

ANNE BRADSTREET: PASSIONATE FEMININITY

Douglas Wilson

With a Foreword by George Grant

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FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

Without the least historical warrant, the seventeenth-century Puritans have commonly been portrayed as dull and dour. They have been discriminatorily caricatured as artless and plain. They have been unfairly criticized as closed-minded and narrow. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Puritans were a colorful, lively, passionate, artful, and delightful people. They took great relish in life. They reveled in the earthly manifestations of beauty, goodness, and truth.

This is particularly evident in the prose and poetry that Puritans—and those Cavaliers and Covenanters sympathetic with their cause—prolifically produced. Indeed, in those heady days just following the age of Shakespeare, the Puritans and their cultural kith and kin transformed the character of English literature for

the good like virtually no other movement before or since. Consider the contributions of such writers as John Donne (1572–1631), William Drummond (1585–1649), Giles Fletcher (1588–1623), George Wither (1588–1667), William Davenport (1606–1688), Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667), Richard Baxter (1615–1691), John Bunyan (1628–1688), Isaac Watts (1674–1748), and, of course, John Milton (1608–1674). By any standard, they afforded us a weighty inheritance of literary treasures.

Clearly, the religious, political, and social upheavals of the day provided those Puritans, Cavaliers, and Covenanters with much to write about. And so they did, with consummate verve, passion, and creativity. Their remarkable emphasis upon substantive education, sublime erudition, and rhetorical excellence was matched only by their emotional maturity, intellectual honesty, and spiritual integrity. The result was a rich body of literature that has continued to shape English-speaking culture ever since.

In the New World, the greatest exponent of this Puritan literary tradition was Anne Bradstreet. As Douglas Wilson demonstrates in this insightful examination of her life and work, she was an epistemologically self-conscious Puritan through and through. She imbibed from the deep wells of Puritan theology all her life. She shared the peculiar Puritan worldview of her Colonial contemporaries—men like Cotton Mather,

PART 1: THE LIFE OF ANNE BRADSTREET

*Madam Ann Bradstreet . . . whose poems, divers times
printed, have afforded a grateful entertainment
into the ingenious, and a monument for her memory
beyond the stateliest marbles. –Cotton Mather*

*That our daughters may be as pillars,
sculptured in the palace style. (Ps. 144:12b)*

CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

The sixteenth century was a tumultuous time, and, for the people who lived throughout it, the very ground shifted under their feet. Some of the most obvious manifestations of this were the settlements established in the New World. Many Puritans had crossed the ocean in order to worship God according to the requirements of the Word of God. Because they were virtually the first to arrive in this new setting, a sparsely inhabited continent invited them to establish a city set on a hill. And this is what they set out to do. Their work had a remarkable impact on both sides of the Atlantic.

But they were living in a new world in other senses as well. A generally medieval view of the world was alive and well just a generation before the great emigration to the colonies. The “new science” was not yet established,

and while educated individuals were aware of recent scientific advancements, many were not yet convinced by them. This was very true of many of those who crossed over to New England.

The established civil order was experiencing birth pangs, as well. Charles I had embraced an absolutist view of the English monarchy, and his tyranny set in motion the forces that would bring him into a fatal collision with Parliament, and it would result in his beheading. Cromwell ruled as the Lord Protector, but the monarchy was restored after his death, and Charles II brought a dissolute court back into vogue. He was succeeded by James II, who brought the court into such contempt that he was removed in what became known as the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

On the issues surrounding religion and the public square, the seventeenth century was the first time in millennia when significant writers began to seriously broach the idea of a broad religious “tolerance.” The idea seemed harmless enough at the beginning, and those who advocated it, like Roger Williams, have been greatly acclaimed—but our generation has been the witness of just how bloodthirsty tolerance can be.

And so Anne Bradstreet, the Puritan poetess, lived in a time of great cultural transition. She was living in a new world, but she had great and deep sympathies for the old order of the old world. Her poetry reflects these

transitions; she lived at a very busy crossroads of human history. In some instances, we find her looking ahead at the road that was eventually taken. In other situations, we see her looking back at the road that was unhappily abandoned. But whichever direction we find her looking, we will discover her to have been a very wise woman indeed.

