

The Puppet-Player

[Angelina Weld Grimké](#) - One of the first African-American women to have one of her plays publicly performed, and was a prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance.

Sometimes it seems as though some puppet-player,
A clenched claw cupping a craggy chin
Sits just beyond the border of our seeing,
Twitching the strings with slow, sardonic grin.

Thoughts

[Myra Viola Wilds](#) – A Kentucky poet who authored a poetry collection in her own hand after losing her eyesight due to overwork as a dressmaker.

What kind of thoughts now, do you carry
In your travels day by day
Are they bright and lofty visions,
Or neglected, gone astray?

Matters not how great in fancy,
Or what deeds of skill you've wrought;
Man, though high may be his station,
Is no better than his thoughts.

Catch your thoughts and hold them tightly,
Let each one an honor be;
Purge them, scourge them, burnish brightly,
Then in love set each one free.

If You Knew

[Ruth Muskrat Bronson](#) – A poet from the Delaware Nation Reservation, remembered for her work as a leader in Native American education and as an activist for Native American rights.

If you could know the empty ache of loneliness,
 Masked well behind the calm indifferent face
Of us who pass you by in studied hurriedness,
 Intent upon our way, lest in the little space
Of one forgetful moment hungry eyes implore
 You to be kind, to open up your heart a little more,
I'm sure you'd smile a little kindlier, sometimes,
 To those of us you've never seen before.

If you could know the eagerness we'd grasp
 The hand you'd give to us in friendliness;
What vast, potential friendship in that clasp
 We'd press, and love you for your gentleness;
If you could know the wide, wide reach
 Of love that simple friendliness could teach,
I'm sure you'd say "Hello, my friend," sometimes,
 And now and then extend a hand in friendliness to each.

Through Time and Bitter Distance

[Emily Pauline Johnson](#) – A Mohawk poet, artist, and performer.

Unknown to you, I walk the cheerless shore.

The cutting blast, the hurl of biting brine,
May freeze, and still, and bind the waves at war,

Ere you will ever know, O! Heart of mine,
That I have sought, reflected in the blue

Of these sea depths, some shadow of your eyes;
Have hoped the laughing waves would sing of you,
But this is all my starving sight descries—

I.

Far out at sea a sail

Bends to the freshening breeze,
Yields to the rising gale,
That sweeps the seas;

II.

Yields, as a bird wind-tossed,
To saltish waves that fling
Their spray, whose rime and frost
Like crystals cling

III.

To canvas, mast and spar,
Till, gleaming like a gem,

She sinks beyond the far
Horizon's hem.

IV.

Lost to my longing sight,
And nothing left to me
Save an oncoming night,—
An empty sea.

Before Quiet

[Hazel Hall](#) – A much-loved poet in her lifelong home state of Oregon, with the Oregon Book Award named jointly for Hall and poet [William Stafford](#).

I will think of water-lilies
Growing in a darkened pool,
And my breath shall move like water,
And my hands be limp and cool.

It shall be as though I waited
In a wooden place alone;
I will learn the peace of lilies
And will take it for my own.

If a twinge of thought, if yearning
Come like wind into this place,
I will bear it like the shadow
Of a leaf across my face.

Escape

[Georgia Douglas Johnson](#) - A poet of the Harlem Renaissance.

Shadows, shadows,
Hug me round,
So that I shall not be found
By sorrow:
She pursues me
Everywhere,
I can't lose her
Anywhere.

Fold me in your black
Abyss,
She will never look
In this,—
Shadows, shadows,
Hug me round
In your solitude
Profound.

Sadness

[William Saphier](#) - A Romanian-born poet and painter.

It is a huge curtain,
stretched at a distance around me.
Aimless gypsies crawl up and over the curtain.
They are my days.
They neither sing nor laugh
but hop over the top of my sadness.
Here and there one wears a gay shirt.
He is faster than the rest.
Even in my sleep with closed eyes
I cannot pierce this drapery.
Some day I will wind a child's smile around my face
and thus disguised
Slip through the curtain and jump...
Where?
Ah, yes, where?

On Joy and Sorrow

[Kahlil Gibran](#) – One of the best-selling poets in the world, publishing several books in Arabic and English, which ruminate on love, longing, and death, and explore religious themes.

Then a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.

And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.

Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.

When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.

Sunshine After Cloud

[Josephine D. Heard](#) – A North Carolina poet and schoolteacher.

Come, “Will,” let’s be good friends again,
Our wrongs let’s be forgetting,
For words bring only useless pain,
So wherefore then be fretting.

Let’s lay aside imagined wrongs,
And ne’er give way to grieving,
Life should be filled with joyous songs,
No time left for deceiving.

I’ll try and not give way to wrath,
Nor be so often crying;
There must some thorns be in our path,
Let’s move them now by trying.

How, like a foolish pair were we,
To fume about a letter;
Time is so precious, you and me;
Must spend ours doing better.

The Plains of Peace

[Olivia Ward Bush-Banks](#) – An African and Montauk poet.

Again my fancy takes its flight,
And soars away on thoughtful wing,
Again my soul thrills with delight,
And this the fancied theme, I sing,
From Earthly scenes awhile, I find release,
And dwell upon the restful Plains of Peace.

The Plains of Peace are passing fair,
Where naught disturbs and naught can harm,
I find no sorrow, woe or care,
These all are lost in perfect calm,
Bright are the joys, and pleasures never cease,
For those who dwell on the Plains of Peace.

No scorching sun or blighting storm,
No burning sand or desert drear,
No fell disease or wasting form,
To mar the glowing beauty here.
Decay and ruin ever must decrease,
Here on the fertile, healthful Plains of Peace.

What rare companionship I find,
What hours of social joy I spend,
What restfulness pervades my mind,
Communing with congenial friend.

True happiness seems ever to increase,
While dwelling here upon the Plains of Peace.

Ambitions too, are realized,
And that which I have sought on earth,
I find at last idealized,
My longings ripen into worth,
My fondest hopes no longer fear decease,
But bloom forth brightly on the Plains of Peace.

'Tis by my fancy, yet 'tis true,
That somewhere having done with Earth,
We shall another course pursue,
According to our aim or worth,
Our souls from mortal things must find release,
And dwell immortal on the Plains of Peace.