

Anne Bradstreet and the Private Voice



Time Line overview

- 1630 • Anne Bradstreet with her husband are among the families who found Massachusetts Bay Colony
- 1635 • Thomas Powell publishes in London *The Art of Striving*
- 1637 • Anne Hutchinson put on trial and exiled from Massachusetts Bay Colony
- 1641 • The Massachusetts Body of Liberties, the first codes of law, adopted
- 1647 • Anne Bradstreet's brother-in-law, Rev. John Woodbridge, travels to London and secretly publishes her work: *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America, by a Gentlewoman of those Parts*
- 1650 • Anne Bradstreet's manuscript is available in London
- 1666 • The Bradstreet's house burns down
- 1672 • Anne Bradstreet dies.
- 1678 • A revised edition of *The Tenth Muse* is made public, with revisions previously made by Anne Bradstreet including new material

Women's Roles in Puritan Culture, pt 2

Elements of Poetic Form

2-lines = Couplet

3-lines = Tercet

4-lines = Quatrain

5-lines = Quintain

6-lines = Sestet

7-lines = Septet

8-lines = Octave

iambic pentameter: standard measure of meter for verse; traditionally it is the expected rhythm for poetry; from Bradstreet's "Prologue" as an example:

To sing / of wars, / of cap / tains, and / of kings

1 2 3 4 5

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An example of the patriarchal attitudes

Female writers faced an onslaught of sexist attitudes, due to cultural expectation.

One example comes from a work by Thomas Powell: *The Art of Striving*, published 1635, which notes:

“Let them [women] learne plaine workes of all kind, so they take heed of too open seeming. Instead of song and musick, let them learne cookery and laundry, and instead of reading Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* let them read the grounds of huswifery. I like not a female poetesse at any hands.”

Women's Roles in Puritan Culture, pt 2

The Massachusetts Body of Liberties

- The first code of law adopted December 10, 1641, contains 94 resolutions.
- Based on English common law, it displays the patriarchal culture's conservative outlook towards the civil liberties of women.
- Reprinted in the anthology *The Annals of America*, Articles 79 and 80 pertain specifically to the legal rights of women:

79. If any man at his death shall not leave his wife a competent portion of his estate, upon just complaint made to the General Courts she shall be relieved.

80. Every married woman shall be free from bodily correction or stripes by her husband, unless it be in his own defense upon her assault. If there be any just cause of correction, complaint shall be made to authority assembled in some court, from which only she shall receive it (166).

Women's Roles in Puritan Culture, pt 2

Female literature of this time serves the limited role of

personal, reflexive meditations

personal day to day diaries

journal keeping of family records

cooking recipes

- The concept encourages a *private* voice for women.
- The realm of their control was regulated to domestic life.
- Only men could sermonize or *publicly* interpret passages of the Bible.

Creative Writing as Meditation

The Puritan Model for Meditation

1. The subject matter is clearly identified or a situation is experienced;
the poet clearly defines a meditative purpose for the selection of the topic
2. The author relates to the object or event on a personal level;
this portion of the practice encourages self examination,
an important element for the writing of poetry overall
3. The author channels the full experience to elements of Divine; this can be
achieved either through a specific passage in the Bible or through
acknowledgement of God's handiwork, or His Glory

Anne Bradstreet's Techniques

- Identify her meter; usually she uses iambic pentameter; confirm any variations in rhythm. Ordinarily a variation from the norm can set up an emphasis on a secondary meaning in the poem.
- Confirm denotations of words to clarify the various meanings; numerous definitions for one word may work together to create complex feelings and multi-leveled ideas.
- Identify the uses of metaphysical conceits: extended metaphors of intense intellectual and creative experimentation.
- Notice the use of irony; oftentimes she will use a sarcastic tone, and apply conventionally religious additions to “cover-up” subtle, reactionary themes.
- Strategic retractions exist in her work as well to manipulate meaning.
- Her language and imagery often employs direct, simple sentence structures.

Prologue

Various themes:

1. self deprecating tone in relation to her poetry's subjects
2. the celebrated French poet Guillaume du Bartas; known for decorated verse
3. Bradstreet's Muse
4. self deprecating tone making allusions to the Greek philosopher Demosthenes
- 5-7. defense of women's writing
8. her ironic, self deprecating theme is concluded; her work is not "worthy"

Contemplations

Successful in its themes, despite the authoritative patriarchy because:

- her religious message is not sermonizing to a clergy
- her primary purpose is self-reflection with a meditative goal
- her self reflection leads to religious morality that can be applied to all humanity
- she utilizes a male-figure when she “travels” through Biblical history
- the complete poems are private work not intended for publication

Format:

Septet stanzas set primarily in **iambic pentemeter** (five feet);

the last line is an alexandrine, set in **iambic hexameter** (six feet).

Rhyme Scheme:

A / B / A / B / C / C / C

Contemplations

Thematic Image Construction, Stanza by Stanza:

1. Poet in autumnal landscape, notices sun
2. Self reflection, mild epiphany moment
3. Oak personified
4. Sun personified
- 5.-6. Earth as bride to sun; fertility of earth
7. Return to sun as subject
8. Poet in self reflection wandering in woods
9. Cricket
- 10.-15. Biblical History with Male Figure
- 16.-20. Return to landscape; seemingly immortal
21. Poet rests under elm tree after mental, spiritual, physical journey
- 22.-28. Various American wildlife shown; nightingale emphasized
- 29.-30. Radical shift in tone; mortality of humans
- 31.-33. Mortals should reflect on divine