From Hierarchy to Balance: Anne Bradstreet's Union of Renaissance and Puritan Influences

Christy Shannon

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From Hierarchy to Balance: Anne Bradstreet's Union

of Renaissance and Puritan Influences

(TITLE)

BY

Christy Shannon

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Abstract

Anne Bradstreet was confronted with two very different influences when she began writing her poetry. One was the Renaissance literary style that she encountered in her native England; the other was a strict Puritan upbringing that would be the controlling factor of her life in the colonies. Both of these influences put a strong emphasis on order and a hierarchical structure. Bradstreet was unable to accept either of these influences completely, but she did manage to combine them in order to create some of the most interesting and memorable poetry of her time. The conflict that she faces is evident in her more formal writing through her use of voices and argumentation. Her later, more domestic poetry reveals an attempt to express her own voice and doubts about the Puritan faith, particularly its doctrine concerning the dangers of becoming attached to earthly things.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Puritanism is its strong emphasis on rules and order, particularly God's order. However, it seems that Anne Bradstreet's place in God's order was difficult for her to determine, as evidenced through her continuing struggle for a strong conviction of her faith. Although she was privileged in her New England community, Puritan doctrine and culture placed her -as a female- near the bottom of the hierarchy of the community of Saints. Bradstreet struggled with the conflict between her own emotions and the Puritan doctrine for most of her life, and this conflict can be seen clearly in her writing.
There is a form of argumentation both within and among her poems. In her more domestic poems, Bradstreet reveals her strong relationship to God and her continuous struggle with her faith. But in some of her other poetry, there is no mention of God or religion at all. In much of her poetry, Bradstreet allows two or more opposing forces to battle for a more privileged status. This argumentative style extends to her domestic poems as well, although it is not seen quite as clearly. Whereas in the more formal poems, the struggle can be seen in each individual poem, the struggle in the domestic poetry can be seen when taking several poems in context. Bradstreet almost always either puts heavy emphasis on the role of God and religion, or else she ignores it completely in her domestic poems. This inclusion or exclusion of religion can also be seen as her struggle for order as she tried to determine the limits of her own voice in her new community.

Throughout her life, Bradstreet was torn away from the places and people she loved the most. Despite wanting to blame God for these separations, she reluctantly convinced herself that it was His will. Bradstreet used her writing as a way of working through these struggles and separations, thereby keeping a written record of her own story, which was much more emotional and personal than the writings of her male counterparts. The conflicts that Bradstreet faced helped her to find her own poetic voice, silencing those who criticized her for imitating her Renaissance predecessors. Bradstreet used her writing as a way of dealing with the constraints that were placed upon her as a woman, and as a way of demonstrating her ability to use characteristics of two strongly contrasting literary influences and to transform them into something that was completely her own.
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Finding Influences and Establishing Boundaries

When Anne Bradstreet began writing poetry, she was faced with two very different influences: the Renaissance literary style and Puritan doctrine. Having been brought up as a strict Puritan, Bradstreet was already getting part of the influence she would use in constructing the format and subjects of some of her poetry. Anne Bradstreet was raised in a strict Puritan home, and the contexts of many of her poems are clearly influenced by her Puritanism. Many scholars, such as Ann Stanford and Elizabeth Wade White, have noted the strong impact that Puritanism had on Bradstreet's writing. One important way in which it influenced her was in its formal aspect. In much of his writing, John Calvin used numbered lists, suggesting a strong sense of order. Writing in this way enforced what he wrote, identifying his sense of the order in God's true religion, and laying the groundwork for later Puritan writers. Like other Puritan writers, Bradstreet used this number/list form in her poetry, especially in Meditations, following the example Calvin set.

Puritanism was not the only influence on her writing. The Renaissance writers who came before her also helped Bradstreet by offering a variety of styles for her to imitate. These two different types of influences did have one thing in common: they were both formed almost entirely by men. Because of this, Bradstreet had little choice but to rely on male-dominated forms of writing. As
noted by Rosemary Fithian Guruswamy, "That a woman needed to write like a man to gain public acceptance seems obvious, but if Bradstreet was writing for her family with, as John Woodbridge indicates, no pretensions toward publication, why would she need such a pose?" (4). The answer to this question is fairly simple. Bradstreet was a poet, and she knew her skills and interests as a writer went beyond those of basic journal writing, which was a common and acceptable mode among Puritan women as a way of recording their own histories. Probably because she knew that as a Puritan woman poet her poetry would never see the light of day, she was more free to experiment with form and content than her male counterparts. Bradstreet uses both Puritanism and Renaissance writing as models, and through them, establishes her own unique style and voice.

The hierarchy of the Puritans served as a paradigm for almost every aspect of their lives. In the life of the individual Puritan, God, of course, was at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the "select" people, and then the others. In America, Puritans placed themselves above the Native Americans and those who chose not to convert to Puritanism. This hierarchy also extended to the Puritan family, where men were ranked highest in their families, followed by women, and finally by children and servants.

One of the first places Anne Bradstreet experiences this Puritan hierarchy is within her own family. According to the Puritan doctrine, wives obeyed their husbands, children obeyed their parents, and servants obeyed their masters. Women's place in the family and in society was strictly regulated by Puritan
dogma. Their involvement in public affairs was almost nonexistent. When women attempted to voice their opinions, they -- and the male relations responsible for them -- were quickly reprimanded. For example, when Anne Hutchinson was exiled from the community for conducting religious meetings in her home, her husband was criticized for allowing his wife to act in this way. Hutchinson's interrogators claimed that she had "'stept out of her place, you have rather bine a Husband than a Wife and a preacher than a Hearer; and a Magistrate than a Subject'" (Evans 32). A woman stepping beyond the boundaries of her place in the hierarchy was a disgrace to her husband, as well as to herself.

Similarly, parents were responsible for the spiritual growth of their children, and they faced enormous pressure from the community to see to this task properly; "Once a week at least, according to law, every father taught his children from a catechism, a book which summarized in the form of questions and answers the Puritan system of Christian belief" (Morgan 54). Parents were held responsible if their children went against the Puritan doctrine, just as husbands were accountable for their wives' actions. For example, not only was Anne Hopkins denounced by John Winthrop for "'giving herself wholly to reading and writing, and had written many books,'" her husband was also criticized because he "failed in his duty to discipline her to stay in her place" (Martin 58). Because Anne Bradstreet was aware of the consequences for these actions, it is possible that she chose to keep her writing private, not just for her own sake, but for those of her father and husband. In addition to knowing about the potential ridicule and
scorn her family might be subject to, Bradstreet was also well aware of the punishment for women who tried to step beyond their boundaries.

