

# **“There Is No Other World”: Country and Politics, a Keynote Presentation to the ASAL 2022 Conference**

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The most important thing for me in my life is learning to understand. Much of my learning has been through David Mowaljarlai, an old Kimberly man who is now dead. But I spent some time in South Dakota with him at an archaeological conference in 1989, and I thought he was the wisest man I’d ever met. And he said to me one day, “You know, Jim, I’ve been learning all of my life to understand.” And I thought that was the most profound thing I’d ever heard. And I took that on board for myself. And that’s what I’m doing: learning to understand.

Aboriginal philosophy doesn’t have an end for an individual. In fact, in Aboriginal society, no one person is meant to have all knowledge. The sharing of knowledge is something that is kept between a number of knowledge-keepers, so that one person doesn’t carry too much knowledge, and thereby have a power they shouldn’t have. You find that is a most important thing.

Firstly, to introduce myself: I am a *plangermairreenner*<sup>1</sup> man of the First Nations of north-east Tasmania. I am not Australia’s imagined Aborigine, nor do I identify as an Australian citizen. My mountain is *turbuna*, my river is *meenamatta lienta* running through *meenamatta walantanalinany*, my matriarchal grandmother is *wapperty* of the *plangermairreenner*, and my patriarchal grandfather is *manalargenna* of the *leetermairremener*. My mother is Ena Everett (*née* Maynard), and my father is Keith Everett. I am known as Jim Everett-*puralia meenamatta*. My home is on *truwuna*-Cape Barren Island off the north-east coast of *lutrawita*/Tasmania, and one of fifty-two islands in the Furneaux Group.

I’m a *plangermairreener* man from *turbuna* Country—*turbuna* is now called Ben Lomond. And *plangermairreener* Country is just on the north side of *turbuna* towards Launceston. And *meenamatta* Country is that Country that runs from *turbuna* right through to the Blue Tiers; it runs right through that valley where the South Esk River runs. It’s a place where I camp quite a bit. And over the past twenty years, I’ve been camping there with my collaborative discussion partner, Jonathan Kimberly. Because sharing knowledge with a non-Aboriginal person, a man who is pursuing a place, an understanding, in Country, is the best way for challenging myself.

I don’t identify as an Australian citizen because Aboriginal people haven’t made any agreements with Australia to be citizens. The Australian governments, right back to the colonial governments, have never asked us to be citizens: They never made any agreements with us to be citizens. We had no formal documentation or ceremonies to mark such an occasion.

The opportunity is there for Australia. I’m one of the people who is pushing very hard for that, and not just playing around with games of a Voice to Parliament, and the idea of being acknowledged in the Constitution as if that brings about shared sovereignty. I’m very serious about that part of my life. But that’s not what I’m here to talk about tonight. I’m really here to just to tell you a story. My story. How did I come to understand Aboriginal philosophy? And what does Aboriginal philosophy really mean? That’s what I’m going to talk about.

I was born on Flinders Island in 1942. My mother was the first Aboriginal woman allowed to have a baby in the district hospital on Flinders Island. And I happened to be that baby. I have a brother and a sister. My brother Eric was older than me, and my sister Barbara, younger. Mum had to go to Launceston to have my brother, and by the time my sister was born, my parents had moved to Launceston anyway, and she was born there. This is as little tykes (see Figure 1). This was taken in southeast Gippsland, at a farm just outside of a place called Morwell. We moved to Morwell because my parents decided that the racism was too much to take here in Tasmania. They packed up everything and they left Tasmania and went to southeast Gippsland. Dad was a bush cutter, cutting pulp for the Mills. And we were living on this farm at the time.



**Figure 1. Jim (left), his older brother Eric (centre), and younger sister Barbara (right), circa 1948**

The first house Dad built was just a one-room shack, near a little creek called Sassafras Creek. And all we had was an earthen floor. I think I have some of my best memories of growing up there, sitting in that creek with my mum and my sister. My brother was always off doing something else. But on nice summery days, we'd be always sitting in that creek, digging in the sand to get freshwater mussels. I have great memories of growing up in those days.

