

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Anne Barbara Ridler**

**- poems -**

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## **Anne Barbara Ridler (30 July 1912 – 15 October 2001)**

Anne Barbara Ridler OBE (née Bradby) was a British poet, and Faber and Faber editor, selecting the Faber A Little Book of Modern Verse with T. S. Eliot (1941). Her Collected Poems (Carcanet Press) were published in 1994. She turned to libretto work and verse plays; it was later in life that she earned official recognition, receiving an OBE in 2001.

### Family

Ridler was the daughter of HC Bradby, a housemaster at Rugby School, where she was born. Her mother, Violet Bradby, born Milford, wrote popular children's stories and was the sister of Humphrey S. Milford, Publisher to the University of Oxford. One of her great-grandfathers was Charles Richard Sumner, Bishop of Winchester, a brother of John Bird Sumner, Archbishop of Canterbury. Her uncle, GF Bradby, was the author of *The Lanchester Tradition* (1919), while her aunt Barbara Bradby was the joint author of *The Village Labourer* (1911). Her cousins included the composer Robin Milford and the Rev. Dick Milford, vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford.

### Life

Anne Bradby was educated at Downe House School and later published a biography of her headmistress, Olive Willis. After six months in Florence and Rome, she took a diploma in journalism at King's College London.

In 1938, she married Vivian Ridler, the future Printer to Oxford University (1958–78), but then the manager of the Bunhill Press, London, and they had two daughters and two sons.

She edited *Charles Williams: The Image of the City and other Essays* (1958) and *Charles Williams: Selected Writings* (1961). A Christian and friend and correspondent of C. S. Lewis, she was on the edge of the Inklings group. Also closely associated with TS Eliot, she wrote a short but powerful poem, "I Who am Here Dissembled", full of allusions to images in Eliot's own poems, for the anthology *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium* in honour of his sixtieth birthday.

For a short time in the 1940s, Ridler was also a successful Verse Dramatist with such plays as *Cain* (1943) and *Shadow Factory: A Nativity Play* (1945).

### Eserleri:

Shakespeare Criticism 1919-1935 (editor), Oxford University Press 1936 - out of print

Poems, Oxford University Press, 1939 - out of print  
A Dream Observed and Other Poems, Poetry London 1941 - out of print  
A Little Book of Modern Verse (editor), Faber and Faber 1941 - out of print  
The Faber Book of Modern Verse (editor), Faber and Faber 1941-1951 - out of print  
The Nine Bright Shiners, Faber and Faber 1943 - out of print  
The Golden Bird and Other Poems, Faber and Faber 1951 - out of print  
A Matter of Life and Death, Faber and Faber 1959 - out of print  
Shakespeare Criticism 1935-1960 (editor), Oxford University Press 1963 - out of print  
Thomas Traherne: Poems, Centuries and Three Thanksgivings (editor), Faber and Faber 1966 - out of print  
Some Time After and Other Poems, Faber and Faber 1972 - out of print  
Dies Natalis, Faber and Faber 1980 - out of print  
New and Selected Poems, Faber and Faber 1988  
Profitable Wonders: Aspects of Thomas Traherne (prose), Morehouse Pub Co 1989  
A Measure of English Poetry, Perpetua Press 1991  
Collected Poems, Carcanet 1997

## **A Dream Observed**

Out from his bed the breaking seas  
By waking eyes unseen  
Now fall, aquatic creatures whirl  
And he whirls through the ambient green.

The sea lion and the scolopendra  
Lolling in sleep he sees  
Strange in their ways, and the swift changes  
Their landscape makes, from shells to trees.

Down English lanes a camel walks,  
Or untrammelled flies.  
But I, wakeful and watching, see  
How chilly out of the clothes he lies.

Easy an act to cover him warm:  
Such a lover's small success  
Like the heaped mind so humble in sleep  
But points our actual powerlessness.