While she was living in England, Bradstreet's boundaries were easy for her to identify. She was a daughter and a wife. She had been given opportunities to acquire an education, and she was living in a country that had been only recently ruled by an intelligent female, Queen Elizabeth I. It has been argued by Edwin Miller and Lawrence Stone that Elizabeth's "strong image legitimated female education and female voice" (qtd. in Guruswamy): "Anne King suggests, in fact, that Thomas Dudley's encouragement of his daughter Anne's education was an inheritance from the Renaissance desire for daughters to emulate the scholarly Elizabeth" (Guruswamy). Although Elizabeth I did write, her main impression on Bradstreet seems to have been as a powerful public woman, rather than as a poet.

When Bradstreet moved to the colonies with her family, everything changed. Although she was still a daughter and a wife, the education she had acquired became more of an impediment than a benefit. In this new land, there was no place for intelligent women who tried to educate themselves through reading and writing:

As Perry Miller explains, in an era that subordinated women to men and men to God, 'women who stepped beyond their domestic confines through literature -- by reading or writing -- were considered dangerous to themselves and society.... Puritans expressed considerable scorn for women who wrote or published' (qtd. in Blackstock)
They were seen as threats to the community. Had she been a man, Bradstreet most likely would have had the opportunity to follow in her father's footsteps by taking an active role in government. As a woman, she managed to find a way to follow in the footsteps of her father by writing. This was not the only instance in which she would be guided by male predecessors.

The Puritans were intent about putting things in their proper place and determining how much value one should put everything in their world. First and foremost were God and his divine will. Total acceptance and submission were required of all Puritans. They tried to refrain from placing too much value on earthly things, which were seen as temporary and inconsequential. This belief extended even to one's children. As Wendy Martin notes, "it was important not to love one's children excessively; in order to offset this peril, it was common to send adolescent children to board with other families" (69). Bradstreet's writings suggest that this is a concept that she struggled with her entire life. She cherished earthly things, be they grandchildren or household items. When they were taken from her, she could not help but feel the loss. Even though she convinced herself they were taken away because she valued them too much, she could not keep from becoming attached to these things.

Her struggle with this concept lies at the heart of many of her poems, particularly in the elegies she writes for her grandchildren. For example, in the elegy she writes for her grandson Simon, Bradstreet writes of God, "With dreadful awe before Him let's be mute,/ Such was His will, but why, let's not
dispute,/ With humble hearts and mouths put in the dust,/ Let's say He's merciful as well as just" (9-12). She comes close to rebelling against the will of God, but instead, she chooses to stop just short of that. By adding "Let's say" to the beginning of the twelfth line, she sounds as if she has doubts about God's mercy, but she has little choice but to submit, albeit ambiguously, to God's will. She seems to question the Puritan hierarchy, and, in some ways, tries to formulate a new hierarchy that will not deny her need for earthly attachments.

In many of her poems, Bradstreet uses classical argumentation to establish supremacy of one thing over another. This argumentation format can be seen clearly in "The Flesh and the Spirit" and "The Four Quaternions." It seems as if Bradstreet is attempting to establish a new order by giving these opposing forces a voice and then allowing them the opportunity to prove their superiority.

This struggle for order is not solely the result of a Puritan stress on order. In fact, her Puritan background often came into direct conflict with the influence she drew from the Renaissance writers. Each of these influences employs its own system of order. Puritanism placed God at the top of the hierarchy, while Renaissance writers often put secular symbols above religious ones. Also, the role of women was drastically different in each of these environments. Puritans had strict rules and limited opportunities for women, while the women of the Renaissance, such as Lady Mary Wroth and Margaret Cavendish, had more literary freedom. The differences between these two influences made it extremely challenging for Bradstreet to determine her proper voice in society, or in her
poetry; "Robert Arner has noted the tension that arises in her poetry between the
'rich humanistic traditions of literature and learning' that she inherited from her
upper class English parents and their friends, and the less liberal Christian Puritan
tradition they carried with them across the Atlantic" (Guruswamy).

It is this change of values that first creates the conflicts that Bradstreet will
struggle through in her poetry for most of her life: "Until recently, most critics
have assumed that the trip across the ocean changed Bradstreet from an
Elizabethan into a Puritan, despite the initial rising of her heart, but the poetry and
what we can glean of her life itself and the lives of the early Ipswich Puritans
suggests that the shift was not so smooth" (Guruswamy). Certainly, reconciling
these two very different world views must have proven a challenge for Bradstreet.

Bradstreet's literary antecedents were not the Puritans, but the writers of
the Renaissance, including Spenser, Sidney, du Bartas, Burton, Browne, Raleigh,
Shakespeare, and Donne. Many of these Renaissance writers were also searching
for a new order. For example, Sir Thomas More creates a very elaborate order and
hierarchy in his formation of Utopia. He discusses every aspect of life in Utopia,
such as marriage, much the same way Calvin does when describing his religious
doctrine. Both More and Calvin rely on strict order to convey their ideals, and, in
both cases, they are seeking an ideal. More creates a virtual perfect society, while
Calvin describes his idea of the perfect religious doctrine.

Another example of the importance of order in Renaissance writing can be
seen in Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier. In addition to a quest for order,
The Book of the Courtier also uses a variation of argumentation that Bradstreet will use in her poetry. Castiglione creates the characters that will determine the qualities of the perfect courtier. In some instances, these characters argue with one another, much the same way Bradstreet's characters will argue. Like More, Castiglione's goal in his use of argumentation and quest for order is a kind of perfection.

This is where Bradstreet differs from her literary predecessors. Her search for order has nothing to do with achieving perfection; as a Puritan, she believes that perfection is unattainable. She is instead trying to determine her own place in the grand scheme of Puritan doctrine. In her poetry, she combines the hierarchy of the Puritans with the search for order of the Renaissance writers in various ways, always searching for a voice which reconciles them.

