



# **Urban Aboriginals and the relation to their cultural heritage: An analysis on the basis of selected poems**

*Ilona Sontag*

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Seminar paper from the year 2008 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Culture and Applied Geography, grade: 2,7, RWTH Aachen University (Institut für Anglistik ), course: Readings in Australian Aboriginal Literature, Proseminar, 7 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: More than 230 years ago, Captain James Cook, a British explorer, 'discovered' the Australian continent and claimed it for Great Britain. From then on, the Indigenous Australian population experienced a drastic cultural and social change. Today around "68% of the Aboriginal population [...] live in urban environments" (Knudsen 2004, S. 73). Despite the progress in assimilation, smoldering sources of social friction between Aboriginal people and the white community, like unemployment, poverty, alcoholism and bad health care, remain. These subjects often occur in literature of indigenous authors, especially poetry, "the most popular genre of Aboriginal creative expression in English" (Shoemaker 1989, S. 179).

Another important theme, which is often worked up in indigenous poetry, is the urban Aboriginal's relation to their cultural heritage, which will be the topic of this term paper.

This theme is of high topicality nowadays, considering the increasing number of Aboriginals living in urban environments. It will be important to figure out to what extent the Indigenous's past does still play a role in their present lives. Also it will be of interest if they still feel connected with their cultural past, if nature still plays a decisive role, even in "civilised Aboriginals'" lives, and how they generally feel about their situation of being part of two significantly differing cultures. Therefore, the poems will be analysed on the basis of the subtopics nature, identity and past.

The aim of this paper is to provide a small overview of recent poetic works dealing with this topical theme of the urban Aboriginals relation to their cultural heritage to draw the reader's attention to a new, probably even largely unknown part of Aboriginal's lives.

This term paper will first give a short overview about the Aboriginal poetry in general and the authors lives. Later on, poems in which subjects like past, civilisation or nature occur will be analysed. Poems by Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Jack Davis will act as exemplary works to be analysed and interpreted. Therefore, at the beginning of the term paper some short biographical facts about these poets will be given to become acquainted with their cultural background.

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