

Anne Bradstreet

Anne Bradstreet was born in Northampton, England, in the year 1612, daughter of Thomas Dudley and Dorothy Yorke; Dudley, who had been a leader of volunteer soldiers in the English Reformation and Elizabethan Settlement, was then a steward to the Earl of Lincoln; Dorothy was a gentlewoman of noble heritage and she was also well educated.

At the age of 16, Anne was married to Simon Bradstreet, a 25 year old assistant in the Massachusetts Bay Company and the son of a Puritan minister, who had been in the care of the Dudleys since the death of his father.

Anne and her family emigrated to America in 1630 on the *Arabella*, one of the first ships to bring Puritans to New England in hopes of setting up plantation colonies. The journey was difficult; many perished during the three month journey, unable to cope with the harsh climate and poor living conditions, as sea squalls rocked the vessel, and scurvy brought on by malnutrition claimed their lives. Anne, who was a well educated girl, tutored in history, several languages and literature, was ill prepared for such rigorous travel, and would find the journey very difficult.

Most of the poems included in Anne Bradstreet's first collection, *The Tenth Muse* (1650), were quite conventional in style and form, and dealt with history and politics. In one poem, for instance, Anne Bradstreet wrote of the 1642 uprising of Puritans led by Cromwell. In another, she praises accomplishments of Queen Elizabeth.

The publishing success of *The Tenth Muse* seems to have given Anne Bradstreet more confidence in her writing. (She refers to this publication, and to her displeasure with being unable to make corrections to the poems herself before publication, in a later poem, "The Author to Her Book.") Her style and form became less conventional, and instead she wrote more personally and directly -- of her own experiences, of religion, of daily life, of her thoughts, of the New England landscape.

Anne Bradstreet was in most ways quite typically Puritan. Many poems reflect her struggle to accept the adversity of the Puritan colony, contrasting earthly losses with the eternal rewards of the good. In one poem, for instance, she writes of an actual event: when the family's house burned down. In another, she writes of her thoughts of her own possible death as she approaches the birth of one of her children. Anne Bradstreet contrasts the transitory nature of earthly treasure with eternal treasures, and seems to see these trials as lessons from God.

From "Before the Birth of One of Her Children":

"All things within this fading world hath end."

And from "Here Follows Some Verses upon the Burning of Our House July 10th, 1666":

"I blest His name that gave and took,
That laid my goods now in the dust.
Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just.

It was His own, it was not mine....
The world no longer let me love,
My hope and treasure lies above."

Anne Bradstreet also alludes to the role of women and to women's capabilities in many poems. She seems especially concerned to defend the presence of Reason in women. Among her earlier poems, the one extolling Queen Elizabeth includes these lines, revealing the sly wit that's in many of Anne Bradstreet's poems:

"Now say, have women worth? or have they none?
Or had they some, but with our queen is't gone?
Nay Masculines, you have thus taxt us long,
But she, though dead, will vindicate our wrong,
Let such as say our Sex is void of Reason,
Know tis a Slander now, but once was Treason."

In another, she seems to refer to the opinion of some as to whether she should be spending time writing poetry:

"I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits."

She also refers to the likelihood that poetry by a woman will not be accepted:

"If what I do prove well, it won't advance,
They'll say it's stolen, or else it was by chance."

Anne Bradstreet largely accepts, however, the Puritan definition of proper roles of men and women, though asking for more acceptance of women's accomplishments. This, from the same poem as the previous quote:

"Let Greeks be Greeks, and Women what they are
Men have precedency 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."

In contrast, perhaps, to her acceptance of adversity in this world, and her hope of eternity in the next, Anne Bradstreet also seems to hope that her poems will bring a kind of earthly immortality. These excerpts are from two different poems:

"Thus gone, amongst you I may live,
And dead, yet speak and counsel give."

"If any worth or virtue live in me,
Let that live frankly in thy memory."

To my Dear and Loving Husband

If ever two were one, then surely we.
 If ever man were lov'd 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 cAnneot quench,
 Nor ought but love from thee give recompence.
 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 persever
 That when we live no more, we may live ever.

A Letter to Her Husband Absent upon Public Employment

My head, my heart, mine eyes, my life, nay, more,
 My joy, my magazine of earthly store,
 If two be one, as surely thou and I,
 How stayest thou there, wilt I at Ipswich lie?
 So many steps, head from the heart to sever,
 If but a neck, soon should we be together,
 I, like the Earth this season, mourn in black,
 My Sun is gone so far in's zodiac,
 Whom whilst I 'joyed, nor storms, nor frost I felt,
 His warmth such frigid colds did cause to melt.
 My chilled limbs now numbed lie forlorn;
 Return, return, sweet Sol, from Capricorn,
 In this dead time, alas, what can I more
 Than view those fruits which through thy heat I bore?
 Which sweet contentment yield me for a space,
 True living pictures of their father's face.
 O strange effect! now thou art southward gone,
 I weary grow the tedious day so long;
 But when thou northward to me shalt return,
 I wish my Sun may never set, but burn
 Within the Cancer of my glowing breast,
 The welcome house of him my dearest guest.
 Where ever, ever stay, and go not thence,
 Till nature's sad decree shall call thee hence;
 Flesh of thy flesh, bone of thy bone,
 I here, thou there, but both but one.

