

Classic Poetry Series

Zora Bernice May Cross
- poems -

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Zora Bernice May Cross(18 May 1890 – 22 January 1964)

Zora Bernice May Cross was an Australian poet, novelist and journalist.

She was born in Brisbane, and was educated at Ipswich Girls' Grammar School and then Sydney Teachers' College. She taught for three years and then worked as a journalist, for the Boomerang and then as a freelance writer.

After the failure of her first marriage she eventually lived in a de facto marriage with David McKee Wright. Zora's first book of poetry, *A Song of Mother Love*, was published in 1916. *Songs of Love and life*, a collection of love poetry thought at the time to be rather too frank, but which proved popular enough to appear in several editions, followed in 1917.

The 1920s saw the continuation of war poetry, both celebrating the exploits of the fighting men and lamenting the realities of war. Zora Cross's *Elegy on an Australian schoolboy*, a poem about her young brother who was killed in the war, is an example of the latter. She is best-known for her 1917 book, *Songs of love*.

She was known not only for her poems, including sonnet sequences, but for a private life scandalous by the standards of her time. She wrote about sex, childbirth and war, in terms also considered too explicit by contemporaries.

As Bernice May, she wrote a regular column in the 1930s for the *Australian Women's Mirror*. It comprised interviews with women writers.

Zora Cross died in the Blue Mountain region of New South Wales in 1964.

Books

Oh! Bury me in books when I am dead,
Fair quarto leaves of ivory and gold,
And silk octavos, bound in brown and red,
That tales of love and chivalry unfold.
Heap me in volumes of fine vellum wrought,
Creamed with the close content of silent speech;
Wrap me in sapphire tapestries of thought
From some old epic out of common reach.
I would my shroud were verse-embroidered too---
Your verse for preference—in starry stitch,
And powdered o'er with rhymes that poets woo,
Breathing dream-lyrics in moon-measures rich.
Night holds me with a horror of the grave
That knows not poetry, nor song, nor you;
Nor leaves of love that down the ages weave
Romance and fire in burnished cloths of blue.
Oh, bury me in books, and I'll not mind
The cold, slow worms that coil around my head;
Since my lone soul may turn the page and find
The lines you wrote to me, when I am dead.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Elegy On An Australian Schoolboy

I would not curse your England, wise as slow,
Just as unjust in deed.

I can believe that from her heart may flow
The truest human creed.

She sounded one high call of Liberty
That despots heard with dread;

I know not what high purpose to be free
Crowns yet her starry head.

Do I but raise a ghost? Is England dead?
Lies she in lands forlorn?

Shall Kentish orchards never hear the tread
Of eager life at morn?

Is she but memories of old men and sad
Since youth has left her side?

Has that vast glory that you dreamed she had
But perished crucified?

England! Though all her vaunted heroes rise
From Nile to Flanders red

Calling you from the long, red sunset skies
You shall remain still dead.

You shall not touch her woods and flowers again,
You shall not sail her Thames,

You shall not see in her soft April rain
The fairy diadems.

She cannot honour you. You do not feel
Her tears and pity deep.

Though all her multitudes in homage kneel,
That cannot break your sleep,

That cannot give you back the dew of earth
The light upon the sea,

The soft, sweet ripple of your child's first mirth—
Your immortality.

In every man there is a great, new world—
Perhaps a glorious race.

How can we tell the hero that war hurled

To death bore not Christ's face?
How can we tell what nobler nations lie
Now on the fields of France,
What unborn masters of creation cry
Through murdered, white romance?

I only know you, brother of my blood,
Have gone; and many a friend,
Trampled and broken in the Flanders mud,
Found Youth's most bitter end.
God! You are not yet one with the kind dust
Before new war-horns blow
And sleek-limbed statesmen in their halls break trust
To tell of other woe.

I speak as if you heard me, O my dear,
From England's far-off shore,
As if that land fills me with such fear
Held you not evermore.
I live too much to feel that death must be,
Though men make death to-day;
I will not set the blame on Deity
Of murder tunes they play.

