting influence of its own society living under the threat of extinction. His importance as the guardian of traditional culture and sacred lore was progressively eroded by contact with European civilization to the point where he was regarded as no more than an imposter and tribal scamp. One reputable observer even

went so far as to suggest that the doctors 'were the greatest swindlers and conjurers, who, by means of their deceits and frauds were able to keep the people in dependance upon them'².

Such a view made it virtually impossible for the genuine *karadji* to maintain his honoured position within Aboriginal society. Following his demise, the way was open for white authorities (whether administrative or in the guise of Church missionary zeal) to undermine the cultural and religious stability of Aboriginal society altogether by supplanting the visionary imperatives established by the *karadji* with a more prosaic 'Christian' ethic designed to encourage Aboriginal assimilation. It was a policy of cultural genocide that has in consequence all but wiped out traditional Aboriginal life in Australia.

But what was it about the person of the *karadji* that so threatened the invading white culture? Why was it so necessary to discredit him as a living embodiment of other-worldly experience? It is a question that we wish to address in the course of discovering how these clever men received their vocation, and from there attained to the highest levels of spiritual knowledge and discipline to which they espoused. For it is only in the context of this classic confrontation between Western materialism, in all its various guises, and the traditional *karadji* in his role as a cultural and metaphysical exemplar, that we begin to perceive the dilemma that faces any traditional society in its fight for survival. What happened yesterday among Aborigines with the destruction of their spiritual and mythological heritage is an event that continues to occur in many parts of the world even today.

The prefix 'clever' appertaining to a *karadji* means much more than adroitness, neat in movement, skillful or dexterous. Probably it was the nearest equivalent English word to equate with that of the indiginous language, although it fails to convey fully the intellectual qualification required in order to become a *karadji*. Perhaps its other aspect of 'seizing what is imperceptible'

might come nearer to a description of the *karadji*'s inherent ability to bridge the gap between what is manifested and the spirit-world of the Dreaming. In any event, the implication of acute intelligence combined with a readiness to associate with older *karadji* during his youth were what distinguished a potential postulant from his contemporaries. In some cases this difference was recognized to be physical as well. Berndt³ actually suggests that a postulant is noticeably different from other young boys by 'the light radiating from his eyes'. This would accord with the idea of a light dwelling within the 'square inch' or in the 'face' as depicted in the Bardo Thodal, or Tibetan Book of the Dead⁴.

More often than not a father would initiate his son into the role of *karadji*. Thus the concept of a spiritual patronomy being handed on from father to son was an important part of acquiring a vocation. In some cases a postulant was actually called a *walamiradalmai* or 'one to whom cleverness has been handed on'. However, the power associated with becoming a *karadji* was not something that a father could bestow upon his son. Such power could only be acquired from the great Baiami (All-father) himself. In other words, while the father or an older *Karadji* may have the right to educate a postulant to full clever man status, they could only do so on the understanding that the postulant had already been made aware of his vocation, often through visionary contact with his Dreaming ancestors. Only when the father or the older *Karadji* has been advised by Baiami in a dream that the postulant was ready did the full process of initiation begin.

Circumstantial and oral testimony suggest that the would-be *karadji* underwent a complex form of initiation that involved both ritual 'death' at the hands of *karadji* or *Oruncha* (Spirits), accompanied by prolonged bouts of meditation in the wilderness. The ritual killing as an act varied in detail throughout Australia, although the principal motifs remained the same. Among the Arunta of the Central Desert region, the officiants extract small clear crystals from their bodies which they

