

# MANY SUCH AS SHE

Victorian Australian Women Poets of World War One

An anthology edited by Michael Sharkey



**Many Such as She:  
Victorian Australian  
Women Poets of World War One**

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## INTRODUCTION

Years ago, when I taught literature in universities, I was sometimes invited to talk to high school students about Wilfred Owen's poetry and its relationship to World War One. The syllabus committees who prescribed such a topic were doubtless well intentioned in wanting young readers to understand the impact of wars on men who had fought in them, but in light of Owens's cultural, historical and geographical remoteness from the students' current concerns, the undertaking struck me as having limited appeal or effect. Many students voiced a heartfelt sentiment, when they optimistically asked me, 'What should I say about this or that poem in the exam?' After a couple of experiences of this sort, I knocked back invitations to repeat anything like discussion under such conditions.

My greater interest lay in the ways civilian poets, and especially the women poets, reacted to that War. Addressing that question involved literary archaeology. Understandably, given the nature of custodianship of the memory of that event, anthologies of Australian writing relating to the War tended to favour work by soldier poets, but two collections stood out as acknowledging women's responses. J.T. Laird's 1971 *Other Banners: An anthology of Australian Literature of the First World War* (1971) contained 48 poems by eighteen male poets and 6 poems by four women poets, and David Holloway's *Dark Somme Flowing: Australian Verse of the Great War 1914-1918* featured 114 poems by fifty-one males and 25 poems by fifteen women poets.

The book I wanted to read, containing more responses by women poets to World War One, and something of their status as real people, did not exist, so I began, in a roundabout way, to collect a broader sampling of poems that might reflect their authors' lives and attitudes. I don't assume that any poem that appears in print can be taken as an unmediated or 'pure' utterance, independent of the rhetorical factors of argument appealing to logic, selective shared beliefs, and other clues to the writer's sense of role and purposeful identification with readers. Poems on patriotic occasions are particularly slippery, so I expect readers of the poems in this collection will be alert to and wary of poets' invocations of customs, manners, folkways and traditions. A short poem by the Queensland-born writer Lala Fisher, first published in the *Australian Worker* in 1915 and subsequently in her book, *The Grass Flowering* (Sydney:

The author, 1915), memorably epitomised the problematic nature of the weasel word ‘sincerity’ in public discourse:

Sincerity?

The cross, the rack, the bloody thong,

The cruel right, the stubborn wrong,

These to sincerity belong.

I was already familiar with books by some of the better known poets, such as Mary Gilmore, Zora Cross, Marion Miller Knowles, and a few of the less renowned or long forgotten: Emily Coungeau, Mary E. Fullerton (‘E’), Gertrude Hart and others. Some books came my way from second-hand bookshops and the poetry shelves of university libraries, but I thought, rather grandly, of trying to read every Australian woman poet’s book published during or shortly after World War One. It’s not so daunting if one’s prepared to spend time in far-flung Rare Book rooms of State and university libraries. I can’t claim to have covered every publication even now, but since the arrival of TROVE, the National Library’s digital resource of bygone newspapers and magazines, and the wider availability of digitally copied archives, the pursuit is appreciably easier.

The very number of women who had written and published verse, much of it admirable in its technical competency and depth of reflection, impressed me. I was perplexed why their work should continue to remain hidden at a time when patriotic nostalgia was being worked up toward what would eventually be an orgy of commercialised fervour associated with the anniversary of the War.

It was evident, of course, that poetry was a convenient and popular mode of expressing emotions and ideas in earlier times. Compulsory universal education in Australia added impetus: the poems offer eloquent testimony to the high standards of late Victorian and early twentieth century primary and secondary education. It also testifies to the degree to which Empire patriotism was inculcated and absorbed, notwithstanding the ways some of the poets later questioned its practice and results. Obviously, not all the poetry written between 1914 and 1918 was concerned directly with the War. The usual suspect topics related to death, love, the frustrations and pleasures associated with work, home, exile, or separation, along with questions of faith and endurance continued to appear. So too, the tenor of occupations, social conditions, beliefs and related matters of class. From what the women had to say concerning the war, however, it was apparent that the overriding temper

of their poetry was more contemplative than gung-ho. An anthology reflecting the range would, I thought, reveal the changes in outlook from Empire enthusiasm or chagrin all the way to abiding sorrow.

The project received another provocation. Invited to lead a seminar at a Summer School on the New Literatures in English at the University of Osnabrück in 1998, I broached the topic of Australia's wartime poets. The place and timing were significant. 1998 marked the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Peace of Westphalia—the series of treaties that marked the conclusion of the ruinous Thirty Years War, a struggle exacerbated by sectarian elements, and as global in its way as the First World War two hundred and sixty-six years later.

Osnabrück's subtle approach to commemoration appealed to me. The city combined the anniversary with other civic and religious events and ceremonies to honour victims of war that was still present in many memories. The memorial to the painter Felix Nussbaum, arrested and killed while fleeing Nazi persecution as a 'degenerate' artist and Jew, bore striking testimony to the city's sense of sorrow. In another building, an exhibition honoured the life and work of Erich Maria Remarque, author of *All Quiet on the Western Front* and other novels based on his experience of World War One. Remarque had left Germany to settle in the USA as a result of attacks on his 'degenerate' pacifism. Part of the show was a display of editions in several languages of his most famous novel, which had been banned in many countries. Alphabetically, Australia led the pack of nations that found the book's anti-war sentiments so offensive as to merit suppression. Yet it had been an Australian, Arthur Wesley Wheen, who had first translated the book into English. Like Remarque, Wheen was a veteran of the War. So my seminar on the poetry of Australian poets who were variously pro- or anti-war resonated with the commemorative events occurring in Osnabrück in 1998.

Ten years after Osnabrück, I published an essay on some of the women's war poetry that I had further collected. Leaving aside the question of quality, the sheer quantity of poetry pointed to a catastrophic intellectual and emotional crisis experienced by the poets.

I approached some publishers with the idea of a commemorative anthology, and again met with the response that it was a non-starter. What was wanted was anything to do with Gallipoli and other feats of Australian chivalry. It wasn't hard to see the way Australian war nostalgia was tending.

Another ten years has passed, in which I have been fascinated by the extent of opportunism associated with the First World War: from organised tourist excursions to Gallipoli, all the way down to the khaki-clad soft toys and other commemorative Kitsch cluttering the shelves of Post Office shops.

Now that the anniversary of Gallipoli has departed with all its civic hoorays, I can think that this book will mark the anniversary of the end of hostilities, much as those thoughtful commemorative events I saw in Germany marked the end of an earlier war to end wars.

## §

Between 2008 and 2016, I had abandoned my initial grandiose plan and narrowed my focus to one Australian State, rather than the entire nation. The primary reason was in a sense arbitrary: compared with other States, Victoria published more single books by women poets. I'd also discovered the mobility of many poets of the period—those born elsewhere but who spent a significant time in Victoria even while continuing to publish in their 'home' States and even internationally, as well as in Victoria. Further, several Victorian-born poets had moved to other States where they also published, in some cases, most of their output. Ultimate selection would not be straightforward.

My selection is based on the criterion of 'significant' Victorian association or identification: some combination of birth, education, work experience including child-rearing, literary and other activity associated with the State during the War. The decision to include or exclude was not always tidily resolved. Typical dilemmas arose. What should I do concerning Alexandra Seager? Born at Ballarat in 1870, Alexandrine Laidlaw (also called Ina) married Captain Clarendon J. Seager, a former British Army cavalry officer. The couple had three sons and three daughters and moved to Adelaide around 1910. There, Alexandra ran an agency to supply governesses, domestic helpers and other workers on rural properties. Her sons enlisted in the Army as soon as war was declared. Edward George, the youngest son, was killed at Gallipoli. The older brothers, Major Harold William Seager MC, and Lieutenant Edward Clarendon Seager DCM, returned to Australia in January 1919.

