

Homage to Mistress Bradstreet
Related Poem Content Details

BY [JOHN BERRYMAN](#)

[1]

The Governor your husband
lived so long

moved you not, restless,
waiting for him? Still,

you were a patient woman.—

I seem to see you pause here
still:

Sylvester, Quarles, in
moments odd you pored

before a fire at, bright eyes on
the Lord,

all the children still.

'Simon ...' Simon will listen
while you read a Song.

[2]

Outside the New World
winters in grand dark

white air lashing high thro'
the virgin stands

foxes down foxholes sigh,

surely the English heart
quails, stunned.

I doubt if Simon than this
blast, that sea,

spares from his rigour for
your poetry

more. We are on each other's
hands

who care. Both of our worlds
unhanded us. Lie stark,

[3]

thy eyes look to me mild. Out
of maize & air

your body's made, and
moves. I summon, see,

from the centuries it.

I think you won't stay. How
do we

linger, diminished, in our
lovers' air,

implausibly visible, to whom,
a year,

years, over interims; or not;

to a long stranger; or not;
shimmer & disappear.

[4]

Jaw-ript, rot with its wisdom,
rending then;

then not. When the mouth
dies, who misses you?

Your master never died,

Simon ah thirty years past
you—

Pockmarkt & westward
staring on a haggard deck

it seems I find you, young. I
come to check,

I come to stay with you,

and the Governor, & Father,
& Simon, & the huddled men.

[5]

By the week we landed we
were, most, used up.

Strange ships across us, after
a fortnight's winds

unfavouring, frightened us;

bone-sad cold, sleet, scurvy;
so were ill

many as one day we could
have no sermons;

broils, quelled; a fatherless
child unkennelled; vermin

crowding & waiting; waiting.

And the day itself he leapt
ashore young Henry
Winthrop

[6]

(delivered from the waves;
because he found

off their wigwams, sharp-
eyed, a lone canoe

across a tidal river,

that water glittered fair &
blue

& narrow, none of the other
men could swim

and the plantation's prime
theft up to him,

shouldered on a glad day

hard on the glorious feasting
of thanksgiving) drowned.

[7]

How long with nothing in the
ruinous heat,

clams & acorns stomaching,
distinction perishing,

at which my heart rose,

with brackish water, we
would sing.

When whispers knew the
Governor's last bread

was browning in his oven, we
were discourag'd.

The Lady Arbella dying—

dyings—at which my heart
rose, but I did submit.

[8]

That beyond the Atlantic
wound our woes enlarge

is hard, hard that starvation
burnishes our fear,

but I do gloss for You.

Strangers & pilgrims fare we
here,

declaring we seek a City.
Shall we be deceived?

I know whom I have trusted,
& whom I have believed,

and that he is able to

keep that I have committed
to his charge.

[9]

Winter than summer worse,
that first, like a file

on a quick, or the poison suck
of a thrilled tooth;

and still we may unpack.

Wolves & storms among,
uncouth

board-pieces, boxes, barrels
vanish, grow

houses, rise. Motes that hop
in sunlight slow

indoors, and I am Ruth

away: open my mouth, my
eyes wet: I would smile:

flaps like a shooting soul

mistress neither of fiery nor
velvet verse, on your knees

might in such weather
Heaven send.

[10]

Succumbing half, in spirit, to
a salmon sash

[13]

vellum I palm, and dream.
Their forest dies

I prod the nerveless novel
succotash—

hopeful & shamefast, chaste,
laborious, odd,

to greensward, privets, elms
& towers, whence

I must be disciplined,

whom the sea tore. —The
damned roar with loss,

a nightingale is throbbing.

in arms, against that one, and
our dissidents, and myself.

so they hug & are mean

Women sleep sound. I was
happy once . .

with themselves, and I
cannot be thus.

(Something keeps on not
happening; I shrink?)

[12]

Why then do I repine, sick,
bad, to long

These minutes all their
passions & powers sink

Versing, I shroud among the
dynasties;

after what must not be? I lie
wrong

and I am not one chance

quaternion on quaternion,
tireless I phrase

once more. For at fourteen

for an unknown cry or a
flicker of unknown eyes.

anything past, dead, far,

I found my heart more carnal
and sitting loose from God,

sacred, for a barbarous place.

[11]

—To please your wintry
father? all this bald

[14]

Chapped souls ours, by the
day Spring's strong winds
swelled,

abstract didactic rime I read
appalled

vanity & the follies of youth
took hold of me;

Jack's pulpits arched, more
glad. The shawl I pinned

harassed for your fame

then the pox blasted, when
the Lord returned.

That year for my sorry face

at twenty-one. Ambition
mines, atrocious, in.

God grudged his aid.

so-much-older Simon
burned,

All things else soil like a shirt.

so Father smiled, with love.
Their will be done.

