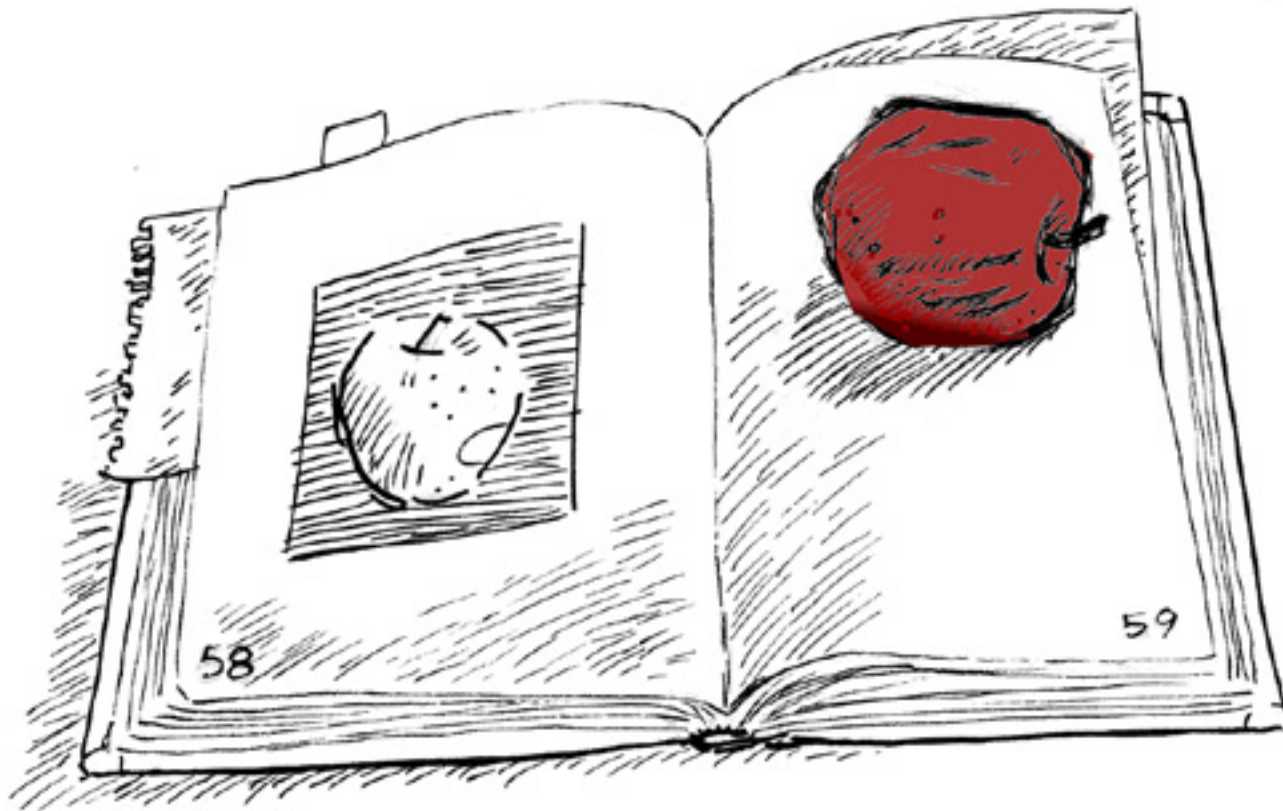


Anne Bradstreet



Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Anne Bradstreet's "Contemplations" exists as a justification of writing as a communion with God.

It is believed to have been completed in the 1660's and published without her consent.

The full poem is uniform in construction:

- comprised of 33 stanzas
- each stanza utilizes a **septet** count (seven lines)
- rhyme scheme ABAB CCC
- meter is set in **iambic pentameter** (5 beats per line) for opening six lines
- the ultimate line utilizes an **alexandrine meter of six beats**

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

The full theme is presented as a tightly woven structure of different concepts.

The entire poem is a complex meditation sequence which ends with the questioning of humanity's placement in the hierarchy of the universe.

The Natural World was meant to show spiritual teachings.

Hierarchies in nature compliment hierarchies of human condition and predict the consequences waiting them in Heaven.

