The Humble Petition of Ann Rumsby
−Her Majesty's Gaol, Parramatta, 23rd August, 1822

"When William Bragge made his request
for me, the earth didn't move one iota
nor Heaven look on,
the appearance of Encke's Comet
over the southern hemisphere
the only propitious sign.
I found him *foul with itch; flat face, short nose*
large scars from scrofulous affection
on the right of neck and jaw
and could not like him.
All the Men servants had wished to marry me.

Sentenced to seven years transportation
on the Convict Ship *Mary Ann*
for stealing goods and chattels (value 35/-)
from Thomas Foulsham, consigned
to the squalor of the Female Factory at Parramatta,
more miserable than any prison,
then to Dr Douglass' reformist house
awaiting service with Judge Barron Field,
I feared that in wishing me to marry Bragge
my Master would be the ruin of me.

Halfway to the Turnpike down the Sydney Road
vexed and in tears, I met with Reverend Marsden
(him they call 'the flogging parson')
professing himself to be my friend.
But he took up my words
in a different light to what I meant
arraigning Dr Douglass for molestation,
the social life of the Colony now afire
with gossip and new-forged scandal.

Summonsed to court,
gaoled for perjury, refusing
to falsely incriminate my Master, banished
to Port Macquarie *because I spoke not that truth*
as they would have it spoken,
I humbly set forth my petition."

*

Governor Brisbane granted Rumsby,
a female unprotected prisoner,
free pardon and sacked the magistrates.
Why she then married Bragge
remains a mystery. She vanishes into the obscurity
of private life, graves lying side by side
in St Ann's Churchyard, Ryde, along with
Miriam, one of their eight children, roots growing
out of the scrapped cities, the adaptable sandstone,
generating
small rebellions here and there.

Margaret Bradstock