**The Puritan Tradition**

**To My Dear and Loving Husband and Upon the Burning of Our House, July 10th, 1666**

Poetry by Anne Bradstreet

**Huswifery**

Poetry by Edward Taylor

**Meet the Authors**

**Anne Bradstreet**

*c. 1612-1672*

Anne Bradstreet was essentially the first notable American poet, man or woman. Considering that Puritan women were not encouraged to improve their minds—let alone express their ideas—this achievement is remarkable.

**Coming to America**

Anne Dudley Bradstreet was born in England and raised on an estate, which her father managed for the Earl of Lincoln. With access to the earl’s library, she received a good education. In 1628, 16-year-old Anne married Simon Bradstreet. Two years later, the young couple sailed for Massachusetts. After her privileged upbringing, Anne Bradstreet was not prepared for the harsh living conditions of colonial America. Her religious faith helped her endure these hardships—as did writing poetry.

**Personal Poetry**

Bradstreet focused primarily on the realities of her life—her husband, her eight children, and her house. In 1650, without her knowledge, Bradstreet’s brother-in-law had some of her verses published in London in a volume titled *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*. It was the first book of poetry ever published by an American colonist.

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**Edward Taylor**

*1647–1729*

For over 200 years, the work of Edward Taylor, one of colonial America’s most inventive poets, remained unread. His poetry did not come to light until the 1930s when his long-forgotten manuscripts were discovered in the Yale University Library.

**Frontier Parson and Poet**

Born in England, Taylor came to America in 1668 to escape religious persecution in his homeland. In 1671, after graduating from Harvard University, Taylor became the minister of a church in Westfield, Massachusetts. He held that position until his death 58 years later.

The wilderness town of Westfield presented many challenges to the highly intellectual Taylor. But he undertook his roles as farmer, physician, and minister with energy. He even called his flock to worship by beating a drum.

Like Anne Bradstreet—a volume of whose work he owned—Taylor wrote his poetry to glorify God. He found his subjects in human life, nature, and everyday activities. His poems on these topics served as a form of worship.
Like all poets, Puritan poets used figurative language to create imagery and communicate ideas beyond the literal meaning of words. Figurative language helped the Puritan poets convey ideas about their religious faith and their personal lives. As you read the poems by Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor, look for the types of figures of speech listed below.

- **A metaphor** is a figure of speech that directly compares two unlike things without using like or as. (*Our house is our nest.*)

- **An extended metaphor** is one that draws the comparison out and compares the two things at length and in many ways. (*Our house is our nest; we fly away only to return to its snug protection.*)

- **Personification** is a figure of speech in which an object, animal, or idea is given human characteristics. (*Our house wraps our family in a warm embrace.*)

- **Hyperbole** is a figure of speech in which the truth is exaggerated for emphasis. (*Our house means more to us than all the money in the world.*)

- Also note the effect of any biblical allusions, or references, and how they enhance the meaning of the poem.

**READING STRATEGY: CLARIFY MEANING IN OLDER POETRY**

When reading works from the Puritan era, it is important to stop and clarify meaning by rereading and restating difficult passages as needed in order to fully appreciate the literature. Be aware of the following as you read the Puritan poets:

- **Archaic language**—words that were once in common use but that are now considered old-fashioned or out-of-date

- **Inverted syntax**—sentence structure in which the expected order of words is reversed

As you read each poem, use a chart like the one shown to record and restate examples of archaic language and inverted syntax.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archaic Language</th>
<th>Inverted Syntax</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>blest</em> (blessed)</td>
<td>&quot;when rest I took&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(when I took rest)</em></td>
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What do you value most?

The things that we value in life may be actual objects or they may be less tangible. For instance, a person might prize a favorite CD or jacket. On the other hand, the gift of family may outweigh more material possessions. The Puritan poets you are about to read valued family life and their religious faith above all things. What do you prize most in your life?

**QUICKWRITE** Imagine that a reality show has offered you the chance to win a million dollars. The catch is that you will have to give up an object, a person, or a belief that you truly value. Assume that you are not willing to make the sacrifice. Write a brief letter to explain why you must turn down the money.

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
To My Dear and Loving Husband

Anne Bradstreet

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

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 ought but love from thee, give recompense.¹

Thy love is such I can no way repay,  
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.

Then while we live, in love let’s so persevere²  
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

¹ recompense (rıˈkəm-pëns′): payment in return for something, such as a service.
² persevere: In Bradstreet’s time, persevere would have been pronounced pür-sav′ər, which rhymes with ever.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE
Reread lines 5–7. How does the poet use hyperbole in these lines to emphasize her feelings for her husband?

CLARIFY MEANING
Use conventional word order to restate the inverted syntax in lines 11–12. What relationship do the lines suggest between earthly love and eternal life?

Analyze Visuals
Many Puritan women stitched samplers like the one shown here. The samplers often depicted nature scenes or stories from the Bible. What values are suggested by the subject matter of the sampler?
TO MY DEAR AND LOVING HUSBAND
In silent night when rest I took
For sorrow near I did not look
I wakened was with thund’ring noise
And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.