My Mum and my father, especially my mother and her parents, had been conditioned by white society in Tasmania to be ashamed of being Aboriginal. Because of this, my Mum was a stickler for how we dressed and how we looked. We weren't allowed outside in the yard without our boots. Because if we were bare-footed, Mum felt that we would draw attention to our Aboriginality, and if we were called "blackies" or "n\*\*\*\*\*s" at that school she used to give us the excuse of, "Just tell them you're Maori." And we knew that wasn't the truth, but we knew that she was giving us that as an excuse.

I began writing at a really early age. I wrote sort of straightforward little rhyming poems, like you know, "The sun sets in the west/That's the best," or whatever rhymed. Back in

those days, the papers in Melbourne used to have a Charlie Chuckles magazine in the middle of the weekend newspaper. And Charlie Chuckles was for the kids. And they'd publish poetry and stuff like that for kids that wrote in. I'd write my poetry and send it in, and then get published. And I was also a fine artist with pen and ink; mainly Indian ink. I drew things like different birds' feet, but very detailed ones. And my teacher in Moe—I was about nine at the time—she went and took all my artwork and had it placed on exhibition in the only newsagents in town. I was pretty chuffed with just getting that artwork up. But many years later I stopped drawing. When my grandmother died, I put all my drawings into her casket, and they were buried with her, and I never drew again. Writing became my way of telling pictures.

I left school and I began delivering telegrams for the local post office in St Kilda, because we had moved into the city by the time I was eleven. By the time I was sixteen, I'd gone with my father, and the last man that was hung in Australia, Ronald Ryan—he was like my uncle. He used to train me bike riding back in those days. He got into trouble later on, of course. But he and my dad got the first boat that I'd ever been on. We went out fishing in this boat, and got to San Remo, which is around Philip Island way, past Cape Shan. But Ronald Ryan packed up and went back to Melbourne, because he could see that the boat that he and my father had wasn't going to make a living out of fishing.



Figure 2. Jim on long-line shark boat, *Castlereagh*



Figure 3. Jim on the fishing boat *Mercury*, circa 1960

I finished up getting a job on fishing boats like this (see Figure 2). A longline shark boat, a big 68-footer. And a little 45-foot boat. And I fished on those boats for a bit, until I was about 19. Later on, I left fishing and I became a steeplejack; I was painting smoke stacks as high as three hundred and fifty feet. One day I was talking to a friend of mine who was in the Citizen's Military Force (CMF), and I was taken by the uniform. So, I joined the regular army. Anyway, I was in the army for three years, and finally, I got out in 1965; that's a big story, because I had to fight the army to get out. It wasn't to do with Vietnam—my mother was given three years to live and the army wouldn't listen to me—wouldn't give me compassionate leave. So, I went away without leave (AWOL) every month until I was able to get home to Flinders Island under an alias. And eventually, a Federal policeman came over and arrested me and brought me down here, to Anglesea barracks [in Hobart], and I was discharged [from the army]. And they paid me a lot of money because they knew they had done the wrong thing by me.

I always had to tackle authorities. And I sort of grew up with that. That was the 1960s. And it was one of those times when there was that much work around Australia, and everybody, all the young people like myself, were jumping on buses up on the mainland and going anywhere you wanted to in Australia and do whatever job you wanted to get. Employers would come into the hotels and ask you if you could do such and such, and if you said no, they'd say, "Don't matter. Come anyway and we will train you."

So, I'm travelling around Australia, doing all this. Finally in 1965, and after I was discharged from the army earlier that year, I decided to come back to work on King Island at a scheelite mine. I left there and jumped on a plane and went to Auckland and took a job on a Norwegian oil tanker that was travelling around New Zealand, and then the tanker went up to the Persian Gulf to Iran, and around to Saudi Arabia, and we were transferring oil around those regions. Anyway, I came back to Australia, and I signed off in Darwin because I saw the opportunity to see a part of Australia I'd never seen. And it was here that I ran into other Aboriginal people, and saw the situation that they lived in. And it was more stark than it was in Tasmania. In Tasmania, there was a subtle racism; it was a very paternalistic, patronising type of racism.

