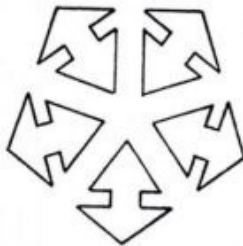


# THE WISDOM OF TREES

## Eleven Australian Poems



**Poems by  
Mark Oliver Smith**

Design by Chris Nelson



*Presented*

*To*

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*For*

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*By*

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**Dedicated to My Daughter  
Hermione Elizabeth Watts**



By Hermione Elizabeth Watts

“Sri Krishna declares that the Supreme Being is the source of all existence and refers allegorically to this universe as being like an inverted tree”

Bhagavad Gita  
Yoga of the Supreme Person  
15th Discourse.



## Arterial Branching

“In her Garden of Life Hermione enriches Soul—Soil with the help of Sophia and Saraswathi”

Mark Oliver Smith



By Hermione Elizabeth Watts

The greatest of all artists is at work in the Cosmos. Everything in it is constructed according to laws that profoundly satisfy the artistic sense.'

Rudolf Steiner

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# **The Wisdom of Trees**

## **Introduction**

### **Part 1**

## **The Poetry of Trees**

### **Real Trees & Mythological Trees**

The 11 poems of this booklet are ordered in a manner that proceeds from real trees to mythological trees. Real trees are alive and they have a life history. They have a story to tell that can be derived by the senses and the imaginative insights of the observer. On the other hand mythological trees are not sensorial. They exist only in the imagination. They can be given a story but it has to be told by the imaginative insights of the poet.

### **From Metaphor to Mythopoesis**

The poet's armoury consists of a whole range of 'figures of speech'. These include metaphor, analogy, allegory and myth! The use of these devices is to explore the nuances of meaning hidden from mere observation. They explore the qualitative meanings of relationships and the sources of wonder. The ineffable cannot be defined. It can be experienced but not communicated fully in words.

### **Quantity and Quality**

Mathematics and Physics are concerned with quantity. Poetry and Music are concerned with quality. In technological societies there is a temptation to reduce quality to quantity. Such a process was evident in the works of Jeremy Bentham's attempt to reduce morality to a felicific calculus. The concepts of morality, beauty and justice are of a different order than those of weight mass and force.

## Part 2

# Trees and Creation

### World Trees, Trees of Life and Trees of Knowledge

Cultural Anthropologists have identified a number of ancient societies that have used the Tree as a primary organization symbol for their creation stories. The tree unites the heavens with the earth. Its three zones link the living with the both the gods and the dead.

Norse mythology has the World Tree in Yggdrasil, an immense Ash Tree. The Crann Bethadth is known in Assyria as the Birth Tree of creation. The Fusang is known to the Chinese as a Tree of Life. The Semitic Abrahamic cultures of Judaism and Christianity have their Garden of Eden with both a Tree of Life and a Tree of Knowledge. Islam prefers to speak of a Tree of Immortality. The Meso-American cosmologies are based on a central World Tree.

### The Peepal Tree (Hindu) and The Tree of Life (Islam)

In Sanatan Dharma, Peepal is called the tree of Gods. It is said that the deities reside on every leaf of the tree. Especially on Saturday, Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Vishnu reside in the Peepal tree. So, **to attain good fortune and happiness**, one must worship the Peepal tree.



## An Islamic Tree of Life



The 'Tree of Life' mosaic is in the audience room of the bath house of Hisham's Palace. Hisham's Palace is an important early Islamic archaeological site. It belongs to the Umayyad dynasty from the first half of the 8th century, one of the so-called Umayyad desert castles. It is located at Khirbat al-Mafja 5 km north of the town of Jericho, West Bank. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hisham's\\_Palace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hisham's_Palace)

## The Universe As An Inverted Tree

In the discourses of the Bhagavad Gita entitled '*Yoga of the Supreme Person*' (15th Discourse), Lord Krishna tells us about the ultimate source of this visible phenomenal universe from which all things have come into being, **just like a great tree with all its roots, trunk, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers and fruits** which spring forth from the earth, which itself supports the tree and in which it is rooted. Sri Krishna declares that the Supreme Being is the source of all existence, and refers **allegorically to this universe as being like an inverted tree** whose roots are in Para Brahman, and whose spreading branches and foliage constitute all the things and factors that go to make up this creation of variegated phenomena.