That fearful sound of “Fire!” and “Fire!”
Let no man know is my desire.

I, starting up, the light did spy,
And to my God my heart did cry
To strengthen me in my distress
And not to leave me succorless.¹

Then, coming out, beheld a space
The flame consume my dwelling place.

And when I could no longer look,
I blest His name that gave and took,²

That laid my goods now in the dust:
Yea, so it was, and so ’twas just.
It was His own, it was not mine,
Far be it that I should repine;³

1. succorless (sūk’ar-lēs): without help or relief.
2. I . . . took: an allusion to Job 1:21 in the Bible—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. blessed be the name of the Lord."
3. repine: to complain or fret; to long for something.
He might of all justly bereft,
But yet sufficient for us left.
When by the ruins oft I past,
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,
And here and there the places spy
Where oft I sat and long did lie:

Here stood that trunk and there that chest,
There lay that store I counted best.
My pleasant things in ashes lie,
And them behold no more shall I.
Under thy roof no guest shall sit,
Nor at thy table eat a bit.

No pleasant tale shall e’er be told,
Nor things recounted done of old.
No candle e’er shall shine in thee,
Nor bridegroom’s voice e’er heard shall be.

In silence ever shalt thou lie;
Adieu, Adieu, all’s vanity. 4

Then straight I ’gin my heart to chide, 5
And did thy wealth on earth abide?
Didst fix thy hope on mold’ring dust?
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
That dunghill mists away may fly.

Thou hast an house on high erect,
Framed by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnishéd,
Stands permanent though this be fled.
It’s purchased and paid for too
By Him who hath enough to do. 6

A price so vast as is unknown
Yet by His gift is made thine own;
There’s wealth enough, I need no more,
Farewell, my pelf, 6 farewell my store.
The world no longer let me love,
My hope and treasure lies above.

4. all’s vanity: an allusion to Ecclesiastes 1:2 in the Bible—“All is vanity,” meaning that all is temporary and meaningless.
5. chide: to scold mildly so as to correct or improve.
6. pelf: wealth or riches, especially when dishonestly acquired.
Huswifery  
Edward Taylor

Make me, O Lord, Thy spinning wheel complete.  
Thy holy word my distaff\(^1\) make for me.  
Make mine affections Thy swift flyers\(^2\) neat,  
And make my soul Thy holy spool to be.  
My conversation make to be Thy reel,  
And reel the yarn thereon spun of Thy wheel.  

Make me Thy loom then, knit therein this twine:  
And make Thy holy spirit, Lord, wind quills;\(^3\)  
Then weave the web Thyself. The yarn is fine.  
Thine ordinances make my fulling mills.\(^4\)  
Then dye the same in heavenly colors choice,  
All pinked\(^5\) with varnished flowers of paradise.

Then clothe therewith mine understanding, will,  
Affections, judgment, conscience, memory;  
My words and actions, that their shine may fill  
My ways with glory and Thee glorify.  
Then mine apparel shall display before Ye  
That I am clothed in holy robes for glory.

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1. **distaff**: staff on a spinning wheel for holding the wool or flax to be spun.
2. **flyers**: parts of spinning wheels that twist fibers into yarn.
3. **quills**: rods or spindles used to wind and hold yarn.
4. **fulling mills**: machines that beat and process woven cloth to make it denser and more compact.
5. **pinked**: decorated.
Comprehension

1. **Recall** In “To My Dear and Loving Husband,” what does the speaker value more than gold?

2. **Recall** When the speaker in “Upon the Burning of Our House” wakes up to find her house on fire, what is her initial reaction?

3. **Clarify** The speaker in Taylor’s “Huswifery” compares himself to a loom. Who or what is compared to the weaver?

Text Analysis

4. **Clarify Meaning** Review the examples of archaic language and inverted syntax you recorded as you read the poems. How would you restate lines 19–20 of “Upon the Burning of Our House”: “He might of all justly bereft, / But yet sufficient for us left”?

5. **Draw Conclusions** Use details from the two poems by Anne Bradstreet to explain what she reveals about her
   - marriage
   - religious beliefs
   - daily life

6. **Make Inferences** What did Bradstreet value more than her house? How did this help her accept the loss of her house by fire?

7. **Analyze Figurative Language** How do the “holy robes for glory” mentioned in line 18 of “Huswifery” complete the poem’s extended metaphor?

8. **Compare Literary Works** What do the poems by Bradstreet and Taylor have in common? What distinguishes one poet’s work from the other’s? In a chart like the one shown, compare and contrast the poets’ work, noting the religious views expressed, the formality of each poet’s style, and the personality revealed. Use specific details from the poems to complete the chart.

Text Criticism

9. **Examine Social Context** The Puritans strongly disapproved of women writers. A Puritan minister even wrote a letter to his sister in England saying, “Your printing of a book, beyond the custom of your sex, doth rankly smell.” In spite of this disapproval, do you think the Puritan community would have considered any aspects of Anne Bradstreet’s poetry praiseworthy? Explain your answer.

What do you VALUE most?

Consider the various things that people value in modern society. What might the Puritans think of some modern values? What do you think of modern values?