I finished up traveling around Australia, coming back home to the island, and in 1969, the Tasmanian Government, who said, "We've achieved genocide," took \$10,000 off the Commonwealth Government, of Aboriginal Affairs money, to relocate Aboriginal people from Cape Barren Island onto the main island. They bought a heap of derelict houses from the housing department that were earmarked for destruction, and they put our families in those derelict houses.

So, I'm down here in Hobart, looking for a fishing boat. At the time the Aboriginal Loans Commission were offering loans for Aboriginal people for whatever business they wanted to get into. And I remember I went into one of the houses here in West Hobart, one of these derelict houses that a well-known family from our island were placed in. The toilet was leaking upstairs and the sewage was running down the stairways. And the housing department had been told about this for two months and hadn't done anything about it. So, I went down to the Department of Social Welfare, because Aboriginal people were a welfare problem. They put Aboriginal housing into the welfare program to manage. And I get into the director there, a fellow by the name of Bernard Smith, and say, "This is disgusting. You should be doing something about this." And finally, this house was given at least some better sort of work on their plumbing to stop the sewage running down the stairways. So, I got involved in that sort of thing.

At that time, AbSchol, the Aboriginal Scholarship organisation, which was run by non-Aboriginal people around the country, were protesting all over Hobart. Really all over Tasmania. But I was down here protesting for the Gurrindji, who had walked off Wave Hill Station [in the Northern Territory]. I was joining them. And we'd go into the supermarkets and

grab all of Vestey's products, because Vestey's were the people that owned the land that the Gurrindji were working on. We'd grab all the Vestey's products and put them all into trolleys, and wheel them up the front and put signs on them saying, "Don't buy Vestey's because they're taking the land away from the Gurrindji and won't give it back." And they [the supermarket managers] would call the police, and the police should come and say, "Did they [the protesters] steal anything?" "No." "Did they damage anything?" "No." "Well, we can't do anything because they haven't done anything that's illegal." So that was the way that we really forced Vestey's right around the nation to do something about handing some of that land to the Gurrindji. That was my first real involvement in Aboriginal politics, and I didn't know much. I just knew what was right and what was wrong.

So, I got my boat, the *Christine Carroll*—it was built down in Dover. My good friend Pip, her dad designed that boat and a sister ship called the *Rita James*. And I ran that *Christine Carroll* for eight years, and, you know, when you were working at sea, and you're pulling up those cray pots, or you're pulling in your lines, you're pulling in a lot of kelp, you're pulling in a lot of things that get caught up in your cray pots that are not what you really want. You'd be surprised how much small life falls off the ropes as they come over the rollers. And I was noticing all of this. I was seeing how all of this life in the sea that was coming up onto our decks, and I had my focus on it to say: How does the sea and environment handle all this fishing?

In the last 12 months with my boat, I put scallop gear on it, because we were running scallop dredges. Mine was a smaller boat and the dredge weighed a bit over a quarter of a tonne. But some of the bigger boats were pulling dredges behind that would weigh easily a tonne, dragging across the sea bottom to get scallops. Now, I lost my dredge one day; my winch brake didn't work, and my dredge wire ran fully out, lost in the sea. I put out a marker and came back two days later. The forty boats that had been working there before had all gone. I just put a grapple over, got my wire, connected it back up, and pulled my dredge in. And I thought I'd do a run over this place where these forty boats, including mine, had been working [a couple of days prior]. I did a couple of drags, and all I pulled up was mangled fish and marine plant life. And I'd never seen anything like it; it was like they were put through a blender. And I'm talking about gummy shark about five feet long, but they were all broken up, and looked terrible. I went straight back into port. I took my scallop gear off the boat. And I put my boat on the market, and I got out of that industry. I thought to myself: I started in 1958 as a fisherman. I didn't start to be a fisherman to destroy the sea bed, damage the environment, especially to the sea that I love so much.

I sold my boat and I came ashore. Eventually, I got a job as the first State Liaison Officer for Aboriginal Affairs; the first state-government specified position for an Aboriginal person. Just prior to that, I had five months working for the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre as a legal aid officer, and that was a big thing for me, to work with people like Michael Mansell, Heather Sculthorpe, and many others, including Pierre Slicer, who later became a justice of the Supreme Court here in Hobart. And they were the political thinkers that I grew up with. Very quickly, I learnt politics. And I was writing political papers, almost from the word go in 1980.

