

Anne bradstreet and struggles to conform



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Anne Dudley Bradstreet was America's first published poet. Cotton Mather described her as: "a gentlewoman whose extraction and estate were considerable." She was an intelligent, well-educated poet, wife, and mother, who contradicted almost all of the stereotypes about stiff, cold Puritans. She used her talents to promote women's rights, to describe life as a Puritan woman in colonial America, and to let her husband and children know how much she loved them. Some historians have said that Anne described her own work as lowly, meanly clad, poor, ragged, foolish, broken, and blemished to appease critical males. It was the support of her family and friends who encouraged her to continue the struggle despite incredible societal pressure and rigorous odds. Her poems dealt with the hardships of life in the early settlements, the Puritan religion, and in subtle ways, the role of women in those times. Because she was a woman, her work was strongly criticized, and some believed that she stole the ideas for her writing from men. In her earlier works, Bradstreet wrote in the style of male authors that she admired. She was careful about expressing her true feelings, and this limited her abilities. She wrote for her own satisfaction, and shared her poetry with family and friends. Without her knowledge, her brother-in-law, Rev. John Woodbridge, took a manuscript of her poems to England with him and had them published in a book called, *The Tenth Muse Lately sprung up in America... By a Gentlewoman in those parts*, which Anne had dedicated to her father. Rev. Woodbridge wrote "By a Gentlewoman" in the title to stress that Anne Bradstreet was a virtuous Puritan who did not neglect her duties for her writing. These later poems were her claim to fame, because they reflected actual experience (as a wife, as a mother, and a woman in seventeenth-century New England), combined with a poet's imagination,

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warmth, and a straightforward humanitarian philosophy. Anne struggled to write poetry in a society that was hostile to imagination and to a woman writer. Seventeenth century Puritan women were expected to be deferential, and her education and her privileged status as a close relative of two governors could not completely protect her from the scorn and persecution that other women who stepped out of their role in Puritan society generally received. Anne wrote quite a bit about her experiences as a wife, mother, grandmother, and as a settler in colonial America. She also wrote about nature, science, religion, the social and political happenings of the time, and about her feelings towards the biases women of her time faced. Anne Bradstreet was, in some ways, an early feminist. Through her poetry, she asserted the right of women to learning and expression of thought. The stereotypical Puritan standards at that time indicated that a woman's place was in the home attending to the family and her husband's needs. Women were generally considered intellectually inferior. The attitude of Anne's day was accurately expressed by Reverend Thomas Parker, a minister in Newbury, Massachusetts, in a letter to his sister, Elizabeth Avery, in England: "Your printing of a book, beyond the custom of your sex, doth rankly smell." As if the social pressure wasn't bad enough, many women faced crushing workloads and a severe lack of free time, as well. Some women suffered from the lack of an education. Others internalized the belief in intellectual inferiority Western society tried to push on them from nearly every authoritative voice. It was Anne's personal situation such as an extensive education, support of friends and an influential family, which gave her the means to cope with some of these obstacles. One of her later works, "In Honor of That High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory", <https://assignbuster.com/anne-bradstreet-and-struggles-to-conform/>

defiantly proclaims her opinion that women are worth more than a man's servant. Anne was deeply interested in relating the arduous life of the early settlers in her poems. Her work provides an excellent view of the difficulties she and her fellow colonists encountered. From the loss of a house to fire, to the risks and difficulties of child-bearing, to the pain of losing children, Anne described such situations with deep emotion and faith. Her writing gives modern-day readers a glimpse into Puritan views of salvation and redemption, and reveals faith that continued even in the midst of doubt. The Puritans believed that suffering was God's way of preparing the heart for accepting His grace. Anne had difficulty reconciling herself with this idea, and she wrote about how she struggled to do everything that she could to give into His will. Puritan wives were expected to defer to their husbands within the family structure, but they were treated as fully equal in the "soul's vocation" and in church affairs and enjoyed extensive legal and social protection against husbandly abuse of power. The "delicate complexity" of this view was perhaps best expressed in the couplet which Anne Bradstreet addressed to men: "Preeminence each and all is yours/Yet grant some small acknowledgment of ours." Puritans also abhorred any waste of time, energy, or talent as a sin against God; ultimately, this worked in favor of talented women such as Bradstreet and defined early indications of the women's movement and clearly questioned the role of women in Puritanical society.

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