## **Part 3**

### **Trees in this Booklet**

Poems 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are poems about real trees. They form part of the landscape that a tourist may see. Poem 3 is about a tree that grew from the 'foot of a rock'. It is more like a vine than a tree. It was on a property excised from the 'Moreton Bay' property near Leadville. The original property featured a fully developed Moreton Bay fig tree.

Poems 6, 7, 8 and 9 feature the qualities of trees. Poem 6 features beautiful flowers of Northern Territory trees. Poem 7 expresses hidden moral qualities attributed to a person. Poem 8 expresses strength, endurance and resilience. Poem 9 depicts a landscape of trees seen from a distance. Poem 10 attempts to read the symbolism of a Christmas Tree.

### **Our Tree of Life**

The tree in poem 11 is a mythopoetic tree which attempts to express a hidden cosmology as a Tree of Life. While the imagination may sometimes falsify reality it can also lead us into new truth. Imagination assists the observer to go beyond sensory impressions towards the meaning of the observations.

This poem is an attempt to go beyond metaphor into metaphysics. It seeks to organise the tree of life painting onto three sets of female deities - Mater Natura, Sophia and Saraswati. These three mothers personify three personality attributes of the one feminine divine being in which her love, wisdom and beauty are combined.

## Stylised Tree of Life



Painting by Hermione E. Watts

'A tree has roots in the soil yet reaches to the sky. It tells us that in order to aspire we need to be grounded and that no matter how high we go it is from our roots that we draw sustenance.' (W. Meather)



# Trees On the Landscape

No. 1

Ghost Gum—Central Australia



**“Perhaps you’re not spirit,  
Perhaps you’re just tree,  
But your beauty and mystery still linger with me!”**



**1.**  
**Ghost Gum**  
Central Australia

Stately sentinel,  
Guardian of time,  
Speak to me softly  
Of your land and mine.

So she rustled her leaves  
And whispered to me:  
"I'm a lone spirit  
And not just a tree.

This land is now arid  
And scorched by the sun,  
Assays its people  
Until pay dirt is won.

Its rocks are all painted,  
The land is a rune,  
With meanings and messages  
On boulders all strewn.

Just decipher those signs,  
Climb skyward with me.  
Give me the password,  
The heavens we'll see."

When the leaves stopped rustling  
I came to my senses.  
I'd lifted the veil  
Of that land with no fences.

Perhaps you're not spirit,  
Perhaps you're just tree,  
But your beauty and mystery  
Still linger with me!

## No. 2 Autumn in Bright, Victoria



Trees Respond to  
the Four Seasons.

‘Too pregnant with  
light the sun causes  
colour to excess’

‘Retain the colour of  
Autumn’s first  
impression’

<https://ourouting.com/autumn-colours-of-bright-victoria/>

## 2. Autumn

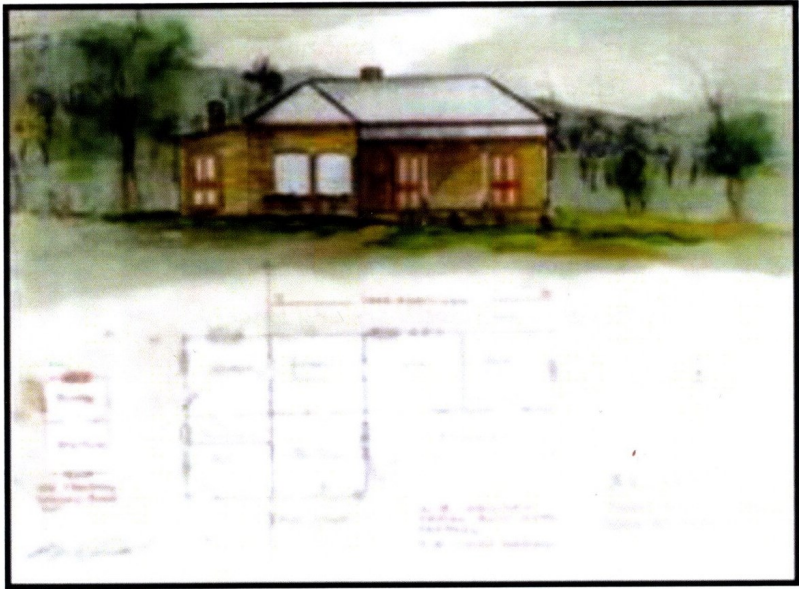
Nature sheds her skin at autumn time,  
And plants her seed in fertile ground.

