

Classic Poetry Series

Ethel Turner

- poems -

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Ethel Turner (24 January 1872 – 8 April 1958)

Ethel Turner was an Australian novelist and children's writer.

Biography

Ethel Turner was born in Doncaster, Yorkshire, England on 24th January, 1872. She migrated to Australia with her widowed mother, older sister Lilian and step sister, Jeannie in 1880.

Educated at Sydney Girls' High School, she and Lilian wrote stories and edited magazines - first the Iris and then the Parthenon. The Parthenon came out monthly and sold for sixpence a copy, generally selling about 1500 copies per month. Both sisters used pseudonyms to give the impression that the various sections of the magazine were written by a number of contributors, whilst in reality the two sisters did all the writing themselves. Being the younger sister, Ethel was left to do the children's page.

Ethel went on to write The Children's Page in the Illustrated Sydney News, which was later taken over by Town and Country Journal. She also contributed to the Bulletin and the English Windsor Magazine.

At the age of 22, Ethel Turner had Seven Little Australians accepted and published by Ward Lock. Interviewed by Life magazine ten years later she related 'How I wrote Seven Little Australians'. The sequel Family at Misrule was published in 1895; the next in the series Little Mother Meg in 1902 and Judy and Punch, the story of Judy's time away at boarding school, much later, in 1928.

Ethel Turners Publishers

Ward, Lock was Ethel Turner's main publisher. William Steele, Ward, Lock's Melbourne manager, wanted Seven Little Australians placed in the Lily Gift Book Series but Ethel Turner disliked both the appearance of the series and the idea of being part of an English series. Seven Little Australians instead appeared first in green or red covers with a gilt picture of Judy running across the cover. The covers were different for later editions, but Ward, Lock proceeded to use the same format for the covers of other Australian authors - Mary Grant Bruce, Lilian Turner and Lillian Pyke - thus creating an Australian series. This was also unacceptable to Ethel Turner. She offered four of her books to Hodder and Stoughton who published them in an illustrated edition, with four colour plates in each and a coloured overlay on the cloth covers. Fair Ines (1910), The Apple of Happiness (1911), The Secret of the Sea (1913) and Flower O' the Pine (1914) appear in the exhibition.

Adult Books

Ethel Turner did not want to be solely a writer of children's books, but her books written for adults were generally less successful. The first, *The Story of a Baby* (1895) was written soon after *Seven Little Australians*. *The Ungardeners* (1925) is another adult title. *Ports and Happy Havens* (1912) is a travel book. 'Child of the Children', displayed in the exhibition in both its original form as a story from *Windsor Magazine* and as an individual publication, appears to be the forerunner of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

War Books

Ethel Turner was wholeheartedly committed to Australia's participation in World War 1. Her war trilogy *The Cub* (1915), *Captain Cub* (1917) and *Brigid and the Cub* (1919) follow the adventures of John Calthrop and advance Ethel Turner's strong support of England and Empire, conscription and the need for Australian women to support the war effort. She emphasized the classlessness of Australian soldiers and looked forward to a more socially equitable Australia once the war was over.

Stories and Poems

Ethel Turner also wrote poems and short stories. *Gum Leaves* (1900), *Happy Hearts: a Picture Book for Boys and Girls* (1908) and *The Sunshine Family: a Book of Nonsense for Girls and Boys* (1923), co authored by her daughter Jean Curlewis are examples of these.

Ethel Turner died in 1958

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Works

Seven Little Australians (1894)
Family at Misrule (1895)
Story of a Baby (1895)
Little Larrikin (1896)
Miss Bobbie (1897)
Camp at Wandining (1898)
Gum Leaves (1900)
Three Little Maids (1900)
Wonder Child (1901)
Little Mother Meg (1902)
Betty & Co (1903)
Mothers Little Girl (1904)
White Roofed Tree (1905)
In the Mist of the Mountains (1906)
Walking to School (1907)
Stolen Voyage (1907)
Happy Hearts (1908)
That Girl (1908)
Birthday Book (1909)
Fugitives from Fortune (1909)
Fair Innes (1910)
Raft in the Bush (1910)

An Orge up to Date (1911)
Apple of Happiness (1911)
Fifteen & Fair (1911)
Ports & Happy Havens (1911)
Tiny House (1911)
Secret of the Sea (1913)
Flower O' the Pine (1914)

The Cub (1915)
John of Daunt (1916)
Captain Cub (1917)
St Tom & The Dragon (1918)
Brigid & the Cub (1919)
Laughing Water (1920)
King Anne (1921)
Jennifer J (1922)
Sunshine Family (1923) (with Jean Curlewis her daughter)
Nicola Silver (1924)
Ungardeners (1925)
Funny (1926)
Judy & Punch (1928)

'Oh, if that Rainbow up there!'

Oh, if that rainbow up there,
Spanning the sky past the hill,
Slenderly, tenderly fair
Shining with colours that thrill,
Oh, if that rainbow up there,
Just for a moment could reach
Through the wet slope of the air
Here where I stand on the beach!

Here where the waves wash the strand,
Swing itself lovingly low,
Let me catch fast with one hand,
Climb its frail rigging and go.
Climb its frail rigging and go?
Where is its haven of rest?
Out in the gleam and the glow
Of the blood-red waves of the West?

