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L.E.L.'s Last Question

'Do you think of me as I think of you?'

FROM HER POEM WRITTEN DURING THE VOYAGE TO
THE CAPE.

'Do you think of me as I think of you,
My friends, my friends?'—She said it from the sea,
The English minstrel in her minstrelsy,
While, under brighter skies than erst she knew,
Her heart grew dark, and groped there, as the blind,
To reach, across the waves, friends left behind—
'Do you think of me as I think of you?'

It seemed not much to ask—As *I* of *you*?
We all do ask the same. No eyelids cover
Within the meekest eyes, that question over.
And little, in the world, the Loving do
But sit (among the rocks?) and listen for
The echo of their own love evermore—
'Do you think of me as I think of you?'

Love-learnèd she had sung of love and love,—
And like a child that, sleeping with dropt head
Upon the fairy-book he lately read,
Whatever household noises round him move,
Hears in his dream some elfin turbulence,—
Even so, suggestive to her inward sense,
All sounds of life assumed one tune of love.

And when the glory of her dream withdrew,
When knightly gestes and courtly pageantries
Were broken in her visionary eyes,
By tears the solemn seas attested true,—
Forgetting that sweet lute beside her hand
She asked not,—Do you praise me, O my land?—
But, 'Think ye of me, friends, as I of you?'

Hers was the hand that played for many a year
Love's silver phrase for England,—smooth and well!
Would God, her heart's more inward oracle

*Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow, eds.,
Nineteenth-Century Women Poets (Oxford:
Clarendon, 1998)*

In that lone moment, might confirm her dear!
For when her questioned friends in agony
Made passionate response,—'We think of thee'—,
Her place was in the dust, too deep to hear.

Could she not wait to catch their answering breath?
Was she content,—content,—with ocean's sound,
Which dashed its mocking infinite around
One thirsty for a little love?—beneath
Those stars, content, where last her song had gone,—
They mute and cold in radiant life,—as soon
Their singer was to be, in darksome death?¹

Bring your vain answers—cry, 'We think of thee!'
How think ye of her? warm in long ago
Delights?—or crowned with budding bays? Not so.
None smile and none are crowned where lieth she,—
With all her visions unfulfilled save one,—
Her childhood's—of the palm-trees in the sun—
And lo! their shadow on her sepulchre!

'Do ye think of me as I think of you?'—
O friends,—O kindred,—O dear brotherhood
Of all the world! what are we, that we should
For covenants of long affection sue?
Why press so near each other when the touch
Is barred by graves? Not much, and yet too much,
Is this 'Think of me as I think of you'.

But while on mortal lips I shape anew
A sigh to mortal issues,—verily
Above the unshaken stars that see us die,
A vocal pathos rolls; and HE who drew
All life from dust, and for all, tasted death,
By death and life and love, appealing, saith,
Do you think of me as I think of you?

(1839 1844)

¹ Her lyric on the polar star, came home with her latest papers.