

I AM, AFTER ALL, JUST A WOMAN: A CRITICAL ANNOTATED ANTHOLOGY OF
VICTORIAN WOMEN POETS

by

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I declare that 'I am, after all, just a woman: A critical annotated anthology of Victorian women poets' is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.


SIGNATURE
(Miss E E R Oswald)

04/03/02
DATE

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*To all the 'Eves' in my life
Who made me realise the importance of being a woman
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Without whom there would be no feminism
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This anthology presents a wide selection of poetry written by women, for the most part, during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). The volume of work produced during Victoria's reign, combined with the relentless processes of change which characterise the period, make it virtually impossible for this or any anthology to be comprehensively representative. The writers deal with varied issues ranging from nature and the natural world to religion, love and, inevitably, to the burning social issues of the day which include political, cultural, educational, legal and patriarchal domination. I have included poems illustrating these issues as well as poetry depicting Victorian women in the role of mother, wife, daughter, atheist, lover and slave.

The main focus in this anthology is on those poets living and writing in Britain during the nineteenth century. The term 'Victorian' is broadly accepted as all those things being of or characteristic of the time of Queen Victoria — whether it be the lace made, the writing done or legislation passed. The problem which has resulted from the use of this term concerns the geographical limits to which it can be meaningfully applied. Britain, including England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland would be the most obvious region to which one could apply the term: in 1800, Ireland abolished her own parliament in favour of an Act of Union with Great Britain. However, during the nineteenth century, Britain had a number of colonies under her flag and one could take the liberty of extending the

regions which fall into the sphere of 'Victorian', by including colonies like India, Australia, Canada and South Africa.

I would argue that women writing from these areas can be considered as part of the broad category of Victorian writers because of their direct affiliation with Britain and the rule of Queen Victoria. British Imperialism, with its extensive network of civil and military administration and the active promotion of immigration, encouraged ideas of uniform social value. As a result, the writings of the period, from different contexts are to some extent comparable. At the same time, though, colonial realities and the demands of colonial life introduce a variety of experience and circumstance that often reveal significant disjunctures between the metropole and far-flung regions. By including a small selection of poetry from various colonies I hope to provide some indication of the points of similarity and difference.

Writing produced during this period in America is problematic because America had secured independence from Britain and therefore not subject to imperial influence. Can we include these women's poems into the definition of 'Victorian'? They wrote in the same time but not the same place: American women writing in this period had a different context and foundation from which to begin their writings. Such differences may seem to preclude any consideration of nineteenth century women's poetry in America. Nevertheless, I have included the writings of these poets as a further point of contrast. Not only does this anthology reveal fresh responses to nature and the natural

world, but we also find hardships and issues like slavery mentioned in the writings of the African-American poets which are not found in those of the British or colonial poets.

Throughout this introduction and the poetry, writers are always referred to as poets. The feminine term 'poetess' did exist during this time but with it came many other connotations which were not always favourable. The term 'poetess' has been used in a neutral sense, but it has been used derogatorily in that the word has picked up overtones from other words such as 'poesy' implying that the writing is 'lightweight'. Males alluded to the word 'poetess' as coming from the word 'poetaster'. This term was usually used to refer to male poets whose writing was not of the accepted standard of the times: 'Poetaster... like 'poetess' can be used for either a professional hack or an amateur dabbler and had no meaning that could be construed in any approving way.' (Blain, 1999: 32) Even though, some of the poets, especially those writing in the Pre-Raphaelite era, tried to rectify these negative connotations by using the word 'poetess' in a positive light, I have followed the example of recent criticism by referring to these women as poets.

Women writers were virtually erased from critical and theoretical work in Victorian times, but more recently much work has been done on Victorian women poets. These

studies have mainly been concerned with ‘tracing the contours of a specifically female poetic tradition, a tradition that is generally perceived as separate from the canonized (male) tradition of Victorian poetry.’ (Scheinberg, 1997:175) This is my broad intention in presenting this anthology. Unfortunately, to study women poets as an independent category means the unavoidable division of gender lines. Scheinberg says that she fears that ‘until we read women poets as participating in the larger poetic discourse of the period, as opposed to only being players in a secluded realm of women’s poetry, we will inadvertently reinscribe the paradigm of Victorian literary criticism that predicted these women’s subsequent historical obscurity, despite their popularity and influence in the period.’ (1997:185) It is vital that feminists bear this in mind when examining the works of Victorian women writers — or any women writer for that matter. Although it may be presumed that women’s lives are constructed differently to those of males, because of biological, social and legal contrasts (and this would result in different ideas, themes, identity processes and styles of writing), this does not mean that their poems are to be interpreted and evaluated according to different criteria to those of male writers.

The reasons for not including the works of male poets in this anthology are as follows: Firstly, there is no scope or space to present a representative selection of poetry which ignores gender in a collection such as this. Secondly, Dorothy Mermin (1999:165), a feminist critic, suggests that all Victorian poets, male and female, can be read as women. She came to this conclusion after studying Matthew Arnold who suffered personal discomfort with the gender role assigned to him by society. Mermin felt that Arnold’s predicament prefigured her own alienation as a woman. Males took great care to ensure

that the writing of poems was an exclusive club for men only and those women who attempted to join were either laughed off or not taken seriously at all. However, this was not true of the entire period. As the century progressed, so did the male view of female writers. Males seemed on the surface to become more accepting of the fact that women deserved to be published. Charles Dickens, famous author and editor of *Household Words*, was greatly impressed by many of the poems which he published in his magazine despite the fact that they were written by women. This move to acceptance by writers like Dickens paved the way for contemporary scholars to have the privilege of both reading and studying the poems written by Victorian women. Other eminent male publishers and authors followed Dickens in promoting the writing of certain female poets. Thirdly, the differentiation between the genders has resulted in many valuable studies which can not be ignored. One can reconcile contrasting differences while noting similarities in the works of both genders. Kathleen Hickok (1999:25) suggests that 'we should certainly make as much of Victorian women's poetry available as possible, including biographical information about the authors, and we should then take this material seriously enough to write and talk about it at length and in detail.' With this challenge in mind, let us examine and 'talk about' the poetry of Victorian women, because they are, after all, just women.

The selection of poetry included here was made after careful consideration. It is impossible to include all the poems with special meaning, making reference to Victorian society or having feminist undertones. The main criteria for selection was that

the poem should throw some light on Victorian society and life as defined earlier in the discussion.

Women were marginalised during the Victorian era. Being a woman was not a role in which one could bloom due to this marginalisation. As a feminist, I felt compelled to give them a voice and make their poetry heard. Many of the poets allude to the hardships to which they were subjected during these times and, initially, I thought that this would be the only criteria used in order to make the selection for this collection. On the other hand, I wanted this collection to be unique, and in order to do this, I resolved to include poetry from women other than the stereotyped British Victorian ones — African-American, American and Indian. Women poets covered many areas in their writing – religion, nature, relationships — and to truly give them a voice, I would need to include these poems in the anthology too. The poets covered here were not only interested in writing about the ‘issues’. Bearing this fact in mind, we need to embody the range of poetry which they have to offer. In making this decision, my selection criteria had to be broadened. I wanted to expose the difficulties to which they were subjected by concentrating on their representation of women, at the same time demonstrating that their poetry has great value, because it was not a frivolous means of passing time. These writers had something to say, and just like their male counterparts, they wanted people to sit up and listen.

Aside from selecting poems which reflect the socio-cultural concerns, I also focussed on individual writers in isolation. In many cases a pattern in their writings

emerges, which shows their own unique preferences. Because I wanted these poets to come alive through their poems, I selected at least one of what I believed to be characteristic of their personal 'passion'. In doing this I hope to show the great diversity in their writing. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) was typically known for her 'Love Poems', Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) for her love of children's lyrics and religion while Emily Bronte (1818-1848) generally seemed to favour poetry about nature. These poets are comparatively well-known considering that they are women. In this anthology however, I anticipate introducing lesser known yet exciting poets, who for the most part, also seem to favour a particular style and theme.

(ii)

'Victorian', for the writers, has to be defined in terms of accepted traditions and ways of life inferred by society, the state and the church. The context in which these women wrote is evident in the poems included herein. To varying degrees, these women were subjected to patriarchal domination, strict religious positioning and prescribed roles in relationships. Richard Altick (1973:50-59) tells us that the women in Britain had no choice but to play the role of the 'weaker sex'. Women's very nature, as seen through the eyes of a patriarchal male, was stereotyped as being needy, physically and intellectually inferior. Men placed the women's stage within the home and the family because her 'limited capabilities' were best suited to this arena. These women suffered from legal and social mediocrity. A woman had no legal personality apart from her husband. She was considered a second-class citizen. More seriously, the vast majority of women were

permitted extremely limited access to education — a circumstance that served to entrench disempowerment.

The history of women's education in the nineteenth century serves as a good example of the predicament in which both the working-class and middle-class women found themselves. Early in the century, women were disadvantaged in the realm of education, later women from different social classes actively fought for reform. As a result of this struggle, women's colleges were established in Cambridge and Oxford in 1869 and 1879 respectively and in 1880 women were for the first time allowed to take degrees at the University of London. (Altick 1973:55) It was only in 1914 that women were afforded equal education opportunities with the introduction of a national system of public education in Britain. For most of the nineteenth century, the education that women received was gender-specific in that even the teachers were carefully chosen — only those who advocated the ideal of limited education would be appointed — to educate the girls in the duties of a wife or domestic servant. Girls were only taught certain subjects and completely excluded from the sciences as this was a sphere reserved for males. This evidence is only one example of the absolute discrimination in education. Even though inspectors were making efforts 'to ensure an appropriately feminine curriculum for girls, there remained a considerable gap between the ideas of schooling and the realities of educational experiences.' (Gomersall, 1988: 300-301) Nevertheless, many teachers in the system did encourage higher levels of learning amongst their female students, and many of the students themselves had an

unquenchable thirst for knowledge which they found means to fulfil. Still, this did not mean that women had the advantages which men had.

The poets of the time saw lack of education for women as a major problem in society, and many of them spent time helping to educate the marginalised by giving classes at community centres in the city so that working-class girls could be exposed to the rudiments of learning. Some of the poets anthologized here refer to the issue of education in their poetry. Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855) expresses a great yearning for knowledge in her poem 'Reason':

Come Reason – Science – Learning – Thought –
To you my heart I dedicate;

By contrast, Mary Coleridge (1861-1907) looks at education from a feminist perspective in some of her poetry and says that education for women could become a curse because these women would be marginalised even further and rejected by society as 'different'. As Bonnie J. Robinson claims, 'She creates a utopia — of difference, of a difference that cannot be appropriated to serve male needs or males desires —in her poetry.' (2000:3) Coleridge's poetry suggests that an educated women would have no place in society. She refers to education specifically for women as 'O evil angel' (Leighton, 1995:614) inferring that it has both good and bad consequences. Even if women were educated, men did not take the women's education seriously and at times looked for a wife whose education included only the bare necessities. The woman as wife would always look to him as a source of knowledge and inspiration. Mary Coleridge, in 'A Clever Woman' illustrates the dismissive and patronising male views of the time:

My logic he sets at defiance
 Declares that my Latin's no use
 And when I begin to talk Science
 He calls me a dear little goose.

Although education was improving, there was little movement toward gender equality. This was yet another facet of Victorian society that most women accepted as part of their subordinate position in life. As May Kendall (1861-1931) writes in 'Woman's Future', the prevailing attitudes, even among women, tend to underplay the possibility of intellectual accomplishment:

Our intellects, bound by a limit decisive,
 To the level of Homer's may never arise.

American women, also suffered under male domination, but not to the same extent as their British counterparts. In America, during the nineteenth century, many societal reforms were put into place and experienced which in turn afforded women opportunities in education and employment. Progress began with the academies some of which taught both boys and girls alike, while 'good female seminaries', like those founded by Emma Willard at Trot, New York, in 1824, prepared the way for women's colleges. In 1837, the first women students were admitted to Oberlin College in Ohio. This development came about far earlier for American women than for the British. However, the official status of a married woman remained much the same as the British Victorians in that she could not be awarded custody, make a will or sign a contract. In this respect, the legal status of a woman can be equated to that of a minor, a slave or a free Negro. Conditions in the American South, especially for African-American women bonded in slavery were worse than deplorable. Slave women had no status whatsoever.

Their marriages were not recognised and they had no rights over their children, who could be taken away and sold at any time. Moreover, they were the helpless victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by their overseers. It was assumed that black females were simply promiscuous by nature. Mary Boykin Chesnut (Tindall, 1993:373), for example, writes, 'Like the patriarchs of old, our men all live in one house with their wives and concubines.' The slave women certainly were never given any rights or chance to voice their opinions and desires, and should they disagree with or disobey a white, the punishment was a severe physical beating sometimes leading to death. Frances Harper (1825- 1911) sums up the plight of her fellow African-American women in her poem 'An Appeal to My Country Women' in which she entreats all the women of America to take note of the fate of black women subjected to the horrors of slavery:

Have ye not, oh, my favored sisters,
 Just a plea, a prayer or a tear,
 For mothers who dwell 'neath the shadows
 Of agony, hatred and fear?

Both in America and in Victoria's extended realm, marriage was seen as the firm foundation upon which society stood, and the view that 'woman's sphere is the home' was widely held. Feminists such as Josephine Butler spoke out very strongly and bitterly about this position. Unfortunately, from an economic perspective many women were forced to find a husband in order to survive.

The necessity of marriage for economic survival is clearly apparent if we examine the example of Caroline Norton (1808-1877). Norton came from a poor family and due to this her mother had to a husband for each of her three daughters to ensure that they

would not have to find work. Norton never loved the man that she married and as result she was unhappy for most of her life and did not feel that there was any good in marriage. (<http://digital.library.upenn/women/norton>) This is seen in her poem 'Escape from the Snares of Love'. From an examination of the negative connotations of the word 'snares' as found in the title, one can see what stance Norton took on marriage and love:

Young love has chains of metal rare,
Heavy as gold—yet light as air:
It chanced he caught a heart one day
Which struggled hard, as loth to stay.

Prudence, poor thing was lingering near—
She whispered in the captive's ear,
"Cease, little flutterer; bear thy chain,
And soon thou shalt be free again!"

No; I assert my right to fly—
The chain shall break, and Love shall die
What! I remain a willing slave?
No—freedom, freedom, or the grave!

Caroline Norton refers to the institution in scathing terms, showing only the negative. This view is also seen in the poems of Felicia Hemans (1793-1835) and Mary Coleridge where both poets highlight the loss women will suffer upon entering this union. For Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1830), marriage is a terminal moment which requires the language of sacrifice and victim. In 'The Marriage Vow', she compares a marriage service to that of a funeral, saying that the latter is preferable. Love can become a serious problem when marriage reveals its problematic aspects:

The altar, 'tis of death! for there laid
The sacrifice of all youth's sweetest hopes.
It is a dreadful thing for women's lip

To swear the heart away; yet know that heart
Annuls the vow while speaking, and shrinks back
From the dark future that it dares not face.

In this poem, Landon shows that a young girl sacrifices her hopes for the future and that by giving away her heart, she is relinquishing her life. Landon was not the only poet to see marriage in this light. Christina Rossetti's poems, both secular and religious, clearly illustrate the fact that she saw marriage as a network of destruction and much of her poetry is a form of protest against this institution.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), like her British counterparts, also touched on relationships in some of her poems. In her poem 'She rose to his requirement' her diction is brutal and sarcastic:

She rose to his requirement, dropped
The playthings of her life
To take the honorable work
Of woman and wife.

Because society saw the female as being socially inferior, for a woman to get married, she has to raise her self from this inferior position in order to be worthy of a man's love. By doing this she makes herself 'marriageable'. The use of the word 'playthings' suggests that, until marriage, a woman exists in a child-like state of being. Dickinson mocks marriage when she refers to it resulting in 'honourable work' for a woman.

Alice Cary (1820-1871) sees marriage in a more positive light and shows this in her poem 'Archie' where she says there are few things in life more beautiful than bridal roses. This could be considered as a very superficial view of marriage. However superficial it may be, it is a far more positive view than those of the other poets

mentioned thus far. Elizabeth Barrett Browning takes a more neutral stance on this issue in all her poems. The sentiments expressed in 'If Thou Must Love Me' are typical:

If thou must love me, let it be for naught
 Except for love's sake only...
 ...But love me for love's sake, that evermore
 Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

One of the common ways in which women are represented is in the stagnant role which they played in Victorian society. May Kendall in her poem 'Woman's Future', implies that an accurate representation of the women of the time would include the passive housewives who have accepted their lot in life. Charlotte Bronte adds to this when the wife in 'The Wife's Will' responds to and trusts her husband's 'slightest word' (<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/bronte/poems/pbc-wife.html>) and in 'To a Wandering Female Singer', written by Felicia Hemans, the woman keeps quiet about her suffering.

Their apparent conservatism aside, these poems reveal an implicit challenge to the conventions of submissiveness and passivity. Take, for example, 'Woman's Future' by May Kendall where the use of an exaggerated style blatantly suggests the depth to which these women have sunk by giving up their dreams and their own individual life in order to do housework and raise children:

On Fashion's vagaries your energies strewing,
 Devoting your days to a rug or a screen,
 Oh, rouse to a lifework – do something worth doing!
 Invent a new planet, a flying-machine.
 Mere charms superficial, mere feminine graces,
 That fade or that flourish, no more you may prize;
 But the knowledge of Newton will beam from your faces,
 The soul of a Spencer will shine in your eyes.

Kendall is sending a strong message in this poem in an attempt not only to motivate women to do much more with their lives, but also to show them how worthless being a submissive woman is. In 'Obscurity of Woman's Worth', Caroline Norton represents both rich and poor women as suffering in these times.

With marriage came the expectation of bearing children. In having a relationship with a husband, women were automatically placed in the role of wife with a natural progression being to the role of mother. Thus a marital relationship could bring about a whole new relationship, that of mother and child. Motherhood, for many of the poets, is a special and unique position to hold. This is one of the few roles which women are given in Victorian society where they have any authority whatsoever, however limited it may be. The poets depict the intense passion a woman feels when becoming a mother, an emotion which is not seen in woman when she becomes a wife. Motherhood is seen as a solace and a holy office, one act which men can not perform, thereby, biologically speaking, giving women an edge over the male.

Donaldson (1980:51) argues that the advent of motherhood in a poet's life shows a marked transformation in her writing. She cites the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as an example. Browning's early poetry making reference to children and their death tends to be very clinical in nature showing very little emotion. It is only after the birth of her first child that her poetry takes on a quality of understanding. Poets

attempting to capture the emotions and day-to-day life of a mother cannot do it adequately from the perspective of an observer.

It can be argued that even in motherhood, freedom of choice was taken away from women as the choice to bear children was not theirs; it was expected of them. Part of the control seen in a patriarchy was that after marriage the husband expected his wife to fall pregnant as quickly as possible. The number of children which a man had was a sign of his virility and something of which to be proud. The husband also wanted an heir so it was very important for the wife to bear him a son.

For most women their children gave them some form of purpose in their lives. This is not true of all women though. Alice Meynell (1847-1922), who bore eight children, states that motherhood is not necessarily an innate desire in all women. Meynell says that motherhood is not something she desired or enjoyed. She was the submissive partner in the marriage and by bearing children she was merely fulfilling societal obligations rather than her own inner emotional or biological desires. She found the process of bearing and feeding children completely foreign both to her body and mental state of being:

He plays with her, and will not sleep.
 For other playfellows she sighs;
 An unmaternal fondness keep
 Her alien eyes.

Similar expressions of the unnaturalness of maternity are fairly common in Victorian poetry.

Some of the poets included in this anthology did not only write about motherhood and the mother-child relationship, but included children's poetry in their work too. Being a mother was socially acceptable and therefore I would like to suggest that by writing children's poetry, women could take this relationship one step further as a means to having their writing viewed as being socially acceptable. Who better to write children's poetry than a woman? Fathers did not tend to have intimate relationships with their children while they were young. The children's place was in the nursery with their nurse or mother. Not enjoying the same level of intimacy, the fathers precluded themselves from writing with the same personal experience possible for mothers.

Children's poetry is often ignored. Presumably critics do not feel that there are underlying themes or messages worth interpreting or analysing. Many of the poets in this anthology enjoyed writing for children, whether the writing took the form of poems, songs, nursery rhymes or fantasy tales. These works were very popular and widely published. One poet who spent a great deal of time writing such poetry was Christina Rossetti who wrote *Sing-Song*, a collection of nursery rhymes which was well received. Some critics believe that we need to examine children's poetry more closely because they argue that their significance goes well beyond that of children's literature. Mothers read the poetry to the children, reared the children and had daily contact with them. These same women wrote the poetry for children. There is a distinct connection between all of these facts.

In poems like the ones found in *Sing-Song* the mothers are the speakers teaching their daughters about the horrors of women's position in society and urging them not to become the ideal Victorian girl. The poems also let the mother-speaker create space for the child's action. By allowing a response from the child, the mother is giving the female child an opportunity which they themselves were never afforded. The mother-daughter relationship is one of greater equality, than the husband-wife relationship which is typified by dominance and subordination. By allowing the child this kind of relationship, the mother is enforcing potentially disruptive and rebellious power in the home while the father is not there. This power is sanctioned by society in the name of motherhood. The strength of the mother-daughter relationships built on equality results in the mother's starting to question the patriarchal domination in the home as well as the family roles enforced by this tradition. Thus these poems, when examined closely, must be seen as a vehicle by which women's movements were transported into the homes influencing both the mother and the child. Sickbert suggests that 'Rossetti's children's poetry offers an alternative story about Victorian parent-child relations.' (1993:407) This 'rebellion' can be found in Rossetti's 'Love me, — I love you' where the mother offers the child freedom of choice in the use of the modal verb requesting the baby to sing, not forcing it to sing:

Sing it high, sing it low,
Sing it as may be.