I became involved in these politics, and I have been ever since. But my life was changing. I was writing poetry. At the time, Tasmanian Aboriginal people were getting abused over the radio and [callers were saying that] we're just white people who are rejecting our white identity. And we were being piece-mealed into being "part Aborigines," and only a fifth or a quarter Aboriginal, or whatever it was that the people who were ringing the talkback radio felt like they could say. These were people who were just disgruntled. And we'd already experienced so much of, "Yeah, you're not black, but you're not white." So, I wrote this [poem called] "Blood Lust"—my first harsh political poem. I feel it's the harshest poem that I've ever written. Because I wanted to hit back at these people who were saying, "You Tasmanian

Aboriginals have got white blood, and so what are [you] complaining about?" [They said] we should just be white people. Yet we were never treated like white people. So, I'm saying, "Well, your blood didn't make us." And I have a go at them (white Tasmanians) really harshly in that poem, and I don't think I've ever written another poem that harsh.

### **Blood Lust (1984)**

Australians you now call yourselves,  
 You mongrel mob invaders.  
 You deny your blood's mixed past  
 Yet think your blood has made us.  
 Come on fools and say your piece,  
 Your argument we know so well.  
 Ancestral lines for you are farce,  
 On genetics you do dwell.  
 For you have a mixture beyond compare,  
 Of indigenous lines you fail.  
 And you come from countries over there,  
 With a heritage fairytale.<sup>2</sup>

Sometime later on, I wrote "Spiritual Places," a poem that I felt, sort of went part way to not being too arrogant about what I was saying to White Australia or White Tasmania. It talks about the spirits, and it talks about our "churches," our sacred places. It talks about the anthropologists who think that they have much more knowledge than us about what our Country is about.

### **Spiritual Places (1987)**

There's just the trees and rocks and ground,  
 with maybe a creek come bubbling down.  
 The grass and flowers, the sky and clouds,  
 and sometimes the spirits in darkish shrouds.  
 A sacred place of all our ways,  
 of all our spirits at this one place.  
 Yet over there, not far from here,  
 and even further in this sphere,  
 are other sites our spirits dwell,  
 for all time our people's will.  
 But those who are not of our kind,  
 who drain our knowledge with white minds,  
 and take it all and give back nought,  
 yet call themselves the experts taught'  
 are thieves who take a heritage ours,  
 and twist it so we lose our powers.  
 So onward comes the desecration,  
 ruining the churches of our nation.  
 For the whites they are resource,  
 with no spiritual sacred source.  
 But to us they're trees, rocks and ground,  
 with maybe a creek come bubbling down.  
 The grass and flowers, the sky and clouds,  
 And sometimes the spirits in darkish shrouds.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 4. Jim solo activism at Takayna, 1995



Figure 5. Jim leading healing ceremony at Takayna, Brighton bypass, 2010

Then I got even more involved. These are later pictures. That one (Figure 4) was when I did a solo protest at the Tarkine Road back in about '95. And I was arrested and put in jail. And this one here is the Brighton Bypass, in 2010 (see Figure 5)—this is when I'm arrested for the fourth time. My son Aaron, who stopped the bulldozers, had been arrested five times. And then, when we were kicked out, but before I was arrested, the police stayed back and allowed me to do a healing ceremony. And in this healing ceremony, I did a healing not only for our people, not only for our Country there, and our ancestors, 42,000 years of heritage—I did a healing, for our people and the Country, and I did a healing for all those white people that live out there

at Brighton, even though they were so much against us, and they threatened us and did all sorts of things, and would be spitting out of their cars as they drove by. But it's important, in my mind, that we see each other firstly as human beings and Country as the way that we can all heal. With this very ceremony, I think it changed my ongoing approach, to remember that is not just us and Country that needs healing, but it is also white society that needs healing, because white society created a big problem and they can't get themselves out of it.

