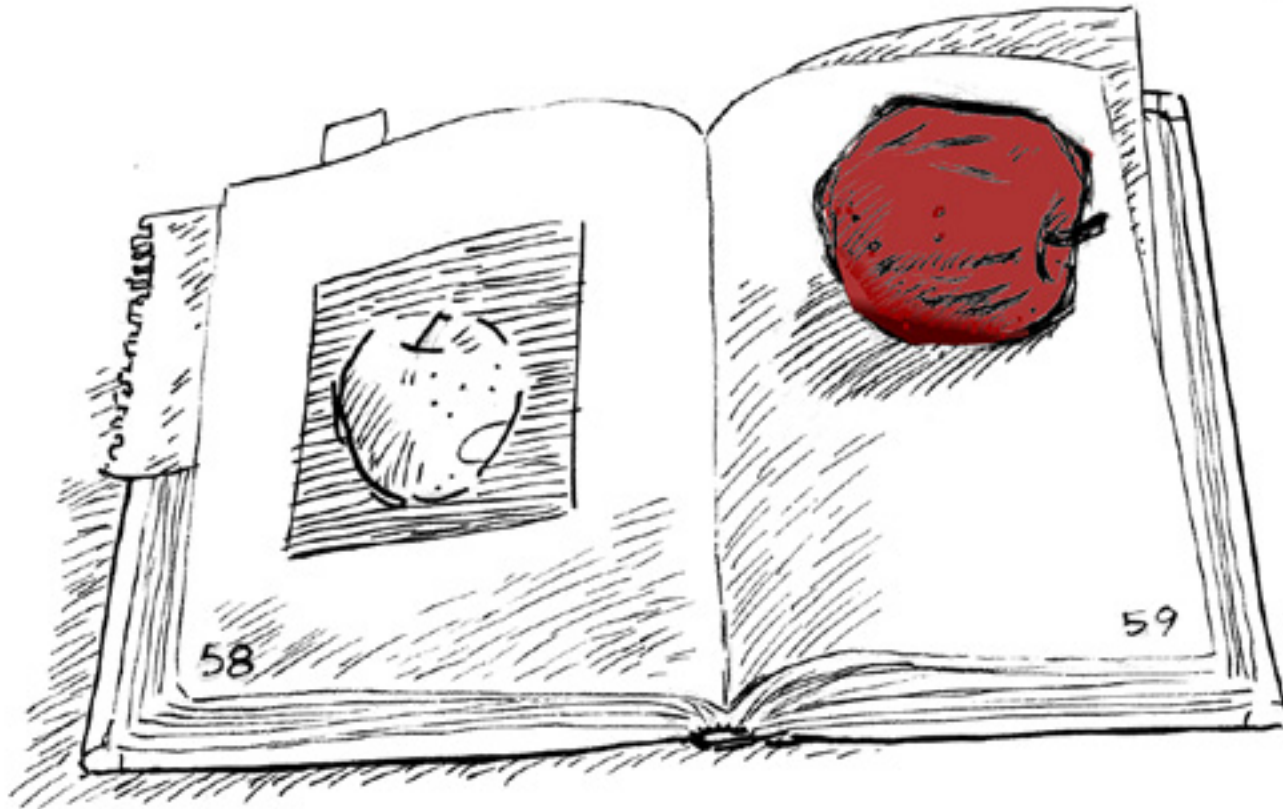


# Anne Bradstreet

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# *Public versus Private Voices*

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**Female literature of this time serves the role of:**

- personal, daily reflexive meditations
- personal day to day diaries
- journal keeping of family records and events
- cooking recipes

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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## **Cultural Expectations of Gender and Creativity**

- Female writers served a defined, domestic purpose, resulting in a gender-based segregation.
- Women's creative works were set merely upon devotional or instructive goals.
- On the other hand, men's writing offered a show of skill, exchange of wit, and personal ambition. Qualities deemed inappropriate for women to show in public.
- What results then, a female writer would have to show caution when assuming a public (or masculine) voice. The feminine voice develops only as a reserve for *private, personal* issues, for situations supporting family or friends, not the community as a whole.