Alice Cary, Felicia Hemans and Eliza Cook (1817-1889) also wrote works for children. Cook, like Rossetti, also wanted to use her poetry as a means to educate. She,

however, used her poetry in order to convey religious philosophy and correct moral behaviour. This kind of value-education is what was expected of mothers and writers.

Value-education in poetry can also be seen in the writing of Katherine Lee Bates (1859-1929), an American poet and academic, who published outstanding works for children. She felt that as a professor at a university these poems were degrading. This, I will argue, is an example of societal constraint. Writing for children was not seen as having any academic worth. Moreover, Bates as a woman writer and scholar seems to have been desperate to be taken seriously. Accordingly, in her later work she forgoes children's poetry in favour of more academically accepted genres.

Like Bates, not all the women who wrote children's poetry were mothers, and some of them were unmarried. In a society where women were seen as socially inferior and only given value once married because their 'social status' had now been lifted to new heights, remaining single was severely frowned upon and questioned. On the whole, single women were considered as being abnormal and, possibly, even sexually deviant.

Between 1858 and 1862, Adelaide Anne Proctor's (1825-1864) poems become increasingly concerned with women's sexuality. For example in 'A Woman's Answer', the speaker describes the promiscuous desires which seek an existence beyond the confinement of an exclusive love:

Dearest, although I love you so, my heart
Answers a thousand times claims besides your own

The Victorians had double standards in this regard. Poets like Elizabeth Barrett Browning were quick to help the needy and the downtrodden, but point accusingly at the darker side of society. One has to question whether or not her statements in her recorded conversations and correspondence about these fallen women not receiving any help because men made the laws, are in fact an accurate representation. Was she just using the traditional patriarchal governance to suit her own purposes and cover hers, and other women's guilt and lack of compassion for these women?

In 'Aurora Leigh', an epic story of a women poet written as a novel-poem in 1857, Browning shows the fall of Marian Erle. The poem starts with Erle showing her innocence as being too good to be true thereby making her fall even more inevitable. Through the events in Marian's life, Browning shows that the legalism of property, religion, inheritance and blood is minded by man. This leaves moral law in the power of women. As a result it is impossible to say that because men made the laws, fallen women are cast aside.

Many poets refer to the 'fallen woman' in their poems but, like Rossetti in 'The Convent Threshold', they tend to be slightly more sympathetic to the plight of these women and far less judgemental than Browning. These poets realise that 'most of the fallen women who play any prominent role in the nineteenth century literature are only variations on life. Seduced, raped, betrayed or simply fickle, they are either innocent girls led astray, or sensational adulteresses.' (Leighton 1989:122) Many of the poets

concentrate on the innocence which the fallen woman has lost and these poems have a tragic and sad tone.

The figure of the fallen women is also, however, a sign for women of the power of writing. Critic and anthologist, Angela Leighton points to this power because according to her, the fallen woman was not 'someone else', a term used to describe a woman from a different social class. Any woman from any walk of life could somehow be classified as a fallen woman. Even the poet, who by writing and publishing was rebelling against societal traditions and expectations might be included in this category. Leighton (1989:125) argues that 'The fallen woman is the muse, the beloved — the lost sister, mother, daughter, whose self was one's own.' If in fact the poet is classed as a fallen woman, writing must indeed have great power.

We can only argue that a female poet writing in the Victorian era can fall into the broader category of 'fallen woman' if we set up and accept the definition of fallen woman as being one who contradicts societal expectations. By writing poetry, women were defying these expectations in that poetry was a writing reserved for men. It was acceptable for women to write novels because they were considered as a frivolous form of writing which did not need the intellectual superiority of a male in order to be written. By adhering to the broadened definition of the 'fallen woman', I would like to suggest that a spinster might be considered to be part of the category of fallen women. It is made clear that society expected the young girl to find a husband and live a life of 'domestic bliss'. Many of the poets in this anthology, like Christina Rossetti and Emily

Dickinson chose not to get married. Some of them were involved with other women, but as this was not considered to be an acceptable relationship in terms of societal norms, they too, were classed as spinsters, with little reference being made to their current relationships. Hickok confirms this by stating that 'Although eminently respectable, the unmarried woman of a certain age (generally understood to be thirty) was in many ways as much a social outcast as the whore.' (1984:117) Perhaps this is part of the reason that poets like Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson withdrew from outside life at approximately the age of thirty. Rossetti withdrew from society after being diagnosed as having Graves disease which discoloured her face. She became increasingly morbid and fanatical. Dickinson, from her mid-twenties became more reclusive with each passing day until she developed a mythical reputation because she was hardly ever seen. (http://www.sappho.com/poetry/historical/e_dickin.html)

Many poets wrote about the social injustices which were forced upon women and often referred to unmarried sisters in their writing in a tone of understanding and respect in an effort to eradicate the negative connotations which were associated with spinsterhood. Some of the poets, who themselves were unmarried, were hurt by the reactions of society with regard to their marital status and this can be seen in the angry tone in which Eliza Cook wrote 'Song of The Ugly Maiden'. She accuses male society of being both cruel and hypocritical towards the female. The rigidity with which these unmarried women were written about, seemed to dissipate towards the end of the century with some poets attempting to redeem the 'fallen woman' through marriage. It is shocking that the only way by which a woman could redeem herself was through the

male tradition of marriage. Again, such attitudes attest to the lack of status that a woman had as an individual. 'By the end of the century, the original literary stereotype of the fallen woman had more or less ceased to exist' (Hickok, 1984:116) which occurred because society had become more accepting and the literary and polemical possibilities of the fallen woman greatly expanded in the sixties and seventies.

The woman as poet, the woman as spinster, and the woman as prostitute, these are three of the many roles and representations of woman found in poetry. The poetic culture that women belonged to welcomed and celebrated intense passions. In some cases these 'passionate' poems were written about and to other women. These women all experienced joy and in some case sorrow because of love. Love and heartache do not distinguish between gender, therefore both heterosexual and homosexual poets experienced and wrote about these emotions in a relationship. The 'love poems', written by Michael Field — a joint pseudonym of Katherine Bradley (1848-1914) and Edith Cooper (1862-1913), an aunt and niece who lived together as devoted companions — is today considered lesbian verse. Amy Levy (1861-1889) wrote expressively against the taboo against lesbianism. Male and female Victorian poets wrote tomes of poems to the women they loved and expressed intense emotion when doing so. Research into the personal lives and background of many of these poets, in biographies, journal articles and other anthologies reveals that many had found a friend, companion and or lover in another women. Some completely rejected a heterosexual way life in preference to a female life-partner. Charlotte Mew (1879-1928), a poet who did not write poetry with overtly lesbian themes, clearly loved and preferred women. (Leighton 1995:644) She, like her American counterpart, Emily

Dickinson suffered incredible heartache due to unrequited love and this emotion is manifested in her poetry.

Katherine Lee Bates seems to be the more fortunate of the lesbian poets in that she was involved in a long-term stable relationship with a woman. She wrote and dedicated many of her love poems to her, one such poem being 'If You Could Come':

My love, my love, if you could come once more
From your high place,
I would not question you for heavenly lore,
But, silent, take the comfort of your face.

Although she was happy in this relationship, she too experienced the loss which the other poets felt, but through the death of her lover, not rejection. She wrote 'Yellow Clover' as a final tribute.

(iii)

The women writing at this time encountered a dynamic and complex society in which they played a very small part. Each poet came from a different background, experienced varying degrees of patriarchal domination and, therefore, represents herself and other woman from divergent perspectives. Not all the poems included in this anthology were written in response to the patriarchal domination under which these women lived and not all the poets were feminists. As we examine the representation of women by the poets, we must bear this in mind in order to avoid

stereotyping the women. Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919) breaks the stereotype in her poem 'Battle Hymn of Women' where she characterises women as soldiers — a role which is completely out of the ordinary. Wilcox shows a different view of woman in this poem; women who were fighting for liberty from a patriarchally dominated society:

They are waking, they are waking
 In the east and in the west; . . .
 . . . Till each sleeper wakes, and stirs;
 Till she breaks from old traditions, and is free;
 And the world shall rise, and render
 Unto woman what is hers,
 As it welcomes in the race that is to be.

This is a traditional view of the feminist movement of the time, where women were crying out for equality with men and used their writing as a voice with which to do this. Wilcox shows how some women have a deep desire to be recognised on the same level as men, as a class of their own, not given recognition because of men. By getting ready for 'battle', women were preparing to fight for the right to be educated, have legal personality and be rid of all other societal constraints. At the beginning of the nineteenth century these desires were impossible to fulfil.

This was also true in Britain where apart from societal traditions as they were, the monarchy and parliament showed no movement towards change. Queen Victoria was quite comfortable with woman's position in society as it was. Women were referred to in parliament as 'the sex'. These words were often followed by loud laughter. Queen

Victoria, herself, denounced 'this mad wicked folly of "Women's Rights" with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety.' (Altick, 1973:58) The queen suggested that one of the female members of court, Lady Amberley, be given a good whipping for expressing advanced views in this regard. (Longford, 1981:9)

Caroline Norton was a pioneer in the fight for change of women's position in society. She personally experienced many hardships as a result of the legal inferiority bestowed upon women. When her husband sued a male friend of hers, implying that she had committed adultery, she was not allowed to attend the court hearing or even testify on her behalf because she had no legal identity apart from her husband. (<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/norton/nc-biography.html>) Once the trial was over, Caroline discovered that despite their many problems, she, as a woman, could not sue for divorce. It was then that she decided to change the law. She did this by associating herself strongly with other women who struggled against injustice and used the powerful tool of writing to get attention. After many years of struggle and negative publicity, Norton was able to make a difference and succeeded in improving the laws affecting married women in several substantial ways. Norton's successes are important in this discussion because they show how fluid Victorian society was and how the contexts from which the poets wrote at the beginning of the century were significantly different from those at the end of the century. We can then conclude that because women based much of their writing on the socio-political issues of the time, their representation of women would change with the changes in society.

In no way can this period be considered as monolithic with static social relations. Change, however, was a slow and tedious process and it was only in the 1880s in which the birth of the 'new woman' took place — one with rights to some education, little legal identity and a unique position in society — when changes made in society began to filter down and be felt. The 'new woman' is a term that was coined for second generation feminists who questioned marriage and who wanted to escape it and become financially independent while leading a self-sufficient and fulfilling life.

Most of the work done by the 'new women' writers was in prose. Nevertheless, this change deserves mention because not all women were complacently sitting around waiting for a husband. Many continued striving and fighting for change right until the end of their lives. The 'new woman' never came to dominate either nineteenth century literature or society. However, her emergence guaranteed the slow evolution of the independent woman. Even though the process of change was a slow one, 'it becomes clear that women poets' relatively rare representations of the 'New Woman' must not be seen as a failure, but, in their best efforts, as a contribution, however small, to constructive change.' (Hickok, 1984:170) It is with this context in mind that we continue to look at the representation of women in the poetry found in this anthology.

Fortunately, the ever-changing society did not allow the suffering and the stereotypical roles of these women to continue and a questioning dissenting tradition moved through the century. Many of the poets met in various societies and clubs

joining together to work among urban and destitute women. These women, however withdrawn their feminist standing seems to be, are now considered as the early radicals who gave a place to feminist propaganda. One poet, in particular, is Adelaide Proctor who gave a large portion of the money which she made from her third volume of poetry, *A Chaplet of Verses* (1861), to fund a shelter for destitute women and children. Many later poets became active in this kind of work when the suffrage movement began to take hold around the world. When becoming involved in this movement the poets began to write about what they saw and felt with regard to the position of women in society. This is seen in Alice Meynell's poem 'A Father of Women', where she is canvassing to get the vote for women.

The representation of women in these poems moves from the traditionally quiescent wives and the mothers, to the women who question their position in society without revolting, to the extremists who want immediate change, who criticise and breakdown the longstanding tradition of patriarchal domination. No matter how the women are portrayed, one fact which is common to all of the poems, is that the women were considered as being inferior to men, their place was at home playing the role of contented wife and mother. Mary Ashley Townsend (1832-1901) sums up the representation of women, by women in her poem 'Her Horoscope':

'Tis true, one half of a woman's life is hope
 And one half resignation...
 ... She dies, an uncrowned doer of great deeds.

The poets in this anthology are not extreme feminists, in contemporary terms, by any means. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life and marriage is well documented in the many

biographies, letters and diaries published, as is that of Jane Wilde (1826-1896). I am by no means suggesting that by being married these poets could not be feminists. These poets were not trying to achieve complete segregation from men, but rather acceptance and status for women in their position as wife, housewife or mother.

Alice Cary is another example of a poet who followed this 'middle-path' of feminism. In her poetry, women are represented as possessing minds of their own even though they do not reject or satirise the male and accept gender roles as a given. In 'Love's Spurning', the female speaker voices her own opinions and one of these is a desire to please her male lover. 'Archie' follows a similar train of thought. There she clearly states that both men and women are just human — only 'angels are perfect'. (<http://www.geocities.com/~poetsgalore/lilip/poets/cary.html>) Both genders are given equal status.

There are those poets who clearly voiced their opinions with regard to their feminist inclinations. In Christina Rossetti's 'In an Artist's Studio', the woman being painted is vampirized by the art; she is more dead in life than in death. Eliza Cook is less subtle in 'The Song of the Ugly Maiden', where the focus is on the body and how men only desire outer beauty. Michael Field in 'Maids, not to you my mind doth change', uses strong verbs when referring to how she the female narrator, reacts and responds to men:

Maids, not to you my mind doth change;
Men I defy, allure, estrange,
Prostrate, make bond or free...

This particular use of diction indicates an unwavering rebellion on the part of a speaker stemming, I assume, from feminist leanings which developed as a result of the unreasonable constraints imposed by a traditional patriarchal society.

Limited references to males in poetry whether in the role of lover, husband, provider, father or patriarch are worth examining because of the different viewpoints which can be found in the poems. The traditional role of the male in society is one of the means by which males are represented in the poetry. They are represented as the saviour of women, the one with the physical strength and mental ability. Josephine Heard (1861-1921), an African-American poet who was very much in love with and committed to her husband, wrote 'The Black Sampson'. In this poem, Sampson not only represents the entire African nation, but is also a representative of power and strength who will lead his people to freedom and avenge the hardships to which they are subjected under slavery. 'Sampson' is idealised by Heard. He is typecast as the conventional male with the strength and position which she gives him, but at the same time takes on the figure of a black liberator, who must be seen as being subversive given the political and racial biases of the time.

Apart from the traditional illustrations of males, other noteworthy representations of the male which can be found in this anthology include Emily Dickinson writing from the perspective of a middle-class white American woman. She points out that men and women are certainly not united in life, but separate, with the male being a law unto himself:

HIS mind, of man a secret makes,
 I meet him with a start,
 He carries a circumference
 In which I have no part

Men are often referred to in negative terms by British poets too. In 'Love versus Learning', Constance Naden (1858-1889) suggests that education is wasted on men:

He's mastered the usual knowledge,
 And says it's a terrible bore;
 He formed his opinions in college,
 Then why should he think any more?

Poems by Ella Wheeler Wilcox also lead the reader to perceive the male as being rather superficial. Wilcox, known for her aggressive feminist beliefs, wrote about divorce which was a highly controversial topic at this time. In her poem 'Divorced' the speaker declares that the male character gave her all he could give and goes on to list a number of unassuming articles. The woman, by contrast, gave her utmost — herself. Wilcox shows the difference between genuine love and giving on the part of the woman against the hollow and selfish love of the male. This disparity is also noted by Browning who is not known for any fanatical feminist inclinations. In 'A Man's Requirements' she makes a very strong statement about men's lack of fidelity and consistency:

Thus, if thou wilt prove me, Dear,
 Woman's love no fable,
 I will love thee — half a year —
 As a man is able.

Some of the socio-political issues which arose as a result of male domination and, conversely, the inferior position of women have been dealt with in earlier sections. Despite the fact that change was exceptionally slow, poets writing at the end of this

period came from a completely different context. Middle-class women were more often than not privileged to have the time to write. Even though they were not happy about the submissive roles given to them by society, they had many opportunities availed to them because of the fact that the husband was the provider. Not all women found themselves in this position.

It was the working woman poet, like Ellen Johnston (1835-1873), who experienced the hardships of working in the factories. Working-class women had to work in servile positions or in mills because of the fact that higher paying jobs were reserved for men and because women were not educated, they could not hold these positions anyway. Most of the poets were aware of the appalling conditions of employment both in the world of industry and in the positions of domesticity available to women as occupations. Middle-class poetry about the working conditions is not a fair representation of what was happening. Middle-class perspectives on working-class experience may not be completely accurate or authentic. One poet who does justice to the process of industrialisation is Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Her poem 'The Hen's Complaint', gives a satirical perspective of industrialisation. Although this poem may appear to be light-hearted because a hen is given a voice thereby making it seem as though this is a children's poem, Wilcox makes it quite clear that there were severe disadvantages to industrialisation:

“O, vile invention of the age,
You fill me with a burning rage!

Unfeeling monster, moved by steam,
You rob me of life's sweetest dream

Deprived of offspring which I crave,
I must go childless to my grave.

British poet Edith Nesbit (1858-1924), a poet who described her socialist poems as manifesting the real essence of herself, reiterates the drawbacks of industrialisation in her poem, 'A Great Industrial Centre':

Work – one dark and unending round
In black dull workshops, out of the light;
Work that others' ease may abound,
Work that delight for them may be found,
Work without hope, without pause, without peace,
That only in death can cease.

On the whole the working-class women who could write and were able to find the time to write, did not have access to publication and I am sure that as a result we have lost many important works.

The British women who were part of the 'working-class' were not the only ones subjected to manual labour. African-American women who were taken as slaves, also had to work. Like the working women, female slaves were treated with very little respect as depicted in their poetry. They suffered from dual discrimination. Firstly they were not afforded the opportunity of education or any socio-political rights because they were 'possessions'. Secondly, they were also victims of male discrimination. This brings a major irony of the socio-political system to light. The male would not allow these women to better themselves through education, yet because of that the male looked down upon them. David sums this irony up when he says 'As long as slaves

remain property, rather than being liberated to the economic freedom of selling their labour power, as long as women remain uneducated, rather than being released to the social freedom of exchanging their value as a rational wife for economic security, both slave owners and husbands end up with a very poor bargain [because] both slaves and uneducated women are cheap but worthless commodities'. (1987:61) The feeling towards women captured in this statement, accurately represents the place of both the working women and the slave. One might say that slavery is pre-eminently the women poet's theme. Women were slaves in many different spheres of life — not only in the formal setting in America. Slaves are people who are completely under the influence of another person or thing. Thus the wife, the mother and the factory worker are, in their own right, slaves. By writing about their lives in these various roles, the women make 'slavery' their theme.

Slave women who bore children, had to live with the harsh reality that at any time, their child could be taken away from them. The tone of bitterness in Frances Harper's poem, 'The Slave Mother', shows exactly how devastating this can be. Harper herself was born in a slave state and her life and literature were inseparably entwined:

They took him from her circling arms,
 Her last and fond embrace.
 Oh! never more may her sad eyes
 Gaze on his mournful face.

No marvel, then, these bitter shrieks
 Disturb the listening air:
 She is a mother, and her heart
 Is breaking in despair.

Another of Harper's poems which gives an accurate description of the conditions under which the slaves had to live, is 'The Slave Auction'. Olivia Ward Bush (1869-1944) also writes about this theme and shares Harper's sentiments. She uses a resentful and pleading tone in the preface to her volume of poems entitled *Original Poems* (1899). She succinctly clinches the feelings of her people by referring to the discrimination subjected upon them:

Judge us not, O favored races,
 From the heights we have attained;
 Rather measure our progression
 By the depths from whence we came.

Even though society was dynamic and conditions gradually improved throughout the period, many of the women still had to experience hardships, whether as a slave or as a wife before they could enjoy any change which came about towards the end of the century. The civil war ended slavery but not racism, and the phrase 'favored races' alludes to the racial superiority which continues to the present, even though slavery has long since been abolished.

The fact that women were writing and publishing poetry was criticised both by society and their male counterparts. Faced with hostility, the poets often used a dramatized voice or a 'mask' in order to displace the representation of women and female subjectivity so that it can be made an object of investigation. One popular device was the adoption of the figure of Sappho.

At the beginning of the century the dominant connotations of Sappho were as the female embodiment of the Romantic hero. Sappho was passionate, intellectual, revolutionary, lonely, doomed and most definitely heterosexual. But, the poets who included Sappho in their poetry had ambivalent feelings about her, because to be equated with Sappho was both a blessing and a curse. Poets who used Sappho in their poetry, included Norton in 'The Picture of Sappho', Hemans in the 'Last Song of Sappho' and Rossetti in 'Sappho'.