proceeded to press slowly and strongly along the front of the postulant's legs up to his breastbone. As they did so, the skin was scored at intervals in order to facilitate entry of the crystals into the postulant's body. The postulant then lay down while the officiants jerked their hands towards him, all the while holding other crystals. Scoring was repeated and more crystals rubbed into the postulant's scalp. Meanwhile, a hole was cut under the first finger of the right hand and a crystal inserted. Finally, the postulant was asked to eat meat and drink water into which a small amount of crystals had been placed. This rite was then repeated on the second and third days, after which a large hole was cut in his tongue as a sign that the power has entered him. Grease was then rubbed all over his body and a sacred representation of the *Oruncha* painted on his chest — symbol of the Spirit-men (Sky Heroes) who have made him a *karadji*. Fur string and gum nuts were placed upon his head in ritual adornment. He was then told that he must remain at the men's camp until his wounds had healed. As well, he was to observe certain food taboos, sleep with a fire between himself and his wife as a sign to the *Oruncha*, and hold himself aloof from everyone. Otherwise the power that had entered his body on initiation may leave him altogether⁵.

This was only one method. Another way required the postulant to sleep at the mouth of a cave and await the visit of an *Oruncha* at daybreak. The spirit threw an invisible spear which pierced the postulant's neck from behind and passed through his tongue, making the ritual hole to signify the receipt of the power. A second spear passed through the head from ear to ear. The postulant fell down dead at this point and is carried into the depths of the cave. Here the spirit removed the victim's internal organs and replaced them with a new set, along with quartz crystal on which his power ultimately depended. (The parallels here with Egyptian mummification practices are obvious in the way that the body is prepared for its new life after ritual 'death'). When the man eventually came to life again he experienced a period of insanity. Only when he partly recovered did the

Oruncha lead him back to his own people who then decorated his nose with a band of powdered charcoal as a sign of his partial entry into the Order.

Thus ends the first phase of the making of a *karadji*. Under normal circumstances, the postulant was not allowed to perform any *karadji* functions for a full year, otherwise the power that had entered him through the insertion of quartz crystals would desert him. It did not mean however that his education had been completed, for in many way the most important period of a *karadji*'s transition into the other-worldly aspects of his profession had only just begun. Finer details in the art of bone-pointing, sorcery, diagnostic techniques in the cure of illness and psychic healing were all taught to the novice *karadji* by his elders during this period. These were the more practical aspects of the *karadji*'s professional expertise and underlay the important social contribution that the man made to his community in the role of doctor. Yet they do not convey fully the spiritual metamorphosis that the man had undergone in his pursuit of the power associated with the ritual insertion of the quartz crystals — and indeed the death and rebirth that he had undergone at the hands of the *Oruncha*, or the tribal officiants.

Here we must look more closely at the use of such artifacts as stones, bones, australites and particularly quartz crystals as power-bearers of rich symbolic significance. To an east coast tribe these quartz crystals were known as 'wild stones' and were said to embody the Great Spirit himself⁶. The use of quartz crystal as an iconic representation of Baiami has its parallels in other cultures as well. The Taoists, for example, regarded jade as a medicine of similar import. In one alchemical text of the 4th century A.D. jade was regarded as a *hsien* medicine and 'the life of those who take *hsuan-chen* (Mysterious Truth, an alias for jade) is without end Jade powder, if taken alone or with water, confers immortality It causes the eater to fly up to be a *hsien* in heaven'⁷. Eliade goes so far as to suggest that the quartz crystal owes its extraordinary prestige to its celestial origin, as originally Baiami's throne was made of crystal. In other words,

these crystals are supposed to have fallen to earth from heaven as 'solidified light'^{8ab}. The Sea Dayaks too considered quartz crystals as 'light stones', regarding this solidified light as being of a supernatural origin. However much one might wish to explore the light symbolism of quartz crystals as a scintilla of divine attributes, it becomes obvious that their insertion into a postulant represents a significant step in the process of deification of the individual concerned. He dies and is 'reborn' on the third day as a spiritual being capable of performing feats of magic and healing at one and the same time. In Mowaldjali's testament⁹ on the making of a *karadji* the importance of quartz crystals as sacred objects is explicit. He says that the bodies of the magicians overflow with magic stones called *gedji*. With these inside them they can see vast distances and into other realms. In particular they are able to see into the underworld and observe the spirits-of-the-dead all bunched together there.