Alexandra Seager wrote poetry throughout the War and was a founding member, Honorary Secretary and Organiser of the 'Cheer-Up

Our Boys Society' that provided supper, concerts and conversation for enlisted men before their embarkation. She was also a founder, in 1915, of Violet Day, a day on which every member of the public was asked to wear a violet in memory of the fallen. She called the first meeting of men returned from Gallipoli, urged them to form an association, and contributed fifty pounds from the Cheer-Up Society. It was subsequently claimed that she was the founder of the RSL. Her poetry appeared in many places, including Edith S. Abbott's *Violet Verses* anthology in 1917, and her poem 'Our Soldier's Song' was set to music by Louis William Yemm and sung at patriotic concerts in South Australia. Was she a Victorian poet, then? Her exemplary personal, creative and humanitarian investment in Australia's contribution to World War One is in no doubt, but alas, I left her out of a representative collection of poets who had more formative and sustained literary association with Victoria during the War. One such was Victorian-born Beatrice Vale Bevan, whose poems appeared nationwide, and especially in Victoria, even though she spent much of her life as a Congregational minister's wife in China and Adelaide. Bevan's life followed an arc of departure and return to her native State: after years in China and South Australia, she returned to Victoria to live among her siblings in a Melbourne bayside suburb.

## §

I do not claim greatness for every poem I've chosen, but I think some, and not always those by the most celebrated authors, are outstanding. I have included many earnest efforts by writers who were famous in their time, as well as many by more obscure practitioners. Many of the poets published at least one book or modest chapbook of verse that has to do with the subject of war. Several—Lesbia Harford, Gertrude Hart, Clara Leonar Patey, Marie E.J. Pitt—published predominantly in regional, State or national newspapers, and their work was collected, if at all, long after the War.

Unsurprisingly, several of the poets had begun publishing in newspapers and journals while still very young and long before 1914. Gertrude Hart (born in 1873) and Marie E.J. Pitt (born in 1869) first published at age fourteen; Nettie Palmer (born in 1885) and Myra Morris (born 1893) also published while still at school. Some poets were particularly encouraged when young by literary elders.

'Cinderella' (Mary Grant Bruce), editor of the children's letters section of the Melbourne *Herald* newspaper, encouraged Joice NanKivell to keep up her contributions of letters and stories and poems, much as Zora Cross was encouraged by 'Dame Durden' (Ethel Turner) of the *Town and Country Journal* to keep sending material for publication. By 1902, Cross (born in 1890) and NanKivell (born in 1887) were published writers in whom love of country and love of Empire ran strong.

The effusions of such precocious young writers were constrained by the prevailing tastes and expectations of editors and readers as much as by the poets' self-inclusion in the English tradition. Rhythmic poetry was a staple of public performance and entertainment. English, Irish and Scottish lyricism and narrative poetry, and such nineteenth century Australian or American works of which many wartime poets saw themselves the heirs, inevitably contributed to the sometimes lilting or lolling effects of the World War One women's (and men's) poetry.

Colonial, State and national education systems endorsed such conventional influence. The nation's newspapers and quarterlies were chiefly edited by journalists whose tastes reinforced traditional practice. The exceptions were so few as to have had a negligible effect on mainstream readers. Harford, Palmer, Fullerton and others who inhabited advanced political circles were familiar with contemporary American and English practice that would eventually result in a shift in sensibility, but beyond the occasional little magazine or fugitive experimental pamphlet, where could the poets have obtained encouragement and sustenance? If any reader believes that the poetry of these women's civilian male contemporaries represented a seismic shift away from a shared outlook or received stylistic form, a perusal of Christopher Brennan's poem *A Chant of Doom* or Henry Lawson's 'England Yet' and other wartime verse will find cause to reconsider. This said, sometimes the women's poetry has some surprises. Archaic expressions and reliance on overly poetical effects like insistent rhyme are variously rejected, adapted or exploited in the poetry of Harford and Grace Ethel Martyr. Sometimes emphatic rhyme is relieved by a sudden denouement, as in the poem 'Stitchin' Seams' by Capel Boake (Doris Kerr), or Martyr's poem 'Rain'. Nina Murdoch's jaunty poems, 'Socks', and 'Colored Bows', also reveal the variety of cadence possible in received forms.

The tone of the poetry is just as varied, and is sometimes evident in the work of a single poet. As one example, the Jingoistic fervour in the early effusions of Dorothy Frances McCrae was soon replaced by grief

and sacred awe that followed the death of her younger brother. So many of the earliest wartime poems were shaped by the literary conventions and Imperial patriotism of the poets' counterparts in Great Britain, but this is a commonplace observation. We cannot expect the literary taste of one generation to be long maintained let alone respected by that which follows.

Dissident women poets of World War One who published extensively are relatively scarce, a reflection on the difficulty of achieving mass circulation in a period of stringent censorship of printed matter. Lesbia Harford, Nettie Palmer, Mary E. Fullerton ('E') and Marie E.J. Pitt stand out as writers whose work appeared in radical papers, though all appear to have understood the pressure on and compulsion of men to enlist even while they opposed conscription. Fullerton and Margery Ruth Betts are hardly to be thought of as congruent in their careers and political aims—the former a prominent anti-conscription speaker and activist, the latter a devout wife of a Congregational minister and college principal, yet both lamented the destruction of what they considered civilised values—in Betts' case extending to an almost unique poem of sympathy for the maimed, and a truly unique poem expressing sympathy for the German opponent of war, Karl Liebknecht, whose treatment by the German government she compares to Christ's under Pilate. Betts' poem 'The Maimed' is a masterpiece of controlled rhetorical argument, building by anaphora (liturgy-like repetition of a particular word to open each line of a list of war's horrors) to an irresistible claim that calls into question the ability of all 'these things numberless and measureless', that is, words alone, to truly signify what the 'sacrifice' of actual lives can mean to those who have not experienced them, as the dead and maimed have, in the flesh. It is as if the words, to Betts' mind, carry the weight of actions and of human lives, as the Eucharist is said to do. The poem pushes against the restrictions of language and seems to question the power of poetry itself, and it is all the more extraordinary for doing so.

Perhaps, too, Betts' poem, like many others in this collection, might show something of the subtle undertow of incipient modernism in certain poets' works. The poems are not all so formally derivative of Romantic and mid-to-late Victorian stylistics as a glance at Australian anthologies covering a longer historical overview of Australian men's and women's poetry might suggest. The experimental impulse is present in poets as different in background and temperament as Harford, Betts, Martyr, and Capel Boake (Doris Kerr).

The women's occupations reflect their sense of world events. Their professions and daily activities include law, postal work, journalism, school and university teaching, clerical work, Red Cross and charity organising, banking, factory work, librarianship, travel writing, fiction writing, political activism, music teaching and dramatic performance. The elocutionary and rhetorical standards are uniformly high, befitting an educated, aspirational, democratic and talented citizenry.

The poems in this collection relay the experiences of such women as felt compelled to come to terms with the effects of war on their lives. Not every poet, female or male, felt driven to do the same. Some poets wrote sparingly of war. Those women who were already publishing at the outset of the War continued to write of other experiences and scenes as well as war-related matters throughout the conflict. Landscape, travel, women's roles and the convulsions of faith, love and loss beyond those associated with war continued to dominate much of their work. It's noteworthy that where they employ rural or native Australian references, their purpose is often quite ambiguous. In many poems, springtime brings memories of happier times with now-absent friends, lovers, siblings, children and colleagues, or a bitter reminder that for some of their loved ones there would be no more springs, and for themselves no consolation could ever come with the return of the seasonal flowers. And many poets did ensure that the flowers they referred to were native to the country.

I initially considered arranging the poems in chronological order of their first appearance in print but have opted for simpler organisation in alphabetical order of the poets' names. This collection focuses on some of the poets associated with just one representative Australian State. Where details of the poets' lives were on public record, I've added brief biographical sketches—as much as one can glean from materials on public record, without lapsing into what Richard Holmes calls the fatal 'past subjunctive' speculations of biography. In every case, I have also cited sources of information. Nothing is so infuriating as unsubstantiated hearsay concerning a poet's life. I have checked and counterchecked facts recorded in this book, but any errors or bias can be sheeted home to me.