Leticia Landon, in 'The Improvisatrice', draws on the Sappho icon in an interesting way. The female speaker of the poem tells a series of sad tales about betrayed heroines and herself dies of a broken heart. Sappho becomes an emblem of poet and muse in one. In the poetry represented here, this classical figure begins to bear a more spirited and culturally resistant role as the century progresses. Sappho becomes the one woman, in many of the poets' writings, who speaks out about the fearful mastery of love. Michael Field, uses Sappho to reassert her lesbianism by raising the question about poetic identity. Field is two people writing with one voice and by using Sappho in their poetry, 'Sappho's own fragments in many ways present a paradigm for the fragmented, or rather the dispersed identities of nineteenth-century women poets.' (Flint in Porter, 1997:157) It has been shown how the women writing in this time knew what their role in society was but at the same time realised that they wanted and were capable of far more than the assigned position which they were given, thus dispersing their identities completely. By using Sappho in their poetry, 'the Victorian woman poets are showing that identity may be something imaginatively, generously, experimentally dispersed and diffuse,

reachable through writing and reading which can stretch both the writer and the reader well beyond the bounds of their personal experience.’ (Flint in Porter, 1997:159)

Why, we must ask ourselves, do these women reject their personal experience in order to write about the imagined? Poetry was a form that allowed them personal freedoms. Through using Sappho, women could create for themselves the ideal narrator for what they wanted to say without implicating themselves. We must remember that most of these women were not revolutionaries, and although they might have felt strongly about their conditions of subservience, they could not risk losing what they had through writing explosive poetry. Flint rightly points out that when women used ‘I’ in their poetry it would be doubly displaced. Firstly, in society these women were never one with themselves; the ‘I’ was something created by and for society, defining the woman through her relationships with others, especially her male counterpart. Secondly, in a traditionally patriarchal society, ‘I’ was accepted as being a reference to the male. Thus, in order to be heard, these women had no choice but to turn to writing dramatic monologues in the third person or narrated by Sappho.

Male critics controlled the literary journals and magazines and therefore had the power to define both the poetry and the female poets themselves. This resulted in women being assigned further representations which remained within the subtext of ‘female’ constructed by nineteenth century society. It was then that women began publishing under pseudonyms or using only their initials — as in the case of Leticia Landon — when submitting their works for publishing. They knew that societal

assumptions would be that this work was the work of a male, because 'good poetry' was obviously expected of males and no-one thought that a woman would have the bravado and the cheek to submit such writing. The women represented themselves as male writers and this portrayal resulted in them establishing an audience to whom they could truly depict women in their poetry.

(iv)

By writing about issues other than those already discussed, the women assuaged their heartache and disappointments in life. Their great love for and celebration of nature is a topic in which the poets found comfort. The poets also found solace in religion. Nature and the natural world are conventional and traditional themes written about by both male and female poets. Women poets, I believe, create a somewhat different sense of the natural world, because this world is seen through the female gaze. The poems in this anthology show this as the female tends to be more emotive about her surroundings than the male. Nature was a facet of life untouched by male domination. There were no confines or restrictions to which the women had to adhere in terms of their position in society during this period. Women could look at, enjoy and experience nature without having to ask permission from a male or have the same standard of education as a male. No matter what their position in society was, females could see all of nature that was around them, there were no lines of division, or parts for male eyes only. Nature became a source of equality. Not surprisingly, a significant number of poems selected

for this anthology retreat from society in their celebration of (or reflections on) the natural world.

A theme which is not often dealt with by critics and anthologists when referring to the poems of women, is their patriotism. This issue ties in with the theme of nature because often the patriotic poems are based on an experience of nature by the poet. Katherine Lee Bates an American poet, wrote 'America the Beautiful' which was originally a four stanza scribble written on a trip to the West where she was overcome by the beauty of her country when standing on top of Pike's Peak in Colorado. She felt so passionate about the scenic splendour, that she refused to change the word 'beautiful' in this poem, even though it was criticised as being hackneyed. Since being set to music, this poem has become one of the most patriotic hymns of all time:

O beautiful for spacious skies,
 For amber waves of grain,
 For purple mountain majesties
 Above the fruited plain!
 America! America!
 God shed his grace on thee
 And crown thy good with brotherhood
 From sea to shining sea!

The poetry written about nature and the natural world can, at times, be linked to the religious devotion manifested by the poets. Christina Rossetti, a British poet writing in the time of the Pre-Raphaelites, a cluster of overt romantic poets in the Victorian era, was also known for her personal and devout religious faith in God. She wrote some four hundred and fifty religious lyrics, some of which touch on the theme of nature as being part of God's creation.

Rossetti's religious poetry tends to be self-effacing which affords her the means to compose a distinctive self as woman and poet while remaining true to the aesthetic of pain and destitution. This aesthetic is one which Rossetti felt was thrust upon her by a male-dominated society and one which she must accept and live with as far as possible. As a result of the socio-political atmosphere in the nineteenth century, many women felt that their allotted position in life could only result in destitution. Rossetti dealt with these controversial issues under a mantle of religion which was more acceptable in a traditionally patriarchal dominated society. Her poems show a submissive role for women, but in terms of submission to God not man. In doing this Rossetti is placing both male and female on an equal footing in the eyes of God, giving the women some strength. Some of her poems show her fear of the power and judgement of God.

Similar tendencies are noted in the poetry of Helen Hunt Jackson (1830-1885), an American poet. In 'A Dream', she attests to the power of God in no uncertain terms:

No more in heaven than earth will he find God
 Who does not know His loving mercy swift
 But waits the moment consummate and ripe,
 Each burden, from each human soul to lift.

This poem deals with a person's arrival in heaven who feels lonely and isolated because God is all powerful. The character in this poem is ashamed because of lack of respect and acknowledgement of God's power and sovereignty.

In the poetry, God is not only depicted as an untouchable omniscient being. Both British and American poets show evidence in their writing that God is a source of peace and comfort, a saviour in every sense of the word who takes on the role of the father-figure:

Not in this world of hope deferred,
 This world of perishable stuff; --
 Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard,
 Nor heart conceived that full 'enough':
 Here moans the separating sea,
 Here harvests fail, here breaks the heart;
 There God shall join and no man part.

This depiction of God as 'father and saviour' is very significant because there are few poems which illustrate the accepted role of the male in Victorian society. Other poets have also followed this train of thought. Olivia Ward Bush an African-American shows deep faith in 'Treasured Moments':

Then sweet rose the voice of the singer,
 Singing of "Christ and the Cross,"
 Till my soul cried loudly within me
 "I'll count everything but as dross."

For His sake who bore our great burden,
 Who labored and suffered so long;
 And my heart grew glad for the singer,
 And I said: "O praise God for the song!"

Ah! How I was strengthened, uplifted.
 How the depths of my soul were stirred;
 And the words, the song and the music
 Seemed the sweetest I ever had heard.

Here the immense emotional stirrings which Bush experienced when worshipping and being in the presence of God are shown. The poem is a moving testimony to the

speaker's (and presumably the poet's) faith. Alice Meynell who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1872 wrote 'A Father of Women' a poem about the emancipation of women, in which she refers to God in the fourth stanza as 'shepherd-father', clearly showing her personal belief in the omniscience of God:

And shepherd-father, thou
Whose staff folded my thoughts before birth,
Control them now I am of earth, and now
Thou art no more of earth.

This excerpt shows that Meynell had given her life to God, trusting him completely to the extent that she wants Him to have total control over her, even her thoughts. Once again a poet is giving all to God not a husband or male relation. These positive depictions of religion and God are not echoed by all the poets. Some poets have written poems that are critical of religion.

Not all of the poets experienced God in such a positive manner, or even professed to have any religious belief at all. Some of the poets used their poems to show how religion and faith in God could cause devastation and heartache in life because God did not answer their prayers, or provide any measure of solace for them. Amy Levy a British poet shows this in 'A Cross-road Epitaph':

When first the world grew dark to me
I call'd on God, yet came not he.

With few exceptions, the women poets who wrote about God often scripted Him as a father and as a saviour. It could be argued that by placing God in this role, women are demonstrating more than a paternal love for God — they are placing Him in the

position accepted as that of husband, therefore crossing emotional love and physical love in their writing. This crossover becomes a form of sexual emancipation for these women and thereby they create themselves as 'New Women'. According to Armstrong, (1996:xxix) 'religious poems are almost always concurrently poems about a women's sexuality because the drama of religious devotion calls up adjacent emotions of sexual longing.' Sexual longing is a feeling usually associated within a marriage. By manifesting feelings of sexual longing in religious poetry, the poets are directly combining their religious poetry with those that fall into the category of love poetry. The range of love expression is vast and thus these two themes are intertwined because the love which the poets express for God often suggests sexual longing as mentioned earlier inferring to the love and sexual longings found in a marriage.

The women in Victorian society and as represented in the poetry in this anthology, were weighed down by certain monolithic cultural projections — 'woman as virgin bride, or dutiful helpmeet, or barren spinster, as ideal beloved or fatal temptress'. (Rosenblum, 199 :126) As a result of these expectations, these women, more so than their male counterparts, are susceptible to self-doubt and powerlessness. For Amy Levy death was a sure solution. She was convinced that because she was a woman nothing would ever become of her writing and became so despondent at this thought that she killed herself. These convictions can be seen in her poem 'A Minor Poet':

My life was jarring discord from the first...
I only crave for rest;
 Too heavy is the load. I fling it down.

Amy Levy brings layers of irony to her own role as a poet in this poem and calls for the critical evaluation of poets regardless of gender distinction.

Death is a prevalent theme among many of the poets. Some, like Levy, took their own lives to end their misery. It can be argued that the cause of their despair was certainly heightened, if not caused by their position and role in society. In 'The Suicide' by Alice Cary she states that should the woman in her poem just have been loved, she might not have committed such a drastic act. Women were so aware of their inferiority. Those who could not accept this lot became deeply depressed at the realisation that there was very little chance of them becoming more than that which was socially acceptable.

For many of these poets, death is a release from the pressures of life as in the case of Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Charlotte Mew. Charlotte Mew does not follow the poetic convention of using the images of graves, cemeteries and coffins to reaffirm the status of life after death. Instead, these images become symbols of a living death. Her poetry speaks of how people deal with pain on earth to the point that life becomes death for them. Almost every poem which Charlotte Mew wrote addresses the issue of death. Denisoff, in an article about Charlotte Mew's graveyard poetry states that 'Mew formulates a graveyard symbology that allows a woman-centered economy of affection and desire to permeate essentialized and seemingly nonsexual social templates.' (Denisoff, 1999:139) This view shows pivotal differences in the writing of male and female poets about the theme of death. The 'social templates' of death are given emotive value and gender by Charlotte Mew.

While not all of the poets wrote about death because they were planning their own suicide, many of them write about it in very dark and tragic terms. Some of the poets found in this anthology write about death in a more positive manner, almost giving a cheerful lilt to their words when referring to it. These poets have come to the realisation that death offers eternal peace and that all the struggle, hardships and pain experienced on earth is finally over and will never have to be endured again.

Now peace the woman's heart has found,
And joy the poet's eye.

After reading this introduction and examining the works that follow, it will be evident that these poems do in fact reflect Victorian society and the many issues to which women were subjected. Many of these poems could have been lost and that makes them all the more valuable in an anthology such as this one. In the words of Angela Leighton, 'it is the range and energy of Victorian women's poetry which make it still, today, worth being read, wept over, laughed and enjoyed.' (1995:xl) However dynamic the Victorian society might have been, to have been published in an anthology of women's poetry was an impossible dream for these women who, at such a suggestion, would surely have responded, 'I am, after all, just a woman!'

African-American Victorian Poets

Name: Olivia Ward Bush

Date of birth: 1869

Place of Birth: Sag Harbor, Long Island

Date of death: 1944

Biography: Bush is one of a number of women of colour whose works have been published. In 1899 her slim volume of verse was published followed by a more substantial collection in 1914.

Voices

I stand upon the haunted plain
 Of vanished day and year,
 And ever o'er its gloomy waste
 Some strange, sad voice I hear
 Some voice from out the shadowed Past;
 And one I call Regret,
 And one I know is Misspent Hours,
 Whose memory lingers yet.

Then failure speaks in bitter tones,
 And Grief, with all its woes;
 Remorse, whose deep and cruel stings
 My painful thoughts disclose,
 Thus do these voices speak to me,
 And flit like shadows past;
 My spirit falters in despair,
 And tears flow thick and fast.

But when, within the wide domain
 Of Future Day and Year
 I stand, and o'er its sunlight Plain
 A sweeter Voice I hear,
 Which bids me leave the darkened Past
 And crush its memory,
 I'll listen gladly, and obey
 The Voice of Opportunity.

Treasured Moments.

For a time away from the tumult,
 She in from the care and strife,
 Away from the gloom and the discord,
 That seemed to encircle my life.

Shut in with the dear, earnest women



Women with hearts true and strong,
 Who dared to face a great evil,
 Who dared to content against wrong.

And the speaker's¹ words were so cheering,
 As she talked to us of the time
 When the women crusaded² together;
 How they battled against the wine,

How they fought against deadly poison;
 How they struggled again and again,
 Till some homes were made better and brighter,
 Till some hearts were robbed of their pain.

Then the speaker's tones grew more tender,
 As she spoke of a life so complete,
 That many lives caught the essence
 Of her life so full and so sweet;

Who had just stepped over the threshold,
 And had entered the "Great Beyond,"
 Life's labor so nobly completed,
 Heaven's blessing triumphantly won.

Then sweet rose the voice of the singer,
 Singing of "Christ and the Cross,"
 Till my soul cried loudly within me
 "I'll count everything but as dross."

For His³ sake who bore our great burden,
 Who labored and suffered so long;
 And my heart grew glad for the singer,
 And I said: "O praise God for the song!"

Ah! How I was strengthened, uplifted.
 How the depths of my soul were stirred;
 And the words, the song and the music
 Seemed the sweetest I ever had heard.

I thought when that hour was ended,
 I shall cherish its memory so long;
 I shall think of the words so inspiring.

¹ referring to a speaker at a Southern Baptist rally

² reference to suffragette movement A movement started in America by Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to promote a woman suffrage amendment to the constitution.

³ referring to God

I shall think of the singer, the song.

As I wended my way again homeward,
Possessed with a sweet, nameless peace,
I thought of the great Life Eternal
Where such moments as these never cease.

Where there's fullness of joy forever,
Where we meet an unbroken band,
Shut in with the dear, blessed Master;
Resting safe at the Father's right hand.

Name: Frances E.W. Harper

Date of birth: 1825

Place of Birth: Baltimore, Maryland

Date of death: 1911

Biography: Harper was one of the most prolific and popular African-American writers prior to the twentieth century. Like many of her contemporaries, her life and her literature were intertwined. She had a strong interest in radical politics and religion. Her poems ushered in the tradition of African-American protest poetry and she did not only write about the issues facing her people, she was an active member of the Maine Anti-Slavery Society. She faced many dangers in her life because of the fact that she was a woman and African speaking in public about political issues. She published a number of volumes of poetry, which became increasingly militant in tone as she grew older. She believed that literature which could not be used to represent and reprimand was useless.

The Slave Mother

Heard you that shriek? It rose
 So wildly on the air,
 It seemed as if a burden'd heart
 Was breaking in despair.

Saw you those hands so sadly clasped —
 The bowed and feeble head —
 The shuddering of that fragile form —
 That look of grief and dread?

Saw you the sad, imploring eye?
 Its every glance was pain,
 As if a storm of agony
 Were sweeping through the brain.

She is a mother, pale with fear,
 Her boy clings to her side,
 And in her kirtle¹ vainly tries
 His trembling form to hide.

He is not hers, although she bore
 For him a mother's pains;
 He is not hers, although her blood
 Is coursing through his veins!

He is not hers, for cruel hands
 May rudely tear apart
 The only wreath of household love
 That binds her breaking heart.

¹ a woman's dress or skirt

His love has been a joyous light
 That o'er her pathway smiled,
 A fountain gushing ever new,
 Amid life's desert wild.

His lightest word has been a tone
 Of music round her heart,
 Their lives a streamlet blent in one—
 Oh, Father! must they part?

They tear him from her circling arms,
 Her last and fond embrace.
 Oh! never more may her sad eyes
 Gaze on his mournful face.

No marvel, then, these bitter shrieks
 Disturb the listening air:
 She is a mother, and her heart
 Is breaking in despair.

An Appeal to My Country Women

You can sigh o'er the sad-eyed Armenian²
 Who weeps in her desolate home.
 You can mourn o'er the exile of Russia
 From kindred and friends doomed to roam.

You can pity the men who have woven
 From passion and appetite chains
 To coil with a terrible tension
 Around their heartstrings and brains.

You can sorrow o'er little children
 Disinherited from their birth,
 The wee waifs and toddlers neglected,
 Robbed of sunshine, music and mirth.

For beasts you have gentle compassion;
 Your mercy and pity they share.
 For the wretched, outcast and fallen
 You have tenderness, love and care.

But hark! from our Southland³ are floating

² Thousands of Armenians were massacred by the Turks between 1894 and 1896

Sobs of anguish, murmurs of pain,
 And women heart-stricken are weeping
 Over their tortured and their slain.

On their brows the sun has left traces;
 Shrink not from their sorrow in scorn.
 When they entered the threshold of being
 The children of a King were born.

Each comes as a guest to the table
 The hands of our God has outspread,
 To fountains that ever leap upward,
 To share in the soil we all tread.

When we plead for the wrecked and the fallen,
 The exile from far-distant shores,
 Remember that men are still wasting
 Life's crimson around our own doors.

Have ye not, oh, my favored sisters,
 Just a plea, a prayer or a tear,
 For mothers who dwell 'neath the shadows
 Of agony, hatred and fear?

Men may tread down the poor and lowly,
 May crush them in anger and hate,
 But surely the mills of God's justice
 Will grind out the grist⁴ of their fate.

Oh, people sin-laden and guilty,
 So lusty and proud in your prime,
 The sharp sickles of God's retribution
 Will gather your harvest of crime.

Weep not, oh my well-sheltered sisters,
 Weep not for the Negro alone,
 But weep for your sons who must gather
 The crops which their fathers have sown.⁵

Go read on the tombstones of nations
 Of chieftains who masterful trod,
 The sentence which time has engraven,

³ The south of America subjected to slavery started in 1619 in Chesapeake when a Dutch vessel dropped off twenty Africans in Jamestown.

⁴ grain or quantity of grain for grinding

⁵ Galatians 6:7 'A man reaps what he sows'

That they had forgotten their God.

'Tis the judgement of God that men reap
 The tares which in madness they sow,
 Sorrow follows the footsteps of crime,
 And Sin is the consort of Woe.

The Slave Auction

The sale began — young girls were there,
 Defenceless in their wretchedness,
 Whose stifled sobs of deep despair
 Revealed their anguish and distress.

And mothers stood with streaming eyes,
 And saw their dearest children sold;
 Unheeded rose their bitter cries,
 While tyrants bartered them for gold.

And woman, with her love and truth—
 For these in sable⁶ forms may dwell—
 Gaz'd on the husband of her youth,
 With anguish none may paint or tell.

And men, whose sole crime was their hue,
 The impress of their Maker's hand,
 And frail and shrinking children, too,
 Were gathered in that mournful band.

Ye who have laid your love to rest,
 And wept above their lifeless clay,
 Know not the anguish of that breast,
 Whose lov'd are rudely torn away.

Ye may not know how desolate
 Are bosoms rudely forced to part,
 And how a dull and heavy weight
 Will press the life-drops from the heart.

⁶ dark, sombre

Name: Josephine D. Heard

Date of birth: 1861

Place of Birth: Salisbury, North Carolina

Date of death: 1921

Biography: In 1890, Heard published a collection of seventy-two poems which was expanded and re-released in 1891. She wrote about love, death, religion and race. She was considered as scholarly and poetic. She displayed her literary taste from an early age and during her school days contributed to several leading evangelical periodicals.

The Black Sampson¹

There's a Sampson, lying, sleeping in the land,
He shall soon awake, and with avenging hand,
In an all unlooked for hour,
He will rise in mighty power;
What dastard² can his righteous rage withstand?

E'er since the chains were given at a stroke,
E'er since the dawn of Freedom's morning broke,
He has groaned, but scarcely uttered,
While his patient tongue ne'r muttered,
Though in agony he bore the galling yoke.

O, what cruelty and torture has he felt?
Could his tears, the heart of his oppressor melt?
In his gore they bathed their hands,
Organized and lawless bands —
And the innocent was left in blood to welt.

The mighty God of Nations doth not sleep,
His piercing eye its faithful watch doth keep,
And well nigh His mercy's spent,
To the ungodly lent:
"They have sowed the wind, the whirlwind they
shall reap."³

From His nostrils issues now the angry smoke,
And asunder bursts the all-oppressive yoke;
When the prejudicial heel
Shall be lifted, we shall feel,
That the hellish spell surrounding us is broke.

The mills are grinding slowly, slowly on,

¹ Old Testament, biblical character known for his great strength found in Judges

² a sneaking, malicious coward

³ Hosea 8:7

And till the very chaff itself is gone;
Our cries for justice louder,
'Till oppression's ground to powder—
God speed the day of retribution on!

Fair Columbia's⁴ family garments all are stained;
In her courts is blinded justice rudely chained;
The black Sampson is awaking,
And his fetters fiercely breaking;
By is mighty arm his rights shall be obtained!

