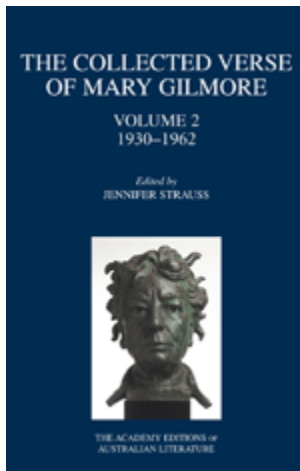


*The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore, Volume 2, 1930-1962* edited by Jennifer Strauss. Brisbane: The Academy Editions of Australian Literature, University of Queensland Press, 2007, pp. 832, AUD\$80.00 Paperback, ISBN 978 070223592 4.



Many readers will be familiar with William Dobell's dramatic and engaging 1957 portrait of Dame Mary Gilmore (1865–1962) which presents her as stately, alert, resolute and visionary. The painting, commissioned by the Australasian Book Society, proved controversial but the sitter liked it, commenting, 'The painting is far more important than the sitter. This painting will still be carrying my identity when my own work is forgotten.' Gilmore, who throughout her long life lived passionately for her idea and ideal of 'Australia', witnessing its rise as an independent nation and its transition to an industrial and urban society, is unlikely to be forgotten. Passionately committed and sometimes battling ill-health, she involved herself in the new nation's social and political development with

great energy and discernment.

Meticulously edited by Jennifer Strauss, Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the School of Literary, Visual and Performance Studies at Monash University, and a respected critic, literary historian and poet, Volume Two of Gilmore's Collected Verse contains all of her poetry published between 1930 and her death in 1962 in her collections, and in magazines and newspapers. Volume One of this two-volume edition of Gilmore's poetry covers the period from 1887 to 1929. As the General Editor's Foreword explains, the Academy Editions of Australian Literature is the first series of critical editions of major works of the nation's literature: 'The (Academy Editions) series provides reliable reading texts and contextual annotation based on rigorous scholarship and thorough textual collation' (p. vii).

Volume 2 comes with a very useful chronology, giving a sketch of Gilmore's life. She was born Mary Jean Cameron in 1865 into a poor, farming family in rural New South Wales. She started out as a pupil teacher at Wagga Wagga, then moved to Beaconsfield, later Silverton (near Broken Hill); then back to Sydney. She became a poet and political activist, and wrote for papers such as the *Worker* and the *Queenslander*. In 1890, she met Henry Lawson and J.F. Archibald, and in 1892, met up with William Lane another profound influence, later joining his journeys to Paraguay in search of a 'New Australia'. There in 1897, she met and married William Gilmore, a shearer and farm labourer from Victoria. They had a son and in 1902 returned to Australia. Gilmore continued her political activism, and was involved in setting up a focus on women's rights, along with lots of other political initiatives up until her death in 1962.

Like that other great Australian poet and political activist, Judith Wright's, Dame Mary Gilmore's name has become a household word. Like Wright too, early in her career, she became deeply aware of how much the Aboriginal people had suffered from the European invasion and the paradoxes behind this dispossession, especially the loss of their way of life, land and languages. Always outspoken in her writing, Mary Gilmore was for the underdog, the outsider. Her major themes revolved around marriage and motherhood, injustice, patriotism, concern for the environment and the fate of the

Aborigines. Volume Two, like Volume One before it, provides reliable texts of all her published poems as well as documenting the often revealing alternative readings when the poems were re-published for different audiences in journals, collections and anthologies.

Finally, the precise annotating, the extensive bibliography detailing individual works, anthologies and periodical publications, and the composition dates of the poems, all linked to the various indexes, mark these volumes as wide-ranging resources. In her very helpful introduction to Volume Two, Strauss points out how the ordering of the poems, and the detail generally is focused to assist literary, biographical and other interpretation. Gilmore lives in these poems and they give a striking and comprehensive picture of a great poet of radical politics, of bush ballads, of song, passion and domesticity. She was always alert to the paradoxes within human experience, as suggested by the following well-known poem, 'Nationality', written during the Second World War, 12 May 1942 (p. 626):

I have grown past hate and bitterness,  
I see the world as one;  
But though I can no longer hate,  
My son is still my son.

All men at God's round table sit,  
And all men must be fed;  
But this loaf in my hand,  
This loaf is my son's bread.

KATHERINE GALLAGHER  
London