



INTRODUCTION

WHEN Mary Gilmore, ardent socialist and Dame of the British Empire, died in 1962 at the age of ninety-seven, her standing as a public literary figure was one achieved by few Australian writers before or since. If forcefulness of character and the indefatigable prose with which she had championed the causes of social reform, Australian identity and Australian writing played a considerable part in that reputation, her poetry was nonetheless an essential component. Apart from numerous poems in journals, she had published eight major collections between 1910 and 1954, as well as a *Selected Verse* (1948), while critics of such contemporary importance as H. M. Green, Tom Inglis Moore and R. D. FitzGerald had placed her among Australian poets worthy of note. Yet although her life and its significance for the history of Australian radical movements, including feminism, have continued to draw attention,¹ her poetry by the end of the twentieth century had become generally known only through a smattering of anthology pieces such as ‘Eve-Song’ (E14 in the present edition), ‘Old Botany Bay’ (E68), ‘The Waradgery Tribe’ (K20), ‘The Tenancy’ (M75),



¹ See, for instance, Sylvia Lawson, *Mary Gilmore* (1966); W. H. Wilde, *Three Radicals* (1969) and *CG; Letters*; Sharyn Pearce, ‘Propagating the Word: Mary Gilmore and the Women’s Page’ and Jennifer Strauss, ‘Stubborn Singers of their Full Song: Mary Gilmore and Lesbia Harford’ in *The Time to Write: Australian Women Writers 1890–1930*, ed. Kay Ferres (1993); Strauss, ‘Australia After All? Mary Gilmore’s Relocation of the Visionary Just Community’ in *From a Distance: Australian Writers and Cultural Displacement*, ed. Wenche Ommundsen and Hazel Rowley (1996); and Anne Whitehead, *Paradise Misaid: In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay* (1997).





and 'Nationality' (R4)² or through the advocacy of performers such as Beverley Dunn. Dunn's 'To Botany Bay on a Bondi Tram', first presented in Melbourne in 1984, was seen not only in rural Australia and other state capitals such as Sydney and Perth, but also in the USA, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.³

There are reasons in Australian literary history why Gilmore's poetry was likely to be pushed into the background. During her own lifetime there were two waves of formidable contenders for critical recognition: R. D. FitzGerald and Kenneth Slessor in the 1930s; Judith Wright, A. D. Hope and James McAuley in the 1940s and 1950s. These were poets more amenable to the kind of critical assessment that ruled in the universities, those official custodians of literary reputation, at the time when Australian literature was beginning to establish something of an academic foothold. And following Gilmore's death, an impatient 'generation of '68' would elbow its way onto the poetic stage with a version of making it

² In a dozen post-1955 anthologies with a claim to represent Australian poetry generally, or as restricted to women's poetry or modern poetry, 31 different Gilmore poems appear, but the majority only once. Exceptions are 7 appearances for 'Nationality', 4 for 'The Tenancy' and 'Old Botany Bay', 3 for 'The Waradgery Tribe', and 2 for 'Eve-Song', 'The Myall in Prison', 'Dedicatory' and 'Nurse No Long Grief'. The staple choice of earlier anthologies, 'Marri'd', appears in only one of these more recent ones.

Gilmore has 9 poems in Wright; 2 in Thompson; 5 in James McAuley's *A Map of Australian Verse: The Twentieth Century* (1975); 2 in *Cross-Country* (2nd edn 1981), ed. John Barnes and Brian McFarlane; 6 in Rodney Hall's *Collins Book of Australian Poetry* (1981); 9 in *My Country: Australian Poetry and Short Stories Two Hundred Years*, ed. Leonie Kramer (1985); 7 in the *Penguin Book of Australian Women's Poetry*, ed. Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn (1986); 3 in Les Murray's *New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (1986); 3 in *Australian Poetry in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Robert Gray and Geoffrey Lehmann (1991); 6 in *The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse*, ed. Susan Lever (1995) and 4 in John Leonard's *Australian Verse: An Oxford Anthology* (1998). She is not represented in Harry Heseltine's *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* (1972); Mark O'Connor's *Two Centuries of Australian Poetry* (1988); *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry*, ed. John Tranter and Philip Mead (1995) or *The Oxford Book of Modern Australian Verse*, ed. Peter Porter (1996), but the last two exclude poets born before 1900.

³ The prose pieces of ODOW and MG's letters were the basis of Joan Murray's one-woman show 'When Butter Was Sixpence a Pound', first performed in Canberra in 1983.



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new that had little time for any of its predecessors' literary pieties.

Publishing has also played its pragmatic role: print runs of Australian poetry have always tended to be small and possessed of a brief shelf-life. Despite its prestigious status and its Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF) publishing grant, the 1948 edition of Gilmore's *Selected Verse* had a print run of only 750 copies and was sold out in less than a year. Neither the smaller selection of Gilmore's poetry published in the Angus & Robertson Australian Poets series in 1963 nor the 1969 enlarged edition of *Selected Verse* have been available except on library shelves for some time, despite the re-printing in 1979 of the latter under the title *The Passionate Heart and Other Verse*. As her biographer W. H. Wilde points out: '[w]hile her poetry remains largely unavailable to modern readers, the likelihood of a resurgence of interest in it is remote'.⁴ The present edition is intended to restore the entire corpus of Gilmore's published poetry to public availability. In doing so it will bring back into print several hundred journal poems which were never collected by Gilmore herself, and which may at first glance seem to confirm the critical commonplace that Gilmore was not only a prolific poet but an uneven one.

This is a persistent note in responses to her work. In 1903, just before her first major publication – the fourteen poems that appeared together with a biographical and critical notice on the Red Page of the *Bulletin* – Gilmore herself wrote to A. G. Stephens:

Mr. Woods writes me 'Had a letter from Mr. Stevens . . . He says you're splendid – but uneven, which is no news to you'.

I am not foolish enough to suppose you said splendid, but for the 'uneven' I am grateful, for I am looking to you for real hard criticism . . . As to these verses of mine, you might well say uneven, for you had the whole 'bilin', good, bad and indifferent. I don't know that any of them are worth much, except perhaps a few of the later ones, but on that point I am open to conviction.⁵

⁴ CG 11.

⁵ *Letters* 25. As Wilde notes, MG follows W. A. Woods's incorrect spelling of Stephens's surname for a considerable period of their correspondence.



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The anonymous review of *The Passionate Heart* in *The Times Literary Supplement* considered that

She is invariably at her weakest when she aims at the biggest effect, at her best in the careful record of small and particular experiences . . . In spite of the fatal facility of her writing there are many poems simple and reticent, which she has laboured by observance and craft to make perfect and absolute.⁶

A rather similar, if differently nuanced, opinion was expressed by Douglas Stewart in his review of *Selected Verse*: 'like Wordsworth and Walt Whitman, with whom, in her degree, she shares largeness of mind and staunchness of heart, Mary Gilmore has written a great deal of inferior poetry'.⁷ More concisely – and more pejoratively – W. H. Wilde, writing in 1988, declared that 'Here and there in *The Wild Swan* (as in all her poetry) one comes across the single poem that makes full and instant recompense for the mass of second-rate and trivial verse'.⁸

It must be said, however, that judgments as to what is 'trivial' or 'second-rate' do not always coincide even within the same era, let alone across boundaries of time, class or gender. A re-evaluation of Gilmore's work cannot be seriously undertaken except on the basis of knowledge of the full corpus. And from the point of view of literary history, poems without claim to intrinsic aesthetic value may nonetheless have a considerable interest for what they reveal of the thematic preoccupations or the stylistic practices of their period. Because Gilmore wrote over such an extended time, and because she had a very strong sense of writing for an audience, her work can be read as revealing many of the changing aspects of Australian poetry from the 1890s through to the middle of the twentieth century.

That the range of Gilmore's work was integral to its value was part of R. D. Fitzgerald's argument in favour of CLF support for the *Selected Verse* of 1948. What was needed, he argued, was a condensation

embracing every aspect, even to some extent the unevenness. Impressive though the cream alone would be (and not small in

⁶ *TLS*, 1 September 1921, p. 560; reprinted in *MP*, 3 March 1922, p. 22.

⁷ *Bn*, Red Page, 15 December 1948. ⁸ *CG* 272.



bulk) it would not represent or demonstrate the whole Mary Gilmore – lyricist, poet of enthusiasms, champion of neglected causes, crusader, pioneer, sympathetic human being, intense human personality – whose skilled craftsmanship in words has always been at the service of some case to be stated, where literary effect was only a means to an end; and the breadth of whose interests and the variety of whose subject-matters have been extraordinary. A selection which failed to give a very full indication of all this and, even curtailed, an impression of mass, of energetic productiveness over a long period, could not provide such an integration of her lifework and diversities as is required.⁹

The present edition takes as its *raison d'être* an expansion of FitzGerald's argument to justify not a mere selection, but the entirety of Mary Gilmore's work as poet.

A working life

Mary Gilmore was born Mary Jean Cameron on 16 August 1865 at the property of her maternal grandparents, near the township of Goulburn in New South Wales. These Beattie grandparents were Irish Wesleyans who had arrived in Australia from Ulster early in 1842. It was their fourth daughter, Australian-born Mary Ann, who in 1864 married Donald Cameron, also a fourth child but born in Scotland to the Presbyterian highlanders Hugh and Mary Cameron; they had arrived in Australia in 1839.

Her Celtic ancestry remained a matter of intense pride to Gilmore, who was convinced that it played a major part in her poetic sensibility. As late as 1930, poems in Scots (and, less frequently, Irish) idiom remained a part of her repertoire. In practice, she was aware of a tendency to elide the two, a point she defended thus in a Note to the unpublished sequence 'The De'il's Chapter':

If the critics fa' on the writer for no' writin' the Scots idiom as weel's indicatin' the accent, the reply is that it is no warse t' write indicated Scots than indicated Woolloomooloo; or (to go further afield) indicated Cockney or American . . . An' if an odd indication of the Irish should appear . . . Aweel, there was virtue before the Covenanters! an' the Gaelic gi'es poetry to

⁹ FitzGerald's letter of 7 January 1945 to the CLF Board is cited in *CG* 401.



the common tongue of Scotland and Ireland alike. In my case the Scots were aye the bonny lilters.¹⁰

To later ears, attuned to a more homogenised Australian accent, such excursions into Celtic may sound at best a quaint affectation, at worst ersatz Robbie Burns, even though two of Gilmore's enduringly popular poems, 'Marri'd' and 'The Brucedale Scandal' are in this mode. W. H. Wilde reminds us that the Celtic lilt was simply part of the childhood environment experienced by Mary Cameron as she listened to her grandfather Beattie reading from the Bible, or to her mother singing ballads such as 'The Bonnie Hills of Scotland' or 'The Irish Emigrant'. Home influences were reinforced during one of Mary's infrequent periods of formal education at the Wagga Wagga Public School in 1874. The headmaster was a Scot, as was the girls' mistress, Miss Galloway, from whom Mary's mother borrowed the novels of George MacDonald.¹¹ In her unpublished autobiographical work, 'My Childhood' (1955),¹² Gilmore tells how, when she herself read these, '[s]omehow I seemed to understand the broad Scottish words by instinct, or perhaps because Father explained them'. It is important to realize, however, that such 'dialect' poems were by no means exclusive to Gilmore. They can perhaps be best understood as a sub-category of early Australian folk poetry. Her adoption of this mode and of the bush ballad, and also her (less frequent) imitation of the Negro minstrel voice (e.g. B82), were doubtless influenced as much by contemporary literary tastes and practices as by personal circumstances.

The editing of *Selected Verse* smoothed out some of the original dialect forms of this earlier verse into more standard English spelling or diction. A similar desire to accommodate the poetry to the modernity of the late 1940s dictated the change of some

¹⁰ ML 4/5. For explanation of MS references see Appendix. For a more detailed description of 'The De'il's Chapter', see pp. xlix–l.

¹¹ A number of works by Scots poet and novelist George MacDonald (1824–1905) would have been available to MG by 1874, including his well-known children's books *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) and *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872).

¹² Five folders in ML MS 123, box 17 contain various sections and stages of this project.



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instances of the increasingly archaic forms ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ to ‘you’. In some instances, however, the resulting losses of poetic character and historical record were greater than any advantage gained.¹³

Mary was the oldest child of seven, four brothers and two sisters being born in the period between 1865 and 1878, although the last born, her second sister, survived for only about seven months. Donald Cameron was not well-off, and the family led a nomadic life as Mary’s adored father changed his employment from station manager to travelling carpenter and building contractor to selector. Her childhood was spent in a rural world barely out of pioneering days – a world which would become a major source of inspiration for her writing and mark indelibly her conceptions of Australian identity. That world continued to surround her when she left home, just before her thirteenth birthday, to begin a career under the tutelage of an uncle as a pupil teacher in a bush school. Poems such as ‘A Timid Child’ and ‘The Bush-born Child’ reflect painful memories of the isolation and attendant fears experienced in these early pupil-teacher years, but she also remembered them as allowing (at least at Wagga Wagga, to which she came in 1883) the satisfaction of a ‘voracious’ appetite for words. Twenty years later, she would tell W. A. Woods, editor of the Hobart *Clipper*, how, as a pupil teacher at Wagga Wagga,

I devoured Carlyle and Victor Hugo . . . I used to often read novels till midnight and then study till daylight. I *couldn’t help* reading – I read everything, Jack Harkaways, Proctor’s Astronom[ical] works, Jevons’s Logic, Family Herald, Gordon’s Poems, Kendall, The Koran, fragments of newspaper stories, even if only a few inches long – anything and everything I could get.¹⁴

A first brush with a different passion – that of labour activism – may have occurred when Mary was posted in September 1887 to a single-teacher school in the remote mining town of Silverton.