Influenced by evolutionary assumptions, we moderns have been trained to assume that all these changes and transitions were for good. And, indeed, some of them were a good thing, but “progress” is by no means an automatic thing. While we may be thankful for modern medicine (and modern dentistry!), our modern cultural rootlessness does not compare well at all with our fathers’ sense of *place* and *identity*.

We should consider these changes in turn. As the Puritans came to America, certain changes were inevitable. It was not possible to build a new “nation” without building a new national identity as well. The fact that they did not initially think that they were building such a new identity does not alter the necessary outcome of their actions. The character exhibited by intrepid explorers and hardy settlers is a type of character than cannot be content with mere duplication of old forms in a new setting. The old forms were brought over, to be sure, but when they were planted here, the new soil affected them drastically, and a breach with the older culture was inevitable.

In addition, the older view of the world, the older cosmology, was still entrenched in England. Challenges there were, but much institutional resistance had to be overcome. That was not the case here, and the older assumptions quickly fell away.

With regard to the civil crisis in Old England, an interesting pattern developed in America that would continue through to the election of Andrew Jackson in the early nineteenth century. The erosion of the old English (unwritten) constitution was well advanced in the old country. The colonists quickly found themselves guardians of the older order—the real civil revolution was occurring back in England. Because of the tyranny of Charles I and the wicked men associated with him, such as Archbishop Laud, the traditional freedoms of Englishmen were under fierce assault. This led to civil war, the effects of which were felt throughout the seventeenth century and most of the eighteenth. The American conservative stance, seeking to maintain the old English order, continued through to the American War for Independence, which really was not a *revolution* at all in the modern sense of the word. The revolutionary activity was happening in England.

We see this as well in the realm of religious “toleration.” The chaos of civil disorder in England brought in a weariness with those who wanted an established church, maintaining a united faith that excluded various

Protestant sects. This weariness created an opportunity for those who, like Roger Williams or John Milton, wanted to establish “toleration.” When the Puritans left for New England, they shared the assumption with virtually every religious party that there could be only one established church. The debate between them concerned which religious party would control the religious establishment. Presbyterians wanted an established church as did the Independents and the Anglicans. The Puritans who came to America maintained this conviction, but they soon discovered that there had been a fundamental change back home. This explains how Roger Williams could have been excluded from Massachusetts Bay but still have very influential friends back in England.

In the midst of this, we find Anne Bradstreet, an educated and intelligent woman with deep Puritan convictions. She was a woman of refinement, living a newly established hardscrabble colony. She wrote poetry that reflected an educated knowledge of the established science of the day. She took a great interest in the politics of her time and wrote a dialogue between the Old England and New, discussing the political troubles of Mother England. She was the daughter of one of New England’s magistrates and was married to another one. The local politics in the colony concerned her directly and immediately.

How she dealt with all these things will teach us a great deal about how wisdom views the world.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING THE PURITANS

Misunderstanding the Puritans is a popular indoor sport for many amateur historians and not a few professionals. Unfortunately, this distorted view frequently comes out in treatments of Anne Bradstreet's life, even when the writer is seeking to be sympathetic to Anne herself. Not all the misconceptions can be set aside in just a few pages, but the general outline of a revisionist view of the Puritans has to be sketched. This is because Anne Bradstreet was a *representative* figure, but she is frequently presented as a Puritan anomaly. She had such a winsome personality, and, since everyone knows that

Puritans were cranks, she is treated as something of a genetic fluke among the Puritans. You see, she was *nice*.¹

Much of what we think we know about the Puritans is just simply wrong.²

For a representative sampling, let's consider the effects of their theology, their view of alcohol, their take on the arts, and their contribution to law.

Admiring (but patronizing) comments abound in literature about the New England Puritans. "The New England Puritans, *in spite of their orthodox views*, were people of broad intellect."³ In spite of their orthodoxy, they were highly educated. Why not "*because of their orthodoxy*"? The answer is found in the fact that for moderns, belief in God and a brain do not go well together.