And yet you have not uttered one poor word
While these harsh thoughts I weave.
Silent as God! No murmur have I heard;
'Tis I, not you, who grieve.
How should I move that vast eternity,
Enough loud my cries and wild?
No more am I regarded than the sea
Regards a brawling child.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Fortune

Dame Fortune's jade with a fanciful horn
Of silver ambitions she warns of the flame;
With pearls for the princes and tears night and morn
For poor little poets who fluttered for fame,
Who smile when she sings as she dances along;
"Come; woo me with courage and delicate song."
I followed her once, but she wearied me soon.
All careless was I of her roseate quest.
I built a dream house, while the stars were in tune,
And slipped into silence and exquisite rest.
But she, like her sex, when my passion seemed cold,
Ran hither and offered me all of her gold.
I went to the door, and I looked at her ware
Of agate and amber and cool crysolite;
I shook my wise head with a holiday air,
And bade her good-day in a daring delight
For I am a fool, and my fortune is made;
I care not a fig for a crown or a spade;
I dwell with the elves 'neath the odorous sky;
The dews of the dawn brush my gables with glee;
And moonlights and sunlights and lovers pass by
All humming this song as they peep upon me:
"Heigh-ho! For the fool who can pity all pelf,
And finds in his bliss that his fortune's himself."

Zora Bernice May Cross

Girl-Gladness

It's holiday time on the hollyhock hills,
And I wish you would come with me laddie-love, now,
The butterfly-bells, from the Folly-fool rills,
Will ring if you listen, and drop on your brow.
So, dear come along,
I've a kiss and a song,
And I know where the fairies are forging a gong
To ring up the elves to a festival fair
Of snippets of sunshine and apples of air.
O laddie, my laddie, quick, run out of school,
And away with a shout and a shake of the head;
I'll pick you a pearl from the pigeon-pink pool
Where cuddles and kisses are going to bed,
Away, come away To the lands of the fay,
For the afternoon tinkles your lassie-love's lay.
Play truant with Time, and while Age is asleep
I'll give you the heart of my girlhood to keep.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Liv

What have you more than I, who crave you so?
Have I not hands and feet and thoughts to tell?
All my sweet senses and fine dreams that swell
Rich with contentments that the star-winds blow?
Yet do I need you everywhere I go,
As if you held me in some stinging spell;
And nothing living but yourself could quell
The conscious longings that tumultuous flow.

I am myself; and yet I cannot move
Hand, foot or eye but I am drawn to you.
I want you all—dreams, kisses, thoughts and eyes.
Dearest, it seems, my very wants would prove
I am yourself, dreaming we measure two;
And lack myself, that which yourself supplies.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Lviii

Do not surcharge our souls with that vile blame
To which our bodies are subjected here;
Nor heap them with the horror of dull fear
Base-borrowed from a life of torpid shame.
But let them linger like a lovely flame
Above the clay to which they must cohere,
Lighting the earthly to the heavenly sphere
To meet the mystery from which they came.

As midnight drinks a message from the moon
And morning takes her orders from the sun,
So let our bodies to our souls submit
And live for ever in their still high-noon,
Where morn and midnight gather into one,
And only angels on their missions flit.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Lx

My mind and heart both love you utterly.
And so each thought of mine is doubly yours,
And all my will about your body pours
Scents of my blood and fires that flow from me.
Who has created me, so young, so free,
Eager to-day to close convention's doors,
To-morrow to return and sweep the floors
With my loose hair in blinding memory?

Dearest, you have, who gave my heart such love,
It sang the marriage of our mingling blood;
Sweeping us on in a supreme control,
To those vast stillnesses that move above;
And in the wonder of its mighty flood
My mind drew God from your eternal soul.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet X

And then came Science with her torch red-lit
And cosmic marvels round her glowing head—
The primal cell, the worm, the quadruped—
Striving to make each to the other fit.
Tongue-trumpeting her own unchallenged wit,
She offered me the woof of Wisdom's thread,
And Truth and Purity that hourly tread
The paths where sages in their wonder sit.

And still I smiled and kissed you with a sob.
My lips on yours, I heard, high up above
Love's feet ring laughter on the starry sod
And felt the echo through our bosoms throb.
Beloved, Science ends in our pure love
Which shares alone the secrets of our God.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xlii

My true mind makes as many loves of you
As my full heart contentedly can hold.
And when the one grows dull, the other cold,
Yet comes another swifter in to woo.
I could not rue such changing retinue
Nor chastise circumstance that keeps me bold.
I make you young or middle-aged or old
Just as it pleases my own whim to do.

And then to counterbalance what you give
Thus all unwittingly, I smile or frown,
Am thoughtful, mirthful, grave or sunny-eyed
To meet your mood and help you best to live.
In me, all women to your wish bow down.
In you, all men at my desire abide.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xliv

Love is the sepulchre of all my sin,
If it be sin to let the body sink
In that slow dying the sick senses drink
That ne'er have felt true Love's delight rush in.
Hot Vice may sear the bloom of Beauty's skin
Polluting Virtue with a painted wink,
But Love smiles lightly at such guilt, I think,
And cures corruption e'er her ills begin.

