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101 Great American Poems

The American Poetry
& Literacy Project

ANNE BRADSTREET (1612?–1672)

An early colonist in Massachusetts, Bradstreet was also America's first published poet, the wife and daughter of governors of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and a mother of eight.

To My Dear and Loving Husband

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved 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 ought 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.

PHILLIS WHEATLEY (1753?–1784)

Wheatley was a literary phenomenon: a young female slave (later freed) who wrote poetry—styled after Milton and Pope—in an adopted tongue. Her poems brought her fame both in America and abroad.

From **To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth**

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of *Freedom* sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate

Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat:
 What pangs excruciating must molest,
 What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
 Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
 That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:
 Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
 Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT (1794–1878)

An editor, translator, and abolitionist, Bryant was so revered in his time that flags in New York were lowered to half-mast at his death. "Thanatopsis" ("Meditation on Death") was first published when the poet was seventeen.

Thanatopsis

To him who in the love of Nature holds
 Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
 A various language; for his gayer hours
 She has a voice of gladness, and a smile
 And eloquence of beauty, and she glides
 Into his darker musings, with a mild
 And gentle sympathy, that steals away
 Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts
 Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
 Over thy spirit, and sad images
 Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall,
 And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,
 Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart;—
 Go forth, under the open sky, and list
 To Nature's teachings, while from all around—
 Earth and her waters, and the depths of air,—
 Comes a still voice—Yet a few days, and thee
 The all-beholding sun shall see no more
 In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,
 Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears,
 Nor in the embrace of ocean shall exist
 Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim
 Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again;
 And, lost each human trace, surrendering up
 Thine individual being, shalt thou go

To mix forever with the elements,
To be a brother to the insensible rock
And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak
Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould.
Yet not to thy eternal resting place
Shalt thou retire alone — nor couldst thou wish
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
With patriarchs of the infant world — with kings,
The powerful of the earth — the wise, the good,
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
All in one mighty sepulchre. — The hills
Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun, — the vales
Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods — rivers that move
In majesty, and the complaining brooks
That make the meadows green; and poured round all,
Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste, —
Are but the solemn decorations all
Of the great tomb of man. The golden sun,
The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,
Are shining on the sad abodes of death,
Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread
The globe are but a handful to the tribes
That slumber in its bosom. — Take the wings
Of morning — and the Barcan desert pierce,
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,
Save his own dashings — yet — the dead are there,
And millions in those solitudes, since first
The flight of years began, have laid them down
In their last sleep — the dead reign there alone.
So shalt thou rest — and what if thou shalt fall
Unheeded by the living — and no friend
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care
Plod on, and each one as before will chase
His favorite phantom; yet all these shall leave
Their mirth and their employments, and shall come,
And make their bed with thee. As the long train

101 Great American Poems

The American Poetry & Literacy Project

Focusing on popular verse from the 19th and 20th centuries, this treasury of great American poems invites poetry lovers to savor a taste of the nation's rich poetic legacy. Selected for both popularity and literary quality, 101 time-honored poems in this entertaining volume include:

Edgar Allan Poe	.....	The Raven
Walt Whitman	.....	I Hear America Singing
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr	.....	Old Ironsides
William Cullen Bryant	.....	Thanatopsis
Robert Frost	.....	The Road Not Taken
Langston Hughes	.....	Still Here
Edwin Arlington Robinson	.....	Miniver Cheevy
Emily Dickinson	.....	I'm nobody! Who are you?

... as well as works by Herman Melville, Vachel Lindsay, Emma Lazarus, Ernest Lawrence Thayer, Stephen Crane, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and other notables.

Chosen by the American Poetry & Literacy Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting poetry and literacy, these much-loved and highly readable poems promise students and general readers alike hours of reading pleasure.

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