For the modern mind, rebellion is authentic, while submission to God is inauthentic. One writer comments, "Here and there in Anne Bradstreet there can be felt also the strain set up between the essential instinctive emotion and the bonds drawn tight against

1. For those open to understanding the Puritans as they really were, the place to start is with Leland Ryken, *The Worldly Saints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986).

2. After finishing this book, I encountered a wonderful volume that really addresses the Puritans and their poetry with genuine insight. It is Robert Daly's *God's Altar: The World and the Flesh in Puritan Poetry*. See Selected Bibliography.

3. Josephine Piercy, *Anne Bradstreet* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), 22, emphasis mine.

the full expression by elements in the Puritan's way of thought."⁴ In other words, her theology was a straitjacket that kept her from realizing her full emotional potential.

The writer goes on to discuss Anne Bradstreet's struggle with trials and submission in her poetry on the death of a child. She starts (in the imagination of this writer) to "flicker toward a passionate rebellion" until a bucket of cold theology douses her. Far better to "rage, rage against the dying of the light," as a modern poet would do. It fits in better for a generation of whiners. In reality, Anne understood herself and the battle between flesh and spirit very well. Like all Christians, she had to strive in her faithfulness to God. She was not a bundle of neuroses; she was a Christian growing in the midst of trials. And she did this self-consciously.

In saying this, it is not possible to understand New England Puritans without understanding the theology of John Calvin. The Puritans were Calvinists, and, unfortunately, about the only thing more grievously misunderstood today than Puritanism is Calvinism. The situation is complicated because some Puritans did fit the popular caricature, such as Michael Wigglesworth and his dogtrot verse called "The Day of Doom."

And of course, New England also had her head cases, and some of them made their mark on posterity. One

4. Kenneth Murdock, *Literature and Theology in Colonial New England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1949), 51.

man, a pastor, was called “Handkerchief Moody.” He thought he had sinned greatly and would not appear in public without a handkerchief over his face. He would preach with his back to the congregation, but whenever he would turn around, he looked like Jesse James robbing a train. But these were pathological cases, not representative of the sane and sound Puritans. The problem is that moderns like to think of the morbid cases as examples of the quintessence of Calvinism. Then, when they discover sane and balanced Puritans, these are treated as exceptions. This is how Anne Bradstreet is regularly represented.

Another erroneous view of the Puritans is that they were a tight-lipped and abstentious people. The word *puritanical* is really a historical slander in this respect. Moderns hear it and assume a teetotaling fundamentalism. But life in the colony was quite different. “Every family kept on a hand a supply of liquor and wine, and cider was considered a necessity of daily living in the country, where it was served with each meal and also carried into the fields by the workers.”⁵

We see that the consumption of alcohol was a routine part of a typical Puritan day. Down in Plymouth Plantation, Bradford once wrote that their water was

5. George Dow, *Every Day Life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 108.

wholesome, but not, of course, as wholesome as good beer and wine.⁶

For Anne Bradstreet herself, this was a self-conscious issue, and she was a representative Puritan in this. One of her poems put it this way:

The vintage now is ripe, the grapes are pressed,
Whose lively liquor oft is curst and blest;
For nought so good, but it may be abused,
But it's a precious juice when well it's used.⁷

It is also commonly maintained that there was a necessary Puritan hostility to festivals, and this is cast in terms of Grinches stealing Christmases. Actually, much of the Puritan problem with such festivals had to do with how they were celebrated at the time—accompanied by carousing, drunkenness, etc. Anne Bradstreet herself makes a positive statement about Christmas. “Through Christendom with great festivity / Now's held (but guessed) for blest Nativity.”⁸ Another area of misunderstanding is that of a presumed hostility toward the arts on the part of the Puritans. “The Puritan character did not warm to fine arts, and austere living was the aim if

6. *Ibid.*, 114.