### **While the spirits are silent and shy**

There's the sound of water down the gully  
 as ole managana calls a hearty cry  
 with man-ferns sat under a gum tree  
 while the spirits are silent and shy.  
 quiet in its space, the family murmurs.  
 with sounds of living things.  
 that feed from those they nurture.  
 In the circle it goes out an' it brings  
 so I sit here as it comes into my being.  
 my family with its spirit of law.  
 and I feel an all strength returning  
 as the land sniffs at my spore  
 she is with me as I with her  
 an' those ole spirits playing' round the hills  
 over the noises of living spirit  
 an' below the mist where the water spills  
 there's the sound of water down the gully  
 an' ole managana brings messages on high  
 an' the man-ferns sit under a gum tree  
 while the spirits are silent and shy.<sup>4</sup>

My poetry kept changing. And I wrote that poem there sitting down alongside the Styx River. I'd go and sit down alongside the Styx when it was summer time, and it wasn't flooding, and I meditate when I write. And so, when I'm writing poetry, I sit there, and I take that Country right in until I'm meditating myself into the natural world. I don't believe in "wildlife." I don't believe in "wilderness" or "native animals." They're not our words. That Country that they call "wilderness," that's our homes. That's the places our people walked. We were there before it was a wilderness. We went through two ice ages, and at one stage those places were just nice meadow Country, and our people knew that Country really well, and we've left our messages in our handprints in many of the caves in the south west. So, they're not wilderness. And the animals are not wild: They are native animals, because they are part of our family.

My teachers: I mentioned David Mowaljarlai<sup>5</sup> earlier, and these are the people that I met, and I read some. Bill Neidjie<sup>6</sup>: I never met Bill. Bill wasn't a man who wrote. He'd sit down and talk, and others would record him. Then they had his work printed and published. He had the deepest ways of seeing how we were part of the world. And I just want to go to that where he says:

Like your father or brother or mother,  
 Because you're born from earth  
 You got to come back to earth when you're dead.  
 You'll come back to earth. Maybe a little while yet.



Then you'll come back to earth.  
That's your bone, your blood,  
It's in this earth  
Same as for tree.

We know White European got different story,  
but our story, everything dream  
dreaming secret "business"  
You can't lose im.  
This story you got to hang to for you,  
children, new children, no matter new generation,  
and how much new generation. You got to hang on to this old story because the  
earth  
this ground earth, where you growing little by little  
tree growing with you, too, grass<sup>7</sup>

That means so much to the Aboriginal psyche. That means so much in the Aboriginal philosophy. If I take you through the next steps here, you'll see what I mean. White society changed over many, many millennia. But one time your people (non-Aboriginal people) were Aboriginal, and you lost the track, you see. You became distant from Country instead of seeing how you are actually part of Country. Yet, all the ingredients are there, in our land, in our Aboriginal Country: they are in there for you. It's like, as Sinsa Mansell said in *tuylupa*,<sup>8</sup> "We are Country. Country is us." And it's very important, very important for Aboriginal people because that's exactly who we are.

Dr Victoria (Vicki) Grieves-Williams writes of Aboriginal philosophy: "This concept has connected Aboriginal people inextricably to the land and all of creation and into a set of obligations and cultural practices that ensured the conservation of the natural world. All Aboriginal people are related to the species and to the landscape as kin, through the process of being born from a totemic site as are the species to whom one is related." But Western philosophy is diametrically in the wrong direction, diametrically away from Aboriginal philosophy. Vicki Grieves-Williams writes here a very good definition for what Aboriginal philosophy is about: That basically all the things where you are born, all the things on your Country, they're all your totems: they're all how you know each other in your family. And as part of your family, you have to be part there too. When I go on to Country, and I sit and meditate, I'm no longer just a human being: I'm part of that natural world.<sup>9</sup>

We are kin with every other thing, not just living things, but with the rocks, with the sand, with the sea, with the air, because that all makes up what we know as a relational ecosystem. Everything is relational. Everything is feeding on everything else to keep the balance. Predator and prey. It's a natural relational ecosystem. It keeps everything sustainable. You shouldn't take too much. Our people did not take very much.

