

POESIA

The celebrations for the centenary of the birth of the great Australian author **Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal tribe** (1920-1993) continue. In collaboration with the Italian publisher **Mimesis**, the **Italian Cultural Institute** is pleased to present the volume edited by **Margherita Zanoletti My People. La mia gente**, the first critical edition of Oodgeroo's largest and most widespread poetic anthology.

In **My People** (1970), now considered a "classic" of postcolonial literature, Oodgeroo's poetry recovers and rewrites the oral and cultural traditions of First Nations populations, while reclaiming the rights denied by Government policies. Oodgeroo is the first Aboriginal poet in history. Her literary career began in the mid-Sixties with the debut collection *We Are Going*, published with the Anglo-Saxon name Kath Walker and then merged into *My People*, here translated into Italian for the first time. This Mimesis volume includes, in addition to the original text and translation, an in-depth introduction, a glossary of terms relating to the Indigenous cultures of Australia and a text by the Waanyi writer Alexis Wright. The cover features a work dedicated to Oodgeroo, created in 2020 by the Wathaurong artist Carol McGregor.

The book presentation at the Italian Cultural Institute will involve the in-person participation of **Marika Duczynski** (Curator, Indigenous Heritage at the Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney) and **Monica Galassi** (Researcher at the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research/PhD student at the Faculty of Arts and Social Science, School of International Studies, University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and the online interventions of **Susan Petrilli** (Professor of Philosophy and Theory of Languages, University "Aldo Moro" of Bari and Visiting Research Fellow, University of Adelaide) and **Margherita Zanoletti**. An open discussion with the public moderated by **Alice Loda** (Lecturer in International Studies and Languages at the University of Technology Sydney) and **Valentina Gosetti** (Associate Professor at the University of New England) will follow.

Margherita Zanoletti is a graduate from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan and PhD in Translation Studies, The University of Sydney, with a special focus on word and image and intercultural studies. She first translated the writings of the Australian painter Brett Whiteley, poems by various First Nations authors and various texts by Oodgeroo into Italian, collaborating with Italian and international publishers. Among her books: *Oodgeroo Noonuccal, My People. La mia gente* (edited, Milan 2021); *Bruno Munari: The Lightness of Art* (co-edited with Pierpaolo Antonello and Matilde Nardelli, Oxford 2017); *Oodgeroo Noonuccal: with 'We are Going'* (with Francesca Di Blasio, Trento 2013).

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920–1993) was born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska in 1920, a descendant of the Noonuccal people of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island).

She was an author and political activist, most commonly lauded as the first Aboriginal poet to publish a collection of verse. Her writing, informed by the oral traditions of her ancestors and guided by her desire to capture that unique Aboriginal inflection using the English language, strove to share the nuances of the author's beloved culture with a wide audience.

During her lifetime she was, and continues to be, recognised as one of Australia's leading literary figures, who used her pen to give voice to the Indigenous struggle for rights and justice. In 1962, she was instrumental in advocating for citizenship rights for Indigenous people as Secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), work that gave rise to the 1967 referendum.

In recognition of a lifetime commitment to Indigenous peoples and her outstanding contributions to Australian literature Oodgeroo Noonuccal was awarded three honorary doctorates by Universities within Australia.



My People (La mia gente) by Oodgeroo Noonuccal

translated (and interpreted) by Margherita Zanoletti

**Istituto Italiano di Cultura
Level 4, 125 York Street**



From: Oodgeroo Noonuccal. 2021. My People. La mia gente. Ed. by Margherita Zanoletti.
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GOD'S ONE MISTAKE

(It repenteth me that I have made man. – Genesis, 6)

I who am ignorant and know so little,
So little of life and less of God,
This I do know
That happiness is intended and could be,
That all wild simple things have life fulfilled
Save man,
That all on earth have natural happiness
Save man.
Without books or schools, lore or philosophy
In my own heart I know
That hate is wrong,
Injustice evil.
Pain there must be and tears,
Sorrow and death, but not
Intolerance, unkindness, cruelty,
Unless men choose
The mean and base, which
Nature never made,
But we alone.
And sometimes I will think that God looks down
With loving smile, saying,
“Poor child, poor child, maybe I was wrong
In planning for you reason and free will
To fashion your own life in your own way.
For all the rest
I settled and appointed as for children
Their simple days, but you
I gave the Godlike gift to choose,
Who were not wise – for see how you have chosen,
Poor child, alone among them all now
Unhappy on the earth.”