7. Jeannine Hensley, ed., *The Works of Anne Bradstreet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 70.

8. *Ibid.*, 72.

not always the achievement of the time.”⁹ But on a more insightful note, Piercy comments, “The Puritans who were to sail to America in 1630, with the Dudleys and Bradstreets among their number, were by birth and culture Elizabethans. These American immigrants stepped from the most glorious period of English literature.”¹⁰

This literary influence is seen in the work of Anne Bradstreet. Following and developing a different aesthetic standard is not the same thing as being hostile to aesthetic standards. Since this is a book about a Puritan *poet*, the issue of aesthetic standards will be discussed later at some length.

The question of law is another area where the Puritans are greatly misunderstood. The modern mind has a vision of Massachusetts Bay as haven for wannabe ayatollahs and manufacturers of scarlet letters.

But the biblical balance of law and liberty was carefully pursued in early Massachusetts. Rev. Nathaniel Ward, whom we shall meet later as a friend of the Bradstreets (and their minister around 1634), was commissioned to take various earlier efforts that had been made to draft some laws and to compile and revise them. This he did, and the result was called the Massachusetts Body of Liberties. The criminal laws were taken largely from the Mosaic Code, which is enough to make many moderns

9. Dow, 45.

10. Piercy, 22.

look at them askance. But we often forget our directions—“as a whole, they were much *milder* than the criminal laws of England at that time.”¹¹ In other words, the introduction of biblical law ameliorated the harshness of the existing law.

Ward, the author of these liberties, is taken by some as the quintessential dour Puritan and by others as the last ember of merry old England in New England. “Nathaniel Ward ... flashes across our early history like a cock pheasant in the gray November woods.”¹² An example of his wit gives a good sampling. “I have only two comforts to live upon; the one is in the perfections of Christ; the other is in the imperfections of Christians.”¹³ But for another perspective on his character, consider this: “Nathaniel Ward, whose name is almost synonymous with orthodoxy and intolerance”¹⁴

When we consider all these things, one of the first truths to strike us should be that Puritanism in New England cannot be handled in simplistic fashion. And when we study these people sympathetically and carefully, the results of our study might be surprising. We may discover ourselves liking and respecting them.

11. Dow, 200.

12. Samuel Morison, *Builders of the Bay Colony* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 218.

13. *Ibid.*, 219.

14. Piercy, 111.

CHAPTER 3: ANACHRONISTIC HISTORY

Anne Bradstreet was the kind of woman modern feminists would love to claim as their own. She was intelligent. She was educated. She thought for herself. That makes her a feminist, right? “If we judge her by her own work, we must discover that her longer, more public works evidence her piety, filial duty, *feminism*, and interest in and wide reading of history, natural science, and literature.”¹⁵

This is to retro-read feminism back into her life and work. Anne Bradstreet was a committed Puritan woman devoted to her God, and she was a woman who adored her very masculine husband. One of the most marked features of her poetry written for her husband is the passionate and personal aspect of it. But one of the tenets of

15. Hensley, xxv, emphasis mine.

feminism is that women have some kind of sisterhood, a solidarity in the revolutionary sense. This assumption is simply imposed on Anne Bradstreet, and her devotion to her husband is then questioned on the basis of it.

What did the warning of the midwife heretic Anne Hutchinson's fate mean for Anne Bradstreet? To what extent is Bradstreet's marriage poetry an expression of individual feeling, and where does it echo the Puritan ideology of marriage, including married love as the "duty" of every god-fearing couple? Where are the stress-marks of anger, the strains of self-division, in her work?¹⁶

Anne Bradstreet simply does not fit into our contemporary categories. She was not a feminist in the modern sense, and neither was she an early ur-feminist. She was an intelligent woman who objected to boorish behavior in men, and she also was averse to unscriptural criticism of her work. But this must be set in the context of her unswerving commitment to the Scriptures and her lifelong happy devotion to the masculine—God the Father, Christ the Bridegroom, her earthly father, and her devoted husband. "We may see in this why God was her kind, careful parent, while for many Puritans he seems to have been a God of terror."¹⁷ She objected to carping

16. *Ibid.*, xxi.

