

SELECTED POETRY

BARBARA NICHOLSON*

Metamorphic Rocks

Bermagui, 30/03/09.

Aged and wrinkled
In their ochre dress
Pockmarked with honeycomb precision
These timeless rocks
Stand thunderously silent
Eternal symbol of tumultuous upheaval
In the age of Biamee.

And the grave of an un-named
But deeply loved
Child of the dreaming
Sits high on the bluff
Adorned with native flowers
And pearls from the sea
His spirit the silent sentinel
Eternally alert to all
Who approach
This sacred shore.

I'd stumbled by there on the Monday
Tuesday I gathered shells and flowers
Wednesday I returned
And silently laid those gifts
With love, for Biamee's child.
Ochred rock, ochred spirit
Transmuted for all eternity.

* Barbara Nicholson is an Aboriginal Wadi Wadi elder, poet, activist and scholar from Wollongong.

A Miscarriage OF Meaning.

Of the miscarriage that occurred to the meaning of democracy.

2001

1901 and the great Australian silence fell with deafening reality
over the brown earth.

A silence screaming out its permanency in mortar and sand
recording in Joycean confusion, tho' lacking his learning and wit,
that ineluctable modality he would ascribe to Bloom some years on.

What measure of law could flaunt its own origins so glibly?

I turn to the visionaries of ancient Hellene,

'speak Solon, Thucidydes, Socrates,

where in your wisdom did you set the precedent?'

I have searched tirelessly there for some rational explanation
trying to establish some noble element in their intent
but in all the Hellenes I found neither trace nor hint
of future obfuscations that would metamorphose
the very heart and soul of your legacy to the world.

Democracy! What sweet, sweet thoughts you dreamed.

And in another world a world away a different dreaming,
more ancient still than that of those thinkers of Hellene,
the Brown people lived in the perfect democracy.

A million campfires bore witness to their timeless enjoyment
of a system of law enriched by its soul

Can anything last forever? What happened?

Who were these pale strangers who took the ancient law
from the brown land and wrung the sacred life force from it?

What name could the Brown People give
to the synthesis imposed so brutally? Democracy?

No, no, no! try 'De...mock...eracy'.

Reconcile This

Wollongong, 2010

In for drunk and disorderly
Mulrunji died in prison on Palm Island
at the hands of those whose role of guardian
was so shamefully neglected.
Neglected because in judicial terms
the word guardian translates
to 'Duty of Care'
but in that powerhouse of white power
duty of care is ignored
the guardians are absolved
of responsibility to this philosophy
they beat him senseless, his precious body
battered, broken and left to
the reapers outrageous havok.

There was never going to be
an investigation, an explanation, a why.
Not until the family and community
gathered in heartbroken solidarity
to protest loudly and clearly
and tried to win some ground
and when it did come
the inquiry was into
the so-called 'Palm Island Riots'
not the death of Mulranji
no dollars for a Black Fella's beating.
No guilt on the part of the police
the police investigating themselves
would only ever have one result
and they seem to have got it.
But the business is not yet over
the blue-shirts have not yet won
justice will only be served
when the hurley-burley's done.

In for murder on ten counts
sentenced to a lifetime inside
the cocky and smug drug thug,
the self-styled
Al Capone of Melbourne
died in prison after a vicious beating
at the hands of another crazed inmate
and immediately three investigations are launched
respect is given to the family
millions of dollars are thrown at
the investigations
and all the resources authorities can muster
are made available to assist the inquiries
moreover, leading Melbourne barristers
jockey for pole-position to represent the family
it seems that even after a life
committed to a nether world where hideous
acts of violence, rape and murder
define the norms of everyday life
you can still command respect.
Gee, it must be a privilege to be white.