At all accounts, I hope a better sense of the range of under-appreciated Australian poetry of the period will become somewhat clearer from the examples that follow.

Michael Sharkey  
Castlemaine, 2018

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Sources of poems are noted in the brief biographical and bibliographical introductions to individual poets. Every effort has been made to locate copyright owners of poems subject to the copyright Act. I would like to hear from copyright claimants to works by the following: Violet B. Cramer: for poems published between 1916 and 1922; Gertrude Hart: for poems published between 1915 and 1926; Myra Morris: for poems published between 1917 and 1919; and Nina Murdoch, for poems published between 1914 and 1922. Any person claiming copyright to any poem should contact me in writing via the publisher, at the same time providing legal evidence of possession of copyright.

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## ‘E’ (MARY E. FULLERTON)



Miss Fullerton, photo by Marietta Studio, Melbourne,  
*Australasian*, Friday 3 July 1925, p. 14. State Library Victoria.

Mary Eliza Fullerton was the second surviving child of the seven children of Robert Fullerton and Eliza Leathers, who were married in Victoria in 1863. She was born at Glenmaggie in Gippsland, on 14 May 1868. Her mother's parents were Jonathan Leathers and Eliza (née Smith). Her father had migrated from Belfast with his sister at age twenty to seek his luck on the Victorian goldfields, where he met his future wife, who had migrated from Sussex at age fourteen.

On a small farm at Glenmaggie in Gippsland, the Fullerton family lived in a bark hut built by their father. Fullerton's mother educated her at home until a schoolhouse opened at Glenmaggie. Fullerton attended the school from age seven to thirteen, and became an avid reader and memoriser of English poetry and the Bible. Her favourite poets were Milton, Burns, Shelley and Byron, and she also read the essays of Hazlitt, Lamb and Macaulay. After leaving school, she continued to educate

herself while she lived and worked on her parents' farm until she was twenty-five. Although she grew up in a strict Presbyterian family, she came to reject orthodox religion in favour of what she called 'a certain vagueness'.

Fullerton published her first poem at twelve in a regional newspaper (the *Trafalgar Journal*). She had read Australian poets Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Lawson, whom she called 'a Homer, a Chaucer in moleskins', and she was enthusiastic about the *Sydney Bulletin*. In 1893, determined to make her way as a fulltime writer after successes in the Melbourne *Argus* and other papers, she moved to Prahran. By 1894, she had achieved publication in the *Australian Town and Country Journal*—and in the *Bulletin*, where her poems would appear for the next fifty years.

Fullerton's closest sister Lydia (born a year after her) and her eldest sister Annie had married and left home when Fullerton went to Prahran, and her parents and three younger sisters joined Fullerton when she moved from Prahran to Hawthorn. Will, the only son of the family, stayed on the farm.

Fullerton's father died in 1901, and her mother nineteen years later. From 1904, Fullerton was engaged in Victorian radical political and literary circles, and she regularly contributed to Vida Goldstein's suffragist paper, *Woman's Sphere*, which ran an article in 1904 on Miles Franklin, who later became one of Fullerton's lifelong correspondents. Fullerton's first book, *Moods and Melodies: Sonnets and Lyrics*, was published in 1908, and from 1909, she worked as a journalist on Goldstein's second paper, *Woman Voter*, the organ of the Women's Political Association. In 1911, Fullerton became Acting President of the Association when Goldstein travelled to England to help the cause 'at the heart of the action'.

By that time, Fullerton had already met fellow activist and office-bearer Mabel Singleton, whose family came from England's industrial west country. Mabel Singleton was ten years younger than Fullerton, and when she married Robert Singleton, in a Registry Office in London in October 1904, Mabel Jupp was twenty-seven and Singleton sixty-three. Robert had retired as chief accountant of Victorian Railways in 1900, and was believed to have amassed a large fortune from discovery in the 1860s of the gold reef that started the Royal Standard mine at Wood's Point—a fortune that enabled him to purchase a mansion ('Haverbrack') in Glenferrie Road, 'the most aristocratic part' of Malvern where he and

his first wife, Sabina Embling established a family. Singleton had served the Victorian government since his commencement as a field assistant in the Department of Lands and Works in 1858, and risen from draughtsman in the engineering accountants branch to accountant before that section was merged with the accountants' branch of the Railways service. His first wife Sabina, whom he had married in 1871, died in 1887 at the age of thirty-four after bearing six children.

In 1898, Singleton had given evidence in England at a suit before the Privy Council in connection with construction of a railway line, and on return to Victoria had retired from government service. He was resident again in London before his marriage to Mabel, who found that life as chatelaine of a mansion in Malvern did not accord with her political inclinations. She had met Vida Goldstein by 1908, and by 1911 was chair of the committee supporting Goldstein's bid for election to Parliament. For his part, Singleton wanted no more children and was furious when Mabel became pregnant and bore a son, on 14 January 1911. Singleton acknowledged the child, named Denis Gordon Singleton, as his own, but he effectively banished Mabel from his home. Fullerton, who welcomed the infant's arrival, made several journeys from the city to visit Mabel and Denis at the Singletons' country house 'Muyanato' at Mount Dandenong. At the same time, she wrote angry poems about Mabel's husband.

In June 1912, Fullerton, Mabel and Denis travelled to England. Mabel's husband made a new will, appointing his oldest son as executor and settling real estate and personal property on him, and cash amounts on two other surviving children from his first marriage. He allowed Mabel two hundred pounds for herself and 800 pounds for Denis's education. (In later years, Denis told Sylvia Martin, Fullerton's biographer, that his father was a 'brute'.)

Fullerton's trip to England was relatively brief, and on her return to Australia, she became prominent as an anti-conscription speaker and as a writer in the *Woman Voter* and in [Samuel] Ross's *Monthly of Protest, Personality and Progress*. Fullerton's poems, sometimes signed 'M.E.F.' and at times in full, appear with those of several Australian and overseas poets in Ross's *Monthly* magazine, which also featured anti-war writings by Ross, Sinclair, Frederick T. Macartney, John Le Gay Brereton, Adela Pankhurst and (in translation), Karl Liebknecht. The *Woman Voter* reported Fullerton's public addresses, such as her July 1917 Melbourne speech on the topic, 'Australia an Island of Voluntarism in a Sea of Conscription'.

## §

Evidence of Fullerton's efficacy as public speaker is contained in private as well as public records. One of the latter occurs in the wartime reflections of Tom Purcell, a Yarraville railway employee, who from 1881 until his death in 1920 kept a diary in which he noted minutiae concerning his daily activities—religious devotions, household accounts, activities, friendships, and correspondence. During the War, he included the names of neighbours and associates killed or maimed in the conflict, his fears for his enlisted sons George and Leo, the replacement of facts by euphemisms and lies in official announcements, and his growing disillusion with the press and the government. He also attended meetings on the Yarra Bank and elsewhere, where political speakers canvassed the inequality of sacrifice and the decline of working-class living conditions, and voiced opposition to compulsory conscription. As historian John Lack writes, Purcell

heard Adela Pankhurst speak at a street meeting in Middle Footscray on 20 April [1917], and next evening he heard Senate candidate Vida Goldstein demand civil, legal and wage equality for the sexes, and denounce 'the new cult of National Service [which] meant industrial conscription and the loss of all that has been gained by arbitration, wages boards and unionism'.

A week later on Sunday 29 April, Tom was at the Yarra bank where 'Miss Vida Goldstein and Miss Pankhurst [,] Fullerton etc Fleming, Lynch etc etc' spoke. And the following week (6 May) he was again at a 'Great gathering on the Yarra Bank' to hear Goldstein and Pankhurst. Tom's enthusiasm outlasted the election. On Sunday 13 May he attended a 'women's peace meeting' that was addressed by Mrs Singleton, Miss Fullerton, Miss John[s], and Rev Frederick Sinclair, whose denunciation of the exploiters of the poor affected him strongly.