I cannot tell the wonder of desire
That flames my cheek when you are by my side.
Nor dare I speak the secret of that bliss
That sets the senses of my soul on fire.
Ah Love! all my sin vanished into pride
When I drank Heaven from your first pure kiss.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xlix

In me there is a vast and lonely place,
Where none, not even you, have walked in sight.
A wide, still vale of solitude and light,
Where Silence echoes into ebbing space.
And there I creep at times and hide my face,
While in myself I fathom wrong and right,
And all the timeless ages of the night
That sacred silence of my soul I pace.

And when from there I come to you, love-swift,
My mouth hot-edged with kisses fresh as wine,
Often I find your longings all asleep
And unresponsive from my grasp you drift.
Ah, Love, you, too, seek solitude like mine,
And soul from soul the secret seems to keep.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xv

Love, you have brought to me my perfect soul,
More sweet than earthly things, more precious rare,
Hiding its fragrance in my loosened hair
And folding up my body like a scroll.
O, lie with me all night, and let the roll
Of Rapture's waves wash over us, as, bare
Of anything save Love, we haply share
The joys of our first parents' chaste control.

My Love, my piece of Heaven God has spilled
Upon my outstretched hands, O, kiss me yet.
Here, lying close to you, I feel—I know,
My being, even now, is charged and filled
With light and bliss it never will forget
Though aeons over my cold corpse should flow.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xvii

Beloved, lest I should remember, I
Must swift forget the wonder of last night.
Hot memory would but blacken out my sight
And dull my senses till they seemed to die.
How could I live, remembering that sigh...
That breath...that sob...that all sublime delight?
Eternal joy is death, I think, and might
Not such sweet madness kill me, coming nigh?

I died with you that hour. Or, if not, merged
Myself in you, commingling all my life
Within your own, until I fled and fled
Into your blood; and my pure pulses surged,
Heaped with the wedded bliss of man and wife...
Dying, I lived...and living, I was dead.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xxi

If there should be a moon above the hill
To-night, dip down with me into the sea
Of our first passion, and, with naked glee,
Breathe its ripe wonder to our beings' fill.
O, as the moonbeams on the violets spill
Rivers of uncontrolled felicity,
We'll tune our bodies to a melody
And set our pulses to a poet's thrill.

Love...Love...Your hot lips tremble on my eyes.
You droop. You swoon in silence over me...
Heaven, out of yours, my very eyelids sup.
The stars are running out of Paradise...
I languish, perfumed with expectancy...
Beloved, kiss me, for the moon is up.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xxix

Dearest, there is no part of us, but air
And earth are counterparts. Your fragrant eyes
Touching my own, some essence of the skies
Instil therein, and all your warm, brown hair
Smells of the sun's slow passion, fine and fair.
I cannot touch your hands but I surprise
Some element of summer; and the sighs
Of stars from your red lips I seem to share.

O Love...Love...Love...Dearer than God to me.
Earth of the earth are we and light of light.
God-born, God-breathing, all our scented souls
In Death will glow, gladdening eternity.
So give me love...all love...this perfect night
As round our naked limbs its full fire rolls.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xxv

I know no miracle so manifest
As that you wrought upon me yesterday,
Filling with love my chalice of pure clay
From fragrant fountains of your own dear breast.
Beaten and sad, with aching eyes I pressed
Close unto you, and, as my body lay,
Broken with pain and grief, you murmured, "Stay,
I am the deathless end of all your quest."

I lifted up my bowed and weeping head,
Borrowing comfort from your arms and eyes.
I felt your lips, long-climbing to my own,
And knew the best of me was not all dead.
I, who had fallen out of Paradise,
Was placed by you upon my rightful throne.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xxvi

O my Beloved, when to-day you said:
"All this must perish and we two will go
Soulless and senseless, to the dust below!"
I could but smile and fondle your dear head.
I could but catch your fingers as they fled
Over my throbbing breasts and whisper low,
"Whence came this breast to lure your fingers' flow?
These burning pulses, leaping passion-fed?"

Dearest, you had no answer. But your blood
Drawing from mine the primal fires of God,
Leapt, laughed, and shouted, panting into mine—
"Love...love is all; and sweeps in mighty flood
Minds, souls and bodies, from the nameless sod
Exultant to the feet of the Divine."

