South of my Days

New England backdrop – landscape frames a sardonic portrait of “Old Dan”
Bleak backdrop of oppressive war and death
Is it too optimistic today?
Combines memory and story
V.Australian landscape – almost mythologised
Oldness evoked
Images of endless time
Stories will go on in others
Past broken, lost? Not renewed?
Hope in summer?
Passed on human storytelling – human race continues
The yarn
Poetry reaches to a timeless metaphysical level
Yarn telling is a way of challenging time – but this moment is brief
It is an illusion
Selective randomness of memory – not the whole truth
Lyrical unforced beauty
Reason and emotion through rhythm and images
Man vs nature – v. Australian
Quintessential Australian man challenging authority – stoically!
All becomes part of one experience
We’ve moved onto the ‘evil’ present – war is our concern
Lost past values/traditions
Old stories – white and indigenous
Poet intervenes in her work – telling a story
Circle of continuity of life
The Company of Lovers

WWII – gratification taken when can as death is so imminent
Lost roots, traditional values compromised
Insecurity – war
Happiness is transient, brief, short, sad?
Death will trap all
V. aware of death
So sacrifice faithfulness, loyalty for short sexual gratification
Short time
Claustrophobia, panic, loss, insecurity, fear
Nature of time – v. Aware of how little we have
Everyone entrapped
Destructive power of time.
**Woman to Man**

The sexual act from a woman’s point-of-view

Written when Wright pregnant with Mckinney’s child (Meredith) - 1949

Explores fertility and birth

Boldly speaks of female sexuality

Sex = life

Sensual poem

Celebration of womanhood

Enjoyment of sex by woman

Sharing the joy of creation – woman + man

Thoughts of the unborn child

This act defeats death just like the resurrection does

But the future is scary!

Imagined/unimagined thoughts of the child?

The hunter and the chase – encompasses the whole process of the intimacy

The security of the arms – the love – you+me=our

The passion evoked with images of male and female genitalia

The orgasm in the dark \(\rightarrow\) the moment of realisation of new life \(\rightarrow\) v. Scary “I am afraid”

Poem contravenes and challenges taboos

Women can and do enjoy sensual and sexual pleasure

Always worried about the child that the woman has created – constant responsibility
**Woman to Child**

Importance and love for the child is central

Lyrical

Celebration of the child growing in the woman

Immediate address to the child

A celebration of the conception

There is hope and a “feel good” feeling

The “dreaming blood” suggestive of the passing on of the genes – the passing generations

The multitudinous stars perhaps suggests the immense power of the love and therefore the creative force of love – the creative force of life itself

A “love” that is perhaps unimaginable before

“O node ....” – incantation directed to the child

The poem is child centred – as the woman is child centred now

The woman is like the tree feeding the child

The child is one way of conquering time – life goes on despite individual death

Individual response to nature in “the root”

The child will become part of the daily cycle of life and the seasons

Enternity is possible through the power of love and creation

All part of the incredible circle/continuity of humanity
Age to Youth

Opens with another very Australian landscape in the “sooty bush” – national flavour but worked by human hands “in the park”

The green suggests an innocence

And the image of innocence and youth is evoked with the boy with “his arms around his dearest” is this a cynical poet commenting on adolescent love?

Change in mood in the second verse with bleaker images of urban humanity – but we can pinpoint the young love in the “crowd” because of the love of feeling

Clear statement from the poet “No, nothing’s better than love” – and the mood of the poem changes again as the poet becomes more didactic

The poet encourages all to let love transcend all – so that we “forget the common world”

Love-making is the essence of humanity – it’s good

Our spirits can be freed – and our fear of the what if should disappear

Cautionary advice to the old – who relate tales of pessimism to the young

What age does to the body – experience does to love

Wright urges freedom, fun, life-giving experiences “to let heart go racing heart” – to believe that the world is a “sweet” place

The “we” includes herself with the ‘cynical’ old

The messages we should send is of the purity, untainted nature of youth’s kisses and glances – are they what is the “truth”

She urges a life that is not full of regret – a life that is full of love and giving – this is the essence of humanity –

The passing of time is inevitable – let’s fill it with life

There is hope – and perhaps a touch of irony??
Double Image

Raging dualities
Nature/culture
Dead cultures/living cultures – which is best?
Nightmarish image
The duality of the psyche
Tight structure/chaos of the mind
Age old fights
One dead/one alive
The “rage” of the old values need to be upheld
“my kinsman skull” – evotive of the bone of the living and the dead – we are all one
We are all related → yet nightmarish relationship
“bitter experience” – massacre of our kinsmen
The horrific images of blood and “jumping flesh” – what we do to each other – the agony and struggle
More than humans die – relationships – value systems etc etc → nightmarish
Grasping attack – revolting – wounds – “speechless eye” – senses are silent in such a frightening image of slaughter
Monster, death, pain
Time beats us – “one must die” – we are all mortal – frightening?
Time “cannot die” → therefore has power
Children, love etc lost through time
“I pace” – alone in life – in “long-dead forests”
The horror of past massacres lingers in the poet’s psyche – loss of life, culture, love, values
The path, the thorn, the pain – Christlike → repetition of love that must hold the generations together → perhaps it takes the nightmare to provide redemption
Lamenting the lost culture of the aborigines
Striking guilt in the poet for what past generations have done – murder of people, environment and yet man is natural
Bitter, horrified, afraid, panic → crescendo of images and emotions
Eve to her Daughters

Monologue as Eve addresses her daughters

Tension between men and women after Adam and Eve driven out of Garden of Eden – whose fault?!!