Monsters in dreams he sees, yet lies  
At peace in his curling bed;  
Blessings that outdo all distress  
Implicit in his sleeping head.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## **A Letter**

Lying in bed this morning, just a year  
Since our first days, I was trying to assess --  
Against my natural caution -- by desire  
And how the fact outdid it, my happiness:  
And finding the awkwardness of keeping clear  
Numberless flamingo thoughts and memories,  
My dear and dearest husband, in this kind  
Of rambling letter, I'll disburse my mind.  
Technical problems have always given me trouble:  
A child stiff at the fiddle, my ear had praise  
And my intention only; so, as was natural,  
Coming to verse, I hid my lack of ease  
By writing only as I thought myself able,  
Escaped the crash of the bold by salt originalities.  
This is one reason for writing far from one's heart;  
A better is, that one fears it may be hurt.  
By an inadequate style one fears to cheapen  
Glory, and that it may be blurred if seen  
Through the eye's used centre, not the new margin.  
It is the hardest thing with love to burn  
And write it down, for what was the real passion  
Left to its own words will seem trivial and thin.  
We can in making love look face to face:  
In poetry, crooked, and with no embrace.  
Tolstoy's hero found in his newborn child  
Only another aching, vulnerable part;

And it is true our first joy hundredfold  
Increased our dangers, pricking in every street  
In accidents and wars: yet this is healed  
Not by reason, but with an endurance of delight  
Since our marriage, which, once thoroughly known,  
Is known for good, though in time it were gone.  
You, hopeful baby with the erring toes,  
Grew, it seems to me, to a natural pleasure  
In the elegant strict machine, from the abstruse  
Science of printing to the rich red and azure  
It plays on hoardings, rusty industrial noise,  
All these could add to your inherited treasure:  
A poise which many wish for, writing the machine  
Poems of laboured praise, but few attain.  
And loitered up your childhood to my arms.  
I would hold you there for ever, and know  
Certainly now, that though the vacuum looms  
Quotidian dullness, in these beams don't die  
They're wrong who say that happiness never comes  
On earth, that was spread here its crystal sea.  
And since you, loiterer, did compose this wonder,  
Be with me still, and may God hold his thunder.  
Anne Barbara Ridler

## **At Parting**

Since we through war awhile must part  
Sweetheart, and learn to lose  
Daily use  
Of all that satisfied our heart:  
Lay up those secrets and those powers  
Wherewith you pleased and cherished me these two years:

Now we must draw, as plants would,  
On tubers stored in a better season,  
Our honey and heaven;  
Only our love can store such food.  
Is this to make a god of absence?  
A new-born monster to steal our sustenance?

We cannot quite cast out lack and pain.  
Let him remain-what he may devour  
We can well spare:  
He never can tap this, the true vein.  
I have no words to tell you what you were,  
But when you are sad, think, Heaven could give no more.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## **Autumn Day**

The raging colour of this cold Friday  
Eats up our patience like a fire,  
Consumes our willingness to endure,  
Here the crumpled maple, a gold fabric,  
The beech by beams empurpled, the holy sycamore,  
Berries red-hot, the rose's core--  
The sun emboldens to burn in porphyry and amber.

Pick up the remnants of our resignation  
Where we left them, and bring our loving passion,  
Before the mist from the dark sea at our feet  
Where mushrooms cling like limpets in the grass,  
Quenching our fierceness, leaves us in a worse case.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## **Before Sleep**

Now that you lie  
In London afar,  
And may sleep longer  
Though lonelier,  
For I shall not wake you  
With a nightmare,  
Heaven plant such peace in us  
As if no parting stretched between us.

The world revolves  
And is evil;  
God's image is  
Wormeaten by the devil;  
May the good angel  
Have no rival  
By our beds, and we lie curled  
At the sound unmoving centre of the world.

In our good nights  
When we were together,  
We made, in that stillness  
Where we loved each other,  
A new being, of both  
Yet above either:  
So, when I cannot share your sleep,  
Into this being, half yours, I creep.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## **Bunhill's Fields**

Under cool trees the City tombs  
extend, and nearer lie  
stones above Blake's and Bunyan's bones  
to Vivian's working days than I.

Since he is gentle, wild and good  
as you were, peaceable Shades,  
there may he go within your care  
as in my heart his love resides.

Such a care as held unharmed  
the tree within the fire;  
spread wings like those that led  
Tobias in the dangerous shire.

And if I fear his death too much,  
let me not learn more faith  
by sad trial of what I dread,  
nor grieve him by my own death.

For our faith is one which may  
convert but not console:  
we shall not, except by our own will,  
part for ever in the gape of hell.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## Collected Poems (1994)

Lying in bed this morning, just a year  
Since our first days, I was trying to assess -  
Against my natural caution - by desire  
And how the fact outdid it, my happiness:  
And finding the awkwardness of keeping clear  
Numberless flamingo thoughts and memories,  
My dear and dearest husband, in this kind  
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## Edlesborough

Beyond the Chiltern coast, this church:  
A lighthouse in dry seas of standing corn.  
Bees hive in the tower; the outer stone  
Pared and frittered in sunlight, flakes with the years:  
Clunch crumbles, but silence, exaltation, endures.