⁴ Poetic name for America

Nineteenth Century American Poets

Name: Katherine Lee Bates

Date of birth: 1859

Place of Birth: Falmouth

Date of death: 1929

Biography: Bates was a noted scholar, poet and writer. She published many volumes of poetry, books on her travels and verses for children. She was nine when she first started writing in a small notebook. She was a lecturer by profession and often took long sabbaticals to travel. She wrote many poems about her hometown, but it is 'America the Beautiful', the American National Anthem, for which she is most famous. She was an ardent feminist and most of her love poems were written for her female lover, although she never assumed the role of being a lesbian activist.

If You Could Come

My love, my love, if you could come once more
 From your high place,
 I would not question you for heavenly lore¹,
 But, silent, take the comfort of your face.

I would not ask you if those golden spheres
 In love rejoice,
 If only our stained star hath sin and tears,
 But fill my famished hearing with your voice.
 One touch of you were a thousand creed.
 My wound is numb
 Through toil-pressed, but all night long it bleeds
 In aching dreams, and still you cannot come.

from Yellow Clover

Must I, who walk alone,
 Come on it still,
 This Puck² of plants
 The wise would do away with,
 The sunshine slants
 To play with,
 Our wee, gold-dusty flower, the yellow clover,
 Which once in parting for a time
 That then seemed long,
 Ere time for you was over,
 We sealed our own?

¹ knowledge

² refers to mischievous sprite in English folklore

America the beautiful

O beautiful for spacious skies,
 For amber waves of grain
 For purple mountain majesties
 Above the fruited plain!
 America! America!
 God shed his grace on thee
 And crown thy good with brotherhood
 From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet,
 Whose stern, impassioned stress
 A thoroughfare for freedom beat
 Across the wilderness!
 America! America!
 God mend thy every flaw,
 Confirm thy soul in self-control,
 Thy liberty in law!

O beautiful for heroes proved
 In liberating strife,
 Who more than self their country loved,
 And mercy more than life!
 America! America!
 May God thy gold refine,
 Till all success be nobleness
 And every gain divine!

O beautiful for patriot dream
 That sees beyond the years
 Thine alabaster cities gleam
 Undimmed by human tears!
 America! America!
 God shed his grace on thee
 And crown thy good brotherhood
 From sea to shining sea!

Name: Alice Cary

Date of birth: 1820

Place of Birth: Cincinnati, Ohio

Date of death: 1871

Biography: Cary started writing at the age of eighteen and as a ballad writer of the 1800s, she was not equalled by any other American man or woman. She loved nature and this was clearly reflected in her poetry. She and her sister Phoebe published their first volume of poetry together in 1850.

Love's Spurning

Come row in my painted boat, Jane,
 There's something I would say —
 'T is all about your marrying me,
 And having your own way.

The beanfields wrong your little hands,
 Your feet are cold in the dew,
 But if you will keep the ring of gold
 That I have brought for you;

No time of merriment shall fall
 But that you shall be there—
 Your shoulders wrapped in a shawl of lace,
 And an ivory comb in your hair.

Row on in your painted boat, and leave
 My beanfields in disgrace—
 My sweetheart's arm around my neck
 Is better than all your lace!

No ivory comb want I, nor ring,
 Nor painted boat, so brave,
 And the way that pleases him is all
 The way I care to have.

Archie

O to be back in the beautiful shadow
 Of that old maple-tree down in the meadow,
 Watching the smiles that grew dearer and dearer,
 Listening to the lips that drew nearer and nearer!
 O to be back in the crimson-topped clover,
 Sitting again with Archie, my lover!

O for the time when I felt his caresses



Smoothing away from my forehead the tresses,
 When up from my heart to my cheek went the blushes,
 As he said that my voice was as sweet as the thrush's,—
 When he said that my eyes were bewitchingly jetty,
 And I told him 't was only my love made them pretty.

Talk not of maiden reserve and of duty,
 Or hide from my vision such wonderful beauty;
 Pulses above may best calmly and even,—
 We have been fashioned for earth, and not for heaven;
 Angels are perfect,— I am but a woman;
 Saints may be passionless,—Archie is human.

Talk not of heavenly, down-dropping blisses,—
 Can they fall on the brow like the rain of soft kisses?
 Preach not the promise of priests and evangels,—
 Love-crowned, I ask not the crown of the angels;
 All that the wall of pure jasper¹ incloses
 Makes not less lovely the white bridal roses.

Tell me that when all this life shall be over,
 I shall still love, and he be my lover,—
 That in meadows far sweeter than clover or heather
 My Archie and I shall sit always together,
 Loving eternally, wed ne'er to sever, —
 Then you may tell me of heaven forever!

The Suicide

WHERE the dry, dusty road makes a crook to evade
 The clump of sweet maples that offer their shade,
 'T is there that the grave of poor Margaret is made.

Where the river you see pushes into the shore,
 As if in its bosom some treasure it bore
 Belonging to earth, which it fain would restore;

Ah, there 't was they found her, her arms o'er her head,
 As if she had drawn up the waves to o'erspread
 Her corpse from all pity, when she should be dead.

Where the grass to the water slopes green, it was there
 They shut up her eyes from their wondering stare,
 That they wrung out the wet from her garments and hair.

¹ An opaque cryptocrystalline variety of quartz that may be red, yellow or brown

I shall say, if the judgement shall call me to speak,
 “ A kiss might have put out the fire in her cheek
 That urged her the last awful refuge to seek.”

Poems of nature and home

When merry birds do crowd
 The branches, singing loud —
 The black, the bluebird — he of scarlet feather —
 And tender, brown-eyed doves,
 Make dole² to tell their loves,
 And winds and waters talk and laugh together ;

When bees about their hives
 Are working for their lives,
 When with his shadow every leaf is dancing,
 While from the land, the sea
 For every joy doth be
 Retiring now, and now again advancing;

When not a cloud be spied
 The blue of heaven to hide,
 And not a lamb of all the flock be straying,
 I think if thou art fair,
 Thou still must needs declare
 ‘T is not our birthright here to go a-Maying³.

A Mother's Solace

Never lost, never lost! yet, my dear little friend,
 I miss the glad light of your wonderful eyes;
 And something I miss from the earth and the skies,
 That will not, and cannot come back, to the end.

Our paths through the fields seem to be as strange ways;
 I wish that some night I could dream a sweet dream,
 Wherein the old nights and the old days would seem
 Like the happy old nights and the happy old days.

I wish you could leave the good angels above!
 I wish I could have you, just one fleeting hour,
 To hold in my bosom, my sweet little flower,

² archaic- one's fate

³ gathering of spring flowers on May Day

And tell you the height and the depth of my love.

Sometimes such a doubt from the last darkness springs ;
My heart turneth sick, and my faith falleth low,
But when the faint bird-tracks appear in the snow,
I trust and believe in the songs and the wings.

Name: Emily Dickinson

Date of birth: 1830

Place of Birth: Amherst

Date of death: 1886

Biography: Dickinson was somewhat of a misnomer in her lifetime. She was very socially active in her twenties, but from her thirties she began to draw away from society. She did have, however, many friends with whom she corresponded on a regular basis. Most of these letters have survived her death, and are written in much the same style as her poetry — abstract, sometimes fragmented, with sudden forces of emotion. These letters included some of her poetry, and although her friends encouraged her to publish, she did not attempt to after 1860, when a publisher turned her down. During her lifetime, only eight of her poems were published, mainly by her friends without her permission. After her death another 1768 poems were discovered. Dickinson was in love with a woman, a love which eventually became unrequited. Her entire collection of poetry was not published until 1955. Feminist scholars believe that Dickinson's 'family edited out some of the female pronouns before publishing her work.' (http://www.sappho.com/poetry/historical/e_dickin.html)

She rose to his requirement

She rose to his requirement, dropped
The playthings of her life
To take the honorable work
Of woman and wife.

If aught she missed in her new day
Of amplitude, or awe,
Or first prospective, or the gold
In using wore away,

It lay unmentioned, as the sea
Develops pearl and weed,
But only to himself is known
The fathoms they abide.

XXII

HIS mind, of man a secret makes,
I meet him with a start,
He carries a circumference
In which I have no part,
Or even if I deem I do
He otherwise may know.
Impregnable to inquest,
However neighborly.

CXXIV

I SHOWED her heights she never saw
 "Would'st climb?" I said,
 She said "Not so"
 "With me?" I said, "With me?"
 I showed her secrets
 Morning's nest,
 The rope that Nights were put across
 And *now*, "Would'st have me for a Guest?"
 She could not find her yes
 And then, I brake my life, and Lo!
 A light for her, did solemn glow,
 The larger, as her face withdrew
 And could she, further, "No?"

Wild Nights — Wild Nights!

Wild Nights — Wild Nights!
 Were I with thee
 Wild Nights should be
 Our luxury!

Futile — the Winds —
 To a Heart in port —
 Done with the Compass —
 Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden —
 Ah, the Sea!
 Might I but moor — Tonight!
 In Thee!

Her sweet weight on my Heart a Night

Her sweet weight on my Heart a Night
 Had scarcely deigned to lie —
 When, stirring, for beliefs delight,
 My bride had slipped away — If 'twas a Dream — made solid — just
 The heaven to confirm —
 Or if Myself were dreamed of Her —
 The power to presume — With Him remain — who unto me —
 Gave — even as to All —
 A Fiction superseding Faith —
 By so much — as 'twas real

Name: Helen Hunt Jackson

Date of birth: 1830

Place of Birth: Amherst

Date of death: 1885

Biography: Jackson, a schoolmate and friend of Emily Dickinson, was an activist for Native American rights and a noted poet and writer of children's stories, novels and essays. Her political interest began in Boston at a lecture where the matter of forcibly removing the Ponca Indians from their reserve was discussed. This incensed Jackson. She wrote the novel, *Ramona* (1883) depicting the Indian experience.

A Dream

I dreamed that I was dead and crossed the heaven,—
 Heavens after heavens with burning feet and swift,—
 And cried: "O God, where art Thou?" I left one
 On earth, whose burden I would pray Thee lift."

I was so dead I wondered at no thing,—
 Not even that the angels slowly turned
 Their faces, speechless, as I hurried by
 (Beneath my feet the golden pavements burned);

Nor, at the first, that I could not find God,
 Because the heavens stretched endlessly like space.
 At last a terror seized my very soul;
 I seemed alone in all the crowded place.

Then, sudden, one compassionate cried out,
 Though like the rest his face from me he turned,
 As I were one no angel might regard
 (Beneath my feet the golden pavements burned):

"No more in heaven than earth will he find God
 Who does not know His loving mercy swift
 But waits the moment consummate and ripe,
 Each burden, from each human soul to lift."

Though I was dead, I died again for shame;
 Lonely, to flee from heaven again I turned,
 The ranks of angels looked away from me
 (Beneath my feet the golden pavements burned).



Freedom

WHAT free man knoweth freedom? Never he
 Whose father's father through long lives have reigned
 O'er kingdoms which mere heritage attained.
 Though from his youth to age he roam as free
 As winds, he dreams not of freedom's ecstasy.
 But he whose birth was in a nation chained
 For centuries; where every breath was drained
 From breasts of slaves which knew not there could be
 Such thing as freedom, — he beholds the light
 Burst, dazzling; though the glory blind his sight
 He knows the joy. Fools laugh because he reels
 And weilds confusedly his infant will;
 The wise man watching with a heart that feels
 Says: "Cure for freedom's harms is freedom still."

To an Absent Lover

THAT so much change should come when thou dost go,
 Is mystery that I cannot unravel quite,
 The very house seems dark as when the light

Of lamps goes out. Each wonted thing doth grow
 So altered, that I wander to and fro
 Bewildered by the most familiar sight,
 And feel like one who rouses in the night
 From dream of ecstasy, and cannot know
 At first, if he be sleeping or awake.
 My foolish heart so foolish for thy sake
 Hath grown, dear one!

Teach me to be more wise.
 I blush for all my foolishness doth lack;
 I fear to seem a coward in thine eyes.
 Teach me, dear one,— but first thou must come back!

Name: Lydia Huntley Sigourney

Date of birth: 1791

Place of Birth: Norwich, Connecticut

Date of death: 1865

Biography: Sigourney married to secure financial stability for both her family and herself, but in the end had to use her writing to earn money when her husband's business failed. She was a successful writer, whose work appealed to women in particular. She was widely published. In 1834 she published eight volumes of poetry, between 1840 and 1850, she published fourteen collections of her poetry and published a volume the year before her death. Death and piety were her favourite subjects and she turned a number of Indian tales written in blank verse into poetry.

from *Eve*

FOR the first time, a lovely scene
 Earth saw, and smiled,—
 A gentle form with pallid mien¹
 Bending o'er a newborn child;
 The pang, the anguish, and the woe
 That speech hath never told,
 Fled, as the sun with noontide glow
 Dissolves the snow-wreath cold,
 Leaving the bliss that none that mothers know
 While he, the partner of her heaven-taught joy,
 Knelt in adoring praise beside his beauteous boy.

She, first of all our mortal race,
 Learn'd the ecstasy to trace
 The expanding form of infant grace
 From her own life-spring fed;
 To mark, each radiant hour,
 Heaven's sculpture still more perfect growing,
 More full of power;

The little foot's elastic tread,
 The rounded cheek, like rose-bud glowing,
 The fringed eye with gladness flowing,
 As the pure, blue fountains roll;
 And then those lisping sounds to hear,
 Unfolding to her thrilling ear
 The strange, mysterious, never-dying soul,
 And with delight intense
 To watch the angel-smile of sleeping innocence.

¹ bearing of manner, especially as it reveals an inner state of mind

Death of an Infant

Death found strange beauty on that cherub² brow,
And dash'd it out. There was a tint of rose
On cheek and lip;— he touch'd the veins with ice,
And the rose faded, — Forth from those blue eyes
There spoke a wishful tenderness,— a doubt
Whether to grieve or sleep, which Innocence
Alone can wear. With ruthless haste he bound
The silken fringes of the curtaining lids
For ever, There had been a murmuring sound
With which the babe would claim its mother's ear,
Charming her even to tears. The spoiler set
His seal of silence. But there beam'd a smile
So fix'd and holy from that marble brow,—
Death gazed and left it there;— he dared not steal
The signet-ring of Heaven.

² a winged celestial being

Name: Mary Ashley Townsend

Date of birth: 1832

Place of Birth: Lyons, Wayne County

Date of death: 1901

Biography: Townsend loved reading and began writing poetry when she was at school. She was seventeen when her first poem was published. She was writing her own column by the time she was eighteen. She continued to write after her marriage and was published in many periodicals in America during the next fifty years. Townsend became an active secessionist and was chosen as Poet Laureate. She also won an award from the Mexican government for her writings about Mexican life.

Excerpt from “Creed”

I believe if should die,
 And you should kiss my eyelids when I die
 Cold, dead, and dumb to all the world contains,
 The folded orbs would open at thy breath,
 And, from its exile in the isles of death,
 Life would come gladly back along my veins.

Embryo

I FEEL a poem in my heart to-night,
 A still thing growing,—
 As if the darkness to the outer light
 A song were owing:
 A something strangely vague, and sweet, and sad,
 Fair, fragile, slender;
 Not tearful, yet not daring to be glad,
 And oh, so tender!

It may not reach the outer world at all,
 Despite its growing;
 Upon a poem-bud such cold winds fall
 To blight its blowing.
 But, oh, whatever may the thing betide,
 Free life or fetter,
 My heart, just to have held it till it died,
 Will be the better!

Her Horoscope

'TIS true, one half of woman's life is hope
And one half resignation. Between there lies
Anguish of broken dreams,— doubt, dire surprise,
And then is born the strength with all to cope.
Unconsciously sublime, life's shadowed slope
She braves; the knowledge in her patient eyes
Of all that love bestows and love denies,
As writ in every woman's horoscope!
She lives, her heart-beats given to other's needs,
Her hands, to lift for others on the way
The burdens which their weariness forsook.
She dies, an uncrowned doer of great deeds.
Remembered? Yes, as is for one brief day
The rose one leaves in some forgotten book.

Name: Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Date of birth: 1850

Place of Birth: Johnstown Center, Wisconsin

Date of death: 1919

Biography: Wheeler was a poet, spiritualist and novelist. Her first published writings were about the conventional family, written very sentimentally. After the death of her husband, she realised that the woman's lot was not as rosy as she had depicted in her early works. She gained the reputation as being the 'sinful poet' when a firm refused to publish her *Poems of Passion* which became very popular when eventually published. Her later poetry is aggressive asserting a tough individualism of her feministic belief in women. Some of her poems are fully of sexual passion symbolised in most cases by a tiger.

I Love You

I love your lips when they're wet with wine
 And red with a wild desire;
 I love your eyes when the lovelight lies
 Lit with a passionate fire.
 I love your arms when the warm white flesh
 Touches mine in a fond embrace;
 I love your hair when the strands enmesh
 Your kisses against my face.

Not for me the cold calm kiss
 Of a virgin's bloodless love;
 Not for me the saint's white bliss,
 Nor the heart of a spotless dove.
 But give me the love that so freely gives
 And laughs at the whole world's blame,
 With your body so young and warm in my arms,
 It sets my poor heart aflame.

So kiss me sweet with your warm wet mouth,
 Still fragrant with ruby wine,
 And say with a fervor born of the South
 That your body and soul are mine.
 Clasp me close in your warm young arms,
 While the pale stars shine above,
 And we'll live our whole young lives away
 In the joys of a living love

Battle Hymn of Women¹

They are waking, they are waking,

¹ A feminist poem published in *Poems of Experience* 1910

In the east, and in the west;
 They are throwing wide their windows to the sun;
 And they see the dawn is breaking,
 And they quiver with unrest,
 For they know their work is waiting to be done.

They are waking in the city,
 They are waking on the farm;
 They are waking in the boudoir, and the mill;
 And their hearts are full of pity
 As they sound the loud alarm,
 For the sleepers, who in darkness, slumber, still.

In the guarded harem² prison,
 Where they smother under veils,
 And all echoes of the world are walled away;
 Though the sun has not yet risen,
 Yet the ancient darkness pales,
 And the sleepers, in their slumber, dream of day.

And their dream shall grow in splendour
 Till each sleeper wakes, and stirs;
 Till she breaks from old traditions, and is free;
 And the world shall rise, and render
 Unto woman what is hers,
 As it welcomes in the race that is to be.

Unto woman, God the Maker
 Gave the secret of his plan;
 It is written out in cipher, on her soul;
 From the darkness, you must take her,
 To the light of day, O man!
 Would you know the mighty meaning of the scroll.

Divorced

Thinking of one thing all day long, at night
 I fall asleep, brain weary and heart sore;
 But only for a little while. At three,
 Sometimes at two o'clock, I wake and lie,
 Staring out into darkness; while my thoughts
 Begin the weary tread-mill toil again,
 From that white marriage morning of our youth
 Down to this dreadful hour.

² a house or section of a house reserved for women member of a household and the wives, concubines, female relatives and servants occupying such a place

I see your face

Lit with the lovelight of the honeymoon;
 I hear your voice, that lingered on my name
 As if it loved each letter, and I feel
 The clinging of your arms about my form,
 Your kisses on my cheek-and long to break
 The anguish of such memories with tears,
 But cannot weep; the fountain has run dry.
 We were so young, so happy, and so full
 Of keen, sweet joy of life. I had no wish
 Outside your pleasure; and you loved me so
 That when I sometimes felt a woman's need
 For the more serene expression of a man's love
 (The need to rest in calm affection's bay
 And not sail ever on the stormy main),
 Yet would I rouse myself to your desire;
 Meet ardent kisses with kisses just as warm;
 So nothing I could give should be denied.

And then our children came. Deep in my soul,
 From the first hour of conscious motherhood,
 I knew I should conserve myself for this
 Most holy office; knew God meant it so.
 Yet even then, I held your wishes first;
 And by my double duties lost the bloom
 And freshness of my beauty; and beheld
 A look of disapproval in your eyes.
 But with the coming of our precious child,
 The lover's smile, tinged with the father's pride,
 Returned again; and helped to make me strong;
 And life was very sweet for both of us.

Another, and another birth, and twice
 The little white hearse paused beside our door
 And took away some portion of my youth
 With my sweet babies. At the first you seemed
 To suffer with me, standing very near;
 But when I wept too long, you turned away.
 And I was hurt, not realising then
 My grief was selfish I could see the change
 Which motherhood and sorrow made in me;
 And when I saw the change that came to you,
 Saw how your eyes looked past me when you talked,
 And when I missed the love tone from your voice,
 I did that foolish thing weak women do,

Complained, and cried, and accused you of neglect,
And made myself obnoxious in your sight.

And often, after you had left my side,
Alone I stood before my mirror, mad
With anger at my pallid³ cheeks, my dull
Unlighted eyes, my shrunken mother-breasts,
And wept, and wept, and faded more and more.
How could I hope to win back wandering love,
And make new flames in dying embers leap
By such ungracious means?

And then She came,
Firm-bosomed, round of cheek, with such young eyes,
And all the ways of youth, I who had died
A thousand deaths in waiting the return
Of that old love-look to your face once more,
Died yet again and went straight into hell
When I beheld it come at her approach.

