

***The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore. Volume One: 1887-1929.* Ed. Jennifer Strauss. St Lucia, Qld.: U of Queensland P, 2004, lxxviii + 741pp.**

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When Mary Gilmore died in 1962 at the age of ninety-seven, she left behind eight major collections of poems, a *Selected Verse* (1948), and a life-time of contributions to journals scattered through the nation's archives. Despite her prominent position in the literary world at that time, only a handful of her poems today are anthologised. The two volumes of Jenny Strauss's *Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore* will restore the entire corpus of her published poetry to public availability.

Strauss's edition has the stated intention of following R. D. Fitzgerald's argument for the *Selected Verse*, which he was instrumental in having published: to represent "the whole Mary Gilmore—lyrist, poet of enthusiasms, champion of neglected causes, crusader, pioneer, sympathetic human being, intense human personality." And these diverse facets do emerge though the poetry Strauss has brought together, particularly Gilmore's empathy for others' circumstances, forceful character, and tireless energy.

This volume begins with her first published poem in 1887 in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* and ends with a poem from the *Bulletin* in 1929; in between are the contents of *Marri'd and Other Verses* (1910), a handful of children's verses that make up *The Tale of Tiddley Winks* (1917), *The Passionate Heart* (1918), and *The Tilted Cart* (1925), as well as several very substantial sections of uncollected poems. Of the pieces known from anthologies, "Eve-Song," "Old Botany Bay" and "Marri'd" are present here, alongside a vast storehouse of interesting material, much of which deserves to be better known. There are many lyrics about love, babies and the natural world, particularly in the earlier pieces, and many other powerful poems such as "The Mother" and "After the Battle," and some fine ballads particularly in *The Tilted Cart*, including "The Brucedale Scandal," which Strauss rightly places in the best of the Australian ballad tradition. And, of course, the volume contains many poems that are of most interest to the cultural historian. As Strauss points out, the collection demonstrates, in part, the changing fashions of Australian poetry and literary taste: Gilmore's use of a blackface minstrel voice jars, and the use of Scots (and sometimes other) dialect is

at least dated. On the other hand, unlike many of those poets freelancing through the years covered by this volume, there is a striking absence of topical verse that feels as if it has been churned out for a deadline.

This first volume includes an excellent introduction that runs to almost 50 pages of scholarly literary biography, detailing Gilmore's long time labour activism and feminism, the importance of William Lane, John Farrell and A. G. Stephens on her life and work, her involvement in Lane's New Australia Association and its Colonia Cosme settlement in Paraguay, her editorship of the "Woman's Page" in the *Worker*, her Australian patriotism, and, particularly, the writing and reception of the poems.

As someone who devoted enormous energy to the causes in which she believed, Mary Gilmore would thoroughly approve of Jenny Strauss's efforts to produce this Academy Edition. The first volume finishes in 1929; the second will begin with the decade that Strauss says was to be "probably the highpoint, or high plateau, of Gilmore's writing life."

Philip Butters, University of Adelaide