



Annis Boudinot Stockton



Susanna Rowson

## **“In the number of the best Patriots”**

### ***Poetry of Annis Boudinot Stockton and Susanna Rowson.***

“...The felicitations you offer on the present prospect of our public affairs are highly acceptable to me, and I entreat you to receive a reciprocation from my part. I can never trace the concatenation of causes, which led to these events, without acknowledging the mystery and admiring the goodness of Providence. To that superintending Power alone is our retraction from the brink of ruin to be attributed. A spirit of accom[m]odation was happily infused into the leading characters of the Continent, and the minds of men were gradually prepared by disappointment, for the reception of a good government. Nor would I rob the fairer Sex of their share in the glory of a revolution so honorable to human nature, for, indeed, I think you Ladies are in the number of the best Patriots America can boast.

“And now that I am speaking of your Sex, I will ask whether they are not capable of doing something towards introducing federal fashions and national manners? A good general government, without good morals and good habits, will not make us a happy People; and we shall deceive our selves if we think it will. A good government will, unquestionably, tend to foster and confirm those qualities, on which public happiness must be engrafted...”

~ George Washington, Mount Vernon, 31 Aug. 1788, to Annis Boudinot Stockton.

By pairing early American female poets Annis Boudinot Stockton (1736-1801) and Susanna Rowson (1762-1824) for the purpose of a single article, I do not want in the least to appear to suggest that their writings are somehow of a minor sort. Both compare very favorably with predecessor Anne Bradstreet and successor Emily Dickinson, not to mention contemporaries (or, in the case of Rowson, *not so distant* contemporaries) Phillis Wheatley Peters and Mercy Otis Warren. Yet as they might be thought too little known or historically obscure by some, I thought a joint article would make it that much more convenient and easy to introduce them in one sitting. Besides this, presenting them together provides us with examples of how poetic craft and sensibility, and from a female perspective, grew and evolved from the period prior to the Revolution to the early Republic at the time of the Jefferson administration. In Stockton, we see a general adherence to conventions of terms, phrasing, and form of 18<sup>th</sup> century verse, yet often time tintured and suffused with a fancy, coloring, whimsy and perspective that are distinctly Stockton’s. In Rowson, we encounter by contrast the burgeoning impact of the romantics, such as Cowper, Burns, and Wordsworth; beginning to exert their influence. Although Stockton was not so widely known in her time as it to have made it possible for her to have left much, if any, literary impression on other writers; indeed Grisworld and the Duyckincks don’t even include her in their catalogs of American authors; it is remarkable on the other hand how Rowson in some poems is reminiscent of fellow New Englanders William Cullen Bryant, Henry W. Longfellow, and John Greenleaf Whittier -- though whether Bryant, Longfellow, or Whittier were especially or at all acquainted with her poetry, I myself am not aware. As well, in her aptitude for lyricism and musicality she manifests a close affinity with Samuel Woodworth. Yet of influence or not, both Stockton and Rowson were striking originals; who, as astute, lively, and vibrant, poets, deserve far greater honor than has hitherto been bestowed on them. That they happened to be women writing in a heavily male dominated society makes their achievement all the more admirable, even inspiring.

The story of their two lives is no less unique and astonishing than their writings, and it is only natural and appropriate to furnish at least some sketch of them before proceeding to samples of their verse. While it is not practicable here to examine anything like their full biography or a more through addressing of their works, it is possible to touch on a few notable highlights of each. Though decidedly unlike in

background, social station, and the cultural eras in which they thrived, both were religiously devout, ardent patriots, and avowed feminists. And as much as we observe differences, we do find in their ambitious spirit and cheery, and yet passionate, outlook on life marked similarities.

