

Anne bradstreet

Profession, Writer



Leonard Anger notes: "For the Puritan, of course, every personal trial had its theological significance" (100). However, in dealing with the deaths of her grandchildren, it is her intense grief and overwhelming sense of loss that compel her to question, and at times challenge, the meaning of God's will, consciously knowing this is against the Puritan doctrine. The elegies reflect Bradstreet's effort in trying to balance her struggle to accept, understand, and define her devotion to her family and the physical world against the spiritual definition of God and the expectations of her that.

Anne Bradstreet's poetry, both in style and substance, embodies who she is as a person: a Puritan, a woman, a wife, a mother, and a poet. Anger notes, "Bradstreet was aware that she was a woman poet, not just a poet," (114) and that "She wrote of her family and of the issues that touched her closely at home" (115). The "domestic" poem allows Bradstreet more freely to express her feelings. Kenneth Surin claims Bradstreet a better poet within her personal work because it most truthfully represents how she relates to the world—as a woman, wife, and mother.

Surin believes the results are evident in Bradstreet's private poetry and that "speaking as a private poet is so sufficiently close to her domestic vocation that she is comfortable in the private role" (116). Bradstreet's comfort level in writing about personal experience is apparent, and as Wendy Martin notes, this allows her to be "considerably more candid about her spiritual crises, her deep attachment to her family, and her love of mortal life" (17). Bradstreet reserves her personal poems for a small, trusted audience of family and close friends.

Writing for this audience rates a safe environment in which she can reveal her thoughts and feelings without the threat of judgment or criticism. It is within this "comfort zone" that Bradstreet writes these three heartfelt elegies and expresses the deeply personal and spiritual conflict she suffers in trying to understand the meaning of her grandchildren's deaths. The first elegy, "In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet, Who Deceased August, 1665, Being a Year and a Half Old," Anne Bradstreet begins with tender emotion and sorrowful farewells.

Her tone is melancholy, her sadness apparent. Beyond Bradstreet's poignant farewells, there is the actual physical structure of the poem to consider. Anger states, "It is clear that the structure of the stanzas is meant to be symmetrical," (109). He describes what he believes Bradstreet's desired effect: "In both [stanzas], the first four lines capture human confusion and sorrow. The last three [lines in each stanza] locate the spiritual essence that provides consolation" (109).

Anger considers this symmetry effective in representing Bradstreet's attempt of trying to find logic in Elizabethan death and her realization that "One cannot reason through experience to begin with. In the first stanza, the pattern of human confusion and sorrow appears in the first four lines when Bradstreet writes repeated farewells and reveals her uncertainty in understanding Elizabethan death: Farewell dear babe, my heart's too much content, Farewell sweet babe, the pleasure of mine eye, Farewell fair flower that for a space was lent, Then eaten away unto eternity (lines 1-4).

Broadsheet is sad that her beloved granddaughter, Elizabeth, should have such a short time on earth and is confused when suddenly and inexplicably she is forever taken away. Looking at the second stanza, in the first four lines Broadsheet focuses on the life cycle of nature, speaking in terms of mature growth-? a contrast to the short life of Elizabeth: By nature trees do rot when they are grown, And plums and apples thoroughly ripe do fall, And corn and grass are in their season mown, And time brings down what is both strong and tall (8-11).

Broadsheet finds it logical that trees eventually rot; ripe fruit falls; corn and grass mown-? their life cycle complete and death expected. What Broadsheet cannot comprehend is why God would not allow Elizabeth a full and long life as He allows tauter. Enveloped within this confusion, Broadsheet reveals her shy question of God's will. As Anger indicates, it is within the last three lines of each stanza Broadsheet accepts her human frailty and receives comfort from accepting God's will.

This expressed in the first stanza when Broadsheet writes the last three lines: " Blest babe, why should I once bewail thy fate, / Or sigh thy days so soon were terminate, / Sits thou are settled in an everlasting state" (5-7). In terms of religion, Broadsheet understands her granddaughter's fate-? to be with God-? is much greater than engaging on earth. Martin comments that Broadsheet is aware of the Puritan woman's duty is " to assist her family in the service of God," (69) and " To love them for their own sake would indicate a dangerous attachment to this world" (69).

However, Breadbasket's heart aches for the physical being of Elizabeth, illustrating the conflict she has in quelling her tendency to place a higher importance on physical life than on spiritual life. In the second stanza, Broadsheet expresses in the final three lines a spiritual comfort and understanding when she accepts God's acts as beyond the OIC capable of mere human beings. She ends the poem: " But plants new set to be eradicate, / And buds new blown to have so short a date, / Is by His hand alone that guides nature and fate" (12-14).