My God! My God! How have I borne it all!
Yet since she had the power to wake that look-
The power to sweep the ashes from your heart
Of burned-out love of me, and light new fires,
One thing remained for me – to let you go,
I had no wish to keep the empty frame
From which the priceless picture had been wrenched.
Nor do I blame you; it was not your fault;
You gave me all that most men can give – love
Of youth, of beauty, and of passion; and
I gave you full return; my womanhood
Matched well your manhood. Yet had you grown ill,
Or old, and unattractive from some cause
(Less close than was my service unto you),
I should have clung the tighter to you, dear;
And loved you, loved you, loved you more and more.

I grow so weary thinking of these things;
Day in, day out, and half the awful nights.

The Hen's Complaint

Beside an incubator stood
The would-be mother of a brood.

³ having an abnormally pale or wan complexion

With drooping wings and nodding head,
These are the clucked-out words she said:

“O, vile invention of the age,
You fill me with a burning rage!

Unfeeling monster, moved by steam,
You rob me of life’s sweetest dream!

Deprived of offspring which I crave,
I must go childless to my grave.

My aching wings which long to cover
A chirping brood of nestlings over,

No more may know that comfort sweet,
Since chickens may be hatched by heat.

Three weeks of quiet expectation
(Full many a flighty hen’s salvation)

I am denied, for now men say
A hen should be content to lay,

And furnish eggs to incubate,
And setting hens are out of date.

Alas, for such a cruel fashion —”
The angry fowl paused, choked with passion,

While from behind a strong hand caught her
And doused her in a tub of water.

British Victorian Poets

Name: Louisa Sarah Bevington

Date of birth: 1845

Place of Birth: London

Date of death: 1895

Biography: Louisa was the eldest of eight children, born to Quaker parents. She published her first volume of poems in 1876 under the pseudonym 'Arbor Leigh'. Her earliest poems showed signs of evolutionary ideas and religious questioning, which was to become a theme in the vast majority of her writing. She married a German artist, Guggenberger, but the marriage only lasted a few years. In the early 1890s, Bevington wrote regularly for the anarchist journals *Freedom*, *Commonwealth* and *Liberty*. By the time she died in 1895, she was recognised as an anarchist poet.

To a Critic

No theme for song—you say—the strength of man?
 Only his tyrant passion? Man, the slave,
 Fit theme for hymning? Never man, the brave,
 Whose eye roves widely, clear as eagle-scan,
 With vowed decision to fight out the plan
 Of mercy steadfastly, and sorrow save,—
 Who taketh will for sword, and hope for stave,
 And frowns down passion as a master can?

Nay, give not whimpering lovers all the lays!
 Too long their tears have sodden sort your art,
 Till songs and sighs scarce know themselves apart,
 And the sweet Easiest wins the proudest praise.
 Let music welcome some undaunted heart
 That wrestles songless through the nights and days.

The Poet's Tear

A TEAR welled up from a poet heart
 And fell on a rose;
 Lay there, bitter, and made it smart,—
 The red, red rose!
 Oh, the grief that wept it was full and pent¹,
 And the sobbing pain-blood came and went
 As song arose!
 When the tear shall dry then shall song be spent;
 O tear, lie still in thy bloomy tent,
 And cherish thy pain in petal and scent,
 Red, tear-filled rose.

¹ closely confined

The tear-drop hides in the rose's breast
 For fear of a ray,—
 For fear it should rise in the sun-lit air
 And perish of glory and gladness there;—
 O worst! O best!

So it quivers to music from day to day,
 Hidden in scent and crimson away,
 For fear of a ray in a rosy nest;—
 O curst! O blest!
 Shall the rose smile up in the eager sky
 That the sun may give?
 Or, shall grief be hidden, and passion shy,
 That a song may live?
 When the petals yield, then the tear shall dry;

If the heart be healed, so its song shall die;
 As the poet grieves, so his music grows;—
 O tear! O rose!
 Shall song be sweet? or shall love be dear?
 O tear-filled rose! and O poet's tear!
 Who knows? Who knows?

Name: Mathilde Blind

Date of birth: 1841

Place of Birth: Mannheim, Germany

Date of death: 1896

Biography: Mathilde Blind was the daughter of a well-known German refugee. Most of her verse is written in unimpeachable English, showing strong literary sympathies and correct versification. In England, she was a popular member of the pre-Raphaelite¹ circle. Her first volume of poems was published in 1867. During her life, most of her friendships and loyalties were with women. She was a staunch follower of the suffragette² movement and spent a lot of time promoting women's education, in which she herself had been marginalised when she was not permitted to attend certain lectures while studying in Europe. Blind can be classed as a feminist, a revolutionary and a socialist, showing scepticism for the world of religion.

The Dead

THE dead abide with us! Though stark and cold
 Earth seems to grip them, they are with us still:
 They have forged our chains of being for good or ill;
 And their invisible hands these hands yet hold.
 Our perishable bodies are the mould
 In which their strong imperishable will —
 Mortality's deep yearning to fulfil —
 Hath grown incorporate through dim time untold.

From The Leading of Sorrow

...Peace ye call this? Call this justice, meted
 Equally to rich and poor alike?
 Better than this peace the battle's heated
 Cannon-balls that ask not whom they strike!
 Better than this masquerade of culture
 Hiding strange hyena appetites,
 The frank ravening of the raw-necked vulture
 As its beak the senseless carrion smites.

What of men in bondage, toiling blunted
 In the roaring factory's lurid gloom?
 What of cradled infants starved and stunted?
 What of woman's nameless martyrdom?
 The all-seeing sun shines on unheeding,
 Shines by night the calm, unruffled moon,

¹ A group of young English artists and writers formed in 1848 to resist existing conventions in art and literature by a return to standards which they supposed to have existed in European art before the time of Raphael.

² woman advocating political enfranchisement of women

Though the human myriads, preying, bleeding,
Put creation harshly out of tune.

Suffering

OH ye, all ye, who suffer here below,
Schooled in the baffling mystery of pain,
Who on life's anvil³ bear the fateful strain,
Wrong as forged iron, hammered blow on blow.
Take counsel with your grief, in that you know,
That he who suffers suffers not in vain,
Nay, that it shall be for the whole world's gain,
And wisdom prove the priceless price of woe.

Thus in some new-found land where no man's feet
Have trod a path, bold voyagers astray,
May fall foredone by torturing thirst and heat:
But from the impotent body of defeat —
The winners spring who carve a conquering way —
Measured by milestones of their perished clay.

³ block on which metal is worked by a smith

Name: Anne Bronte

Date of birth: 1820

Place of Birth: Thornton, Bradford

Date of death: 1849

Biography: Anne was the last of six children whose mother died when she was a year old. Anne was very different from her sisters, perhaps because of the fact that she spent so much time with her aunt, who might have influenced both her personality and religious beliefs. Anne's early poems show a deep attachment to her home, which she left for the first time when she was fifteen years old to attend school. Many of the settings and characters in her poems could have come from her time at the Gondals. She began to write most of her religious poetry in 1837, when she fell ill and went through a religious crisis. Her logical drive and her delight in intellectual reasoning resulted in most of her poems developing into dialogue and narrative which gives them a pleasurable quality of argument or plot unfolding.

If This Be All

O GOD! if this indeed be all
 That Life can show to me;
 If on my aching brow may fall
 No freshening dew from Thee,

If with no brighter light than this
 The lamp of hope may glow,
 And I may only *dream* of bliss,
 And wake to weary woe;

If friendship's solace must decay,
 When other joys are gone,
 And love must keep so far away,
 While I go wandering on,

Wandering and toiling without gain,
 The slave of others' will,
 With constant care, and frequent pain,
 Despised, forgotten still;

Grieving to look on vice and sin,
 Yet powerless to quell
 The silent current from within,
 The outward torrent's swell:

While all the good I would impart,
 The feelings I would share,
 Are driven backward to my heart,
 And turned to wormwood, there;

If clouds must *ever* keep from sight



The glories of the Sun,
And I must suffer Winter's blight,
Ere Summer is begun;

If life must be so full of care,
Then call me soon to Thee;
Or give me strength enough to bear
My load of misery.

Music on Christmas Morning

MUSIC I love but never strain
Could kindle raptures so divine,
So grief assuage¹, so conquer pain,
And rouse this pensive heart of mine
As that we hear on Christmas morn,
Upon the wintry breezes borne.

Though Darkness still her empire keep,
And hours must pass, ere morning break;
From troubled dreams, or slumbers deep,
That music *kindly* bids us wake:
It calls us, with an angel's voice,
To wake, and worship, and rejoice;

To greet with joy the glorious morn,
Which angels welcomed long ago,
When our redeeming Lord was born,
To bring the light of Heaven below;
The Powers of Darkness to dispel,
And rescue Earth from Death and Hell.

While listening to that sacred strain,
My raptured spirit soars on high;
I seem to hear those songs again
Resounding through the open sky,
That kindled such divine delight,
In those who watched their flocks by night.

With them, I celebrate his birth
Glory to God, in the highest Heaven,
Good-will to men, and peace on Earth²,
To us a Saviour-king is given;
Our God is come to claim His own,

¹ to make something burdensome or painful less intense or severe

² Luke 2:14

And Satan's power is overthrown!

A sinless God, for sinful men,
Descends to suffer and to bleed;
Hell *must* renounce its empire then;
The price is paid, the world is freed,
And Satan's self must now confess,
That Christ has earned a *Right* to bless:

Now holy Peace may smile from heaven,
And heavenly Truth from earth shall spring:
The captive's galling bonds are riven,
For our Redeemer is our King;
And He that gave his blood for men
Will lead us home to God again.

Name: Charlotte Bronte

Date of birth: 1816

Place of Birth: London

Date of death: 1855

Biography: Charlotte was the third daughter of Maria Branwell and the Reverend Patrick Bronte. In 1826, she and her sister Emily started to write about an imaginary world called Angria. Charlotte's career consisted mainly of governess work and tutoring, but failed when she tried to open her own school. A collection of Bronte and her two sisters' poems was published in 1846, under the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. She started to move in literary circles, after the death of her sisters, in 1849. In a very real sense 'Charlotte's life was spent in mourning, in a struggle against the grim realities which surrounded her — abandonment, brutalization, emotional deprivation, death.'

(<http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/bronte/cbronte/brontbio1.html>) During her life she was forced to confront the traumatic loss of her mother, her four sisters, and her brother and the search for reality, for her own identity. Writing provided her with a psychological release, in which she was able to transmute her own experiences into great art through her creative powers.

The Wife's Will¹.

SIT still a word a breath break
 (As light airs stir a sleeping lake,)
 The glassy calm that soothes my woes,
 The sweet, the deep, the full repose.
 O leave me not! For ever be
 Thus, more than life itself to me!

Yes, close beside thee, let me kneel
 Give me thy hand that I might feel
 The friend so true so tried so dear,
 My heart's own chosen indeed is near;
 And check me not this hour divine
 Belongs to me is fully mine.

'Tis thy own hearth thou sitt'st beside,
 After long absence wandering wide;
 'Tis thy own wife reads in thine eyes,
 A promise clear of stormless skies,
 For faith and true love light the rays,
 Which shine responsive to her gaze.

Aye, well that single tear may fall;

¹ Charlotte was married in 1854 under duress to her father's curate, Arthur Bell Nicholls. Arthur promised to assist Charlotte in the looking after her father. This and her own illness persuaded her to accept the proposal. She died the following year from exhaustion and starvation. This poem can be considered as partly autobiographical.

Ten thousand might mine eyes recall,
Which from their lids, ran blinding fast,
In hours of grief, yet scarcely past,
Well may'st thou speak of love to me;
For, oh! most truly I love thee !

Yet smile for we are happy now.
Whence, then, that sadness on thy brow?
What say'st thou? "We must once again,
Ere long, be severed by the main?"
I knew not this I deemed no more,
Thy step would err from Britain's shore.

"Duty commands?" 'Tis true 'tis just;
Thy slightest word I wholly trust,
Nor by request, nor faintest sigh
Would I, to turn thy purpose, try;
But, William hear my solemn vow
Hear and confirm ! with thee I go.

"Distance and suffering," did'st thou say ?
"Danger by night, and toil by day ?"
Oh, idle words, and vain are these;
Hear me ! I cross with thee the seas.
Such risk as thou must meet and dare,
I thy true wife will duly share.

Passive, at home, I will not pine;
Thy toils thy perils, shall be mine;
Grant this and be hereafter paid
By a warm heart's devoted aid:
'Tis granted with that yielding kiss,
Entered my soul unmingled bliss.

Thanks, William thanks ! thy love has joy,
Pure undefiled with base alloy;
'Tis not a passion, false and blind,
Inspires, enchains, absorbs my mind;
Worthy, I feel, art thou to be
Loved with my perfect energy.

This evening, now, shall sweetly flow,
Lit by our clear fire's happy glow;
And parting's peace-embittering fear,
Is warned, our hearts to come not near;
For fate admits my soul's decree,

In bliss or bale to go with thee!

Reason

Unloved I love, unwept I weep,
 Grief I restrain, hope I repress;
 Vain is this anguish, fixed and deep,
 Vainer desires or means of bliss

My life is cold, love's fire being dead;
 That fire self-kindled, self-consumed;
 What living warmth erewhile it shed,
 Now to how drear extinction doomed!

Devoid of charm how could I dream
 My unasked love would e'er return?
 What fate, what influence lit the flame
 I still feel inly², deeply burn?

Alas! there are those who should not love;
 I to this dreary band belong;
 This knowing let me henceforth prove
 Too wise to list delusion's song.

No, Syren! Beauty is not mine;
 Affection's joy I ne'er shall know;
 Lonely will be my life's decline'
 Even as my youth is lonely now.

Come Reason — Science — Learning — Thought —
 To you my heart I dedicate;
 I have a faithful subject brought:
 Faithful because most desolate.

Fear not a wandering feeble mind:
 Stern Sovereign, it is all your own
 To crush, to cheer, to loose, to bind;
 Unclaimed, unshared, it seeks your throne.

Soft may the breeze of summer blow,
 Sweetly its sun in valleys shine;
 All earth around with love may glow, —
 No warmth shall reach this heart of mine.

² in an inward manner

Vain boast and false! Even now the fire
Though smothered, slacked, repelled, is burning
At my life's source; and stronger, higher,
Waxes the spirit's trampled yearning.

It wakes but to be crushed again:
Faint I will not, nor yield to sorrow;
Conflict and force will quell the brain;
Doubt not I shall be strong tomorrow.

Have I not fled that I may conquer?
Cross the dark sea in firmest faith
That I at last might plant my anchor
Where love cannot prevail to death?

Name: Emily Bronte

Date of birth: 1818

Place of Birth: Haworth, Yorkshire

Date of death: 1848

Biography: Emily is considered to be the greatest writer of the Bronte sisters, as well as the most spirited in temperament. For Emily, the real and imagined worlds were always intermeshed and the slide from one to the other was direct and uncomplicated. Her genius is masculine in character and her poetry often becomes a dialogue with her muse. Her poetry shows her fierce desire for independence which was ought after all her life, while rejecting conventional creeds. Her intense love of nature can also be seen in her writing.

'The night is darkening around me'

The night is darkening around me,
The wild winds coldly blow,
But a tyrant spell has bound me
And I cannot, cannot go.

The giant trees are bending
Their bare boughs weighed with snow
And the storm is fast descending
And yet I cannot go.

Clouds beyond cloud above me,
Wastes beyond wastes below,
But nothing drear can move me,
I will not, cannot go.

'Riches I hold in light esteem'

Riches I hold in light esteem
And Love I laugh to scorn
And lust of Fame was but a dream
That vanished with the morn —

And if I pray — the only prayer
That moves my lips for me
Is — 'Leave the heart that now I bear
And give me liberty.'

Yes, as my swift days near their goal
'Tis all that I implore —
Through life and death, a chainless soul
With courage to endure! —

Fall, Leaves, Fall

Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away;
Lengthen night and shorten day;
Every leaf speaks bliss to me
Fluttering from the autumn tree.
I shall smile when wreaths of snow
Blossom where the rose should grow;
I shall sing when night's decay
Ushers in a drearier day.

Name: Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Date of birth: 1806

Place of Birth: Durham County

Date of death: 1861

Biography: Elizabeth Barrett was born at Coxhoe Hall Durham, on 6 March, 1806, the eldest of eleven children. Her father was a West Indian planter. When she was still an infant, the family moved to Hope End, Herefordshire, the place with which the early memories recorded in 'Aurora Leigh', 'The Lost Bower' and other poems are associated. 'Until she was about fifteen years of age, she was healthy and vigorous, although "slight and sensitive", and was a good horse-woman. But, either in endeavouring to saddle her pony for herself, or in riding, she injured her spine; and the hurt was the occasion, if not the cause, of her being treated as an incurable invalid by her father—so long as she was under his roof.'

(<http://www.bartleby.com/223/0309.html>) From Hope End, the family moved a number of times, finally settling in London, where Browning first came to see her. The marriage took place on 12 September, 1846; and a week later, they were on their way to Italy, where they made their permanent home in Casa Guidi, Florence.

In 1844, before her marriage, she published a two-volume edition of her poems which was to make her name in the literary world. It was with this publication that she caught the attention of Robert Browning. She carried on writing until her death, after a short illness, in 1861.

If Thou Must Love Me

If thou must love me, let it be for naught
 Except for love's sake only. Do not say,
 'I love her for her smile — her look — her way
 Of speaking gently, - for a trick of thought
 That falls well with mine, and certes¹ brought
 A sense of pleasant ease on such a day' —
 For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
 Be changed, or change for thee — and love, so wrought,
 May be unwrought so. Neither, love me for
 Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry:
 A creature might forget to weep, who bore
 Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
 But love me for love's sake, that evermore
 Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

A Man's Requirements

I

Love me Sweet, with all thou art,
 Feeling, thinking, seeing;

¹ certainly or truly

Love me in the lightest part,
 Love me in full being.

II

Love me with thine open youth
 In its frank surrender;
 With the vowing of thy mouth,
 With its silence tender.

III

Love me with thine azure² eyes,
 Made for earnest grantings;
 Taking colour from the skies,
 Can Heaven's truth be wanting?

IV

Love me with their lids, that fall
 Snow-like at first meeting;
 Love me with thine heart, that all
 Neighbours then see beating.

V

Love me with thine hand stretched out
 Freely — open-minded:
 Love me with thy loitering foot, —
 Hearing one behind it.

VI

Love me with thy voice, that turns
 Sudden faint above me;
 Love me with thy blush that burns
 When I murmur 'Love me!'

VII

Love me with thy thinking soul,
 Break it to love-sighing;
 Love me with thy thoughts that roll
 On through living — dying.

² a light purplish blue

VIII

Love me in thy gorgeous airs,
 When the world has crowned thee;
 Love me, kneeling at thy prayers,
 With the angels round thee.

IX

Love me pure, as muses³ do,
 Up the woodlands shady:
 Love me gaily, fast and true,
 As a winsome lady.

X

Through all hopes that keep us brave,
 Farther off or nigher,
 Love me for the house and grave,
 And for something higher.

XI

Thus, if thou wilt prove me, Dear,
 Woman's love no fable,
 I will love thee — half a year —
 As a man is able.

Exerpt from **Aurora Leigh**⁴

Book V

⁵There it is,

We woman are too apt to look at One,
 Which proves a certain impotence in art.
 We strain our natures at doing something great,
 Far less because it's something great to do,
 Than haply that we, so, commend ourselves
 As being not small, and more appreciable
 To some one friend. We must have mediators

45

³ a poet or a guiding spirit

⁴ An epic poem written as a verse-novel (1856)

⁵ Here Aurora rehearses one of the platitudes of sexual difference that were common in the nineteenth century. We see the notion that a woman could only be inspired by the personal and the sentimental (Reynolds (ed.), 1996:143)

Betwixt our highest conscience and the judge; 50
 Some sweet saint's blood must quicken in our palms
 Or all the life in heaven seems slow and cold:
 Good only being perceived as the end of good,
 And God alone pleased, — that's too poor, we think,
 And not enough for us by any means. 55
 Ay, Romney, I remember, told me once
 We miss the abstract when we comprehend.
 We miss it most when we aspire, — and fail.
 Yet, so, I will not. — This vile woman's way
 Of trailing garments, shall not trip me up: 60
 I'll have no traffic with the personal thought
 In art's pure temple. Must I work in vain,
 Without the approbation of a man?
 It cannot be; it shall not.

Work and Contemplation

The woman singeth at her spinning-wheel
 A pleasant chant, ballad or barcarolle⁶;
 She thinketh of her song, upon the whole,
 Far more than of her flax; and yet the reel
 Is full, and artfully her fingers feel
 With quick adjustment, provident control,
 The lines, too subtly twisted to unroll,
 Out to a perfect thread. I hence appeal
 To the dear Christian church — that we may do
 Our Father's business in these temples murk,
 Thus, swift, and steadfast; thus, intent and strong;
 While, thus, apart from toil, our souls pursue
 Some high, calm, spheric⁷ tune, and prove our work
 The better for the sweetness of our song.

⁶ imitation of a Gondolier's song

⁷ of the heavens, exalted

Name: Ethna Carbery

Date of birth: 1866

Place of Birth: Ballymena, Ireland

Date of death: 1902

Biography: Mrs. Seumas Macmanus also known as Anna Johnston and Ethna Carbery, wrote much prose and verse, and began publishing when she was about fifteen. Her first poetry was published under the name of Ethna Carbery. She contributed to most of the magazines and newspapers of her time. She was known for her deep love of Ireland and anything Irish — this intense patriotism as well as her lovingness and her loveliness were her most conspicuous qualities.