Accompanying this transformation, postulants were often seen to grow feathers on their arms which, after a few days, developed into wings. Taoists also believe that when a man obtains the *tao* feathers begin to grow on his body. Plato made the same suggestion in Phaedrus (249e) when he wrote, 'A man beholds the beauty of the world, is reminded of truth and beauty, and his wings begin to grow'. In the *Pancavimca Brahmana*. (IV. 1,13) the symbolic explanation is even more explicit when it states that 'he who understands has wings'. The use of feathers, then, as an expression of spiritual transformation is widely documented. In the context of the making of a *karadji* this practice quite obviously signifies an important moment in his transition from being an ordinary tribal member to that of a 'man of high degree'.

Acquiring a new name signifying the rebirth of the individual concerned exemplifies this transition¹⁰. Although the neophyte has become a member of the Order of *karadji* and is already capable of a number of magical tricks that serve to reaffirm the presence of the quartz crystal-derived power in his person, these are only a small part of his professional armory.

Their significance is exoteric insofar as a *karadji* must be seen to occupy a socially contributive position within his community as well. If he is not healing sickness, curing mental disorders, exorcising demons or assessing the identity of murderers in the context of the normal process of dying, then he is involved in developing his own mediumistic powers through long sojourns in the wilderness and prolonged bouts of meditation.

In this respect a great deal of emphasis is placed upon breathing techniques among *karadji*, similar to those used in hesychastism¹¹. One report suggests that a *karadji* used to sit on the bottom of a river for days at a time, talking with a spirit known as Konikatine. He was able to hold his breath for the entire period of his immersion, returning to the surface with bloodshot eyes and covered in ooze¹². This concurs with an experience related by Pao-P'u-Tzu when he spoke of his great uncle Hsien-kung who, when very drunk one hot summer day, 'would go to the bottom of a deep pool and stay there for almost a day, because he was able to keep the *ch'i* (ethereal essence) and to breathe like an embryo'. Such claims may not be factual in a physiological sense (although it would be a risk to discount them entirely), they do indicate a pre-occupation with meditational breathing techniques among *karadji* similar to those practised in other spiritual disciplines.

In fact one is constantly struck by the similarities that exist between the Taoist *hsien* and the Aboriginal *karadji*. Both have subsidiary roles to play as resident diagnosticians within their respective communities. Both engage in magical acts such as prolonged flight¹³. Both are said to turn lighter in body colour on the assumption of their position of *karadji* or *hsien*. And both express themselves in a complex symbolic language and ritual action that is in part animistic. While for the *hsien* there is the alchemical association culminating in a desire to produce gold or the attainment of immortality, these disciplines find their paradigm in the *karadji*'s desire to develop his 'inner eye' or powers of spiritual discernment to the point where he becomes an 'expert'.

Possessing the 'inner eye' of course has numerous practical applications. In his role as tribal doctor, the *karadji* is often called upon to use his inner eye in diagnosing internal ailments. Mowaldjali, in his testimony, gives a clear outline of the functional use of the inner eye. "The diagnostician's eye, that is the magic eye, is the one which he checks the liver, the urine, the gall-bladder, the heart and the intestines. He checks these completely. "Ah yes," he says, (ie. the *karadji*) "the trouble is in the back of the neck!" He *sees* (our italics) perfectly . . . they call him the expert. He is trained by the *rai* (spirits/*Oruncha*). In the beginning, he is unable to see very far. His sight is still dim. As yet he doesn't know (understand). So the *rai*, they send a spirit animal or insect out to him. Then his eyes begin to open and he is astonished. That's the way he begins to see further and further. "Did you see far?" he is asked. "I saw the *rai*," he replied. "Ah, very good. You are getting better and better. You are becoming an expert at seeing these animals and insects. (ie. the *rai*)" .

