Judith Wright is not only remembered as a poet, but as a critic, short-story writer, environmentalist, and social activist for Aboriginal land rights in her native Australia. Born into a wealthy pastoral family in New South Wales, she grew up surrounded by the beauty of the Australian landscape. She decided to be a poet when she was 14, after discovering poetry at the New England Girls' School. She went on to Sydney University, where she studied philosophy, history, psychology, and English without bothering to complete a degree for any one subject.

One flaw Wright found with early twentieth-century Australian writers was that they wrote as though still in England, giving no mention to the native flora or fauna. Wright's early poetry is quite different, as it captures the imagery of Australia with its particular animals, trees, and flowers. Her first book, *The Moving Image*, was published in 1946. She develops a distinctly female voice in her second book of poetry, *Woman to Man*. Most of her anthologized poems are from these first two books of poetry, even though she would publish many more volumes in her lifetime.

At the age of 30, she met the philosopher J. P. McKinney, whom she later married. His death in 1966 perhaps caused her to write poems with a more pessimistic tone than is found in her earlier work.

Wright received several awards for her poetry, including the Grace Leven Prize in 1950, the Robert Frost Memorial Award in 1977, the Australian World Prize in 1984, and the Queen's Medal for Poetry in 1992.

She had always had an interest in conservation, helping to found the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland in the early 1960s and working to protect the ecology of the Great Barrier Reef. In her later years, she gave up writing poetry to devote even more time to social causes. Because of her ancestry, she felt guilt for the treatment of the Aboriginal people and worked to publicize their plight and their poetry. She edited several collections of Australian verse and helped the Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal get published.

Over her life, Judith Wright published more than 50 books, including a memoir, *Half a Lifetime*, in 2000, which covers her life until the 1960s. Judith Wright loved Australia and its people and was still actively involved in work to make life better for its citizens when she died of a heart attack in Canberra at the age of 85.

**Further Information**


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