### *Annis Boudinot Stockton*

Annis Boudinot, coming from a line of French Huguenot settlers, was born in Darby, Pennsylvania in 1736. Her father was a very successful self-made merchant and entrepreneur, not that dissimilar in this sort of character from John Jacob Astor of a later generation. Annis' wealthy status qualified her to be among society's elite, and which in turn brought her in contact with Richard Stockton (1730-1781), one of New Jersey's most eminent and affluent attorneys and jurists; and a trustee and patron of the college there. In addition, he received several governmental appointments in the colony from Royal Governor William Franklin. He and Annis married in 1757, and subsequently had six children, including daughter Julia who became the wife of physician and Benjamin Rush. The couple lived very well and built a stately home in Princeton that they named "Morven." Among its singular features was a rich and diverse garden, with, for instance, an unusual assortment of trees, that was modeled on Alexander Pope's own at Twickenham; Stockton having spent some time in England was able to acquire plans to the same. At the time just before the Revolution, Stockton was essentially a moderate who had no desire to break with the mother country. Yet as events developed, he found himself persuaded and pressured by those nearest to him to undertake a different course. Annis' brother, Elias Boudinot, for one was a staunch advocate for separation, and later went on to become both President of Congress (1782-1783) and a signatory to the Treaty of Paris in 1783. As a result, Stockton himself, though not without some trepidation, became one of the radicals himself and was elected by New Jersey in 1776 to the Continental Congress; where he voted for and signed the Declaration of Independence. In November of that same year, the British raided Princeton, and Cornwallis set up headquarters at Morven. In their flight, Annis safely secured the papers of Princeton's famous Whig Society from British capture, while at the cost of having to abandon her own; for which act of courage she was subsequently made an honorary member; the only female that had ever been so privileged. Seeking refuge in Monmouth County, Stockton was caught by some Tories and handed over to the British. He ended up being kept prisoner in New York till January 1777, at which time, in precarious health and after some reportedly severe and rigorous treatment, his release was obtained. But not without cost; for the British were able to coerce him to take an oath of neutrality; and which Stockton adhered to till the end of his life. He for a while returned to his law practice, but came down with cancer and died of the same in 1781. Son-in-law Benjamin Rush summed him up this way: "Richard Stockton. An enlightened politician, and a correct and graceful speaker. He was timid where bold measures were required, but was at all times sincerely devoted to the liberties of his country. He loved law, and order, and once offended his constituents by opposing the seizure of private property in an illegal manner by an officer of the army. He said after the treaty with France took place, 'that the United States were placed in a more eligible situation by it, than they had been during their connection with Great Britain.' His habits as a lawyer, and a Judge (which office he had filled under the British government) produced in him a respect for the British Constitution; but this did not lessen his attachment to the Independence of the United States."<sup>1</sup>

Despite her husband's withdrawal from direct revolutionary involvement, Annis herself maintained the struggle, including, as well as charity work, penning several poems, published in newspapers, espousing the American cause. Among her biggest fans was George Washington and with whom she frequently corresponded.

And yet Annis' patriotic verses are only a portion of her poetic works, and from an early age she wrote a wide variety of different sorts of pieces. Among these were laudatory odes, pensive sonnets, quite sophisticated pastorals, sincerely sympathetic epitaphs, pious hymns, and a few humor poems. That she was not known, or not known much, to Griswold and the Duyckincks is owing to her having kept most of her poems in manuscript, and which were only circulated to friends and family. In one of the most surprising discoveries of literary scholarship these surfaced in 1984 upon being donated to the New Jersey Historical Society. And it was only in just 1995 that Carla Mulford then published the complete collection of Annis' known works; giving the world for the first time the opportunity to assess Annis' poetry in full.

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<sup>1</sup> *Travels Through Life* (1905 edition) pp. 109-110.

In all, the poems, and their exposition and presentation by Mulford, are exceedingly impressive. As Mulford herself observes “[Annis’ poems] are imitative of the poets Stockton most admired (Milton, Pope, Dryden, Gray, Thomson, and others), yet they reflect the poet’s transformative agenda, her tendency to test the limits of language and genre to formulate poetry with an American vision.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, upon my chance to read them, what a driven and ebullient soul Annis must have been over the course of her life to have voiced herself with such euphoric vim, breadth of imagination, and studied variety. Again, putting her on par with Anne Bradstreet and Emily Dickinson not only is just, but in her broad range of expression she may be fairly said to even have outdone them. And given the relatively brief time anyone outside her lifetime has had the chance to become familiar with her poems, it is no exaggeration to say that it would seem only a matter of time before she will, in all, procure a due and more fitting place of honor among the America’s finest and most creative composers of verse.

### *Susanna Rowson*

Susanna Rowson’s fame rests largely on her extremely popular and best-selling novel (in its day, and reportedly, only second in that category to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*) *Charlotte Temple, A Tale of Truth* (published in 1791 in England, and 1795 in America.) States Duyckinck: “Of the latter twenty-five thousand copies were sold in a few years. It is a tale of seduction, the story of a young girl brought over to America by a British officer and deserted, and being written in a melodramatic style has drawn tears from the public freely as any similar production on the stage. It is still a popular classic at the cheap book-stalls and with travelling chapmen. The *Inquisitor* [another of Rowson’s novels] is avowedly modelled on [Laurence] Sterne, and the honest heart of the writer has doubtless a superior sensibility, though the sharp wit and knowledge of the world of the original are not feminine qualities, and are not to be looked for from a female pen.”<sup>3</sup>

And yet novel writing is only a part of the corpus of Rowson’s work, and which also contains poetry, songs, plays (including an opera), and “a Dictionary, two systems of Geography, and Historical Exercises” (Duyckinck.)

Born in 1762 in Portsmouth, England, Susanna was the daughter of Royal Navy lieutenant William Haswell, and the half-sister (by the same father) of Robert Haswell, Robert Gray’s second in command and one of the log keepers in the trade and exploration voyages (1787-1790) of the brig *Columbia* and sloop *Lady Washington* to the Pacific Northwest Coast. About the time of the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in Boston, the Haswells were living at seaside Nantasket in Hull, Massachusetts. As loyalists, they were placed under arrest, and relocated inland. Finally in 1778, Haswell was exchanged as a prisoner and the family left for Halifax, Nova Scotia; ultimately settling in England. Common with the fate of such loyalists, their property had been confiscated by the rebels and this rendered them destitute. A not terribly friendly or cordial start for a female author who would one day praise the new America to the stars. For her part, Susanna assisted her struggling family by earning a living as a governess.