The brass-robed Rector stretched on his tomb endures.  
Within, we go upon the dragon and the bat,  
Walk above the world, without,  
Uplifted among grey lavender, beech and sycamore,  
Shades of the sea-born chalk, indelible and austere.

If we see history from this hill  
It is upon its own conditions, here  
Each season swirls and eddies the circle of a year  
Round the spectator church, and human eyes  
Take, on its plinth, a long focus of centuries.

We seem like gods on any hill.  
From here all toil resembles rest, and yet  
Unlike a god we feel ourselves shut out.  
Surely that farm in a carved blue curve of trees  
So still with all its creatures, holds the unattainable peace?

It is Time's camouflage deceives us.  
There it extends like space: whatever moves  
(A horse to drink, a reaper to stack the sheaves)  
Displays the movement in its whole succession,  
Not a change of terms, only a changed relation.

Deceit or truth? The dead possess the hill  
In battlements of Totternhoe or slate;  
The view is ours, the range and ache of sight.  
If Time serves: in a common space unrolls  
This Resurrection field, with sheaves in glory like risen souls.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## For A Child Expected

Lovers whose lifted hands are candles in winter,  
Whose gentle ways like streams in the easy summer,  
Lying together  
For secret setting of a child, love what they do,  
Thinking they make that candle immortal, those streams  
forever flow,  
And yet do better than they know.

So the first flutter of a baby felt in the womb,  
Its little signal and promise of riches to come,  
Is taken in its father's name;  
Its life is the body of his love, like his caress,  
First delicate and strange, that daily use  
Makes dearer and priceless.

Our baby was to be the living sign of our joy,  
Restore to each the other's lost infancy;  
To a painter's pillaging eye  
Poet's coiled hearing, add the heart we might earn  
By the help of love; all that our passion would yield  
We put to planning our child.

The world flowed in; whatever we liked we took:  
For its hair, the gold curls of the November oak  
We saw on our walk;  
Snowberries that make a Milky Way in the wood  
For its tender hands; calm screen of the frozen flood  
For our care of its childhood.

But the birth of a child is an uncontrollable glory;  
Cat's cradle of hopes will hold no living baby,  
Long though it lay quietly.  
And when our baby stirs and struggles to be born  
It compels humility: what we began  
Is now its own.

For as the sun that shines through glass  
So Jesus in His Mother was.  
Therefore every human creature,  
Since it shares in His nature,  
In candle gold passion or white  
Sharp star should show its own way of light.  
May no parental dread or dream  
Darken our darling's early beam:  
May she grow to her right powers  
Unperturbed by passion of ours.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## Free Fall

A long while, a long long while it seems:  
The bat-winged figure shaking his robe,  
The cameras purring.

It is Daedalus the tailor, up on the Eiffel Tower  
Ready to fly. The year is 1900;  
We watch it, now.

...Shakes at his bat-robe, first to the right,  
Then left, then right again, a twitch,  
A doubtful gesture.

'Cast thyself from the pinnacle, angels will bear thee up.'  
So great a height - the wings will surely beat  
And bear me up?

Shaking his robe. A mile of film we are wasting:  
Why doesn't he jump? In these long seconds  
What is he thinking?

That the plan was crazy, and the careful stitches  
Shaped him a shroud? Perhaps he is wondering  
How to withdraw.

To pretend a flaw in the work, a change in the wind;  
And imagines how it would be to face  
The jeering crowd,

Slink back to his trade and live, with nothing to live for.  
So still he hesitates, and shakes his shroud,  
Then, suddenly, jumps.

Not even a flap from the wings. The lens below  
Can barely follow the plummeting shape,  
So quick his fall,

Hollowing out his own grave.  
We are caught between dismay and laughter  
Watching it now -

Not in a myth, not a century back, but now.  
Ridiculous death. Yet as he stood on the tower,  
Shaking, shaking his robe,

He mimed what each man must in private try,  
Poised on the parapet of darkness -  
Each in that crowd, and you, reader, and I.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## Nothing is Lost

Nothing is lost.  
We are too sad to know that, or too blind;  
Only in visited moments do we understand:  
It is not that the dead return ---  
They are about us always, though unguessed.

This penciled Latin verse  
You dying wrote me, ten years past and more,  
Brings you as much alive to me as the self you wrote it for,  
Dear father, as I read your words  
With no word but Alas.

