

The Poetry of Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672)

From *The Prologue*

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I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits,
A poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on female wits:
If what I do prove well, it won't advance,
They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance.

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Let Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are
Men have precedency and still excel,
It is but vain unjustly to wage war;
Men can do best, and women know it well.
Preeminence in all and each is yours;
Yet grant some small acknowledgement of ours.

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And oh ye high flown quills that soar the skies,
And ever with your prey still catch your praise,
If e'er you deign these lowly lines your eyes,
Give thyme or parsley wreath, I ask no bays;
This mean and unrefined ore of mine
Will make your glist'ring gold but more to shine.

The Author to Her Book

Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain,
Who after birth did'st by my side remain,
Till snatcht from thence by friends, less wise
than true,
Who thee abroad exposed to public view,
Made thee in rags, halting to th' press to trudge,
Where errors were not lessened (all may
judge).

At thy return my blushing was not small,
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call.
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,
The visage was so irksome in my sight,
Yet being mine own, at length affection would
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could.
I washed thy face, but more defects I saw,
And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.
I stretcht thy joints to make thee even feet,
Yet still thou run'st more hobbling than is meet.
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,
But nought save home-spun cloth, i' th' house I
find.
In this array, 'mongst vulgars may'st thou roam.
In critic's hands, beware thou dost not come,
And take thy way where yet thou art not
known.
If for thy father askt, say, thou hadst none;
And for thy mother, she alas is poor,
Which caused her thus to send thee out of
door.

To My Dear and Loving Husband

If ever two were one, then surely we,
If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me ye women, if you can.

I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor aught but love from thee give recompense.

Thy love is such I can no way repay,
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persevere,
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

Her Mother's Epitaph

Here lies:

A worthy matron of unspotted life,
A loving mother and obedient wife,
A friendly neighbor, pitiful to poor,
Whom oft she fed, and clothed with her store;
To servants wisely awful, but yet kind,
And as they did, so they reward did find:
A true instructor of her family,
The which she ordered with dexterity,
The public meetings ever did frequent,
And in her closest constant hours she spent;
Religious in all her words and ways,
Preparing still for death, till end of days:
Of all her children, children lived to see,
Then dying, left a blessed memory.

By Night when Others Soundly Slept

By night when others soundly slept
And hath at once both ease and Rest,
My waking eyes were open kept
And so to lie I found it best.

I sought him whom my Soul did Love,
With tears I sought him earnestly.
He bow'd his ear down from Above.
In vain I did not seek or cry.

My hungry soul he fill'd with Good;
He in his Bottle put my tears,
My smarting wounds washt in his blood,
And banisht thence my Doubts and Fears.

What to my Saviour shall I give
Who freely hath done this for me?
I'll serve him here whilst I shall live
And Love him to Eternity.

Before the Birth of One of Her Children

All things within this fading world hath end,
Adversity doth still our joys attend;
No ties so strong, no friends so dear and sweet,
But with death's parting blow are sure to meet.
The sentence past is most irrevocable,
A common thing, yet oh, inevitable.
How soon, my Dear, death may my steps attend,
How soon't may be thy lot to lose thy friend,
We both are ignorant, yet love bids me
These farewell lines to recommend to thee,
That when the knot's untied that made us one,
I may seem thine, who in effect am none.
And if I see not half my days that's due,
What nature would, God grant to yours and you;
The many faults that well you know I have
Let be interred in my oblivious grave;
If any worth or virtue were in me,
Let that live freshly in thy memory
And when thou feel'st no grief, as I no harmes,
Yet love thy dead, who long lay in thine arms,
And when thy loss shall be repaid with gains
Look to my little babes, my dear remains.
And if thou love thyself, or loved'st me,
These O protect from stepdame's injury.
And if chance to thine eyes shall bring this verse,
With some sad sighs honor my absent hearse;
And kiss this paper for thy dear love's sake,
Who with salt tears this last farewell did take.