Too pregnant with light the summer sun  
Causes colour to excess!  
Earth's glorious palette of green and gold  
Turns grey and brown-  
Goodness is overripe!

Earth child take your lesson-  
Guard each treasured moment and  
Retain the colour of autumn's first impression.

When the drab day of life's autumn sheds her  
tears of sorrow,  
May the consolation of another tomorrow  
Reach into the darkness of the night.

### No. 3 The Tree on 'Bugadah'



Pencil sketch of 1<sup>st</sup> residence, 'Bugadah', by Kenneth John Smith

'**Bugadah**' was the name of the homestead built by my paternal grandfather Sydney Patrick Smith. Syd selected the land in 1908 or 1909. It was located about a mile north of '**Rock Linden**', the home of Joseph Fletcher Bayliss. Joseph Bayliss was the father of Jessie Smith (Sydney's wife) and his home was adjacent to the '**Moreton Bay**' property on Uarbry Road (now the Dunedoo Golden Highway). The nearest village was Leadville near Dunedoo.

### 3. The Tree at 'Bugadah'

There's a tree that grows from the foot of a rock,  
It's beside 'the drip' they say.  
If you had spent your lifetime there  
You'd know it's on 'Moreton Bay'.  
It's a tree that can tell a long story  
Of struggle and poverty and ill  
And the spring that continually nourishes it  
Trickles from a rocky hill.  
Ride to Cock-a-butta, (near Merotherie),  
Look for the 'Ivy Rock' and it's not that far,  
Then wind your way along the track  
And you'll see it – Sydney's 'Bugadah' \*.  
But Sydney's not there any longer,  
He's moved to greener fields.  
He left for better pastures,  
For acres with higher yields.  
You may wander about the property  
On sandstone slopes and basalt tops.  
You might see the animals drinking,  
Where the water springs into the 'troughs'.  
Walk round to the 'Hands and Arms',  
(A cave full of hornets nests).  
Inspect the aboriginal paintings -  
Look out for the ants and other bush pests.  
Sydney grubbed the wattle and the apple  
Until the clearing saw the light.  
He split the timber and crosscut it  
With the elements fought his fight  
It was a long hard struggle,  
Fought bitterly till the end.  
Now the early pioneers are missing -  
No more their hearts to rend.  
Still, the verdict's not yet given  
The tree is growing still.  
Syd's living in his children –  
That mighty conquering will!



## **An Antarctic Beech** (*Nothofagus Moorei*)



A remnant tree in Australia found in the McPherson Range

The Antarctic Beech  
A descendant from Gondwana  
<https://www.wikipedia.org/>

# Tree Quotes

A mighty tree starts from a seed

The roots of a family tree begin with the love of two hearts

Advice from a tree:

- Stand tall and proud
- Go out on a limb
- Remember your roots
- Drink plenty of water
- Be content with your natural beauty
- Enjoy the view

Like branches on a tree, we may grow in different directions yet our roots remain as one.

(Unknown)

Spiritual life is like a tree: I cannot see it grow day by day, perhaps only after a few years. Growth is process that requires patience.

(P. Elijah)

Learn character from trees, values from roots and change from leaves.

(T. Harneed)

Trees are poems that the earth writes upn the sky.

(K. Gibran)

The trees will tell their secrets to those that tune in.

(S. Morgan)

## No. 4 The Willow Tree At Tibooburra



It is difficult to grow trees in Outback Australia



#### 4.

### The Willow Tree At Tibooburra

Those hot nor-westerlies of summer  
Hard on dry spells,  
The pinging of grit on gal'iron-  
Sounds of tinkling bells.

Dry in the Tibooburra tank,  
Tommy's willow dying of hunger.  
Water fetched from Whittabrinah  
To feed the orphan of Yalpunga\_

Once suckered round a peppercorn  
That perished for want of rain,  
Transported in a cossack boot-  
Delivered by camel train!

Tommy nurtured that Queensland native  
It responded by throwing shade  
For camels, (ghan'd from Wilcannia),  
And goats on daily parade.