We are confronted here with an angelic disposition. It is said that the *rai* are those spirits that are responsible for teaching *karadji* the esoteric aspects of his profession. At the same time, differentiation is made between the inner eye and the use of ordinary eyes for normal perception. "We think he is looking with his ordinary eyes," Mowaldjali suggests. But really the *karadji* is observing with his inner eye, a gift of the *rai*. In this respect one would hesitate to ask whether so-called 'X-ray' paintings popular among Northern Territory tribes are a formalization of the capacity for inner eye observation. Empirical knowledge would of course provide the information and images for these paintings to be made. But this does not explain why the painters would wish to depict the internal organs as if they were being observed from outside the body. Perhaps the *karadji*'s ability to see within with his inner eye provided the initial inspiration for this style of painting.

The inner eye has other applications which reach beyond those of a purely diagnostic character. Through the use of the

inner eye as a meditative device, the *karadji* is able to make contact with the spirit-realm and its inhabitants, the *rai*. In this respect Berndt's free translation of a text related to him by a Yaralde tribesman stresses the importance that *karadji* place upon meditation as a mode of contact between themselves and the spirit-world.

'When you see an old man sitting by himself over there in the camp, do not disturb him, for if you do he will "growl" at you. Do not play near him, because he is sitting down by himself with his thoughts in order to *see*. He is gathering those thoughts so that he can feel and hear. Perhaps he then lies down, *getting into a special posture*, so that he can *see* while sleeping [ie. meditating]. He sees indistinct visions and hears 'persons' [*rai/Oruncha*] talk in them. He gets up and looks for those he has *seen*, but not seeing them, he lies down again in the prescribed manner, so as to see what he has *seen* before. He puts his head on the pillow as previously so as to *see* [ie. invoke a vision] as before. Getting up, he tells his friends to strengthen that power [known as *miwi*], a constituent of the quartz crystals within themselves, so that when they lie down they will be able to see and feel (or become aware of) people present, and in that way they will perceive them.'

Not surprisingly, this *miwi* or 'power' is said to be present in all persons, though especially developed only by a few. It is said to be located in the pit of the stomach, which must be considered as a generalized symbolic location similar to the base of the spine as referred to in Kundalini yoga. According to Hindu tradition, *kundalini* which is a form of *shakti*, is always considered to be present in the human being and is represented by a coiled-up snake. Like the *luz* bone also, that indestructible kernel said to contain those elements necessary for the restoration of an individual being under the influence of 'celestial dew' (one cannot help noticing the physical similarity here between celestial dew and the solidified light of quartz crystals as a power-bearer), the *kundalini* snake can be taught to rise up through the various plexuses in order to reach the 'third

eye'. In other words, the *luz/miwi/kundalini* nexus, when developed, can precipitate a restoration of the primordial state and so bring about man's recovery of his sense of eternity¹⁴.

If this is so, then we are close to identifying the essential nature of the *miwi* power so closely associated with quartz crystals. For snakes figure largely in the *karadji* initiation ceremonies throughout Australia and are closely associated with the presence of these wild stones. In one case a postulant is taken up to heaven, either on a cord or a rainbow which serves as a rope. There he is 'killed' and impregnated with quartz crystals as well as tiny rainbow snakes. In another ceremony, a postulant is shown a tiger-snake which leads him into a hole full of snakes that made him clever by rubbing themselves against him. Daisy Bates claimed that a *karadji* she once met had the power to hold communion with a mythical snake named Kajoora. In each case we are looking at some sort of spiritual realization accompanying the symbolic presence of snakes in one way or another. It is important to note that even if snakes are physically present on occasions during these ceremonies, their function is largely symbolic. Like *kundalini* serpent-power, they are capable of communing with the inner eye of a *karadji* and so release *miwi*, or power.

Of course, this is not without its dangers. As in any intense spiritual discipline psychic terrors are always lurking, ready to play havoc with the postulant's mental stability. Our Yarlalde tribesman vividly reminds us of the psychic risks a postulant runs in becoming a *karadji*: 'When you sit down to see the prescribed visions, and you see them, do not be frightened, because they will be horrible. They are hard to describe, though they are in my mind and my *miwi*, and though I could project the experience into you after you have been well trained.

