

Anne Bradstreet (c. 1612-1672)
THE PROLOGUE

1

To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings,
Of cities founded, commonwealths begun,
For my mean' pen are too superior things:
Or how they all, or each their dates have run
Let poets and historians set these forth,
My obscure lines shall not so dim their worth.

5

2

But when my wond'ring eyes and envious heart
Great Bartas' sugared lines² do but read o'er,
Fool I do grudge the Muses³ did not part
'Twixt him and me that overfluent store;
A Bartas can do what a Bartas will
But simple I according to my skill.

10

3

From schoolboy's tongue no rhet'ric we expect,
Nor yet a sweet consort⁴ from broken strings,
Nor perfect beauty where's a main defect:
My foolish, broken, blemished Muse so sings,
And this to mend, alas, no art is able,
'Cause nature made it so irreparable.

15

4

Nor can I, like that fluent sweet tongued Greek,⁵
Who lisped at first, in future times speak plain.
By art he gladly found what he did seek,
A full requital of his striving pain.

20

1. mean: Humble or lowly.

2. Great Bartas' sugared lines: Guillaume du Bartas (1544-1590), French poet whose epic poems based on the Bible were translated into ornate heroic couplets by the English poet Joshua Sylvester (1563-1618) as *The Divine Weeks of the World's Birth* (1604).

3. Muses: The nine goddesses who preside over the arts and sciences in Greek mythology.

4. consort: Harmony.

5. sweet tongued Greek: Demosthenes, an Athenian orator known for putting stones in his mouth in order to practice precise enunciation.