¹³ The editors of *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*, for instance, preferred the original text of ‘Marri’d’ to that of *SV*.

¹⁴ *Letters* 15–16. Cf. a letter to Stephen Murray-Smith in 1959: ‘My literary educators were my own people, The Bible, John Bunyan, Walter Scott, John Farrell, William Lane, J. F. Archibald, (The “Bulletin”) and A. G. Stephens (The “Bookfellow”)’ (*Letters* 353).



She would remain there until the end of 1889. After the boom period of the goldrushes, Australia was entering a time of economic difficulty with severe industrial unrest following the pitting of emergent labour organisations, notably those of the shearers, maritime workers and miners, against industrial and pastoral employers. Silverton miners were already feeling the pinch of the town's declining prosperity in the face of competition from the richly endowed nearby mines of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company, and a local branch of the newly formed Amalgamated Miners' Association of Australasia had been set up the year before Mary's arrival. It seems unlikely that she could have spent over two years in Silverton without developing an awareness of industrial issues, especially as she had already come into contact with discussion of these in 1886 during a holiday spent with her maternal aunt, Jane Lockett (Beattie), a teacher, novelist and feminist campaigner on labour issues.

There is, however, more evidence from the Silverton period of the budding writer than the incipient socialist. The earliest Verse Notebooks in the Mitchell Library's Gilmore Papers (MS 123) date from 1887, and from this period also come her earliest recorded published poems: 'After the Shipwreck' in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Gazette* (1887), and 'A Soliloquy' in the *Town and Country Journal* (1888). Nonetheless, when she achieved her ambition of a posting to Sydney in 1890, Mary gravitated towards the literary world of radical politics associated particularly with the *Bulletin*. It seems probable that her entrée into this milieu came less through her identity as a fledgling writer than through her mother's friendship with Louisa Lawson, a connection that had begun in professional association during 1888. This was the year that Louisa Lawson founded the feminist journal, the *Dawn*; it was also the year that Mary Ann Cameron moved to Sydney and established herself as an independent working journalist.

The circumstances of this, the effective end of her parents' marriage, are nowhere referred to by Gilmore; but from a distance one is struck by a certain similarity to her own later marital history. The extreme discretion of the separation, however, enabled mother and daughter to take up residence entirely respectably in Sydney, where Mary began teaching at Neutral Bay. Records suggest she



was a conscientious teacher, but much of her energy was spent elsewhere, on literature and politics. In terms of her immediate literary development, one major influence among the *Bulletin* circle was John Farrell. Farrell was a writer of left-wing satirical and narrative verse who had published his first major collection, *How He Died*, in 1887. His work may well have influenced the nature of Mary Cameron's adoption of the bush ballad, a form to which, as Mary Gilmore, she would pay her dues in *The Tilted Cart* (1925). In terms of her publishing history, however, the most important of these early contacts was A. G. Stephens, who would later, as editor of the *Bulletin* Red Page and the *Bookfellow*, ensure the publication of a number of her poems. It may have been through Stephens's involvement in 1891 in sub-editing the *Boomerang*, William Lane's radical Brisbane journal, that Mary first became interested in Lane's New Australia Association.¹⁵ We know that she was involved in this in 1891, although she did not actually meet Lane until he visited Sydney in 1892.

In 1910 Gilmore is quoted in the *Worker* as declaring 'My three educators were John Farrell, William Lane, and A. G. Stephens, and to have been moulded by these three is luck for which one could never be thankful enough.'¹⁶ In Gilmore's later construction of her life, however, another paramount influence of the early Sydney days is added in the person of Henry Lawson. According to her account in the unpublished manuscript 'Henry Lawson and me', it was Lawson who opened her eyes to the realities of urban poverty, while accepting her advice on literature and education and developing a sentimental attachment for her that was disrupted by his disapproving mother.¹⁷

The New Australia Movement and Colonia Cosme

If the full extent of Mary Cameron's emotional commitment to Henry Lawson remains in doubt, there can be little uncertainty

¹⁵ Farrell also was an enthusiastic supporter of Lane and a contributor to the *Boomerang* and the *Worker* (both Brisbane and NSW).

¹⁶ See biographical note to 'Australian Poems Selected by their Authors', *Wr*, 13 January 1910, p. 21.

¹⁷ ML Papers, vol. 45. For MG's relationship with Lawson and her retrospective account of it, see *CG* 59–75.



about her commitment to the ideas of the charismatic Utopian socialist, William Lane, who, in 1893, led a band of members of the New Australia Co-operative Settlement Association to establish a colony in Paraguay. Lane, an Englishman who had settled in Brisbane after arriving in Australia in 1885, became a major theoretician and spokesman for the union movement, first in 1887 as co-founder and editor of the weekly newspaper, the *Boomerang*, then from 1890 as editor of the Brisbane *Worker*. He used the *Worker* to support both the Maritime Strike of 1890 and the Queensland Shearers' Strike of 1891, the latter ending disastrously in the trial and imprisonment of twelve union leaders.

Mary Cameron, who had been active in the 1890 Labour Defence Committee organised by the Trades and Labour Council, shared the dismay of many union supporters at the failure of the 1890 and 1891 strikes. Her response, however, was not one of disillusionment, but of increased idealism, as she rallied to Lane's New Australia Settlement Association, with its avowed aim of setting up a co-operative commune to demonstrate to the world the principles by which Australian society ought to be regulated. In 1892 the Association's journal, *New Australia*, which aimed to engender support, funds and prospective settlers for the project, began publication at Wagga Wagga, where the *Hummer*, the newspaper of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union, had been established in 1891. In 1893 the *Hummer*, which had meanwhile become the New South Wales edition of the *Worker*, moved to Sydney. *New Australia* moved with it; and Mary, who had already been contributing articles and poems under the initials M.J.C., M.C., and M., became more involved in its production. This was a year of high activity, since in July the first settlers departed on the Association's ship, the *Royal Tar*. They were bound for Paraguay, where a government land grant had been negotiated with a country hungry for settlers.¹⁸

Whatever her personal inclinations may have been, Mary was not in that group of settlers. A policy decision excluded single women, and although there seems to have been a possible attachment, even an engagement, between Mary and one of the prospective settlers, David Stevenson, no marriage had taken

¹⁸ For the background to the choice of Paraguay as the settlement site, see Whitehead, *Paradise Mislaid*, pp. 142–7 and 162–79.



place.¹⁹ She remained in Sydney, teaching and continuing to work (as writer and for a period as acting editor) for the *New Australia*, giving special attention to the women's issues that had been one of Lane's interests.

It was not until November 1895 that Mary Cameron, summoned to teach the children of Lane's second settlement at Colonia Cosme, paid her own passage and set out alone for Paraguay, travelling by ship via New Zealand to Montevideo, and thence by paddle-steamer, train and on horseback. In the seven years before her return to Australia, she experienced the death of both parents, her father in 1896, her mother in 1899. In 1897, she married – not Stevenson, but the handsome, sturdy, but scantily educated William Gilmore, an ex-shearer and farm labourer. In 1898 their only child, William Dysart Gilmore, was born. A year later the Gilmores witnessed William Lane's departure from Cosme and, convinced that the Colony could not succeed and that the health of their child was threatened, they made their own plans to leave. The funds for their return to Australia had, however, to be found, and to this end Will Gilmore took employment on an *estancia* (station or ranch) in Patagonia, the distant southernmost province of Argentina.

Mary remained behind for nine unhappy, anxious months, initially in Cosme, and then in Villa Rica, the railway town where she had gone for Billy's birth. Finally, in November 1900, Will returned to escort them to Patagonia. Mary's employment as governess to the daughter of the Felton family, owners of the *estancia*, Killik Aike, ensured that she and Will were provided with a cottage near the main homestead. This arrangement ended, however, with Mary's removal to the township of Rio Gallegos in August 1901. The reasons for this further separation, unwanted according to Mary's surviving letters to Will, are not clear. Certainly Mary's later descriptions of her pupil are extremely unflattering, but it is unlikely that she would have allowed this dislike to override her desire to live as a family unit with Will and Billy.²⁰

¹⁹ MG's accounts of the degree of commitment between Stevenson and herself are reticent and low-key. Whitehead provides the most expansive version of their relationship: *ibid.*, pp. 32, 121, 209, 271–2, 279–94.

²⁰ Whitehead suggests that MG may have been resented for intervening in the welfare of employees such as the boy whose death is recounted in MG's



Whatever the reason, the move meant that Mary saw out the remainder of their Patagonian stay in Rio Gallegos, eking out their income by giving English lessons, which had the reciprocal benefit of improving her fluency in Spanish. Photographs of Rio Gallegos from 1900 suggest that it was very much a frontier town, but it was the climate rather than the society that Mary was referring to when she called it ‘wild Gallegos’ and commented that its hardy inhabitants considered it a remarkably fine day:

When the mud ain’t in your boots, and
The slush ain’t past your knees,
And the wind don’t cut your eyes, and
The cold don’t more than freeze.²¹

Nonetheless she always retained an interest in, and admiration for, Latin-American and Spanish culture, putting time and effort into translating Latin American poetry during 1910–20, and being a passionate defender of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War.

The failure of Cosme as a co-operative settlement had less effect on Gilmore’s political ideals than might have been expected. Her letters at the time, like her later journalistic accounts, show that she retained a firm belief in voluntary and co-operative sharing as the only basis of a just society, but was convinced that imposed theoretical models would not work. For the rest of her life as a

unpublished short story ‘We Called Him José’ (ibid., pp. 343–8). Concerning her abandonment of short story writing, MG wrote in 1924 to W. H. Ifould, principal librarian of the New South Wales Public Library: ‘While Lawson lived I kept off stories, with the exception of one called “Buenos Aires” published in the “Bulletin” over twenty years ago, and “Saunders of Patagonia” in “The Worker” a little later. My family did not like this one, and, being easily dashed, two others half finished were never touched again’ (ADFA G137 2/14).

²¹ The MS of ‘Puerto Gallegos’ in ML 4/1 is annotated in her hand ‘Written and published in “The Herald” Buenos Aires, September 1901, when we had icicles from our breath for six months of the year on our blankets’. The poem could not be found in the English-language daily *Buenos Aires Herald* despite an extensive search made in Argentina’s Biblioteca Nacional. The daily *Herald*, however, carries advertisements for a weekly version, where the poem may have appeared; but no copies of the weekly survive in either the Biblioteca Nacional or the archives of the *Buenos Aires Herald*. On the MS in ADFA G137 1/4, which was sent in 1955 to Inglis Moore, ‘Herald’ has been struck out and ‘Standard’ substituted, but this is also unidentified.



self-described ‘Labor woman’ and Australian patriot it would be issues rather than systems which commanded her allegiance. She had, moreover, a great belief in getting things moving and was temperamentally unsuited to Utopianism, since she liked and trusted change: in the poem of that name first published in the *Worker* in 1928 (132), complete stasis represents the ultimate nightmare. In retrospect she saw the failure of Cosme as partly due to its having contravened the ‘law of life [which] is movement’ (*Letters* 163). Nonetheless the changes made at Cosme to her personal circumstances were to generate considerable tension about her own role in life.

1902–1910: The re-emergent writer

Mary Cameron had by no means abandoned poetry for Paraguay. Apart from work published in the Cosme journals, she had left poems with the original editor of *New Australia*. This was W. W. Head, who had left Sydney in 1894 as a result of his involvement as treasurer in the debts of the New Australia Association. In 1895 he emerged in Tasmania as W. A. Woods, editor of the *Tasmanian Democrat*, then owner–editor of the Hobart *Clipper*.²² In these roles he published a number of the poems entrusted to him by Mary Cameron (who was a strong defender of his personal probity in the Association’s financial affairs). He also supplied copies to A. G. Stephens, who in 1899 put up an abortive proposal for their publication in a small booklet. Mary Gilmore, on the other hand, believed, at least for some time, that marriage and motherhood, which she took extremely seriously, entailed the abandonment of literary ambition. In an ironically prophetic letter to Will in 1899, she wrote:

People here say I mean to be a writer, and that is why I resigned. They know nothing about it. I wouldn’t be a writer in case I should let the love of it grow into my life and perhaps owe to it what I only want to owe to you – or that it might set up another aim or tie in which you would not be the centre. (*Letters* 9)

²² On the name change from Head to Woods, see Gavin Souter’s *A Peculiar People* (1968).



After the return to Australia in 1902, however, writing came in seductive pursuit to the remote and impoverished farm at Strathdownie (near Casterton) where the Gilmores had found a home with Will's parents. Its messenger was A. G. Stephens, offering the irresistible lure of a Red Page devoted to her poetry – enough to make Mary feel, when it appeared in October 1903, that she could 'go down on her knees for joy' (*Letters* 30). Even more potent in eroding resolutions to be exclusively housewifely was the persistent perception of her as a writer that informed the Stephens correspondence during the Casterton years.²³ And if her conscience needed soothing, there was the fact that the family's finances were so straitened, as Will struggled to support his family as an itinerant shearer and labourer, that a significant contribution was made by the modest fees earned by Mary's poems and the journalistic pieces that she had begun writing.

