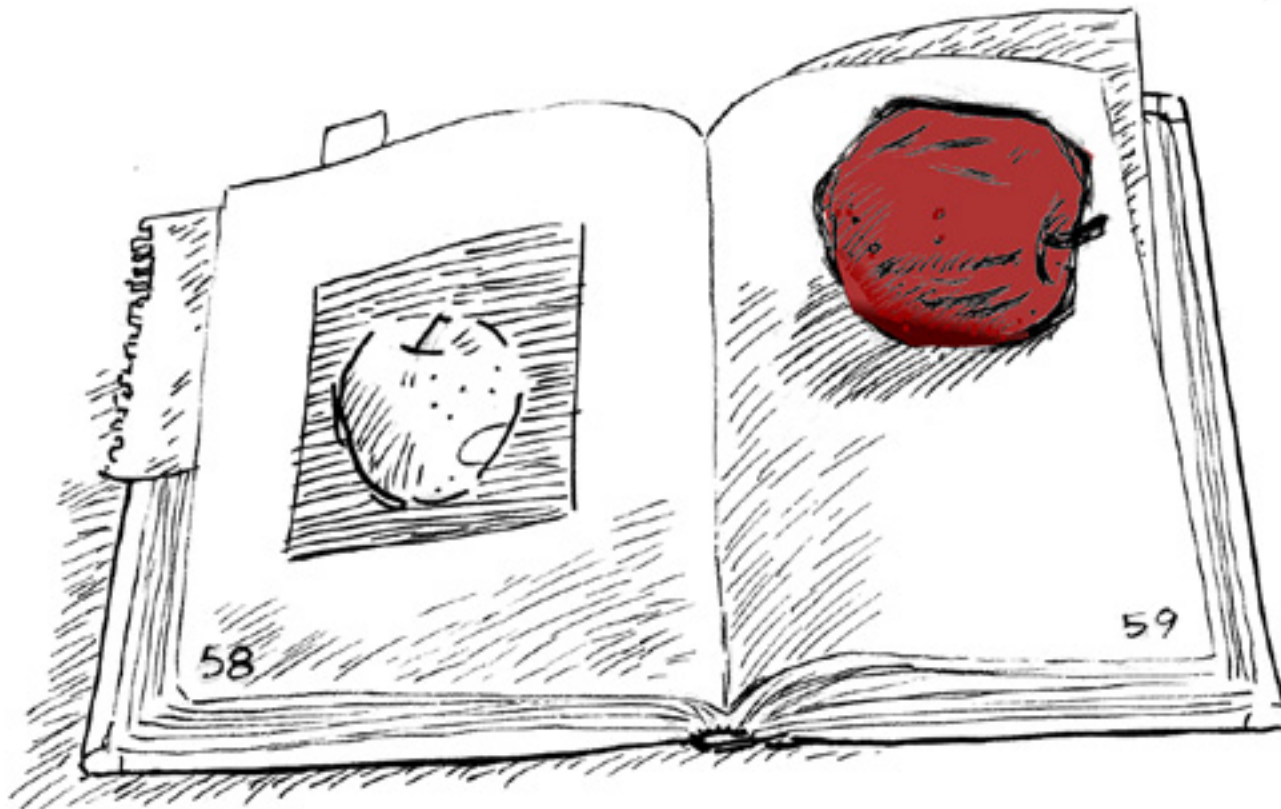


# Anne Bradstreet

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# *The Author to Her Book*

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**This was written after the first edition appeared in London; it was included in the second edition, published in 1678 after Bradstreet's death.**

This verse takes on her signature similar approach and strategy in its format.

- The full poem is set in iambic pentameter.
- The rhyme scheme is constructed as what are called **heroic couplets**:  
AA BB CC DD EE ...
- The theme places an emphasis on humility and piety.

She utilizes an **extended metaphor** which is carried throughout the verse.

- Immediately, the poem establishes an uncommon image of personification, connecting the image of a new born to that of her published collection of poems.
- The use of maternal scenes reinforce the concept throughout the verse.

# *The Author to Her Book*

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One should notice Bradstreet's instant choice of diction, establishing a tone of sarcasm, irony, and self deprecation:

- > physically the child/book is “ill-formed”
- > a product of her “feeble brain”

- Her language and tone are strongly strategic, placing a critical distance between herself and the creative product.
- She often alludes to the history of the document's publication, see lines 3 and 6.
- In this fashion she preserves the notion that women should not have ambitions nor attempt to have public voices— yet, at the same time, every statement she makes is a retort to those men who hold the view women should not be allowed to participate in Literature or intellectual crafts.

# *The Author to Her Book*

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- By directing her voice towards the book, as a mother to a child, she indirectly speaks to anyone critical of her abilities in a *maternal* and in turn an almost commanding, disciplinary voice. No male poet would be able to do the same.
- Unlike “Prologue,” which enters an element of elevated debate with intense rhetoric, “The Author to Her Book” exists in a less defense mode. Her main efforts here are to establish a strong sense of mock humility.

Throughout the piece Bradstreet makes connections between the images of the book production and the metaphoric child.

- Lines 5 states: “Made thee in rags, halting to th’ press to trudge”— rags referring to clothing, but also alludes to the paper-making process, how cotton and rag-content became finished sheets of paper.

# *The Author to Her Book*

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Likewise, her poet speaker transforms within the piece.