The Flesh and the Spirit

In secret place where once I stood
 Close by the Banks of Lacrim flood,
 I heard two sisters reason on
 Things that are past and things to come.
 One Flesh was call'd, who had her eye
 On worldly wealth and vanity;
 The other Spirit, who did rear
 Her thoughts unto a higher sphere.
 "Sister," quoth Flesh, "what liv'st thou on
 Nothing but Meditation?"

Doth Contemplation feed thee so
Regardlessly to let earth go?
Can Speculation satisfy
Notion without Reality?
Dost dream of things beyond the Moon
And dost thou hope to dwell there soon?
Hast treasures there laid up in store
That all in th' world thou count'st but poor?
Art fancy-sick or turn'd a Sot
To catch at shadows which are not?
Come, come. I'll show unto thy sense,
Industry hath its recompence.
What canst desire, but thou maist see
True substance in variety?
Dost honour like? Acquire the same,
As some to their immortal fame;
And trophies to thy name erect
Which wearing time shall ne'er deject.
For riches dost thou long full sore?
Behold enough of precious store.
Earth hath more silver, pearls, and gold
Than eyes can see or hands can hold.
Affects thou pleasure? Take thy fill.
Earth hath enough of what you will.
Then let not go what thou maist find
For things unknown only in mind."

Spirit.

"Be still, thou unregenerate part,
Disturb no more my settled heart,
For I have vow'd (and so will do)
Thee as a foe still to pursue,
And combat with thee will and must
Until I see thee laid in th' dust.
Sister we are, yea twins we be,
Yet deadly feud 'twixt thee and me,
For from one father are we not.
Thou by old Adam wast begot,
But my arise is from above,
Whence my dear father I do love.
Thou speak'st me fair but hat'st me sore.
Thy flatt'ring shews I'll trust no more.
How oft thy slave hast thou me made
When I believ'd what thou hast said
And never had more cause of woe
Than when I did what thou bad'st do.
I'll stop mine ears at these thy charms
And count them for my deadly harms.
Thy sinful pleasures I do hate,
Thy riches are to me no bait.
Thine honours do, nor will I love,
For my ambition lies above.
My greatest honour it shall be
When I am victor over thee,
And Triumph shall, with laurel head,
When thou my Captive shalt be led.
How I do live, thou need'st not scoff,
For I have meat thou know'st not of.
The hidden MAnnea I do eat;

The word of life, it is my meat.
My thoughts do yield me more content
Than can thy hours in pleasure spent.
Nor are they shadows which I catch,
Nor fancies vain at which I snatch
But reach at things that are so high,
Beyond thy dull Capacity.
Eternal substance I do see
With which enriched I would be.
Mine eye doth pierce the heav'ns and see
What is Invisible to thee.
My garments are not silk nor gold,
Nor such like trash which Earth doth hold,
But Royal Robes I shall have on,
More glorious than the glist'ring Sun.
My Crown not Diamonds, Pearls, and gold,
But such as Angels' heads infold.
The City where I hope to dwell,
There's none on Earth can parallel.
The stately Walls both high and trong
Are made of precious Jasper stone,
The Gates of Pearl, both rich and clear,
And Angels are for Porters there.
The Streets thereof transparent gold
Such as no Eye did e're behold.
A Crystal River there doth run
Which doth proceed from the Lamb's Throne.
Of Life, there are the waters sure
Which shall remain forever pure.
Nor Sun nor Moon they have no need
For glory doth from God proceed.
No Candle there, nor yet Torch light,
For there shall be no darksome night.
From sickness and infirmity
Forevermore they shall be free.
Nor withering age shall e're come there,
But beauty shall be bright and clear.
This City pure is not for thee,
For things unclean there shall not be.
If I of Heav'n may have my fill,
Take thou the world, and all that will."

Verses upon the Burning of our House
by Anne Bradstreet

In silent night when rest I took,
For sorrow near I did not look,
I waken'd was with thund'ring noise
And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.
That fearful sound of "fire" and "fire,"
Let no man know is my Desire.
I starting up, the light did spy,
And to my God my heart did cry
To straighten me in my Distress
And not to leave me succourless.

Then coming out, behold a space
The flame consume my dwelling place.
And when I could no longer look,
I blest his grace that gave and took,
That laid my goods now in the dust.
Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just.
It was his own; it was not mine.
Far be it that I should repine,
He might of all justly bereft
But yet sufficient for us left.
When by the Ruins oft I past
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast
And here and there the places spy
Where oft I sate and long did lie.
Here stood that Trunk, and there that chest,
There lay that store I counted best,
My pleasant things in ashes lie
And them behold no more shall I.
Under the roof no guest shall sit,
Nor at thy Table eat a bit.
No pleasant talk shall 'ere be told
Nor things recounted done of old.
No Candle 'ere shall shine in Thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice ere heard shall bee.
In silence ever shalt thou lie.
Adieu, Adieu, All's Vanity.
Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide:
And did thy wealth on earth abide,
Didst fix thy hope on mouldring dust,
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
That dunghill mists away may fly.
Thou hast a house on high erect
Fram'd by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnished
Stands permanent, though this be fled.
It's purchased and paid for too
By him who hath enough to do.
A price so vast as is unknown,
Yet by his gift is made thine own.
There's wealth enough; I need no more.
Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store.
The world no longer let me love;
My hope and Treasure lies above.