(In the event, Tom Purcell's sons' war experiences confirmed Tom's misgivings. Both young men were wounded in France and invalided home, George in 1917 and Leo to England in 1918 with a gunshot wound, before being returned to Australia in 1919.)

## §

Fullerton's 1921 volume of poems, *The Breaking Furrow*, bears the dedication 'To My Friend Mabel Singleton'. In the following year, Fullerton left Australia to live for the remainder of her life with Singleton, first at the garden city of Letchworth, then at Maresfield in East Sussex, and finally London. She died on

23 February 1946, and legal notices in Australia recorded her address as ‘Late of “Sandbank”, Budletts, Uckfield, Sussex’. Her executrices were Sophia Smyth Fullerton and Isabel Fullerton (both of ‘Arden’, 24 Evansdale Road, Hawthorn), and Emily Fullerton of 31 Ocean Street, Bondi in New South Wales.

Mabel Singleton’s son Denis Gordon Singleton, whose early years were spent in the care of the two women, was a Mosquito pilot in the RAF in World War Two. He achieved the rank of Wing Commander and was awarded a military OBE. He retained affectionate memories of the two maternal presences in his early life, and died in October 2008 at the age of 97.

## §

Fullerton’s first collection of poems, *Moods and Melodies*, published in Melbourne in 1908, was issued under her own name though she published individual works under pseudonyms that included ‘E. Alpenstock’, ‘Robert Gray’, ‘Turner O. Linger’, and ‘Gordon Manners’. She published her mature work chiefly under the pen-name ‘E’. Her biographer, Sylvia Martin, speculated that Fullerton may have initially adopted the pen name out of conviction that her gender and lack of tertiary education gravitated against recognition of her work, but by the 1920s, her authorship of the novels published under her own name—*Two Women* (1923), *The People of the Timber Belt* (1925) and *A Juno of the Bush* (1930)—had made her something of a celebrity. In 1925, the *Australasian* spoke of her recognition in ‘artistic circles in Great Britain’, especially after publication of the second of these novels, noting that her earlier (1923) autobiographical novel, *Clare, Margaret*, had shared a £250 prize offered by the publisher, Philpots.

Fullerton’s friend and colleague Miles Franklin (Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin, 1879-1954) also employed pen-names (‘An Old Bachelor’ and ‘Vernacular’, but chiefly ‘Brent of Bin Bin’), but Franklin’s identity became known early in her literary career. On Fullerton’s death, Franklin arranged publication of Fullerton’s last two poetry collections, *Moles Do So Little with their Privacy* and *The Wonder and the Apple*, both of which bore the attribution ‘E’ at Fullerton’s insistence; the latter title bore Fullerton’s dedication to ‘The four Australian generations of my family’.

The poems in Fullerton’s first collection of verse foreshadowed her concern with woman’s love and independence. *Moods and Melodies* contained 39 sonnets and nine lyrical verses, whose language and themes reflected her religious upbringing and focus on doomed hero-figures, from a range of kindred, sometimes outcast spirits including Eve, Hagar,

Judas, and Joan of Arc. Poems on love also advance the sense of fated desire and action, as in her poem 'From the Star World': 'You and I must have met / In a star-world long ago; the thrill is with me yet, / I worshipped and loved you so'. Also present is her insistence on the desire and striving for reform of relationships, in poems like 'The Attributes', 'Talent and Genius', and 'The Reformer'.

In subsequent years, Fullerton's poetry confirms her adaptation of nationalist mythology to emphasise woman-oriented identity. Her poems, polemical writing and fiction, as well as her 1921 memoir *Bark House Days*, memorialise pioneering (in every sense) women, and portray the land and native flora as possessing sensuous female correspondences. Spring, rain, the bushland, youth, 'violets of joy' and what she called, in a poem of 1903 ('In the Night-Watches'), the 'soft luxurious warmth' of solitude, hold subtle significance of female desire. The world of men is correspondingly portrayed as mechanistic, gadget-obsessed (as in her poem 'Gadgets'), and unthinkingly or otherwise cruel to women (in her poem 'Puppets'). By contrast, her poems dwelling on the effects of war (exemplified in the poems reprinted here) are characteristically focused on women's pain rather than legendary aspects of mythic Australian male heroism.

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## Publications

### Poetry

- Moods and Melodies: Sonnets and Lyrics*, Melbourne: Lothian, 1908.
- The Breaking Furrow*, Melbourne: Sydney J. Endacott, 1921.
- Moles Do So Little With Their Privacy, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1942.
- The Wonder and the Apple*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1946.

Novels (the first three under her own name)

*Two Women: Clare, Margaret, by Two Anonymous Writers*, London: Philpot, 1923  
[Clare is attributed to Fullerton].

*The People of the Timber Belt*, London: Philpot, 1925.

*A Juno of the Bush*, London: Heath Cranton, 1930.

*Rufus Sterne: A Novel*, Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1932 [Written under  
pseudonym Robert Gray].

*Murders at the Crab Apple Café*, London: Herbert Jenkins, 1933 [written under  
pseudonym Gordon Manners].

Memoirs

*Bark House Days*, Melbourne: Sydney J. Endacott, 1921.

*The Australian Bush*, London: J.M. Dent, 1928.

Mary Fullerton  
The Targets

All over the world the women  
    In travail by day and night;  
Are bringing to life the targets  
    For the day when the monarchs fight.

All over the world the women  
    Think they are rearing men,  
So they and the failing fathers  
    Shall live in their youth again.

In many a cot the woman,  
    With the babe on her shelt'ring breast,  
Is nursing his limbs for battle  
    A-crooning her son to rest.

All over the world the women  
    Give service and love and life;  
While over the world the tyrants  
    Are brewing the brew of strife.

All over the world the women  
    Are yielding their sons to-day  
For well is the lesson taught them  
    That the woman must obey.

And the sons of the women fettered  
    Alone in the right to give,  
Are slaves of the ancient system,  
    And shall be while they live.

And the fathers toil and suffer  
    For the day when the world runs red:  
Feeding their sons for targets,  
    With a hard won bitter bread.

Oh, women, the wide world over,  
    Oh, fathers, who father men,  
Shall yet the word awake you  
    That's won by the flaming pen.

By the soul that knows the value  
    Of the sons your patience breeds:  
That tyrants themselves are mortal,  
    And mortal the tyrants' creeds.

Shall never the word awake you,  
    Spoke by the seer's stern mouth;  
So the rulers shall seek for targets  
    And find them nor north nor south.

Shall never the vision wake you,  
    Sprung living within the soul;  
Ye sons of the sacred masses,  
    The pieces that make the whole.

Oh, not till the hour ye take it  
    That light to your spirits dim;  
Will the tyrant lose his targets  
    And the world be quit of him.

Till the mothers, sons and fathers,  
    Rise up as a single soul:  
Crying, "You are not master,  
    We will not render toll.

The breed of the slave is perished,  
    The race of the gods begun,  
We say it each sire and mother,  
    We say it each sacred son.

We toil for the home and nation,  
    We live for the joyful earth;  
Not the red recurring harvest,  
    And the terrible aftermath.

Soul is too great for target,  
    The life for a tyrant's pawn;  
No more is the unit only  
    A parcel of muscle and brawn.

All over the world the toilers  
    Have traile'd the god to birth;  
And we who died for the despot  
    Shall live for the fruitful earth.

For the lamp in the soul is lighted,  
    And the clarion loudly rings:  
"No more be the patient people  
    The targets of bloody kings."

Source: *The Woman Voter*, Monday 5 October 1914, p. 2.

Mary Fullerton  
The Gippslander

Oh, for the smell of the fern roots,  
    As I broke them through with the plough;  
I close my eyes and I fancy  
    I'm back on the old flat now.  
I'm turning the furrows even.  
    In the slant of the setting sun,  
In the paddock down by the river,  
    Where the fern roots twist and run.