Broadsheet understands that God needs no reason. His authority so great, He alone chooses the fate of all living things. According to Puritan theology, God's will is unquestionable, and she at last defers to the wisdom of His ever-knowing power. This pattern, a tug-of-war between the devotion to her faith and her human need for rational explanation, is successful in contributing to the motional power of this elegy. Four years following the death of Elizabeth, Broadsheet is again grief-stricken by the loss of a second grandchild, Anne.

In the elegy Broadsheet dedicates to her, " In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Anne Broadsheet, Who Deceased June 20, 1669, Being Three Years and Seven Months Old," seen Decodes more Torturing In tone, out again Tints nearest consulting to ten greater power of God. However, Broadsheet does not begin this poem with tender farewells, her accusation put forth immediately: " The heavens have changed to sorrow my delight" (2). She directly charges heaven for her sadness and in doing so indirectly blames God.

Accusation alternates with retraction as Broadsheet then deflects that statement by later in the poem calling herself a fool: " More fool then I to look on that was lent / As if mine own, when thus impermanent" (13-14). Broadsheet places the blame back on herself for her foolish expectations of thinking that Anne belongs to this life, when in fact she belongs to God. This is another example of the great effort Broadsheet puts forth in trying to reconcile her feelings between the natural world and the spiritual world.

In the closing lines Broadsheet writes: " Meantime my throbbing heart's cheered up with this: / Thou with thy Savior art in endless bliss" (17-18). Through rote obedience, Broadsheet claims comfort by the thought that Anne is now with God; although, this attempt to balance her grief against her trust in God expressed with reluctant resignation. Tragically, Breadbasket's grandson, Simon, dies just five months following the death of her granddaughter, Anne.

It is this third poem, " On My Dear Grandchild Simon Broadsheet, Who Died on 16 November, 1669, Being But a Month, and One Day Old," that is most powerful in illustrating the culmination of Breadbasket's deep sorrow and intense frustration in her continued search for the meaning of her grandchildren deaths. Breadbasket's anger is palpable. Her grief is acute and raw. She now intends her accusations to be understood and deliberately ends the alternating pattern of shy questioning and submissive acceptance of God's will, a method used in the two previous elegies to mask her challenge of God.

Broadsheet barely contains her anger and outrage when she blatantly charges God for her grandchildren deaths and penny questions his goodness when she writes: " Three flowers, two scarcely blown, the last I' the' bud, / Cropped by the' Almighty hand; yet is He good" (3-4). She cannot find wisdom or greater meaning in God's decision. She cannot reconcile the supposed goodness of God with the tragic deaths of her three grandchildren: a good God would not inflict such pain and sorrow.

Breadbasket's voice is marked with strained piety that barely conceals her contempt of a God who would intend the death of a child to serve as a lesson to her. Pamela Shelton comments on this when writes, " In poems mourning the deaths of grandchildren, she finds it more difficult to accept the God that she, as a Puritan, must love and obey: she writes with bitter irony about a God who kills children in order to test adults. " Broadsheet fills her lines with dark sarcasm and takes less care in her attempts to mask her accusations.

Shelton notes what she considers the most powerful lines in this elegy: " Later, mourning her grandson Simon Broadsheet, the word 'say is chillingly ironic: 'Such was [God's] will, but why, let's not dispute, / With humble hearts and mouths put in the dust, / Let's say he's merciful, as well as Just. Here Broadsheet cannot connect her roles of grandmother and Puritan; she can only go through the gesture-? write the poem in which she tries to trust God-? of reconciling her personal experience with her religious faith. In this elegy, Broadsheet seems not as cautious in camouflaging her accusations; in fact, her tone is unmistakably condescending. However, she strategically constructs her phrases and carefully sneezes near words, stressfully

conveying near sense AT Dearly walkout crossing ten dangerously thin line that separates piety and heresy within the Puritanical society. She demonstrates this by naming him merciful and Just, albeit without sincerity or In Breadbasket's closing lines, it is revealing that she does not refer to conviction.

Simon being with God. Instead she writes, " Go pretty babe, go rest with sisters twain" (11). Broadsheet finds comfort not from the thought that Simon is with God, but that he is now with his sisters. Here she is outright refusing to accept comfort from a God who she deems unjust and unfair. Anne Broadsheet reveals through these three moving elegies dedicated to her beloved grandchildren the emotional and virtual Journey she traveled in seeking answers to her questions of faith.

These poems symbolize Breadbasket's mourning the loss of her grandchildren and the conflict she experiences in attempting to define her faith in God and in the Puritan religion. According to Martin, " Anne Broadsheet finally managed to believe in God," (76) but, " her faith was based on a profound desire to remain connected to life, whether in this world or the next" (76). I declare the Honor Pledge. Works Cited Martin, Wendy. An American Triptych: Anne Broadsheet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich. 17, 69, 76. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.