At the outbreak of the American Revolution, the father was placed under house arrest, and subsequently the family was moved inland, to Hingham and Abington, Massachusetts. In 1778, the failing health of Lieutenant Haswell led to a prisoner exchange, and the family was sent via Halifax, Nova Scotia to England, settling near Kingston upon Hull. Their American property having been confiscated, they lived in relative poverty, Susanna helping to support the family by serving as a governess.

In 1786, she married William Rowson, the leader of Royal Guards band. It was while living in London she began writing novels; with *Charlotte Temple* being published in 1791, and did some acting in provincial theaters. She evidently gained some notoriety as an actress, for in 1793, she and her husband arrived in America as a result of being hired by the Philadelphia Theater, one of the most renowned of its kind in America at that time.

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<sup>2</sup> *Only for the Eye of a Friend: The Poems of Annis Boudinot Stockton* (1995), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> *Cyclopedia of American Literature*, vol. 1, p. 519.

From there, Susanna's career took off in all energetic directions,<sup>4</sup> and she was found (as we earlier noted) writing plays, educating young ladies at academies, serving as editor of a prominent magazine, being active and vocal in supporting religion, patriotism, and feminism, as well as finding time to keep abreast of literary fashions and write poetry.

For one, I cannot praise Rowson's poems more than to say that upon my initially browsing them I readily found myself pleased by and enjoying most of what I read. Annis Stockton's poems, by comparison and the effort is more than worth it, admittedly require a bit more patience and close reading to best savor and appreciate. But Rowson's poems require less advance preparation and grab one much like a song does; which of course is no coincidence given her close ties to the musical theater. While, true, we might find the style and tone unavoidably dated, one can't help but find in her wording and sentiments an excitable and warm-blooded person to whom we can frequently relate and share feelings with. Simply put, she talks good, plain sense, and yet does so with an exquisite fineness and excellence raised up by the sort of genuine and real life heartfelt motivation that Wordsworth, in his *Prefaces*, insists on in poets. It is perhaps then to be regretted that Rowson has been so tied to *Charlotte Temple* because in her poetry she is arguably more interesting and inventive.

In arriving at the following selections from Annis Stockton and Susanna Rowson, I've sought to give some idea of the relatively broad range of both the topics covered and poetic forms undertaken by the two. But, as could be expected in such a brief summary, the number of pieces chosen serve merely as a hint to the two poetesses' scope. For a *proper* idea of their vigor and versatility, it is necessary to peruse a full volume of their writings. Many are the pieces I would have been delighted to include, but in pursuance of an introductory presentation have opted instead for something more light and manageable.

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#### ***POEMS BY ANNIS BOUDINOT STOCKTON.*<sup>5</sup>**

##### **A Hymn Written in the Year 1753**

1.

Jesus thy Servant is resign'd  
To thy unerring will  
Oh, may my heart be more than inclin'd  
Thy precepts to fulfill.

2.

Do with me what thou thinkest best,  
Conform my soul to thee,  
Stamp thy dear image on my breast  
And ne'er depart from me.

3.

For in thy blissful smiles I live –  
More sweet than lifes thy love,  
And in thy favour is Contain'd  
The heaven I hope above.

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<sup>4</sup> By 1809, she had at last settled in Boston.

<sup>5</sup> As found in *Only for the Eye of a Friend: The Poems of Annis Boudinot Stockton* (1995), edited by Carla Mulford.

4.

Thou art my soul[']s honour and wealth  
Her bliss and friendship too,  
The source of all her peace and health  
And every joy in view.

5.

Then lead me thro the giddy path  
Of youths deceitful road,  
The source of all her peace and health  
And every joy in view.

6.

And at the last gloomy hour  
When death my flesh invades,  
Oh, let thy staff thy crook power  
Support me through the shades.

7.

Then with thy presence gild the gloom  
Of that tremendous vale  
O! guide the wandering exile home  
Nor let my foes prevail.

8.