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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Critics have called Anne Bradstreet’s “Contemplations” an example of a female public voice using the discourse of the masculine control to her own means.

- In her mind, the work is a private voice utilizing and perhaps borrowing a portion of the expected masculine public strategies.
- Her private sermons utilize strategies which further protect her from public retribution— under her own control.

## **However:**

- It is important to realize this work was published despite her objections.
- She wanted to retain the material in a private environment, not for public display.

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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## **Puritan Patriarchal Attitudes**

- These were based on medieval theories of the Divine Fall which proposed that Adam first appeared as an androgynous creature. The formation of Eve absorbed all feminine traits from Adam. This re-figuration permits the cycle of Biblical events to occur, spiraling down to the downfall of humankind.
- From the beginning, Adam emerged in an all-male society composed of God and His angels, a society without preparation for a female individual.
- Adam existed in a limbo, in a position between Heaven and Earth.
- His original relationship with the masculine Father did not permit Adam to be a fully resolved male, keeping him in an asexual or feminized position.
- Through Adam's later relationship with Eve however, he regained a sense of the male hierarchal structure of the world (Wittreich, 114).

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Wittreich, Joseph. *Feminist Milton*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987. Print.

# Geneva Bible, 1599

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- Puritan values of women based themselves on this theory, showing females as helpmates, yet describing them as secondary to males.
- These values are echoed throughout the various Biblical interpretations.

## ***from Ephesians 5:22-33***

**22** Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord.

**23** For the husband is the wife's head, even as Christ is the head of the Church, and the same is the Saviour of his body.

**24** Therefore as the Church is in subjection to Christ, even so let the wives be to their husbands in everything.

**25** Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it,

**26** That he might sanctify it, and cleanse it by the washing of water through the word,

# Geneva Bible, 1599

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- 27** That he might make it unto himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blame.
- 28** So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself.
- 29** For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord doeth the Church.
- 30** For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.
- 31** For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh.
- 32** This is a great secret, but I speak concerning Christ, and concerning the Church.
- 33** Therefore every one of you, do ye so, let every one love his wife, even as himself, and let the wife see that she fear her husband.

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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- According to William Scheick, the Puritan ministry harshly reinforced the sexist aspects of the Genesis myth, claiming “the mother of mankind was not only created from Adam’s rib on second thought (as it were), but through a weakness of mind she ruined paradise and engendered mortality” (167).
- In their eyes, women’s equality occurred in the afterlife, only before God in the heavens, with the other pre-elected souls.
- Cheryl Walker notes that for women writers in general “Eve represented a tainted symbol because of her connection to the fall in Puritan theology” (170, no. 20).
- Few writings by women dwell on the subject of reclaiming or re-examining Eve’s actions. Yet, the stereotypical titles Eve assumed (first woman, mother, and wife) often merge with analysis by female writers.

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Scheick, William. *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America*. Lexington: UP Kentucky, 1998.  
Walker, Cheryl. *The Nightingale’s Burden: Women Poets Before 1900*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982.



# *Public versus Private Voices*

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- During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, child bearing and production of a family represented religious duty and proved the worth of a woman. As Walker contends, “the mother remained the archetype of female power” (11). Although regulated by the patriarchy, motherhood served as a power women could claim.
- In private and in public, women authors assumed the masks transferred to the Eve archetype: virgin, wife, mother.
- Through utilizing these divinely sanctioned titles and masculine-regulated roles in their writing, women elevated and defended their status in the homo-social dominated society.
- What resulted: writing in general existed with a division between the masculine/public voice and the feminine/private voice.