'However, some of them are evil spirits. Some are like snakes, some are like horses with men's heads [centaurs?], and some are spirits of evil men which resemble burning fires. You see your camp burning and the floodwaters rising, and thunder, lightning and rain, the earth rocking, the earth moving, the hills

moving, the water whirling, and the trees which still stand, swaying about. Do not be frightened. If you get up you will not see these scenes, but when you lie down again you will see them, unless you get too frightened. If you do you will break the web (or thread) on which the scenes are hung. You may see dead persons walking towards you, and you will hear their bones rattle. If you hear and see these things without fear, you will never be frightened of anything. These dead people will not show themselves to you again, because your *miwi* is now strong. You are now powerful because you have seen these dead people.'

Here we see the *miwi* power addressed as a separate entity to the intellectual energy of the *karadji*. It too is capable of being affected by untoward visionary experience, yet at the same time able to develop a psychic power of its own. This would accord with any bona fide meditational technique designed to release dormant psychic or spiritual energy so that it rises in phases to the 'crown of the head'. What this Yaralde tribesman is speaking of is the effective conquest of the higher states of being within himself. The process of disintegration, of arresting manifestation, is the one sure way of finding the primordial, motionless unity that existed before the rupture between himself and the spirit realm of the Dreaming.

Much emphasis is placed upon displays of magic and extraordinary events by *karadji*, such as climbing into the sky on aerial ropes, telepathy, speaking in languages, observing monsters, acts of sorcery and bone-pointing in order to justify the title of clever men in the eyes of ethnologists and writers on comparative religion. Unfortunately, little attempt has been made so far to explore the rich symbolic and metaphysical significance of these acts in the light of a viable spiritual discipline. This has led to a subsequent diminishment of the importance of the *karadji*'s role within Aboriginal society. To equate his visionary experience with other shamanic disciplines again tends to reduce the significance of his spiritual endeavours in a way that identifies them too closely with induced

ecstatic experience. What is missing in these studies is a systematic reasoning into why such people embark upon these supernatural or revelatory journeys in the first place. Is this because current thinking has dichotomized the relationship between spiritual and physical wellbeing? One suspects this to be the case. As with most indigenous peoples, their spiritual life, because it is largely oral and esoterically based, has long ago been categorized as being no more than a reflection of so-called 'primitive' mentality. Indeed it is one of the principal foundations of modern philosophy and psychology to suggest that all religious disciplines evolve somehow from archaic models. Thus the spiritual life of Aborigines has always been regarded as undeveloped, and the people themselves as the 'oldest' form of humanity! It is a condition under which Aborigines continue to live today, their lives still an object of anthropological interest separate from any recognition that their culture might be a substantial source of arcane lore and wisdom from which all of us might derive benefit. Until attitudes change profoundly this situation will remain as it is — a more or less tacit acceptance that Aborigines and their way of life represents a monumental cultural impasse in the history of humanity.

The *karadji*, as cultural exemplar, reflected a unique human type. In an inherently conservative society perhaps too much pre-occupied with ancestral allegiance and the past, he often represented a potent force for change. Because of his direct contact with the Dreaming and its pantheon of spirit-figures, he was one of the few people able to create new dances, songs and stories. Through him a tribal community could remain culturally vital and grow accordingly. Although his role sometimes required him to be spiritually oppressive in terms of instilling fear among those who did not fully understand his other-worldly activities, this is not to say that his presence within the tribe was of a negative character. Much of that fear was a mixture of awe and respect anyway. After all, he was different; he had subjected himself to an encounter with Sky Heroes; he

had died and been reborn again as a man of 'high degree' with the responsibility to obey both natural and supernatural law. Such experience inevitably set him apart from other men, although he ostensibly lived a normal life within the tribe.