If Bradstreet had been able to choose only one of these influences to follow, she might not have had to face such a continuous struggle. The best she could do was to try to find a way to compromise both influences with each other. Her writing can never be fully characteristic of the Renaissance because she is not of that time or place. Neither can her writing be purely Puritan because her work reflects such serious doubts about the faith. Like her, the poetry struggles to find its proper place.

As different as these two influences are, they do have one thing in common, and that is that they are both male-dominated. Not only were Bradstreet's most influential literary predecessors men, but so were many of the
members of her colonial audience. Family members and neighbors approved of her writing, "but probably the person who most encouraged her in the early period was her father" (Stanford, *Worldly Puritan* 6). Undoubtedly, Thomas Dudley had a huge impact on his daughter. It was through him that she was educated and met her future husband. His encouragement of his daughter's writing seems puzzling, however, given his role as one of Anne Hutchinson's strongest critics. However, Anne Bradstreet may have been pushing the boundaries for a woman, but she was careful not to move beyond these boundaries, as Anne Hutchinson did. According to Stanford, "Anne Bradstreet went as far as her place in a society which condemned Anne Hutchinson and Anne Hopkins would allow" ("Dogmatist and Rebel" 87). Bradstreet questions, rather than challenges, aspects of the Puritan doctrine, and this may be the fine line that makes her writing acceptable while Hutchinson's actions are not.

Bradstreet's first impression of the colonies was not an optimistic one. When she first arrived, Bradstreet "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 joined the church at Boston" (Bradstreet 241). This is the first of many instances in which she submits to what she perceives to be the will of God. Prior to arriving to the colonies, Bradstreet's feelings about the move are not documented. However, her attachment to her homeland, England, is evident in much of her early poetry, in which she clings to memories of her homeland as much as she takes pleasure in earthly things. For example, as Stanford notes
regarding Bradstreet's "The Four Seasons," she did not describe her surroundings, but rather set down her remembrance of Old England" (*Worldly Puritan* 47).

Bradstreet was not given much choice in the decision to go to the colonies, and she was filled with disappointment when she got there. Her place in England was secure; in the colonies, it was in conflict. Because of her Puritan faith, she believed that she could not do much to determine her place in heaven, so she instead concentrated on her attempt to establish an order in her poetry that would allow her to argue and reason her way into a transplanted life.

**Arguing for Supremacy**

Many of Anne Bradstreet's early poems rely on voices and argumentation in order to create a debate-like format. The influence of both her father and her literary predecessors is apparent in "The Four Quaternions." As Rosamond Rosenmeier points out, these poems "are the direct descendants of Thomas Dudley's poem on the four parts of the world" (52). While the subject of the poems was inspired by her father, the format clearly follows the Renaissance model. The debate format is most evident in the quaternions, in which each element, humour, age of man, and season, is given a voice and permitted to prove its superiority, which is somewhat reminiscent of Castiglione's strategy in *The Book of the Courtier*. The same type of format is also seen in "The Flesh and the Spirit," in which the voices are those
of two sisters. In these poems, one voice is supposed to prove superior to the others; however, rarely is this the case. Bradstreet sets out hoping to demonstrate an unquestionable hierarchy, but instead she finds that the unquestionable hierarchy is ultimately just an illusion.

Critics argue that "The Four Quaternions" is flawed because "the first two Quaternions are well-written debates, but the final two are merely orderly sets of speeches, rather than debates" (Requa "Poetic Voices" 157). This argument goes on to assert that Bradstreet does not achieve the unity in these poems that she was looking for. However, the connections between the poems are clearly stated. If the latter two quaternions are speeches rather than debates, perhaps it is because Bradstreet has realized that the argument for supremacy cannot be resolved and that the only acceptable solution is to find a balance.

So important is order in these poems that each voice first argues over who will initiate the debate. The voices in the first two quaternions, the elements and the humours, are extremely aggressive, and some of them choose to elevate themselves by degrading the others. For example, fire speaks first in "The Four Elements" and lists a lengthy catalog of its achievements and abilities, beginning by saying, "What is my worth, both ye and all men know,/ In little time I can but little show" (28-29). Fire is not only capable of sustaining life, but it is also able to destroy it, as it says, "And in a word, the world I shall consume/ And all therein, at that great day of doom" (134-135). Earth speaks next, but is not quite as intent as Fire when it comes to describing the destruction it is capable of;
instead, Earth focuses more on its importance in the lives of men and animals; it says, "I am th' original of man and beast" (148). Water and Air follow in the discussion, with each one detailing its most impressive abilities.

Bradstreet uses the same sort of format for the other three quaternions. It is interesting to note the gender of each voice. At times, Bradstreet seems to give them female voices, while at other times, the voices are distinctly male. Bradstreet presents the four elements as female when she writes, "In placid terms they thought now to discourse,/ That in due order each her turn should speak" (6-7). She makes the same distinction in "The Four Humours in Man's Constitution": "But first they wisely showed their high descent,/ Each eldest daughter to each element" (7-8). Rosenmeier notes that "Bradstreet frequently echoes male voices but in the personas of women: sisters, daughters, wives, mothers" (12). Bradstreet's own voice is silent, unable to manifest itself because, at this point, she is too dependent on imitation to express herself freely.

Occasionally, she seems to be so preoccupied with following a certain format and making what she is writing suitable for men to read that she silences herself and instead writes with a style and voice that are more traditionally masculine than feminine. Blackstock argues that the issue of gender becomes important because Bradstreet associates love with females and aggression with males. According to Blackstock, "Fire and Choler continue to display 'masculine' aggression and desire for dominance rather than anything resembling love" (3).
Bradstreet's association of masculinity with dominance is a direct reflection of the society in which she lived. In the colonies, men dominated every aspect of society, and they were threatened when women tried to participate actively in society, like Anne Hutchinson did. Men felt that they were entitled to superior positions of power, and they were determined to control their power through whatever means necessary.

Bradstreet tries to dispute this balance of power in her poetry by suggesting that both the male and female elements need one another. As Phlegm says in "The Four Humours," "Unless we agree, all falls into confusion" (599). They are codependent, and it is essential that they recognize one another's importance rather than waste time attempting to prove their own superiority. In the end, though, "'masculinity' prevails, however, predictably enough since it represents itself through aggression" (Blackstock).