Marriage and motherhood render women insignificant in society → leads to depression?

Distinctly feminist writing

The opening lines suggests the male/female tension → “It was not I”

“not I” → hints at the beginnings of misogyny

But Eve followed Adam → and reference to life of domesticity which is far from harmonious

The new Eden is a dystopia – one made by Man and materialism starts to replace spirituality

Technology does not improve life – escalators, refrigerators, insurance trusts → but all these man-made ideas does not make Adam happy

He’s constantly resentful that he has been ’turfed’ out of Eden – the more he creates, the more complicated life becomes but no happier

He is as flawed as Eve – the temptress!

Biting irony and raw criticism describes to Adam’s behaviour → painting him as a self-centred man

He rejects “God and the Other” – with an arrogant pride → his pride suggests that he is free

His philosophy eventually leads him to the position where he doesn’t exist – ironic interpretation of existential philosophy?

The poet then turns to her daughters suggesting that “they take over” → man has not succeeded

Perhaps a simpler life is better → but she doubts her daughters’ natures – they are sure to be too submissive

So all are responsible – but in the end it doesn’t matter because we’ve come to the conclusion that we don’t exist anyway! At least God doesn’t exist so the whole fable isn’t true → what have we founded our civilisation upon?

Is it all meaningless?
Fire Sermon

A response to the Vietnam war – calling for an end to the war

A plea on behalf of the “little people” –

The chemical rain = napalm – the effect of developed countries on the developing countries

⇒ Starvation – as they ate the buffalo and now have no means to support themselves

The little people don’t understand the “Sinister powers” ⇒ they are part of a different world, a different culture

The image of the developed countries with the television screen – the effect of the media brings the horror and sadness into the poet’s living room

The poet laments the distance between her and the victims of the war ⇒ she can touch the screen but she cannot comfort ⇒ sense of her emptiness, frustration and helplessness + deep sense of compassion

The guilt that she feels looking at her hand – as part of the developing world

Whose hand is creating this suffering?

She feels that she has killed her own child ⇒ the unity of humanity

Tone shift ⇒ she focuses on the Buddha ⇒ the calm, the inward looking that contrasts the horror and violence of the war and the materialism of the developed world

Maya in Sanskrit means “Illusion” but not necessarily imaginary. It is what we see, we must deal with it and live within it” ??? Not sure where I’m going with this one????

Shiva is God as Destroyer but a positive force as creation follows destruction

Maya is Buddha’s mother

Shiva is God of wild mountains and forests, god of outsiders who do not fit into organised society

Arjuna a great warrior killed his blood brother

The plea of the poet, on behalf of self and the “simple people” is to live

Should the poet act or not? What is right action? Confused ⇒ questioning

Are we all responsible?

What is justified?

But the Buddha who sits and “smiles inward” understands the nature of man – the desires, the tension between east and west/the tension between desire and calm

He suggests following own conscience – “Be an island”

But the poet doesn’t calm

The Buddha just is – in the moment – to just be – that is nature and so sitting “under a napalm rain” is acceptable and he accepts it calmly.
Tightropes

Meta-poetry – how poets write poetry
Structure
Vision
Balance
Rhythm/rhyme
Highs and lows of achievement
Risk-taking
Very loose structure
Cf/ct “Double Image”
Teetering on the edge of mood, meaning, rhythm
Dangerous place to be
Challenging thoughts, ideas, value systems
The Dark Ones

Australian nationhood is an oozing wound
Collapse of the policy of assimilation?? – you know more than me about this!
The “shadows glide” → not integrated into society
“Pension day” → not integrated – now reliant on their ‘invaders’?
White man has a sense of shame as the “faces turn aside”
And the undercurrent of whispers that white man has this constant reminder of own past deeds
The ghosts of memory haunt – of past horrors → constant reminder “haunting”
Day/night –
Us/the other
Shame/guilt ridden
“The dark gutters of grief” → image of the aboriginal features that evoke the feeling of loss,
disempowerment, sorrow, loss – all in a face
There is “shamed relief”
But is the “bargaining goes on” suggestive of an element of grief

The ghosts haunt both physically and imaginatively from the memory and history
Smalltown Dance

Image of two women folding a sheet in the back garden

This is the “ancient dance” of domesticity

A dynamic image and Wright maps out the movement

“the white expanse reduces to neat” → is this what we do with ideas – what women do?

Are women then packed into “cupboard shelves”?

There are lots of ideas out there “flapping white”

The women remain within the garden - only the blue sky above them – their ideas remain here – trapped

They are constrained by their religion – means of control

And yet they have hope and desires in the freshness of the “green” → maybe the allure of the paddocks over the fence?

An excitement and a plea to “run”

But women know they are bound by the fence – expectations of society

The sheets that tug – are the ideas that tempt – and yet must be folded in the domesticity and put in the cupboard

There is a limit to conceptualisation → women have to operate within boundaries and so ideas don’t get further than the peg!

Suggestion of a hopeless future – “impossible world” – “fold”, “put them away”, “close the cupboard door” on all “those beckoning roads”

Entrapment of women holding onto the sheets within the fence.