I grew up with a father who used to go out when the Cape Barren goose eggs were being laid, or when the black swans were laying eggs. He would only ever take eight eggs. He never would take more. And he was very careful about that. He raised us telling us you don't take any more than eight eggs, because we need those ones to have more for next year. That was how we all became part of that relational ecosystem. And it all balances, or at least it did. And the problem is now, that the balance is starting to get awfully broken.

So, I needed to learn so much more, and I happened to be camping up on the Blue Tiers where I used to go from the late 1990s, and just camp by myself. And I camp usually up around the Blue Tiers to start with, because I have other camps, but I go and start at my favourite spot just near a place called Full Moon Creek. And I met this fellow. Well, when I arrived, he was

there, painting on the ground, on a little island that was formed with the water running around in the middle of this little creek. Jonathan Kimberly, who is here tonight. Jonathan and I have been in a collaborative discussion, as we call it, now, for eighteen years. Anyway, I watched Jonathan painting and they're abstract. There's the kind of abstract painting that I can read, and I could almost walk into them because I felt there's Country there, and I can understand that.

And so I go down the creek a bit further away from this whitefella, painting away there. And I sat down and meditated myself with the creek, because I quite often take a special place. I just meditated with the creek until I could feel almost a part of the moss. Almost see these pieces of bark and twigs like they were brothers and sisters going by. And I wrote a poem called "Blue Tears in the Blue Tiers Country." Anyway, that night, we're camping in the same place, I'm sitting with Jonathan by the campfire, and I read him the poem. He said, "You wouldn't be interested in doing a collaboration, would you?" And, I said, yeah, alright, thinking I'd write a poem and he do a painting, and done. Eighteen years later, and many, many, many camps, many, many discussions, learning to understand Country, and sharing that with Jonathan, whose roots are in the UK and Europe, living here. And I thought, this is a great challenge for me. Because we all come from Country, you know, and white people need to embrace that, because that's what Aboriginal philosophy is about. The truth of the matter is, that we all belong to Country. Because we all got the same ingredients from Country that makes up our bodies. And we all go back to Country.

Jonathan and I discussed the diversity of concepts of *worldliness* as a means to understand that which is the "fact-reality" worldliness of "all-life" Country as compared with that which has been created inside of the *colonial-dome of thinking*. This dome is what I call the West's conditioned thinking: that this is the way the world should be, rather than thinking outside of its parameters to redefine the world in its natural state. Through our collaboration we have been able to create a discussion to explore concepts without the limitations of the West's angst for [imagined] Paradise. Our discussion has opened our minds to redefined concepts of a Paradise unwritten, embracing all-life in its fact-reality. It takes us beyond the written, or imagined Paradise to understand that as humans we are but one small component of the ONE "paradise" in its fact-reality of all-life. Thus our art collaboration produces ONE painting-writing immersion with all-life; our shared identity within it, and of it.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 6. Jim and Jonathan Kimberley

Jonathan and I work together in a collaborative discussion. Jonathan's paintings and my writings, brought together, are one. Because although they were Jonathan's paintings and my writings, the one discussion was what made them. And so, we have a oneness of work, and we have never separated those. We don't go selling the paintings, just as "Jonathan's," and the poetry as "Jim's." They're one work because we believe that the blending of that knowledge learning about being part of Country is an important part about understanding each other. It might be just us two, but I'd hope that what we're doing, and what we're writing will bring forward a lot of other people to start seeing and learning.

And I know many people here who are not Aboriginal who do that. We've got lots of people in here tonight who understand exactly what I'm saying; who are not Aboriginal, but they know it. And I'm really pleased that that sharing is actual, not just that I've been sharing it, but it's there, and it is actually taken up by other people, who are not First Nations people from this Country. I think that's an immense move by people, and politicians can't do that.