It even seemed that poetry might be profitable. In 1908 Bertram Stevens on her behalf had suggested publication of a collection of her poems to both Angus & Robertson and Lothian (see Appendix, p. 677). The former was not publishing poetry at the time and Lothian would have required Gilmore to meet all publishing costs, which was out of the question. In 1909, however, the Melbourne publisher George Robertson, urged on by Gilmore's new acquaintance Bernard O'Dowd, not only agreed to publish, but offered a contract remarkably generous for its time: printing at the firm's risk, a royalty of ten per cent on the first thousand copies sold (at a price of two shillings and sixpence) and fifteen per cent on all further copies (*Letters* 42). It was more common for publishers of poetry to require authors either to guarantee against loss or to bear the printing costs themselves, with the publishing house acting essentially as a distributor. Around 1950, Gilmore would tell Hugh McCrae: 'Did you know that my only two books of verse (till *Selected Verse*) that I did not have to pay for myself are *Marri'd* and *The Passionate Heart*?'²⁴ Given Robertson's terms,

²³ In 1914 MG wrote to Dowell O'Reilly that she believed it was her correspondence with Stephens that saved her from breaking down: 'he always said (when he wrote) the word that gave me strength' (*Letters* 52).

²⁴ The undated letter, in ADFA MS G137 1/2, must have been written after *SV* (1948) but before *FM* (1954), since the latter was also subsidised by the CLF.



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when *Marri'd and Other Verses* appeared in 1910, it must have seemed to offer hope of financial as well as critical reward. Some of the latter it certainly achieved, being favourably noticed, for instance, by Stephens in the *Bookfellow*, by the anonymous author of the 'Bookworm's Corner' in the *Freeman's Journal* (1 September 1910), and by both Norman Lilley (on 13 January 1910) and H. S. Taylor (on 15 June 1911) in the *Worker*. Perhaps of even greater importance in keeping the book in the public eye would be re-printings of individual poems such as the three in Bertram Stevens's *Golden Treasury of Australian Verse* (1912), 'The Green, Green Hill' in *Everylady's Journal* of June 1911, and 'Bereft' as late as November 1923 in the *Advocate*.²⁵ Attention was also attracted by musical settings such as G. H. Clutsam's 'Six Songs from the South' and Louis Lavater's setting of 'The Green, Green Hill', announced in the Music Section of the *Bookfellow*, 1 October 1912.²⁶

It was journalism, however, that first promised regular income. In 1907 the editor of the *Worker*, Hector Lamond, had agreed to Mary's proposal for a Women's Page, offering payment of £2 a week. The project was enough to justify having moved from the loneliness of the farm into the relative sociability of the township of Casterton,²⁷ but even more importantly it offered a way of reconciling Gilmore's hunger to write and her sense of duty: she would extend family obligations into public life. The education of Australia's women for socialism, she argued, would make Australia a better place for women and children – and hence ultimately for all mankind. The first Women's Page, in January 1908, was indicative of the future both in its proposals for a child endowment scheme and a Domestic Workers' Union and in its

²⁵ In 1926, M. P. Hansen and D. McLachlan ignored poems from *PH* when revising their anthology *An Austral Garden: An Anthology of Australian Verse*, retaining the four poems chosen in 1912 from *Marri'd*.

²⁶ Printed scores of these settings are held in NLA MS 727, series IV, which also holds 'Six Poems by Dame Mary Gilmore set to music by John Arcot', 'Yesternight' set by Marie E. Coulson-Blair and manuscript and printed scores of 'Australian Battle Cry' arranged by Evelyn Grieg.

²⁷ On the problems of MG's life in the period 1902–07, see *Letters* 24–6, W. H. Wilde, 'Mary Gilmore – The Hidden Years', *Meanjin*, 32 (1973), 425–31 and 'Dame Mary Gilmore's "descent into hell"', *National Times*, 6–11 May 1974, pp. 42–4.



attack on alcoholism. Until 1931 the Women's Page would offer a characteristic mixture of radical political comment and domestic cosiness, with household hints and the kind of recipes that were collected in the extremely popular *Worker Cook Book* (1914).²⁸ The Page's Poet's Corner also offered a site for publication and many of Gilmore's poems from the period 1910–30 appeared initially, sometimes exclusively, there.

To Sydney again, and a marital re-arrangement

Editing the Women's Page from Casterton proved not to be an entirely satisfying way of engaging with public or literary life. Gilmore hungered for the wider scope of Sydney, and opportunity came after the death of Will's father in 1911. It was decided that the farm should be leased, while Mary, with Billy, settled in Sydney, relying at least in part on her literary earnings, and Will joined his brother in North Queensland to establish a family property there. In the event he succeeded, first with 'Springbank', some 110 miles east of Cloncurry, then with 'Greenwood', a property closer to Cloncurry. The latter was a joint venture with Billy, who, with his mother's approval, left Sydney to join his father in 1914.

The marital separation, proposed as temporary, would be permanent. Gilmore never visited Queensland. She saw her husband, and later her son, only on their rare visits, recorded in letters to friends such as Nettie Palmer or Hugh McCrae.²⁹ It was clearly not a matter of financial necessity. The Queensland property had its usual share of rural vicissitudes, but there were enough funds to meet the occasional emergency in Gilmore's life (see below p. lix), and to ensure her some income after Will's death in 1945. Copies of the regular correspondence that she maintained with Will were destroyed by her before her death, so there is no way of knowing whether the issue was ever discussed by them, or whether there was simply a gradual implicit acceptance of the fact that there was no possibility of a shared life that could satisfy their divergent interests. Certain poems, notably 'Contractual' (E22), 'Eve-Song'

²⁸ On the Women's Page, see further Sharyn Pearce, 'Propagating the Word: Mary Gilmore and the Women's Page', in Ferres, *The Time to Write*, pp. 88–107.

²⁹ E.g. *Letters* 72, 108, 110, 150.



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(E14) or 'The Woman' (E41) from *The Passionate Heart* (1918) and 'In Life's Sad School' (M121) from *Battlefields* (1939), are often considered autobiographical in their depiction of the binding nature of a less than satisfactory marriage, while love poems such as 'Eternal Claim' (E56) or 'Patagonian' (E79) have tempted speculation about some 'other man' in the life of someone who declared herself always a 'one-man woman'.³⁰ While Gilmore could be sympathetic as a matter of general principle to women who 'fell' (whether through passion or economic necessity), her Protestant commitment to the idea of contract made her distinctly uneasy about women in irregular relationships involving adultery: witness her reactions towards Marie Pitt, Zora Cross and, at a much later date, Dorothy Hewett.³¹ Principles are, of course, no guarantee of corresponding practice; but the fact remains that no breath of any actual romantic affair touched Mary Gilmore in her long years in Sydney. The close friendships that she maintained with fellow literary figures such as Dowell O'Reilly or Hugh McCrae were always conducted with the utmost propriety.

Gilmore's sense of literary decorum would also seem to preclude unmediated revelation of personal passion. Speaking to her practice as a writer on the Red Page of the *Bulletin* (6 December 1902), she declared: 'In regard to the literary Woman directly using her own personal experience as copy, it is a matter entirely regulated by her sense of honor and her feeling of personal dignity. The things intimately one's own, and intimately one's self, are not for the public, as a rule.' It is a salutary corrective to reading her poems as autobiography rather than as studies in a particular genre to remember that 'Marri'd' (B1), often taken as celebrating Gilmore's newly achieved marital happiness, was written in 1896,³² a year

³⁰ Quoted in *CG* 337 (but unsourced); at pp. 205 and 336 Wilde discusses and dismisses the autobiographical issue in relation to the love poems of *PH* and *Bat*.

³¹ Hewett's vivid vignette of MG's unsympathetic reception of her as a budding writer is at p. 252 of her autobiography *Wild Card* (Ringwood, Vic.: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1990). The very different experience described by Ruth Park in *Fishing in the Styx* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books, 1993, especially pp. 185–7) is more in accord with the experiences recounted by Katharine Susannah Prichard, Eleanor Dark, Ernestine Hill, Dorothy Cottrell and Judith Wright in the Tributes written for the special Gilmore issue of *Ovld* (No. 4, 1955).

³² Two AMSS (ADFA G62 1/1 and NLA 727 3/3) carry an 1896 date. The



before her marriage, and published in both *Cosme Evening Notes* and *Cosme Monthly* under the generic title ‘The Housewife’. Gilmore did nothing to draw attention to this, indeed the change of title seems to invite an understanding of the poem as autobiographical. Much later, however, she can be found objecting to the appetite for autobiographical revelation as a denial of poetry’s creative function. In the unpublished, untitled ‘They will read what you have written’ (9 August 1943) she warns fellow poets against the prevalence of literal-minded readers who insistently ‘find you in a word/ made mantle for another’s grief’.³³

The War, the *Bookfellow* and *The Passionate Heart*

Attention to the grief of others was a consistent feature of Gilmore’s poetry, lending considerable justification to her claim: ‘There was no hunted one/ With whom I did not run’ (‘The Baying Hounds’, M40). And during the years that saw the preparation of her second collection, *The Passionate Heart* (1918), World War I provided more than enough of others’ grief. That event had been preceded, however, by a more local and mundane source of anxiety, the financial woes of one of Mary’s favourite literary journals, the *Bookfellow*.

The brainchild of A. G. Stephens, who wanted a forum that would provide space for serious literary discussion, reviews and creative writing, the journal had appeared briefly in 1899, been incorporated into the Red Page of the *Bulletin* during Stephens’s period as literary editor, then revived briefly in 1907 until Stephens went to New Zealand as leader-writer for the Wellington *Evening Post*. Back in Australia, Stephens re-instituted the *Bookfellow* as a monthly in 1911, but rapidly encountered financial difficulties. Gilmore admired Stephens deeply for his commitment to Australian literature; she was personally grateful for the way he had furthered her career by publishing her work in the *Bulletin* and in the 1899 and 1907 runs of the *Bookfellow*; and she may well also have identified the latter as somewhere that she could place poems of a more reflective and ambitious scope than those she was

annotation ‘Paraguay ’98’ on the TMS (Fryer 2/2996) appears to be an incorrect, retrospective dating.

³³ In NLA 727 2/5/3.



publishing in the Poets' Corner of the *Worker*. Many of the poems that mark the increased poetic maturity of *The Passionate Heart*, such as 'Life-Song' (E21), 'Life and Thought' (E51), and 'The Crater' (E53), would first appear in the *Bookfellow* between 1913 and 1915.

In 1913, when it looked as if the *Bookfellow* would go under, Gilmore intervened with financial help, borrowing money from her brother Hugh to become technical owner of the struggling enterprise, an arrangement that limped along for three years, creating a considerable drain on Mary's scanty resources and some tension over financial arrangements between the two principals involved.³⁴ Nonetheless their friendship survived the journal's closure in 1916. Gilmore testified to it in 'The Owing' (E12), and Stephens published her small pamphlet of children's verse, *The Tale of Tiddley Winks*, in 1917 and continued to publish her work when he managed to re-establish the *Bookfellow* between 1919 and 1925. There is no evidence that Gilmore attempted, during her period of financial involvement, to intervene in Stephens's editorial decision-making. That she had no guarantee of automatic publication is demonstrated by the annotation 'Sent *Bookfellow*' on the manuscripts of a number of unpublished poems from that period.³⁵

In 1916 there were more disturbing concerns than the closure of the *Bookfellow*: Australian society confronted the full reality of being at war. The tragic Gallipoli campaign had come and gone, and the first contingent of Australian troops was already fighting in France. The question arose of whether men should be conscripted into the armed forces. The Prime Minister, W. M. ('Billy') Hughes, favoured conscription but agreed to take the issue to a referendum. The campaign preceding the October vote that narrowly rejected conscription was a bitter one, both revealing and creating class and sectarian divisions. Gilmore was herself deeply divided. Her admiration for active courage predisposed her

³⁴ For details, see *CG* 177–81.

³⁵ The most frequent source of these annotations is in NLA 8766 10/8/12 and 10/8/13 where it occurs on the following: 'Let the swallow go' (8 February 1914), 'O moon set up against the sky' (23 March 1913), 'There was an oak tree in the street' (revised 4 December 1913), 'Strange are the ways of Love!' (22 January 1914), 'The air is cold' (22 January 1914) and 'To Sydney' (15 March 1914).



to hero-worship, while her nationalism predisposed her to envisage the ANZAC as the true modern warrior-hero, the inspiration of poems like 'Australia Marching On' (C38). Yet warrior-heroes left behind them women who must 'Suffer and Follow On' (C34)³⁶ or struggle against suspicions that the actual death of their sons and husbands might be no better than that of the dog lying dead in the street in Gilmore's most powerful anti-war poem 'The Mother'.³⁷ Moreover, socialism, to which Gilmore remained committed, saw the war as essentially driven by the interests of international capitalism, manipulating imperialist and religious sentiments for its own ends. 'After the Battle' (F25) is in this vein, as are some of the poems written in the 1930s, for example 'Battlefields' (M8) and 'To the War-Mongers' (M54).

In 1916, however, Gilmore wavered, opposing war in principle but giving unqualified support to the Australian soldiers conducting it. And in the case of conscription, she appeared to indicate ambivalence by taking sick leave from the Women's Page during the 1916 referendum campaign. In 1917, when Hughes unsuccessfully put the conscription question to a second referendum, Gilmore explicitly argued against conscription for overseas service, but accepted it for the defence of Australian territory. This halfway position, in conjunction with her stubbornly maintained personal admiration for Hughes, was unsatisfactory to the recently installed editor of the *Worker*, H. E. Boote, whose vigorous anti-conscription campaign had had considerable influence on the 1916 outcome. Indeed, the seeds of Gilmore's final rupture with the *Worker* in 1931 were sown during these conscription campaigns.