But let thy spirit whisper peace,  
And shew my sins forgiven;  
Make ev'ry doubt and sorrow cease,  
And antedate my heaven

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**The disappointment[,] an ode 1756 to Mr. S[tockton] --**

I see my kind protector come --  
To soothe my throbb[ing] heart to rest --  
He breaks that cloud[']s o'erspreading gloom --  
And chases midnight from my breast --  
No tis not him a shadowy sprite --  
So like my lover met my eyes --  
Some angel left the fields of light --  
Touch'd with compassion at my sighs --  
No more he joins the Social band --  
Around my cheerful fire side ---  
Where friendships fascinating wand --  
Once made his hours serenely glide. --  
Tis not for me that voice to hear --  
Whence sprightly wit and manly sense  
Can floe to charm the brow of care --  
And wisdom's choicest gifts dispense.  
But he shall live within my heart --

His image all my Joy supply --  
And when death hurls the fatal dart  
I'll bear it with me to the sky --

Yes see the blest hour arrives --  
Ev'n now the peaceful clime I view --  
When gentle love and virtue thrives --  
And souls their lapsed powers renew.  
No disappointment enters there --  
The tender heart no absence pains --  
For love refin'd is angels' fare --  
For love eternal ever reigns. --

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**[I]mpromptu epitaph on the grave digger of Princeton—1769—**

Here lies honest John  
Who dug the graves of many  
Now circumscrib'd to one  
For which he'd ne'er a penny  
Six shillings were his dues  
But out of those he's cheated  
For death no favour shews  
Since monarchs thus are treated  
And now his dust is level'd  
With dust that soar'd above him  
Whose deeds if all unravel'd  
The better man would prove him  
May all that view this humble stone  
This les[s]on learn, this truth reverse,  
That from the Cottage to the throne  
Virtue alone makes difference here. --

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**On hearing that General [Joseph] Warren was killed on Bunker Hill,  
on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1775**

Ill-fated hand that sent the cruel dart,  
Which pierc'd brave Warren's gen'rous, humane heart!--  
That heart, which, studious of his countries good  
Held up her rights and seal'd them with his blood! --  
Witness those famed resolves at Suffolk made,  
Drawn by his pen, and by his counsels led. --  
But boast not *Gage*, tho' he unburied lies,  
Thousands of heroes from his dust shall rise;  
Who still shall freedom's injur'd cause maintain,  
And shew to lawless kins the rights of men. --  
-- For *thee*, blest shade, who offer'd up thy life  
A willing victim in the glorious strife,  
Thy country's tears shed o'er thy sacred urn,  
Sweeter than dew-drops in a vernal morn,  
In rich libations to thy mem'ry pour,  
And waft their odours to the heav'nly shore:  
Nature herself, fresh flowret wreaths shall weave,

To scatter daily on thy honor'd grave;  
While all the brave and all the good shall come,  
To heap unfading laurel's on thy tomb.

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**[L]ines impromptu on Miss Morgan[']s birth day**

May circling years with Joy unmix'd return  
And crown with health and peace this natal day  
May all that can enliven or adorn  
Conspire to aid the gratulating lay --  
Let Aries smooth his blustering brow and smile  
Let genial suns unloose the frost bound plain  
May vegetation pay the ploughman[']s toil  
And pleasure come with all her laughing train  
While for my nancy I a wreath would twine  
Blooming and sweet as is a vernal morn  
Come then ye muses add your art to mine  
And tell the world this day the nymph was born  
When virtue truth and innocence unite  
To grace the mind that lights a lovely face  
The soft assemblage in a form so bright  
Pleas'd we behold and lost in wonder gaze. --

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***On hearing of the news of the capture of Lord Cornwallis  
and the British army, by Gen. WASHINGTON.***

[For the *New-Jersey Gazette*.]

By a LADY of NEW-JERSEY

BRING now ye Muses from th' Aonian grove,  
The wreath of victory which the sisters wove,  
Wove and laid up in Mars' most awful fane,  
To crown our Hero on Virginia's plain.  
See from Castalia's sacred fount they haste,  
And now, already on his brow 'tis plac'd;  
The trump of fame proclaims aloud the joy,  
AND WASHINGTON IS CROWN'D, re-echo's to the sky.  
Illustrious name! thy valour now has broke  
Oppression's galling chain, and took the yoke  
From off thy bleeding country, set her free,  
And every heart with transport beats for thee.

For thee! Rochambeau, Gallia's vet'ran chief,  
Sent by fair freedom's friend to her relief;  
An arch triumphal shall the muse decree  
And heroes yet unborn shall copy thee;  
Our lisping infants shall pronounce thy name,  
In songs our virgins shall repeat thy fame,  
And taught by THEE the art of war, our swains  
Shall dye with British blood Columbia's plains.  
Viominills, (heroic brothers) too!  
Unfading laurels now await for you,  
And all the noble youth, who in your train,

In search of glory cross'd the Atlantic main.  
Blest with sweet peace in Sylvan shades retir'd  
Our future bards (by your great deeds inspir'd)  
In tuneful verse shall hand this aera down,  
And your lov'd names with greatful [sic] honours crown.

EMELIA.

