

# Storymen

HANNAH RACHEL BELL

What do the artistic works of acclaimed author Tim Winton and eminent Ngarinyin lawman Bungul (David) Mowaljarlai have in common? According to Hannah Rachel Bell, they both reflect a sacred relationship with the natural world, the biological imperative of a male rite of passage, an emergent urban tribalism, and the fundamental role of story in the transmission of cultural knowledge.

In Bell's four-decade friendship with Mowaljarlai, she had to confront the cultural assumptions that sculpted her way of seeing. The journey was life changing. When she returned to teaching in 2001, Tim Winton's novels featured in the curriculum. She recognised an eerie familiarity between his works and those of Mowaljarlai, and thought Winton must have been influenced by traditional elders to express such an 'indigenous' perspective. She wrote to him, and the result is four years of correspondence and an excavation of converging world views – exposed through personal memoir, letters, paintings and conversations – culminating in *Storymen*.

**Hannah Rachel Bell's** four-decade friendship with Mowaljarlai and the Ngarinyin has produced farsighted co-cultural initiatives in education, publication and cultural tourism. An activist for sustainable cultural, social and economic relationships, Hannah now writes full-time from her home in rural Victoria.

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For Joan Butun.

I have never forgotten your dedication to the Ngarinyin kids.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are respectfully advised that images  
of deceased people appear in this book and may cause distress.

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# Glossary

<i>banman</i>	diagnostician, doctor, dream interpreter, mystic
<i>coolaman</i>	generic name for shallow, open-ended basket made from bark
<i>djambarra</i>	holes in the ground through which the Earth breathes
<i>Djingun</i>	Owlet Nightjar, nocturnal predator of small insects: title of one side of the moiety system interrelated with flora and fauna
<i>Dulugun</i>	place of the dead where spirits live
<i>gadiya</i>	local name for White settlers; also <i>anmara</i>
<i>gala</i>	opaque
<i>Gwion Gwion</i>	originally a mysterious cave bird who pecked the first paintings into rock shelters; the art of stone, technology and the <i>wunan</i> came from this bird
<i>junba</i>	songs and narrative dance cycle; also contemporary dance
<i>lej</i>	to light
<i>lej muma</i>	it lights my ears
<i>Maranbabiddi</i>	remote Ngarinyin community usually accessed in cool season
<i>Mogoyad</i>	name of <i>Wanjina</i> who on his return from the <i>Wanilirri</i> meetings, lay down and became a painting
<i>munnumburra</i>	senior woman or man with high degree of cultural knowledge; expert in law
<i>ngolnol</i>	wind; a headwind, very strong, associated with cyclones
<i>ngoru</i>	breath
<i>Wanilirri</i>	<i>Wanjina</i> site; also the name of a boxwood stand in a particular area
<i>Wanjina</i>	creative spirit being who brings life-giving rain, and law to his people
<i>wilmi</i>	mist; moving fog over water bodies, evidence of spirit children
<i>Wodoi</i>	the Spotted Nightjar, nighthawk that sleeps during the day and roams at night; title of one side of the moiety system ( <i>djingun</i> is the other)
<i>wuddu</i>	early morning ritual to bathe children in fire smoke to awaken their spirits to the light of the day
<i>wunan</i>	the sharing law of the <i>Wanjina</i> tribes; involves moiety, land, marriage, knowledge and stories; a binary order of classification sometimes associated with ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ in <i>djingun</i> and <i>wodoi</i> moieties
<i>wunggud</i>	energy or essence of living things; circulates in water and gives structure and form to all things

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