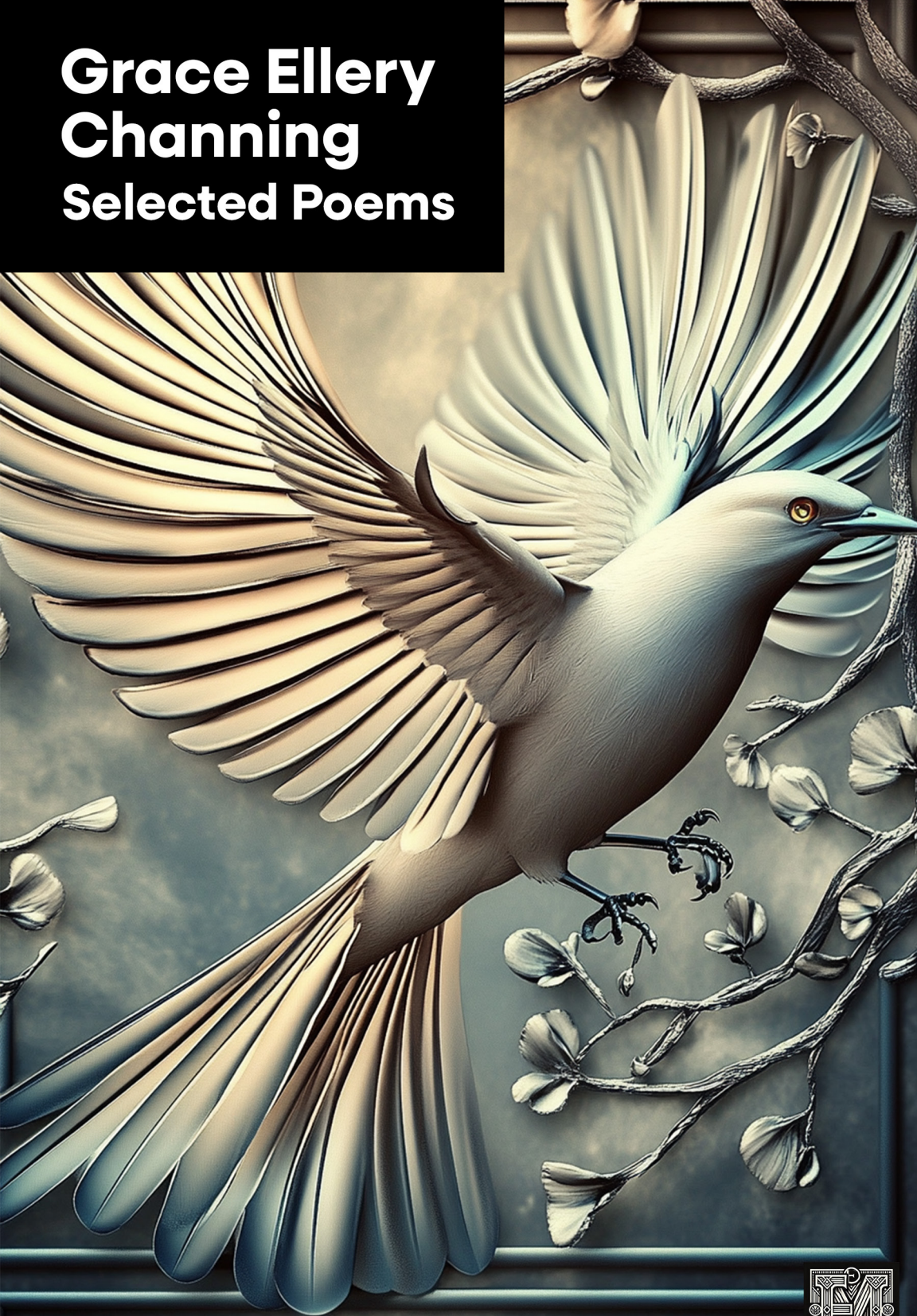


**Grace Ellery
Channing
Selected Poems**



Grace Ellery Channing

December 27, 1862 [Providence, Rhode Island] –

April 3, 1937 [New York City, New York]