Or where the isles of the dawn
Lie on an amethyst sea,
Does it drift, pale and forlorn,
Ghost of the glory I see?
Is there, ah, is there a land
Such as the Icelanders say,
Or past the West's ruddy strand
Or on the edge of the day,

Some undiscovered clime
Seen through a cloud's sudden rift,
Where all the rainbows of Time
Slowly and silently drift?
Some happy port of a sea
Never a world's sail has made,
Where till the earth shadows flee
Never a rainbow may fade.

Oh, if that rainbow up there,
Just for a moment would reach,
Through the wet slope of the air
Here where I stand on the beach.
Here where the waves wash the strand
Swing itself lovingly low,
Let me catch fast with one hand,
Climb its frail rigging and go!

Ethel Turner

A Boat on the Sea

A BOAT on the sea, my boat,
Eager and frail!
Sweet skies, smile as you look
On that fairy sail.

Waves, great waves, many years
You have worked your will.
Just while she passes through,
Kind waves, be still.

Winds—and I may not ask
That you never blow,
But spare her the moaning note
That the old boats know.

Ethel Turner

A Christ-child Day in Australia

A COPPER concave of a sky
Hangs high above my head.
Vague thunder sullenly goes by
With dragging, muffled tread.

The hot air faints upon the grass,
And at its bitter breath,
Ten thousand trembling flower-souls pass,
With fragrant sighs, to death.

There comes no breeze. No breeze has sprung
And sweetly blown for days.
Dead air in silent sheets has hung,
Smooth wavering sheets of haze.

The very birds that erstwhile soared
Hide hushed in haunts of trees.
Nature no longer walks abroad,
But crouches on her knees.

Crouches and hides her withered face,
Above her barren breast,
And I forget her yester grace
And the clustering mouths she blessed.

'Tis in no alien land I sit,
Almost it is mine own.
Its fibres to my fibres knit,
Its bone into my bone.

These are no alien skies I know,
Yet something in my blood
Calls sharp for breath of ice and snow
Across the wide, salt flood.

Calls loud and will not be denied,
Cries, with imperious tears,
And mem'ries that have never died
Leap wildly o'er the years:

The thrill of England's winter days,
Of England's frost-sharp air,
The ice along her waterways,
Her snowfields stretching fair,

Her snowfields gleaming through the dark,
Her bird with breast aglow,
On the white land a crimson mark,
—Ah England, England's snow!

Fair as a queen, this far south land,
A wayward bride, half won,

Her dowry careless flung like sand,
Her royal flax unspun.

And if beneath her ardent glance
Her subjects faint and reel,
Does she but melt, stoop to entrance,
They kiss her hem and kneel.

And I—I kneel. For oft her hand
Has gently touched my hair.
Then with a throb I rise and stand,
—A Queen!—why should she spare!

Yet when the Christ-Child mem'ries steal,
Some ebb-tide swells to flood.
Ah, England—just once more to feel
Thy winter in my blood

Ethel Turner

A Trembling Star

"There is my little trembling star," she said.
I looked; once more
The tender sea had put the sun to bed,
And heaven's floor
Was grey.

And nowhere yet in all that young night sky
Was any star,
But one that hung above the sea. Not high,
Nor very far
Away.

"I watch it every night," she said, and crept
Within my arm.
"Soft little star, I wish the angels kept
It safe from harm
Always.

"I know it is afraid," she said; her eyes
Held a sweet tear.
"They send it all alone into the skies,
No big stars near,
To stay.

"They push it out before the sweet, kind moon
Lights up the sea.
They laugh because it fears the dark. `Soon, soon,
You'll braver be,'
They say.

"One night I climbed far up that high white tree
Beside the beach,
And tried to stretch my hand across the sea
And tried to reach
The grey.

"For something made me feel my heart would break
Unless that night
I in my hand my trembling star could take
And kiss its fright
Away.

"There only blew a strange wind chillily,
And clouds were swept.
The angels would not let my own star see
That someone wept.
I pray

"To Christ, who hears my little prayers each night,
That He will seek
Through all His skies for that sweet, frightened light,
And stoop His cheek

And say

"` My angels must not send so frail a thing
To light the West.
Lift up the little trembling star to cling
About my breast
Always."

Ethel Turner

Where does the Winter go?

There goes the Winter, sulkily slinking
Somewhere behind the trees on the hill.
He caught a vision of sweet Spring prinking
In green before her mirror---the rill.
And he turned away
With his face quite grey,
And he went without ever a glance behind him
But I want to know
Which way does he go,
And does anyone ever try to find him?
Is he caught to the sky in a burst of thunder
And tucked away in the clouds to sleep?
Or does he go down to the sea, I wonder,
And fling himself out where the waves roll deep?
Is he washed ashore
After tossings sore,
And found by some fisherman, pale and dying?
On some lonely beach
Beyond human reach
Still and stark is poor Winter lying?
Or climbs he up, with his grey head drooping,
Yon purple mountain that hides the sun,
And stooping and rising, rising and stooping,
Digs a grave where never was one?
And then lies down
In his grey, pale gown
A prayer on his lips, and his hands together?
"What tears will they shed
Because I am dead?
They will dance on my grave all the bright Spring weather."
Oh! Winter, Winter, my tears are falling,
Are you glad of the tears of a little child?
Though Spring is abroad and calling, calling,
I cling to the edge of your cloak so wild.
And I kiss your hand
And I understand,
And I smooth your poor grey head, low-lying,
Ah! I cannot sing
Just yet with the Spring
While Winter, Winter, is pale and dying.

Ethel Turner