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**ELEGY.**

For thee I drop the tender tear  
For thee I breathe the heartfelt Sigh  
Thy loss excites the pangs Severe  
And torn from thee I'd rather die  
The wretch who quits his native shore  
And leaves his al[l] on earth behind  
Has *hope* that fate may yet restore  
And to his wisdom prove more kind  
But ah that dear deceiver now  
To me no balm can ever give  
No Cordial drop She can bestow  
My dropping spirits to relieve  
For ah the dream of bliss is flown  
My trembling steps on other ground  
With no protector quite alone  
pursues a phantom never found

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**On a little boy going to play on a place from whence he had just fallen**

So the wreck[e]d mariner who tos[s]'d on shore  
Hear the wind whistle and the billows roar  
Hous'd in some humble cot he vows in vain  
Never to trust the faithless deep again  
But warm'd and cloath'd to the first port repairs  
And in a can of flip forgets his fears.  
The Seamen[']s Register he hastes to seek  
And sets his name to sail within a week.

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**On the Celebration of the Birth of the  
DAUPHIN of FRANCE.<sup>6</sup> [1782]**

The Genius of America enters the garden of the Chevalier de la Luzerne,  
with two attendant Sylphs, carrying baskets of flowers in their hands.

FIRST SYLPH

COME, let us break our leafy caskets here,  
And pour the blushing beauties of the mead;  
For see Luzerne with loyal zeal, prepare

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<sup>6</sup> The Dauphin referred to here is, of course, Louis XVI's second son, Louis-Charles and who tragically died in 1795 while being held a prisoner of the Revolutionaries.



To hail the joy that crown's his master's bed.

GENIUS OF AMERICA

Yes, strew the fragrant treasures on the ground,  
Perfume the air with aromatic gales;  
Go call the Naiads from their pearly bound,  
And bid the Tritons come with vocal shells --  
To sound across the Atlantic's wide domain,  
And greet the infant from these western shores;  
Present an off'ring from Columbia's plain,  
A grateful off'ring of her fruits and flow'rs.

SECOND SYLPH

Turn, lovely infant, thy auspicious eyes,  
Nor scorn the rural presents that we bring;  
A mighty empire from these woods shall rise,  
And pay to *thee*, the aid they owe thy king.

GENIUS OF AMERICA

Till then accept these emblems of our truth,  
While Heav'n, invok'd by us, shall safely lead  
Thy steps thro' all the slipp'ry paths of youth,  
And form thee fit to be thy nation's head.  
Virtue herself shall dignify thy heart,  
And princely valour deck thy youthful form;  
Science shall join with nature and with art,  
Thy opening mind to animate and warm.

FIRST SYLPH

And ev'ry love, and ev'ry grace shall wait,  
As handmaids, to attend the darling boy;  
The muses too, shall leave their calm retreat  
On Pindus yop, to aid the nation's joy.

SECOND SYLPH

Turn, lovely infant, thy auspicious eyes,  
Nor scorn the rural present hat we bring;  
A mighty empire from these woods shall rise,  
And pay to *thee*, the aid they owe thy king.

GENIUS OF AMERICA.

Tritons, convey to Gallia's royal ear  
The pleasing transport on our hearts engrav'd,  
To none more dear is France's blooming heir,  
Than to the people whom his father sav'd.  
Oh! Tell him, that my hardy generous swains,  
Shall annually hail this natal day;  
My babes congratulate his lisp'ing strains,  
And blooming virgins tune the cheerful lay.  
For him their pious vows the skies ascend,  
And bring down blessings on his lovely queen;  
May vict'ry ever on his arms attend,  
And crown his days with peace and joy serene.

EMILIA.

**An ODE for CHRISTMAS DAY. [1789]**

Aurora ushers in the glor'ous day  
 That shot thro' realms of death the vivid ray,  
 And shed the balm of peace.  
 Celest'al harbingers proclaim our hope,  
*The SAV'OUR'S BORN*, and Nature's mighty prop  
 Bids every sorrow cease!

SPIRIT of *grace*, before whose awful sight,  
 The groves retire on Pindus lofty height,  
 Breathe on my trembling lyre!  
 Smile on the humble off'ring of the poor,  
 Brought not from pride's self-righteous store,  
 But waits thy kindling fire!  
 If ever rapture on a theme divine,  
 With hallow'd incense rose from human shrine  
 To mix with seraphs lays:  
 Tho bands of angels and archangels bring  
 Their golden harps to hail the infant king,  
 Receive my mite of praise!

Ages before this azure arch was rear'd,  
 When on the gloomy void no form appear'd  
 Of mountains tow'ring peak;  
 Of grove, or plain, or rivers winding stream;  
 Or sun, or star, had cast a lucid beam,  
 To chear the dread opaque.

The Almighty Sire revolved the plan,  
 And caus'd the shadows of the state of man  
 To pass before his throne.  
 He saw them tempted, -- lose their blissful state,  
 Deeply involv'd in woe; -- but ah! Too late,  
 They'd mourn th' unhappy deed.  
 Divine compass' on fill'd th' eternal mind,  
 And to the errors of his offspring-kind,  
 Redempt'on was decreed.

His sacred son, the darling of his soul,  
 Offer'd to drink for man the bitter bowl,  
 And suffer in his stead.  
*Adam* for all his race the curse procur'd,  
 But CHRIST the dreadful penalty endu'd,  
 And bruise'd the serpent's head.

