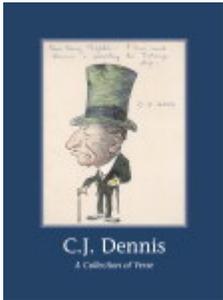


C. J. Dennis: A collection of verse by C. J. Dennis. Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2005, pp. 59, A\$24.95, paperback, ISBN 0 642 27618 8.



This lovely book is a useful introduction to the range of Dennis’s work. Collecting fifteen poems of the ‘larrikin poet’ C. J. Dennis (1876–1838), it includes seventeen of Hal Gye’s illustrations, including some not previously included in the editions of his works, and some photographs. It commences, almost inevitably, with the marching song ‘Austral—aise’, with its footnote ‘Where a dash (—) replaces a missing word, the adjective “blessed” may be interpolated ... However, any other word that suggests itself is suitable.’ One does not need a vivid imagination to think

of other words that the 1st AIF may have inserted in the chorus

Get a — move on,
Have some — sense
Learn the — art of
Self de — fence

There is at least one piece from each of *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*; *Doreen*; *The Moods of Ginger Mick*; *Digger Smith*; *The Glugs of Gosh*; *Jim of the Hills*; *A Book for Kids*; *Rose of Spadgers*; *Backblock Ballads and Other Verses*; *Backblock Ballads and Later Verses*; and *The Singing Garden*. The range of his work is thus represented, including the less popularly successful children’s verse and the satirical *Glugs of Gosh*.

Of course, with such a small selection, some favourites will almost certainly be missing. I missed ‘Triantiwontigongolope’ a favourite of our grandson; and ‘The play’, in which Dennis compares

The [dramer] writ by Shakespeare, years ago,
About a barmy goat called Romeo

to the pre-World War I ‘pushes’ in Melbourne’s lanes:

Wot’s in a name? Wot’s in a string of words?
They scraps in old Verona wiv the’r swords,
An’ never gives a bloke a stray dog’s chance,
An’ that’s Romance.
But when they deals it out wiv bricks an’ boots
In Little Lon., they’re low, degraded broots
Wot’s jist plain stoush wiv us, right ‘ere to-day
Is “valler” if yer far enough away.

Although editions of some of the titles are still in print, much of Dennis's work is not, and it is nearly twenty years since Alec Chisholm's *Selected Verse* of 1950 was reissued.

I hope that this small selection will stimulate an appetite to see more of the work of a rhymers who once enjoyed enormous popularity: it evokes a different feeling for the Australia of the early twentieth century than works of 'high culture' do.

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