

AMERICAN WOMEN POETS

of the Nineteenth Century



An Anthology

Edited by Cheryl Walker

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Lydia Sigourney

Good seed before the world hath sown her tares;  
Nor in their toil decline—that angel bands  
May put the sickle in, and reap for God,  
And gather to his garner.

Ye, who stand,  
With thrilling breast, to view her trophied praise,  
Who nobly reared Virginia's godlike chief—  
Ye, whose last thought upon your nightly couch,  
Whose first at waking, is your cradled son,  
What though no high ambition prompts to rear  
A second Washington; or leave your name  
Wrought out in marble with a nation's tears  
Of deathless gratitude;—yet may you raise  
A monument above the stars—a soul  
Led by your teachings, and your prayers to God.

TO THE FIRST SLAVE SHIP

First of that train which cursed the wave,  
And from the rifled cabin bore,  
Inheritor of wo,—*the slave*  
To bless his palm-tree's shade no more.

Dire engine!—o'er the troubled main  
Borne on in unresisted state,—  
Know'st thou within thy dark domain  
The secrets of thy prison'd freight?—

Hear'st thou *their* moans whom hope hath fled?—  
Wild cries, in agonizing starts?—  
Know'st thou thy humid sails are spread  
With ceaseless sighs from broken hearts?—

Lydia Sigourney

The fetter'd chieftain's burning tear.—  
The parted lover's mute despair,—  
The childless mother's pang severe,—  
The orphan's misery, are there.

Ah!—could'st thou from the scroll of fate  
The annal read of future years,  
Stripes,—tortures,—unrelenting hate.  
And death-gasps drown'd in slavery's tears.

Down,—down,—beneath the cleaving main  
Thou fain would'st plunge where monsters lie,  
Rather than ope the gates of pain  
For time and for Eternity.—

Oh Afric!—what has been thy crime?—  
That thus like Eden's fratricide,  
A mark is set upon thy clime,  
And every brother shuns thy side.—

Yet are thy wrongs, thou long-distrest!—  
Thy burdens, by the world unweigh'd,  
Safe in that *Unforgetful Breast*  
Where all the sins of earth are laid.—

Poor outcast slave!—Our guilty land  
Should tremble while she drinks thy tears,  
Or sees in vengeful silence stand,  
The beacon of thy shorten'd years;—

Should shrink to hear her sons proclaim  
The sacred truth that heaven is just,—  
Shrink even at her Judge's name,—  
"Jehovah,—Saviour of the opprest."

Lydia Sigourney

The Sun upon thy forehead frown'd,  
But Man more cruel far than he,  
Dark fetters on thy spirit bound:—  
Look to the mansions of the free!

Look to that realm where chains unbind,—  
Where the pale tyrant drops his rod,  
And where the patient sufferers find  
A friend,—a father in their God.

*FEMALE EDUCATION*

Addressed to a South American Poet<sup>1</sup>

Thou, of the living lyre,  
Thou, of the lavish clime,  
Whose mountains mix their lightning-fire  
With the storm-cloud sublime,  
We, of thy sister-land,  
The empire of the free,  
Joy as those patriot-breasts expand  
With genial Liberty.

Thy flowers their fragrant breast  
Unfold to catch its ray,  
And Nature's velvet-tissued vest  
With brighter tint is gay,  
More blest thy rivers roll  
Full tribute to the Sea,

1. The South American poet may well be Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1652–95) who wrote in favor of female education.