The Holy Spirit too would undertake,  
 To cure the deadly wound that sin should make,  
 And justice mercy crown'd.  
 The sacred Three the amazing contract seal'd,  
 And every bright intelligence was fill'd  
 With reverence most profound.

Nor can th' eternal plan of mystic love,

By all the arts of Hell abortive prove,  
 For numerous hearts shall yeild [sic]:  
 And sad captivity be captive led,  
 Receive the gift by union with the head,  
 And all their griefs be heal'd.  
 Now light, mankind, your hospitable fires,  
 And let the charity such love inspires,  
 Like holy incense rise!  
 More sweet than all the choicest fragrant gums,  
 The eastern sages mingl'd in perfumes,  
 A costly sacrifice!  
 Far in the east they saw an unknown star,  
 Gild with superior light the hemisphere;  
 Led by the sparkling ray:  
 They found the place of JESU's humble birth,  
 Saw bands of angel forms descend to earth,  
 With heav'n's eternal day.  
 The song begins, -- the morning-stars rejoice,  
 Mortals so favor'd join your grateful voice!  
*On earth be endless peace!*  
 Celest'al harbingers proclaim our hope,  
*The SAV'OUR'S BORN*, and Nature's mighty prop  
 Bids ev'ry sorrow cease.

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**A LYRIC ODE. – Feb. 28 [1791]**

FROM dreams I wake to real woe,  
 While winds from every quarter blow,  
     And urge the beating rain;  
 I[']ll leave my pillow, steep[e]d in tears  
 And try to dissipate my cares  
     With my sweet lyre again.

Ah! where is fancy's magic power,  
 That us'd to charm each weary hour,  
     And gild the darkest Storm?  
 Ev'n in the howling of the wind,  
 Soft plaintive murmurs she cou'd find,  
     Breath'd by some airy form!

Oft has she borne me on her wing,  
 To climes that know eternal spring,  
     To sweet Arcadian vales;  
 To where the vi'lets fragrant breath,  
 Perfumes unseen the desert heath,  
     With aromatic gales.

To groves whose dark embrowning shades,  
 Skirted with ever-verdant meads,  
     And woodbine mantled round;  
 With streams, whose velvet margins bear,  
 The blushing rose, and lilly [sic] fair,  
     Spontaneous on the ground.

But now no more her presence cheers;  
Her wand no soft enchantment rears,  
    To soothe my heart-felt pain:  
How loud the tempests horrid roar,  
I see the wrecks on every shore,  
    And hear the dying strain!

My mind congenial with the gloom,  
That hides fair nature's brightest bloom,  
    Welcomes contending storms;  
Sad emblem of the griefs that prey,  
And waste my widowed heart away,  
    In retrospective forms.

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*POEMS BY SUSANNA ROWSON.*<sup>7</sup>

**ODE TO SENSIBILITY.**

HAIL, Sensibility! thou angel dear,  
Who breath'st the sigh or drop'st the silent tear  
    At other's grief;  
Who guid'st the generous liberal hand,  
    To give relief.  
Without thee, say, what had we been?  
Unfeeling brutes, who scarce deserve the name of men.  
Come, fill my heart, and let it overflow,  
Exult in other's joys -- or bleed at other's woe.

See yon poor wretch with hunger starv'd,  
Eager he eyes his precious grain of food;  
What, tho' tis tainted, mouldy, dry or hard,  
His famish'd appetite still thinks it good.  
There was a pang shot through my very heart;  
At thy command, my ready hand  
Of my small portion hastes to give a part,  
While from my eye th' unbidden tear will start,  
That such keen mis'ry should afflict mankind.

    Yet as I gently grieve,  
I bless the hour, Benignant Pow'r,  
That gave the means those sorrows to relieve.  
How can the stoic think it bliss  
    To know no joy, to feel no woe;  
Mine is a happier state than his,  
    Who both these passions know.  
Whose pulse can beat to joy's light measure,  
And dance the revel round of pleasure;  
Or drop th' excruciating tear  
O'er sacred friendship's hallow'd bier.

Sweet Sensibility be mine,  
    And I'd not change my lowly cot,  
Queen of the eastern world to shine,

---

<sup>7</sup> These selections were taken from *Miscellaneous Poems* (1804) by Susanna Rowson.

And share the proudest monarch's lot.  
What if thou hast a thousand darts?  
I will not once repine.  
Oh, might I be allowed to share  
The raptures which thy smile imparts!  
Empty thy quiver without fear,  
Wring from my tortur'd heart its every tear,  
If thinly scattered here and there  
Thy sweetest joys are mine.

~\*\*\*~

### STORMY EVENING

THE skies a sombre shade assume,  
While the chill north-eastern breeze  
Serves to heighten ev'ning's gloom,  
Howling through the leafless trees.

Nature wears her robe of white;  
Vesper glimmers in the west;  
Not one gem has sable night  
To grace her brow, or clasp her vest.