"Of the Four Humours in Man's Constitution" follows in much the same way as "The Four Elements." Choler, who speaks first, ends her speech by saying, "To what you now shall say I will attend,/ And to your weakness gently condescend" (158-159). Elizabeth Wade White notes how Choler, like Fire, "spends a great deal of her allotted time in belittling the other three" (190). The remaining three humours defend themselves while trying to establish their own superiority. Again, the end result is the need for unity and balance. No real supremacy, and therefore no hierarchy, is ever determined. Bradstreet "acknowledges that Fire and Choler are 'the best of all the four when they agree'
(206), yet realizes that left to themselves they would consume all else" (Blackstock).

It is interesting to note that the female personae seem to recognize and accept this necessity for unity and equality sooner than the masculine ones, Fire and Choler, both of whom seek to establish their authority mainly by criticizing their sisters. In fact, "Choler's derision of the other humors unites them against him rather than setting them against each other" (Blackstock).

Bradstreet's use of argumentation in these two poems serves as a way to establish the importance of unity and the suggestion of equality. Undoubtedly, unity was extremely important for the Puritans who came to the colonies. Abandoning their homeland, the early settlers were left with little on the frontier besides one another. In order to survive in this new place, they had to band together. The concept of equality, on the other hand, was a much more radical idea. In several of her poems, Bradstreet suggests that women are capable of much more than just being wives and mothers. Her prime example of this is Queen Elizabeth I. In fact, "Bradstreet's elegy for Queen Elizabeth is apparently the only specifically feminist poem besides the quaternions that she dared to write" (Blackstock). Bradstreet firmly believes in the wisdom of women. In her elegy to Queen Elizabeth, Bradstreet writes, "Nay masculines, you have thus taxed us long,/ But she, though dead, will vindicate our wrong./ Let such as say our sex is void of reason,/ Know 'tis a slander now but once was treason" (101-105).
Bradstreet is not always so outspoken when it comes to relaying her opinion. Many times she uses sarcasm or subtlety to convey her true feelings. For instance, in "The Prologue," she writes, "Let Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are/ Men have precedence and still excel./ It is but vain unjustly to wage war;/ Men can do best, and women know it well" (39-42). Bradstreet's tone sounds less than sincere here, as if she is projecting for men what they want to hear even though she herself doesn't believe it. Her sarcasm is evident through most of "The Prologue," especially when she writes, "If what I do prove well, it won't advance,/ They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance" (31-32). This appears to be another instance in which she submits to what the men around her want. What she writes may be what they find acceptable, but what she believes is not under their jurisdiction.

Subtlety is another way through which she strives to prove her own merit as a writer. She writes in "The Prologue," "To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings,/ Of cities founded, commonwealth begun,/ For my mean pen are too superior things:/ Or how they all, or each their dates have run/ Let poets and historians set these forth,/ My obscure lines shall not so dim their worth" (3-8). Her humility is customary for the Renaissance writers she has studied. The real significance is that even after she proclaims that these topics are too superior for her to address, she goes on to do it anyway in "The Four Monarchies." She has enough faith in her ability that she attempts to offer a vivid retelling of world history. By doing this, she asserts that women are capable of writing about
"masculine" topics, and she also casts herself into the role of poet and historian. These new roles only further complicate her search to find her place.

Unlike the "The Four Elements" and "The Four Humours," "The Four Ages of Man" refrains from arguing for superiority; "Already ordered by time's movement, the ages see no point in competing for dominance" (Blackstock). Because there is no argumentation, this poem becomes more of a discussion than a debate. Even so, traces of Renaissance style can be seen in the poem. Although the Puritans enjoyed Shakespeare's sonnets, they had little use for his plays. Bradstreet, though, presents some of her poems in a very theatrical way, particularly "The Four Ages of Man" and "The Four Seasons." She does this through the presentation of different voices in all of the quaternions, but "the theatrical setting evoked at the beginning of 'The Four Ages of Man' places more emphasis on performance, in the sense of acting, than in either of the previous quaternions" (Blackstock). By using a theatrical approach, Bradstreet can explore many different roles and voices, thereby experiencing, and experimenting with, different placement in the hierarchy. She is no longer restricted to her role of wife and mother; instead, she places herself in the rather unique position of an educated and talented woman writer, capable of transcending the traditional role of the Puritan woman. Had she been restricted to a typical Puritan woman's role, her writing would have been limited to journal writing about everyday events, told entirely from the perspective of a wife and mother.
Bradstreet emphasizes this even more through the description of childhood. "The best part of this age, Childhood explains, is the brief period of joy and innocence when one does not yet realize the condition into which one is born" (Blackstock). Once one is aware of this, his or her place in the Puritan hierarchy becomes inescapable. Childhood admits, "Yet this advantage had mine ignorance,/ Freedom from envy and from arrogance" (90-91). Prior to this realization, one has a sense of freedom that does not exist after this truth is revealed to him. Ignorance, in this case, is indeed bliss.

By the time Middle Age speaks, a very different pattern is evolving; "Rather than claiming superiority, he concedes that his broader perspective necessarily builds on theirs" (Blackstock). Middle Age acknowledges his direct connection to the ages that have come before him; "What they have done, the same was done by me,/ As was their praise or shame, so mine must be" (236-237). Similarly, "Old Age, the last of the four to appear, confirms and extends the positions of the preceding three" (Blackstock). He describes his connection to the prior three ages by saying, "Babe's innocence, youth's wildness I have seen,/ And in perplexed Middle Age have been" (337-338). The unity of this group is clearly evident. Instead of fighting one another, they build on one another's knowledge to create a unity based on a natural evolution. Bradstreet, once again, is unable to clearly present one as superior to the others, and by the time she writes the last two quaternions, it looks as though she has reconciled herself to the idea that unity and balance are more attainable than an ideal hierarchy.
The final quaternion, "The Four Seasons," begins like "The Four Ages of Man," "without chaotic struggles for precedence" (Blackstock). At this point, Bradstreet makes one final attempt to present one season's superiority over the others, but she does it only after suggesting a powerful sign of unity: "Autumn begins without distinguishable introduction from Bradstreet," (Blackstock) suggesting that unity is so complete among this poem's voices that they blend together. However, Autumn tries to undermine this by attempting "to establish supremacy, arguing that 'sure at this time, time first of all began'" (9). His attempt fails and the final consensus of this poem, as with all the quaternions, is that creating a hierarchy is a futile task and that unity and balance are the keys to avoiding chaos.

