

Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672)

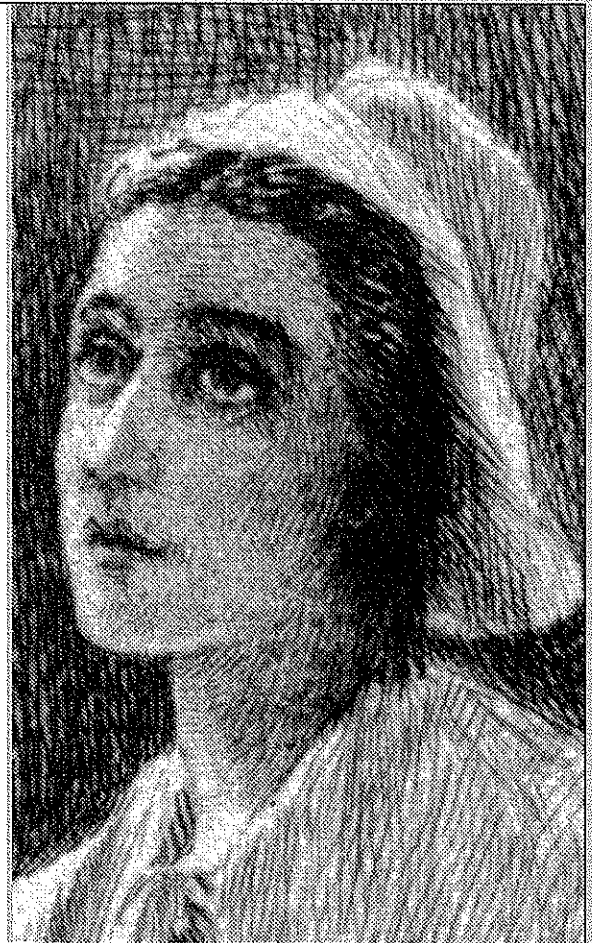
Author of “To My Dear and Loving Husband”

Anne Bradstreet and her husband, Simon, arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, when she was only eighteen. Armed with the convictions of her Puritan upbringing, she left behind her hometown of Northampton, England, to start afresh in America. It was not an easy life for Bradstreet, who raised eight children, suffered through multiple illnesses, and faced many hardships.

A Private Writer Made Public Despite the difficulties she endured, Bradstreet was able to devote her spare moments to the very “unladylike” occupation of writing. She wrote for herself, not for publication. Nevertheless, in 1650, John Woodbridge, her brother-in-law, arranged for the publication in England of a collection of her scholarly poems, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America, By a Gentlewoman of Those Parts*. Generally considered to be the first collection of original poetry written in colonial America, the book examined the rights of women to learn and express themselves. Bradstreet’s later poems, such as “To My Dear and Loving Husband,” are more personal, expressing her feelings about the joys and difficulties of everyday Puritan life. In one, she wrote about her thoughts before giving birth. In another, she wrote about the death of a grandchild.

Bradstreet’s poetry reflects the Puritans’ knowledge of the stories and language of the Bible, as well as their concern for the relationship between earthly and heavenly life. Her work also exhibits some of the characteristics of the French and English poetry of her day.

In 1956, the poet John Berryman wrote “Homage to Mistress Bradstreet,” a long poem that pays tribute to this first American poet.



*There is no object that we
see; no action that we do;
no good that we enjoy; no
evil that we feel, or fear, but
we may make some spiritual
advantage of all: and he that
makes such improvement is
wise, as well as pious.*

To
My Dear
and
Loving Husband
Anne Bradstreet

Reading Strategy

Paraphrasing

How would you paraphrase these first two lines?

Vocabulary

quench (kwench) *v.*
satisfy a thirst

recompense (rek' em pens') *n.* repayment; something given or done in return for something else

manifold (man' ə fōld')
adv. in many ways

persevere (pur' sə vir')
v. persist; be steadfast in purpose

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me ye women if you can.

5 I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought¹ but love from thee, give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay.

10 The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persevere,²
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

1. **ought** (ôt) *n.* anything whatever.

2. **persevere** pronounced (pur sev' er) in the seventeenth century, and thus rhymed with the word ever.