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xxviii

Give me a child!! Dear Heart, we have loved long,
Draining each other's sweetness to the last
Wild drops of honeyed madness falling fast
Upon our limbs in ecstasies of song.
"More love," we cried. "More, and still more." And, strong
And fierce, the tide of passion filled the vast
Immeasured space of our desire, and cast
Us breathless to the realms the white gods throng.

My Poet, let the tempest rise once more,
Until from spirit out of spirit, wise
And free, we draw our own youth back again—
My dimpled chin, your eyes; and learn the lore
Of everlasting life and all emprise
From the sweet child that comes to us through pain.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Love Sonnet Xxxv

I cannot find a fault in you; and yet
I think you are not perfect many ways.
I have seen lips more meet for maiden praise
And eyes less shadowed with a grey regret.
But pure perfection of your love has let
The tenant mirrors of my mind such rays,
All other men reflect a smoky haze
And in the murk their virtues I forget.

He knows not perfect who has found the best,
Nor worth who would deny unworthiness.
But meanest flowers are fair as any rose
When blowing fragrant to our least behest.
So you are perfect in my heart no less
For that unworthiness my poor mind knows.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Memory

Late, late last night, when the whole world slept,
Along to the garden of dreams I crept.
And I pulled the bell of an old, old house
Where the moon dipped down like a little white mouse.
I tapped the door and I tossed my head:
"Are you in, little girl? Are you in?" I said.
And while I waited and shook with cold
Through the door tripped me---just eight years old.
I looked so sweet with my pigtails down,
Tied up with a ribbon of dusky brown,
With a dimpled chin full of childish charme,
And my old black dolly asleep in my arms.
I sat me down when I saw myself,
And I told little tales of a moonland elf.
I laughed and sang as I used to do
When the world was ruled by Little Boy Blue.
Then I danced with a toss and a twirl
And said: "Now have you been a good, good girl?
Have you had much spanking since you were Me?
And does it feel fine to be twenty-three?"
I kissed me then, and I said farewell,
For I've earned more spanks than I dared to tell,
And Eight must never see Twenty-three
As she peeps through the door of Memory.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Sonnet Of Motherhood Vi

I'd have you love my body as my soul,
Praise it and magnify it night and day,
Knowing its sweetness blossoms out of clay
With tremulous movement to its spirit goal.
These arms perchance have clambered branch and bole,
These feet have run from many beasts of prey;
But Love has led them to a clearer way.
Moulding white rapture from apparent dole.

O, let my body be your soul's delight,
Your mirror true of Beauty most-esteemed,
That looking on its form your lips breathe low:
"This is herself, her soul within my sight."
So read it over as a book you dreamed
In boyhood's fancy many a year ago.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Sonnet Of Motherhood Viii

Make me the melody of meeting palms,
The roundelay of little running feet.
Strike me a measure to a trembling sweet
Of the mouth's laughter and the fingers' psalms.
I know of music in the ocean calms—
A siren singing where the long tides meet.
I know of lyrics in the leaf's long beat,
But the child-chant is symphony of balms.
Sing it to me. O, sing it to my blood...
Through chord and fibre of my being run
The liquid quavers, and the pause and turn
Of every note in its seraphic flood.
Sing on that anthem of the sea and sun
And the deep dreams that in your being yearn.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Sonnet Of Motherhood X

I walked among the flowers that bend their heads
Low to the earth and back again to light,
Hearing them prattle of their blue and white—
Violet and jasmine in the bordered beds.
They whispered them of every wing that weds
Fragrance to fragrance in the dusky night;
And, seeing them, I knew another sight,
And saw them bowing where all Beauty spreads.

I touched each petal with the sunbeams flaked—
Roses and pansies of the early morn,
Lilies that lilted of the moon's light grace,
And left them hushed when all my joy was slaked;
For in the garden of my soul, God-born,
Each flower made beauty for my child's soft face.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Sonnet Of Motherhood XI

A miracle of miracles is here.
Take off your shoes. This place is holy ground.
No man-child ours like that the shepherd found
By dreaming Mary when the Star burned clear.
Our God has given us a woman, dear,
With satin skin her dimpling shoulders round.
No pinkest shell with sea-blown bubbles crowned
Could match the marvel of her tiny ear.