A Letter to Her Husband, Absent Upon Public Employment

As loving hind that hartless wants her deer,
Scuds through the woods and fern with hark'ning ear,
Perplext, in every bush and nook doth pry
Her dearest deer might answer ear or eye:
So doth my anxious soul, which now doth miss
A dearer dear (far dearer heart) than this,
Still wait with doubts, and hope, and failing eye,
His voice to hear or person to descry.
Or as the pensive dove doth all alone
On withered bough most uncouthly bemoan
The absence of her love and loving mate,
Whose loss hath made her so unfortunate:
Ev'n thus do I, with many a deep sad groan,
Bewail my turtle true, who now is gone,
His presence and his safe return still woo
With thousand doleful sighs and mournful coo.
Or as the loving mullet, that true fish,
Her fellow lost, nor joy nor life doth wish,
But launches on that shore, there for to die
Where she her captive husband doth espy.
Mine being gone, I lead a joyless life,
I have a loving fear, yet seem no wife:
But worst of all, to him can't steer my course,
I here, he there, alas, both kept by force.
Return my dear, my joy, my only love,
Unto thy hind, thy mullet and thy dove,
Who neither joys in pasture, house nor streams;
The substance gone, O me, these are but dreams.

Together at one tree, oh let us browse,
And like two turtles roost within one house,
And like the mullets in one river glide,
Let's still remain but one, till death divide.

Thy loving love and dearest dear,
At home, abroad, and every where,

In Reference to Her Children

By Anne Bradstreet

I had eight birds hatched in one nest;
Four Cocks there were, and Hens the rest.
I nursed them up with pain and care,
Nor cost nor labor did I spare,
Till at the last they felt their wing,
Mounted the trees, and learned to sing.
Chief of the brood then took his flight
To regions far, and left me quite.
My mournful chirps I after send
Till he return, or I do end:
Leave not thy nest, thy Dame, and Sire;
Fly back and sing amidst this Quire*.
My second bird did take her flight,
And with her mate flew out of sight;
Southward they both their course did bend,
And seasons twain they there did spend,
Till after, blown by southern gales,
They northward steered with filled sails.
A prettier bird was nowhere seen
Along the beach, among the treen.
I have a third, of color white,
On whom I placed no small delight;
Coupled with mate loving and true,
Hath also bid her Dame adieu.
And where Aurora first appears
She now hath perched, to spend her years.
One to the Academy flew
To chat among that learned crew;
Ambition moves still in his breast
That he might chant above the rest,
Striving for more than to do well,
That nightingales he might excel.
My fifth, whose down is yet scarce gone,
Is 'mongst the shrubs and bushes flown,
And as his wings increase in strength
On higher boughs he'll perch at length.
My other three still with me nest
Until they're grown; then, as the rest,
Or here or there they'll take their flight;
As is ordained, so shall they light.
If birds could weep, then would my tears
Let others know what are my fears
Lest this my brood some harm should catch

*choir

And be surprised for want of watch:
Whilst pecking corn, and void of care,
They fall un'wares in Fowler's snare;
Or whilst on trees they sit and sing,
Some untoward boy at them do fling;
Or whilst allured with bell and glass,
The net be spread, and caught, alas!
Or lest by Lime-twigs they be foiled,
Or by some greedy hawks be spoiled.
Oh, would, my young, ye saw my breast,
And knew what thoughts there sadly rest.
Great was my pain when I you bred,
Great was my care when I you fed;
Long did I keep you soft and warm,
And with my wings kept off all harm.
My cares are more, and fears, than ever,
My throbs such now as 'fore were never.
Alas, my birds, you wisdom want;
Of perils you are ignorant.
Oft times in grass, on trees, in flight,
Sore accidents on you may light.
Oh, to your safety have an eye;
So happy may you live and die.
Meanwhile my days in tunes I'll spend
Till my weak lays with me shall end.
In shady woods I'll sit and sing,