Meanwhile, in 1918, Gilmore was finalising the preparation of her second collection, *The Passionate Heart*, wrestling with a process of selection that eventually reduced an in-proof manuscript of about a hundred and forty poems to one of ninety-nine.³⁸ Not only had Angus & Robertson agreed to publish the book, but George Robertson (of Sydney) himself took a hand in its production,

³⁶ Respectively *Wr*, July 1915 and April 1915.

³⁷ *Bn*, April 1917. Omitted from *PH*, although present in the galley proofs, 'The Mother' was finally collected as 'War' (K61) in *UW* (1932).

³⁸ ML 4/8 has two specially bound copies of *PH* which include page proofs of the discarded poems.



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personally going through the proofs with Gilmore. The resulting volume did a great deal to enhance her poetic standing. It was much more widely reviewed than *Marri'd* had been, and its reviews were generally favourable, if not quite as ecstatic as Zora Cross's exclamation that '[Gilmore's] words are flames; her lines threads of living lightning'.³⁹ Both the *Murray Pioneer* of 3 March 1922 and the *Southern Morning Herald* (Goulburn) of September 1921 reprinted the more sedate but prestigious judgement of London's *Times Literary Supplement*:

Although life is to Mrs Gilmore a motive force often overpowering, she is artist enough to know that it needs direction, that health is not itself holiness, nor strength beauty, nor movement music . . . She seeks some principle which may give to a volatile impulse dignity, truth and consistency.⁴⁰

Of notices in major metropolitan newspapers, the most extensive was that of Bertram Stevens in the Melbourne *Herald* of 18 July 1919; but John Shaw Neilson, who had found in Gilmore a champion of his still largely unrecognised talent, reported rather indignantly that the Melbourne *Age* had offered merely 'a poor paltry notice'.⁴¹ And in the *Worker* of 9 January 1919, R. J. C[assidy] was only moderately enthusiastic towards the work of someone whom he saw, according to Gilmore herself, as having an insufficiently elevated idea of her own (and his) poetic calling. Years later she told Tom Inglis Moore: 'when editing the Woman's Page of "The Worker", again & again Rod Quinn and R. J. Cassidy berated me because I always spoke of myself as a verse-writer, saying it was "an insult to them" that I did so' (*Letters* 138).

The Passionate Heart opens with a group of seven war poems, all with a composition date of 1918. Of these only 'The Corn' (E4), published in the *Worker* on 28 February 1918, deals with the horrors of war. Of the other poems, previously unpublished, 'These Fellowing Men' (E1), 'Memorial' (E2) and 'The Measure' (E5)

³⁹ *LH* (March 1919), p. 13.

⁴⁰ *TLS*, 1 September 1921, p. 560. The comparisons made in this review with volumes by Roderick Quinn and Hugh McCrae were distinctly to MG's advantage. *MP* also ran a substantial and enthusiastic review (1 December 1923, p. 22) by its editor, H. S. Taylor.

⁴¹ Letter of 11 January 1919, ML Papers vol. 16.



are elegies combining celebration of soldierly courage with grief at the waste of young lives and recognition of the suffering of the women left behind.⁴² ‘Gallipoli’ (E3) and ‘The Satin of the Bee’ (E7) on the other hand suggest the healing power of nature to ‘clothe with fresh green grass’ the ‘battle-scarred’ plains of Gallipoli and France. Placed separately from these six poems is ‘Bugles in the Valley’ (E20), which honours Cosme’s menfolk for their patriotic readiness to enlist. Gilmore contemplated the latter as a ‘possible name for my next book’⁴³ but the title finally selected, in consultation with George Robertson, seems a more accurate reflection of the emotional energy with which Gilmore engages with each of her dominant themes: war, love, words, and – if to a lesser extent here than would be the case in *Battlefields* (1939) – social justice, including that dealt out to women.

The Tilted Cart (1925), and the Goulburn years

There is, however, one poem in *The Passionate Heart* that points towards her next collection, *The Tilted Cart: A Book of Recitations*. The jaunty ‘When Myall Creek Was New’ (E85), written in 1918, revisits the ‘bush ballad’ style of some of her earlier work in a deliberate attempt to evoke ‘a song of the long ago;/ The years that we know no more.’ The stylistic consistency of *The Tilted Cart* is not accidental, nor is it entirely to do with the fact that all its poems were written between 1919, the date of ‘The Roads that Led to Anzac’ (G28), and 1925, the date when the Worker Trustees published *The Tilted Cart*. For Gilmore was writing other, quite different, poems at the time. The twenty years after *The Passionate Heart* were extraordinarily productive ones, but rather than evincing a single-minded focusing and honing of her poetic talent, they show an attempt to harness the diversity of her poetry by organising it into discrete collections, each possessing its own thematic and formal logic.

Two of these attempts came to nothing. One, which reminds us of the international component of Gilmore’s reading, had begun

⁴² Part IV of ‘These Following Men’ was published in *Wr* on 18 April 1918, but the first six-line section of the same poem, along with ‘The Measure’, was rejected by *Bn*, according to MG’s annotations in NLA 8766 10/8/12.

⁴³ See annotation to MS in NLA 8766 10/8/12.



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as early as 1910 with 'Version' ('Here within the empty room', C10) and, although concentrated in the years 1913 to 1915, continued until as late as 1933. It consisted of a collection of some thirty translations, or versions, of Spanish poems – for the most part from Latin America rather than continental Spain. Her source for the Latin American poems was the anthology *El parnaso oriental: Antología de poetas Uruguayos* (1905), edited by Raoul Bustamante. Eight of these poems from the Spanish were published in the *Worker*, but the fact that she held virtually all of them back from her other collections, along with the fact that they are assembled in four typed booklets (three in the Mitchell Library and one in the National Library of Australia), seems to indicate that she had hopes for them as a distinct collection.⁴⁴ If this did not eventuate, the formal discipline of translating the sonnets which predominated in the Spanish originals may well have contributed to the increased command that she demonstrated over this form in *The Wild Swan* (1930) and *Under the Wilgas* (1932). The exercise also gave her, in 'From the Spanish' (written 1933, M104), one of the finest of those powerfully condensed short lyrics for which she is rightly respected.⁴⁵

The other failed enterprise was 'The De'il's Chapter'. This collection exists in three separate versions, the most substantial containing forty-one poems.⁴⁶ In 1956 Gilmore annotated the sole undated version: 'I haven't the least idea when, how or why I wrote this. It must have been dashed off in a week & then forgotten.' The two dated MSS, however, indicate a longer period, most of the composition being done in the first three months of 1920. The result is a kind of wild, partly satirical, partly eulogistic, phantasmagoria involving Heaven, Hell, the Devil, St Peter, George Robertson,

⁴⁴ Only in the autograph verse booklet of NLA 8766 10/8/12, which appears to be an early preparatory basis for *PH*, are these poems dispersed among other poems of the same period, given composition dates, and attributed to *El parnaso oriental*.

⁴⁵ See further Jennifer Strauss, 'Un-Australian Activities? Mary Gilmore's Translations from the Spanish', *Australian Literary Studies*, 18 (1997), 156–64, and 'A Note on Mary Gilmore's Uruguayan Anthology', *ibid.*, 19 (1999), 224–5.

⁴⁶ NLA 8766 10/7/5. The undated TMS in NLA 8766 10/7/6 is under the pseudonym Argyle McCallum. ML 4/5 holds a shorter, dated AMS version.



Henry Lawson, Billy Hughes and various other less celebrated literary and political figures. A Foreword excuses the poem's irreverence and defends its use of the Scots idiom (already quoted in part on p. xxxi above). The defence itself seems only to participate in the debilitatingly quaint archaism that afflicts the whole text and was presumably apparent even in the 1920s to Alexander Vidler, who politely refused her suggestion that he should publish the work under the pseudonym of Argyle MacCallum.⁴⁷

The poems of *The Tilted Cart*, on the other hand, if already somewhat old-fashioned, could certainly command an audience in 1925, although scrutiny of reviews of the book suggests a different audience from the one that had judged *The Passionate Heart* as placing Gilmore securely among Australia's best contemporary poets. Her loyal advocates, A. G. Stephens and H. S. Taylor, gave notice of the new book respectively in the *Bookfellow* (17 March 1926) and the *Murray Pioneer* (26 February 1926), but the more symptomatic reviews are those of 'Adolphe' in the *Graziers' Journal* of 4 March 1926 and Walter Greig in the *Railway Union Gazette* of 10 November 1926. When Gilmore, working in collaboration with R. D. FitzGerald, later chose poems for *Selected Verse*, those from *The Tilted Cart* were largely ignored, one exception being the lively 'The Brucedale Scandal' (G33), which can justly claim a place among the best of the Australian ballad tradition. Gilmore never abandoned the kind of material that dominated *The Tilted Cart*, but prose was to become her more common medium for pursuing the theme of 'the days of long ago'. She had already tried prose in the sketches and essays of *Hound of the Road* (1922), a precursor to the very popular *Old Days Old Ways* (1934).

Gilmore's productivity in the early 1920s is the more remarkable given her poor state of health. This was not a new phenomenon. Her biographical notes and letters include a constant chronicle of accidents and ill-health. Perhaps a clue to her longevity is in the account she gives in 'My Childhood' of the occasion when she was expected to die with a chest infection suspected to be tuberculosis. The Presbyterian minister was called in: 'Suddenly I realised that the prayers were about me, "This child so soon to appear before

⁴⁷ MG's letter of 24 July 1920 to Vidler: Fryer 2/2723.



There". When I realised this I was in such a rage that I could have hit somebody and do not recollect any more of the service. I wasn't going to die.⁴⁸ In 1920, however, it seemed as if Gilmore, hospitalised with blood pressure, heart and respiratory problems, might indeed be at risk of dying, as if there might have been an element of the prophetic when she had written in 1919: 'The hungry years took toll, took toll' (F40). For almost ten years she had coped with constant hard work, frequent financial anxiety and a nomadic existence in boarding-house rooms. Medical advice was that Sydney's humid climate exacerbated her respiratory problems, and so she moved inland, back to her childhood territory. Despite occasional returns to Sydney, her home from 1921 to 1925 was in Goulburn, either in St John of God's, a hospital run by a nursing order of Catholic nuns, or in the Hotel Imperial.

It is difficult to estimate exactly the effect of these years. In some ways, Gilmore's life went on as before, since she continued to edit the Women's Page, to throw herself into debate on public issues, including her campaign for Goulburn's war memorial, and to send out poems, both to established venues such as Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* and new ventures such as the Melbourne-based *Spinner*. When she returned to Sydney in 1925, it must have seemed as if the Goulburn years had had two main effects. In terms of her writing, *Hound of the Road* and *The Tilted Cart* suggested that revisiting the area of her childhood had re-kindled an unproblematic sense of affiliation to rural traditions. It had also apparently served to replenish her formidable energies, which she promptly applied to activities such as being Vice-President of the 1927 Authors' Week Committee and one of the foundation Vice-Presidents of the Fellowship of Australian Writers – established in 1928 at a meeting organised by Gilmore at Sydney's Lyceum Club, to which she had belonged since its establishment in 1914.

From *The Wild Swan* to *Under the Wilgas*: 1930–1932

The extent to which the Goulburn years had actually given new directions to Gilmore's poetry was probably not apparent until the production of no less than three new collections in as many years:

⁴⁸ This passage is taken from the copy of 'My Childhood' made by W. H. Wilde (ADFA G137 2/11).



The Wild Swan (1930), *The Rue Tree* (1931)⁴⁹ and *Under the Wilgas* (1932). The composition dates of the poems in all three overlap considerably, but her selective shaping of the volumes shows an intensification of the desire for coherence of effect already apparent in *The Passionate Heart*. The most surprising, even anomalous, was *The Rue Tree*, for it consists of poems not only explicitly religious, but distinctly churchly, and perceptibly Catholic. Certainly, despite an anti-clericalism consistent with her radicalism, Gilmore had not given public utterance to the kind of religious scepticism that surfaces in such early jottings as

God sits up in Heaven in such an isolation, caused by His very greatness, that all that we can do, would no more affect him than the troubles of an ant the Jungfrau . . . A man cannot love God any more than he can love his own soul, or any other thing not recognisable by the senses . . . The love of man is a greater factor of human happiness than the love of God.⁵⁰

As far as the poems of *Marri'd* or *The Passionate Heart* are concerned, such religious references as occur seem mainly emotive, and doctrinally unobjectionable to the Protestantism to which Gilmore remained affiliated, if somewhat eclectically, to the end of her life, having reached the comforting conclusion that 'true religion is not sectarian' (*Letters* 359). In 1910, however, she had written to A. G. Stephens concerning the reception given to *Marri'd* in her then home-town of Casterton. The minister, she says, looked through the newly-published book

in search of heresy; judging by the look on his face. But he is above the narrower aspects of creed . . . can open his heart to the symbolism of the Virgin mother; though he never said so . . . Funny thing how one continues to be haunted by a hope & a belief in religion when the evidence is all so much against it.⁵¹

The emphasis on Mary, Mother of God, is unusual for the strict

⁴⁹ The Bibliography in *CG* dates *RT* as 1930, in error: cf. 'the first proofs became available to Mary in May 1930 although the book itself was not publicly available until 1931' (p. 277). The publisher's imprint is 1931 and the earliest reviews date from August 1931.