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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Looking at Anne Bradstreet's work, critics normally separate the existing text into two groupings:

an early formal rendering of work

a later, intimate production after the first publication

- Kenneth A. Requa notes that Bradstreet's: "public voice is imitative, the private voice is original" (291).
- Re-examining her writing with other colonial authors shows that despite the restraint imposed upon women and the regulation of the content of their verse, colonial New England women composed texts with inner impulses which contain "terms at once personal *and* public," working within the designs set by the Puritan ministries (my emphasis/Scheick, 168).

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Requa, Kenneth. "Anne Bradstreet's Poetic Voices." *Early American Literature*. 9 (1974): 3- 18. Print.

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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- Bradstreet utilizes in portions of her works voices which create an archetype of Eve.
- Walter Hesford notes Bradstreet “was more adept in making present her personal losses than in realizing her spiritual hope. In her mature work, Bradstreet writes as an Eve bearing the fruits of her mortality” (88).
- In other words, she uses a voice of the *postlapsarian* Eve.

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Hesford, Walter. “The Creative Fall of Bradstreet and Dickinson.” *Essays in Literature* 14 (1987): 81-91. Print.

# *Lapsarianism Views*

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**prelapsarian:** events occurring *before* the Fall of Humankind

**postlapsarian:** events occurring *after* the Fall of Humankind

**supralapsarianism:** the doctrine that the decree of election  
*preceded* human creation and the Fall

**infralapsarianism:** the doctrine, held by Calvinists, that God planned  
the Creation, *then* permitted the Fall of Humankind, elected a chosen number,  
planned their redemption, and suffered the remainder to be eternally punished

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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- With this logic in mind, Bradstreet herself avoids depictions of Eve in her poems, except for “Contemplations.”
- Emily Watts believes this poem claims “Eve as the common mother of women, but even there Eve sinned ‘to be more wise;’” thus, per Watts, Eve relates as a symbol that should be rejected by other female writers (13).
- Watts later contends that: like all women poets of her day, Bradstreet thus had a consciousness of herself as a woman and as a person with something valuable to say. Unlike other women poets of her day however, Bradstreet recognized that motherhood, at least for her, was a major part of being a woman (14).

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Watts, Emily Stipes. *The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945*. Austin: U of TX P, 1977. Print.

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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- However, Watts avoids the notion that Eve as the first mother does strongly suits Bradstreet's maternal image and voice. Likewise, despite the negative connotations of stanza 12, showing Eve regretting her impulsive decision, Bradstreet herself reflects further in the poem over similar feelings of fate and mortality:

## Contemplation #20

Shall I then praise the heavens, the trees, the earth,  
Because their beauty and their strength last longer?  
Shall I wish there, or never to had birth,  
Because they're bigger and their bodies stronger?  
Nay, they shall darken, perish, fade, and die,  
And when unmade so ever shall they lie,  
But man was made for endless immortality (ll 134-40).

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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- With these lines, she recognizes in herself that although life is short, it serves a purpose.
- Walker notes “Contemplations” acts through its title and transcends earthly matters as a meditative exercise (17). In the process, she loosely associates herself with Eve, transcends the original sin and removes guilt from her “grandame” (l. 78).
- Because of masculine control, Bradstreet’s public voice echoes the patriarchy, even at the risk of disadvantaging herself. Because of such dismissals, it is hard to distinguish between her traditional “male” voice and her personal feelings.

# *Public versus Private Voices*

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- Furthermore, Eve appears in stanza 12 without “guilt for her sin, only grief for her loss” (87). This refusal to grieve over past choices subconsciously reclaims Eve as a possible archetype for women writers to utilize.
- Bradstreet reasons that fate exists as God perceives it. From the beginning of Genesis to the “present time,” with Bradstreet meditating in verse, all is set in an order and control; all actions remain expected and foreseen by the paternal God.
- Eve’s actions thus merely starts the history of humankind spiraling forward, leading Bradstreet to her “present,” self-meditative, analysis.