

John Shaw Neilson

The Orange Tree

The young girl stood beside me. I
Saw not what her young eyes could see:
- A light, she said, not of the sky
Lives somewhere in the Orange Tree.

- Is it, I said, of east or west?
The heartbeat of a luminous boy
Who with his faltering flute confessed
Only the edges of his joy?

Was he, I said, borne to the blue
In a mad escapade of Spring
Ere he could make a fond adieu
To his love in the blossoming?

- Listen! the young girl said. There calls
No voice, no music beats on me;
But it is almost sound: it falls
This evening on the Orange Tree.

- Does he, I said, so fear the Spring
Ere the white sap too far can climb?
See in the full gold evening
All happenings of the olden time?

Is he so goaded by the green?
Does the compulsion of the dew
Make him unknowable but keen
Asking with beauty of the blue?

- Listen! the young girl said. For all
Your hapless talk you fail to see
There is a light, a step, a call
This evening on the Orange Tree.

- Is it, I said, a waste of love
Imperishably old in pain,
Moving as an affrighted dove
Under the sunlight or the rain?

Is it a fluttering heart that gave
Too willingly and was reviled?
Is it the stammering at a grave,
The last word of a little child?

- Silence! the young girl said. Oh, why,
Why will you talk to weary me?
Plague me no longer now, for I
Am listening like the Orange Tree.

Meeting of Sighs

Your voice was the rugged
old voice that I knew;
I gave the best grip of
my greeting to you.
I know not of your lips —
you knew not of mine;
Of travel and travail
we gave not a sign.

We drank and we chorused
with quips in our eyes;
But under our song was
the meeting of sighs.
I knew not of your lips —
you knew not of mine;
For lean years and lone years
had watered the wine.

Beauty Imposes

Beauty imposes reverence in the Spring.
Grave as the urge within the honeybuds,
It wounds us as we sing.

Beauty is joy that stays not overlong.
Clad in the magic of sincerities,
It rides up in a song.

Beauty imposes chastenings on the heart,
Grave as the birds in last solemnities
Assembling to depart.

Mary Gilmore

A Little Ghost

The moonlight flutters from the sky
To meet her at the door,
A little ghost, whose steps have passed
Across the creaking floor.

And rustling vines that lightly tap
Against the window-pane,
Throw shadows on the white-washed walls
To blot them out again.

The moonlight leads her as she goes
Across a narrow plain,
By all the old, familiar ways
That know her steps again.

And through the scrub it leads her on
And brings her to the creek,
But by the broken dam she stops
And seems as she would speak.

She moves her lips, but not a sound
Ripples the silent air;
She wrings her little hands, ah, me!
The sadness of despair!

While overhead the black-duck's wing
Cuts like a flash upon
The startled air, that scarcely shrinks
Ere he afar is gone.

And curlews wake, and wailing cry
Cur-lew! cur-lew! cur-lew!
Till all the Bush, with nameless dread
Is pulsing through and through.

The moonlight leads her back again
And leaves her at the door,
A little ghost whose steps have passed
Across the creaking floor.

The Waradgery Tribe

Harried we were, and spent,
broken and falling,
ere as the cranes we went,
crying and calling.

Summer shall see the bird
backward returning;
never shall there be heard
those, who went yearning.

Emptied of us the land;
ghostly our going;
fallen like spears the hand
dropped in the throwing.

We are the lost who went,
like the cranes, crying;
hunted, lonely and spent
broken and dying.

Old Botany Bay

"I'm old
Botany Bay;
stiff in the joints,
little to say.

I am he
who paved the way,
that you might walk
at your ease to-day;

I was the conscript
sent to hell
to make in the desert
the living well;

I bore the heat,
I blazed the track-
furrowed and bloody
upon my back.

I split the rock;
I felled the tree:
The nation was-
Because of me!

Old Botany Bay
Taking the sun
from day to day...
shame on the mouth
that would deny
the knotted hands
that set us high!