- At first she appears rather harsh and inattentive,  
    “At thy return my blushing was not small,  
    My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,  
    I cast thee by as one unfit for light,  
    Thy visage was so irksome in my sight” (ll 7-10)
- —but she quickly changes her attitude towards her metaphoric child,  
    “Yet being mine own, at length affection would  
    Thy blemishes amend, if so I could” (ll 11-12).
- The blemishes allude to the imagined (or real) errors in the text and meter.
- The speaker states to the child-book to be honest that it is a product of a single parent household— in other words, Bradstreet’s husband had no part in the construction of these words.

# *The Author to Her Book*

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Throughout the piece, Bradstreet uses double meanings, suggestive commentary to show alternative messages.

- She may appear inattentive within the first few lines, but it is important to acknowledge that the title of the work claims ownership of the product.
- Very few women intentionally sought out to be published in this era.
- Furthermore her mock humility is established within the first line itself with the wording “feeble brain.” In this fashion, she stresses the fact her criticism is only in half serious.

# *A Letter to Her Husband*

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**This poem is an example of a private work which unintentionally became public.**

In this case notice how Bradstreet's theme moves from abstraction of emotions to individual experience.

- Although the work exhibits a heavy anti-Puritan theme:
  - > open expression of emotion from wife to husband
  - > open allusion to female fertility
  - > mention of pagan references to the Zodiac

Bradstreet does maintain a sense of devout Christian beliefs within her work

- > allusions to Protestant marriage vows
- > acknowledgment of family presence

# *A Letter to Her Husband*

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The structure of the poem is similar to other poems with her formula:

- The rhyme scheme is set in heroic couplets.
- Lines 1-24 lines are **iambic pentameter**;
- however, the closing couplet, lines 24-26, is in **iambic tetrameter** (four feet).

The poem uses a strong metaphysical conceit equal to John Donne's intentions in England.

- Running through the poem is an extended metaphor connecting the concept of the astronomic symbols of the Zodiac to her marriage.
- In turn, heavy emotions are shown:  
loneliness, resentment, sarcasm, longing.



# *A Letter to Her Husband*

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First, notice how the strategic emphasis on the word “nay” in **line 1**; this word changes the iambic rhythm of the line. It creates a natural pause adding emphasis to the meaning of the sentence.

- The litany of words she lists are all metaphors to show her husband’s worth.

In **line 2** pay close attention to her diction; here she takes a rather un-Puritan approach by using the word “earthly,” as opposed to “emotional” or “spiritual.”

- She is in fact viewing her marriage more than as a spiritual, religious union.

This shows their love in a *fertile* sense— which is a major function of marriage: the act of procreation, one of the expectations from God.

- Furthermore, the word “early” foreshadows lines 7-8 where she shows herself as an embodiment of the fertility symbol of the Earth.

Her husband in turn becomes a symbol of the sun.

# *A Letter to Her Husband*

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- This echoes stanza 5 from “Contemplations” where she talks of the sun as a bridegroom to the Earth. (See page 196.)
- **Line 3:** If two be one is an intentional **paradox**, a contradiction ; in this case, in marriage, two people become one person in the eyes of Church and God. To some extent this mirrors the concept of Adam and Eve being of one body at one time in **prelapsarian** events in Genesis.
- **Line 4:** *Why do you think she chose the word “How” and not “Why”?* This small wording adds a greater, emotional feeling. In other words: How can you bear to be away from me, away from our relationship?

# *A Letter to Her Husband*

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- **Line 5** will echo the opening of line 1 by mentioning the words of “head” and the “heart.” These represent many binary, complimentary aspects:

body and soul      –or–

mind and spirit

- In addition, the word “sever” has multiple meanings:
  - (1) to put asunder, part;
  - (2) to keep separate or apart by intervening, to cut in two;
  - (3) to separate with suddenness or force, as with guillotine.
- All of these serve as very emotionally violent and disturbing concepts which can be applied symbolically to her feelings at his absence.
- Furthermore, in **line 6**: Note the line break between the words “neck” and “sever.” A visual pun is created with the two words, reenforcing historical connections: in England, beheading was a common punishment.

# *A Letter to Her Husband*

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- **Lines 7 and 8** introduce several new patterns of imagery that extend throughout the poem.

The myth of Demeter and Persephone is alluded to here with mentioning of the

“Earth this season, mourn in black.”

- *Which season do you think she is alluding to?*
- Pay attention to how she ties the seasons to the time, their respective places—she is north, he is south—and their emotions—she is cold, he warm. Likewise, the Earth is stationary, the sun is a wandering element.
- Like John Donne’s work, Bradstreet develops a metaphysical metaphor through the image of the zodiac: scientific knowledge of the physical world is paired with their intangible relationship.

# *A Letter to Her Husband*

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- **Line 10:** the phrase “His warmth” is out of place in a normal sentence structure, as it is the object of the verb “did cause.” With this strategy, the iambic meter is reinforced.
- **Line 13:** “in this dead time” again reinforces the concept of winter season. His absence brings coldness.
- **Line 14:** Those fruits: Note her comparison of herself to a fruit-bearing tree—and limbs—and her children as the fruit, the result of sexual intercourse. “Thy heat”: Heat is more clearly seen here as passion, not just the removed sun.
- **Line 16:** Notice she sees his face—and does not mention her own—in their children, even though they are a product of the two of them.

# *A Letter to Her Husband*

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- **Line 22:** Shows a strong sense of sarcasm at his long absences.
- **Line 24:** The language here takes on an interesting diction with the phrase: “nature’s sad decree.” A strong embellishment for simply discussing death, but it reinforces the iambs of the poem.

**In the end,** this poem results in a strongly surprising poem from a Puritan woman— in many ways celebrating the body as well as the union of a marriage.