Perhaps the poem that best signifies Bradstreet's search for order is "The Flesh and the Spirit." In this poem, two sisters debate over which is superior: things of this world or things of heaven. This poem gives Bradstreet the opportunity to express her own doubts through the use of a persona and voice other than her own. Like the first two quaternions, "The Flesh and the Spirit" is an aggressive debate with one voice arguing for supremacy over the other. One of the differences is that, in this poem, both voices are female. Although Bradstreet again turns to the debate format, it is not because of an attempt to imitate her predecessors. According to Stanford, she chooses this form because it is the most effective way for her to illustrate her own doubts (Worldly Puritan 85).
Spirit, of course, wins the debate because that is the only outcome that would fit into the Puritan expectations. However, the weakest part of Spirit's argument is that she resorts to earthly things to describe the wonders of heaven. For example, she says, "The stately walls both high and strong, / Are made of precious jasper stone; / The gates of pearl, both rich and clear, / And angels are for porters there; / The streets thereof transparent gold, / Such as no eye did e'er behold" (88-93). The victory of Spirit over Flesh seems half-hearted and unconvincing, not based on stronger arguments or rhetoric, but rather on Bradstreet's compliance with the Puritan faith. This poem is an illustration of the struggle Bradstreet faced during most of her life. In her own life, Bradstreet submitted time and again to what she believed was the will of God, even though her attraction to earthly things was difficult for her to ignore. In the poem, Flesh presents a stronger argument, but submits to Spirit because that is the only way for Bradstreet's poetic voices to avoid sounding heretical. Once again, she is writing what she should believe instead of what she actually believes.

Bradstreet achieves unity from the onset of this poem by making the sisters twins. They represent two halves of a whole person. They, like the elements and humours, are codependent. Rosenmeier notes, "Once the sisters are separated from each other, and the earth left to Flesh only, both sisters will suffer an irreparable loss" (111-112). Consequently, Bradstreet's main focus in this poem shifts from unity to balance. Bradstreet realized that earthly things did indeed appeal to human nature, but she also knew that this attraction needed to be
held in check by the spirit. This struggle between her attraction to earthly things, such as fame and personal ties, and the Puritan doctrine, is even more evident when looking at the body of her poetry.

Achieving Balance in Poetry and Life

In addition to the voices and personae Bradstreet creates within some of her poems, there are also different voices among her poems. For example, in "The Four Quaternions" and "The Four Monarchies," the voice of the narrator is much more public than in Bradstreet's domestic poems. This "public" narrator seems to anticipate the potential for an audience that included people outside of Bradstreet's own family. Bradstreet, in her domestic poems, had a more definite audience in mind, including her husband and her son. In her domestic poems, Bradstreet is no longer trying to imitate her predecessors; instead, she has the freedom to write in more experimental ways because she is more secure with her audience. If Bradstreet had anticipated having her work made public, it is unlikely that she had these more personal poems in mind for publication. Without the threat of public scrutiny, Bradstreet has the confidence to express her own thoughts in her own voice. Once she stops imitating the male writers she has studied, she finds her own voice.

The differences between her public and private poems are not limited to voice and contrasting degrees of stylistic imitation. The place of religion
fluctuates between the two groups of poetry. As Emily Stipes Watts notes in regard to "The Four Quaternions," "Although the Child traces his difficulties to Adam, Old Age hopes to see his Redeemer, and Spring recalls Eden, the general scheme of the world, the general sense of order, is nowhere traced to the immanence of God" (31). Renaissance influence is clearly seen in parts of "The Four Quaternions" through Bradstreet's references to the signs of the zodiac in "The Four Seasons." She also alludes to Greek mythology in "The Four Elements," referring to Perseus, Medusa, and Daphne by name. God is almost entirely absent from these poems.

Bradstreet's Puritan background is much more evident in her domestic poems, particularly in "Upon the Burning of Our House" and in her elegies to her grandchildren. In her longer, public poems, God is rarely mentioned. This is generally the case in her early poetry, in which she was imitating her Renaissance predecessors who did not emphasize religion as much as classical references to mythology. Bradstreet follows their lead for the most part in an attempt to be taken seriously as a poet.

God appears in her domestic poems because these poems report occurrences in her daily life and that is where she saw God's will at work. She acknowledges God's role in her life by including him in her domestic and later poetry. One of these poems is "Upon the Burning of Our House," which is, essentially, another instance in which she submits to God's will. Robert D. Richardson, Jr. notes, however, that "her submission to the will of God is a
somewhat forced acknowledgment of an arrangement that is not really satisfactory" (105). By this time, though, Bradstreet has stopped trying to create an arrangement that is satisfactory, and instead concentrates on negotiating the present arrangement and her own beliefs and feelings.

The significance of God's appearance in Bradstreet's later elegies can be seen by noting the absence of God in the early elegies. Stanford notes that these early elegies "are closer to classical than to Puritan models" (Worldly Puritan 16). It is evident that at this point Bradstreet was still clinging to the examples of the past. By the time she wrote the elegies for her grandchildren, her focus had shifted from Renaissance style to Puritan doctrine. This could be due, at least in part, to the people for whom she is writing. The deaths of her three grandchildren tempted her to blame God, so it seems only natural that these elegies would serve as a way of working out this conflict. With the deaths of her parents, Bradstreet accepted that they have lived full lives, and she wrote their elegies in a Renaissance style, celebrating their lives.

It is interesting to note that Bradstreet's domestic poetry is more highly regarded by literary scholars, in part because her public poems depended too much on imitation. Eberwein states:

A survey of recent Bradstreet criticism or even a quick review of anthology selections reveals general agreement that "Contemplations" is her most important poem and that the domestic verses in which the woman speaks of intimate concerns impress most readers as touching and memorable. The ambitious quaternions and the study of the Four Monarchies which dominated The Tenth Muse receive less attention. The inclusion of only the last quaternion, "The Four Seasons," in Harrison T.
Meserole's comprehensive anthology of *Seventeenth-Century American Poetry* confirms the general rejection of her early work as does John Berryman's acknowledgement in *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* that "all this bald/ abstract didactic rime I read appalled" (166). Perhaps the most useful influence Bradstreet received from her Renaissance predecessors was Sidney's advice to "Look in thy heart, and write" (Requa "Use of DuBartas" 145). Ironically, Bradstreet's poetry in her own doubting, Puritan, female voice was far superior to her attempts to write like a Renaissance man.