Where the young scrub sprouts for ever,  
    And the flapping bark falls down  
From the long, lean tree trunks loosened,  
    Curling, and crisp and brown.  
I fancy the fire of tussocks  
    Tangy and sweet still burns  
On the rugged fallow spaces,  
    With the litter of scrub and ferns.

Oh, the blue smoke rolling upward  
    In the chilly evening air,  
Goes drifting down the river,  
    To sleep in the shadows there.  
And oh, for the sigh of Dobbin,  
    When called by the early star,  
With a slap on his back, the traces  
    I loose from the swingle bar.

And along the narrow pathway  
    Where the tussocks switch the knee;  
Dobbin and I go homeward.  
    Each to his well-earned "tea."  
There in the kitchen window  
    Mother has set the light,  
And the table is waiting ready,  
    And the room is warm and bright.

Somehow the work has tired me  
    As it never used to do;  
There's a weakness running through me,  
    And an ache in my body, too;  
So after supper's over  
    Lord, I've had dreams again,  
Dozed while I mused, till fancy  
    Was fact in my weary brain.

I'm Private Jones in England,  
    Far, far from the old home track;  
With a shrapnel wound, in the shoulder  
    And a bullet hole through my back.  
Still, I'm not so sure I'm wanting  
    Just yet to be home once more,  
Till I've seen right through to the finish  
    The job I enlisted for.

Source: *Weekly Times Annual* (Victoria), Thursday 4 November 1915, p. 41.

Mary Fullerton ('E')  
Next Door

The waves of European conflict surge  
    Against our shores, the striving millions fight,  
But greater far calamity to him—  
    The rabbit man's grey pony died last night.

About the town, men read the posted names  
    Of those who strive no more for wrong or right;  
And women weep: but what is that to him—  
    The rabbit man's grey pony died last night.

The widow in his street is sore bereft,  
    Her son is fallen, gone her spirit's light,  
The European wave has reached her heart—  
    The parson came and brought the news last night.

At last he finds community of grief,  
    His home-bound-heart can comprehend her plight:  
He knows the widow, and he knew her son:  
    The rabbit man whose pony died last night.

Source: E (Mary Eliza Fullerton), 'Next Door', in *Birth: A Little Journal of Australian Poetry*, vol. 2, no. 24, November 1918, p. 4.

Mary E. Fullerton  
War Time

Young John, the postman, day by day,  
In sunshine or in rain,  
Comes down our road with words of doom  
In envelopes of pain.

What cares he as he wings along  
At his mechanic part,  
How many times his hand lets fall  
The knocker on a heart?

He whistles merry scraps of song,  
Whate'er his bag contain—  
Of words of death, of words of doom  
In envelopes of pain.

Source: Mary E. Fullerton, *The Breaking Furrow*, Melbourne: Commonwealth of Australia & Sydney J. Endacott, 1921, p. 29.

Mary Fullerton  
A Man's a Sliding Mood

Ardent in love and cold in charity,  
Loud in the market, timid in debate:  
Scornful of foe unbuckled in the dust,  
At whimper of a child compassionate,

A man's a sliding mood from hour to hour,  
Rage, and a singing forest of bright birds,  
Laughter with lovely friends, and loneliness,  
Woe with her heavy horn of unspoke words.

What is he then with his conflicting moods,  
Or is there in a deeper dwelling place  
Some stilly shaping thing that bides and broods?

Source: *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse*, ed Les Murray, South Melbourne:  
Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 86.

## JOICE M. NANKIVELL



Photo of Joice NanKivell Loch by Clarke Hilwood Studios London, c. 1920-22.  
State Library Victoria

Joice Mary NanKivell (24 January 1887–8 October 1982) published under several variants of her birth and married names: Joyce NanKivell, Joice Mary Loch, J.M. Loch, Mrs Sydney Loch, Joice M. Loch, Joice M. NanKivell, and Joice NanKivell Loch. She gave different birth dates in several literary and other documents, varying as much as six years from that given above.

NanKivell was the daughter of Edith Ada NanKivell (née Lawson, born in Jersey 1866, died at Windsor, Victoria 1951) and George Griffith NanKivell (born at St Kilda 1859, died at Richmond, 1941). Edith and George had two children, Joice and Charles George (called Geoffrey by the family). Joice's father managed a sugar plantation at Farnham, near Ingham in North Queensland on behalf of his father, Thomas NanKivell, who was considered Australia's richest man.

Joice grew up and worked on the family plantation, where her sympathies lay with the disenfranchised as a result of the treatment she saw accorded to Kanaka labourers. Her family's fortunes collapsed when the importation of black labour was abolished, and her parents walked off the property. The family moved to rural Victoria, where Joice's father took a job managing a property in Gippsland, where she also worked until her mid-twenties.

Joice was educated by governesses and, during an interlude in Melbourne, at a school in Brighton, where she began to write verse and children's stories. By her teen years, she was a regular letter writer to children's sections of the Melbourne *Leader* newspaper and others, and a winner of prizes for essays. One of many stories she contributed to the Melbourne *Leader* newspaper's Children's Page concerned a trip from Mars aboard the space ship 'Flying Fox', to a world where she and a companion named Dorothy encounter former British sovereigns as far back as King Arthur. The editor, Mary Grant Bruce, and other readers were sometimes prompted to remark how they enjoyed Joice's letters and stories.

Her poems of early adulthood revealed a patriotic slant on contemporary events, and one such work, 'Peace', published in the Melbourne *Leader* newspaper at the conclusion of the Boer War in 1902, with the byline 'Joice NanKivell, aged 15' proclaimed

The long, hard war is over, and we have peace once more,  
And may we long have unity twixt German, French and Boer;  
A peace with all, as brethren should, but never had before,  
So long may peace embrace the world, from sea to sea, from shore to shore,

When first the Boers decided our countrymen to kill  
We were ashamed of them, you know, and took their challenge ill;  
We thought we soon will settle them, they soon will get their fill,  
And then we'll take their country, and make them pay the bill

But when we went to fight them, they showed what they could do;  
We tried our best to beat them, and wide our thunder threw;  
And after years' hard fighting, we made them pretty blue,  
So let's have Peace and Unity mixed up in Irish stew.

Family finances prevented her from pursuing medical studies, but she nevertheless moved to Melbourne, taught herself touch-typing,

submitted and published poems in several papers and magazines, and applied for and obtained a job as secretary to Dr Alexander Leeper, Warden of Trinity College and Head of Classics at Melbourne University. Her record as author of reviews in the Melbourne *Evening Herald* newspaper, and children's fiction and poetry (one of her earliest publications was in the Melbourne journal *Contrast*) impressed Leeper, who hired her without interviewing others. She consequently read widely in ancient history and classical literature that Leeper made available from his extensive library. In 1916, she published *The Cobweb Ladder*, her first book for children.

Joice's patriotic fervour was still expressed in poems like 'The Eleventh Hour', published in the *National Leader* newspaper in Queensland in December 1916. The poem, addressed to waverers, concluded with the lines 'Every ounce of your strength is needed— still you are standing deaf and dumb. / How can you pause? The cry is urgent: 'God of Nations, when will they come?' A note at the poem's conclusion stated 'Miss NanKivell's only brother, who left Australia with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, was killed at Pozières'.

When the Melbourne *Evening Herald* editor Guy Innes asked her to review a memoir of war experience, *The Straits Impregnable*, by 'Sydney de Loghe' (London-born Frederick Sydney Loch, a former jackeroo, who had been wounded at Gallipoli and returned to Australia), Joice wrote a glowing account of his book. Published by the Australasian Authors' Agency in Melbourne in 1916, *The Straits Impregnable* had been initially banned by the censor on the grounds that it would impede enlistment. The London firm of John Murray published the book in revised form the following year. Loch's first-hand report on Gallipoli gave Joice an insight into the events in which her brother, Sergeant Charles George ('Geoffrey'), had played a daringly significant part before he went to France, where, aged twenty-eight, he was killed in action at Pozières. (He was awarded the Military Medal.)

