

Classic Poetry Series

Rex Ingamells
- poems -

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Rex Ingamells(1913 - 1955)

Rex Ingamells was a poet and the founder of the Jindyworobak movement. He was born in Ororoo, South Australia. He gained his education at the University of Adelaide, prior to becoming a high school teacher. He also worked as a journalist and publisher's representative. In 1951 he lectured in Australian Literature at the Melbourne Technical College.

Ingamells wrote his prose manifesto 'Conditional Culture' (1938), and founded the Jindyworobak movement in that year, in response to L.F. Giblin's urging that poets in Australia should portray Australian nature and people as they are in Australia, not with the 'European' gaze, an article in the Age concerning Australian Literature (February 16, 1935) by G.H. Cowling, and The Foundations of Culture in Australia by P.R. Stephenson. Ingamells was named as a judge of the Commonwealth Jubilee Literary competition in 1951.

Ingamells is the recipient of the 1945 Grace Levin Prize for Poetry.

Boomerang

This piece of hardwood, cunningly shaped,
was curved so evenly while piccaninnies gaped
at a Warrior who chipped at it with pieces of flint,
and formed it by meticulous dint upon dint.
Outside his wurly he sat beside a tree,
and chipped at it patiently for hours - not for me,
but to kill the Wallaby in the rocky pass,
to kill the fat wild Turkey hiding in the grass.

Rex Ingamells

Captain William Bligh

Look for an iron soul to bear the piled
anathema of time, to take, without
abjectness, scorn of every human rout,
colossal though by all the world defiled!
Discovering such in Bligh, instruct your child
in burning shame that one man, walled about
with rigid purpose, so should feel the flout
of History's rogues through Legend running wild.

The suffering soul of Bligh bends not to shame
but, as sand-heavy hills wait greening grass,
hoists high the lie till truth shall square the score.
His soul is innocent. Watch! It will flame,
superb, when gritty storms of falsehood pass,
and, by humanity, will, tower the more.

Rex Ingamells

Macquarie Harbour

Macquarie Harbour jailers lock
the sullen gates no more.....
but lash-strokes sound in every shock
of ocean on the dismal rocks
along that barren shore.

No more the bolters hear the hound
that bays upon the wind,
and terror-spurred kepp onward-bound
until they drop upon the ground
starved and terror-pinned....

But gales that whine among the hills
sniff at the savage tracks
the hopeless took. The snowfall fills
bleak ranges; then the moonlight spills
broad arows on their backs.

Rex Ingamells

News Of The Sun

The noon is on the cattle-track;
the air is void of sound,
except where crows, poised burning-black,
cry to the dusty ground.

Through mulga and mirage go none
but brazen Boolee now,
scorning the mercy of the sun
beneath the niggard bough.

But suddenly the mulga stirs;
the hot leaves flash like stars;
and, threading song on wing-beat whirrs,
burst flights of gay galahs.

Rex Ingamells

Shifting Camp

Glint of gumtrees in the dawn,
so million coloured: bush wind-borne
magpie-music, rising, falling;
and voices of the stockmen calling.

Bellowing of cattle: stamping,
impatient of the place of camping:
bark of dogs, and the crack-crack-crack
of stockwhips as we take the track.

Neighing of night-rested mounts...
This is a day that really counts:
a day to ride with a hundred head,
and a roll of canvas – that's my bed.

Rex Ingamells

Ship From The Thames

Stay, ship from Thames with fettered sails
in Sydney Cove, this ebb of tide;
your gear untangled from the gales,
imprisoned at your anchor ride.

The portly gentleman who are
the pillars of the land come down
and greet the Newcomes voyaged far
to make a name in Sydney town.

The Recoats, too with shouldered arms,
marshal pale wretches from the hold,
who, cramped in tempest and in calms
have learned to do as they are told.

Flash phaetons fill the streets to-day;
inn-tables rock to sailor fists;
the Governor, while the town is gay,
checks over new assignment lists.

Aloof, the slandered and abhorred
behold from of a quarried rise,
the cause of all the stir aboard
a fiercer glitter in their eyes.

Rex Ingamells

The Camp Fires Of The Past

A thousand, thousand camp fires every night,
in ages gone, would twinkle to the dark
from crest and valley in the rolling bush,
from mulga scrub and mallee scrub, from dunes
of Central sand, from gaps in straggling ranges,
from gibber plains and plains of iron-wood,
through leaves and in the open, from the mangroves
by shore of Carpenteria, from rocks
and beaches of the Bight.....for countless aeons,
a thousand, thousand camp fires burned each night,
and, by the fires, the Old Men told their tales
which held their listeners spellbound.... Every night
among the fires men chanted to the beat
of stick and boomerangs and clap of hands,
or drone-and-boom of didgeridoo, the songs
rising and falling, trailing, quickening,
while eyes gleamed bright, through smoke drift, bodies shone
and dusked in fitful glow amid the shadows.....

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