Hark! the tempest, loud descending,  
Beats against the brittle pane;  
In its drifting torrents blending  
Fleecy snow, and drenching rain.

Now, to banish spleen and vapours,  
Bid the fire cheerful blaze;  
Bring your book; and let the tapers  
Shed around their friendly rays.

Ope the volume, turn the pages,  
Read, and muse, and chat by turns,  
How ambition lawless rages,  
How the patriot's bosom burns.

Learn from Milton, bard inspired,  
How, e'en angels could rebel;  
From Homer, how, by Grecians fir'd,  
Ilium's lofty towers fell.

Now the traveler, faint and weary,  
Often sighing as he goes,  
O'er heaths, through forests, dark and dreary,  
Beats against the drifting snows.

Ears, and cheeks, and fingers tingle,  
Tortur'd by the piercing frost;  
Scarce he hears his sleigh bells jingle,  
Now alas! the track is lost.

Numbing cold each sense invading,

Checks his pulse, and seals his eyes;  
No kind hand the sufferer aiding,  
Buried in the drift, he dies.

Fancy whither art thou leading?  
Stay! the scenes too painful grown;  
I see those friends whose hearts are bleeding,  
When the traveller's fate is known.

By HIM, who has the storm directed,  
May each traveller, doom'd to roam,  
Be through this drear night protected,  
And conducted safely home.

Then, no more the storm regretting,  
Pond delight his soul inspire;  
Wind, and snow, and cold forgetting,  
Chatting round the social fire.

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### TO A MOTH

THAT ONE EVENING, EARLY IN THE SPRING, FLEW IN AT  
THE WINDOW, AND PLAY'D ROUND THE CANDLE.

LITTLE flutt'ring, fragile being,  
Lively harbinger of spring,  
Welcome to my humble dwelling,  
Welcome is the news you bring.

You say, the wintry season's over,  
Chilling storm and biting frost;  
That the fields will soon recover  
All the verdure they had lost.

Ah! beware, gay little stranger;  
Go not near yon dazzling light;  
Why, uncon[s]cious of thy danger,  
Round it dost thou wing thy flight?

By its splendour fascinated,  
Nearer, and nearer wilt thou fly?  
Ah! poor fool, I see thou'rt fated  
In th' alluring flame to die.

So, by merit oft attracted,  
The heart susceptible admires;  
Basks in the pow'rful rays refracted --  
In the subtile flame expires;

Too late acquainted with its danger,  
Fain would the fascination fly;  
But ah! like thee, poor little stranger,  
'Tis doom'd to flutter, yield, and die.

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## THE ROSES OF LIFE

WHY should we complain of this life's dreary road,  
Or the thorns and the thistles that in our path lay?  
Has not Heaven a portion of reason bestow'd,  
To pass them o'er lightly, or brush them away?  
I'll gather life's roses wherever I find them,  
And smile at their folly who dread to come near;  
Who cast all its joy's and its pleasures behind them,  
Nor pluck the sweet buds, lest the thorn should appear.

There are sorrows and cares in this life, 'tis well known;  
The heart may weep blood, though the cheek maybe dry;  
But in soothing another's, we lighten our own,  
And light falls the tear that fills Sympathy's eye.  
Dear Sympathy! thou art the rose without thorns;  
Dwell still in my bosom, each care to beguile:  
Thy softness the cheerful face ever adorns,  
And throws o'er the sad one, a meek patient smile.

Grim Poverty, too, is a thorn in our way --  
Ah no! for meek Industry stands by his side;  
With cheerful spring flowers she makes the path gay,  
And smiles at the frowns and repinings of pride.  
Come, strew round thy violets sweetly narcotic;  
So calm and refreshing the rest they bestow,  
The monarch supreme, or the tyrant despotic,  
Such rest can ne'er take, nor such slumbers can know.

And see the gay wreath with which Heaven has bound us,  
Society, friendship, and chaste mutual love;  
Snatch, snatch the gay flowers! the storm gathers round us;  
The roses will fade, and their fragrance remove.  
Then bend, humbly bend to the storm as it passes;  
Tho' sharp be the thorn that remains on the spray,  
Friendship's blossom ne'er fades, and its perfume surpasses  
The light summer flowers, which flitted away.

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## SONNET I

THE primrose gay, the snow drop pale,  
The lily blooming in the vale,  
Too fragile, or too fair to last,  
Wither beneath th' untimely blast,  
Or rudely falling shower;  
No more a sweet perfume they shed,  
Their fragrance lost, their beauty fled,  
They can revive no more.

So hapless woman's wounded name,  
If Malice seize the trump of fame;

Or Envy should her poison shed  
Upon the unprotected head  
    Of some forsaken maid;  
Tho' pity may her fate deplore,  
Her virtues sink to rise no more,  
    From dark oblivion's shade.

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### **THE ENQUIRY**

What in life is worth possessing?  
Tell me, rigid censors, say:  
Love alone's the choicest blessing;  
Then let's love our lives away.