[16]

Simon is much away. My
executive stales.

He to me ill lingeringly,
learning to shun

Food endless, people few, all
to be done.

The town came through for
the cartway by the pales,

a bliss, a lightning blood

As pippins roast, the question
of the wolves

but my patience is short.

vouchsafed, what did seem
life. I kissed his Mystery.

turns & turns.

I revolt from, I am like, these
savage foresters

Fangs of a wolf will keep, the
neck

[15]

round of a child, that child
brave. I remember who

[18]

Drydust in God's eye the
aquavivid skin

in meeting smiled & was
punisht, and I know who

whose passionless dicker in
the shade, whose glance

of Simon snoring lit with
fountaining dawn

whispered & was stockt.

impassive & scant, belie their
murderous cries

when my eyes unlid, sad.

We lead a thoughtful life. But
Boston's cage we shun.

when quarry seems to show.

John Cotton shines on
Boston's sin—

Again I must have been
wrong, twice.

I am drawn, in pieties that
seem

[17]

Unwell in a new way. Can
that begin?

the weary drizzle of an
unremembered dream.

The winters close, Springs
open, no child stirs

God brandishes. O love, O I
love. Kin,

Women have gone mad

under my withering heart, O
seasoned heart

gather. My world is strange

and merciful, ingrown
months, blessing a swelling
trance.

[19]

So squeezed, wince you I
scream? I love you & hate

off with you. Ages! *Useless.*
Below my waist

he has me in Hell's vise.

Stalling. He let go. Come
back: brace

me somewhere. No. No. Yes!
everything down

hardens I press with horrible
joy down

my back cracks like a wrist

shame I am voiding oh
behind it is too late

[20]

hide me forever I work thrust
I must free

now I all muscles & bones
concentrate

what is living from dying?

Simon I must leave you so
untidy

Monster you are killing me
Be sure

I'll have you later Women do
endure

I can *can* no longer

and it passes the wretched
trap whelming and I am me

[21]

drencht & powerful, I did it
with my body!

One proud tug greens
heaven. Marvellous,

unforbidding Majesty.

Swell, imperious bells. I fly.

Mountainous, woman not
breaks and will bend:

sways God nearby: anguish
comes to an end.

Blossomed Sarah, and I

blossom. Is that thing alive? I
hear a famisht howl.

[22]

Beloved household, I am
Simon's wife,

and the mother of Samuel—
whom greedy yet I miss

out of his kicking place.

More in some ways I feel at a
loss,

freer. Cantabanks &
mummers, nears

longing for you. Our
chopping scores my ears,

our costume bores my eyes.

St. George to the good sword,
rise! chop-logic's rife

[23]

& fever & Satan & Satan's
ancient fere.

Pioneering is not feeling well,

not Indians, beasts.

should she? many creep out
at a broken wall—

and if, o my love, my heart is
breaking, please

Not all their riddling can
forestall

affirming the Holy Ghost

neglect my cries and I will
spare you. Deep

one leaving. Sam, your uncle
has had to

dwells in one justified.
Factioning passion blinds

in Time's grave, Love's, you
lie still.

go from us to live with God.
'Then Aunt went too?'

Lie still. —Now? That happy
shape

Dear, she does wait still.

[25]

my forehead had under my
most long, rare,

Stricken: 'Oh. Then he takes
us one by one.' My
dear.

all to her good, all
can she be exiled?

ravendark, hidden, soft
bodiless hair

Bitter sister, victim! I miss
you.

you award me still.

[24]

—I miss you, Anne,

You must not love me, but I
do not bid you cease.

Forswearing it otherwise,
they starch their minds.

day or night weak as a child,

tender & empty, doomed,
quick to no tryst.

Folkmoths, & blether,
blether. John Cotton rakes

[27]

—I hear you. Be kind, you
who leaguer

Veiled my eyes, attending.
How can it be I?

to the synod of Cambridge.

my image in the mist.

Down from my body my legs
flow,

Moist, with parted lips, I
listen, wicked.

—Be kind you, to one
unchained eager far & wild

out from it arms wave, on it
my head shakes.

I shake in the morning &
retch.

Now Mistress Hutchinson
rings forth a call—

[26]

Brood I do on myself naked.

A fading world I dust, with
fingers new.

[29]

so shorn ought such caresses
to us be

—I have earned the right to
be alone with you.

faintings black, rigour,
chilling, brown

who, deserving nothing, flush
and flee

—What right can that be?

parching, back, brain
burning, the grey pocks

the darkness of that light,

Convulsing, if you love,
enough, like a sweet lie.

itch, a manic stench

a lurching frozen from a
warm dream. Talk to me.

of pustules snapping, pain
floods the palm,

[28]

sleepless, or a red shaft with
a dreadful start

[31]

Not that, I know, you can.
This cratered skin,

rides at the chapel, like a
slipping heart.

