

Fall 2007

## Lake Mollyalup (Poem)

Maxime Fumagalli

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### Recommended Citation

Fumagalli, M. (2007). Lake Mollyalup (Poem). *Spiritan Horizons*, 2 (2). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons/vol2/iss2/18>

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Maxime Fumagalli  
(1940-2001)

An Aboriginal woman of the Nyoongar people, Maxime Johns was born in Woodanilling, South Western Australia. She was educated at the girls' boarding school of the New Norcia Mission and became an accomplished artist and poet at an early age. Married to an Italian immigrant, Maxime's aboriginal culture shines through her poetry and painting, expressing her love of the land and of nature, and the pain of her people.

*The poem expresses eloquently the call of the people and of the lake itself to the Spiritans...*

*In 1997 the 150th anniversary of the "failed" mission to Australia<sup>2</sup> was fittingly celebrated by a Spiritan pilgrimage to the site of the Sancta Maria Mission on the shore of Lake Mollyalup in Western Australia.*

*Providentially, the first Assembly of the Spiritan Oceania Region (comprising the Spiritan International Australia and Papua New Guinea Groups) was taking place in Perth at the time. The Assembly, which included the Superior General, the Provincial Superiors of several Spiritan circumscriptions, the local Bishop, and members of the clergy and laity, undertook a pilgrimage to Albany and Lake Mollyalup. A peak moment of the celebration was the reading by Mrs. Maxime Fumagalli of the poem she composed for the occasion, "Lake Mollyalup." The poem expresses eloquently the call of the people and of the lake itself to the Spiritans "to take up the challenge of where they begun."*

*The site of the Sancta Maria mission was rediscovered in 1960 thanks to the painstaking work of local priests, Frs. Noel Fitzsimons and Bernie Dwyer. After extensive archival research, enquiries made in the local area led the amateur archaeologists to Mr. Parsons, an elderly man of 90 years of age who still had a memory of the "holy place." It had been pointed out to him as a boy by the Aboriginal people of the time – "the place where the holy men with the long black frocks lived." An excavation of the site revealed the foundations of the stone fireplace and the wooden wall-posts. The foundations yielded up the remains of cooking pots and the remnants of two rosary beads, which carried the inscription of Libermann's Society "Sainte Marie, priez pour nous."*

*Lake Mollyalup, still a government reserve in pristine condition, is marked by a fitting monument to the missionaries erected in 1976 and a large cross from the 1997 pilgrimage. It continues as an annual place of pilgrimage for the local Church. Today Spiritans minister once again to the people of the area in the parishes of Albany and Mount Barker. Ministry to the Aboriginal people was declared a priority commitment of the Spiritan International Australia Group at its most recent Chapter.*

LAKE MOLLYALUP

From far off places, they had Journeyed  
Those Gentle servants of God Appeared  
Forsaking personal homes and Comforts  
Their commitment to love  
In the service of needs.

The lake is still calling  
It beckons and sighs  
Rekindles our spirits  
Like sparks in a fire

They came and they suffered  
It seems to say  
But I have been waiting  
To greet you today.

The prayers of those faithful  
Encompass my shores  
And call through the night  
To their God, and yours.

In their spirit of Commitment  
I implore, you to Come  
To take up the Challenge  
Of where they begun

Take up our Lords Cross  
That was their hearts, Desire.  
For miracles await  
That are ours to inspire

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to Fr. Walter McNamara, C.S.Sp., for the text and background to this poem. It was carefully copied from the original respecting the grammatical construction, including capitalization.

<sup>2</sup> In September 1845, five members of Fr. Libermann's Society of the Holy Heart of Mary set sail for Western Australia at the invitation of Bishop Brady of Perth to undertake the evangelization of the Aboriginal people. From the outset the mission was marked by tragedy and disaster. One of the group, Fr. Maurice Bouchet, died about two weeks after arrival and the others were victims of Bishop Brady's unstable personality and administrative ineptitude. Forced to live in appalling conditions with no resources, the two remaining members, Frs. Thiersé and Thévaux, finally abandoned the small mission of Sancta Maria on the edge of Lake Mollyalup and set sail in September 1848 to join their community in Mauritius. A more detailed account of the failure of the Australian venture can be found in Henry J. Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth, A General History of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh PA, 1983, pp. 195-199.