Alf Redpath and Frank Foster  
Lived on that cretaceous sea,  
Yarned time away on that granite isle,  
Enjoyed the shade of that tree.

Frank was proud of his garden,  
With its vegetables of stone,  
Its opalised fruit of iguandon  
And its diprotodon bone!

Cont'd...

Its aboriginal artefacts, its axeheads,  
Its stones of initiation,  
Its deftly shaped flintstones-  
Relics of an early cremation.

After rain, Frank would fossick  
For gold, in Tibooburra's street.  
He called it his shining eldorado-  
The Archangel Michael's "beat!"

Eventually, after a sudden gust,  
The willow tree fell down.  
Frank and Alf then sought the shade  
At the other end of town.

"Wonder if Tommy met St. Peter?"  
"Dunno," said Alf, "it's hard to tell,  
but if he burns as well as the willow roots  
it's going' to be hot in hell!"

## No. 5

### Stuart Town was once called Ironbark



A Stand of Ironbark Trees

Stuart Town, known as the "Home of the Man from Ironbark" is a small service centre surrounded by sheep and cattle farming and orchards. The town, originally called "Ironbarks" now comprises little more than a post office, a School of Arts building, an Open Air Museum, a Rural Transaction Centre with an Internet Cafe, and a hotel. Although tiny it is the place where New South Wales premier, Sir Robert Askin, was born and where Sir Isaac Isaac's father worked as a saddler.

## 5.

### Ironbark or Shades of Stuart Town

It 's sunset on Cuga Burga,  
The locals beat a retreat,  
As shades of many old 'Ironbarks'  
Come marching down the street.

The paymaster leads the push  
With bushrangers all in tow.  
Bell and Harvey head the pack  
The others form in a row.

Dunn and O'Mealley are silhouetted  
And Gilbert's next to Ben Hall,  
The sunlight flickers through them  
Onto leaves of ironbarks tall.

Then follow the miners singing  
Of days that gleamed of gold.  
The madman's there with Gardiner  
And Hanlan's in the fold.

John Haynes looks so impressive  
In his suit of armour plate.  
He shuffles along ungainly  
For this he mustn't be late!

It's the annual 'shout' of Banjo  
And the man he eulogized.  
Beers are on at Ironbark Inn -  
Hearken to glee and lies.

Cont'd ...

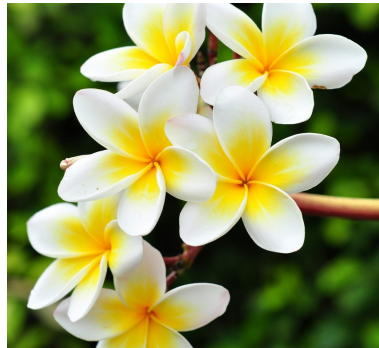
“Here’s to the confounded barber,  
Here’s to the ensuing brawl.  
Here’s to the diggings that drew us  
Enriched us one and all.”

So they drank their pints and faded  
Into the gleaming light.  
Yet their presence glows in the embers  
Of campfires burning bright.

There’s many a ghost at Ophir  
And spooks that wear a gown,  
I’ll wager they’re not as thirsty  
As the shades of Stuart Town!

# From Metaphor to Mythopoetics

## No. 6 Heart of my Land



## 6. Heart of My Land

Brilliant Bougainvillea,  
Cheerful colours you ray,  
Heart of friendship and welcome  
Brightens up the day.

Purple Parakeelya  
Beauty in the wild,  
Heart of patience and striving,  
Changes harsh to mild.

Fiery Poinciana,  
Blazing in the breeze,  
Heart of courage and daring,  
Boldest of the trees.

Delicate Jacaranda,  
Colours of violet and blue,  
Heart of peace and purity,  
Strives for all that's true.

Double Mussaenda,  
Flowers so fertile,  
Heart of generous giving,  
Openness with a smile.

Fragrant Frangipani,  
Perfumes to enthrall,  
Heart of love and kindness,  
Friendliest flower of all.

**No. 7**  
**My Frangipani**





## My Wife Mary Eirane Smith (Nee Kinmont) (Born 1932)

### 7.

#### My Frangipani

My frangipani's glory  
Rays brighter than the day  
So plainly dressed in goodness  
Is dignity on display.