I just want to talk a little bit about capitalism. I don't want to go too far with that, because I think we all know capitalism's a big threat to us. The problem with capitalism is that it's forcing practices on Country and it's causing great damage. I've met a young woman who works through UTAS, Jennifer Lavers, who's doing a lot of really important research on the micro-plastics that are going into the sea and the birds are eating it. Reading her work has me very, very disturbed. To know just how much this plastic is causing the damage to sea birds. That's the area that Jennifer is studying, and of course it's much larger than that. She's also looking at the very good reasons for our traditional burns. And how that helps protect some of the systems. But just take this plastic. There are eight billion tonnes of plastic that go into the sea every year. Eight billion tonnes of plastic! And it's getting broken down into micro-plastics. It's also very toxic, once it starts to break down. I had a talk to one of my nieces who runs her uncle's Muttonbird shed on Big Dog Island, which is in between Cape Barren Island and Flinders Island. And I said to her, Emmerenna, have you noticed any plastic in the birds? And she said, "I've noticed this for a few years, I can hear the plastic plunking against the drum when I'm pushing the stomach out." There are plastic bottle tops, as big as the bottle tops off Coke bottles, and the birds are swallowing them. Some of these birds, and I take this from Jennifer Laver's work, are actually going back to their babies and regurgitating plastic into the young chicks, and they are getting filled up with it. And they don't live.

### **Are You Listening White Australia?**

Learning to understand

It is not for us that you have a God  
 in your image as man with His power  
 to create a realm of worldly possessions  
 in your desire for the virtual paradise  
 for we cannot see your God in Heaven  
 nor in his churches who cannot agree  
 to whom his pleasure bestows glory.  
 For our creator is here with us in this place  
 where Moinie is the spirit of All-life  
 who connects us like a river's flow  
 in a circuitry of ever-cycles with everything  
 and the timeless space where we live forever  
 within the memory of All-life Country  
 with our laws of the land never changing.  
 Yet your supernatural God is the unknown

we cannot touch feel see or hear  
 is a god who has not seen us in His law  
 and so we wonder . . .  
 why our gift of connection with All-life  
 is not accepted by you for the respect  
 and love we share in the natural paradise.  
 We offer tagari-lia that Moinie created  
 in connection with all natural bodies  
 for it is here that our gift is held for you  
 to heal the sins vindicated by your God  
 as we journey together with respect for All-life  
 and learn to understand the gifts from *moinie*  
 in the ever-cycle of life and death.<sup>11</sup>

I've written here, "Are you listening white Australia?" Because I write poetry to challenge things. Lay it out a bit. We're being led into doing so much harm to the Country just for money that goes to rich people.

Gina Rinehart before COVID started had nineteen billion dollars of personal wealth. Two years later, she had 40 billion dollars of personal wealth. She had more than doubled her personal wealth, during COVID. Something is wrong! There are poor people dying in the streets. Our forests are getting cut down. Our seas are now being threatened by salmon farming, and the toxins that go down to the bottom, killing all the sea grasses. All the kelps. And there's a slime that's building up under those salmon farms. And they're allowed to use toxins that are banned in other countries. It's been found now, that humans have micro-plastics in their blood. So, we have got big problems if capitalism doesn't change its way, or if capitalism is not changed into something that allows us to live sustainably with Country. Aboriginal philosophy and the understanding of relational systems really can show the way. Corporations need to take notice. Stop telling us that we are inferior, because we carried the knowledge that not even the richest corporations can have and hold. We have to take it up because relational ecosystems are being killed.

Capitalism is a growth profit system: you need growth, population to keep growth profits on the move. We are overpopulating our Earth Mother. We're getting up close to nine billion people, and already we can see that we are not able to grow enough food to feed everybody. And the countries that are growing enough food, are throwing away so much. When I was here at this University for a Bachelor of Arts, I studied policy, and one of the things I was looking into was regional policy. Now, at that time, this is about 1993, the American Government was paying 15% of the biggest wheat growers to grow nothing else but wheat. And every year they had to grow wheat, and the wheat that was stockpiled to control the market, to control the prices, was burnt. And at the time people were starving in Africa. Capitalism is about rich people staying rich, and poor people being kept poor. About Country being exploited, and taking everything out of it, and not realising that you can't keep doing that and keep the balance. So somehow or other, I hope, we are going to see immense change.