Channing was born in Providence, Rhode Island, to William Francis Channing, an inventor who had worked with Alexander Graham Bell in developing the telephone, and Mary Jane (née Tarr). She was a great-great-granddaughter of William Ellery (1727–1820), a signer of the United States Declaration of Independence. She moved to Southern California in the late 1880s to cure her lung troubles and became an associate editor of *The Land of Sunshine*. Channing eventually married the artist Charles Walter Stetson after he and Channing's friend, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, divorced in 1894. In addition to her only book of poetry, *Sea Drift*, published in Boston in 1899, she published several works of fiction including “‘The Sister of a Saint,’ Other Stories” (1895) and the novel *The Fortune of a Day* (1900).

Sea Drift. Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1899.

Awards

A hero's crown for that man of men
 Whose right arm shall prevail!
But what befits their prowess then,
What laurels shall their brow attain,
What guerdon to their lot remain,
 And what hosannas hail,
Who fail and fail and fail again,
 And rise again—to fail?

Lucifer

“Let him that hath been wronged salute thee!”
George Sand.

I am the Angel of the fallen Star:
Men say I lost it from the angelic crown
That burned my guilty forehead when adown
From the infinite heights of Heaven I plunged afar
Into eternal Hell;—lo, on that star,
Once diademed, my regnant feet are set!
I did not lose, only I scorned to wear;
Another and more glorious past compare
Awaits me, but it has not risen yet.
No star shines bright enough to light my brows;
I have cast my crown from me—Love allows
No crown his consecrated brows above,
Save Love’s own scarred insignia: I am Love,
And crownless greater than the crowned ones are.

I am the patient Angel:—round me swing
A million worlds of souls; incessant nights
Of lesser ministrants, to calmer heights
Pass by;—I see them pass;—each aspirant wing
Upbearing a pale soul aspiring
With love-expectant eyes;—I bend my own.
Aeons like butterflies flit pass; alone
Upon my star I hold my post and wait.
Like sombre shadows of some brooding fate,
From either mighty shoulder straight outspread
My ominous wings;—the living and the dead,
Born and unborn, who yet shall be and are,
I, Lucifer, lord of the fallen Star,
Wrap close beneath the darkness of my wing.

I am the infinite Angel. Who of all
The angelic host forsook high Heaven for hell?
Man’s angelhood who ever loved so well,

From angel state consentingly to fall?
Not the joy-bringing angels—they ye call
Guardians; not dark Death with the dread pall;
Not he sublimely broken on the Cross
(The loving Angel!) who for Man would die.
These loved indeed, yet loved not these as I,
Who for Love's sake bear love's eternal loss.
Hell! blind one, Heaven's gate lies close within;
And for the sombre suffering men call sin,
Look up!—that far, faint, radiant gleam above
The forehead of the high, sad Angel,—Love,
Lucifer,—whom thou hatest most of all.

Why Dost Though Doubt

It is enough: thy sky's unclouded; there's a boundless blue
Above those hills; that breath of perfumed air
Swept o'er thy flowers. Shall it not be true
That Thou art, O Thou ever loving Care
To whom my thirsting heart turns longingly?

Deep silence: not one whispered sound to tell me if I reach
Truthward or no; the stillness gives no sign.
And yet—and yet, may not that stillness teach
How safely Earth rests in a calm divine?
Greatness alone so very still could be.

Horizonwards, with glorious banners, glows the Sun-God, and drops.
So day is dead:—O what if Heaven be far!
The dusk is purple on the mountain tops,
And o'er them (O my heart!) the rising Star.
It is enough—enough.