Yet nobler still the heart  
Refined as if by fire  
A Scottish pride now tempered  
Compassion a true desire.

In such faith and courage imaged  
A mother's love is found  
Her children a grateful chorus  
Her song a joyful sound.

A touch of regal splendour  
Soul beauty to behold  
An aura of spiritual kindness  
Encircles a heart of gold.



*Mary's 80th Birthday  
Celebration*



*22 March 2012*

**No. 8.**  
**“The Knotted Old Gum”**

*‘The Knotted Old Gum’* was painted by Kenneth Jophn Smith. He was born in Coolah, N.S.W. in 1908 and died in 1987. He lived his early life on ‘Bugadah’. This farm formed part of the larger ‘Moreton Bay’ property near Leadville N.S.W. After Leadville his family moved to Gulgong. At Gulgong Ken joined the Railway as a Junior Porter.

As a young lad his mother encouraged him to develop his natural aptitude in music and painting. Ken persisted as an amateur artist and his “Knotted Old Gum” is an excellent example of his talent. It is a masterful expression of the struggle he saw in life. It tells us as much about the painter as the landscape itself.



This painting is now in the possession of Hermione Elizabeth Watts.

## 8. “The Knotted Old Gum”

The knotted old gum just stands and stares  
And looks at the passing years.  
It measures its life in fallen bark  
And ponders its fate as it nears.

It's a tree that's had a long struggle  
While perched on the top of a hill.  
But its roots are firmly anchored  
In the soil that nourishes it still.

It's not a tree of great beauty  
They're mostly the same in these lands.  
All twisted and knotted and broken  
Yet defiantly there it stands.

It wants to whisper a message  
Before it gives into a fight:-  
“Discard those exhausted philosophies  
And reach up into the light!

Be not ashamed of your country,  
Or the land that's given you birth.  
Fight for your hold on Australia  
And fight for all you're worth!

There are alien ideas that choke,  
And pests will infest you too.  
Put down your roots even deeper –  
Ever your strength to renew!”

**No. 9**  
**Hills of our Homeland**



'Brindabellas So Blue'



Canberra A.C.T.

**9.**  
**Hills of Our Homeland**  
**A Welcome to Canberra**

1.

Canberra parades her colours in September,  
Golden wattle pipes-in the Spring.  
Honeyeaters welcome the warmer weather,  
Bright songbirds merrily sing:

**Chorus**

Hills of our homeland,  
Brindabellas so blue.  
She nurtures this land  
Holds out her hand  
Extends a warm welcome to you!

2.

Namadgi's band is busily tuning,  
Gang-gangs bobbing as they play.  
Crimson Rosellas are gaily chattering  
Currawongs minstrel to this lay:

**Chorus**

3. (optional)

March to the Hut River Crossing.  
Black and White Swans join too  
The Wallaby Choir is assembling  
Let them chorus this to you:

**Chorus**

No. 10  
My Teddy's Pythagorean Xmas Tree



## 10.

### My Teddy's Pythagorean Xmas Tree

She stands there in her coded garb  
A quizzical Teddy at her side!  
She sparkles in her baubled dress  
Hiding secrets – **one to five!**

**One** teaches us of wholeness  
That gives meaning to all its parts.  
It pictures generous giving –  
A uniting of all true hearts!

**Two** reveals to us her symmetry  
Her left and right-hand sides,  
How the male and female principle  
Within each of us abides!