My Dearest

She is my Dearest, and I take
 My burdens to her gentle breast,
 All doubts that fill my waking hours,
 All troubles that beset my rest:
 Whate'er the griefs, her prayerful eyes
 Shine with no shadow of surprise.

I think if angels took her hand
 And led her where God's pastures are,
 And knelt her at His feet, He swift
 Would frame her in a splendid star,
 And place her in a sea of light
 To cheer and gladden all the night.

She is so sweet, so true, so pure,
 If all the varied speech of earth
 Were mine to tell her goodness by,
 I could not falter half her worth:
 God made her, loved her, found her true,
 That is enough for me and you.

Only, life grows more beautiful
 While she walks with us unafraid,
 Interpreting with saintly speech
 The heaven in which her soul has stayed;
 Impressing still its fine sense
 Upon our dull intelligence.

I tremble at the day to come
 When she, my Dearest, will depart;
 And I bereft with feet that stray.



Loving, compassionate as Thou art,
 I pray as one in danger durst¹,
 Take me to Thee, kind Lord, the first.

Anne Hathaway²

Here did you stand, so shy and sweet,
 With face turned to the moss-grown way
 That William ³trod with eager feet
 To you, at the end of day.

Above you, tinted apple blossoms
 Showered their leaves across the lane,
 And round you stole the soft perfumes
 Of flowers after rain

Old cottage scents that rise at dusk
 From Rosemary⁴ and jessamine⁵,
 The passionate warm breath of musk⁶,
 And odorous woodbine⁷.

The blush of girlhood is not yours,
 You are a woman grave and fair;
 Yet in your eyes your youth endures,
 And in your sunset hair.

Across the fields at eventide
 With jaunty step, and smile elate,
 He came and sought you, bluebell-eyed,
 Tryst⁸ keeping at the gate.

And, "Sweetheart, hast thou waited long?"
 And, "Nay, love, but a little space:"
 Then was it but the throstle's⁹ song,
 Or lovers face to face?

He lingered near you, all unchid,

¹ dare

² Wife of famous poet/playwright, William Shakespeare

³ William Shakespeare

⁴ An aromatic evergreen Mediterranean shrub having light blue or pink flowers and greyish-green leaves that are used in cooking and perfumery

⁵ commonly known as Jasmine – a vine or shrub with compound leaves and white or yellow flowers

⁶ refers to the musk rose – a Mediterranean shrub cultivated for its clustered musk-scented white flowers

⁷ A Mediterranean honeysuckle having yellowish flowers

⁸ An agreement as between lovers to meet at a certain time or place

⁹ Any of the various Old World thrushes, especially a song thrush

He prayed, as only lovers can;
 He knew the worth your true heart hid,
 O fair, O happy Anne.

Dear! did you dream in days to come
 How great your lover's name would be?
 How spell of his should wreath your home
 With immortality?

How strangers by your hearth should sit
 And close their eyes, and seem to view,
 Through vistas dim, your shadow flit,
 And William's shadow, too?

Or did you live those far-off years
 Love-sheltered, holding home the best,
 Haply, no envious, worldly fears
 Stirring your gentle breast?

O sweet dead woman! blessed above
 All women of those distant days;
 Who knew the depth of Shakespeare's love,
 And merited his praise.

from **Rody MacCorley**

Ho! see the fleetfoot host of men
 Who speed with faces wan,
 From farmstead and from fisher's cot¹⁰
 Upon the banks of the Bann¹¹.
 They come with vengeance in their eyes.
 Too late, too late are they.
 For Rody MacCorley goes to die
 On the Bridge of Toome¹² today.

Oh Ireland, Mother Ireland,
 You love them still the best;
 The fearless brave who fighting fall,

¹⁰ A small house

¹¹ The longest river in Northern Ireland

¹² A bridge in Ireland

Upon your hapless breast;
But never a one of all your dead
More bravely fell in fray,
Than he who marches to his fate
On the Bridge of Toome today.

Name: Mary E. Coleridge

Date of birth: 1861

Place of Birth: London

Date of death: 1907

Biography: Coleridge was a poet, novelist and essayist, who spent a great deal of her time teaching working women in her home. She spent all of her life living in her parents' home. She published her first collection of poetry in 1896, under the pseudonym of 'Andos', with the help of Robert Bridges. Most of her work was not collected and published until after her death. She was quite shy of publication due to the fact that although she seemed to have written poetry all her life they were used for private readings among her friends and family. Her poetry seems to promote a separate feminist perspective although she participated very little in the feminist debates of the day.

A Clever Woman

You thought I had the strength of men,
 Because with men I dared to speak,
 And courted Science now and then,
 And studied Latin for a week;
 But woman's woman, even when
 She reads her Ethics in the Greek.

You thought me wiser than my kind;
 You thought me 'more than common tall'
 You thought because I had a mind,
 That I could have no heart at all;
 But woman's woman you will find,
 Whether she be great or small.

And then you needs must die — ah, well!
 I knew you not, you loved not me.
 'Twas not because the darkness fell,
 You saw not what was there to see.
 But I that saw and could not tell —
 O evil angel, set me free!

Marriage

No more alone sleeping, no more alone waking,
 Thy dreams divided, thy prayers in twain;
 Thy merry sisters to-night forsaking,
 Never shall we see thee, maiden, again.

Never shall we see thee, thine eyes glancing,
 Flashing with laughter and wild in glee,
 Under the mistletoe kissing and dancing,

Wantonly free.

There shall come a matron walking sedately,
Low-voiced, gentle, wise in reply.
Tell me, O tell me, can I love her greatly?
All for her sake must the maiden die!

Name: Eliza Cook

Date of birth: 1817

Place of Birth: Southwark

Date of death: 1889

Biography: Cook was the youngest of nine children, who prided herself in the fact that she was a working-class poet who was self-educated and self-directed. She had a difficult childhood which did not deter her. In her determination to be successful she sent a number of her poems to literary magazines signed only with her initials. These poems received rave reviews. The second edition of her next volume bore her full name and, eventually, she and her poems became the rage of London. She never married and seems to have strong views on the degraded position of women within marriage.

Song of the Imprisoned Bird

Ye may pass me by with pitying eye,
 And cry 'Poor captive thing!'
 But I'll prove ye are caged as safely as I,
 If ye'll list¹ to the notes I sing.

I flutter thrall², and so do all; —
 Ye have bonds ye cannot escape;
 With only a little wider range,
 And bars of another shape.

The noble ranks of fashion and birth
 Are fettered by courtly rule;
 They dare not rend the shackles that tend
 To form the knave and fool.

The parasite, bound to kiss the hand
 That, perchance, he may loathe to touch;
 The maiden; high-born' wedding where she may scorn, —
 Oh! has earth worse chains than such?

The one who lives but to gather up wealth, —
 Though great his treasure may be;
 Yet, guarding with care and counting by stealth, —
 What a captive wretch is he!

The vainly proud, who turn from the crowd,
 And tremble lest they spoil

¹ listen

² one who is intellectually or morally enslaved

The feathers of the peacock plume
 With a low, plebeian³ soil:

Oh! joy is mine to see them strut
 In their chosen, narrow space;
 They mount a perch, but ye need not search
 For a closer prison-place.

The being of fitful, curbless wrath
 May fiercely stamp and rave;
 He will call himself free, but there cannot be
 More mean and piteous slave; —

For the greatest victim, the fastest-bound,
 Is the one who serves his rage;
 The temper that governs will ever be found
 A fearful, torture-cage.

Each breathing spirit is chastened down
 By the hated or the dear;
 The gentle smile or tyrant frown
 Will hold in love or fear.

How much there is self-will would do,
 Were it not for the dire dismay
 What bids ye shrink, as ye suddenly think
 Of 'What will my neighbour say?'

Then pity me not; for mark mankind,
 Of every rank and age;
 Look close to the heart, and ye'll ever find⁷
 That each is a bird in a cage.

Song of the Ugly Maiden

Oh! the world gives little of love or light,
 Though my spirit pants for much;
 For I have no beauty for the sight,
 No riches for the touch.
 I hear men sing o'er the flowing cup
 Of woman's magic spell;
 And vows of zeal they offer up,
 And eloquent tales they tell.
 They bravely swear to guard the fair

³ of, belonging to, or characteristic of commoners

With strong, protecting arms;
 But will they worship woman's worth
 Unblent with woman's charms?
 No! ah, no! 'tis little they prize
 Crookbacked⁴ forms and rayless eyes.

Oh! 'tis a saddening thing to be
 A poor and Ugly one:
 In the sand Time puts in his glass for me,
 Few sparkling atoms run.
 For my drawn lids bear no shadowing fringe,
 My locks are thin and dry;
 My teeth wear not the rich pearl tinge,
 Nor my lips the henna⁵ dye.
 I know full well I have nought of grace
 That maketh woman 'divine',
 The wooer's praise and doting gaze
 Have never yet been mine.
 Where'er I go all eyes will shun
 The loveless mien⁶ of the Ugly one.

I join the crowd where merry feet
 Keep pace with the merry strain;
 I not the earnest words that greet
 The fair ones in the train,
 The stripling youth has passed me by
 He leads another out!
 She has a light and laughing eye,
 Like sunshine playing about.
 The wise man scanneth calmly round,
 But his gaze stops not with me;
 It hath fixed on head whose curls can be, unbound,
 Are bright as curls can be;
 And he watches her through the winding dance
 With smiling care and tender glance.

The gay cavalier has thrust me aside;
 Whom does he hurry to seek?
 One with a curving lip of pride,
 And a forehead white and sleek.
 The grey-haired veteran, young with wine,
 Would head the dance once more;
 He looks for a hand, but passes mine,

⁴ referring to a hunched back

⁵ A reddish-orange dye prepared from the dried and ground leaves of a Middle East tree or shrub

⁶ appearance or aspect

As all have passed before.
 The pale, scarred face may sit alone,
 The unsightly brow may mope;
 There cometh no tongue with annoying tone
 To flatter Affection's hope.
 Oh! Ugliness! thy desolate pain
 Had served to set the stamp on Cain⁷.

My quick brain hears the thoughtless jeers
 That are whispered with laughing grin;
 As though I Had fashioned my own dull orbs⁸,
 And chosen my own seared skin.
 Who shall dream of the withering pang,
 As I find myself forlorn —
 Sitting apart, with lonely heart,
 'Mid cold neglect and scorn?
 I could be glad as others are,
 For my soul is young and warm;
 And kind it had been to darken and mar
 My feelings with my form;
 For fondly and strong as my spirit may yearn
 It gains no sweet love in return.

Man, just Man! I know thine eye
 Delighteth to dwell on those
 Whose tresses shade, with curl or braid,
 Cheeks soft and round as rose.
 I know thou wilt ever gladly turn
 To the beautiful and the bright;
 But is it well that thou should spurn
 The one GOD chose to blight?
 Oh! why shouldst thou trace my shrinking face
 With coarse, deriding jest?
 Oh! why forget that a charmless brow
 May abide with a gentle breast?
 Oh! why forget that gold is found
 Hidden beneath the roughest ground?

Would that I had passed away
 Ere I knew that I was born;
 For I stand in the blessed light of day
 Like a weed among the corn, —
 The black rock in the wide, blue sea —
 The snake in the jungle green,

⁷ Old Testament Biblical character who was inflicted with a physical mark after murdering his brother
⁸ eye or eyeball

Oh! who will stay in the fearful way
Where such ugly things are seen?
Yet mine is the fate of lonelier state
Than that of the snake or rock;
For those who behold me in their path
Not only shun but mock.
Oh! Ugliness! thy desolate pain
Had served to set the stamp on Cain!

Name: Michael Field — Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper

Date of birth: 1846 & 1862

Place of Birth: England

Date of death: 1914 & 1913

Biography: Michael Field was a joint pseudonym for Bradley and Cooper, an aunt and niece who collaboratively wrote twenty-seven tragedies and eight volumes of verse. These two started writing together during their travels during which, they also became lovers. Both were supporters of the suffrage movement as well as the anti-vivisection league. It is only from the publication of Michael Field's poems that the lesbian connotations of the traditional 'Sappho' poems are made apparent. Many of their poems are love poems written about and to each other.

'Maids, not to you my mind doth change'

Maids, not to you my mind doth change;
Men I defy, allure, estrange,
Prostrate, make bond or free:
Soft as the stream beneath the plane
To you I sing my love's refrain;
Between us is no thought of pain, Peril, satiety¹.

Soon doth a lover's patience tire,
But ye to manifold desire
Can yield response, ye know
When for long, museful days I pine,
The presage² at my heart divine;
To you I never breathe a sign
Of inward want or woe.

When injuries my spirit bruise,
Allaying virtue ye infuse
With unobtrusive skill:
And if care frets ye come to me
As fresh as nymph³ from stream or tree,
And with your soft vitality
My weary bosom fill.

¹ The condition of being full or gratified beyond the point of satisfaction.

² An indication of warning of a future occurrence, a prediction

³ from Greek and Roman mythology – beautiful maiden inhabiting and sometimes personifying features of nature such as trees and waters

'So jealous of your beauty'

So jealous of your beauty,
 You will not wed
 For dread
 That hymeneal⁴ duty
 Should touch and mar
 The lovely thing you are?
 Come to your garden-bed!

Learn there another lesson:
 This poppy-head,
 Instead
 Of having crimson dress on,
 Is now a fruit,
 Whose marvellous pale suit
 Transcends the glossy red.

What, count the colour
 Of apricot,
 Ungot,
 Warming in August, duller
 Than those must shy,
 Frail flowers that spread and die
 Before the sun is hot!

Lady, the hues unsightly,
 And best forgot,
 Are not
 Berries and seeds set brightly,
 But withered blooms:
 Alack, vainglory dooms
 You to their ragged lot!

Long Ago, XVII

The moon rose full: the women stood
 As though within a sacred wood
 Around an altar — thus with awe
 The perfect, virgin orb⁵ they saw
 Supreme above them; and its light
 Fell on their limbs and garments white.

⁴ reference to consummation the marriage

⁵ circle, sphere

Then with pale, lifted brows thy stirred
 Their fearful steps at Sappho's⁶ word,
 And in a circle moved around,
 Responsive to her music's sound,
 That through the silent air stole on,

Until their breathless dread was gone,
 And they could dance with lightsome feet,
 And lift the song with voices sweet.
 Then once again the silence came:
 Their lips were blanched as if with shame
 That they in maidenhood were bold
 Its sacred worship to unfold;
 And Sappho touched the lyre⁷ alone,
 Until she made the bright strings moan.
 She called to Artemis⁸ aloud—
 Alas, the moon was wrapt in cloud!—
 'Oh, whither art thou gone from me?
 Come back again, virginity!
 For maidenhood do still I long,
 The freedom and the joyance strong
 Of that most blessed, secret state
 That makes the tenderest maiden great.
 O moon, be fair to me as these,
 And my regretful passion ease,
 Restore me to my only good,
 My maidenhood, my maidenhood!'
 She sang: and through the clouded night
 An answer came of cruel might—
 'To thee I never come again.'
 O Sappho, bitter was thy pain!
 Then did thy heavy steps retire,
 And leave, moon-bathed, the virgin quire¹⁰.

⁶ Greek lyric poetess of Lesbos, according to the legend, she threw herself into the sea in despair as a result of her unrequited love for Phaon.

⁷ Instrument of harp kind

⁸ Goddess of chastity and of hunting

¹⁰ choir

Name: Felicia Hemans

Date of birth: 1793

Place of Birth: England

Date of death: 1835

Biography: Hemans was one of six children, whose life was filled with tragedy. Both her father and her husband went overseas due to financial difficulties and never returned, but the greatest tragedy of all for her was the death of her mother. By the time she herself died, she was worn out both from writing and raising a family. In her poetry she explored what it means to be a woman, challenging traditional beliefs while at the same time reinforcing persistent stereotypes. Her work celebrates the lives, events and imagined thoughts of unremembered women from different cultures and different time periods. Her interest in the contradictions of power and womanliness, fame and modesty, self-expression and self-denial, also gave to later generations a characteristic topos for women's poetry. Behind its apparent acceptance of the sad lot of women there can also be heard a passionate protest on their behalf. (<http://www.uky.edu/UniversityPress/books/records.html>)

To a Wandering Female Singer

Thou hast loved and thou hast suffer'd!
 Unto feeling deep and strong,
 Thou hast trembled like a harp's frail string —
 I know it by thy song!

Thou hast loved — it may be vainly
 But well — oh! but too well —
 Thou hast suffer'd all that woman's breast
 May bear — but must not tell.

Thou hast wept and thou hast parted,
 Thou hast been forsaken long,
 Thou hast watch'd for steps that came not back —
 I know it by thy song!

By the low clear silvery gushing
 Of its music from thy breast,
 By the quivering of its flute-like swell --
 A sound of the heart's unrest.

By its fond and plaintive lingering,
 On each word of grief so long,
 Oh, thou hast loved and suffer'd much --
 I know it by thy song!



The Grave of a Poetess

I stood beside thy lowly grave;
 Spring odours breathed around,
 And music, in the river wave,
 Pass'd with a lulling sound.

All happy things that love the sun,
 In the bright air glanced by,
 And a glad murmur seem'd to run
 Through the soft azure sky.

Fresh leaves were on the ivy bough
 That fringed the ruins near;
 Young voices were abroad, but thou
 Their sweetness could not hear.

And mournful grew my heart for thee,
 Thou in whose woman's mind
 The ray that brightens earth and sea,
 The light of song was shrined.

Mournful, that thou wert¹ slumbering low,
 With a dread curtain drawn
 Between thee and the golden glow
 Of this world's vernal² dawn.

Parted from all the song and bloom
 Thou wouldst have loved so well,
 To thee the sunshine round thy tomb
 Was but a broken spell.

The bird, the insect on the wing,
 In their bright reckless play,
 Might feel the flush and light of spring —
 And thou wert pass'd away.

But then, e'en then, a nobler thought
 O'er my vain sadness came;
 Th' immortal spirit woke, and wrought
 Within my thrilling frame.

Surely on lovelier things, I said,
 Thou must have look'd ere now,

¹ archaic - be

² of, relating to, or occurring in the Spring

Than all that round our pathway shed
Odours and hues below.

The shadows of the tomb are here,
Yet beautiful the earth!
What see'st thou then, where no dim fear,
No haunting dream hath birth?

Here a vain love to passing flowers
Thou gav'st — but where thou art,
The sway is not with changeful hours,
There love and death must part.

Thou hast left sorrow in thy song,
A voice not loud but deep!
The glorious bowers of earth among —
How often didst thou weep?

Where couldst thou fix on mortal ground
Thy tender thoughts and high?
Now peace the woman's heart has found,
And joy the poet's eye.

Name: Jean Ingelow

Date of birth: 1820

Place of Birth: Boston, Lincolnshire

Date of death: 1897

Biography: Ingelow, the eldest child of her parents, remained in the family home all her life. Her second volume of poetry, published in 1863, was immensely popular going into thirty editions. She belongs in the genteel tradition of women's poetry — a tradition which offered moral and emotional comforts in accessible verse forms. However, this sense of inhibition dissipated when she wrote about Lincolnshire or her fantasy tales for children. Here she seemed to become fired up in her writing.

From 'Songs of Seven'

Seven Times Six. — Giving in Marriage

To bear, to nurse, to rear,
 To watch, and then to lose:
 To see my bright ones disappear,
 Drawn up like morning dews,—
 To bear, to nurse, to rear,
 To watch and then to lose:
 This have I done when God drew near
 Among his own to choose.

To hear, to heed, to wed,
 And with thy lord depart
 In tears that he, as soon as shed,
 Will let no longer smart,—
 To hear, to heed, to wed,
 This while thou didst I smiled,
 For now it was not God who said,
 "Mother, give Me thy child."

O fond, O fool, and blind!
 To God I gave with tears;
 But when a man like grace would find,
 My soul put by her fears,—
 O fond, O fool, and blind!
 God guards happier spheres;
 That man will guard where he did bind
 Is hope for unknown years.

To hear, to heed, to wed,
 Fair lot that maidens choose,
 Thy mother's tenderest words are said,

Thy face no more she views;
 Thy mother's lot, my dear,
 She doth in naught accuse;
 Her lot to bear, to nurse, to rear,
 To love,— and then to lose.

'Little babe, while burns the west,'

Little babe, while burns the west,
 Warm thee, warm thee in my breast;
 While the moon doth shine her best,
 And the dews distil not.

All the land so sad, so fair —
 Sweet its toils are, blest its care.
 Child, we may not enter there!
 Some there are that will not.

Fain would I thy margins know,
 Land of work, and land of snow;
 Land of life, whose rivers flow
 On, and on, and stay not.

Fain would I thy small limbs fold,
 While the weary hours are told,
 Little babe in cradle cold.
 Some there are may not.

Name: Ellen Johnston

Date of Birth: 1835

Place of Birth: Bridgeton

Date of Death: 1873

Biography: Ellen had an unhappy childhood which started when her stepfather sent her to work in a factory at the age of ten. She was an unmarried mother and was classed by society as being a 'fallen woman'. After the birth of her daughter, she was too frail to return to the factory and so started contributing poetry to a weekly newspaper. She was forced to return to factory work in order to support her family. Much of her poetry is about the sufferings and hardships endured by her own class.

