Anne Bradstreet, Puritan Women, Plain Style Writing

Anne Bradstreet: Wife, Mother, Poet

Background Information and Notes
Notebook Part 1
(info in blue MUST be recorded in notebook)
• Born 1612 to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Dudley
• Well tutored in literature, history in Greek, Latin, French, Hebrew, and English
• Married Simon Bradstreet (age 25) at age 16
• 1630 – sailed to America on the Arabella with the Massachusetts Bay Company and John Winthrop (three month voyage)
  – “I found a new world and new manners at which my heart rose up [in protest.]”
• Four boys and four girls (within 10 years)
• Wrote her poetry for personal reasons
• Did not want it published
• Brother-in-law (without her knowing) took her poems to London and had them published in a work titled, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*. She was 38 years old.
• She was both praised and scorned.
• Her father and husband were prominent men
• Both father and husband were governors of Massachusetts
  – “...any woman who sought to use her wit, charm, or intelligence in the community at large found herself ridiculed, banished, or executed by the Colony’s powerful group of male leaders.”
Women’s roles and expectations...

• Her friend, Anne Hutchinson (also intelligent, educated, prosperous, and religious) had troubles....
  – Held prayer meetings for women
  – Beliefs about the Holy Spirit
  – Labeled a Jezebel and banished
  – Eventually slain in an Indian attack in New York

*No wonder she didn’t want her poetry published!
Here lies
A worthy matron of unspotted life,
A loving mother and obedient wife,
A friendly neighbor, pitiful to poor,
Whom oft she fed and clothed with her store;
To servants wisely aweful, but yet kind,
And as they did, so they reward did find:
A true instructor of her family,
The which she ordered with dexterity,
The public meetings ever did frequent,
And in her closest constant hours she spent;
Religious in all her words and ways,
Preparing still for death, till end of days:
Of all her children, children lived to see,
Then dying, left a blessed memory.
Within this tomb a patriot lies
That was both pious, just and wise,
To truth a shield, to right a wall,
To secretaries a whip and maul,
A magazine of history,
A prizer of good company
In manners pleasant and severe
The good him loved, the bad did fear,
And when his time with years was spent
In some rejoiced, more did lament
1653, age 77
Double Bondage – Puritan Women

• The following are comments about women in colonial America.
• For each comment, I’d like you to write for one minute about what thoughts occur to you when reading. Go beyond a brief response of few words...really respond to the comment in a subjective way. Do you agree? Do you disagree? Are you offended? Do you find it interesting? Be specific! Answer as if you are sitting in a college classroom with people of all ages and walks of life. Be genuine, but not flippant or disrespectful.
Even as highly respected a man as Governor John Winthrop believed women could not bear intellectual rigor without irreparable harm.
"The few women who sought to expand their intellectual and creative talents beyond the confines of their homes found themselves in the center of an oppressive atmosphere."
“Women simply did not do what Bradstreet did in the seventeenth century – unless there was something ‘wrong’ with them.”
“Bradstreet questioned, thought through her problems, came to her own conclusions, and asserted herself. She was not the docile, dour, resigned automaton that figures so centrally in the twentieth-century mythology of Puritanism. The same is true of her as a woman: she did not expend her energies as a proper daughter, mother, wife; and thus she does not correspond to our present concept of seventeenth-century womanhood.”
“Writing poetry must have been her outlet for her discontent.”
Plain Style or Puritan Plain Style

- A way of writing that stresses simplicity and clarity of expression
  - Beauty in the absence of embellishment
  - Simple, direct
  - Uncomplicated sentences - historical context ;)
  - Use of everyday words and common speech
Plain/Puritan Plain Writing...

- Was the opposite of the “high style” of writing in England at the time which used classical allusions, Latin quotations, and elaborate figures of speech.

- Also used a lot of INVERSION – a form of writing that inverts words or phrases
  - Normal syntax is switched to accommodate poetic writing
    - “In silent night when rest I took.”  versus
    - “I took rest in the silent night.”
Three Minute Quick Write...

• For the next three minutes, write about the following: How would you deal with the destruction and loss of your home? What if all of your material things you hold dear went up in flames? What would your initial reaction be? What things would you most miss? Would your reaction change as time passed?