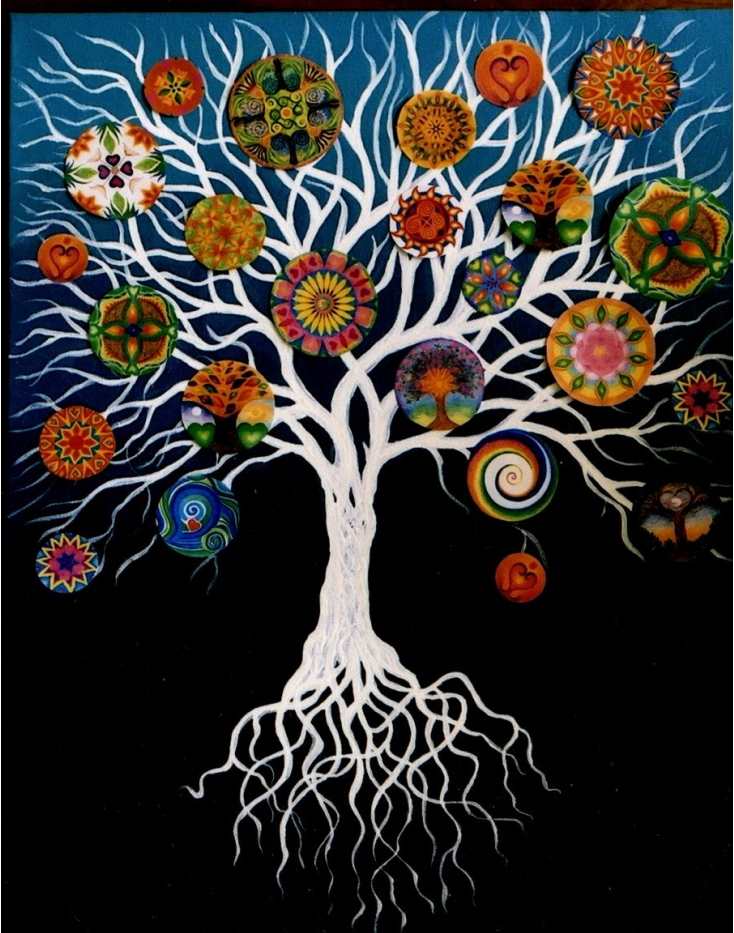
Her shape over all is triangular  
With sides that number **three**.  
It's amazing what lies hidden  
In her sacred geometry.

Her **four** is in surroundings  
(Not in the tree at all)  
The environment sends its forces  
Four seasons – I recall!

A light now dwells among us –  
Its angelic presence anoints.  
A star atop our Christmas Tree  
Shines out from all **five** points!



No. 11  
Our Tree of Life





## 11.

### **Our Tree of Life Mater Natura, Saraswati, Sophia**

Our Exemplar and Friend  
She hangs as a gift on my wall  
Although she is everyone's Mother Natura.  
She teaches us about the Wholeness of Nature  
About the polar relationship  
Of astronomy and embryology  
Of Inscape and Landscape

——— 0 ———

Her music sings in us  
For she is also our Saraswati  
She encourages us to learn through the arts  
To explore the levels of consciousness  
Of sleep and wakefulness  
With its visions and premonitions  
Of Imagination and Inspiration

——— 0 ———

She is robed in white  
Emitting a dazzling aura  
As Sophia is our personal oracle  
She is teaching us to read the Cosmic script  
With intuitive wisdom.  
She is our Tree of Knowledge  
Our Moral Mentor

——— 0 ———

Cont.

As our inner voice  
Our silent partner  
Uniting the Cosmic  
With the Telluric  
She embodies spiritual truths.  
Without her triune nature  
We could not find our way.  
She is our Tree of Life.

—— 0 ——



# Notes To Our Tree of Life

## The Seed

The fruit contains a multitude of seeds. These seeds have a cosmic and an earthly composition

## The Leafage

It was Goethe who first noted that the proto-typic shape of the leaf was manifest in the shape of the foliage. Thus, in various states of metamorphoses it appears in the shape of the sepal, petal, stamen and carpel. Indeed, when viewed perceptively the shape of the whole tree is leaf. These processes also demonstrate that unity can be found in diversity. Not all leaves have a fixed pattern. These leaves may metamorphose into various shapes over time but retain an underlining or recognizable controlling shape.

## The Roots

The roots of trees are seldom acknowledged in paintings. Our iconic painting awards equal value to the uppermost parts and the normally unrevealed roots. While the festival of colour is on open display above ground, the root system is silently active in the darkness below. This activity is not only concerned with earthly nourishment and the anchorage of the whole tree. The roots are probing into the depths of being. They are discovering the collective consciousness where the ancestors have hidden their memories. The root system unites the telluric earth forces to the heavenly form — shaping forces from the cosmos.

## **The Branches**

Our Tree branches fulsomely from its central trunk. These laterals form miniature trees as they spiral up the trunk. The main trunk becomes a 'wet nurse' for nourishment of each of the branches. The main trunk climbs towards the sun while the laterals fill space around the tree. The main trunk is radial while the laterals are spherical in space. The trunk is the Queen Bee of the tree hive.