Things that passed to mind I'll bring.
Once young and pleasant, as are you.
But former toys (no joys) adieu!
My age I will not once lament,
But sing my, time so near is spent,
And from the top bough take my flight
Into a country beyond sight,
Where old ones instantly grow young,
And there with seraphims set song.
No seasons cold nor storms they see,
But spring lasts to eternity.
When each of you shall in your nest
Among your young ones take your rest,
In chirping language oft them tell
You had a Dame that loved you well,
That did what could be done for young,
And nursed you up till you were strong;
And 'fore she once would let you fly
She showed you joy and misery,
Taught what was good, and what was ill,
What would save life, and what would kill.
Thus gone, amongst you I may live,
And dead, yet speak, and counsel give.
Farewell, my birds, farewell, adieu!
I happy am if well with you.

Upon the Burning of Our House

July 10th, 1666

By Anne Bradstreet

In silent night when rest I took,
For sorrow near I did not look,
I waken'd was with thund'ring noise
And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.
That fearful sound of fire and fire,
Let no man know is my desire.

I, starting up, the light did spy,
And to my God my heart did cry
To strengthen me in my distress
And not to leave me succourless.
Then coming out beheld a space,
The flame consume my dwelling place.

And, when I could no longer look,
I blest his Name that gave and took,
That laid my goods now in the dust:
Yea so it was, and so 'twas just.
It was his own: it was not mine;
Far be it that I should repine.

He might of all justly bereft,
But yet sufficient for us left.
When by the ruins oft I past,
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,
And here and there the places spy
Where oft I sat, and long did lie.

Here stood that trunk, and there that chest;
There lay that store I counted best:
My pleasant things in ashes lie,
And them behold no more shall I.
Under thy roof no guest shall sit,
Nor at thy table eat a bit.

No pleasant tale shall e'er be told,
Nor things recounted done of old.
No candle e'er shall shine in thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice ere heard shall be.
In silence ever shalt thou lie;
Adieu, adieu; all's vanity.

Then straight I gin my heart to chide,
And did thy wealth on earth abide?
Didst fix thy hope on mould'ring dust,
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
That dunghill mists away may fly.

Thou hast an house on high erect,
Fram'd by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnished,
Stands permanent tho' this be fled.
It's purchased, and paid for too
By him who hath enough to do.

A prize so vast as is unknown,
Yet, by his gift, is made thine own.
There's wealth enough, I need no more;
Farewell my pelf, farewell my store.
The world no longer let me love,
My hope and treasure lies above.

As Weary Pilgrim

By Anne Bradstreet

As weary pilgrim, now at rest,
Hugs with delight his silent nest,
His wasted limbs now lie full soft
That mirey steps have trodden oft,
Blesses himself to think upon
His dangers past, and travails done.
The burning sun no more shall heat,
Nor stormy rains on him shall beat.
The briars and thorns no more shall scratch,
Nor hungry wolves at him shall catch.
He erring paths no more shall tread,
Nor wild fruits eat instead of bread.
For waters cold he doth not long
For thirst no more shall parch his tongue.
No rugged stones his feet shall gall,
Nor stumps nor rocks cause him to fall.
All cares and fears he bids farewell
And means in safety now to dwell.
A pilgrim I, on earth perplexed
With Sins, with cares and sorrows vexed,
By age and pains brought to decay,
And my clay house mold'ring away.
Oh, how I long to be at rest
And soar on high among the blest.
This body shall in silence sleep,
Mine eyes no more shall ever weep,
No fainting fits shall me assail,
Nor grinding pains my body frail,
With cares and fears ne'er cumb'ered be
Nor losses know, nor sorrows see.
What though my flesh shall there consume,
It is the bed Christ did perfume,
And when a few years shall be gone,
This mortal shall be clothed upon.
A corrupt carcass down it lies,
A glorious body it shall rise.
In weakness and dishonour sown,
In power 'tis raised by Christ alone.
Then soul and body shall unite
And of their Maker have the sight.
Such lasting joys shall there behold
As ear ne'er heard nor tongue e'er told.
Lord make me ready for that day,
Then come, dear Bridegroom, come away!