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Susan Ballyn

For Veronica Brady

The news of Veronica Brady's death, while not unexpected, was still a shock to everybody who knew her. I have written elsewhere about my adventures when travelling with Veronica, journeys packed with unexpected things. Our first meeting was and always will be one of the landmarks in my life.

When we were at a conference in Kuala Lumpur she told me that she had greatly enjoyed a poem I had written on the occasion of Anna Rutherford's death. She encouraged me to continue writing but I found that academic life and writing were just too much. Occasionally Veronica would ask me if I continued to write to which the reply was always the same, "Not really". Now, however, in honour of her memory I would like to share two pieces she did read, "The Wind and the Moon" and "South Atlantic Dispatch" and other poems.

During my one and only sabbatical I started a collection *Water Whispers* which was largely written in Byron Bay and Tasmania. It needs heavy editing and perhaps one day I will follow Veronica's advice and get it finished. In the meantime, I shall continue to miss a great friend and colleague.

The Wind and the Moon

All night
 The wind has buffeted
 The dark world outside my window,
 Whirling
 In the silent ears of cattle
 Haunched in monolithic stillness
 Under shifting skies.
 The spirits of elm-grove and oak-forest
 Muttering and moaning
 Before the rolling eye of the wind,
 Have eased great tap-roots
 Through memories born before time.

The wind has discarded their gift.

The moon climbed out of the sea
 Dragging pale souls behind
 To hang
 On the pointing finger of yew

Alone on the hill;
Twirled and twisted
Pale ghosts on a gibbet,
Wind-chased screaming
To that silent place
Of which only the moon knows something.
The wind and the moon strive on
In total disregard of me.

Shadow

This thing that haunts me
Is strange –
Evading all capture, all attempt at dominance.
Rarely assuming its recognized shape,
It is gross in deformity,
Creeping large behind, dissolving forwards –
But never really gone.
Defying analysis
Its mobility amazes,
Sectioning into jigsaw puzzle pieces,
Furtively lurking round corners,
Up walls, down drains,
Always one step ahead – or behind –
The reminder of an existence
I'd rather forget.
This impossible tyrant
Is my constant companion
Leaning wise-guy
Into the sun and moon,
Living on my life,
Dying with my death
Slipping into my tomb.

South Atlantic Dispatch

The waters are still,
closing over these strange intruders
dropping white – limbed, bald – eyed
into the terrible silence.
No neat philosophies for them,
only the ultimate reality

of a sudden tomb
for which there is no logic.
No mahogany – polished words
serve now the tumbled figures
settling slowly through the sea-bed dust,
startling a thousand alien eyes.

The waters are still again,
closing over present insanity,
future history. Ensuing silence echoing
what was, what could have been –
but never is.

No. 6 from *Water Whispers*

Nothing disturbs
The inverted
Landscape –
Except, perhaps,
The silent wailing
Welling up
Inside – like
A storm brewing,
Threatening but
Unable to unleash.
The upside down
State must
Be mine,
A mirror image
Is true to
My nature –
Reflecting back
What others
Wish to see.

Susan Ballyn is Professor Emerita, founder and director of the Australian Studies Centre (ASC) and co-editor of the journal *Coolabah* at Barcelona University. Her research focuses on Postcolonial Studies, English Renaissance Poetry, Australian and Pacific literature, Convict History of Australia, detective fiction and Ageing Studies.

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