Despite the extreme differences between these two groups of poems, Bradstreet successfully unites the influences behind each in her most highly praised poem, "Contemplations." Using her own voice, Bradstreet manages to demonstrate her dedication to both her religion and her literary aspirations. "Contemplations" serves as the ultimate unity of Bradstreet's work. In this poem, Bradstreet uses both religious and secular allusions to combine the two predominant forces in her life. Through part of the poem, she offers a retelling of the Cain and Abel story, but she does not restrict the poem's content by limiting herself to only religious references. She makes mention of God in several passages, but she also incorporates some classical allusions, such as to Phoebus, Thetis and the Muses. Despite her use of these classical references, she is no longer attempting to imitate her predecessors. By the time Bradstreet writes this poem, she has abandoned both the futile task of creating a hierarchy and her dependence on Renaissance role models.

Another important feature of this poem is its full description of nature, this being the nature of New England, rather than of Old England. Her emphasis on
nature makes her a prototype for many American writers, among them Thoreau, Whitman, and Dickinson, who will also stress the beauty and importance of nature.

The struggle that is characteristic of so much of Bradstreet's poetry can also be seen in her life. Because of the many roles that Bradstreet played, she was always trying to find a compromise or balance between her own nature and the rules of Puritanism. Time and again, Bradstreet finds ways to compromise with the Puritan hierarchy in her poetry, even though she never really denounces it. An important component of the Puritan doctrine was man's pre-eminence over woman. However, Ann Stanford writes that, "for Anne Bradstreet this dogma did not mean that women were not to use their wits at all" ("Dogmatist and Rebel" 78). The trick was to keep from becoming too vocal and risk public scrutiny and scorn, as Anne Hutchinson did. Bradstreet found a way to reconcile Puritan doctrine with her own personal beliefs without offending the elders.

All of these conflicts and compromises stem from Bradstreet's struggle to unite her own feelings with the Puritan doctrine in some way. This struggle is seen most clearly in her domestic poems, especially those poems concerning her husband and children. Wendy Martin writes, "Clearly, her passion for her husband and her love for her children supersede her considerations of eternal life" (33). Try as she might, Bradstreet never seemed to be able to resolve this conflict completely; "Although Bradstreet experienced conflict between her passion for
Simon and her duty to care for him selflessly, her love poems focus on her desire and longing rather than on duty or deference" (Martin 68).

Her longing for her husband was only one aspect of Bradstreet's struggle. Her personal poetry reflects her ongoing battle to detach herself from earthly things. Theoretically, the Puritans were not supposed to become too attached to the things of this world; rather, they were expected to spend their lives thinking about their spiritual lives. However, this ideal seems to contradict the social and materialistic characteristics of many people. Certainly, being detached from earthly things made the voyage to America easier for the Puritans, although they were no doubt homesick. And while the writings of John Winthrop and William Bradford may appear to be rather detached because they try not to sound vulnerable, it is quite the opposite with the poetry of Anne Bradstreet. Recent scholarship shows that in her poetry, she continually seems to be searching for some sort of lasting attachment to something of this world, while at the same time, trying to cope with homesickness and loss of all that she holds dear.

The first instance of detachment that Bradstreet wrote about was when she feels torn from her familiar environment and transplanted to New England. Because her father and husband made the decision to go, it was unlikely that she had much influence over the decision to leave England. Eventually, she submitted to her new situation after convincing herself that it was the will of God. Throughout her life, she would look to religion in order to deal with unpleasant situations, where she could wrestle with her religion and the conflicts she
encounters within herself. One of these unpleasant situations is when Bradstreet came to the colonies, where she "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 joined to the church at Boston" (Bradstreet 241).

The next move Bradstreet made was from Ipswich to Andover. Ipswich offered Bradstreet the opportunity to socialize with a fairly large number of people because it "had become by 1642 the second largest settlement in the colony" (Stanford *Worldly Puritan* 77). Andover, on the other hand, was more agricultural in nature and "because of the scattered nature of the village, the exchange of talk and news would be more difficult" (Stanford *Worldly Puritan* 78). Little by little, Bradstreet was being more and more removed from society. It seems only natural, then, that she would be more focused and attached to her husband and children: "Anne Bradstreet . . . was always sensitive to her surroundings, and the environment of Andover emphasized family relationships and rural isolation" (Stanford *Worldly Puritan* 79). This isolation, most likely, was also causing her to become attached to the home she and her husband were making for themselves in Andover.

Anne Bradstreet's aloneness is perhaps matched by her husband, who was orphaned at 14 and whose guardian died the year of his marriage to Anne (Rosenmeier 37-8). This may help explain the close relationship of the two and his support of her writing ability. While "many other Puritans expressed considerable scorn for women who wrote or published," (Martin 58), Simon
Bradstreet seemed to understand that writing was a way for Anne to gain some sort of connection with her family members and with her community. Poetry gave Anne Bradstreet a voice that she otherwise would not have had in Puritan New England, and this voice allowed her to participate, in an indirect way, in the events of a community that encouraged detachment and female silence.

The sense of Bradstreet's isolation was further magnified by the frequent business trips of her husband. While he was away, Bradstreet wrote several poems to him, celebrating the bond between them. In these poems, too, she gives evidence of wanting to bridge the gap caused by death. "It was the Puritan belief that a marriage was dissolved at death. Marriage was for earthly life only, and in any after life union between spirits was no longer in effect" (Stanford Worldly Puritan 24). Bradstreet acknowledges this in her poems, but she seems reluctant to the idea and "tries to get around the idea of the complete severance of death by writing lines so that 'I may seem thine, who in effect am none'" (Stanford Worldly Puritan 24).

There is some speculation as to the true nature of her feelings for her husband. Spousal devotion in the Puritan faith was a sign of piety, so long as the spouse did not love selfishly or carnally. For Anne Bradstreet "to allow her emotional or physical desire for Simon to eclipse her greater commitment to God would be idolatry" (Martin 68). This provides yet another conflict for Bradstreet because her love poems come dangerously close to betraying the strong emotional ties she has to her husband. Even "for twentieth-century critics these poems have
provided evidence . . . of a true poetic sensibility in an otherwise Puritan poet" (Rosenmeier 113). Clearly, though, Bradstreet's sensibility can be seen in other poems to her husband, as well as to her children. Her devotion to her family was absolute, despite her Puritan upbringing.