⁵⁰ ML 3/VN/1.

⁵¹ Letter, 27 October 1910, inserted in one of the two Fryer copies of *MV*.



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Presbyterianism of Gilmore's origins. It is, however, consistent enough with the kind of womanliness that informs, and is admired in, her first collection.

Given this, it is not surprising that Gilmore, arriving in Goulburn ill and to some extent lonely in her personal life, should have responded strongly to the care she received from the order of nuns responsible for the running of St John of God's Hospital – so strongly that she contemplated conversion and apparently took instruction in the Catholic faith. If her account of the provenance of 'Only the Book of her Name for Trover' (J79) is correct, this response must have occurred within a few months of her arrival in Goulburn in March 1921. The poem, written in October, was published in the *Bookfellow* on 30 November 1921. Years later, when Gilmore was putting her papers in order, she noted on one copy of the poem: 'From "The Rue Tree" & written when I was trying to become a Catholic, because my friends, the nuns of the Convent of Mercy so much desired it. But the doctrine defeated me. Mary Gilmore 27.7.1953'.

The doctrine nevertheless nourished some of the poems of *The Rue Tree* and the whole experience opened up a new freedom in her relationship to religious experience of a general rather than a sectarian kind. Eventually she would accept quite readily the judgment of Colin Roderick and R. D. FitzGerald that there was a strong religious strain in her poetry.⁵² Meanwhile, Gilmore may have baulked at the final definitive act of conversion, but she had gained a new and sympathetic audience for her work. In May 1921 the *Catholic Press* published 'That Which Was Lost' (F85), and for years thereafter Gilmore was both published by and well-reviewed in the *Press* and in other Catholic journals such as the *Advocate* and the *Tribune*. This situation was affected by Gilmore's outspoken attacks on the Church's support for Franco in the Spanish Civil War and even more by Gilmore's refusal to join in the vilification of Communism in the Cold War years. Nothing, however, could shake Gilmore's admiration for the nuns of the Convent of Mercy, although it is distinctly ironic that her last public

⁵² Characteristically, MG credits both Roderick and FitzGerald with being the 'first' to bring her attention to it: see letters to Roderick on 3 July 1959 and to Mrs Smith on 5 September 1960 (*Letters* 350–1, 359–60).



assertion of this should be in one of the 'Arrows' (short paragraphs or occasionally a poem) that she began writing for the Communist *Tribune* as a protest against the attempts of the Menzies Government to outlaw the Communist Party in 1951 and to prevent the holding of the 1952 Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship.⁵³ One of her Arrows for 1 February 1957 states: 'How frequently I berate the churches, but I could never berate the nuns. Their work throughout the whole world speaks for them.'

At the time of its publication *The Rue Tree* was given an ecumenically favourable reception by those who admired its general spirituality, such as P. I. O'Leary in the *Advocate* (20 August 1931) and S[tanley] E[lliott] N[apier] in the *Sydney Mail* (19 August 1931). But the enthusiasm was less universal than that which had greeted *The Wild Swan*, and subsequent Australian history has served to maintain more interest in the themes and attitudes of the latter volume than in the kinds of religious experience represented in *The Rue Tree*. It is, for instance, the only major collection not specifically mentioned in the entry on Gilmore in the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (2nd edn, 1994).

The Wild Swan showed that Gilmore's affiliation to rural traditions, renewed in Goulburn, was not without ambivalence. Reactivated alongside affectionate memories of pioneer days were preoccupations that Gilmore attributed in the first instance to her father, namely an active concern for the environment and for the history and culture of Australia's indigenous inhabitants. In her publications during the first half of the 1930s these intertwined themes dominate Gilmore's work, whether in poetry or in the prose essays and sketches of *Old Days Old Ways* (1934) and *More Recollections* (1935). It is largely the Gilmore of this period, and perhaps also the later campaigner against nuclear warfare, who would be saluted as a mentor by the like-minded Judith Wright in 'To Mary Gilmore'.⁵⁴

⁵³ For MG's offer to write for *Trib*, see 'Biographical Notes' in *Mary Gilmore: A Tribute*, ed. Dymphna Cusack, T. Inglis Moore and Barrie Oviden (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1965), p. 47.

⁵⁴ Wright, *Collected Poems 1942-1985* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson/HarperCollins, 1994), p. 321.



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The Wild Swan is fraught with a sense of loss, and while few have quarrelled with the phrase ‘Never again’ in such elegiac laments for lost species of fauna as ‘A Song of Swans’ (I3), there have been objections to its use in a poem like ‘The Aborigines’ (I19), where it is conjoined with the repeated phrase ‘O, the lost tribes’. It can be argued that Gilmore thereby acceded to (even collaborated in) notions of the ‘dying race’ that had been present since the nineteenth century and that had the effect of evading representation of actual contemporary Aborigines, even possibly of disarming activism on their behalf.⁵⁵ What was, however, distinctive – and not always welcome – was Gilmore’s insistence on white Australia’s historical responsibility for a process that she would not accept as merely another manifestation of social Darwinism. ‘Their blood is black on our hands that nothing can purge’ is the line that precedes ‘O, the lost tribes!’ The most powerful poem of historical guilt in *The Wild Swan* is ‘The Hunter of the Black’ (I25), which describes a particular practitioner of the general process that she presents confrontationally as the opening paragraph of ‘The Aborigines in Our Literature’:

We talk of the terrible Spaniards and what the *conquistadores* did to the American Indians in the south, but we are silent as to what in modern and educated times we did in Tasmania and Australia. But a little comparison with the Spaniards would not hurt us, for it would perhaps remind us that after all that we are told he did in South America, there are still 10,000,000 Indians left in that continent; but of the natives of our own country there are only a handful, and these are left not by our mercy, but because they have escaped us by distance.⁵⁶

In this particular essay, however, she moves rapidly into the theme that she had taken up in ‘Literature: Our Lost Field’, published over five weeks (October–November 1927) in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. These articles extended into popular journalism

⁵⁵ Wilde, for instance, argues (CG 267–9) that Gilmore ‘chose to revert to an outdated, idealized, romanticized view of the Aboriginal’, and suggests that her interest in the Aborigines originated less with her memories of her father than with a reading of K. Langloh Parker’s *Australian Legendary Tales* (1896) and *More Australian Legendary Tales* (1898).

⁵⁶ ‘The Aborigines in our Literature’, repr. in *Mary Gilmore: A Tribute*, p. 123.



the challenge that anthropologists had already offered, namely that white Australians should realise that these so-called ‘savages’ actually possessed complex social structures, fully fledged law codes and a developed oral literature – in effect, a culture of their own. In arguing that a distinctively Australian literature should make use of both Aboriginal mythology and Aboriginal words, Gilmore was anticipating much of the thought of the Jindyworobak movement, which would come into being in Adelaide about 1938. And she was, like them, laying herself open to the charge that she was endorsing a practice that would, by the 1980s, be censured as cultural appropriation. Most literary critics of the 1940s and 1950s, however, simply berated the result as an aesthetically disastrous linguistic hybrid.

Under the Wilgas represents Gilmore’s most concerted attempt to introduce Aboriginal language into her poems; and this may partly account for the general sense that this is a weaker collection than *The Wild Swan*, where the Aboriginal poems are less cluttered with explanatory notes and glosses on words the authenticity of which is in any case doubtful. Certainly, however, the Aboriginal poems of *The Wild Swan* evoked positive contemporary responses: *Stead’s Review* was inspired to commission a series of articles on the theme ‘The Aborigine Passes’ and Gilmore was invited to participate, contributing the essay ‘The Legacy of the Years’. But it is probably also true that some of those who gave glowing tributes to *The Wild Swan* were paying less attention to the Aboriginal poems than to the nature poems or to the short, admirably concentrated lyrics of human experience such as ‘Never Admit the Pain’ (173) or ‘Nurse No Long Grief’ (187). Newspaper and journal reviewing was both extensive and enthusiastic, and Gilmore must have been pleased to find that she had again been reviewed favourably in the *Times Literary Supplement*.⁵⁷ Even more pleasurable perhaps were enthusiastic letters from friends of

⁵⁷ *TLS*, 11 December 1930, p. 1070. Australasian reviews of *WS* in 1930 included those in *Argus* (8 September), *Trib* (11 September), *Sydney Sun* (14 September), *NZT* (17 September), *SMH* (20 September), *Brisbane Courier* (20 September), *AWM* (23 September), *Brisbane Daily Mail* (27 September), *New Zealand Times* (4 October), *FJ* (16 October), *Catholic Leader* (23 October), *Des* (November) and *BPMag* (December). Reviews of *UW* in 1932 included *SMH* (20 August),



considerable standing in the literary world such as George Mackaness, Nettie Palmer and Hugh McCrae.

The 1930s: The making of a reputation and a living

H. S. Taylor had seen *The Passionate Heart* as placing Gilmore securely among Australia's notable poets; it seemed that *The Wild Swan* was convincing others of this. W. H. Wilde believes that poems like 'Never Admit the Pain' (173) motivated H. M. Green to declare in 1933 that 'Some of Mrs Gilmore's lyrics are among the best that this country has produced'.⁵⁸ Green's praise was not to be taken lightly, for his *An Outline of Australian Literature* (1930) had given notice of the arrival of a serious literary historian. His pronouncement came in the year that two of Gilmore's early mentors, A. G. Stephens and George Robertson (of Angus & Robertson), died. A generational change was taking place in the definers of Australia's literary establishment, and Gilmore was fortunate in finding supporters among the newcomers.

Notable among these were George Mackaness and Tom Inglis Moore. Mackaness, head of the Department of English at Sydney Teachers' College 1924–46, was active with Gilmore in the Fellowship of Australian Writers and a member of the Advisory Board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF), but with regard to Australian poetry he is best remembered for editing *The Wide Brown Land* (1934), which remained a popular general anthology of Australian poetry for some twenty years.⁵⁹ Gilmore had already been represented in Percival Serle's *An Australasian Anthology* in 1927: she had five poems in *The Wide Brown Land* and seven in its successor in 1946, *Poets of Australia*. That she had acquired standing not only as a poet but as a judge of poetry (and a networker) is indicated by Mackaness's seeking of her advice on the latter:

FJ (8 September), *Launceston Courier* (6 October), *Des* (November), *Australian Bookman* (26 November), *Christchurch Times* (1 October), *Bn* (31 August) and *Advocate* (25 August).

⁵⁸ Cited in CG273.

⁵⁹ The next major anthology, *A Book of Australian and New Zealand Verse* (1949), ed. Walter Murdoch and Alan Mulgan, was not well received, and Oxford University Press replaced it with Judith Wright's *A Book of Australian Verse* in 1956.



A & R have commissioned me to prepare for them a *new* and *modern* Anthology of Australian Verse. I want this time to be quite sure that no writer of assured or potential importance is forgotten. I know that many of the younger poets, particularly those whose work is still uncollected, are your own protégés or protégées. Can you help me to get in touch with any worth while, or, better still, can you tell me where I can see their verse. You know in what obscure places poetry appears, and one cannot keep track of more than a few magazines.⁶⁰

A more far-reaching role in fostering Gilmore's career was taken by Inglis Moore, reviewer and leader-writer of the *Sydney Morning Herald* 1934–40, a long-term member of the CLF Advisory Board, and in 1955 one of the founders, at Canberra University College (later, the Australian National University), of the first full-scale course in Australian literature. In a major survey article on Australian poetry, published in 1937 in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he gave judicious praise to Gilmore's work. In a further article of 15 August 1942 he wrote that despite the fact that she had written too much, '[h]er best work places Mary Gilmore squarely among the first dozen poets of Australia'. If she was disappointed to find that she was not one of those discussed in his *Six Australian Poets* of the same year she put a brave face on it in responding to an apparent objection from Hugh McCrae:

Re 'Tom's Six'??? Don't be absurd! I agree with him entirely. I think he did a great thing in that he rose above personal ties of friendship, & the pressures of friends who thought others should be included. He *did* get the best; or rather the highest. He took the diamonds set in gold, not the diamonds scattered through the ashpit.⁶¹

She had had less need to be philosophical when E. Morris Miller's seminal work *Australian Literature from its Beginnings to 1935* appeared in 1940. Writing jubilantly to McCrae of the way both

⁶⁰ Letter of 21 February 1940, ML Papers vol. 15. Of poets suggested by MG, only William Hart-Smith, Mary Fullerton ('E') and possibly Brian Vrepon are found in recent anthologies, Katharine Susannah Prichard and Ernestine Hill being known for their work in other fields.

⁶¹ Letter to Hugh McCrae, 19 November 1942, ADFA G62 1/2.



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were treated by Miller, she added: 'And he quoted you and what you said of me, & how my heart leapt up to be reminded of what you had so generously said.'⁶²

The decade 1930 to 1940, including as it does the 1939 publication of *Battlefields*, was probably the highpoint, or high plateau, of Gilmore's writing life, if not of her role as a public literary personality, which Wilde sees as picking up major impetus in 1933 when the Fellowship of Australian Writers celebrated her Life Membership with a birthday party that would become an annual event in Sydney's literary life.⁶³ Yet it was a decade that began with a major break with the past. In February 1931 Gilmore's long connection with the *Worker* was severed in a shabby manner when she was effectively manoeuvred into offering her resignation by a combination of factors: the revival of questions about her loyalty to socialist policy during the 1916–17 conscription debate, an attrition of the space made available for the Women's Page, and the final indignity of finding, by way of the pay clerk, that she had been summarily reduced by the management from the position of a staff worker to that of a mere 'contributor'.