Following the appearance of her review, Joice was introduced to Loch, and they discovered many shared cultural interests. Loch was also deeply sympathetic with NanKivell's grief at her brother's death. Their friendship resulted in their marriage at the Methodist manse in Royal Parade, Carlton, in Melbourne on 22 February 1919. Joice was worried that her family might not approve of the union on account of her age. Two years older than Loch, she had stated her age as twenty-six rather than thirty-one at the time of her marriage.

The couple wanted to travel abroad and work as journalists and writers, and when Guy Innes guaranteed that Joice could work as a freelance correspondent, she and her husband left Australia in 1920 for London. When Innes moved to London to take up a position with Lord Northcliffe's newspapers, Joice's journalism increasingly appeared in English papers.

With a contract from John Murray to write on events in Ireland, the Lochs carried on to Dublin, despite Joice's relatives' warnings about the danger involved, to cover the Sinn Fein war. Sydney worked on another book, and Joice wrote for the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, as well as for the Melbourne papers. Their jointly authored book, *Ireland in Travail*, appeared in 1922, and in Australia, under the rubric 'Points for the Propagandist', the *Worker* newspaper quoted from the book an aphorism indicative of the distance Joice had travelled since her early effusive verse: 'Patriotism, how it limits a man in judgment, in sincerity, in his horizon'.

Following their Irish experience, Joice and Sydney volunteered to assist with a Quaker relief organisation for refugees in Poland, where, after a trip to Moscow, they worked among displaced and homeless refugees. The Quaker Relief Movement was particularly concerned with people suffering from damage inflicted on that country by Lenin's troops. The Lochs' jointly authored book, *The River of a Hundred Ways: Life in the Devastated Areas of Eastern Poland* (1924) and their newspaper reportage witnessed the desperate conditions of refugees. For their part in practically assisting humanitarian work, Joice and Sydney were awarded medals by the President of Poland.

In 1923, they went to Greece as aid workers following the burning of Smyrna. For two years, they worked in a Quaker-run refugee camp on the outskirts of Thessaloniki before renting a Byzantine tower by the sea in the seaside village of Ouranoupoli, near Mt Athos. Joice provided medical aid and a program to educate girls and to help the poverty-stricken villagers, who included Greek Orthodox Turks who had settled after the expulsion. Joice and her husband purchased looms and made others so the women could work to revitalise the rug industry. She and her husband sourced local wools and dyes and designed the new Pirgos rugs using motifs from ancient Byzantine manuscripts in the monasteries at Athos. They sourced the dyes and wool and later sold the rugs in Greece, England and Australia. Joice also acted as a medical orderly and held regular clinics for the villagers.

In 1940, Joice and Sydney joined the Friends Relief Service in Bucharest to assist refugees fleeing from Poland. They provided food and other relief and helped organise the refugees' escape; Joice took a group of 1000 refugees by ship from Constantinople to Palestine, and worked for the remainder of World War 2 with Polish and Greek refugees in Palestine. In 1945, the Lochs returned to Greece to help with reconstruction work. When Sydney died in 1954, Joice continued her rug-making projects, free medical clinics, and used royalties from her writing to provide a water supply to her village.

For their work in Greece, the couple were awarded medals by the King of the Hellenes, and Joice was later the recipient of other awards by governments of Greece, Romania, Serbia, Poland, and Britain, for humanitarian work saving Polish and Jewish refugees. In 1972, the Australian government belatedly awarded her the Order of the British Empire in recognition of her work for international relations. She died at Ouranoupolis and was buried with Greek Orthodox rites. Kallistos Ware, the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Oxford (now Metropolitan Kallistos) named her 'one of the most significant women of the 20th century'. The tower in which the couple lived and worked is now a museum.

Joice's later non-fiction works, *A Life for the Balkans* (1939) and *Prosporon, Uranopoulos Rugs and Dyes* (1964), reflect her interest and connection with that country, as do her later poems.

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Joice's husband Sydney Loch (1888 or 1889–Greece, 1954 or 1955 according to different sources) had come to Australia in 1905, and worked as a jackeroo before enlistment. As well as his account of Gallipoli, he published several novels in 1916 and 1917, under the name Sydney de Longhe, and another, *Three Predatory Women*, under his own name in 1925 (London: George Allen & Unwin). A further Australian publication was '*One Crowded Hour: A Call to Arms* (Melbourne: Australasian Authors' Agency, 1918), a compilation of newspaper articles about his War experience. His last publication was *Athos: The Holy Mountain* (London: Lutterworth, 1957), a travel book that Joice completed as a tribute to him, but requested the omission of her name.

## §

Joice published several children's books under the name Joice M. NanKivell, commencing with *The Cobweb Ladder* (1916). Her book of sketches of her childhood bush and city life, *The Solitary Pedestrian* (1918), includes reminiscences of her family, including her brother Charles George (who appears in the book under the name 'Robin'). Later books published under her married name include those already mentioned and *The Fourteen Thumbs of St Peter* (about Russia). Her autobiography, *A Fringe of Blue*, was published in 1968 and her *Collected Poems* two years before her death. The royalties of Joice's and Sydney's books went to further their causes.

## §

The 1915 poem, 'To You Who Should Follow', a product of Joice's early patriotism before she acquainted herself with the truth of Gallipoli, was syndicated widely, following its first appearance in print in Victoria. The poem's patriotic sentiments are conventionally expressed in an appeal to men to enlist. She returned to the theme in other poems that were widely republished up until the result of the second Conscription Referendum in December 1917 put an end to the issue of conscription.

Joice's post-World War One poems are at once more sophisticated in form and historical consciousness. She came to regard war as less a matter of glory than of abiding pity, and poems such as 'Lake Narocz' express a sweeping concern for all suffering humanity—a concern enacted in her practical deeds. Beside the enduring tone of fellow feeling for the victims of war and famine, her later poems attest to her sense of wonder at the dramatic seasonal phenomena she experienced in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.

### Publications

#### Children's fiction

*The Cobweb Ladder*, Melbourne: Lothian, and London: Limpkin, 1916.

*The Fourteen Thumbs of St Peter*, London: John Murray, 1926.

*The Hopping Ha'penny* [as J.M. Loch], London: Methuen, 1935.

*Tales of Christophilos*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954.

*Again Christophilos*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959.

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Joice M. NanKivell  
To You Who Should Follow

Over the rim of the ocean, beyond the stretch of the sky,  
Stand brothers, husbands, and lovers, who count it their glory to die.  
Broken, unbeaten, heroic, torn limbs and quivering breath,  
Day after day, night after night, shoulder to shoulder with death.

Shoulder to shoulder with death! Would we keep them safe at our side,  
Saved by the blood of their brothers who followed their duty and died?  
Safe, though dead voices are calling, and wounded men beckon in pain,  
Do you, who should follow, care nought? Have they hewn you a pathway in vain?

They fight as our forefathers fought, and they died as our forefathers died;  
Raw and reckless they rushed to the fight, and they came out well proven and tried.  
The zip and the bite of the bullet, the thunder, the shriek of the shell—  
Yet they surely find glimpses of Heaven even in uttermost Hell.

Will ye close your eyes to the call, the whisper that thrills through and through,  
Will you close your eyes to the beck'ning, the hearts that are broken by you?  
For every tear that is falling, and for all the blood that is spilt,  
Blame only yourselves, oh, ye slackers, for the guilt is mostly your guilt.

Then buckle your armour and follow, over the ways they have won;  
Tread if you can, in their footsteps—their voices are urging you on.  
Think: you could join battalions, and they are so pitiful few.  
Their King and their country have claimed them, and now they are calling on you.

Source:

*Brunswick and Coburg Leader* (Victoria), Friday 24 September 1915, p. 1.

