

AMERICAN WOMEN POETS

of the Nineteenth Century



An Anthology

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TO THE HUDSON

Oh, river! gently as a wayward child
I saw thee mid the moonlight hills at rest;
Capricious thing, with thine own beauty wild,
How didst thou still the throbbings of thy breast?
Rude headlands were about thee, stooping round,
As if amid the hills to hold thy stay;
But thou didst hear the far-off ocean sound,
Inviting thee from hill and vale away,
To mingle thy deep waters with its own;
And, at that voice, thy steps did onward glide,
Onward from echoing hill and valley lone.
Like thine, oh, be my course—nor turned aside,
While listing to the soundings of a land,
That like the ocean call invites me to its strand.

ODE TO SAPPHO

Bright, glowing Sappho! child of love and song,
Adown the blueness of long-distant years
Beams forth thy glorious shape, and steal along
Thy melting tones, beguiling us to tears.
Thou priestess of great hearts,
Thrilled with the secret fire
By which a god imparts
The anguish of desire—
For meaner souls be mean content—
Thine was a higher element.
Over Leucadia's rock¹ thou leanest yet,

i. According to legend, Sappho leapt from Leucadia's rock when Phaon did not reciprocate her love.

With thy wild song, and all thy locks outspread;
 The stars are in thine eyes, the moon hath set—
 The night dew falls upon thy radiant head;
 And thy resounding lyre—
 Ah! not so wildly sway:
 Thy soulful lips inspire
 And steal our hearts away!
 Swanlike and beautiful, thy dirge
 Still moans along the Ægean surge.
 No unrequited love filled thy lone heart,
 But thine infinitude did on thee weigh,
 And all the wildness of despair impart,
 Stealing the down from Hope's own wing away.
 Couldst thou not suffer on,
 Bearing the direful pang,
 While thy melodious tone
 Through wondering cities rang?
 Couldst thou not bear thy godlike grief?
 In godlike utterance find relief?
 Devotion, fervor, might upon thee wait:
 But what were these to thine? all cold and chill,
 And left thy burning heart but desolate;
 Thy wondrous beauty with despair might fill
 The worshipper who bent
 Entranced at thy feet:
 Too affluent the dower lent
 Where song and beauty meet!
 Consumed by a Promethean fire
 Wert thou, O daughter of the lyre!
 Alone, above Leucadia's wave art thou,
 Most beautiful, most gifted, yet alone!
 Ah! what to thee the crown from Pindar's² brow!
 What the loud plaudit and the garlands thrown

2. Greek lyric poet (c. 522–c. 438 BC) famous for his odes celebrating victors in the national games.

By the enraptured throng,
 When thou in matchless grace
 Didst move with lyre and song,
 And monarchs gave thee place?
 What hast thou left, proud one? what token?
 Alas! a lyre and heart—both broken!

THE POET

Non Vox Sed Votum¹

It is the belief of the vulgar that when the nightingale sings, she leans her breast upon a thorn.

Sing, sing—Poet, sing!
 With the thorn beneath thy breast,
 Robbing thee of all thy rest;
 Hidden thorn for ever thine,
 Therefore dost thou sit and twine
 Lays of sorrowing—
 Lays that wake a mighty gladness,
 Spite of all their mournful sadness.
 Sing, sing—Poet sing!
 It doth ease thee of thy sorrow—
 "Darkling" singing till the morrow;
 Never weary of thy trust,
 Hoping, loving as thou must,
 Let thy music ring;
 Noble cheer it doth impart,

1. Lat., not the voice but the vow.