In the event, leaving the *Worker* probably freed Gilmore not only for creative activity more rewarding than the journalistic slog of the Women's Page, but also for the development of the kind of public literary persona that would be recognised in 1937 when she was made a Dame of the British Empire 'for services to literature'. In immediate financial terms, however, the effect must have been alarming: even if the *Worker* salary had been small, it had been reliable. With the Depression biting severely in both urban and rural Australia, 1931 was not a good year to join the unemployed. From this time, until granted a pension by the CLF in 1945, Gilmore would have no regular source of income to cushion the uncertainties of freelancing. Poetry did bring in a certain amount. In terms of value for effort, fees for the individual poems that she was publishing during the thirties in outlets such as the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Sydney Morning Herald* were more rewarding than the royalties on poetry collections, which had in any case to be

⁶² Letter of 21 December 1940, ADFA G62 1/2.

⁶³ For the expansion of MG's literary activities and the recognition accorded her at this time, see CG 294–7.



offset against her obligation to cover the production costs.⁶⁴ Her prose collections and journalistic pieces provided better returns. Useful supplementation came from radio royalties and fees for appearances, for which she began to be much in demand, and Angus & Robertson offered her welcome employment during this period as a manuscript reader.⁶⁵ A major sustaining factor in the later years of her life was the CLF. This was not only through the grants given towards the publication of *Selected Verse* and *Fourteen Men*. In 1938 she received a year's Fellowship for the preparation of an autobiography. *Old Days Old Ways* and *More Recollections* may well have suggested that Gilmore had talent in this genre, but although she continued to assemble material for the project for many years, the only part to reach any degree of narrative coherence and completion is contained in the manuscript versions of 'My Childhood'. In 1943 a Commonwealth Literary Scholarship of £200 offered more than double the 1938 sum, and finally in 1945, in part through the intervention of the Prime Minister John Curtin, she was awarded a CLF pension at the maximum rate of three pounds a week – the equivalent of the maximum salary previously paid her by the *Worker*.

***Battlefields* (1939) and World War II**

Throughout 1938 Gilmore's major concern was with the fate of what she told A. H. Chisholm might well be her last book of verse (*Letters* 135). It is clear from MS 173 at State College of New York, Buffalo, that she had started assembling material much earlier for 'a new book to follow "Under the Wilgas"', but substantial changes, both additions and deletions, had been made by the time the manuscript of *Battlefields* reached Angus & Robertson late in 1937. In June 1939 she wrote to McCrae:

My poor book promised for Sep. 1938, Oct. Dec. Feb. 1939,
Easter is still God knows how far off yet. The tears of age are

⁶⁴ In the financial year 1942–43 the royalties from *Battlefields* were £16. 5s. as against fees from *AWW* of 10 guineas (£10. 10s.) for 'Singapore' and £10. 2s. 6d. for 'Edmondson VC', although these were exceptionally high fees for single poems.

⁶⁵ For one of her reports, see *Letters* 108–9. She was paid 10 guineas for the radio reading by the Australian Broadcasting Commission of *ODOW* (*Letters* 140).



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bitter, & I have wept them . . . In the grave one will forget . . . so that the heart break will not matter. But I can't imagine forgetting an unpublished book, even there. (*Letters* 165)

Battlefields finally appeared in August 1939, on the very day of the announcement of the signing of the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union. Public attention was engrossed by the imminent outbreak of World War II and thereafter by war news, so Gilmore's 'poor book' received less notice than might have been expected in more normal times. The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 26 August did, however, provide one major review entitled 'New Life for Poetry'. This drew attention to the fact that the title had wider implications than might be immediately understood, since the *Battlefields* referred to were not only those of war. Rather, Gilmore could be seen as championing the cause of all those embattled by poverty, oppression and misfortune, 'whether they be families on the dole, Aborigines, or victims of modern warfare and cataclysms of nature'. If the reviewer had added to this list those struggling with unhappy personal relationships, the identification of *Battlefields* as a collection that gathered together Gilmore's major themes of the past twenty years would have been more complete. The review rightly, however, suggests that, despite the presence of celebratory poems such as 'The Ringer' (M1), 'Ode to the Pioneer Women' (M3) or 'The Snipe' (M15), the emotional centre of the book is to be found in the opening lines of 'The Baying Hounds' (M40): 'There was no hunted one/ With whom I did not run'.

The operation of this instinctive sympathy could produce internal contradictions in Gilmore's work when it existed in unresolved conflict with avowed ideological positions (which are themselves, of course, by no means always free of internal contradictions). The area in which such contradictions are most problematic to contemporary readers is likely to be that of race. Gilmore was, like most members of the labour movement of her time, deeply committed to the White Australia policy and continued to defend it late in her life. At one level this must be understood as a politico-economic policy as much as a racist one. That is, it was an attempt by the Australian labour force to resist the importation of cheap labour, and it happened that the first



major conflict arose over the importation of South Sea islanders (kanakas) into the Queensland sugarcane fields. Gilmore's 1924 poem 'The Black Labor Advocate' (F150) shows that cheap coloured labour was felt to be a continuing threat to the Australian workingman's conditions. But in its tone, if nothing else, it also reflects another ideological basis, one by no means uncommon for its time: the doctrine of white (especially British) racial superiority and the eugenic theories that demanded the continuing 'purity' of the superior race. This was the basis of the prohibition on intermarriage with the local Guarani population imposed on all those joining the New Australia settlement in Paraguay. It remains the basis of Gilmore's 'The Brown Woman's Husband' (F89); of her disapproval of Prichard's *Coonardoo* for its depiction of miscegenation;⁶⁶ and of this reaction in 1920 to a speech

to the effect that we shd. unite with India for Defence. (Of the white man? Australia is no fool but she has a few knaves in power who may sell her. I have come to the conclusion that the Empire that goes "black" is as degenerate as the individual, man or woman, who mates black).⁶⁷

Yet this was the woman who would later write approvingly in 'My Childhood' that Wagga Wagga was a town where '[t]he most successful maternity nurse was a white woman with an aboriginal husband', and who, even in 1921, was about to embark on what

⁶⁶ In 1930, two years after she had told Nettie Palmer that the week's episode of the serialisation of *Coonardoo* was 'cold and dirty', she referred to the novel's 'sordidness' (*Letters* 76, 83). The so-called science of eugenics – founded, and the term coined, by Sir Francis Galton (1822–1911) – argued that mental, moral and physical weaknesses in offspring and the consequent failure in the proper evolution of mankind were the result of degenerate ancestry. Miscegenation was seen as one possible cause; parental depravity was another. In the late nineteenth century medical temperance writers inveighed against drunkenness in fathers on this basis: cf. the Academy Edition of Catherine Martin's novel *An Australian Girl* (1890), ed. Rosemary Campbell (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002), pp. xxix, 32. Although interested in the theories of heredity, MG's attitude was always tempered by compassion for the physically and mentally impaired (see E58, E59, E90, F39, F112, R35, R36 and *Dis*). And, with many of those who had entertained eugenic theories, she was repulsed when information emerged concerning their systematic application under the Nazi regime.

⁶⁷ Letter to Norman Hargreaves of 12 April 1920, ADFA G137 2/12.



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many saw as a pro-Aboriginal ‘crusade’ along lines epitomised in the letter she wrote to the Lord Mayor of Sydney when presenting a bark painting to the city: ‘when you have read that Legend of the picture I gave, what can you feel but wonder at this expression of the mind, the culture and the far-reach of intellect of a people so long despised and destroyed by us.’⁶⁸ This was also the woman who would mourn in ‘Japan’ (M25) for those killed in the typhoon of 1934; who would produce, in ‘Fourteen Men’ (R2), a powerful image of the horror of racial violence directed against the goldfields Chinese; and who would write in 1956 that Mena Abdullah’s poem ‘The Red Koran’ made her feel ‘that in the admixture of races Australia is about to produce an independent literature of her own, not one based on English or U.S.A. as shapers’ (*Letters* 324). In almost all the cases mentioned it is the status of the subject as victim (or in the case of Mena Abdullah as young and in need of championing) that elicits Gilmore’s sympathetic response. This is certainly the case with one of the most explicitly anti-racist poems in *Battlefields*, ‘The Jews’ (M9).

In the case of conflicting responses to war, two poems in *Battlefields* constitute a kind of concise compendium of Gilmore’s attitudes to what she had witnessed in 1914–18. The title-poem (M8) belongs with those earlier, mostly journal-published poems that attacked war as an institutionally sanctioned sacrifice of the innocent. Despite the difficulty of its Hardy-esque diction and gnarled syntax, the poem powerfully restates earlier themes of the fellowship of soldiers and the guilt of Church and State in its opening stanzas:

“Art lonely, lad, now the earth covers thee?”
Nay; them I fought talk friendly here with me.
“Hast thou no patriot grief? No sense of loss?”
Not now! ’Twas flags hung Christ again on Cross;

The patriotic flags fly nevertheless in ‘For Anzac (1939)’ (M6) with its image of the ‘man who bore the sun’ rising ‘Unconquered in his bright/ Ascending flame’;⁶⁹ and patriotism was to be the

⁶⁸ ADFA G137 1/10.

⁶⁹ The reference is to the badge with the insignia of the rising sun worn by Australian troops from the time of World War I.



dominant note of Gilmore's poetry during World War II. It was to earn her enormous popularity, especially for three poems published in the widely read *Australian Women's Weekly*: 'No Foe Shall Gather our Harvest' (R29), 'Edmondson VC' (O9) and 'Singapore' (R33).

The most historically interesting of these is 'Singapore', which exists in three versions, one written so rapidly upon the bare report that the supposedly impregnable fortress had fallen that Gilmore imagines a heroic resistance put up by Australian troops. The second, written after the truth of the fiasco of Singapore's surrender had become known, reflects the fierce revival of Australian distrust of the British High Command and British political interests which, smouldering ever since Gallipoli, had been re-ignited by the dispute between Churchill and Curtin over whether Australian troops should be withdrawn from the North African and Middle Eastern combat zones as a consequence of Japan's entry into the war. The *Weekly*, making a probably correct judgment that such an outspoken attack on imperial incompetence would not get past the censor, persuaded Gilmore to make the modifications that enabled the third version to be published. The present edition follows the text printed in *Fourteen Men*, where Gilmore restored some of the material changed at the behest of the *Weekly*; the *Weekly* version is recorded in the apparatus.

The most popular of the three poems, however, was undoubtedly the 1940 'No Foe Shall Gather our Harvest'. Here the British heritage, as transformed by Australian bush virtues, was proudly affirmed.⁷⁰ The poem's popularity was both immediate and long-lasting. The *Weekly* sold large numbers of it as a full-colour single-sheet reproduction in 1942, as well as inscribing the last four lines of stanza one on their 1941 Christmas card. In 1945 it was printed on the cover of *Conversazione*, the programme of the Centenary Celebration of the Australian Holy Catholic Guild of St Mary and St Joseph.⁷¹ On 21 January 1953 it appeared in a very different context in the Communist *Tribune*, which considered 'this fine poem' appropriate to an Australia Day when 'hungry Wall Street hands [are] reaching out for Australia's harvest of manpower,

⁷⁰ An early draft in her diary of 16 June 1940 revises the title from 'The Men from Riverina' to 'Song of the Cattlemen'.

⁷¹ A copy survives in ML 123, Miscellaneous, VIII/G/2.



uranium and other precious assets which must and shall remain Australian'. In the ten years after publication it was frequently read over radio, recited at concerts, and several times set to music.⁷²

The successful combination of patriotism and bush tradition in 'No Foe' may have shaped the choice of most of the poems in *Pro Patria Australia*, the pamphlet published by W. H. Honey in 1944. With the exception of the title-poem (P1), which had appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Christmas Day 1943, all the poems were reprintings from earlier collections; but this did not deter the purchasing public, who bought up the 5,000 print-run within weeks. Not so successful financially, but of more poetic interest than the fairly banal patriotism of the title-poem of *Pro Patria Australia*, was another pamphlet, *The Disinherited*, published by Robertson & Mullens in 1941. This sequence of 30 poems was based on the psychologically troubled Richard Talbot, whom Gilmore had tried unsuccessfully to help during his disastrous career as a soldier in the early years of the war. 'Her Lips are Pale' (B43) in *Marri'd* is the first of a number of poems interested in characters who by some twist of nature or nurture are excluded from entering vitally into life. Gilmore had already used the title 'The Disinherited' in *The Passionate Heart* to describe the outcast state of the physically deformed (E59). Now she returned to it (N1) in representing a character for whom 'The dice were loaded full and well/ The dreadful night that I was born'. Although Gilmore herself described it as 'a psychological study of pity for the parentally doomed', the sequence actually gains strength from the fact that nurture seems only part of the reason for the ultimately mysterious alienation of a man who 'died/ In a child's young years'.

The making of *Selected Verse* (1948)

One endorsement of *The Disinherited* came from R. D. FitzGerald, who had already been responsible for an important review of *Battlefields*.⁷³ FitzGerald's prize-winning poem 'Essay on Memory'

⁷² Wilde cites settings at the time by Peter Dawson and Elsa Marshall-Hall (CG 345) and ML holds settings by Phyllis Abbott (undated, in Papers vol. 43), Allan Richardson (1953) and Jennifer Mann (1956). Settings of poems are cited in their footnotes, but the listing is unlikely to be complete.