EUCALIPTO MUNICIPALE

Eucalipto nella strada di città,
Duro bitume intorno ai tuoi piedi,
Staresti meglio
Nel mondo fresco di rigogliose sale di boscaglie
E richiami di uccelli.
Qui mi sembri
Come quel povero cavallo da tiro
Castrato, domato, una cosa violata,
Imbrigliato e sellato, il suo inferno prolungato,
Il capo chino e il passo spossato esprimono
La sua disperazione.
Eucalipto municipale, mi fa pena
Vederti così
Piantato nella tua erba nera di bitume –
O concittadino,
Cosa ci hanno fatto?

MUNICIPAL GUM

Gumtree in the city street,
Hard bitumen around your feet,
Rather you should be
In the cool world of leafy forest halls
And wild bird calls. Here you seem to me
Like that poor cart-horse
Castrated, broken, a thing wronged,
Strapped and buckled, its hell prolonged,
Whose hung head and listless mien express Its hopelessness.
Municipal gum, it is dolorous
To see you thus
Set in your black grass of bitumen —
O fellow citizen,
What have they done to us?

L'UNICO SBAGLIO DI DIO

(Mi pento di aver fatto l'uomo. – Genesi, 6)

Io che sono un'ignorante e so così poco,
Poco della vita e ancora meno di Dio,
Una cosa la so:
Che la felicità è prevista e possibile,
Che tutte le cose semplici e primitive hanno vita piena
Tranne l'uomo,
Che tutti sulla terra sono felici per natura
Tranne l'uomo.
Senza libri o scuole, tradizione o filosofia
Dentro il mio cuore so
Che l'odio è sbagliato,
L'ingiustizia è male.
Il dolore e le lacrime, la sofferenza e la morte
Sono inevitabili, ma non così
L'intolleranza, la cattiveria, la crudeltà,
A patto che gli uomini non scelgano
La volgarità e la meschinità, che non vengono dalla Natura
Ma unicamente da noi.
E a volte penserò a Dio che guarda giù
Con sorriso amorevole, e dice
“Povero figlio, povero figlio, forse ho sbagliato
A darti la ragione e il libero arbitrio
Per gestirti la tua vita a modo tuo.
Per tutto il resto
Come si fa coi bambini ho stabilito io
I loro giorni semplici, a te invece
Ho dato il dono Divino di scegliere,
A te che saggio non eri – e infatti guarda come hai scelto,
Povero figlio, tra tutti quanti il solo
Infelice sulla terra.”

THE PAST

Let no one say the past is dead.
The past is all about us and within.
Haunted by tribal memories, I know
This little now, this accidental present
Is not all of me, whose long making
Is so much of the past.

Tonight here in Suburbia as I sit
In easy chair before electric heater,
Warmed by the red glow, I fall into dream:
I am away
At the camp fire in the bush, among
My own people, sitting on the ground.
No walls about me,
The stars over me,
The tall surrounding trees that stir in the wind
Making their own music.
Soft cries of the night coming to us, there
Where we are one with old Nature's lives
Known and unknown,
In scenes where we belong but have now forsaken.
Deep chair and electric radiator
Are but since yesterday.
But a thousand camp fires in the forest
Are in my blood.
Let none tell me the past is wholly gone.
Now is so small a part of time, so small a part
Of all the race years that have moulded me.

IL PASSATO

Nessuno dica che il passato è morto.
Il passato è tutto intorno e dentro di noi.
Osessionata da memorie tribali, so che
Questo breve ora, questo presente incidentale
Non è tutto di me, che la mia lunga formazione
In gran parte appartiene al passato.

Stasera qui in Periferia mentre siedo
In poltrona davanti alla stufa elettrica,
Riscaldata dal suo rosso bagliore, precipito nel sogno:
Sono lontana
Accanto al fuoco nella boscaglia, tra
La mia gente, seduta per terra.
Niente muri intorno a me,
Le stelle sopra di me,
Intorno gli alberi alti si muovono
E suonano nel vento.
I tenui gridi della notte giungono a noi, là
Dove siamo una cosa sola con le creature della Natura
Conosciute e sconosciute,
In luoghi a cui apparteniamo ma che abbiamo abbandonato.
Poltrone e caloriferi elettrici
Esistono da ieri.
Ma mille migliaia di fuochi nella foresta
Sono nel mio sangue.
Nessuno venga a dirmi che il passato se n'è andato.
Questo adesso è solo un pezzetto di tempo, un pezzetto
Di tutti gli anni di lotta che mi hanno plasmata.