Indeed, she puts so much emphasis on the idea that she and her husband are one that the idea of any sort of separation seems extremely unlikely. Her place in the family unit is dependent on her relationship to her husband, and in her poetry she attempts to establish the importance of this bond in her search for her own place. Her poem, "A Letter to her Husband, absent upon Publick employment," opens with the lines, "My head, my heart, mine eyes, my life, nay more, / My joy, my magazine of earthly store, / If two be one, as surely thou and I, How stayest thou there, whilst I at Ipswich lie?" (1-4). Her longing for him while he is away is clear, and reinforces the idea that she seems to feel left alone quite often. This isolation makes it difficult for Bradstreet to fit into the role of typical Puritan wife. Because of Simon's frequent absences, Anne Bradstreet was forced to take on the role of both mother and father. In many ways, Anne Bradstreet is a pioneer among working women. While her top priority is her family, she also pursued the closest thing to a career that she could have: writing poetry. By being both a mother and a poet, Bradstreet extends herself over many different roles, thereby complicating her search for her place in the hierarchy.

Establishing and maintaining the importance of her place within the family was within her reach, and she had more power and control over this than in her
larger goal of trying to establish a new hierarchy. Her role within the family allowed her the chance to leave her impression on her children, thereby attaining a kind of fame or remembrance that she thought her poetry might not be capable of. By leaving her mark on her children, she would, in a way, be leaving her mark on the world. In order to do this, though, she had to form strong emotional bonds with her children.

The sense of loss and longing for attachment that Bradstreet feels becomes a strong theme in her later poetry. In "Before the Birth of one of her Children," she illustrates the bond she has with her husband and she acknowledges that her death during childbirth is a distinct possibility. She realizes that death is inevitable but she seems intent on finding some way of being remembered by her husband, even if it is from beyond the grave. She writes, "And if chance to thine eyes shall bring this verse,/ With some sad sighs honor my absent hearse;/ And kiss the paper for thy dear love's sake,/ Who with salt tears this last farewell did take" (27-30).

Bradstreet was equally determined to find a definite place in the lives of her children, despite the conflict a close bond with them would entail. According to Puritan doctrine, "it was important not to love one's children excessively" (Martin 69). The reasoning behind this was that there was a very real possibility, if not a probability, that parental affection would be rewarded by the death of a child before it even reached puberty; the 'due distance' kept by Puritan parents from their children might, at least in part, have been an instinctive response to this possibility, a means of insulating themselves to
some extent against the shock that the death of a child might bring
(Stannard 239)
This idea proved to be yet another struggle for Bradstreet, who so obviously
adored her children, as evidenced by her poetry. The attachment to her children is
seen clearly in her poem "In reference to her Children, 23. June, 1656." In this
poem, Bradstreet refers to her children as birds who, one by one, leave the nest.
Although five of her children have already left the nest, the remaining three are
still with her. Of them, she says, "My other three, still with me nest,/ Until they're
grown, then as the rest,/ Or here or there, they'll take their flight,/ As is ordain'd,
so shall they light" (39-42). She realizes that it is God's will that her children
move on, but that does not make her sense of loss any lighter. As they leave, her
role as mother becomes less significant and she is left trying to find a connection
to something else.

The tone of the poem illustrates Bradstreet's love and devotion for her
children, while at the same time, echoing the desire to be remembered after she is
dead, that shown in "Before the Birth of one of her Children." She writes, "When
each of you shall in your nest/ Among your young ones take your rest,/ In
chirping language, oft them tell,/ You had a dam that lov'd you well" (83-86). She
seems to believe that if she can form and sustain a connection with her children,
then a part of her will live on through their remembrances of her, and she will
have, in her own way, conquered the permanent separation caused by death.

Bradstreet's conflicting opinions concerning death appear in several of the
elegies she writes for both her parents and her grandchildren. In the elegy to her
mother, "Bradstreet does not promise her subject heavenly bliss. Rather, she
gives her worldly remembrance" (Stanford Worldly Puritan 79-80). By not
promising a heavenly afterlife, Bradstreet is consistent with the Puritan doctrine
of predestination, which is yet another kind of hierarchy. The idea of
remembrance, though, makes it possible for Bradstreet to show that her mother
did indeed have a secure place in Anne's heart. Guaranteeing a heavenly afterlife
to her mother would have gone directly against her own religious beliefs. Again,
though, the idea of being remembered is echoed in this poem. Instead of trying to
make herself remembered, however, she is striving to keep the memory of her
mother alive, just as she will do for her three grandchildren.

In the elegy to her father, there is a distinct change in Bradstreet's
perception of predestination. She concludes her poem with, "Ah happy Soul,
'mongst Saints and Angels blest,/ Who after all his toyle, is now at rest" (66-67).
In these last two lines, she plainly states her belief that her father is indeed in
heaven, although believing such things conflicts with Puritan doctrine. Like her
father, her grandchildren, too, will also dwell in heaven after they die, according
to the elegies that Bradstreet writes for them. The idea of justice and injustice of
death will also figure into the elegies of both her father and her grandchildren.
"In this elegy [about her father], there is no question of the rightness of death; her
father is 'timely mown,' for he is 'fully ripe.' It is otherwise in the poems on the
deaths of her grandchildren" (Stanford, "Dogmatist and Rebel" 295). The elegies
on her grandchildren will clearly show Bradstreet's feelings of bereavement, due
in no small part to the young ages at which these children were taken from her and their lost opportunity to live a full earthly life.

In the elegy to her granddaughter, Elizabeth Bradstreet, Anne Bradstreet writes, "Farewell dear babe, my heart's too much content,/ Farewell sweet babe, the pleasure of mine eye" (6-7). She seems to have convinced herself that she was too attached to this child, which after all, is an earthly thing. Bradstreet "seems at first disposed to take the blame on herself, certainly for her mourning, perhaps even for the child's dying: the 'babe' was 'too much' the speaker's heart's 'content' for God to let the idolatrous attachment go unpunished . . ." (Mawer 213). However, later in the poem, she addresses, although subtly, the unfairness of such a young child dying, hinting that it is God with whom she is angry: "And buds new blown to have so short a date,/ Is by His hand alone that guides nature and fate" (18-19).