—It is Spring's New England.
Pussy willows wedge

like the crabs & shells of my
Palissy ewer, touch!

My soul strains in one qualm

up in the wet. Milky
crestings, fringed

Oh, you do, you do?

ah but *this* is not to save me
but to throw me down.

yellow, in heaven, eyed

Falls on me what I like a
witch,

by the melting hand-in-hand
or mere

for lawless holds,
annihilations of law

[30]

desirers single, heavy-footed,
rapt,

which Time and he and man
abhor, foresaw:

And out of this I lull. It
lessens. Kiss me.

make surge poor human
hearts. Venus is trapt—

sharper than what my Friend

That once. As sings out up in
sparkling dark

the hefty pike shifts, sheer—

brought me for my revolt
when I moved smooth & thin,

a trail of a star & dies,

in Orion blazing. Warblings,
odours, nudge to an edge—

while the breath flutters,
sounding, mark,

[32]

—Ravishing, ha, what
crouches outside ought,

flamboyant, ill, angelic.
Often, now,

I am afraid of you.

I am a sobersides; I know.

I *want* to take you for my
lover. —Do.

—I hear a madness. Harmless
I to you

am not, not I? —No.

—I cannot but be. Sing a
concord of our thought.

[33]

—Wan dolls in indigo on
gold: refrain

my western lust. I am
drowning in this past.

I lose sight of you

who mistress me from air.
Unbraced

in delirium of the grand
depths, giving away

haunters what kept me, I
breathe solid spray.

—I am losing you!

Straiten me on. —I suffered
living like a stain:

[34]

I trundle the bodies, on the
iron bars,

over that fire backward &
forth; they burn;

bits fall. I wonder if

I killed them. Women serve
my turn.

—Dreams! You are good. —
No. —Dense with hardihood

the wicked are dislodged, and
lodged the good.

In green space we are safe.

God awaits us (but I
am yielding) who Hell
wars.

[35]

—I cannot feel myself God
waits. He flies

nearer a kindly world; or he
is flown.

One Saturday's rescue

won't show. Man is entirely
alone

may be. I am a man of griefs
& fits

trying to be my friend. And
the brown smock splits,

down the pale flesh a gash

broadens and Time holds up
your heart against my eyes.

[36]

—Hard and divided heaven!
creases me. Shame

is failing. My breath is
scented, and I throw

hostile glances towards God.

Crumpling plunge of a pestle,
bray:

sin cross & opposite, wherein
I survive

[38]

and though the crop hopes,
Jane is so slipshod

nightmares of Eden. Reaches
foul & live

I see the cruel spread Wings
black with saints!

I cry. Evil dissolves, & love,
like foam;

he for me, this soul

Silky my breasts not his,
mine, mine, to withhold

that love. Prattle of children
powers me home,

to crunch, a minute tangle of
eternal flame.

or tender, tender.

my heart claps like the swan's

I am sifting, nervous, and
bold.

under a frenzy of *who* love
me & who shine.

[37]

The light is changing.
Surrender this loveliness

I fear Hell's hammer-wind.
But fear does wane.

you cannot make me do. *But*
I will. Yes.

[40]

Death's blossoms grain my
hair; I cannot live.

What horror, down stormy
air,

As a canoe slides by on one
strong stroke

A black joy clashes

warps towards me? My
threatening promise faints—

hope his help not I, who do
hardly bear

joy, in twilight. The Devil
said

his gift still. But whisper

'I will deal toward her softly,
and her enchanting cries

[39]

I am not utterly. I pare

will fool the horns of Adam.'
Father of lies,

torture me, Father, lest not I
be thine!

an apple for my pipsqueak
Mercy and

a male great pestle smashes

Tribunal terrible & pure, my
God,

she runs & all need naked
apples, fanned

small women swarming
towards the mortar's rim in
vain.

mercy for him and me.

their tinier envies.

Faces half-fanged, Christ
drives abroad,

Vomitings, trots, rashes. Can
be hope a cloak?

You'll get a bigger one there,
& bite.

my baby John breaks out. O
far from where he bred!

[41]

How they loft, how their sizes
delight and grate.

for the man with cropt ears
glares. My fingers tighten

The proportioned, spiritless
poems accumulate.

[44]

my skirt. I pass. Alas! I pity
all.

And they publish them

Bone of moaning: sung
Where he has gone

Shy, shy, with my, Dorothy.

away in brutish London, for a
hollow crown.

a thousand summers by
truth-hallowed souls;

Moonrise, and frightening
hoots. 'Mother,

be still. Agh, he is gone!

how *long* will I be dead?' Our
friend the owl

[43]

Where? I know. Beyond the
shoal.

vanishes, darling, but your
homing soul

Father is not himself. He
keeps his bed,

Still-all a Christian daughter
grinds her teeth

retires on Heaven, Mercy:

and threw a saffron scum
Thursday. God-forsaken
words

a little. This our land has
ghosted with

not we one instant die, only
our dark does lighten.

escaped him raving. Save,

our dead: I am at home.

