

The Song of the Darling River

The skies are brass and the plains are bare,
Death and ruin are everywhere --
And all that is left of the last year's flood
Is a sickly stream on the grey-black mud;
The salt-springs bubble and the quagmires quiver,
And -- this is the dirge of the Darling River:

`I rise in the drought from the Queensland rain,
`I fill my branches again and again;
`I hold my billabongs back in vain,
`For my life and my peoples the South Seas drain;
`And the land grows old and the people never
`Will see the worth of the Darling River.

`I drown dry gullies and lave bare hills, (lave = wash)
`I turn drought-ruts into rippling rills --
`I form fair island and glades all green
`Till every bend is a sylvan scene.
`I have watered the barren land ten leagues wide!
`But in vain I have tried, ah! in vain I have tried
`To show the sign of the Great All Giver,
`The Word to a people: O! lock your river.

`I want no blistering barge aground,
`But racing steamers the seasons round;
`I want fair homes on my lonely ways,
`A people's love and a people's praise --
`And rosy children to dive and swim --
`And fair girls' feet in my rippling brim;
`And cool, green forests and gardens ever' --
Oh, this is the hymn of the Darling River.

<i>The sky is brass and the scrub-lands glare,
Death and ruin are everywhere;
Thrown high to bleach, or deep in the mud
The bones lie buried by last year's flood,
And the Demons dance from the Never Never
To laugh at the rise of the Darling River.</i>

Henry Lawson 1889