But if Love, that greatest treasure,  
Is not plac'd within our pow'r;  
Then let Friendship fill the measure,  
Then to Friendship give the hour.

Take the present time, enjoy it;  
And since life is but a span;  
They are wisest, who employ it,  
Snatching all the sweets they can.

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### **TO THE ROSE.**

LOVELY, blushing, fragrant Rose;  
Emblem of life's transient joys,  
Ere half thy sweets thou canst disclose,  
One rude touch thy bloom destroys.

Though the sweetness thou dost yield  
Can pleasure to each sense impart;  
The thorn, beneath thy leaves conceal'd,  
Oft wounds the unsuspecting heart.

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

### **SIMILE.**

PASSION is like the base narcotic flower,  
That flaunts its scarlet bosom to the day;  
And when exerting its nefarious power,  
Benumbs the sense, and steals the strength away.

In the gay morn attractive to the ere,  
Its thin leaves flutter in the wanton wind;  
But ere the sun declines, t'will fade and die,  
While still its baleful poison lurks behind.

But Love! pure Love! the human soul pervading,  
Is like the musk-rose, scenting summer's breath;



Its charms, when budding in its prime, and fading,  
Will even yield a rich perfume in death.

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### THANKSGIVING.

AUTUMN receding, throws aside  
Her robe of many a varied dye;  
And WINTER, in majestic pride,  
Advances in the low'ring sky.  
The lab'rer in his granry stores  
The golden sheaves all safe from spoil;  
While from her horn gay Plenty pours  
Her treasures to reward his toil.  
To solemn temples let us now repair,  
And bow in grateful adoration there;  
Bid the full strain in hallelujahs rise,  
To waft the sacred incense to the skies.

Now the hospitable board  
Groans beneath the rich repast;  
All that lux'ry can afford,  
Grat[e]ful to the eye or taste;  
While the orchard's sparkling juice,  
And the vintage join their powers;  
All that nature can produce,  
Bounteous Heav'n bids be ours.  
Let us give thanks; yes, yes, be sure,  
Send for the widow and the orphan poor;  
Give them wherewith to purchase clothes and food;  
'Tis the best way to prove our gratitude.

On the hearth high flames the fire,  
Sparkling tapers lend their light;  
Wit and genius now aspire  
On Fancy's gay and rapid flight;  
Now the viol's sprightly lay,  
As the moments light advance,  
Bids us revel, sport, and play,  
Raise the song, or lead the dance.

Come, sportive love, and, sacred friendship, come,  
Help us to celebrate our harvest-home;  
In vain the year its annual tribute pours,  
Unless you grace the scene, and lead the laughing hours.

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### SONG.

WRITTEN FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE  
BIRTH DAY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON, ESQ.  
AND SUNG ON THAT OCCASION, IN BOS-  
TON, FEBRUARY 11th, 1798.

Air. -- *Anacreon in Heaven.*

WHEN rising from ocean Columbia appear'd,

Minerva to Jove, humbly kneeling, requested  
That she, as its patroness, might be rever'd,  
And the pow'r to protect it, in her be invested.  
Jove nodded assent, pleasure glow'd in her breast,  
As rising, the goddess: her will thus exprest  
"The sons of Columbia forever shall be  
From oppression secure, and from anarchy free."

Rapture flash'd through the spheres as the mandate  
went forth,  
When Mars and Apollo, together uniting,  
Cried, Sister, thy sons shall be fam'd for their worth,  
Their wisdom in peace, and their valour in fighting;  
Besides, from among them a chief shall arise,  
As a soldier, or statesman, undaunted and wise;  
Who would shed his best blood, that Columbia might be,  
From oppression secure, and from anarchy free.

Jove, pleas'd with the prospect, majestic arose,  
And said, "By ourself, they shall not be neglected;  
But ever secure, tho' surrounded by foes,  
By WASHINGTON bravely upheld and protected.  
And while Peace and Plenty preside o'er their plains,  
While mem'ry exists, or while gratitude reigns,  
His name ever lov'd, and remember'd shall be,  
While Columbians remain INDEPENDENT and FREE."

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### **BALLAD.**

BENEATH a willow's pendant shade,  
Elinor, sad, unhappy fair,  
Inspired by music's plaintive aid,  
Thus breath'd her sorrows to the air:  
Ah me! I feel love's poison'd dart,  
In vain the poison would repel,  
But who transfix'd it in my heart,  
I cannot, will not, dare not tell.

When bright along the eastern skies,  
The morning sheds a golden beam,  
How fervent do my prayers rise,  
Invoking peace and health for him.  
The village maidens speak his fame,  
He does all other youths excel,  
But where he dwells, or what's his name,  
I cannot, will not, dare not tell.

Zephyr, as you with the cooling air  
Light around his temples play,  
Soft to his ear these tidings bear;  
Whisp'ring gently, Zephyr, say,  
Speak in the language of a sigh,  
How much I love, how true, how well;  
But should he ask my name, reply,

I cannot, will not, dare not tell.

---

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