⁷³ In 'Three Australian Poets', *Australian Quarterly*, 11.4 (1939), 55-7.



had been published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 April 1938. On that same day, Gilmore despatched one of the effusive but remarkably generous outbursts of praise with which she characteristically responded to writing she admired (*Letters* 141). The ensuing correspondence led to one of the most important literary relationships of Gilmore's later years. FitzGerald would join Tom Inglis Moore in soliciting a CLF publishing grant for *Selected Verse* and in assisting Gilmore with the choice of poems. He would, if with some reluctance, write a Foreword to the volume. He would help keep her work in the public eye with a major critical assessment of it in 1960, 'Mary Gilmore: Poet and Great Australian'.⁷⁴ And in 1969, after Gilmore's death, he would edit her *Selected Verse*, expanded to include poems from *Fourteen Men* of 1954.

The making of *Selected Verse* began in 1944, when Gilmore formally approached the CLF for assistance. Considerable discussion followed, not only between Gilmore and the Board but also within the CLF Board and between the Board and FitzGerald, who was asked to act as a reader of the manuscript at the end of 1944. The terrier-like tenacity with which Gilmore pursued the project over the next three years may have been learned in her earlier experiences of publication, but it is also possible that it bore some relationship to the enormous loss that she suffered in 1945 when her husband's death was followed within a few months by that of her son. In some brief working notes made by her biographer with reference to 1945, the recording of Will's death is followed by the not unjustifiably exasperated comment 'Begins to get obsessed with putting down her main achievements'.⁷⁵ The two facts are not causally connected by Wilde, but it is understandable that Gilmore, once deprived of the roles of wife and mother that she had always seen as investing her with social as well as personal value, would now seek a compensatory aggrandisement of her role as writer and public figure.

The arrangement of *Selected Verse* certainly seems aimed at aligning her with the kind of contemporary mainstream poetry-writing defined in 1942 by Inglis Moore's select band of *Six*

⁷⁴ *Mjn*, 19 (1960), 341–56.

⁷⁵ The handwritten single page is among the Papers of W. H. Wilde, ADFA G170/1.



Australian Poets: McCrae, Shaw Neilson, O'Dowd, Baylebridge, Brennan, and FitzGerald. There is no representation of the more polemical and occasional poems published only in journals, and the few choices of early work from *Marri'd* (10 poems) and the folk poems of *The Tilted Cart* (8) are relegated to the end of the collection.⁷⁶ They are preceded by 16 poems from *The Rue Tree* and 12 parts of the sequence *The Disinherited*. The greater part of the volume, which contains 211 poems, is devoted, in order, to *The Passionate Heart* (32 poems), *The Wild Swan* (72), *Under the Wilgas* (26) and *Battlefields* (47). *The Rue Tree*, which Gilmore saw as something of a one-off among her books, is not in its chronological sequence, and is represented by only sixteen poems.

Critical reception after the appearance of *Selected Verse* in 1948 suggested that the strategy of selection succeeded. In *Southerly*, for instance, Tom Inglis Moore updated his earlier 1945 CLF lecture on Gilmore to include *Selected Verse*, concluding that it 'clinched her claim to be one of our major poets'.⁷⁷

Fourteen Men (1954) and 'Dame Mary's fabrications'

Selected Verse was not intended to be the final act of Gilmore's poetic career. Letters written in March 1948 to George Ferguson, Publishing Director of Angus & Robertson, and to FitzGerald, make it clear that Gilmore was still pursuing publication of the new collection which she had already offered unsuccessfully to Melbourne's Bread and Cheese Club before proposing it in 1942 to the CLF.⁷⁸ At that time the CLF advised that a selection of her already published verse would be preferable, and Gilmore proceeded to act accordingly. Nonetheless, as Inglis Moore indicates in the review-article cited

⁷⁶ The effect of this became odder in the revised edition of 1969, when the selection of 24 poems from *Fourteen Men* was simply added to the existing pagination of the first edition. The 1969 edition appeared again in 1979 under the title *The Passionate Heart and Other Poems*.

⁷⁷ Inglis Moore, 'Mary Gilmore', *Sy*, 10 (1949), p. 122.

⁷⁸ Negotiations with J. K. Moir of the Bread and Cheese Club for publication of an MS of poems and notes began in 1938, apparently at their suggestion (see *Letters* 147) but came to nothing. In 1944, writing to W. H. Malloch to thank him for her inclusion in the *Chronicles of the Club*, MG adds as a postscript: 'Can you tell me *why* Mr Moir did not have my book printed?' (ADFA G137 5/44).



above, poems as successful in their different ways as 'No Foe Shall Gather our Harvest' or 'Nationality' (R4) had been excluded from the *Selected* in order that they might appear 'in a projected volume of her recent verse'. Her resumed campaign for the volume that would become *Fourteen Men* began then in 1948, but it was only after several years of 'adding and amending as time and strength allowed' that Beatrice Davis, the influential Angus & Robertson editor, agreed, on the recommendation of Inglis Moore and R. G. Howarth,⁷⁹ to print a thousand copies on a guarantee against loss of seventy-five pounds. When *Fourteen Men* finally appeared in 1954 Gilmore was in her ninetieth year.

It is possible that members of the CLF Board felt a degree of relief when Gilmore's 'Inscription' (R1) declared that 'the work is done that I had to do', but the book was warmly and respectfully received by a public less intimately involved in its gestation. While it was awarded the Gold Medal of the Australian Literature Society as the best book of 1954, the judicious praise of A. D. Hope, by no means known for the charity of his reviews, may be in retrospect more impressive.⁸⁰ This is especially so because Hope's title, 'A Poet of To-day', stressed Gilmore's relevance to the present, as did Roland Robinson's 'A Living Poet'.⁸¹ The very assertiveness of those titles can be seen as consciously confronting a tendency by others to pay attention less to the quality of her poetry than to the poet's age and historical significance, as in the *Bulletin's* 'Eighty-Nine'.⁸²

History, however, harboured a time bomb with regard to the title-poem (R2), which describes a child's experience of witnessing the dangling corpses of fourteen Chinese killed during the Lambing Flat riots. If the poem stood alone, it would be possible to claim that the adoption of a child persona was an imaginative way of driving home the horror of what had certainly been an ugly event,

⁷⁹ Howarth, Reader in English at the University of Sydney, and editor of *Sy*, was a member of the CLF Board 1950–55.

⁸⁰ *SMH*, 13 November 1954. Other important reviews were by A. G. Mitchell in *Ovld* (Winter 1955) and Walter Murdoch in his regular radio broadcast for the Australian Broadcasting Commission in December 1954.

⁸¹ *Ovld* (Autumn 1955).

⁸² Anonymous review, *Bn*, Red Page, 8 September 1954.



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even if no official acknowledgment was ever made of actual lynchings. Unfortunately, Gilmore accompanied the poem with an authorial note categorically asserting it to be autobiographical fact. On 18 August 1955 a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* from a Stephen Hall of Balgowlah reminded readers that the Lambing Flat riots had occurred in 1861, four years before the birth of Mary Cameron.

The question of the extent to which Gilmore's copious reminiscences are rendered unreliable by what Wilde calls 'Dame Mary's fabrications' is a difficult one, as is the question of what relevance this has to the aesthetic quality of the poetry. Wilde's discussion of the issues enumerates other examples of 'historical inaccuracies, distortions and fantasies' and rehearses the very different approaches adopted by F. H. Mares in 1965 and Dorothy Green in 1981.⁸³ Green's analysis of the fabrications as springing from 'a sense of immense internal deprivation' is that of a literary biographer, influenced by psychoanalysis and feminism. Mares, on the other hand, reflects an earlier 'close-reading' school of criticism in concentrating on the effect of the poems as autonomous work of the imagination, in effect dismissing the significance of the notes. Wilde's own final, 'obvious' suggestion is one that interestingly pre-empts, in plain language, much of the justification of that 1990s phenomenon, the 'faction'. As 'a natural teller of tales', he says, 'she embroidered real facts with imaginative details to make them more dramatic, colourful and interesting – indeed, more like fiction'.

For an editor of Gilmore's poems, the notes, even if they can be left as an unresolved ethical or aesthetic problem, require a pragmatic resolution with regard to their placement. Gilmore early developed the habit of adding an explanatory note or other comment to journal-published poems, especially those in the *Worker*. These of course appeared with the poem, and were constrained by limitations of space. Her earlier collections, however, were without notes, except for *The Tilted Cart* (published by the *Worker* Trustees). That volume introduced the notes of biographical reminiscence or personal opinion that became a feature

⁸³ CG 437–42; F. H. Mares, 'Dame Mary Gilmore', *Sy*, 25 (1965), 234–45; Dorothy Green, "A deep gust for life", *Hemisphere*, 25 (1981), 216–19.



of collections from the publication of *Under the Wilgas* onwards. By *Fourteen Men* the five pages of notes in *Battlefields* had become sixteen, and individual notes were sometimes longer than the poem to which they were attached. Indeed Gilmore assured Tom Inglis Moore that the notes were ‘the main things’ in *Fourteen Men* (*Letters* 233). In the published collections the Notes are mostly relegated to the final pages (a standard practice of book design). But Gilmore clearly intended the notes to be read *with* the individual poems; so, in the present edition, they have been placed together, thus also preserving consistency with the journal-published poems.

Another of Gilmore’s practices that became intensified in the later work is that of putting together a number of short thematically associated poems to constitute a larger whole, a kind of composite poem, a quality indicated by titles such as ‘Vignettes’ (M76), ‘Aboriginal Themes’ (M62), ‘Verdicts’ (R61), or even ‘Fragments’ (R62). The practice is already visible in early work such as ‘Life’s Cry of Pain’ (B136) from *Marri’d* or in the loose groupings published in the *Bookfellow* under the heading ‘A Woman’s Thoughts’. One can argue pragmatically that the circumstances under which Gilmore wrote, with severe constraints on her time and energy, made it likely that she would be more able to complete short poems than long ones, but this does not account for her determination to construct something larger from at least some of these. For all her insistence on herself as one who wrote of ‘the small and simple’ (‘Los Heridos’, M55), it is difficult to believe that the young woman who had written ‘I am ambitious, and I know it’ in her Verse Notebook (1889–92) had been completely cured of a hankering for the largeness of scope that so attracted her, for instance, in her first encounter with the work of R. D. FitzGerald.⁸⁴ Gilmore did indeed attempt long poems, but few apart from ‘The Ringer’ achieved publication and one suspects that her struggles with such unpublished works as ‘The Nightingale’ may have convinced her that the critics were right in judging that her talents were not suited to the structuring of a

⁸⁴ Cf. her letter to FitzGerald of 9 May 1927: ‘May I who write little things in little words and in simple form, pay homage to the bigger thing in you?’ (*Letters* 69).



long discursive poem.⁸⁵ The composite poem, with its associative and lateral connections, offered a compromise. And it was by no means without its successes in work such as ‘These Fellowing Men’ (E1), ‘Life-Song’ (E21), ‘A Song of Swans’ (I3) and ‘Los Heridos’ (M55). Such poems do, however, present a bibliographer with a very tangled web, not so much in identifying separate publications of the component parts as in trying to disentangle the manuscript sources, since the parts appear in various combinations and versions before settling into their final grouping.

The last years: 1954–1962

*‘I shall go as my mother went/ The ink still wet on the page’*⁸⁶

As is clear from the closing pages of *Courage a Grace*, Gilmore did not undergo the dwindling into obscurity that often attends upon old age. While she clearly recognised that *Fourteen Men* would be her last major book, she derived a great deal of pleasure from the preparation of *Verse for Children*, a small book of twelve poems, most of them reprinted from the *Bookfellow* or the *Worker*. Published by the Writers’ Press in 1955, it was illustrated with line drawings by Celeste Mass. And throughout her remaining years she continued to publish, if sporadically, in old friends such as the *Bulletin* and *Meanjin* as well as in the newly founded left-wing journal *Overland*, which delighted her by publishing a special issue in 1955 to honour her ninetieth birthday.

Acknowledgements of her place as a public figure continued to come, however, not only from the political left but from a wide spectrum of cultural opinion: the woman chosen to preside as Queen of the May over the unions’ celebrations of May Day could also enjoy public expressions of admiration from the Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, or Cardinal Gilroy. Her contemporaries may have seen it as no more than one last characteristic contradiction that on 5 December 1962, the day before she was to

⁸⁵ From May 1919 until 1920, MG worked on a poem of about 70 to 80 lines, variously titled ‘The Nightingale’, ‘The Nightingale and the Dreamer’ and ‘Threnody’ (multiple manuscripts NLA 727 (series 1 and 2), NLA 8766 and Buf 173).

⁸⁶ ‘The Tenancy’ (M75).



be accorded the pomp and circumstance of a State funeral, her final published words should appear in the *Tribune* and that they should declare: 'When I am gone I ask/ No mighty ones to follow me'.

There is perhaps a more poignant contrast offered in her Verse Notebook 1958–62. Throughout a long life Gilmore had acted on the principle of vital engagement with life that she enunciated in such poems as 'Contest I Ask' (M90).⁸⁷ The last entry in this last Verse Notebook shows her turning her face in another direction:

When in the house the last noises
Of night have ceased
There is only a sea where sleep
Can come in without knocking
Or opening doors.
And peace comes too
With his hand in the hand of sleep.

It is dated 6 January 1962; although she would not die until December 2 of that year, the many pages that follow are blank.

