

Cloak of Grand Design

To Linda Burney - first Aboriginal woman in the Federal House of Representatives.

Wrapped in a kangaroo skin cloak she stood
and silently declared her heritage,
gracious and proud of race and womanhood,
composed, resplendent, still – on centre stage.

Her close Wiradjuri sister ‘sang her in’,
clear voice resounding from the gallery –
a moving welcome from spiritual kin,
salute to Aboriginality.

Enfolded thus she gave her maiden speech,
unflustered, with both grace and dignity,
her totems close and handy, within reach –
goanna, cocky – strong community.

And as her words concluded – something new –
Ken Wyatt* crossed the house and they embraced;
“It’s going to be good to work with you.”
Amazing sentence in our hostile age
where – togetherness just isn’t quite the rage,
co-operation rarely makes front page.

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Glennis Henning – 23/10/16

- Ken Wyatt – an Aboriginal man of Noongar, Yamitji and Wongi heritage who represents the Liberal Party and crossed the chamber when her speech was done.