The importance of the *karadji* as resident tribal sage and seer cannot be underestimated. The arcane information at his disposal was a constant source of spiritual security among other tribal members who looked to him for answers in times of uncertainty. He was the only man allowed to have (indeed capable of) contact with Baiami, the All-Father and culture-giver, through the medium of his spirit-messengers, the *Oruncha*. In the tradition of the prophet or seer, he alone had the power to intercede with these Sky Heroes on behalf of his fellow tribesmen. One story relates how a *Karadji* made contact with Baiami in order to request his help in ending a drought afflicting his tribal country. To do this, the *karadji* had to ascend the mountain Oobi-Oobi, beyond the top of which lay Baiami's quartz crystal throne. Coming to the mountain, he discovered footholes cut in the rock in the form of a ladder. He proceeded to climb this ladder for four days until he had reached the top. Here he discovered a stone excavation, into which bubbled up a fresh spring of water. Thirsty after his long climb the *karadji* drank his fill, only to realize how invigorated he now felt. His fatigue had fallen away. Near the spring he noticed a number of circles built from piled up stones, one of which he entered. Immediately he heard the sound of a *gayandi* (bullroarer), the traditional medium through which the voice of Baiami's spirit-messenger communicated with men. Having pleaded his case for the cessation of the drought with them, the *karadji* was raised by some of the attendant *Oranchi* off the sacred mountain of Oobi-Oobi into the numinous presence of Baiami, seated on his crystal throne. Here he was told to gather all the flower blossoms he could carry and convey them back to his tribe. This he did and, with the aid of the *Oranchi*, was transported back to Oobi-Oobi from where he returned to his tribe¹⁵.

This legend, divested of its narrative connotations, is a

perfect example of the symbolic mode of thought associated with spiritual transformation that we find at work within Aboriginal cosmology. Here we encounter the remnants of a sacred map as well as a method of approach to the epiphanic state. The 'ladder' that must be climbed reflects the various stages of spiritual development that a *karadji* must undergo on his spiritual journey. Drinking from the 'spring' at the source is inevitably rejuvenating and can only be done after the long and difficult climb has been completed. The *karadji*'s recognition of the sacred mandalas and his 'entry' into one of them (probably each one, although it is not stated) is a universal image of contemplation and spiritual renewal. Of course entry into one of these will precipitate contact with the realm of the Spirit through the medium of 'voices'. At this point the *karadji* finds himself 'raised' by the angelic orders into the very heart of that rarified spiritual realm of Baiami, the All-Father as symbolized by the crystal throne¹⁶. Not only is it made clear to him here that the 'drought' can be ended through contact with the Dreaming, but only through a distribution of Baiami's 'blossoms' among those living in the physical world can this be truly achieved on a much broader plane. In other words, a *conjunctio* between the supernatural and the natural worlds must be achieved by way of ritual contact and meditation if man's existence on earth is to remain vital.

Such a legend has all the elements found in a sacred text associated with a more literal spiritual discipline. Because it is couched in symbolic language, however, this in no way diminishes its metaphysical significance, nor suggests a lack of sophistication in its method. The *karadji*'s whole being is directed towards intercession on behalf of his people, and of himself. This cannot be achieved through the ratiocinative process solely. Only the symbolic mode of expression can embrace effectively the essentially disparate elements that make up knowledge of the epiphanic state. In this respect, nearly all Aboriginal secret-sacred legends (that is, esoteric) are concerned with the deliniation of metaphysical elements.

Finally one is confronted with the special sanctity embodied in a practising *karadji*. Both his shadow and the 'crown of his head' are considered to be so closely identified with his *miwi* power that it is forbidden (taboo) to touch either of them. To do so is regarded as a sacrilege, and in consequence the crime demands an appropriate form of punishment. Unfortunately, the sacrilege perpetrated upon the *karadji* by European civilization during the past 200 years has continued to go unpunished. In fact, his presence within the tribal community has always been regarded as subversive, precisely because he stood for a dimension of spiritual experience unattainable to those in question. It takes very little to see why outback graziers, colonial authorities and later, government administrators, sought to neutralize his influence within his tribe as far as possible. Squatters had him driven from the land or executed; missionaries and teachers made every attempt to undermine his spiritual authority through the introduction of alien beliefs; doctors brought into ridicule his use of traditional remedies by the flagrant use of modern medicinal techniques; observers and, more latterly, anthropologists emphasised the sorcery aspects of his profession to the detriment of his spiritual attainments. In the end, traditional Aboriginal society was effectively destroyed when the *karadji*, as a cultural exemplar, was considered to be redundant. His *miwi* power flowed from him and was eventually lost. The spiritual knowledge and the ascetic disciplines that needed to be practiced for its attainment have now all but been eradicated. What was left were the remnants of a traditional society trying desperately to make sense of a world that only he had the power to understand.