Editorial rationale and arrangement of poems

The present edition of all of the identified, published poems by Mary Gilmore is based on an extensive bibliographic survey of all likely printed sources – in volume, magazine and newspaper forms. Initial guidance on where to search came from a preliminary, detailed examination of the extensive collections of Gilmore manuscripts in Australian and American libraries, as detailed in the Appendix. An edition of the unpublished poems represented in those collections, while potentially justifiable (if also daunting) would be another, separate enterprise. Perhaps as many as 3,000 unpublished poems and fragments are extant in manuscript form. In many cases they are unworked poetic jottings, although some bear evidence of having been sent out for publication but rejected. Gilmore was staggeringly prolific of ideas for poems: on the

⁸⁷ Hence her affinity to Vitalism, which in Australia is sometimes traced back to Bernard O'Dowd (see B57), but is particularly associated with Norman Lindsay (see K36) and those who wrote for his short-lived but highly influential journal, *Vision* (1923–24). It espoused the anti-authoritarianism of Rabelais, the (supposed) amorality of classical Greek art and the philosophy of the life force propounded by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). The last has most relevance to MG.



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evidence of composition dates, she would sometimes begin as many as four poems on a single day, but not all of these would be brought to a state where they were ready for submission to editors. There is some work of interest in the unpublished material, but it is rarely of high or distinctive quality. In any case, the present edition of the published poems – nearly 1,350 of them – affords access to the full range of Gilmore's poetic work.⁸⁸

The choice of copy-texts and the arrangement of the poems are designed to reflect the historical sequence of Gilmore's self-projection as an Australian poet and of her reception by readers. For this reason the copy-texts are chosen from early, but not necessarily the earliest, published versions. The distinction is between the uncollected poems and those appearing in her various volume collections. The copy-texts of the former are taken from their earliest verifiable printing. Those of the latter are taken from the volumes in preference not only to earlier journal-published printings but also to later revisions made or possibly sanctioned by Gilmore for anthology representation or for *Selected Verse*. Some republication in newspapers and journals or in more obscure anthologies may well have been overlooked despite the extensive searches undertaken, but all known printings prior to Gilmore's death in 1962 are noted and were taken into account in determining which ones represented new typesettings. All such typesettings were collated with the relevant copy-texts, and the collations are recorded following each text. For every published poem therefore, the reader is afforded access to all the variant versions available to readers during Gilmore's lifetime. (See the List of Abbreviations for the manner of citing journal and anthology sources.)

⁸⁸ The detailed list of unpublished poems and drafts compiled during the editor's examination of the manuscripts has been deposited with the Academy Editions papers at the ADFA Library. About 2,340 are dated and 560 undated. Fragments of less than 4 lines were, in the main, excluded from the count. On the other hand, being based on a match of title and first line, the count will probably have included some fragments that relate to published (or other unpublished) poems. The Appendix lists manuscripts relevant to the poems edited here. These two sources create the foundation for a future edition (or editions), based on manuscript sources, though the feasibility of such an undertaking remains an open question, particularly if intended to be complete.



The individual collections were, by and large, the main source of her critical reputation, and there is ample evidence that she gave considerable attention to their arrangement. It is easy to identify her intention to make *The Tilted Cart* (1925) generically homogeneous, or to establish distinct thematic identities for *The Wild Swan* (1930), *The Rue Tree* (1931) and *Under the Wilgas* (1932), three collections that drew on a common period of composition. Less immediately accessible evidence is contained in the manuscript collections, especially those at Buffalo and in the Mitchell Library (see Appendix). In particular, the latter holds several differently arranged lists of contents made by Gilmore for both *Battlefields* (1939) and *Fourteen Men* (1954).

It is reasonable to assume that Gilmore was herself responsible for the contents and organisation of her collections. Qualification needs to be made, however, with respect to *The Passionate Heart* (1918) and *Selected Verse* (1948). In the case of the former she has recorded the assistance given to the choice of poems by George Robertson, assistance which may have extended to their ordering. In the case of *Selected Verse*, we know that she discussed the choice of poems with Inglis Moore and R. D. Fitzgerald,⁸⁹ and it seems likely (though not explicitly stated anywhere) that they may have advised the non-chronological structure which places at the beginning of the book the three collections seen as her strongest (*The Passionate Heart*, *The Wild Swan* and *Battlefields*). We know that both Bertram Stevens and Bernard O'Dowd acted as intermediaries with publishing houses for her first collection, but there is no reference to their having played any editorial role. The only case where it is known that Gilmore had the services of a publisher's editor is that of *Fourteen Men*.⁹⁰

In view of the importance of the collections in Gilmore's presentation of her work, it was decided to preserve the integrity of the collections as well as making them the source of copy-texts.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Inglis Moore's account of the making of *Selected Verse* in 'Mary Gilmore', p. 123, makes it clear that, while he and FitzGerald acted as consultants in the choice of poems, 'the final judgement was made by Dame Mary', but does not discuss the arrangement of the volume. ⁹⁰ See I34 n. 1.

⁹¹ Apart from the fact that a strictly chronological presentation by date of publication would have disrupted Gilmore's carefully considered ordering of



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A further argument for the latter choice is that we have evidence from manuscript holdings, as well as references in her diaries and letters, that Gilmore proof-read the texts of her collections, and in doing so often performed final editing tasks, giving directions to the printer about formatting and changes to titles or to the order of poems.⁹² The most extensive of such editing work at proof stage was with *Selected Verse*. In April 1948 she wrote to George Ferguson, Publishing Director of Angus & Robertson, of going through the galley proofs to alter ‘repetitional rhymes . . . In separate books they did not matter, but when collected, the mind says I heard (or I saw) that before!’ (*Letters* 231).⁹³ The same letter gives some indication of the laboriousness of proof-reading, especially as Gilmore’s eyesight deteriorated. ‘Galley proofs from A.& R.,’ she writes, ‘are a treat to tired eyes. I bless the printers and I bless your staff.’

It is not easy to establish the exact role of the printer for each of Gilmore’s collections, although one would assume that in every case the printer also took some responsibility for proof-reading. The least successful in this exercise was the printer of the Worker Trustees, with the result that an Errata slip had to be inserted into *The Tilted Cart*. In the case of the small collection *Pro Patria Australia* (1944) Gilmore dealt directly with the printer, W. H.

the collections, there was the practical difficulty that previously unpublished poems would then have to be treated as uniformly published at the year of their respective collection, and some system would have to be devised for ordering their arrangement.

⁹² Extant proofs marked up by Gilmore are as follows. Incomplete galley proofs for *MV* are in ML 4/2 and NLA 8766 10/7/5. (The only marking up in the latter is for stanza breaks in ‘The Lovin’ Word’.) Identical sets of galleys for *PH* in ML Papers vol. 43 and ML 4/8 lack some poems of the published volume and include a number finally omitted, while a fragment of typeset material is in NLA 8766 10/8/14. Page proofs of *TC* are in NLA 1695/3 and Fryer 2/2073, also incomplete galleys in Fryer. Galleys and page proofs (both incomplete) for *WS* are in ML 5/1. Galleys for *RT* are in NLA 8766 10/9/20; and galleys for *UW* in NLA 8766 10/7/5. No proofs are available for *Bat*, *FM* or *SV*. References in the *Letters* to proof-reading the collections occur at pp. 43 (for *MV*), 164 (for *Bat*) and 308 (for *FM*). Further references occur in *CG* 144 (*MV*), 201 (*PH*), 277 (*RT*), 331 (*Bat*) and 402 (*SV*).

⁹³ MG also cites the problem of repetitive rhymes in reporting to FitzGerald in May 1948 that the galleys are finished (*Letters* 232).



Honey, and this may have inspired her to seek independent printing of the early version of *Fourteen Men*. A letter of 25 July 1944 reminds us that wartime stringencies as well as aesthetics affected publication. Gilmore is told that Cumberland Newspapers ‘can do your book if you don’t want too many copies . . . 500 would suit them better. They are very busy & paper is not plentiful’.⁹⁴ She was apparently still searching when she wrote in 1948 to George Ferguson: ‘As I have my next book of verse being finally typed, I would like “Selected” out of the way when I can find a printer’ (*Letters* 229). There is some syntactic ambiguity here, but the closing clause evidently refers to a printer not for *Selected Verse*, but for *Fourteen Men*, which Angus & Robertson had not agreed to publish at that stage. Large publishing houses usually worked through their own printers, hence the gratitude to Angus & Robertson’s printers already quoted, or her comment to J. K. Ewers after his review of *Under the Wilgas*: ‘And how grateful I am to Mr Anderson who printed the book! He looked after every possible error in my script as well as typographical’.⁹⁵

The poems in the collections, therefore, can be assumed to have more authority than those published in journals and newspapers, where the extent of Gilmore’s participation is less certain.⁹⁶ As copy-texts, the collection poems are normally emended only in cases where a correction made in Gilmore’s hand to galley or page proofs has not been translated to the printed version or on occasions such as those in *The Tilted Cart* where Gilmore has corrected printed

⁹⁴ Letter from E. M. Howard, NLA 727 2/5/5.

⁹⁵ *Letters* 95. Anderson is less likely to have been a member of Robertson & Mullens, as the editors of *Letters* suggest, than of the firm of Brown, Prior & Co., the printers of *WS*, *RT* and *UW*. By the time Robertson & Mullens published *Dis* in 1941, Anderson was a partner, the firm being Brown, Prior & Anderson. Earlier, George Robertson had used Speciality Printing as printers for *MV*, while W. C. Penfold printed *PH* for Angus & Robertson, who in 1918 had not yet established their long-lasting connection with Halstead Press, the printers of *Bat*, *SV* and *FM*.

⁹⁶ In the later years there are occasional references in *CG*, *Letters* and the Diaries to receiving proofs from publications such as *AWW*, *DT*, *SMH* and the short-lived *ANR*. Journals such as *Mjn* or *Ovld* regularly sent proofs to contributors and there is at least one reference to proofs from the former in *Letters* (p. 308). The situation is more doubtful earlier on, but it seems unlikely that small local weeklies such as *AB* or *MP* sent out proofs or that a whole stanza would have



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copies by hand to indicate an error missed in, or introduced after, proof-reading.

The collections act as chronological milestones in the present edition. The uncollected poems are placed between them, in chronological sequence of publication.⁹⁷ In nearly all cases it has been possible to provide a date of initial composition.⁹⁸ The copy-texts of the uncollected poems are taken from the earliest verified printings. For the most part, they have been identified and then located using Gilmore's annotations to manuscripts, her considerable collection of press clippings, and other sources such as acknowledgements of prior publication in later printings. Nonetheless, there are instances where verification of publication cannot be made, even on those occasions when the printed form preserved in Gilmore's papers provides an attributed source. This is often due to the incomplete preservation of copies of some of the journals in which Gilmore published (e.g., the *June Democrat and Southern Cross*, the *Wentworth Magazine* and early issues of the *Worker*). The sixteen such unverified printings have been included in a separate final section of the collection. Where a later verified printing is available, however, this has been taken as the copy-text, with the earlier attribution noted and collated if available in print form.

disappeared from 'The Door' if *Spin* had done so: see the collation for I113. Obviously the poems published in *Clip* during MG's absence in South America were not proof-read by her, and her rapture at seeing the actual *Bn* Red Page of 1903 suggests that she had not seen it in proof (see p. xl).

⁹⁷ For the purposes of this order, all journals published monthly or quarterly are treated as published on the first day of the month of publication.

⁹⁸ Dates of initial composition are available for most of MG's poems, thanks to her habit of dating a first draft and preserving that date on further copies or revisions. MSS with a revision date are very rare. She did, however, develop the practice of removing composition dates in preparing final typed MSS of collections for a publisher or printer, as in the ML's typescripts of *WS* and *UW*. Some MSS have been dated retrospectively with annotations like 'I think' or 'about', or indicating only the year. MG's letters, diaries and reminiscences sometimes identify the date at which a poem was written, as do the footers added to some journal-published poems. Journal dates are occasionally later than the available MS ones, probably indicating that the manuscript sent to the publisher bore the date of a revised text. In this edition, the preferred composition date is that of the earliest MS. In the absence of an MS date, the earliest date provided with a printed version is given.



Although the uncollected poems, especially those from certain journals, do sometimes require emendation, editorial interventions have been kept to a minimum. They have been admitted where there appears to be a gross failure in sense, grammar or spelling;⁹⁹ where there is an apparently motiveless breach of an established pattern, such as a refrain; or where an autograph annotation to a print clipping or a subsequent printing corrects what appears to be an error of typography or format. Emendation is not made where an annotation on a print clipping appears to indicate a proposed revision rather than a correction, although the border-line between these two categories is not always clear. In all these latter instances, however, the evidence for the emendation is reported in the apparatus, which identifies all cases of emendation other than those covered by the silent categories listed in Note on the Texts.

Subject to the specification of silent categories given below, the edition has endeavoured to indicate the original form of the copy-texts with regard to matters such as the presence of distinctive stanzaic forms, broken lines, indentation and its relative degree, and sectional breaks.

In these ways, then, the evidence of a public and major career in Australian poetry – one that spanned more than seven decades – is laid out in great detail for the first time. This edition provides the historical and textual information for newly informed readings of the poetic achievement of the woman who became Dame Mary Gilmore. Volume One covers the period 1887–1929 and Volume Two covers 1930–62.

⁹⁹ Historically acceptable spellings (e.g. 'Harbor' in H45, 'woful' in H50) are respected. They often follow spellings in Australian newspapers of the time or earlier sources. Editorial matter follows MG's spelling of the proper noun Labor/Labour, varying with the context in which it occurs.

