

CENTURIES OF AMERICAN WOMEN'S POETRY

UGD, Faculty of Philology, Stip and AC Stip

FORWARD

Presented by: Marija Emilija Kukubajska, PhD

Feminists would paradoxically say: we do not have to fight for equality - we are equal to men; or we have always been equal – believers would say, or - democracies should treat everybody equal – some politicians would claim... Yet, we will, presumably for ever, be working on equality and human rights, and freedom of expression – as sociologists, philosophers, politicians and writers/ poets would say.

In a publication, “*Contemporary American Women Poets: An A-To-Z Guide*” (prepared by Catherine Cucinella, 2002) readers find a mapping of achievements among contemporary American women poets who encounter an enormous range of variety and innovative styles. They have established the history of the literary challenge, and fashioned or reshaped the culture of living, supporting the liberation tendencies against previous, restrictive or outdated views. American female poetry has been influenced by a range of issues - as infinite as the rapid redefining and questioning imposed in the New World.

In addition, the lexicon of the presumable New World Order has also began impacting the American poetry through other voices: Hindu, Arab, Chinese and every other imaginable descendants on planet earth.

The women authors in this brief selection represent poetry from the 17th century to today, and carry on the spiritual and intellectual wealth that built the American, and the global bank of issues, as relevant to societies in change, applicable to international literary and cultural topics. Out of thousands US female voices, we chose eight for this occasion, those that denote cornerstones in style and substance.

Female poets are offered with their observation on modern and postmodern women liberation movement, as well as poets with their 17th and 19th c. subtle yet bold articulations. We included poets acclaimed for their 1960's socialist revolt and sexual revolution, and poets with ethnic minority, multi-cultural quest and unrest for ideological and social recognition, for human rights, or defense of individual liberties.

From the piety and purity of the first American poetess, Ann Bradstreet to the moral rebellion and intellectual deconstructivism of Erica Jong, the American diversity of ideas reflects a universal representation *of one idea under ... God, divisible or indivisible*, color-blind or faithless, faithfully or atheistically challenging previously established concepts, in literature and life.

A publication from 1842, “*GEMS from American Female Poets*”, edited by Rufus Griswold, prides in presenting female issues that have become inconceivable to the language and philosophy of the 20th and 21st century. Page X, for instance, quotes a qualification that belongs to a distant intellectual and ethical worldview, yet it deserves its place in the history of American thought, a repository of *the spirit of the times*. Here is a sample of this striking difference in style and substance: “*Nearly all American (female) poetry ... is of the purest moral character, one that ... an intelligent father would not hesitate to place in the hands of a daughter... (poetry) generally distinguished for propriety and beauty of thought, and harmonious verification...*” (December 1st 1841).

This presentation for the International Women's Day, 2013, reflects the variety of the American perception stretching from sublime love for God, family and country to ultimate rejection of life, and its addictions and self-denial. We chose to focus on the constructive messages, and on the female nature identified as the "gentler gender, regardless to its often refusal to accept this attribute, all in the name of *equality*. We also chose to consider that the fight for women's rights does not include only fight with violent opposition but rather with prudent, sensible intellectual and emotional tools used by powerful, fascinating female authors like Emma Lazarus or Maya Angelou.

Sylvia Plath

(1932-1963)



Life and work

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, Massachusetts. She was a gifted, but troubled poet, known for the confessional style of her work. Her interest in writing emerged at an early age, and she started out by keeping a journal. A Fulbright Fellowship brought Sylvia Plath to Cambridge University in England, where she met the poet Ted Hughes and eventually married in 1956. Sylvia Plath had her first collection of poetry, *The Colossus*, published in England in 1960. She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1982 for *Collected Poems*. The major themes of her poetry include women's place in American culture, family, ancestors, death, youth, parenthood and relationships. Her poetic style is significant for its versatility of form, use of rhyme and rhyme variations, and specific word choice. She was a compelling poet, whose influence on contemporary poetry scene has been inestimable. The story of her troubled life and tragic death, was the basis for the 2003 biographical film *Sylvia* starring Gwyneth Paltrow.

Anne Sexton

(1928-1974)



Life and Work

Anne Gray Harvey was born in Newton, Massachusetts. She attended Garland Junior College for one year and married Alfred Muller Sexton II at age of nineteen. Like Sylvia Plath and other *Confessional poets*, Sexton offers the reader an intimate view of the emotional anguish that characterized her life. She made the experience of being a woman a central issue in her poetry. She won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1967 for *Live or Die*. Her poems focus on: religious quest, the meanings of gender, inheritance and legacy, the search for fathers, mother-daughter relationships and issues of female identity. She wrote in free verse during the middle and late phases of her poetic career. Most important is her gift for unique imagery, often centering on the body or the household. Despite a successful writing career she lost the battle with her mental illness at the age of 46.