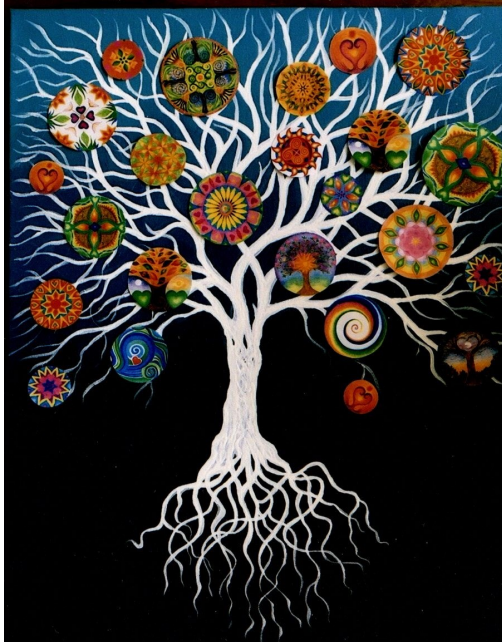
## **The Fruit**

The tree fruits in its Mandalas. The fruit itself is firstly a process. This process is in the whole tree before it emerges in form. The seed of this fruit gives rise to later generations before they too, become a Tree of Life. Each will then enter the great stream of life which unites the individual with the ancestors. Each individual will ultimately be assigned its own world. The tree teaches us that life itself is a stream that periodically fruits and provides sustenance for man or beast. Alternatively, it may fall and provide sustenance to the earth.

## **The Fruit as Mandala**

In due season the buds burst into blossom and then form a fruit. The fruit of our Tree is a crop of mandalas. They reveal life stories of family members. Each mandala demonstrates the process of common parentage yielding diversity of offspring. Within the one there is many, within commonality there is diversity.

## No. 11



### Our Tree of Life

#### The Trunk

Her perpendicular trunk climbs skyward to the light of the sun. At the same time her roots delve downwards into the darkness of the earth. She is a bridge between earth and heaven. More importantly she unites the provinces of light and darkness. Although she appears to be one tree, she is in fact, many trees, (see below). Her central trunk grows at both ends. Her mid region mediates between the roots and the blossoms. Like the human being, the Tree of Life is polar, but with three interpenetrating regions.

## **Other Aspects of the Plant Kingdom**

While the painting portrays a range of characteristics at first sight, it only opens the door to a wider range of wonder.

Some of these may be briefly mentioned:

- The gender and sex life of plants
- The relationship of insects to plant life (especially bees, butterflies, beetles and worms)
- The relationship of plants to animals and
- The relationship of plants to humans

## About the Author



**Mark Smith and his Tree of Life**

Mark Smith had an extensive career in Education. Although trained as an English and History teacher he taught little History and less English.

He began his career in the New South Wales Department of Education. After later training as a District School Counsellor and Guidance Officer he became a Teachers College Lecturer. He later transferred to the Commonwealth Teaching Service and became a Principal Education Officer. After being compulsorily transferred to the newly created Northern Territory Teaching Service, he was made a Superintendent of Guidance and Special Services.

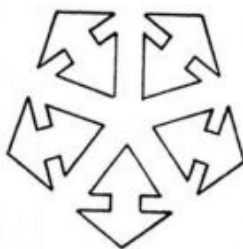
Mark's interest in poetry began when his uncle presented a copy of Henry Lawson's poetry to him in 1950. Now retired in Canberra, he has collected some of his own verses in order to pay tribute and acknowledge his debt to his favourite bush balladist.

In retirement Mark has enjoyed his membership in Probus. He has enjoyed interstate touring, genealogical research and historical studies



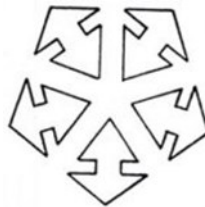
with U3A. In gathering his poems together, he is seeking to honour an interest that was dormant for a long time.

This booklet is part of a series of booklets which present Mark's poetry in digestible segments. Each booklet has a theme which reflects Mark's exploration of Australiana



# THE WISDOM OF TREES

## Eleven Australian Poems



Poems by  
**Mark Oliver Smith**  
Research and Design by  
**Chris Nelson**