17. *Ibid.*, xxvii.

and gossip because they were unscriptural, not because she might have been anticipating her agreements with Gloria Steinem.

She wrote of those who thought a woman ought to leave the world of *belles lettres* alone:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits,
A poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on female wits:
If what I do prove well, it won't advance,
They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance.¹⁸

Anne Bradstreet knew that men who preserve their authority by undervaluing the legitimate achievements of women are not masculine. In fact, they were exhibiting their insecurities, the antitheses of masculinity.

Let Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are
Men have precedency and still excel,
It is but vain unjustly to wage war;
Men can do best, and the women know it well.
Preeminence in all and each is yours;
Yet grant some small acknowledgments of ours.¹⁹

18. *Ibid.*, 16.

19. Hensley, 16.

In other words, Anne had no problem with masculine initiative and leadership. She objected strongly when men were threatened by a competent woman. Her father and her husband were very strong men, and she gloried in that fact. But these very masculine men encouraged her in her education and poetry, and they were not at all threatened by it. In her view, a man who objects to some “small” accomplishment by a woman, simply because it was done by a woman, was not much of a man.

As a faithful Puritan, she knew the order of the world. But she also knew that, occasionally, in unusual circumstances, God could use a Deborah. In a poem about Queen Elizabeth I, she wrote:

She hath wiped off th' aspersion of her sex
That women wisdom lack to play the rex...
Was ever people better ruled than hers?²⁰

A little later in the poem, she attacks certain “masculines” who say that women are *void* of reason:

Now say, have women worth? or have they none?
Or had they some, but with our Queen is't gone?
Nay masculines, you have thus taxed us long,
But she, though dead, will vindicate our wrong.

20. *Ibid.*, 196.

Let such as say our sex is void of reason,
Know 'tis a slander now but once was treason.²¹

We see the need for this kind of thinking in our day as well. Because many have come to see how wrong feminism is, they glibly assume that anything that is not feminism must be biblical. Anne Bradstreet knew better than this.

Men must assume the leadership, and they must be secure in their masculinity as they do so. This security will be seen in how they respect and honor their wives and daughters as genuinely gifted to aid them in the work for which they are called. One significant indicator of whether they do this will be seen in the education they provide for their daughters. The masculine and feminine are given by God to work together, point and counterpoint. Man was created in the image of God, and male and female together. This was not egalitarian, but men and women were assumed to have been created to complement one another.

In maintaining this, Anne was not resisting the teaching she had received from the Bible—she was applying it. She was not out of step with the Puritan leaders in New England—she was highly respected and honored by them. John Cotton was her pastor. Cotton Mather wrote glowingly of her accomplishments. Nathaniel

21. *Ibid.*, 198.

Ward praised her. Her father and her husband greatly encouraged her. *These* were not the “carping tongues” of which she wrote.

CHAPTER 4: EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Anne Dudley was born in 1612 or 1613 in Northamptonshire, England, to Thomas and Dorothy Dudley. Her father was working as a clerk for a noted attorney. Her mother was a well-born gentlewoman.

The Dudley family was descended from an ancient and noble family, the Sutton-Dudleys, to which Sir Philip Sidney was also proud to belong. In one of her poems, Anne Bradstreet notes her kinship with Sidney. She came from a noble family, and she was aware of and pleased with it.

Her father had come to Puritan convictions as a young man, which is why his daughter was brought up in the faith. She had a tender conscience, and her early years in the covenant were a great blessing to her.

In my young years, about 6 or 7 as I take it, I began to make conscience of my ways, and what I knew was sinful, as lying, disobedience to parents, etc. I avoided it. If at any time I was overtaken with the like evils, it was a great trouble, and I could not be at rest 'till by prayer I had confessed it unto God.²²

Around 1619, Anne's father took a post as steward for the Earl of Lincoln. This meant that the Dudleys had to move to the earl's estate at Sempringham, a busy harbor on the east coast of England and a center for the wool trade about eighteen miles from Boston. Anne's parents were members of one of the finest parish churches in England: Saint Botolph's. John Cotton, one of the great Puritan preachers in an era of great preachers, was not only vicar of Saint Botolph's, but years later he would become the Bradstreets' pastor in America, in a new Boston.