I want to finish with [showing you] this short film, *Blood of Life: Poems on Country* that Jonathan and I have produced. [*The following is Jim's voiceover to the film*]

*Moinie knew  
 that to create life  
 meant that life  
 would need a common thread  
 to life with country and place,*

so that each life would have a role.  
 Yet, even though life  
 would be many different kinds,  
 they all would need the blood of life  
 itself, a thing across everything  
 it touches like a fluid  
 that would be life.  
 This all-clear fluid blood  
 was created.  
 And Moinie created everything with it,  
 so that life's blood  
 was made water  
 so to travel to everything  
 for in all the arteries,  
 and all of the veins, I am the flow of life,  
 and when death comes  
 my journey takes me away to yet another life  
 where new growth needs me.  
 Yet I journey in the world  
 around and on this place  
 as the passenger in clouds,  
 until I form in rain or sleet or snow  
 for the sun to create me again as water  
 every flow of my still  
 that moves in heart and blood, water, canals,  
 pump and savour every taste of my colours,  
 journeying with talking water,  
 whose song harmonises the words in me,  
 babbling over rocks and smooth passages  
 that carry me in bloodlines  
 of all life, of everything  
 relating to every other thing that is life  
 or not life.

This place is outside of the Bible  
 of world ideas that paint Eden  
 with ancient trees that hold the fruit of life's rules,  
 from the theistic man-God,  
 who owns all for man,  
 who never walked this Country place  
 as equals with all life of clean water,  
 but see their reflection in the sky  
 where man God lives in his kingdom,  
 while his images  
 will seek paradise.

Yet it is my blood Country  
 from a time before.  
 People would want to take it all,  
 heeding nothing

*that it does when trees are gone,  
and life is still.*

*In the taking of Country from family custodians  
while a society cares not,  
that water will cry  
with dry tears of drought, destruction, despair  
from cutting of connections  
to the death of an all-clear water.*

*As the shimmering green, blue, yellow, red  
in the high places of all life giants  
where nests give space to feathery colours  
who relate to ground and winds  
on Country places that differ  
as same in all life  
with other all life  
Life Circuitry flows with no colour.  
Red of life's nectar.*

*In the cycle of each and all timeless  
before and after, ever cycle  
the changes only to before,  
yet always same as then  
or after. It is but a memory.  
Relived forever  
All life.  
We are as one  
As all life  
Is us, and there is no other world.*

And there is, no other world! Thank you.



**Figure 7. Jim Everett *purulia-meenamatta, truwana* 2018**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I use Tasmanian Aboriginal language recorded by colonists and published in: Henry Ling Roth. *The Aborigines of Tasmania*. F. King & Sons, Printers and publishers, Broad Street, Halifax, England, 1899; N. J. B. Plomley. *A Word-List of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages*. Foot & Playstead, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Everett and Karen Brown. *The Spirit of Kuti Kina, Tasmanian Aboriginal Poetry*. Illustrated by Tony Thorne, Eumarrah Publications, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Everett and Brown. *The Spirit of Kuti Kina*.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Everett and Karen Brown. *Weeta Poona: The Moon Is Risen*. Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Inc, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> See also David Mowaljarlai. *Yorro Yorro: Original Creation and the Renewal of Nature: Rock Paintings and Stories from the Australian Kimberley*. Magabala Books, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> B. Neidjie. *Gagudu Man, Land*. JB Books, Marlston SA 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Neidjie, *Gagudu Man, Land*.

<sup>8</sup> See performance information: <https://www.theatreroyal.com.au/shows/tuylupa>

<sup>9</sup> Victoria Grieves-Williams. "Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing." Discussion Paper No. 9, Darwin: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> puralia meenamatta (Jim Everett) and Jonathan Kimberley. "Paradise: Working Exmodern" (2nd International Imagined Australia Forum, University of Bari, Italy), in *Transcultural Ecocriticism, Global Romantic and Decolonial Perspectives*, chapter 10, edited by Stuart Cooke and Peter Denney, Bloomsbury, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Jim Everett-puralia meenamatta, Tasmanian Requiem Program, directed by F. Butler, Theatre Royal, May 2016. moinie: lutrawita-pakana creator spirit; tagari-lia: my family—with poetic licence meaning *our family*.