If that society is ever to renew itself in the face of Western secular materialism, then his role within the Aboriginal community must be revived. He alone holds the key to renewed contact with the Dreaming and an understanding of the epiphanic state. Without a revival of this knowledge there is no prospect of a continuation of the traditional life of Aborigines in Australia as it once was. C.P. Mountford inadvertently mourned

their loss to the world when he observed 'Day after day I watched the beautiful unclothed bodies of the men as they strode along beside us. They were a continued delight to the eye, their skin shining with health, their rippling muscles and the royal carriage It is small wonder, then, that the elders should possess a mental poise and balance which belongs only to the best in our civilization'.

Such an epitaph, poignantly expressed as it is, cannot compensate for the disappearance of those 'wild stones', nor the wealth of visionary experience, wisdom and arcane knowledge that went with them, from the spiritual landscape of men's minds. It remains to be seen whether white Australians have the understanding, or indeed desire, to allow such a renaissance to occur without destroying it at its inception.

Notes

1. The name of such clever men varies in accordance with the different regions of Australia from where they originate. *Karaji* (Western Districts of New South Wales), *wingirin* (Queensland), *kuldukke* (south of the Murray, Victoria) et al.
2. C. Strehlow. *Die Aranda-und-Loritja-Stamme*, Part 4, p.42.
3. R.M. & C.H. Berndt, *The World of the First Australians*, p.308.
4. Goethe also speaks of the 'eye which itself is the light' in his *Doctrine of Colours (Farmenlehre)* as a method of physiological visionary perception. It is also interesting to note that the traditional Taoist *hsien* postulant could only be detected by his peculiar appearance.
5. Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*. Also A.P. Elkin, *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*.
6. A.C. McDougall, *Manners, Customs and Legends of the Coombangree Tribe*, *Science of Man* 3:117.
7. Pao-P'u-Tzu, *The Inner Chapters*, transl. by Tenney L. Davis and Ch'en Kuo-fu, *American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol.74, No.10, Dec. 1941.
8. (a) Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One*, p. 25. (b) cf. Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*, No. 94 in which he echoes the contemplative writings of Richard of St Victor:

'Above prana, the light,

past light, the crystal.

Above crystal, the jade!'

Spiritual Discipline and Psychic Power

9. H.H. J. Coates, *The Rai and the Third Eye*, Oceana, XXXVII. 1966.
10. Cf. 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God'. John 3:3.
11. Cf. Gregory Palamas' remarks: 'Hesychia is the standing still of the mind and of the world, forgetfulness of what is below, initiation into secret knowledge of what is above, the putting aside of thoughts for what is better than they; this is the true activity, the ascent to the true contemplation and vision of God'.
12. P. Beveridge, *The Aborigines of Victoria and the Riverina*, 1889.
13. 'Operators in *thumi* sorcery walk on air which the spirits have made soft and solid for a foot above the earth. The air also moves, carrying the operators direct to their victim. Billy Emu, a famous Weilwan *karadji*, was able to cover 122kms a day, as fast as a horseman', Elkin field notes, 1944. In contrast, Pao-P'u-Tzu maintains that certain *hsien* were capable of travelling 12000 li (about 4000 miles) in one day!
14. René Guenon, *The Lord of the World*.
15. K.L. Parker, *More Australian Legendary Tales*. London 1898.
16. cf. *The Book of Enoch*. 'They elevated me aloft to heaven. I proceeded, until I arrived at a wall built with stones of crystal . . . Attentively I surveyed it, and saw that it contained an exalted throne, the appearance of which was like that of frost.' Chapter XIV.