So Anne grew up among the nobility. Her opportunities for enlightening reading and study were great. She was surrounded by a vigorous Puritan aristocracy and had the opportunity to learn music and manners along with other perks associated with the aristocracy of the day. When she was around nine, her father (who had responsibility for managing all the earl's affairs) brought in a young assistant to help with the estate. Simon Bradstreet, twenty, was a young man who had just

22. Hensley, 240-41.

earned his bachelor's degree from Cambridge. He had earlier been associated with the household of the earl, but he now began work as Thomas Dudley's assistant.

Previously, while Simon Bradstreet had been at university, he had served as the tutor/governor for the son of a certain Lord Rich by his first wife Penelope Devereaux. She was the "Stella" of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets and later became quite notorious in her immorality. Her husband divorced her, and Simon Bradstreet spent some time helping with the young son. When Simon went to work for the household of the Earl of Lincoln, he was a mature and experienced young man. His subsequent work showed that his abilities were evident from the beginning.

A few years later Anne was to comment on the beginnings of a spiritual lethargy. "But as I grew up to be about fourteen or fifteen, I found my heart more carnal, and sitting loose from God, vanity and the follies of youth take hold of me."²³ She was not overtly rebellious, but she had begun to drift. An outsider would probably not have noticed anything, but for the Puritans the spiritual life was one of uncompromising zeal. Anne knew in her soul that she had begun to slacken in her concern for the things of God. In this circumstance the Lord brought a gracious chastisement.

23. *Ibid.*, 241

About sixteen, the Lord laid His hand sore upon me and smote me with the smallpox. When I was in my affliction, I besought the Lord and confessed my pride and vanity, and He was entreated of me and again restored me. But I rendered not to Him according to the benefit received.²⁴

The smallpox killed multitudes and disfigured many others. Anne not only survived, but also appears to have been comparatively unscarred by the disease. She asked God to spare her, and He graciously answered her prayer. When she says that she rendered not according to the blessing, this does not mean rebellion but rather insufficient gratitude. In this, she exhibits a typical Puritan awareness that all our efforts fall short of God's standard, and that we can only be accepted by His grace.

Her development into spiritual adulthood was not completed until after her marriage and after she had moved to America.

After a short time 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 and jointed to the church at Boston.²⁵

24. Hensley, 241.

25. *Ibid.*

She says here that her “heart rose.” This is the only indication of rebellion against spiritual authority that we find in her writings, and it was apparently a short-lived rebellion. When she was convinced that it was the way of God, she joined herself to the church at Boston.

But what was the “it” against which her heart rose? Her reference to “a new world and new manners” indicates that the source of her heart’s rising was not a question of the faith itself but more likely a matter of differences in ecclesiastical practice—set in the context of a young aristocratically trained woman adjusting to life in a rough-and-tumble colony.

The most likely candidate for an “issue” was the New England custom of requiring some sort of testimony of God’s converting grace before someone was brought into church membership. This was in contrast to the practice of simply receiving into membership someone who was a member in good standing in another sound church. But whatever the difficulty was, Anne was apparently convinced, and was brought into the church at Boston.

From this time on her growth in grace was steady and continual. Subsequent trials would test her, and questions and doubts would present themselves to her, but she walked throughout the rest of her life as a fruitful Christian.

CHAPTER 5: MARRIAGE

At the age of sixteen, Anne Dudley married Simon Bradstreet. Simon, born at Horbling in 1603, was the son of a dissenting minister in Lincolnshire. That explains why he had been reared as a nonconformist—a Puritan. His father had been one of the first fellows of Immanuel College at Cambridge, a college renowned as a hotbed of Puritanism.

His father's death, when Simon was about fourteen years old, interrupted his grammar school education. But within two or three years he was taken into the household of the Earl of Lincoln, one of the most religious of England's noble families. The steward of this household, as it turns out, was Thomas Dudley, Anne Dudley's father. Still, Anne probably did not catch Simon's eye (yet).