Lines to Ellen, the Factory Girl

Dear Ellen, when you read these lines, O throw them not aside!
O, do not laugh at them in scorn, or turn away in pride!
I know 'tis a presumptuous thought for me to thee to write,
For, Ellen, feeble are the words that my pen can indite.

Had fortune smiled upon thy birth and favoured thee with wealth,
Then, Ellen, I would be content with praying for your health;
But since I know that you, like me, are forced your bread to win,
Exposed to many dangers 'mid the factory's smoke and din,

I know you have a feeling heart — that you will not be stern,
Nor deem it curiosity your history to learn;
Although I never saw thy face, yet I have read thy lays,
And 'tis my earnest prayer for thee that thou'lt see many days

A year ago this very month I read your touching song —
Your last farewell to your betrothed, just after he had gone;
My thoughts were with you ever since — I thought of writing then,
But courage I could not call forth, and fear held back my pen.

Hast thou no mother, Ellen dear, to know thy griefs and fears,
No sister who has shared thy joys through all thy childish years,
No brother's merry coaxing ways to welcome thee at home,
No father dear, in his arm-chair — are all those loved ones gone?

I know your heart is sensitive, and that you ill can brook
The sneer from those you work beside, the cold contemptuous look;
Tho' I have met with some of those, the number is but few —
The most of those I work beside are friends sincere and true.

I rise each morn at six o'clock, and pray that God will guide
Me through the duties of the day, whatever ill betide;
And when at night I lay me down, in calm and quiet repose,
I sleep the dreamless sleep of health contentment only knows.

For, dearest, in this world, you know, the sun's not always shining,
But underneath each heavy cloud there lies a silver lining,¹
Although thou art companionless, with no friend save thy cat,
I trust 'twill not be so with thee when thy betrothed comes back.

Thine eyes with love shall sparkling beam when he comes back again
To claim the hand thou promised him before he crossed the main;
Then I will wake my feeble muse, and let my song be heard,
A marriage sonnet unto him — St Ninian's noble bard.

¹ A well known proverb.

Name: May Kendall

Date of birth: 1861

Place of Birth: Bridlington, Yorkshire

Date of death: 1931

Biography: Kendall's first publication was a book of fairy tales in 1885. Her poetry was published in many magazines during the 1880s and two volumes were published in 1887 and 1894. Given the militant tones of many of her stories and poems, it is obvious that Kendall was interested in woman's politics. She also includes new themes in her writing such as evolution. She was severely critical of the old ways of thinking. Kendall gave up writing poetry for reforming work.

Woman's Future

Complacent they tell us, hard hearts and derisive,
 In vain is our ardour: in vain our sighs:
 Our intellects, bound by a limit decisive,
 To the level of Homer's¹ may never arise.
 We heed not the falsehood, the base innuendo,
 The laws of the universe, these are our friends,
 Our talents shall rise in a mighty crescendo,
 We trust Evolution to make us amends!

But ah, when I ask you for food that is mental,
 My sisters you offer me ices and tea!
 You cherish the fleeting, the mere accidental,
 At the cost of the True, the Intrinsic, the Free.
 Your feelings, compressed in Society's mangle,
 Are vapid and frivolous, pallid and mean.
 To slander you love; but you don't care to wrangle;
 You bow to Decorum, and cherish Routine.

Alas, is it woodwork you take for your mission,
 Or Art that your fingers so gaily attack?
 Can patchwork atone for the mind's inanition²?
 Can the soul, oh my sisters, be fed on a *plaque*?
 Is this your vocation? My goal is another,
 And empty and vain is the end you pursue.
 In antimacassars the world you may smother;
 But intellect marches o'er them and o'er you.

On Fashion's vagaries your energies strewing,
 Devoting your days to a rug or a screen,

¹ 850 B.C. Greek epic poet, two of the greatest works in Western literature attributed to him

² the condition or quality of being empty

Oh, rouse to a lifework — do something worth doing!
 Invent a new planet, a flying-machine.
Mere charms superficial, mere feminine graces,
 That fade or that flourish, no more you may prize;
But the knowledge of Newton³ will beam in your faces,
 The soul of a Spencer⁴ will shine in your eyes.

³ English mathematician and scientist who invented differential calculus and formulated the theory of universal gravitation, a theory about the nature of light and three laws of motion

⁴ Herbert Spencer – a British philosopher who attempted to apply the theory of evolution to philosophy and ethics

Name: Leticia Elizabeth Landon

Date of birth: 1802

Place of Birth: Chelsea

Date of death: 1838

Biography: Like her contemporary Hemans, Landon also found herself having to use her poetic ability for economic use. She became an assistant on one of the influential journals of the day *The Literary Gazette*, where besides her verses, reviews and essays, she earned a satisfactory daily wage. Her writings became known and sought, and between 1821 and 1830 she published six volumes of her poetry. Her initials, L.E.L. became a sure selling point for her. Her success, however, came at a price. She became the centre of many scandalous stories resulting in her marrying and leaving England for good in 1838. She was very unhappy in her marriage and was found dead two months later — a suspected suicide, which seemed plausible considering it was a major theme in her poetry.

from *Fragments*¹

Secrets

Life has dark secrets; and the hearts are few
 That treasure not some sorrow from the world —
 A sorrow silent, gloomy, and unknown,
 Yet colouring the future from the past.
 We see the eye subdued, the practised smile,
 The word well weighed before it pass the lip,
 And know not of the misery within:
 Yet there it works incessantly, and fears
 The time to come; for time is terrible,
 Avenging and betraying.

The Marriage Vow

The altar, 'tis of death! For there are laid
 The sacrifice of all youth's sweetest hopes.
 It is dreadful thing for woman's lip
 To swear the heart away; yet know that heart
 Annuls the vow while speaking, and shrinks back
 From the dark future that it dares not face.
 The service read above the open grave
 Is far less terrible than that which seals
 The vow that binds the victim, not the will:
 For in the grave is rest.

¹ A collection of poetry by L.E.L.

The Farewell

Farewell!

Shadows and scenes that have, for many hours,
 Been my companions; I part from ye like friends —
 Dear and familiar ones — with deep sad thoughts,
 And hopes, almost misgivings!

Song

Farewell! — and never think of me
 In lighted hall or lady's bower²!
 Farewell! — and never think of me
 In spring sunshine or summer hour! —
 But when you see a lonely grave,
 Just where broken heart might be,
 With not one mourner by its sod³,
 Then — and then only — THINK OF ME!

² A woman's private chamber in a medieval castle, a boudoir

³ A section of grass-covered surface, soil held together by matted roots

Name: Amy Levy

Date of birth: 1861

Place of Birth: Clapham, south-west London

Date of death: 1889

Biography: Levy was born of Jewish parents, and was the first Jewish student at Newnham College, Cambridge. She had published a poem in a feminist journal by the age of thirteen and continued to publish while she was at university. Levy started going deaf at a very young age and as a result of this disability suffered from deep depression. She eventually killed herself at the age of twenty-seven, by inhaling fumes from a charcoal stove. Levy felt that she was doomed to remain a minor poet because she was a woman and her life and work are a sad reminder that the odds which women were struggling with in those times were, sometimes, too much for them to bear. Her work is often indicative of her own melancholy and pain, where she expresses her vision of the world as being irredeemable.

Ballade of a Special Edition

He¹ comes; I hear him up the street—
 Bird of ill omen, flapping wide
 The pinion² of a printed sheet,
 His hoarse note scare the eventide.
 Of slaughter, theft, and suicide
 He is the herald and the friend ;
 Now he vociferates with pride—
 A double murder in Mile End³ !

A hanging to his soul is sweet ;
 His gloating fancy's fain to bide
 Where human-freighted vessels meet,
 And misdirected trains collide.
 With Shocking Accidents supplied,
 He tramps the town from end to end.
 How often have we heard it cried—
 A double murder in Mile End.

War loves he; victory or defeat,
 So there be loss on either side.
 His tale of horrors incomplete,
 Imagination's aid is tried.
 Since no distinguished man has died,
 And since the Fates, relenting, send
 No great catastrophe, he's spied

¹ Could be referring to a newspaper boy or Jack the Ripper

² Wing of a bird

³ reference to the murders of Jack the Ripper – serial killer whose activities were chronicled in the newspaper on a daily basis. The double murder took place on 30 September, 1888

This double murder in Mile End.

Fiend, get thee gone! no more repeat
 Those sounds which do mine ears offend.
 It is apocryphal⁴, you cheat,
 Your double murder in Mile End.

A Cross-road Epitaph

When first the world grew dark to me
 I call'd on God, yet came not he.
 Whereon, as wearier wax'd my lot,
 On Love I call'd, but Love came not.
 When a worse evil did befall,
 Death, on thee only did I call.

From A Minor Poet

There was a woman once;	160
Deep eyes she had, white hands, a subtle smile,	
Soft speaking tones: she did not break my heart,	
Yet haply had her heart been otherwise	
Mine had not now been broken. Yet, who knows?	
My life was jarring discord from the first:	165
Tho' here and there brief hints of melody,	
Of melody unutterable, clove the air.	
From this bleak world, into the heart of night,	
The dim, deep bosom of the universe,	
I cast myself. I only crave for rest;	170
Too heavy is the load. I fling it down.	

⁴ of questionable authorship or authenticity, erroneous; fictitious

Name: Anne C. Lynch

Date of birth: 1820

Place of Birth: Bennington, Vt.

Date of death: 1909

Biography: Lynch began to write very early for literary journals. Her first volume of poetry was published in 1848. Being a British citizen, Lynch is considered to be a British poet even though she lived in America for part of her life. She and her husband, Professor Botta, lived in New York, where she often did charity work, collecting funds for both women and children during the Franco-Prussian war. Her poetry is both musical and elegant and themes in her poems, show her interest in literature, poetry, music and art.

To a Poet's Wife

She, who in lonely pride may wear
 The laurel¹ on her brow,
 And sit beneath its chilling shade,
 Is far less blest than thou.

A higher happiness is thine,
 To hear the voice of Fame
 Re-echo in her silver tones,
 The one beloved name.

To a Poet, Painter and Musician

Three Muses² one day
 Had a serious fray,
 Concerning a youth who had
 wandered astray,
 And fast up Parnassus³ was taking his
 way.
 They each urged a claim
 Each gave him her name,
 And each vowed to crown him with chaplets of fame.

Frown followed retort,
 Till to cut it all short,
 They decided to carry the case up to court.
 Apollo⁴ averred,



¹ A wreath of an evergreen tree with small blackish berries conferred as a mark of honour in ancient times upon poets and heroes.

² Greek mythology – any of the nine daughters of Mneinosyne and Zeus. Each presided over a different art or science

³ A mountain, about 2458m high, in Central Greece, north of the Gulf of Corinth. In ancient times it was sacred to Apollo, Dionysus and the Muses

⁴ Greek mythology – The god of prophecy, medicine and poetry and sometimes identified with the sun

That from all he had heard,
The claim of exclusiveness seemed quite absurd;
And he gave his decree
That this soul should be free
For the "joint occupancy" of the whole three.

Name: Charlotte Mew

Date of birth: 1879

Place of Birth: London

Date of death: 1928

Biography: Mew was one of the last poets of the Victorian era. In her family life, death struck often and by 1898, only her mother, herself and one sister remained out of a family of nine. Despite this Charlotte was able to produce respected poetry. The publishing of her writing came slowly, and only in 1912, did she really begin to get literary notice. Her poetry centres around loneliness, disillusionment, sexual longing and fear. Her love poems are for the most part, bleak and without hope. This reflects the personal frustration she felt in her own life, where she was not able to find a woman to love her in return and connect with her in the way that she hoped. In the late 1920s, after her mother died and her only surviving sister was diagnosed with cancer, Charlotte began to suffer from delusions and was put in a nursing home and ended up committing suicide by drinking a bottle of disinfectant.

My Heart is Lame

My heart is lame with running after yours so fast
 Such a long way,
 Shall we walk slowly home, looking at all the things we passed
 Perhaps today?

Home down the quiet evening roads under the quiet skies,
 Not saying much,
 You for a moment giving me your eyes
 When you could bear my touch.

But not to-morrow. This has taken all my breath;
 Then. Though you look the same,
 There may be something lovelier in Love's face in death
 As your heart sees it, running back the way we came;
 My heart is lame.

A Quoi Bon Dire¹

Seventeen years ago you said
 Something that sounded like Good-bye;
 And everybody thinks you are dead,
 But I.

So I, as I grow stiff and cold
 To this and that say Good-bye too;
 And everybody sees that I am old
 But you.

¹ Literally – has what good statement (What is the use of saying this?)

And one fine morning in a sunny lane
 Some boy and girl will meet and kiss and swear
 That nobody can love their way again
 While over there
 You will have smiled, I shall have tossed your hair.

I So Liked Spring

I so liked Spring last year
 Because you were here; —
 The thrushes too —
 Because it was these you so liked to hear —
 I so liked you.

This year's a different thing,—
 I'll not think of you.
 But I'll like the Spring because it is simply spring
 As the thrushes do

from "The Quiet House"

Red in the strangest pain to bear;
 In Spring the leaves on the budding trees;
 In Summer the roses are worse than these,
 More terrible than they are sweet;
 A rose can stab you across the street
 Deeper than any Knife;
 And the crimson haunts you everywhere —
 Thin shafts of sunlight, like the ghost of reddened
 swords have struck our stair
 As if, coming down, you had split your life.
 I think that my soul is red
 Like the soul of a sword or a scarlet flower;
 But when these are dead
 They have had their hour.
 I shall have had mine too,
 For from head to feet
 I am burned and stabbed half through
 And the pain is deadly sweet.
 The things that kill us seem
 Blind to the death they give;
 It is only in our dream
 The things that kill us live.

Name: Alice Meynell

Date of birth: 1847

Place of Birth: Barnes, near London

Date of death: 1922

Biography: Much of Meynell's childhood was spent in Italy, where she converted to Roman Catholicism — a theme often reflected in her poetry. While she was still a girl, her poetry was praised by established writers. She produced several volumes of poetry after 1875. She became very active in the suffragette movement, but despite her political affiliations her poetry remained personal and lyrical. Some of her poems make reference to the burden of motherhood and she is probably the first poet to overtly refer to unmaternal instincts. She brings to this topic a sense of uncertainty and foreboding.

A Father of Women

Our father works in us,
The daughters of his manhood. Not undone
Is he, not wasted, though transmuted thus,
And though he left no son.

Therefore on him I cry
To arm¹ me: 'For my delicate mind a casque²,
A breastplate for my heart, courage to die,
Of thee, captain, I ask.

'Nor strengthen only; press
A finger on this violent blood and pale,
Over this rash will let thy tenderness
A while pause, and prevail.

'And shepherd-father, thou
Whose staff folded my thoughts before birth,
Control them now I am of earth, and now
Thou art no more of earth.

'O liberal, constant, dear,
Crush in my nature the ungenerous art
Of the inferior; set me high, and here,
Here garner up thy heart!'

Like to him now are they,
The million living fathers in the War —
Mourning the crippled world, the bitter day —
Whose striplings are no more.

The crippled world! Come then,

¹ referring to the fight for women's right to vote

² a helmet, especially an ornate visorless headpiece of the sixteenth century

Fathers of women with your honour in the trust,
 Approve, accept, know them daughters of men,
 Now that your sons are dust.

The Shepherdess

She walks — the lady of my delight —
 A shepherdess of sheep.
 Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;
 She keeps them from the steep;
 She feeds them on the fragrant height,
 And folds them in her sleep'

She roams maternal hills and bright,
 Dark valleys safe and deep.
 Into that tender breast at night
 The chastest stars may peep.
 She walks — the lady of my delight —
 A shepherdess of sheep.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
 Thou gay they run and leap.
 She is so circumspect and right;
 She has her soul to keep.
 She walks — the lady of my delight —
 A shepherdess of sheep.

Cradle-Song at Twilight

The child not yet is lulled to rest.
 Too young a nurse, the slender Night
 So laxly holds him to her breast
 That throbs with flight.

He plays with her, and will not sleep.
 For other playfellows she sighs;
 An unmaternal fondness keep
 Her alien eyes.

Name: Mary Russell Mitford

Date of Birth: 1787

Place of Birth: Alresford, Hampshire

Date of death: 1855

Biography: Mitford falls into the group of 'minor' writers of the time and is better known for her essays and novels than her poetry. She had an extravagant father who spent a good deal of time gambling and so she had to write in order to make money to pay his debts. Her gift was for charming sketches of country manners, scenery and character, which appeared in magazines and was eventually collected into five volumes.

On Being Requested to Write on Scottish Scenery

Fair art thou, Scotia¹. The swift mountain stream
 Gushes, with deafening roar and whitening spray,
 From thy brown hills; where eagles seek their prey,
 Or soar undazzled in the solar beam.
 But dearer far to me, be thou my theme,
 My native Hampshire²! Thy sweet valleys gay,
 Trees, spires, and cots that in the brilliant ray
 Confusedly glitter like a morning dream.

And thou, fair forest! lovely are thy shades,
 Thy oaks majestic, over the billows pale,
 High spreading their green arms: or the deep glades,
 Where the dark holly, armed in prickly mail,
 Shelters the yellow fern, and tufted blades
 That wave responsive to the sighing gale.

¹ A medieval and poetic name for Scotland

² A county of Southern England

Name: Constance Naden

Date of birth: 1858

Place of Birth: Near Birmingham

Date of death: 1889

Biography: Naden was not only a poet, but a chemist, a psychologist and a freethinker. She believed that scientific values would outgrow religious ones. Many of her poems have scientific vocabulary which deal with the old themes of love and death from a new angle. Naden's writing was not overtly feminist, but she did present the common female stereotypes and hardships in her work.

Love Versus Learning

Alas, for the blight of my fancies!

Alas, for the fall of my pride!

I planned, in my girlish romances,

To be a philosopher's bride.

I pictured him learned and witty,

The sage and the lover combined,

Not scorning to say I was pretty,

Not only adoring my *mind*.

No elderly, spectacled Mentor,

But one who would worship and woo;

Perhaps I might take an inventor,

Or even a poet would do.

And tender and gay and well-favoured,

My fate overtook me at last:

I saw, and I heard, and I wavered,

I smiled, and my freedom was past.

He promised to love me forever,

He pleaded, and what could I say?

I thought he must surely be clever,

For he is an Oxford¹ M.A.²

But now, I begin to discover

My visions are fatally marred;

Perfection itself as a lover,

He's neither a sage³ nor a bard⁴.

He's mastered the usual knowledge,

¹ University in England

² Master of Arts degree

³ One venerated for experience, judgement and wisdom

⁴ A poet, especially a lyric poet

And says it's a terrible bore;
 He formed his opinions in college,
 Then why should he think anymore?

My logic he sets at defiance,
 Declares that my Latin's no use,
 And when I begin to talk Science
 He calls me a dear little goose.

He says that my lips are too rosy
 To speak in a language that's dead,
 And all that is dismal and prosy⁵
 Should fly from so a sunny head.

He scoffs at each grave occupation,
 Turns everything off with a pun;
 And says that his sole calculation
 Is how to make two into one.

He says Mathematics may vary,
 Geometry cease to be true,
 But scorning the slightest vagary
 He still will continue to woo.

He says that the sun may stop action,
 But he will not swerve from his course;
 For love is his law of attraction,
 A smile his centripetal force.

His levity's truly terrific,
 And often I think we must part,
 But compliments so scientific
 Recapture my fluttering heart.

Yet sometimes 'tis very confusing,
 This conflict of love and of lore —
 But hark! I must cease from my musing,
 For that is his knock at the door!

⁵ dull, commonplace

Name: Edith Nesbit

Date of birth: 1858

Place of Birth: London

Date of death: 1924

Biography: Nesbit began her literary career by writing verse, but is best remembered for her very successful children stories. She never had much sympathy for the suffragette movement and encouraged a bohemian atmosphere in her house, where women could be found smoking and wearing bloomers. She did show an interest in the plight of the poor which can be seen in some of her poetry.

A Great Industrial Centre

Squalid street after squalid street,
 Endless rows of them, each the same,
 Black dust under your weary feet,
 Dust upon every face you meet,
 Dust in their hearts, too — or so it seems —
 Dust in the place of dreams.

Spring in her beauty thrills and thrives,
 Here men hardly have heard her name.
 Work is the end and aim of their lives —
 Work, work, work! for children and wives;
 Work for a life which, when it is won,
 Is the saddest under the sun!

Work — one dark and unending round
 In black dull workshops, out of the light;
 Work that others' ease may abound,
 Work that delight for them may be found,
 Work without hope, without pause, without peace,
 That only in death can cease.

Brothers, who live glad lives in the sun,
 What of these men, at work in the night?
 God will ask you what you have done;
 Their lives be required of you — every one —
 Ye, who were glad and who liked life well,
 While they did your work—in hell!