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Joice M. NanKivell  
We Are Not Schooled in Vengeance

We are not schooled in vengeance, we count all men are free.  
Strange roads we sought and opened, threw wide, both land and sea,  
And we are slow to anger, but the blood ye spilled is wet.  
Though slowly we remember, more slowly we forget.

We are not schooled in vengeance, but—learn and know our way,  
We shall not doff our armor till drop for drop ye pay;  
And render unto Caesar the price of stricken years,  
Disgorging all ye plundered, full toll for blood and tears.

The brand of Cain is on you, marked deep on soul and brow,  
An outcast from the nations, with broken faith and vow;  
Ye sat at all our councils, ye smoked the pipe of peace,  
Ye broke bread with the nations, and swore that strife, should cease.

We are slow to anger, but we shall not sheathe the sword,  
Until you render tribute for the blood that you outpoured;  
Can ye break our might, slow gathered?—hold back the turning tide?—  
We are not schooled in vengeance, but—our sons have fought and died.

Source: *Herald* (Melbourne), Friday 21 July 1916, p. 1; *Daily Herald* (Adelaide),  
Saturday 17 March 1917, p. 3.

Joice M. NanKivell  
Where Are You Going To?

‘Where are you going to, pretty man?’  
‘To the football field as fast as I can.  
And then I shall go to the cinema show.  
War on a pictured screen, you know,  
Brightened by farces two or three,  
With a girl at my side, is enough for me.  
So off to the football field I go, where the shouting  
drowns the crying.’

‘Where are you going to, soldier men?  
To the fields of France and back again?’  
‘We have heard the call of the brotherhood,  
And whatever comes we shall count it good,’  
A handful only we take the track,  
And the chances are we shall not come back,  
But we shall fight as our brothers fought, and fall  
where our mates are lying.’

Where are you going to, do you know?  
Some are going where strong men go,  
But the others have trampled beneath their feet  
The British Flag as they stroll the street.  
They heard, but they chose Life’s easy ways,  
And their souls are branded for all their days—  
They have dinned the Motherland, and the broken men,  
and the dying.

Source: *Brisbane Courier*, Monday 18 June 1917, p. 8.

Joice M. NanKivell  
Lake Narocz

*Where in the winter of 1916, 60,000 Russian soldiers  
crashed through the ice and were drowned in a vain attempt  
to reach the German lines on the other side.*

The breeze ruffles your surface  
And you laugh up to the sun,  
The wind stirs your brown depths deeper,  
And still you laugh to the sun,  
And your laughter wakes not the sleeper  
Where the great pike bask in the sun  
That drifts down from your surface.

Waves jostle the reed in the shallows,  
And spend themselves on the shore,  
Fretting in needless anger,  
Stirring the stones on the shore,  
But they rouse you not from your languor  
In the fast embrace of the shore.  
Waves jostle the reeds in the shallows.

In the winter the ripples are stilled,  
Smooth and white in the pall on the water,  
A pall laid to cover the dead,  
The dead who lie under the water,  
Did you stir in your sleep at their tread?  
To comfort them under the water  
Until all their crying was stilled?

At the crashing of ice did you stir?  
Why should your slumber be broken?  
In spring the ice grinding, complaining  
Gives you sign that the winter has broken,  
That the sun his old power is regaining.  
Should the spell be so suddenly broken?  
That the crashing of ice made you stir?  
And what is the crying of men?  
Smooth is your bed for the sleepers.

Did you think it the wolf or the wind  
That howled o'er the couch of the sleeper,  
When guiltless and those who had sinned  
Fell asleep in the arms of the sleeper  
And hushed was the crying of men?  
And you stirred not in your dreaming,

Still clasped in the arms of the winter,  
By never a ripple disturbed,  
Calm as the breath of the winter,  
Unconquerable and unperturbed,  
Still as the stillness of winter,  
You heard not nor woke from your dreaming.

Source: Joice NanKivell Loch, *Collected Poems*, Burford, Cygnet 1980, pp.11-12.

## NETTIE PALMER



Nettie Palmer. Photographer unknown. State Library Victoria.

Janet Gertrude Palmer was born on 18 August 1885 at Sandhurst (Bendigo), the only daughter of Irish-born John Higgins, a draper and later accountant, and his wife Catherine (née MacDonald). The family moved to Armadale in Melbourne, where Esmonde MacDonald, Nettie's only brother was born in 1897. (In 1917, Esmonde enlisted in the AIF and served as a gunner in the Field Artillery Battery during World War One.)

Nettie was educated at home by her mother and at a Miss Rudd's Seminary at Malvern before she attended Presbyterian Ladies College. Her school friends included Hilda Bull (later radical intellectual and wife to playwright Louis Esson) and Christian Jollie Smith (later solicitor, anti-Conscriptionist, foundation committee-member of the Communist Party of Australia, and tireless defender of working-class interests).

Nettie's first writing was a response to her parents' strict Baptist beliefs, and she began to publish verse and prose while still at school. She matriculated with honours in Latin, French and English, with strong

results also in history. Enrolling at the University of Melbourne in 1905, she graduated BA in 1909 and MA in 1912, gaining a scholarship and honours results. From 1905, against her parents' efforts to restrain her interests, she engaged in political events that were bolstered by her association with poet and cultural nationalist Bernard O'Dowd, whom she regarded as a sage and with whom she shared a passionate sense of affiliation with the Australian bush. O'Dowd's lecture and pamphlet *Poetry Militant* as well as his poems collected in *Dawnward?* (1903), *The Silent Land* (1906) and the long poem *The Bush* (1912) inspired many radical women and men besides Nettie Higgins: Katherine Susannah Prichard left one of his lectures 'almost too exalted exhilarated to speak'.

Nettie wrote and published at first under several names including 'Bendigo', Owen Roe O'Neill, and Shalott. Later names would include Janet Gertrude Palmer, N.P., N.Q., and Nettie Palmer.

In 1909, she met the writer Vance Palmer, who had embraced radical Australian nationalism in Queensland, where he wrote an essay on 'An Australian National Art' for *Steele Rudd's Magazine*. He subsequently worked as a journalist in London, returning via Russia and Japan. In Melbourne in 1909, he met many members of literary circles and engaged in activities with the Victorian Socialist Party prior to returning to Queensland to work as a tutor and bookkeeper before again travelling in England and France between 1912 and 1915, apart from a return via America and Mexico in 1912 and 1913. He supported himself through astonishingly prolific literary work, while encountering writers including Katherine Mansfield, Ezra Pound, Frank Harris and expatriate artist Will Dyson.

Nettie was meanwhile assisted by her father and uncle to travel to Europe in furtherance of her academic career. Her uncle, Henry Bournes Higgins, Judge of the Arbitration Court, defender of the Labor movement, advocate for women's tertiary education and member of the Melbourne University Council, was a notable supporter of the arts, and in 1904 had donated £1000 for a poetry scholarship. (Nettie later published an admiring biography of her distinguished uncle.)

Nettie studied for the diploma of the International Phonetics Association in Germany, France and England from 1910 until 1912, during which time she and Vance, who had been engaged since 1911, married in London on 23 May 1914 and went on a honeymoon to France. When war was declared, they returned to England, where their first child, Aileen, was born, and then, one month after the sinking of

the *Lusitania*, left for Australia, where they continued their literary and political activities, including campaigning against censorship and the Conscription plebiscite. Their second daughter, Helen, was born at Katherine Susannah Prichard's cottage (formerly inhabited by Louis and Hilda Esson), at Emerald, southeast of Melbourne, in the Dandenong Ranges.

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Nettie published two collections of poems in England, in 1914 and 1915. In Melbourne, she and Vance would eventually become one of Australia's outstanding cultural partnerships.