Lines in a letter, lines in a face  
Are the faithful currents of life: the boy has written  
His parents across his forehead, and as we burn  
Our bodies up each seven years,  
His own past self has left no plainer trace.

Nothing dies.  
The cells pass on their secrets, we betray them  
Unknowingly: in a freckle, in the way  
We walk, recall some ancestor,  
And Adam in the color of our eyes.

Yes, on the face of the new born,  
Before the soul has taken full possession,  
There pass, as over a screen, in succession  
The images of other beings:  
Face after face looks out, and then is gone.

Nothing is lost, for all in love survive.  
I lay my cheek against his sleeping limbs  
To feel if he is warm, and touch in him  
Those children whom no shawl could warm,  
No arms, no grief, no longing could revive.

Thus what we see, or know,  
Is only a tiny portion, at the best,  
Of the life in which we share; an iceberg's crest  
Our sunlit present, our partial sense,  
With deep supporting multitudes below.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## Poem For A Christmas Broadcast

Woman s Voice

Perhaps you find the angel most improbable?  
It spoke to men asleep, their minds ajar  
For once to admit the entrance of a stranger.  
Few have heard voices, but all have made a journey:  
The mind moves, desiring dedication,  
Desiring to lay its gifts, as a dog its bone,  
At the feet of the first creation. 'Take it or leave it'  
Says pride, 'You made it; You must bear the blame.'  
But secretly the heart 'O make it good.'  
'Either God acts in vain, or this is God.'

1st King

Melchior brings gold. O teach me to give,  
For this was infancy's first love:  
Its first possession; its adult passion  
O new creation  
Take my treasure and make me free.

2nd King

Caspar, incense: all that is strange,  
Oblique, projected beyond the range  
Of the First Person. Such mediation  
O new creation  
Take, that we dare the direct sight.

3rd, King

Death is a strong wish. Balthasar  
Brings his desire in a gift of myrrh ;  
Seeking perfection in pain and cessation  
O new creation  
Die for me, make me desire to live.

All Three

Mary, who nourished glory on human kindness  
By springs of power hidden from the mind,  
Here is our small self-knowledge, now  
Make it acceptable, or teach us how.

Mary

He will accept it, never fear,  
For his audacity is my despair.  
O do not give what he should not bear.  
His boldness is beyond belief,  
His threats, his lightnings, his short grief.  
Is it divine or mortal confidence?  
Mortal ignorance, godlike innocence.  
Brazen, he takes love as a right;  
He knows to demand is to give delight.  
Youngling, here we offer love  
What have we to offer but love?  
And what is our love? Greed and despair.

O do not take what you should not bear,  
Or tainted love by true convince:  
Let us not harm you, helpless Prince.  
Sin is the chance of mercy;  
Then even sin contrives your greater glory.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## **The Cranes**

We thought they were gulls at first,  
while they were distant-  
The two cranes flying out of a natural morning,  
They circled twice about our house and sank,  
Their long legs drooping, down over the wood.  
We saw their wings flash white,  
Frayed at the black tip,  
And heard their harsh cry, like a rusty screw.

Down in the next field, shy and angular,  
They darted their long necks in the grass for fish.  
They would not have us close, but shambled coyly,  
Ridiculous, caught on the ground. Yet our fields  
Under their feet became a fen: the sky  
That was blue July became watery November,  
And echoing with the cries of foreign birds.

Anne Barbara Ridler

## The Spring Equinox

Now is the pause between asleep and awake:  
Two seasons take  
A colour and quality each from each as yet.  
The new stage-set  
Spandril, column and fan of spring is raised against the  
winter backdrop  
Murrey and soft;  
Now aloft  
The sun swings on the equinoctial line.  
Few flowers yet shine:  
The hellebore hangs a clear green bell and opulent leaves  
above dark mould;  
The light is cold  
In arum leaves, and a primrose flickers  
Here and there; the first cool bird-song flickers in the thicket.  
Clouds arc pale as the pollen from willows;  
March fallows are white with lime like frost.

This is the pause between asleep and awake:  
The pause of contemplation and of peace,  
Before the earth must teem and the heart ache.  
This is the child's pause, before it sees  
That the choice of one way has denied the other ;  
Must choose the either, or both, of to care and not to care;  
Before the light or darkness shall discover  
Irreparable loss; before it must take  
Blame for the creature caught in the necessary snare:  
Receiving a profit, before it holds a snare.

Anne Barbara Ridler