

Classic Poetry Series

Dora Wilcox
- poems -

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Dora Wilcox(1873 - 1953)

Mary Theodora Joyce Wilcox poet and playwright, was born on 24 November 1873 at Christchurch, New Zealand, daughter of William Henry Wilcox, saddler, and his wife Mary Elizabeth, née Washbourne.

Educated privately and at Canterbury College, she contributed to the Bulletin and taught for several years at Armidale, New South Wales, before travelling to England where she published Verses from Maoriland (1905) and Rata and Mistletoe (1911). Dora Wilcox married Jean Paul Hamelius, professor of English at Liège University, Belgium, in London on 14 October 1909 and served with the Voluntary Aid Detachment in London in 1915-18.

After her marriage to Moore she devoted much time to helping him to research The Story of Australian Art. She published Seven Poems (1924) and in 1927 won the Sydney Morning Herald's prize for an ode commemorating the opening of the Commonwealth parliament. In 1931 she won a prize for a one-act play, The Raid, while another, The Fourposter, was included in Best Australian One-Act Plays. A contributor to Australian, English and European periodicals, Dora Wilcox also published Samuel Butler in Canterbury, New Zealand (1934), a lecture given to the Sydney branch of the English Association of which she was a patron.

She died, childless, in Sydney on 14 December 1953.

An Evening

TO break the stillness of the hour
There is no sound, no voice, no stir;
Only the croak of frogs,—the whirr
Of crickets hidden in leaf and flower.

The clear-cut outlines of a spire
Spring from a mass of eucalypt
Sharply against the sky,—still tipped
With one last gleam of lingering fire.

So solemnly the shadows creep;
On dovelike wings Night flutters down;
Lights twinkle in the little town;
The valley lies in quiet sleep.

So comes the dark, so fades the light,
On all those leagues of tossing sea
That lie between my home and me,
And glimmer to the stars all night.

And so, beloved, silently
In thine own land the shadows fall
On grassy lawn, and garden-wall,
On shining sand, and troubled sea,—

On paths thy feet shall never tread,—
On fields thine eyes shall never see,—
And on thy new home, strange to me,
That silent City of the Dead!

Yea, stillness rests, O Tried and True,
On hand and heart, on lips and eyes!
On thee eternal silence lies,
On thee is utter darkness too.

We lost too much in losing thee,
Yet we who knew and loved thee best,
Wish thee an everlasting rest,
Night came on thee so quietly.

Peace with the Shadows! Peace to all
Who work and weep, who pray and wait;
Till we and thou are one with Fate,
And on us too, the Night shall fall!

Dora Wilcox

Carolling: Ah! what English nightingale,
Heard in the stillness of a summer eve,
From out the shadow of historic elms,
Sings sweeter than our Bell-bird of the Bush?
And Spring is here: now the Veronica,
Our Koromiko, whitens on the cliff,
The honey-sweet Manuka buds, and bursts
In bloom, and the divine Convolvulus,
Most fair and frail of all our forest flowers,
Stars every covert, running riotous.
O quiet valley, opening to the East,
How far from this thy peacefulness am I!
Ah me, how far! and far this stream of Life
From thy clear creek fast falling to the sea!

Yet let me not lament that these things are
In that lov'd country I shall see no more;
All that has been is mine inviolate,
Lock'd in the secret book of memory.
And though I change, my valley knows no change.
And when I look on London's teeming streets,
On grim grey houses, and on leaden skies,
When speech seems but the babble of a crowd,
And music fails me, and my lamp of life
Burns low, and Art, my mistress, turns from me, --
Then do I pass beyond the Gate of Dreams
Into my kingdom, walking unconstrained
By ways familiar under Southern skies;
Nor unaccompanied; the dear dumb things
I lov'd once, have their immortality.
There too is all fulfilment of desire:
In this the valley of my Paradise
I find again lost ideals, dreams too fair
For lasting; there I meet once more mine own
Whom Death has stolen, or Life estranged from me, --
And thither, with the coming of the dark,
Thou comest, and the night is full of stars.

Dora Wilcox

Liebesweh

AH, my heart, the storm and sadness!
Wind that moans, uncomforted,
Requiem for Love that's dead'
 Love that's dead!
Leafless trees that sough and sigh,
Gloom of earth, and grey of sky,
Ah, my heart, what storm and sadness!

Ah, my heart, those sweet Septembers!
Ah, the glory and the glow
Of the Spring-tides long ago,
 Long ago!
Gleam of gold, and glint of green
On the grassy hillsides seen,
Ah, my heart, those sweet Septembers!

Ah, my heart, on sweet soft pinions,
Spring, the lov'd one, hovers nigh,
She shall settle by-and-by,
 By-and-by!
But the hills shall shine in vain,
Love, alas, comes not again,
Ah, my heart, on sweet soft pinions!

Dora Wilcox

The Call Of The Bush

Three roads there are that climb and wind
Amongst the hills, and leave behind
The patterned orchards, sloping down
To meet a little country town.

And of these roads I'll take the one
That tops the ridges, where the sun
Is tempered by the mountain-breeze
And dancing shadows of the trees.

The road is rough - but to my feet
Softer than is the city street;
And then the trees! - how beautiful
She-oak and gum - how fresh and cool!

No walls there are to hamper me;
Only in blue infinity
The distant mountain-ramparts rise
Beneath the broad arch of the skies.

And in that high place I shall hear
The wild birds' singing, soft and clear;
And horse-bells tinkling as of old
In amongst the wattles' gold

Far-off is the ocean tide;
But there across the country-side
Roll waves of bush that rise and fall
To break against the mountain-wall.

And every little farm is seen
An island in a sea of green;
And every little farm at night
Flings through the dark its beacon-light -

There in the silence of the hills,
I shall find peace that soothes and stills
The throbbing of the weary brain, -
For I am going home again.

Dora Wilcox

The Wattle Tree

Winter is not yet gone - but now
The birds are carolling from the bough.
And the mist has rolled away
Leaving more beautiful the day.
The sun is out - O come with me
To look upon the wattle tree!

Let misers hoard and hide their gold;
Here there is treasure-trove untold,
In yellow blossom, mass on mass
Spread out for wayfarers who pass
With hearts to feel, and eyes to see
How lovely is the wattle tree.

O strange, O magical! to forget
For a moment care and fret,
Whilst the next spirit, like a cup
Drained of delight, again fills up
And overflows with ecstasy
Before the miracle of the tree.

And rich and poor, who pause to bless
The shining tree in thankfulness,
Are bound in fellowship indeed.
What matter politics or creed,
Or class or colour? surely he
Loves mankind who loves a Tree!

Towards illimitable skies
From the earth the trees arise:
Givers of Joy, their gold and green
Against the blue of Heaven is seen.
A symbol of man's destiny
Is the blossoming the wattle tree.

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And the mist has rolled away
Leaving more beautiful the day.
The sun is out - O come with me
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