

Limitations

By Henrietta Cordelia Ray

The subtlest strain a great musician weaves,
Cannot attain in rhythmic harmony
To music in his soul. May it not be
Celestial lyres send hints to him? He grieves
That half the sweetness of the song, he leaves
Unheard in the transition. Thus do we
Yearn to translate the wondrous majesty
Of some rare mood, when the rapt soul receives
A vision exquisite. Yet who can match
The sunset's iridescent hues? Who sing
The skylark's ecstasy so seraph-fine?
We struggle vainly, still we fain would catch
Such rifts amid life's shadows, for they bring
Glimpses ineffable of things divine.

Source: Collected Black Women's Poetry, Volume 3 (Oxford University Press, 1988)



Henrietta Cordelia Ray was born in New York City. She graduated from the University of the City of New York in 1891 with a master's in pedagogy and became a teacher, but stopped in order to write. Her ode "Lincoln" was read at the unveiling of the Emancipation Memorial in Washington, DC, in April 1876.

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