Again, the very people who Bradstreet loves the most are being taken away from her and she is struggling to hang to them in some way, or least to find a way to keep their memory alive through her poetry. Unlike the elegies to her parents, the ones to her grandchildren portray more distinctly her feelings of mourning, anger, and loss, as well as a conviction that they will go to heaven. This conviction conflicts directly with Puritan doctrine, and Bradstreet was undoubtedly aware of that.

The elegy to her granddaughter, Anne Bradstreet, echoes the same certainty that the elder Bradstreet has concerning a desirable afterlife. Again, she
appears to chide herself for the affection she had toward her granddaughter. She writes, "How oft with disappointment have I met,/ When I on fading things my hopes have set?/ Experience might 'fore this have made me wise,/ To value things according to their price:" (8-11). She admits that the deaths of her parents and other granddaughter should have taught her not to become so attached to things that eventually fade away. Indeed, if one never becomes attached to anything, one never feels sorrow or loss when it is taken away. Bradstreet, on the other hand, seems willing to bond with people, despite the emotional risk that comes with that bond.

In an elegy to her grandson, Simon Bradstreet, Anne Bradstreet comes even closer to stating her anger and frustration with God, but she struggles to remain in control. She writes, "Cropt by th' Almighty's hand; yet He is good" (8). She sounds almost as if she is having an argument within herself on what she should say and what she really feels. Her anger toward God is more evident than in her previous elegies, and she seems less inclined to hide it. By the end of the poem, she does what she always does when something or someone she loves is taken away: she accepts it, albeit reluctantly. Bradstreet concludes the poem by writing, "Go pretty babe, go rest with sisters twain;/ Among the blest in endless joy remain" (15-16).

Further evidence of the compromise Bradstreet made as a poet/mother appears in the book's epistle, written by her brother-in-law, the Reverend John Woodbridge. He is careful to make note that "these Poems are the fruit of some
few houres, curtailed from her sleep and other refreshments" (3). For Bradstreet, the role of good Puritan wife and mother would always take priority over her role as poet. Anything less would have conflicted with the Puritan faith. That is not to say, however, that Bradstreet was completely satisfied with this arrangement. Indeed, "it is evident in her poetry that this minor role as public poet was a problem for her and that she never fully resolved for herself the conflict between what she considered to be her principal vocations as housewife and mother and her role as poet" (Requa "Poetic Voices" 150).

Perhaps the poem that most shows Bradstreet's attachment to earthly things is "On the Burning of Our House." Her connection to earthly things reveals itself in this poem, when all of her possessions are destroyed. She manages to reconcile herself to this event, mainly through the same means she did when she first came to the colonies: submission to and faith in God's will. She writes, "It was His own, it was not mine,/ Far be it that I should repine" (21-22). She views this devastating occurrence as further evidence of God in her life, reprimanding her for placing too much value on worldly things. She clearly sounds conflicted here because "this poem's power is the result of the very poignant tension between her worldly concerns . . . and her spiritual aspirations" (Martin 74). In the poem, she describes the objects that were destroyed in the house and her distress is evident. She writes, "My pleasant things in ashes lie,/ And them behold no more shall I" (31-33). As in the elegy to her granddaughter, Bradstreet blames herself for valuing earthly things too much. She writes, "Then straight I 'gin my heart to
chide. And did thy wealth on earth abide?” (41-42). Perhaps the reason that she values these earthly things so much is that they provide a source of remembrance for her. For example, she may have seen a trunk or a chest and associated memories of her family or her homeland with that object. When the object is destroyed, the memories are more difficult to conjure up. Through her poem, she provides the memories of her possessions, and her language keeps her memory alive as well.

Anne Bradstreet endured many separations, from her homeland to her husband and her grandchildren. These separations made it difficult for her to determine her own individual place in the world and challenged her faith. She struggled with loneliness, anger, and grief through her poetry, and she tried to write herself into her families' memories as well. Ultimately, in nearly all of her work, Bradstreet looked for compromise in her writing, which required her to submit to what she perceived to be the will of God. She seemed to acknowledge that He was responsible for all her pain, but that this pain brought her back to her faith time and time again, and allowed her to write it out. She had very conflicted feelings toward her religion because she wanted to place blame and find comfort in it at the same time.

Undoubtedly, Anne Bradstreet had an effect upon the people who read her work, and she continues to have an effect upon the people who read and study her writing. Anne Bradstreet lives on through her writing, in a way that even she may not have imagined. Her struggle to accept all aspects of her faith and her desire
for emotional ties to her family members and her material possessions embody the conflict with which she dealt nearly all her life. She may not have been the ideal Puritan, but her inner struggle with the faith makes her appear to be the true embodiment of a Puritan artist, which may explain the continued interest in her life and work. Indeed, she has not only lived on; she has become the voice which best combines the European and colonial strands of the Puritan experience, and who best articulates the vulnerabilities and strengths of a female Puritan colonist who was, in spite of herself, a poet.

Conclusion

Although Bradstreet achieves unity and balance in her poetic efforts, she never truly achieved it in her own life. The opposing forces were simply too strong. She could no more compromise her own feelings than she could diminish the Puritan doctrine in her life. Like the twin voices in "The Flesh and the Spirit," each of these forces takes turns being superior in Bradstreet's life, without resolution.

Perhaps the biggest impact on Bradstreet's poetry, then, was her emigration to the colonies. Being in America forced Bradstreet to find her own voice. Because she was almost entirely cut off from the culture and literature of England after she moved to the colonies, she had little choice but to rely on her own ingenuity. Had she stayed in England, she may well have continued to
imitate the male writers around her, in which case she would not have attained the place in literary history she has today. As a female colonist who was at times lonely, frightened, angry, and joyful, her struggles with her faith and place ultimately helped her develop her own poetic voice, and, indeed, ensured her lasting legacy.

Although Bradstreet was presented with two very strong influences - that of the Renaissance and that of the Puritans - neither of which she could totally conform to, she found a way of balancing them. It was through her struggle to combine these two hierarchical structures that she found her own place in the world and her own voice in her writing. Bradstreet found a way to balance most of the contrasting influences and roles in her life. She used her role of wife and mother to create some of the most impressive poetry of her time. Furthermore, she used her writing as a way of dealing with the constraints that were placed upon her as a woman and as a way of demonstrating her ability to use characteristics of two strongly contrasting literary influences and transform them into something that was completely her own.
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