Lord, thy servant zealous &
just.

Finish, Lord, in me this work
thou hast begun.

[42]

Sam he saw back from
Harvard. He did scold

When by me in the dusk my
child sits down

his secting enemies. His
stomach is cold

[45]

I am myself. Simon, if it's
that loose,

And they tower, whom the
pear-tree lured

while we drip, while

let me wiggle it out.

to let them fall, fierce
mornings they reclined

down the brook-bank to the
east

fishing for shiners with a
crookt pin,

wading, dams massing, well,
and Sam's to be

a doctor in Boston. After the
divisive sea,

and death's first feast,

and the galled effort on the
wilderness endured,

[46]

Arminians, and the King bore
against us;

of an 'inward light' we hear
with horror.

Whose fan is in his hand

and he will thoroughly purge
his floor,

come towards me. I have
what licks the joints

and bites the heart, which
winter more appoints.

Iller I, oftener.

Hard at the outset; in the
ending thus hard, thus?

[47]

Sacred & unutterable Mind

flashing thorough the
universe one thought,

I do wait without peace.

In the article of death I
budge.

Eat my sore breath, Black
Angel. Let me die.

Body a-drain, when will you
be dry

and countenance my speed

to Heaven's springs? lest
stricter writhings have me
declined.

[48]

'What are those pictures in
the air at night,

Mother?' Mercy did ask.
Space charged with faces

day & night! I place

a goatskin's fetor, and sweat:
fold me

in savoury arms. Something
is shaking, wrong.

He smells the musket and
lifts it. It is long.

It points at my heart.

Missed he must have. In the
gross storm of sunlight

[49]

I sniff a fire burning without
outlet,

consuming acrid its own
smoke. It's me.

Ruined laughter sounds

outside. Ah but I waken, free.

And so I am about again. I
hagged

a fury at the short maid,
whom tongues tagged,

and I am sorry. Once

less I was anxious when more
passioned to upset

I lie, & endure, & wonder.

It will be a glorious arm.

A haze slips sometimes over
my dreams

Docile I watch. My wreckt
chest hurts when Simon
pales.

[50]

and holiness on horses' bells
shall stand.

the mansion & the garden &
the beauty of God.

Wandering pacemaker,
unsteady friend,

[53]

Insectile unreflective
busyness

in a redskin calm I wait:

In the yellowing days your
faces wholly fail,

blunts & does amend.

beat when you will our end.
Sinkings & droopings
drowse.

at Fall's onset. Solemn voices
fade.

Hangnails, piles, fibs, life's
also.

I feel no coverlet.

But we are that from which
draws back a thumb.

[52]

Light notes leap, a beckon,
swaying

The seasons stream and,
somehow, I am become

They say thro' the fading
winter Dorothy fails,

the tilted, sickening ear
within. I'll—I'll—

an old woman. It's so:

my second, who than I bore
one more, nine;

I am closed & coming.
Somewhere! I defile

I look. I bear to look. Strokes
once more his rod.

and I see her inearthed. I
linger.

wide as a cloud, in a cloud,

Seaborn she wed knelt before
Simon;

unfit, desirous, glad—even
the singings veil—

[51]

My window gives on the
graves, in our great new
house

Simon I, and linger. Black-
yellow seething, vast

[54]

(how many burned?)
upstairs, among the elms.

it lies fróm me, mine: all they
look aghast.

—You are not ready? You áre
ready. Pass,

as shadow gathers shadow in
the welling night.

dark air fills, I am a closet of
secrets dying,

O all your ages at the mercy
of my loves

Fireflies of childhood torch

races murder, foxholes hold
men,

together lie at once, forever
or

you down. We commit our
sister down.

reactor piles wage slow upon
the wet brain rime.

so long as I happen.

One candle mourn by, which
a lover gave,

In the rain of pain &
departure, still

the use's edge and order of
her grave.

[56]

Love has no body and
presides the sun,

Quiet? Moisture shoots.

I must pretend to leave you.
Only you draw off

and elf's from silence melody.
I run.

Hungry throngs collect. They
sword into the carcass.

a benevolent phantom. I say
you seem to me

Hover, utter, still,

drowned towns off England,

a sourcing whom my
lost candle like the firefly
loves.

[55]

featureless as those myriads

Headstones stagger under
great draughts of time

who what bequeathed save
fire-ash, fossils, burlled

after heads pass out, and
their world must reel

in the open river-drifts of the
Old World?

speechless, blind in the end

Simon lived on for years.

about its chilling star: thrift
tuft,

I renounce not even ragged
glances, small teeth, nothing,

whin cushion—nothing.
Already with the wounded
flying

[57]