Wings

A dream of wings,

A vision and a sound of flying things:
Sweet wings of song, fleet wings of hurrying hours,
Joy-plumed moments, glories, triumphs, powers,
Golden and swift and sudden as day dying;
And heavy wings of sorrows, trailing low
Their sombre fringe; and blinding wings that go
Whirling some flashing joy; slow wings of pain
That languid beat the air and still remain
Forever poised for flight, but never flying;
Dwellers in dear green trees
Are winged like these.

I dream of wings:

The restless stir, the feathered fluttering
Of hope, too feeble yet for wandering;
(Unsafest fledgling! tarry in the nest;
Leaving, thy plumes are arrows for some breast.)
The hovering, spread pinions opaline
Of an upbearing faith, steady, serene,
And jubilant and tireless and strong,
Whose song is flight, whose stalwart flight is song,
From the first lifting, tiny, feathered curl
Of the nesting dreamer to the splendid furl
Of resting wings on wings, in gathering mood
For farther flight into infinitude;
Then how they leave, they lift, they rise, they bear—
Wings of the air, like these,—wings of the air,
Eagle and gull,—Oh, what a flight is there!

I dream of wings:

Butterfly wings of fancies; gossamer,
Airier still, of subtle shapes that stir
And wake and breathe, one flickering hour to spread
Ephemeral gauzes forth, and then be dead,—
Yet winged, still winged were in their brief staying;

And small, soft wings that dip and hush and hover,
 That bend and brood and cover
 Still smaller, softer, lowlier featherlings,
And breast to breast on the beloved's laying,
 With crooning, warbling, singing,
That warmer, lighter, safer, closer press,
The nearer, dearer for the nakedness;
Warm wings of love, that fold and hold and bless
With feathered touches, feather-soft caress;
 Such high song, lowly winging,
 Such peace, such bliss, such rest,
 Have dwellers of the nest.

I dream of wings:

Weak wings and wistful, stormy wings and strong,
Plumes shod with music, feather-sandalled song,
Sweeping the air-ways of the sky along;
Quick-throbbing, wide, vibrating, life-filled, free,
Messengers many as the winds that be,
The universe is but a nest for ye.
And dimly I discern within the weaving
Of wings with wings, the blue still intercleaving,
Wings and more wings;—till folded calm without,
Beyond the darkness and beyond the doubt,
Past the believing and the unbelieving,
Warm, safe, sustaining, underneath, above,
The mighty wings, the song-filled heart of Love;
And know all other songs, all other wings,
Are but dropped feathers and dim echoings.

I dream—I dream of wings.

Amoricide

Was need of so much cruelty
 Even if he must be slain?
Could'st thou not murder decently:
Let him with arrows pierced be;
 Or stabbed with swords amain?

Could'st thou not his young lips well slake
 With the bitter hemlock lees;
Could'st thou not burn him at the stake;
Or smother when he should awake;—
 Any or all of these?

But bitterer than poisoned cup;
 More cruel than the sword;
Thou bad'st him at thy board to sup,
Then snatched the ignoblest weapon up,
 And slew Love with a word.

Songs of Arno

I. TWILIGHT

It is the hour when Arno turns
Her gold to chrysoprase;
When each low-hanging star outburns
Its faint, mysterious rays,
As from the prison of faery urns
Which faery hands upraise.

It is the hour when life's constraint
A moment's ease is given;
When Earth is like a holy saint,
Stilled, sanctified, and shriven,
And the deep-breathing heart grows faint
To be so near to Heaven.

II. MOONLIGHT

Oh, Arno lies in light afloat,
The light moon floats a-near;
Her silver sheen, where close I lean,
O'er Arno's breast streams clear;
Soft breathes a violin's low note,—
I bend my soul to hear.

Oh, Arno shines, and sets within
Her ripples all atune!
Hushed Earth and Heaven, as lovers even,
Commingle in a swoon;
The light streams from the violin,—
The music from the moon.

Walt Whitman

O'er Tuscan hills I heard it breathed,
 And up the olive slopes it ran,
 And then the laurel all began
Singing of brows once laurel-wreathed;

Of bards whose vanished voices fill
 The resonant, deep valleys yet;
 The laurel never can forget,
Such echoes tremble through it still.

