Classic Poetry Series

Enid Derham

- 8 poems -

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Enid Derham (24 March 1882 – 13 November 1941)

Enid Derham was an Australian poet and academic.

Life

Derham was born in Hawthorn, Melbourne, Victoria, the eldest daughter of Thomas Plumley Derham, solicitor, and his wife Ellen Hyde, née Hodgson, of Melbourne. Derham was educated at Hessle College, Camberwell, then at Presbyterian Ladies' College and the University of Melbourne. She graduated M.A. with final honours in classics in 1903, and subsequently studied at Oxford University.

Derham lectured in English at the University of Western Australia in 1921 and was appointed senior lecturer in English at the University of Melbourne in 1922, and held this position for the rest of her life. She died suddenly of a brain haemorrhage at her home in 1941.

Writing

In 1912 she published The Mountain Road and Other Verses, and Empire: A Morality Play for Children. She also edited books of prose, poetry and drama. A posthumous selection of her best poems.

Melbourne University Press released a posthumous anthology of her best work called Poems in 1952 which established her reputation as a poet.

While her poetry was influenced by her classical studies, she was one of the earliest Australian writers to recognise the poetry of Emily Dickinson

Works:

The Mountain Road and Other Verses
Empire: A Morality Play for Children
Poems (Melbourne University Press)

A Ballade of Home

LET others prate of Greece and Rome,
  And towns where they may never be,
The muse should wander nearer home.
  My country is enough for me;
  Her wooded hills that watch the sea,
Her inland miles of springing corn,
  At Macedon or Barrakee—
I love the land where I was born.
On Juliet smile the autumn stars
  And windswept plains by Winchelsea,
In summer on their sandy bars
  Her rivers loiter languidly.
  Where singing waters fall and flee
The gullied ranges dip to Lorne
  With musk and gum and myrtle tree—
I love the land where I was born.

The wild things in her tangles move
  As blithe as fauns in Sicily,
Where Melbourne rises roof by roof
  The tall ships serve her at the quay,
  And hers the yoke of liberty
On stalwart shoulders lightly worn,
  Where thought and speech and prayer are free—
I love the land where I was born.

Princes and lords of high degree,
  Smile, and we fling you scorn for scorn,
In hope and faith and memory
  I love the land where I was born.

Enid Derham

Eternal Rest

When the impatient spirit leaves behind
The clogging hours and makes no dear delay
To drop this Nessus-shirt of night and day,
To cast the flesh that bound and could not bind
The heart untamable, the tireless mind,
In equal dissolution shall the clay
That once was seer or singer flee away--
It shall be fire and blown upon the wind.
Not us befits such change in radiance dressed,
Not us, O Earth, for whom thou biddest cease
Our grey endurance of the dark and cold.
These eyes have watched with grief, and now would rest;
Rest we desire, and on thy bosom's peace
The long slow change to unremembering mould.

Enid Derham

Farewell

I LEAVE the world to-morrow,—
 What news for Fairyland?
I'm tired of dust and sorrow
 And folk on every hand.

A moon more calm and splendid
 Moves there through deeper skies,
By maiden stars attended
 She peaces goddes-wise.

And there no wrath oppresses,
 And there no teardrops start,
There cool winds breathe caresses,
 That soothe the weary heart.

The wealth the mad world follows
 Turns ashes in the hand
Of him who sees the hollows
 And glades of Fairyland.

And pine boughs sigh no sorrow
 Where fairy rotas play,—
I leave the world to-morrow
 For ever and a day.

Enid Derham

O City, Look the Eastward Way

O CITY, look the Eastward way!
 Beyond thy roofs of shadowy red and grey
Floats like a lily on the airy stream,
Radiant and vast, a cloud,
Around whose billowy head
Splendour from out the glooming West is shed
As if it were not ever to take flight,—
And on its edge of gleam
In the clear blue of waning afternoon,
Faint as a spirit slipping from the shroud,
Faint, and yet gathering light,
The Moon.

O city, dream and pray!
This is thy evensong at close of day.

Enid Derham

The Awakening

The Soul, of late a lovely sleeping child,
Spreads sudden wings and stands in radiant guise,
Eyed like the morn and bent upon the skies;
Her the blue gulf dismays not, nor the wild
Horizons with the wrecks of thunder piled;
Storm has she known, and how its murmur dies
Starlike through stainless heavens she would rise
And be no more with cloudy dreams beguiled.
Was sleep not sweet?--sweet till on sleeping ears
Earth's voices broke in discord. Now she hears
Far, far away diviner music move;
Nor shall her wing be sated of its flight,
Nor shall her eyes be weary of the night,
While round her sweep the singing stars of Love.

Enid Derham

The Mountain Road

COMING down the mountain road
 Light of heart and all alone,
I caught from every rill that flowed
 A rapture of its own.

Heart and mind sang on together,
 Rhymes began to meet and run
In the windy mountain weather
 And the winter sun.

Clad in freshest light and sweet
 Far and far the city lay
With her suburbs at her feet
 Round the laughing bay.

Like an eagle lifted high
 Half the radiant world I scanned,
Till the deep unclouded sky
 Circled sea and land.

No more was thought a weary load,
 Older comforts stirred within,
Coming down the mountain road
 The earth and I were kin.

Enid Derham

The Suburbs

MILES and miles of quiet houses, every house a harbour,
Each for some unquiet soul a haven and a home,
Pleasant fires for winter nights, for sun the trellised arbour,
Earth the solid underfoot, and heaven for a dome.

Washed by storms of cleansing rain, and sweetened with affliction,
The hidden wells of Love are heard in one low-murmuring voice
That rises from this close-meshed life so like a benediction
That, listening to it, in my heart I almost dare rejoice.

Enid Derham

The Wind-Child

MY FOLK'S the wind-folk, it's there I belong,
I tread the earth below them, and the earth does me wrong,
Before my spirit knew itself, before this frame unfurled,
I was a little wandering breeze and blew about the world.
The winds of the morning that breathe against my cheek
Are kisses of comfort from a love too great to speak;
The whimpering airs that cry by night and never find their rest
Are sobbing to be taken in and soothed upon my breast.
The storm through the mountains, the tempest from the sea,
That ride their cloudy horses and take no thought of me,
They are my noble brothers that hasten to the fight,
They fill my heart with singing, they fill my eyes with light,
They're a shield upon my shoulder, a sword by my side,
A battle cry for weariness,—and a plume of pride.
But sometimes in the moonlight, when the moon is in the west,
Young and strange and virginal and dropping to her rest,
There comes a wind from out the south, a little chill and thin,
And draws me from the human warmth that houses it within.
My soul streams forth to follow a soul that lures it on,
The sleepy flesh calls kin to it, and murmurs to be gone;
Across the dreaming dewy flowers and through the shadowy trees
The sweet insistent whisper comes, and I am ill at ease.
How, they have not told me, and where, I do not know,
But the wind-folk is my folk, and some day I'll go.

Enid Derham