

INTRODUCTION



Anne Bradstreet

(1612-1672)

Anne Bradstreet is the first significant American poet. She was born in England, the daughter of Thomas Dudley, steward to the Earl of Lincoln. At age 16 she married Simon Bradstreet, a graduate of Cambridge. She sailed to America in 1630 with her husband, her parents, John Winthrop and the other first settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: “I changed my condition and was married, and came into this Country, where I found a new world and new manners, at which my heart rose. But after I was convinced it was the way of God, I submitted to it.”

Thomas Dudley and Simon Bradstreet became leaders in the Colony. Anne Bradstreet had 8 children and lived a busy life as a wife and mother in a frontier wilderness, yet she also managed to write poetry and meditations. Her collection *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America* was published in London in 1650, the first book of poetry in American literature. Her major subjects are (1) the problem of belief in God; (2) the problem of the flesh versus the spirit; and (3) problems of domestic life in early New England. The aesthetic virtues of her best poetry are simplicity, honesty, realism and emotional power deriving from archetypal themes and symbolism. Critics have faulted Bradstreet for conventionality of form, occasional awkwardness of rhythm and forced syntax.

Bradstreet feared that her passion and her love of beauty and sensory experience were unchristian, but her poetry transcends Puritan inhibition and Calvinist doctrine, affirming natural feelings and a balance of head and heart in advance of Jonathan Edwards and Hawthorne. She contradicts the stereotype of the cold and sexless Puritan. Her devotion to family and her concept of man and women as complementary opposites make her a forerunner of the religious Victorians. At the same time, she is modern in her occasional religious doubt, like Emily Dickinson: “Many times hath Satan troubled me concerning the verity of the scriptures, many times by Atheisme how I could know whether there was a God.”

Michael Hollister (2015)



Anne Bradstreet with husband