

Classic Poetry Series

Rolf Boldrewood
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Rolf Boldrewood(1826 - 1915)

Rolf Boldrewood (T. A. Browne) was one of the best-known novelists of nineteenth-century Australia. *Robbery Under Arms* brought him a national and an international audience. It became a household name, and has remained in print since 1889.

Boldrewood was the first novelist to create specifically Australian characters. He was one of the chief spokesmen for 'old' (pre-goldrush) Australia; for pastoral Australia; and above all, for conservative Australia.

Browne had three careers: as a pioneer squatter; civil servant and writer and epitomised the pioneer colonist who experiences sudden reversals of fortune. Research, shows that he was not merely the sunny, hopeful and genial man portrayed in earlier studies, but rather an impulsive, extravagant, at times thoughtless optimist, whose Micawber-like temperament enabled him to escape being crushed by his ill-judged decisions.

Browne used his own life and experiences as raw material for his novels, but his career was in many ways far grimmer than most of his fiction.

Perdita

She is beautiful yet, with her wondrous hair
And eyes that are stormy with fitful light,
The delicate hues of brow and cheek
Are unmarred all, rose-clear and bright;
That matchless frame yet holds at bay
The crouching bloodhounds, Remorse, Decay.

There is no fear in her great dark eyes --
No hope, no love, no care,
Stately and proud she looks around
With a fierce, defiant stare;
Wild words deform her reckless speech,
Her laugh has a sadness tears never reach.

Whom should she fear on earth? Can Fate
One direr torment lend
To her few little years of glitter and gloom
With the sad old story to end
When the spectres of Loneliness, Want and Pain
Shall arise one night with Death in their train?

I see in a vision a woman like her
Trip down an orchard slope,
With rosy prattlers that shout a name
In tones of rapture and hope;
While the yeoman, gazing at children and wife,
Thanks God for the pride and joy of his life.

Whose conscience is heavy with this dark guilt?
Who pays at the final day
For a wasted body, a murdered soul,
And how shall he answer, I say,
For her outlawed years, her early doom,
And despair -- despair -- beyond the tomb?

Rolf Boldrewood

The Bushman's Lullaby

Lift me down to the creek bank, Jack,
It must be fresher outside;
The long hot day is well nigh done;
It's a chance if I see another one;
I should like to look on the setting sun,
And the water, cool and wide.

We didn't think it would be like this
Last week, as we rode together;
True mates we've been in this far land
For many a year, since Devon's strand
We left for these wastes of sun-scorched sand
In the blessed English weather.

We left, when the leafy lanes were green
And the trees met overhead,
The rippling brooks ran clear and gay,
The air was sweet with the scent of hay,
How well I remember the very day
And the words my mother said!

We have toiled and striven, and fought it out
Under the hard blue sky,
Where the plains glowed red in tremulous light,
Where the haunting mirage mocked the sight
Of desperate men from morn till night,
And the streams had long been dry.

Where we dug for gold on the mountain side,
Where the ice-fed river ran;
In frost and blast, through fire and snow,
Where an Englishman could live and go,
We've followed our luck for weal or woe,
And never asked help from man.
And now it's over, it's hard to die
Ere the summer of life is o'er,
When the pulse is high and the limbs are stark,
Ere time has printed one warning mark,
To quit the light for the unknown dark,

And, home! to see home no more.

No more! no more! I that always vowed
That, whether or rich or poor,
Whatever the years might bring or change,
I would one day stand by the grey old grange,
And the children would gather, all shy and strange,
As I entered the well-known door.

You will go home to the old place, Jack;
Then tell my mother, for me,
That I thought of the words she used to say,
Her looks, her tones, as I dying lay,
That I prayed to God, as I used to pray
When I knelt beside her knee.

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By the lonely water they made their couch
And the southern night fast fled,
They heard the wildfowl splash and cry,
They heard the mourning reeds' low sigh.
Such was the Bushman's lullaby,—
With the dawn his soul was sped.

Rolf Boldrewood