Presented by Natalija Pop Zarieva, M.A. Poem read by student: Vase Janeva Koleva

ANNE BRADSTREET

(1626 – 1672)

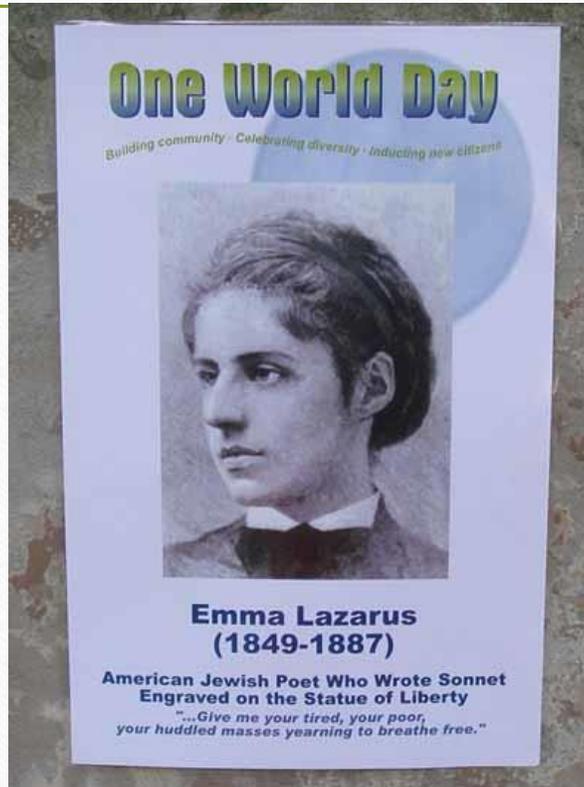


Life and work

The first American female poet and writer, Anne Bradstreet, was an English governor's daughter, and wife of the governor of Massachusetts colony, whom she married at age 16, and left England with her beloved husband. We learn from the Preface to the second volume of poems that she was "as much loved for her gentleness, discretion and domestic diligence as she was admired for her genius, wit, and love of learning", according to Carolyn May's book from 1854, *American Female poets*. The stately measures of her refined thought and versification display "solemn majesty" of her genuine love for family, nature and concepts of the universe, the human history and the greatness of America.

EMMA LAZARUS

(1849-1887)



Life and work

A Jewish American poet, born of Sephardic family settled in America in the 18th century. Privately tutored, she expanded her knowledge in world culture and read German, French and Italian besides English. At age 18 she had her *Poems and Translations* published, sponsored by her father, a wealthy sugar merchant. Besides other poetry collections, she published a history novel, *Alide, An Episode in Goethe's life* (1874), *The Spangoletto* (1876) a verse drama about a Spanish painter, and volume of translations, *Poems and Ballads of Heinrich Heine* (1881). Her poems appeared in leading American newspapers. Lazarus became the most prominent female activist for the Jewish cause in America, organized refugee relief and published articles on Jewish issues. Her two sisters published her poems posthumously, after she died of cancer. Emma's poem "The New Colossus" was recited at the dedication of the Statue of Liberty" with her verse engraved in the statue.

Presented by: Marija Kukubajska, PhD

Poem read by student: Natasa Visinova

Emily Dickinson

(1830-1886)



Life and work

An American poet, born in Amherst, Massachusetts, to a successful family with strong community ties, she lived a mostly introverted and reclusive life. After she studied at the Amherst Academy for seven years in her youth, she spent a short time at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary before returning to her family's house in Amherst. Thought of as an eccentric by the locals, she became known for her penchant for white clothing and her reluctance to greet guests or, later in life, even leave her room. Most of her friendships were therefore carried out by correspondence. Major themes: flowers and gardens, morbidity.

Presented by: Marija Krsteva, M.A.

Poem read by student: Ana Gorgeva

Alice Walker (1944 -)



Life and work

American author, poet, feminist, and activist, author of fiction and essays on race

Met Martin Luther King Jr. when she was a student at Spelman College in Atlanta in the early 1960s. Walker credits King for her decision to return to the American South as an activist for the Civil Rights Movement. She marched with hundreds of thousands in August in the 1963 March on Washington.

She is best known for the critically acclaimed novel *The Color Purple* (1982) for which she won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize

ERICA JONG

(1942 -)



Life and Work

Opposite of Bradstreet's respect for female spiritual dignity, 300 years later, an American woman liberated herself to the extent that love for her became an object of sex, while sexual organs are obsessively seen even in fruit and vegetables. Erica Jong is the feminist movement author that mirrors 20th c. anxiety, fear, addictions, madness and manias for freedom of expression. Her 20 books of poetry, fiction and memoirs, include the most famous, *Fear of Flying*, published in 1973, sold in 18 million copies worldwide. Her recent essays appear in *The New York Times Book Review*, and she is a frequent guest on television talk shows. Her award-winning books include *Fanny*, *How to Save Your Own Life*, *Parachutes and Kisses*, *Any Woman's Blues*, *Love Comes First*, *Sappho's Leap*. She is also the author of the memoir *Fear of Fifty*. Erica and her second husband, a lawyer, live in New York City and Connecticut.

Presented by: Marija Kukubajska, PhD

Poem read by students: Zagica Shikoska i Petar Jangelovski

MAYA ANGELOU

(1942 -)



Life and Work

African-American poet, professor, author, playwright, film director, TV producer, actress, dancer, civil- rights activist (worked with Martin Luther King Jr, and Malcolm X), Maya Angelou has given no the American literature her significant talent demanding respect for her poetic imagination with social, racial and ethnic character. She has published six autobiographies, labeled as autobiographical fiction, including the internationally known *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), five books of essays, several books of poetry, several plays, movies, television shows and journalistic reports from Africa. She received dozens of awards and more than thirty honorary doctorates. She explore issues on racism, identity, family, and travel.

Presented by: Marija Kukubajska, PhD

Poem read by student: Dragana Miteva

Presentation by:

~~Marija Emilija Kukubajska, PhD, coordinator~~

Natalija Pop Zarieva, MA, presenter, technical and sound arrangement and power point arrangement

Marija Krsteva, MA, presenter

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