Anne Bradstreet  
“Prologue”  

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, 
My obscure lines shall not dim their worth. 

But when my wandering eyes and envious heart 
Great Bartas' sugared lines to but read o'er, Fool I 
Do grudge the Muses 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. 

From schoolboys’ tongues no rhet’rick we expect 
Nor yet a sweet consort 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. 

Nor can I, like that fluent sweet-tongued Greek 
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. 
Art can do much, but this maxim’s more sure: 
A weak or wounded brain admits no cure. 

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 stolen, or else it was by chance. 

But sure the antique Greeks were far more mild, 
Else of our sex why feigned they those nine, 
And poesy made Calliope’s own child? 
So, ‘mongst the rest they placed the arts divine. 
But this weak knot they will soon full untie - 
The Greeks did naught but play the fool and lie. 

Let Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are, 
Men have precedence 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 acknowledgment of ours. 

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 glistening gold but more to shine.

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1 Guilliaume de Bartas, French poet who greatly inspired Bradstreet.  
2 Supposedly, the Greek orator Demosthenes overcame a speech impediment to become a prolific speaker.  
3 Vulnerable.  
4 Muse of heroic poetry.  
5 Bay wreaths were given to great poets. Bay is also referred to as Laurel.