But I,—I let the laurel pass,
 And pass, the dim Etrurian land;
 Far louder sing within my hand
The voiceless syllables of grass.

Your music keeps its mighty ring,
 O ancient groves of Tuscany!
 But tenfold eloquent to me
The common herb One taught to sing.

Green art thou, laurel overhead,
 Yet sombre to this tiny blade,
 And some one says that he who made
The grass and me to live, is dead.

It may be true,—for Italy
 Hath seen the night of many a sun;
 Thou, O my Country, hadst but one,
If set, how dim thy light must be!

It may be false,—the sky's as blue,
 The ilex hath not dropped a leaf
 Nor Earth put off a rose for grief,
And yet, for all,—it may be true.

Unruffled, silver olives wave,

Loud sings the laurel where I pass,
But louder still I hear the grass,—
The grass, new-growing on a grave.

Afterthought

I gave the jewel, but withheld
 The casket from his hand:
And yet the casket was excelled
 By thousands in the land.

The jewel I so light resigned,
 So lightly bade him wear,—
Go search the world, and never find
 A second like it there.

Strange niggard I, so to mistake
 False values for the true:
Bring back my jewel, love, or take
 The worthless casket too.

from The Woman

IV. CONSUMMATION

Now let earth fade,—it is but earth;
Let Heaven prove a lie,—
'Tis only Heaven; let life, let birth
Be dead;—let death too die!

For I have outlived earth and heaven,
Outvanquished death and life,
Whose lips the immortal kiss have given
That seals the woman—wife.

Love made me mistress, bride, and wife
To his divinity;
Mother I shall be, (Love gives life,)
To Immortality.

Separation

The world is full of farewells! Is it so?
Not to the dying alone, but to all
Who feel the throbbing of this pulse of life
Must these sad farewells fall?

I hold thy hand; thine earnest eyes, O friend,
Look full assurance from thy soul to mine,
Nor can they shine nor darken forth one thought
But my heart shall divine.

Dear dreaming lips, thy varying mould betrays
The changing mood, as words were faint to do,
Yet is there not an echo of thy voice
But shakes my pulses too.

How am I grown so wise that lips and eyes,
Down-dropping lids, the colour in thy cheek,
Hold each a language more familiar, dear,
Than tongues of others speak?

I'll tell thee: there are threads so subtly spun
Eye cannot seize them nor the touch divine,
Yet strength is naught beside them, and they run
From thy soul unto mine.

Strong as the stars and flower-tremulous,
Of various span, attuned in perfect way,
An infinite harp, whose thrilling strings lifeswept
Supernal music play.

And thoughts and feelings, ne'er so dimly stirred,
Flash their swift messengers these paths along,
And smite the slumbering harp-strings till they wake
Into majestic song.

Each faintest throbbing of thy spirit's life,

Transmitted, breaks in music into mine;
And mine can breathe no feeblest note but stirs
The answering chord in thine.

Death cannot rend these beating strings, nor Time,
The Universe itself not give them pause,
Only a spirit disobedient
To its own spirit laws;

Only a soul disloyal to itself,
Leaving the highest harmony it knew,
Breaking its music for discordant ends,
Shatters its harp-strings too.

And this is separation,—this alone;
There is no other; farewells have no force
For those who keep unchanged through changing lives
This voiceless intercourse.

What though to-morrow tossing waves and leagues
Of alien land shall hide thy face from me,
And hands can feel each other's clasp no more
Though stretched imploringly;—

Shall we therefore be parted? Is there power
To bind the spirit willing to be free?
Say no, a thousand times!—nor Time, nor Space,
Earth's darkest gloom, nor Heaven's divinest grace,
Life's sombrest shadow, nor Death's awful face,
Hell,—nay, not God Himself in highest place
Can stay my soul,—my loving soul from thee.