- God made Nature to mirror Heaven, the world itself is a metaphor
- humans needed to meditate on this fact on a daily basis, remind themselves of their placement within the Universe
- "Contemplations" individually act as meditations

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplations#1 and #2:

A meditation on an autumn scene: the sun rising over trees.

- Although the trees are “painted” (l5) they are *not* shown as “vain” creatures:

“the trees all richly clad, yet void of pride” (l3)

—they are not objects of deception or falsehood.

- From the opening, Bradstreet establishes a positive tone of affirmation.
- The sun rising shifts the trees appearance to a golden hue, mixing colors.

This sight shifts all her senses into awareness: “rapt” is a derivative of the word: “rapture.”

- In the divine sense, she is experiencing an epiphany or a mild divine ecstasy.
- This borders on metaphysical ideas of the time, such as John Donne utilizes.
- Bradstreet rationalizes that if so much beauty is displayed in the Material World, then beauty in the Spiritual World is even more glamorous.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplation #3:

- An solitary oak is introduced, one that has survived many years of winter.
- She talks directly to the tree itself, as a fellow-creature of God.
- In line 7 when she says “all these as nought, eternity doth scorn” she is talking directly to the tree, likewise to the reader, and thirdly, to herself as a triad of meditation.
- The tree acts as a bridge from earthly concerns to aerial heaven—but notice the oak also channels her thought process and the remainder of the poem towards further meditations on the divine.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplation #4:

- the sun returns, paired with the leafy tree
 “Soul of this world, this universe’s eye”
- This stanza shows she is aware of other beliefs; she is well versed in Greek myths.
- Likewise she realizes the majesty of the sun could easily confuse the pagan mind; she addresses the sun directly, just as she addressed the tree.
- Furthermore she chastises herself for personifying the sun, addressing it as a personification.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplation #5:

- She continues talking to the sun, but shifts focus to the earth.
- Despite her earlier comments, she continues to personify objects of her contemplations: here she portrays the earth as a female body, a *fertile* body
- The earth is shown *flirting* with the sun:
 “ushers thee with smiles and blushes”—
- The sun is shown as an instrument of God's power.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

- Likewise, this verse recalls the Old Testament Psalm 19:

1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth ye work of his hands.

2 Day unto day uttereth the same, and night unto night teacheth knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

4 Their line is gone forth through all the earth, and their words into the ends of the world: in them hath **he set a tabernacle for the sun.**

5 Which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth like a mighty man to run his race.

6 His going out is from the end of the heaven, and his compass is unto the ends of ye same, and none is hid from the heat thereof (*Geneva Bible 1599*).

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Noticed the pattern the stanzas establish:

- the opening sestet presents a major image of her contemplation
- questions are presented within the opening sestet
- the ending couplet presents a divine interpretation of her reflections—
a resolution to her meditative process is obtained
- the resulting alexandrine therefore acts as a “moral” to the stanza
- the additional foot acts as a psychological emphasis on the line’s importance
- the ending couplet cycles back to a higher purpose, higher reflection

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

For its time period, this section of the poem does depart slightly from the typical stern Puritanical thought process.

Wearing the mask of a meditative sermon, she moves into a strong poem of self-analysis.

- Her poet-speaker experiments with the creative process in order to achieve a meditative moral.
- In the end, a transition is built from the individual to all Humanity.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplation #8:

- This stanza is the pivotal moment where the focus shifts from reflections on the sun to deeper self reflections.
- The speaker is shown in solitude, walking along
 “pathless paths I led my wand’ring feet” (l51)
- She no longer shown walking along a manicured human-controlled path.
- She is moving into an aspect of the wilderness itself; just as she physically moves through the American landscape, psychologically she wanders through her inner feelings.
- In solitude she wants to find a song, through the help of her Muse— but the song needs to be appropriate to magnify the Creator’s merit.
- She feels creative limitations—ideas are not forming.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplation 8 shifts the focus of the poem from a positive, upbeat tone to a more reflective, somewhat pessimistic view of the world.

