

Classic Poetry Series

**Jessie Mackay**  
**- poems -**

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## Jessie Mackay(1864 - 1938)

Jessie Mackay was a New Zealand poet.

Her parents were Scottish. She went to Christchurch to train as a teacher, and taught at small rural schools until 1898. She moved to Dunedin, and worked as a journalist for the Otago Witness. In 1902, she moved to Christchurch where she lived with her sister Georgina. In 1906, she was lady editor of the Canterbury Times.

Her papers are held by the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, New Zealand. The Jessie Mackay Memorial Award for Verse is given by the PEN New Zealand.



# Dunedin In The Gloaming

Like a black, enamoured King whispered low the thunder  
To the lights of Roslyn, terraced far asunder:  
Hovered low the sister cloud in wild, warm wonder.

"O my love, Dunedin town, the only, the abiding!  
Who can look undazzled up where the Norn is riding, --  
Watch the sword of destiny from the scabbard gliding!

"Dark and rich and ringing true -- word and look for ever;  
Taking to her woman heart all forlorn endeavour;  
Heaven's sea about her feet, not the bounded river!"

"Sister of the mountain mist, and never to be holden  
With the weary sophistries that dimmer eyes embolden, --  
O the dark Dunedin town, shot with green and golden!"

Then a silver pioneer netted in the rift,  
Leaning over Maori Hill, dreaming in the lift,  
Dropped her starry memories through the passionate drift: --

"Once -- I do remember them, the glory and the garden,  
Ere the elder stars had learnt God's mystery of pardon,  
Ere the youngest, I myself, had seen the flaming warden --

"Once even after even I stole ever shy and early  
To mirror me within a glade of Eden cool and pearly,  
Where shy and cold and holy ran a torrent sought but rarely.

"And fondly could I swear that this my glade had risen newly, --  
Burst the burning desert tomb wherein she lieth truly,  
To keep an Easter with the birds and me who loved her duly."

Wailing, laughing, loving, hoar, spake the lordly ocean:  
"You are sheen and steadfastness: I am sheen and motion,  
Gulfing argosies for whim, navies for a notion.

"Sleep you well, Dunedin Town, though loud the lulling lyre is;  
Lady of the stars terrene, where quick the human fire is,  
Lady of the Maori pines, the turrets, and the eyries!"

Jessie Mackay

# October In New Zealand

O JUNE has her diamonds, her diamonds of sheen,  
Meet for a queen's neck, if Death had e'er a queen!  
June has her blue days, jewels of delight,  
Set in the ivory of Alp-land white,—  
But October, October's the lady o' the year!

O January's garland is redder than the rose,  
And the wine-red ruby of January glows  
All the way to madness and half the way to sin,  
When sleep is in the poppy and fire is in the whin!  
But October, October's the lady o' the year!

October will ride in a mantle o' the vair,  
With the flower o' the quince in her dew-wet hair;  
October will ride to the gates of the day,  
With the bluebells ringing on her maiden way;—  
For October, October's the lady o' the year!

Jessie Mackay

# Ortygia

IN Ortygia the Dawn land the old gods dwell,  
And the silver's yet a-quiver on the old wizard well  
By the milk-white walls of the Temple of the Moon,  
Where the Dawn Maids hallow the red gods' tune,  
And old grey Time is a nine-year child,  
Back between the rivers ere man was ever 'guiled,  
Or the knelling 'Never, never!' by the cherubim was rung.  
It was there, there, there, in Ortygia the young,—  
It was there, there, there, in the meadows of the sky  
That first we went a-summering, my love of loves and I.  
And well I wot the pleasaunce for them that thither go  
Is litten with the beacons that the Dawn Maids know,  
With their vigil at end in the Temple of the Moon,  
And their prayer all prayer for the waked world's boon.  
The words they speak in that land are new as the dawn;  
The rills that run in that land are diamond, drawn  
From the old wizard well where the red gods croon.  
And walk you in Ortygia or late or soon,  
It is but lovers only that ever you will see;  
For every silver wood-king's a trysting tree,  
And the dream-flowers are keeping their first high May  
For the glad and the glamoured who walk yon way;  
And to the summit etherous the track you cannot miss,  
Though the hills are dim and sheeny with the rainbow's kiss.  
O, we walked the road of iris, my love of loves and I  
In Ortygia the young with the red gods by!

Jessie Mackay

# Rona In The Moon

Rona, Rona, sister olden,-  
Rona in the moon!  
You'll never break your prison golden,-  
Never, late or soon!

Rona, for her crying daughter,  
At the dead of night  
Took the gourd and went for water;  
Went without a light.

There she heard the owlets wrangle  
With an angry hoot;  
Stick and stone and thorny tangle  
Wounded Rona's foot.

'Boil the moon!' she said in passion;  
'Boil your lazy head!  
Hiding thus in idle fashion  
In your starry bed!'

Angry was the moon in heaven;  
Down to earth she came:-  
'Stay you ever unforgiven  
For the word of shame!

Up!- you made the moon a byword -  
Up and dwell with me!  
Rona felt the drawing skyward,-  
Seized a ngaio tree.

But from earth the ngaio parted  
Like a bitten thread;  
Like a comet upward darted  
Rona overhead.

In the moon is Rona sitting  
Never to be free;  
With the gourd she held in flitting  
And the ngaio tree.

You'll never break your prison golden,-  
Never, late or soon,  
Rona, Rona, sister olden, -  
Rona in the moon!

Jessie Mackay

# Song Of The Driftweed

HERE'S to the home that was never, never ours!  
Toast it full and fairly when the winter lowers.  
Speak ye low, my merry men, sitting at your ease;  
Harken to the homeless Drift in the roaring seas!

Here's to the life we shall never live on earth!  
Cut for us awry, awry ages ere the birth.  
Set the teeth and meet it well, wind upon the shore;  
Like a lion, in the face look the Nevermore!

Here's to the love we were never let to win!  
What of that? a many shells have a pearl within;  
Some are mated with the gold in the light of day;  
Some are buried fathoms deep, in the seas away.

Here's to the selves we shall never, never be!  
We're the drift of the world and the tangle of the sea.  
It's far beyond the Pleiad, it's out beyond the sun  
Where the rootless shall be rooted when the wander-year is done!

Jessie Mackay