Name: Caroline Norton

Date of birth: 1808

Place of Birth: London

Date of death: 1877

Biography: Caroline entered London society in the late 1820s. Caroline was forced, due to financial circumstances, to marry a man whom she did not love. This marriage was a disaster and saw Caroline involved in a number of law-suits with regard to separation, maintenance and custody. Caroline continually found herself in a difficult position because of the fact that she was a woman. She was determined to bring in legal reform so that women could have a separate legal identity from their husbands. She succeeded in improving the laws which affected married women in several substantial ways. Her writing, which had always been a great source of joy and comfort to her, took a back seat during this time, but she later returned to writing fiction. Her poetry is very pretty and gentle in comparison to her prose, in which she was outspoken about women whose experiences were similar to her own. In 1877, she married for the second time and for the first time in her life found complete happiness, which was short-lived when she died in the same year.

Obscurity of Woman's Worth

In many a village churchyard's simple grave,
 Where all unmarked the cypress branches wave,
 In many a vault where Death could only claim
 The brief inscription of a woman's name;
 Of different ranks, and different degrees,
 From daily labour to a life of ease,
 (From the rich wife who through the weary day
 Wept in her jewels, grief's unceasing prey,
 To the poor soul who trudged o'er marsh and moor,
 And with her baby begged from door to door, —)
 Lie hearts, which, ere they found that last release,
 Had lost all memory of the blessing "Peace",
 Hearts, whose long struggle through unpitied years
 None saw but him who marks the mourner's tears;
 The obscurely noble! who invaded not
 The woe which He had willed should be their lot,
 But nerved themselves to bear!

Of such art thou,
 My Mother! With thy calm and holy brow,
 And high devoted heart, which suffered still
 Unmurmuring, through each degree of ill.
 And, because Fate hath willed that mine should be
 A Poet's soul (at least in my degree,) —
 And that my verse would faintly shadow forth
 What I have seen of pure unselfish worth, —
 Therefore I speak of Thee; that those who read
 That trust in woman, which is still my creed,



Thy early-widowed image may recall
And greet thy nature as the type of all!

Escape from the Snares of Love.

Young Love has chains of metal rare,
Heavy as gold — yet light as air:
It chanced he caught a heart one day
Which struggled hard, as loth to stay.

Prudence, poor thing, was lingering near —
She whispered in the captive's ear,
“Cease, little flutterer; bear thy chain,
And soon thou shalt be free again!”

No; I assert my right to fly —
The chain shall break, and Love shall die
What! I remain a willing slave?
No — freedom, freedom, or the grave!

Meanwhile Love slumbered by his prize
His languid limbs and closing eyes
Prudence beheld — she spoke again,
“Oh! yet a moment bear thy chain!”

Unheeded prayer! the struggling heart
Strove still the slender links to part,
While timid Prudence gazed and sighed,
Weary of strife, and loth to chide.

One moment more the links had broke,
But slumbering Love, alarmed, awoke;
With iron rivets bound the chain,
And turned secure to sleep again.

Let hearts which now in bondage weep,
Repose, till wearied Love shall sleep:
Oh! struggle not, lest he should wake; —
Slip off the chain — it will not break.

I Do Not Love Thee

I do not love thee! — no! I do not love thee!
And yet when thou art absent I am sad;
And envy even the bright blue sky above thee,
Whose quiet stars may see thee and be glad.

I do not love thee! — yet, I know not why,
Whate'er thou dost seems still well done, to me:
And often in my solitude I sigh
That those I do love are not more like thee!

I do not love thee! — yet, when thou art gone,
I hate the sound (though those who speak be dear)
Which breaks the lingering echo of the tone
Thy voice of music leaves upon my ear.

I do not love thee! — yet thy speaking eyes,
With their deep, bright, and most expressive blue,
Between me and the midnight heaven arise,
Oftener than any eyes I ever knew.

I do not love thee! yet, alas!
Others will scarcely trust my candid heart;
And oft I catch them smiling as they pass,
Because they see me gazing where thou art.

Name: Adelaide Anne Proctor

Date of birth: 1825

Place of Birth: London

Date of death: 1864

Biography: Proctor grew up in a literary and intellectual atmosphere and her first poem was published in 1843 at the age 18. Her career as a poet really began when she sent a poem to Dickens as editor of *Household Words*. The great passion in Proctor's life was visiting the sick and refugees, night schools and social questions affecting women. These passions as well as her conversion to Roman Catholicism were mentioned, at times, in her writing.

A Woman's Question

Before I trust my Fate to thee,
 Or place my hand in thine,
 Before I let thy Future give
 Colour and form to mine,
 Before I peril all for thee, question thy soul to-night for me.

I break all slighter bonds, nor feel
 A shadow of regret:
 Is there one link within the past,
 That holds thy spirit yet?
 Or is thy Faith as clear and free as that which I can pledge to thee?

Does there within thy dimmest dreams
 A possible future shine,
 Wherein thy life could hence forth breathe,
 Untouched, unshared by mine?
 If so, at any pain or cost, oh, tell, me before all is lost.

Look deeper still. If thou canst feel
 Within thy inmost soul,
 That thou hast kept a portion back,
 While I have staked the whole;
 Let no false pity spare the blow, but in true mercy tell me so.

Is there within thy heart a need
 That mine cannot fulfil?
 One chord that any other hand
 Could better wake or still?
 Speak now — lest at some future day my whole life wither and decay.

Lives there within thy nature hid
 The demon-spirit Change
 Shedding a passing glory still
 On all things new and strange —

It may not be thy fault alone — but my heart against thy own.

Couldst thou withdraw thy hand one day

And answer to my claim,

That Fate, and that to-day's mistake,

Not thou — had been to blame?

Some soothe their conscience thus: but thou, wilt surely warn and save me now.

Nay, answer not — I dare not hear,

The words would come too late;

Yet I would spare the all remorse,

So, comfort thee, my Fate —

Whatever on my heart may fall — remember I would risk it all!

From **A Legend of Provence**¹

What need to tell that dream so bright and brief,

Of joy unchequered by a dread of grief?

What need to tell how all such dreams must fade,

Before the slow, foreboding, dreaded shade,

That floated nearer, until pomp and pride,

Pleasure and wealth, were summoned to her side,

To bid, at least, the noisy hours forget,

And clamour down the whispers of regret.

Still Angela strove to dream, and strove in vain;

Awakened once, she could not sleep again.

She saw, each day and hour, more worthless grown

The heart for which she cast away her own;

And her soul learnt, through bitterest inward strife,

The slight, frail love for which she wrecked her life,

The phantom for which all her hope was given,

The cold bleak earth for which she bartered heaven

But all in vain; would even the tenderest heart

Now stoop to take so poor an outcast's part?

Years fled, and she grew reckless more and more,

¹ A historical region and former province of south east France bordering on the Mediterranean sea

Until the humblest peasant closed his door,
And where she passed, fair dames, in scorn and pride,
Shuddered, and drew their robes aside.
At last, a yearning seemed to fill her soul,
A longing that was stronger than control:
Once more, just once again to see the place
That knew her young and innocent; to retrace
The long and weary southern path; to gaze
Upon the haven of her childish days;
Once more beneath the convent roof to lie;
Once more to look upon her home — die!

Name: Christina Rossetti

Date of birth: 1830

Place of Birth: London

Date of death: 1894

Biography: Rossetti's first poetry was published when she was twelve. She suffered a religious and emotional crisis in her teenage years which outwardly took the form of self-abnegation. She became one of the most spiritual poets of her time and was much concerned with social issues such as poverty, prostitution and unemployment. Many of her poems show an obsession with death while others deal with religious themes.

In an Artist's Studio

One face looks out from all his canvasses,
 One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans;
 We found her hidden just behind those screens,
 That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
 A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
 A nameless girl in freshest summer greens,
 A saint, an angel; — every canvass means
 The same one meaning, nigher more nor less.
 He feeds upon her face by day and night,
 And she with true kind eyes looks back on him
 Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
 Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
 Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
 Not as she is, but as she fills his dream

Song

When I am dead my dearest,
 Sing no sad songs for me;
 Plant thou no roses at my head,
 Nor shady cypress tree:
 Be the green grass above me
 With showers and dewdrops wet;
 And if thou wilt, remember,
 And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
 I shall not feel the rain;
 I shall not hear the nightingale

Sing on, as if in pain:
 And dreaming through the twilight
 That doth not rise nor set,
 Haply I may remember,
 And haply may forget.

'If a pig wore a wig'

If a pig wore a wig,
 What could we say?
 Treat him as a gentleman,
 And say 'Good day.'

If his tail chanced to fail,
 What could we do? —
 Send him to the tailoress
 To get one new.

The heart knoweth its own bitterness

When all the over-work of life
 Is finished once, and fast asleep
 We swerve no more beneath the knife
 But taste the silence cool and deep;
 Forgetful of the highways rough,
 Forgetful of the thorny scourge,
 Forgetful of the tossing surge,
 Then shall we find it is enough? —

How can we say 'enough' on earth;
 'Enough' with such a craving heart:
 I have not found it since my birth
 But still have bartered part for part.
 I have not held and hugged the whole,
 But paid the old to gain the new;
 Much have I paid, yet much is due,
 Till I am beggared sense and soul.

I used to labour, used to strive
 For pleasure with a restless will:
 Now if I save my soul alive
 All else what matters, good or ill?
 I used to dream alone to plan
 Unspoken hopes and days to come: —
 Of all my past is this the sum:
 I will not lean on child of man.

To give to give, not to receive,
 I long to pour myself, my soul,
 Not to keep back or count or leave
 But king with king to give the whole:
 I long for one to stir my deep —
 I have had enough of help and gift —
 I long for one to search and sift
 Myself, to take myself and keep.

You scratch my surface with your pin;
 You stroke me with hushing breath; —
 Nay pierce, nay probe, nay dig within,
 Probe my quick core and sound my depth.
 You call me with a puny call,
 You talk, you smile, you nothing do;
 How should I spend my heart on you,
 My heart that so outweighs you all?

Your vessels are by much too strait;
 Were I to pour you could not hold,
 Bear with me: I must bear to wait
 A fountain sealed thro' heat and cold.
 Bear with me days or months or years;
 Deep must call deep until the end
 When friend shall no more envy friend
 Nor vex his friend at unawares.

Not in this world of hope deferred,
 This world of perishable stuff; —
 Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard,
 Nor heart conceived that full 'enough':
 Here moans the separating sea,
 Here harvest fail, here breaks the heart;
 There God shall join and no man part,
 I full of Christ and Christ of me.

Love me, — I love you

Love me, — I love you,
 Love me, my baby;
 Sing it high, sing it low,
 Sing it as may be.

Mother's arm under you,

Her eyes above you;
Sing it high, sing it low,
Love me, — I love you.

Name: Jane Francesca Wilde

Date of birth: 1826

Place of Birth: Ireland

Date of death: 1896

Biography: This formidable woman, better known as Speranza, is not only highly acclaimed for her own work, but also for the fact that she is the mother of Oscar Wilde. 'Speranza' believed that she had been an eagle in her past life and so continuously sought a high place to live. In her youth she was an inflammatory writer but seemed to settle down after her marriage in what she called being imprisoned within a woman's destiny. After the death of her husband, she suffered financially which was finally eased by pensions. Speranza's poetry has a bombastic character and she shows great reverence for the role of the artist. She was, however, very self-conscious of herself being a female poet.

Desillusion

Too soon, alas! too soon I plunged into the world with tone and clang,
 And they scarcely comprehended what the Poet wildly sang.
 Not the spirit-gance deep gazing into nature's inmost soul,
 Not the mystic aspirations that the Poet's words unroll.
 Cold and spiritless and silent — yea, with scorn received they me,
 Whilst on meaner brows around me wreath'd the laurel crown I see.
 And I, who in my bosom felt the godlike nature glow,
 I wore the mask of folly while I sang of deepest woe.
 But, courage! years may pass — this mortal frame be laid in earth,
 But my spirit reign triumphant in the country of my birth!

Colonial Victorian Poets

Name: Isabella Valancy Crawford

Date of birth: 1850

Place of Birth: Sydney Scottin Dublin, Ireland

Date of death: 1887

Biography: She emigrated with her family to Canada in 1858 and was educated at home by her parents. Isabella was fond of both history and verse. Her family was struck by ill-health and in a few years nine of her eleven siblings had died. Later in life she and her mother lived in poverty, with Isabella writing in order to support them. She had the talent to write about old themes with amazing freshness as if she was seeing things for the first time.

His Wife and Baby

IN the lone places of the leaves,
Where they touch the hanging eaves,
There sprang a spray of joyous song that sounded sweet and sturdy,
And the baby in the bed
Raised the shining of his head,
And pulled the mother's lids apart to wake and watch the birdie.

She kissed lip-dimples sweet,
The red soles of his feet,
The waving palms that pattered hers as wind-blossoms wander;
He twined her tresses silk
Round his neck as white as milk
Now, baby, say what birdie sings upon his green spray yonder!

'He sings a plenty things
Just watch him wash his wings!
He says Papa will march to-day with drums home through the city
Here, birdie, here's my cup,
You drink the milk all up;
I'll kiss you, birdie, now you're washed like baby clean and pretty.'

She rose, she sought the skies
With the twin joys of her eyes,
She sent the strong dove of her soul up through the dawning's glory;
She kissed upon her hand
The glowing golden band
That bound the fine scroll of her life and clasped her simple story.

His Mother

IN the first dawn she lifted from her bed
The holy silver of her noble head,



And listened, listened, listened for his tread.

'Too soon, too soon!' she murmured, 'Yet I'll keep
My vigil longer thou, O tender Sleep,
Art but the joy of those who wake and weep!

'Joy's self hath keen, wide eyes. O flesh of mine,
And mine own blood and bone, the very wine
Of my aged heart, I see thy dear eyes shine!

'I hear thy tread; thy light, loved footsteps run
Along the way, eager for that 'Well done !'
We'll weep and kiss to thee, my soldier son!

'Blest mother I he lives! Yet had he died
Blest were I still, I sent him on the tide
Of my full heart to save the nation's pride!

'O God, If that I tremble so to-day,
Bowed with such blessings that I cannot pray
By speech a mother prays, dear Lord, always

'In some far fibre of her trembling mind!
I'll up I thought I heard a bugle bind
Its silver with the silver of the wind.'

Name: S. Frances Harrison

Date of birth: 1859

Place of Birth: Toronto, Canada

Date of death: 1935

Biography: Harrison is of Irish-Canadian extraction. In her early adulthood she was well-known for her proficiency in music both as a performer and a composer. She began her writing in 1887 and spent a great deal of time capturing landscapes in poetry.

From **In March**

See how vacant and flat
 The landscape empty and dull,
 Scared by an ominous lull
 Into a trace we have sat
 This hour on the edge of a broken, a grey snake-fence,
 And nothing that lives has flown,
 Or crept, or leapt, or been blown
 To our feet or past our faces
 So desolate, child the place is!
 It strikes, does it not, a chill,
 Like that other upon the hill,
 We felt one bleak October?
 See the grey woods still sober
 Ere it be wild with glee,
 With growth, with an ecstasy,
 A fruition born of desire.
 The marigold's¹ yellow fire
 Doth not yet in the sun burn to leap, to aspire;
 Its myriads spotted spears
 No erythronium² rears;
 We cannot see
 Anenome³,
 Or heart-lobed brown hepatica;
 There doth not fly,
 Low under sky,
 One kingfisher dipping and darting
 From reedy shallows where reds are starting,
 Pale pink tips that shall burst into bloom,
 Not in one night's mid-April gloom,
 But inch by inch, till ripening tint,
 And feathery plume and emerald glint
 Proclaim the waters are open.

¹ any of several plants of genera *Calendula* and *Tagetes* with bright-yellow or golden composite flowers

² North American corn-producing plant with white or golden-yellow flowers and red anthers

³ plant of the buttercup family of genus *A~* with flowers of various colours

Name: Emily Pauline Johnson

Date of birth: 1861

Place of Birth: Brantford, Ontario

Date of death: 1913

Biography: Brantford's writing became very popular in Canada and as a result of this reputation was discounted by the academics. She used her writing to join the two worlds from which she came — native Indian and Canadian. Her poems focus on both native themes and Canada's struggle with an identity born under British rule.

Canada

Crown of her, young Vancouver¹; crest of her, old
 Quebec²;
 Atlantic and far Pacific sweeping her, keel to deck.
 North of her, ice and arctics; southward a rival's
 stealth;
 Aloft her Empire's pennant; below, her nation's
 wealth.
 Danger of men and markets, bearing within her
 hold,
 Appraised at highest value, cargoes of grain and
 gold.

A Prodigal

My heart forgot its God for love of you,
 And you forgot me, other loves to learn;
 Now through a wilderness of thorn and rue
 Back to my God I turn.

And just because my God forgets the past,
 And in forgetting does not ask to know
 Why I once left his arms for yours, at last
 Back to my God I go.

¹ city and seaport of British Columbia, Canada

² province of East Canada originally settled by the French

Name: Louisa Lawson

Date of birth: 1848

Place of Birth: Mudgee, New South Wales

Date of death: 1920

Biography: Lawson moved to Sydney in 1883 and became a pivotal figure among spiritualists, republicans, feminists and radicals. She started the first Australian feminist journal *Dawn* and was active in the women's suffrage movement.

The Reformers

We lead the way, we lead the way,
We rise alert to meet each day,
We start the fight, we head the fray,
We lead the way, we lead the way.

We turn the sod, we stir the pool,
We point the way to those who rule.
We cheek the rogue, we chide the fool,
We point the way to those who rule.

We bear reverse, we breast rebuff,
We force a way o'er passes rough,
We stand the kick, we take the cuff,
Till Death's stern umpire calls "Enough."

A Plea for Australia

Come out from among them, ye sons of Australia!
Come out and denounce them with tongue and with pen.
Tear off from each traitor her honoured regalia,
Give back to Australia her birthright again!

The golden tiara that flashed o'er the mountain,
The girdle of opals¹ like fires on the sea,
Were stolen and scattered like drops from a fountain.
Shall ye, her protectors, say thus shall it be?

To robe her in sackcloth, to crown her with ashes,
Cast lots for her raiment and sully her fame?
Rob, wrong and belie her, until with wet lashes
She bows her fair forehead in sorrow and shame?

She who is so queenly — our tender girl-mother —
Beloved of heroes. By white virgins blest.

¹ amorphous quartz-like form of hydrated silica, some of which are valued as gems

From pole unto pole find ye never another
 Like her — of Earth's daughters, the fairest and best.

Come out from among them, true sons of Australia!
 Come out from among them, and show yourselves men
 With courage undaunted, and fearing not failure;
 Give back to Australia her prestige again!

A Mother's Answer

You ask me, dear child, why thus sadly I weep
 For baby the angles have taken to keep;
 Altho' she is safe, and forever at rest,
 A yearning to see her will rise in my breast.
 I pray and endeavour to quell it in vain,
 But stronger it comes and yet stronger again,
 Till all the bright thoughts of her happier lot
 Are lost in this one — my baby is not.
 And while I thus yearn so intensely to see
 This child that the angels are keeping for me,
 I doubt for the time where her spirit has flown —
 If the love e'en of angels can fully atone
 For the loss of a mother's, mysterious and deep.
 I own that thought sinful, yet owning it — weep.

Name: Sarojini Naidu

Date of birth: 1879

Place of Birth: Hyderabad, India

Date of death: 1920

Biography: Naidu was a passionate advocate for India. She spent a great deal of time fighting for the independence of India abroad. After refusing to speak English in her early childhood, her poetic career began at thirteen the day she began to speak only English to her parents. She had a difficult life suffering from ill-health and being ostracised for breaking the bonds of the Brahmin caste system by marrying Dr. Naidu. She seems to have gained from the fact that maturity comes earlier in the East and was considered wise at the age of seventeen. She had a great desire for all things beautiful and it was this desire that made her a poet.

Autumn Song

Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow,
 The sunset hangs on a cloud;
 A golden storm of glittering sheaves,
 Of fair and frail and fluttering leaves,
 The wild wind blows in a cloud.

Hark to a voice that is calling
 To my heart in the voice of the wind:
 My heart is weary and sad and alone,
 For its dreams like the fluttering leaves have gone,
 And why should I stay behind?

The Poet's Love-song

In noon-tide hours, O Love, secure and strong,
 I need thee not; mad dreams are mine to bind
 The world to my desire, and hold the wind
 A voiceless captive to my conquering song.
 I need thee not, I am content with these:
 Keep silence in thy soul, beyond the seas!

But in the desolate hour of midnight, when
 An ecstasy of starry silence sleeps
 On the still mountains and the soundless deeps,
 And my soul hungers for thy voice, O then,
 Love, like the magic of wild melodies,
 Let thy soul answer mine across the seas.

Name: Olive Emilie Albertina Schreiner

Date of birth: 1855

Place of Birth: Wittenberg Mission Station, Lesotho

Date of death: 1920

Biography: Schreiner is best known for her short-stories and novel *The Story of an African Farm*. She wrote a few poems. She was politically active and participated in women's suffrage groups. Her strong views about the oppression of women is reflected in her writing. She was a passionate advocate of the less privileged in society. Schreiner was very involved in the imperial politics and spent some time writing against colonialism.

The Cry of South Africa

Give back my dead!
 They who by the kop¹ and fountain
 First saw the light upon my rocky breast!
 Give back my dead,
 The sons who played upon me
 When childhood's dew still rested on their heads.
 Give back my dead
 Whom thou hast riven from me
 By arms of men loud called from earth's farthest bound
 To wet my bosom with my children's blood!
 Give back my dead,
 The dead who grew up on me!

¹ small hill

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