Simon spent the next eight years or so working under Thomas Dudley to help manage the earl's various offices. We may also surmise that he spent a good portion of this time watching his future wife grow up. During this time, it was suggested to Simon that he attend Immanuel College at Cambridge, which he did for a year. When Bradstreet returned to the earl's household, Thomas Dudley moved on to Boston (England), and the office of steward was given to Simon. From that new position he managed to get the earl's reluctant permission to move on in order to become the steward for the Countess of Warwick. He was a very capable man and discharged his responsibilities for both households faithfully.²⁶

It was during his tenure with the Countess that Simon, in 1628, married Anne Dudley. He was twenty-five, and she was sixteen. While they were still newlyweds, she persuaded him to accompany the Dudleys to New England in 1630. And obviously, all the abilities that were so clearly in evidence before Simon left his native country continued with him in the new world.

The marriage between Anne and Simon was a supremely happy one. She was completely devoted to him, and he consistently treated her with tenderness and a strong provision. Some indication of the nature of their

26. Cotton Mather, *The Great Works of Christ in America* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979 [1702]), 138-40.

marriage can be seen in her poem entitled “To My Dear and Loving Husband”:

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in 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.
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 persevere
That when we love no more, we may live ever.²⁷

Her happiness toward Simon is one of the more striking things about her life. He is her *dear* husband in the title of this poem, as well as in a number of others.

This is not surprising, for Simon Bradstreet cut quite a dashing figure. Governor Bradstreet's portrait shows “an attractive man with long hair and the glow of good living—not a dour ascetic, rather more like a Cavalier than the popular idea of the typical Puritan.”²⁸ He

27. Hensley, 225. Incidentally, it should be noted that Anne pronounced “persevere” differently than we do.

28. *Ibid.*, xxv.

provides us with yet another example of how winsome Puritans could be and how consistently this surprises modern readers.

Anne's devotion to her husband was both passionate and very Christian. That is to say, her erotic devotion to him was bounded by Scripture, and set in the context of a close and warm friendship. In one of her poems, when she is anticipating her possible death in childbirth, she speaks of herself as his dear friend:

How soon, my Dear, death may my steps attend,
How soon't may be thy lot to lose thy friend.²⁹

To say that she thought a lot of him would be an understatement:

My head, my heart, mine eyes, my life, nay, more,
My joy, my magazine of earthly store.³⁰

Because he was a competent man of affairs, Simon frequently traveled to various towns within the colony. When he was gone from home (and once he even had to go back to England to make an appeal to the king), Anne was disconsolate:

29. Hensley, 224.

30. *Ibid.*, 226.

As loving hind that (hartless) wants her deer,
Scuds through the woods and fern with hark'ning ear.³¹

Because the Bible is the Word of God, we should not be surprised when those who build their lives on it, as the Puritans sought to do, discover that their lives come to be ordered properly. One place where this order can be plainly seen is within the covenant of marriage.

The marriage of Anne and Simon Bradstreet was not atypical in this respect. The Puritans recovered the biblical teaching that the marriage bed was to be honored and not just tolerated. They gave themselves to the married state with a strong commitment, and one of their great contributions to our culture was the establishment of the view that romantic and erotic devotion was sustainable within the covenant of marriage.

In discussing this, C.S. Lewis once commented that the exaltation of virginity was a Roman Catholic trait, and “that of marriage, a Protestant trait.”³² Leland Ryken makes the same point very well in *Worldly Saints*.³³ The Puritan position on the divine intention for marriage was threefold. In the first place, it was for mutual companionship, in the second, it was for protection against

31. *Ibid.*, 229.

32. C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 1954), 35.

33. Ryken, 39-54.

sexual temptations, and last, it was for procreation, for the sake of godly offspring. So the Puritans not only taught that sexual love within marriage was lawful, their assumption was also that it was supposed to be intense, exuberant, wholehearted, and passionate.

The writings left behind by our Puritan fathers and mothers indicate that this view was not just acknowledged, it was widely practiced. And in this, we find that Anne Bradstreet was a faithful Puritan wife.