Nettie's journalism and talks provided income while Vance wrote fiction and, with her, edited short fiction and such classics as Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life*. Nettie's diaries, critical studies and biographies were crucial in the promotion of an Australian cultural tradition. Nettie produced regular book reviews for Melbourne newspapers, especially the *Argus* and *Australasian*, and gradually appears to have abandoned verse (apart from a translation of a poem by Verlaine in the early 1920s). Her earlier poems reappeared in anthologies while her literary journalism was both essential for the family income and persuasive in foregrounding the more outstanding Australian writers of her own and earlier generations.

Nettie Palmer's pre-World War One verse received mixed reviews. A sensitive 1915 reviewer of *The South Wind*, which appeared in the Melbourne *Herald*, observed that 'in more than one verse, the mere suggestion of shadow and shine prefigures an entity for ever escaping, much as the melody of Dvorak's "Humoreske" indicates the existence, present yet always unrevealed, of a being not of this earth, but of the dales of Arcady of old time. Some of Richard Hovey's wonderful woodland verses furnish a parallel, but lack the absolute and certain human touch that thrills in "Transformation," "The Hour", and "The Prisoner". Not less in things said, but in the mastery of the word unspoken, lies Mrs Palmer's sincerity and charm'.

Elsewhere, the *Sydney Morning Herald's* reviewer treated Palmer's poetry patronisingly in 1916, lauding Vance's first collection, *The Forerunners*, while faintly praising Nettie's *Shadowy Paths*. Vance was commended for 'his power of producing a vivid impression in a few lines' and his ability to 'make us share' his 'mental vision'. The reviewer asserted that Nettie's volume, 'contains less of intrinsic importance',

but 'there is much in it that is distinguished by genuine charm and gracefulness', and that 'Miss Palmer's muse is not one of force, nor does she aim at the highest peak of Parnassus. But within her limitations her verse is excellent. She brings to it a sympathy, a delicacy of feeling, and a sense of melody, and above all a tender simplicity which carry her far when more ambitious flights might have failed'.

Palmer nonetheless continued to produce lyrical verse throughout the War.

Her poem 'Birds' (1916) and others appeared sporadically but her sense of the urgency of the task she embarked on with her husband, to encourage recognition of Australian literature, remained a priority.

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Nettie's cousin Mervyn Bournes Higgins, sole son of Justice Henry Bournes Higgins and his wife Mary, enlisted in the army while his family was in England at the outbreak of the War, and he survived Gallipoli only to die, a Captain in the 8<sup>th</sup> Australian Light Horse, at Magdhaba, Egypt, on 23 December 1916, aged 28. His desolated parents created a scholarship in his name at Melbourne University.

Vance Palmer might have avoided joining the army during the War on the grounds that he was a married man and parent of two daughters, but he felt compelled to enlist, and in March 1918, did so. He was sent with reinforcements for the fourteenth Battalion to France, arriving three days after the Armistice. He found army life agreed with him, seeing it as a guild or 'band of brothers'. After spending some time in France, England and Ireland, he returned to Australia, still a private soldier, and was discharged in Melbourne on 4 November 1919. The army experience informs Vance's second collection of poems, *The Camp*, published in 1920, which contains his most celebrated and much-anthologised poem, 'The Farmer Remembers the Somme'.

Among other immediate postwar writing and journalism, and a number of plays for the Melbourne Pioneer Players, Vance contributed articles to the soldiers' magazine *Aussie*, under the pen name 'Rann Daly', and, on foreign affairs, to the Catholic newspaper the *Advocate*.

The Palmers lived in Caloundra in Queensland from 1925, but returned to Europe on occasion after the War. Vance went to promote his work in 1930, and the couple went together in 1935 and 1936, when they were closely involved in supporting the Republican cause in the Spanish

Civil War. Back in Australia after a brief sojourn in Spain, the couple were active in the cultural fight against Fascism. Nettie became Victorian editor of a Sydney anti-Fascist journal for women, and a member of a branch of the International Refugee Emergency Committee, while teaching migrants English, and undertaking other literary activities.

Vance, a liberal socialist like his wife, made his last overseas trip in 1955 as a delegate to the World Peace Council. He died at his home at Kew on 15 July 1959, a few days before *Meanjin* magazine published a special issue in honour of both Nettie and Vance. In poor health, but nevertheless caring for ill and elderly relatives through the 1940s and 50s, Nettie Palmer died at Hawthorn on 19 October 1964.

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Nettie Palmer  
The Mother

In the sorrow and the terror of the nations,  
In a world shaken through by lamentations,  
Shall I dare know happiness,  
That I stitch a baby's dress?

So: for I shall be a mother with the mothers,  
I shall know the mother's anguish like the others,  
Present joy must surely start  
For the life beneath my heart.

Gods and men, ye know a woman's glad unreason,  
How she cannot bend and weep but in her season,  
Let my hours with rapture glow  
As the seams and stitches grow.

And I cannot hear the word of fire and slaughter;  
Do men die? Then live, my child, my son, my daughter!  
Into the realms of pain I bring  
You for joy's own offering.

Source: Nettie Palmer, *Shadowy Paths*. London: Euston Press, 1915, p. 30.

Nettie Palmer  
The Barrack Yard

A sack of straw suspended from a tree,  
    Soldiers with bayonets in the barrack-yard,  
    In turn they lunge and thrust and stand on guard,  
Their faces rigid, fraught with destiny.

A summer wind is moving dreamily,  
    The sack a hundred times is gashed and marred,  
    In the tree-shadows by the railings barred  
The city children stare and laugh to see.

What of life's glory, what of memory's glow!  
What of the boon of song, the great word written,  
    The highest peak our dreamers ever saw!  
We learn to slay our kind. Ah, might we know,  
Dying, that every foe our hands had smitten  
    Was but a mute and soulless man of straw.

Source: Nettie Palmer, *Shadowy Paths*. London: Euston Press, 1915, p. 49.

Nettie Palmer

Birds

I know a place where birds are wild and swift,  
    And strange and splendid,  
    Hills where their sweetest songs are never ended,  
And those that have no song may fare adrift  
Attired like clouds at sunrise, rift on rift.

Across the high, bright orchard where there hung  
    Late apples glowing,  
    Came lories, red and blue, like small waves flowing,  
Came later yet rosellas, and among  
The smooth, bare branches like a garland swung.

And ah! the birds that sang, the soft, grey birds,  
    The twilight feathered,  
    Moving with tiny leaps like silken tethered  
Singers to some great prince whose glance rewards  
Each long-drawn call and all the wavering chords!

They sang, the grey-garbed mountain thrushes sang,  
    And we two listened,  
    Rapt on some rain-washed evening while there glistened  
A sudden leaf a-tremble: you would hang  
Clematis round me or the wild pea's fang.

At morning, when white clouds like leaves drop down  
    Filling the hollows,  
    And make vast, milk-white lakes and silence follows,  
There on a stump some laughing jackass clown  
Stillter than wood thought all the world his own.

But all the world was ours! The birds were ours,  
    Because we knew them,  
    The trees were ours, because our love passed through them,  
And every dome of cloud and all the flowers  
And mountain mists that built our silent bowers.

Enough, we had been jubilant too long,  
    The gods have judged us,  
    Such vital joy their tranquil eyes begrudged us.  
You fight in France: here when the thrushes throng  
How can I bear alone to hear their song.

Source: *Weekly Times Annual*, Saturday 4 November 1916, p. 15.

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**Michael Sharkey** has written literary biographies and essays for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, and books by other editors. He has also published widely on nineteenth and twentieth-century fiction and poetry, and has contributed several hundred reviews to literary journals and newspapers in Australia, Europe, Canada and New Zealand. A selection of the latter is contained in *The Poetic Eye: Occasional Writing 1982-2012*, published in the Netherlands by Brill. He has edited the work of several Australian writers, and he formerly edited *Ulitarra* literary magazine and the *Australian Poetry Journal*. He taught Australian and other literatures at universities in Australia, New Zealand, China and Germany, and is the author of fourteen collections of poetry and was awarded the 2012 Grace Leven Prize for poetry. He lives in Castlemaine, Victoria.

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