- Due to its strategy of self-examination the Self has been made important focus.
- In a sense, Bradstreet's speaker is wanting to find proof of worthiness and self-worth.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

- The focus shifts from celebrating God as center of the Divine Universe to the Self questioning the methods of her Inner Universe—the speaker discusses issues from the center of her personal reflections
- In a manner of speaking the Creator has been put into the background of her personal frustrations—the poem becomes less of a full devotional and more of a personal reflection, creative experiment.

Contemplation #9:

- The crickets and grasshoppers are shown content to sing to God in their limitations of one note.
- The speaker complains: — why can't I find a higher poem to glorify God?

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Collectively Contemplations #10-11:

- Although she uses the word “conceit” in this case Bradstreet utilizes the secondary dictionary meaning where conceit equals the thought process, the statements conceived in the mind; knowledge.
- These two stanzas spiral her from herself to reflections on past histories, to the past records in the Bible specifically.
- She shifts to a mask of masculine persona. Because Bradstreet is about to reflect on scripture, and only men were allowed a *public* voice discussing scripture, she is *privately* meditating on what a man would do *publicly*.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplation #10:

1. In present times, reflecting back on the past,
 2. living men ("being") reflect ("fancy") on the deeds of others in history;
 3. this process allows past events to return, even though they're gone forever,
 4. and in turn this recalls years in the distant past.
 5. It transforms a man into a well-aged and well-experienced individual,
 6. more so than Methuselah, or his grandfather,
 7. while the modern man is reflecting on these same historical Biblical persons.
- What she shows here, is the benefits of the contemplative, meditative process; she defends her own poem's actions through the example of a male character.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplation #11:

- This stanza continues the thread of the new idea; the male figure reflects back in history, down to events spiralling out of Eden, to the scenes with Adam selecting the forbidden fruit and the penalties which resulted.
- Bradstreet is strategically exploring a new idea in the scriptures and needs to utilize a male mask to soften her approach on the subject.
- Adam is shown in control:
 “[He] sees glorious Adam there made lord of all,

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Fancies the apple, dangle on the tree" (ll 71-72)

Contemplation #12:

- This poem here shows a post-lapsarian Eve, with a new born Cain in her lap.
- Eve, "our grandame" is shown regretting the circumstances which forced them out of Paradise by the deceit of Satan.
- What is unique with her presentation, when you compare #11 and #12 notice both Adam and Eve are equally at fault—Bradstreet does not place a heavier guilt on Eve for wanting "to be more wise"— (l 83)

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplations #13 – 15:

- These reflect on the circumstances of the first murder and Cain's punishment then spirals these scenes back to the New England "present."

Contemplations #16 – 20:

- These shift the focus back to the landscape and its seemingly long life, contrasting against humanity's short term:
 - “But man grows old, lies down, remains where once he'd laid” (l 126).
- She does resolve despite this, “man was made for endless immortality” (l140).

Contemplation #21:

- Here the poet-speaker returns to her current time: her wandering has lead her to rest under an elm by a river.
- Again she is consumed in a sense of the solitary Self in nature.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplations #22–25:

- These four stanzas discuss further the concepts of wildlife in the river itself; mixing in Greek imagery as metaphor, and watery images.

Contemplations #26–28

- She speaks directly to a nightingale, comparing her toils as human through the carefree life of the bird, which
 “fears no snares,
 That neither toils nor hoards up in thy barn,
 Feels no sad thoughts nor cruciating cares” (ll 183-185)
- The bird’s carefree life does not recall to her metaphors for past history, of humanity’s past Paradise, nor does it remind her of divine heaven to come—the bird is left in an ever present tense.

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

Contemplation #29–30

- These present yet another shifts in tone painting a bleak picture of human sufferage and toil.
- Most of humankind is blind to the necessary changes to save themselves. They refuse to consider their damnation.

What the poet—speaker ultimately resolves:

- God alone is eternal
- human-made crafts and designs and history will fade eventually

Bradstreet's "Contemplations"

What makes this work stand out:

- collectively these contemplations and meditations are involved with the natural landscape of early colonial America
- these verses are strictly *private* observations on human nature, utilizing the New England landscape as an extension of the self
- as a female, she borrows the male discourse in order to create her own interpretations of scripture and cultural concepts of the Divine
- the first *public* creative voice emerging from the American landscape is that of a woman's *private* self-examinations