How like to me, and yet 'tis you—all you.
I dare not touch her. Take your soul, My Own.
Set in my body with your mind, your sight,
Your dreams and thoughts with every promise true—
A queen to sit upon a regal throne
With a man's soul won out of woman's right.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Sonnet Of Motherhood Xlv

Dearest, your mother feels (though dead) this birth—
Laughs at the fire within your shining eyes—
Your eyes, yet mine, wherein such glory lies
Never before beheld upon the earth.
She scents the fragrance of the lily-mirth
Lilting this body that I drew all-wise
Out of your own, so hers, and with low sighs,
Mellowed in mine to what a wondrous worth.

Kiss me. Kiss her. The miracle is wrought—
The simple beauty out of simple love—
Mother and father, child and God—all One—
Eternal trinity for ever sought.
O, blessed from her quiet place above,
Your mother kisses us—a life's work done.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Sonnet Of Motherhood Xxiv

How many holy women mothered me
And brought me to perfection for this hour,
When from my being all the living power
Of sweetest woman should at last flow free?
Aeons on Aeons on a loving knee
Some woman rocked me in her scented bower,
Till my soul bloomed an everlasting flower
Calling with fragrance to a singing bee.

You came. You saw me. And because in you
A myriad mothers all their love had spread,
Those holy women since the dawn of day
Gave you the promise of a master true...
Dearest, that bee unto the flower was wed
When your song fitted with my humble lay.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Sonnet Of Motherhood Xxix

How strangely lone unto myself I grow,
Listening and looking for I know not what;
Turning my head with terror cold and hot
At wandering whispers of a music low!
Familiar pieces of my being flow
Far, far away, to thymy hill and plot,
While chained to patience in this close-shut spot
I sit apart from everything I know.

O Love, I fear the liveness of my limbs
Leaning to nothing to their solitude.
Draw up the blinds and let the stars rush in,
The mournful moon and all the air she swims.
I would not languish in my mother-mood
While just without earth makes her old, mad din.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Sonnet Of Motherhood Xxvii

O, not alone I weave this miracle
Of glowing spirit from my body's zone.
With every moment of the life unknown
You feed the glory of a growing cell.
All day I think of you, and night must tell
Dreams of my dreams unto your heart alone;
So, seeing you, I take you, O my own,
Into my child where first you wrought Life's spell.

Dearest, as much as I, you breathe in pain,
Breeding yourself—your very soul from me
By look and sign, soft word and action strong,
And all you longed for in its form regain.
I am a humble haven where we three,
Father and child and mother, make a song.

Zora Bernice May Cross

Sonnet Of Motherhood Xxxi

Beloved, I who shall be mother soon
Need mothering myself this tired hour,
As heavily the sweet and precious power
Weighs on my heart till I am near to swoon.
Console me, soothe me, Dearest, with the boon
Of your firm strength, and little comforts shower
Soft on the drifting doubtings that devour
Patience and courage when the death-winds croon.

You are your mother, Dear, as I am mine.
And, as we slumber to our souls' caress,
Those two who panged for us and weeping smiled,
Draw near and bind us in a peace divine.
O mother me; all else is comfortless
As painted lips above a dying child.

Zora Bernice May Cross

The Fairie's Fair

Who's that dancing on the moonlight air,
Heel tapping, Toe-heel rapping?
Oberon opening the fairies' fair
To jig away sorrow on the grave of Care.
Come along, old folk, cold folk, bold folk,
Drop your shears at the midnight stroke.
Elves are crying: "Who'll come buying
Jugs of Joy from a fairy's cloak?"
Mab is sitting on a silver shoe,
Bright eyes laughing, Light lips quaffing
Airy bubbles from a cup of dew,
Her bracelets tinkle with delights for you.
Come along tall folk, small folk, all folk,
Race the stream where the fat frogs croak,
Buy a bobbin! There goes Robin
Tying Time to a daisy's yoke!

Zora Bernice May Cross

The New Moon

What have you got in your knapsack fair,
White moon, bright moon, pearling the air,
Spinning your bobbins and fabrics free,
Fleet moon, sweet moon, in to the sea?
Turquoise and beryl and rings of gold,
Clear moon, dear moon, ne'er to be sold?
Roses and lilies, romance and love,
Still moon, chill moon, swinging above?
Slender your feet as a white birds throat,
High moon, shy moon, drifting your boat
Into the murk of the world awhile,
Slim moon, dim moon, adding a smile.
Tender your eyes as a maiden's kiss,
Fine moon, wine moon, no one knows this,
Under the spell of your witchery,
Dream moon, cream moon, first he kissed me.

Zora Bernice May Cross