

**Transatlantic dame school?:
Anne Bradstreet's early poems as pedagogy**

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Introduction

The dame school in early New England had its roots in the transatlantic traditions of the English diaspora, 1620-1630. Although we have very little direct evidence of actual sites, teachers, texts, or terms of operation of individual dame schools in colonial life, there is ample ethnographic evidence that basic literacy was delivered via the dame school method, just as it had been in the 16th century in old England. Dame schools were a necessity of frontier, immigrant life, just as they had been a needed fact of rural English life. Simply put, female teachers, usually young matrons who counted their own children among their pupils, taught reading to neighborhood or local children, boys and girls, in preparation for the more formal “grammar schools” or Latin schools, which only boys would attend in preparation for college or a profession. My focus in this study is on one example of dame school teaching and texts in the early theocratic colonies. Specifically, I am interested in the literary and cultural contexts of Anne Bradstreet's early poems, which would constitute her juvenilia, written between ages 16 and 30, in both England and New England. My contention is that the early poems are long and didactic for a reason; namely, they were likely used as teaching texts, or early Novanglian curricula, in a home school, or dame school setting.

The early poems of Anne Dudley Bradstreet (1612-1672) have been largely ignored in the literature canon, in anthologies, and in scholarship. When they are noticed,

they are disparaged or used as a stylistic comparison to the later poems. The early poems are seen as long, boring, tedious, and derivative. They are dismissed as the work of a young hand aping older English forms, the writing of a sycophantic amateur wanting the praise of her father and his cronies; whereas the later poems are short, lyric, and accessible to contemporary readers. They are personal, intimate, and sentimental, in a word, likeable. Bradstreet's first quaternions, the long, formal poems in four sets of four each, "The Four Elements," "The Four Humours," "The Four Ages of Man," and "The Four Seasons of the Year," were originally circulated in the colonies in manuscript form in 1642, eight years before their transatlantic London printing. They were dedicated to her father, Thomas Dudley, as much an act of filial piety as a register of her attempt to connect with a governing class which itself was an institutionalized religious and governmental *literati*. Seen as such, Bradstreet's poems are not so much an artistic achievement, as an effort to provide a pedagogical text in accord with the 1642 Bay Colony law mandating literacy for all children under the aegis of the church at Boston. Parents had to, by law, teach their children to read, and by that time Bradstreet had four of her own, as well as various nieces and nephews. With her didactic and scrupulously innocuous quaternions as text, she may well have run a dame school in her home, teaching reading with her own copied poems.

For instance, in the fourth part, "Phlegm," of the quaternion, "The Four Humours," (1642, 1650) Bradstreet writes about the brain, the anatomical avatar of the humour, phlegm. In this passage, her very vocabulary reveals an intense interest in

learning, physical anatomy, and in how learning “flows”: “The brain’s the noblest member will allow/Its form and situation will avow/Its ventricles, membranes, and wondrous net/Galen, Hippocrates drive to a set.” The voice of Phlegm continues, and can be compared to Bradstreet’s own voice, in a much later lyric poem to her husband upon one of his transatlantic absences, “Another” (166?, 1678), in which the contrast between material and treatment is obvious, likely indicating that Bradstreet’s poems had vastly different rhetorical purposes:

“Phlegm”	“Another”
<p>The conjugation of the parts to th’brain Doth show, hence flow the powers which they retain: Within this high built citadel, doth lie The reason, fancy, and the memory: The faculty of speech doth here abide, The spirits animal from hence do slide.¹</p>	<p>Mine being gone, I lead a joyless life, I have a loving peer, yet seem no wife; But worst of all, to him can’t steer my course, I here, he there, alas both kept by force. Return my dead, my joy, my only love, Unto thy hind, thy mullet, and they dove.²</p>

Bradstreet likely taught this verse, within the quatrain “The Four Humours,” and/or crafted it so that it could be read and remembered for its content of natural philosophy, so that her children could learn the basics human anatomy.³ This poem, as well as most of the others in the early works of Bradstreet, written from approximately 1628-1642, are in

¹ Jeannine Hensley, ed., *The Works of Anne Bradstreet* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967), 48-49.

² *Ibid.*, 229.

³ See my essay, “Bradstreet’s Four Humours as 17th Century Science” at <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/colleges/artsands/langandlit/bradstreet/4humours.htm>

stylistic opposition to the mature, later poems, the shorter lyric poems which have become a beloved part of our extant American literature canon. I want to make the case for the likelihood of the intended use of her poems in a pedagogical setting, thus answering the most persistent of all Bradstreet scholarship questions: Why are the early poems so formal, so banal, so didactic? As readers and teachers of poetry, we generally find a greater satisfaction in poems that explore sympathetic experiences, those of self-identity, relationships, loss, love, and doubt. The often cited later poems of Bradstreet fit into this aesthetic. They are not “obnoxious” to us as are the early, didactic poems.

This study will review the traditional, critical reading of the poems in Bradstreet studies from approximately the last fifty years, and will also show how New England education systems and literacy requirements were established early on in the foundation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, based on English models for the dame school, grammar school, and college sequence. Additionally, the publication gap between the manuscript circulation and its transatlantic London printing, and the strongly rhymed and metered verse forms of the quaternions and occasional poems, both point to the likelihood that the early poems, especially the quaternions, were nothing more than school texts, meant to be learned, memorized, and recited. Moreover, the first and only seventeenth century official curriculum, the *New England Primer*, was not ratified and in use until 1689-90.

Critical Traditions

The Anne Bradstreet most scholars and lay-people know comes from the 1967

text, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, edited by Jeannine Hensley and introduced by Adrienne Rich. These women are largely responsible for the ‘Bradstreet compromise’ (my term): that we would acknowledge the early poems if only to focus on the later poems, the ones which have regularly found themselves anthologized and even considered ‘love poetry.’ Hensley and Rich are the combined critical voice that denigrated or dismissed Bradstreet’s longer and earlier poems as tedium, yet praised her shorter, personal poems as minor (or major?) jewels in the early American canon of poetry. My interest in resituating the early poems within the tradition of female education in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth centuries provides a more satisfying answer to the question of public/private duality, and the antipathy/sympathy tension in Mrs. Bradstreet’s work. Simply put, if we read the 1642 manuscript poems contained in the 1650 *Tenth Muse* as pedagogy consistent with English curricular tastes of the time, we can explain their sternly academic tone, and “often wooden lines and forced rhymes.”⁴

We can now connect Bradstreet to her material in a way that makes biographical and cultural sense, more sense than Adrienne Rich’s unflattering observations of Bradstreet’s *The Tenth Muse*, in which she comments that Bradstreet appears to have written her early poems so as to escape from the conditions of her harsh colonial experience:

Anne Bradstreet’s early work may be read, or skimmed, against this background. Apart from its technical amateurishness, it is remarkably

⁴ Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1984), 15.

impersonal even by Puritan standards. She was receiving indelible impressions during those [twenty] years between her arrival in New England and the publication of her verses in 1650.⁵

Rich, an original ‘hater’ of the juvenilia, further calls the quaternions, “long, rather listless pieces . . . composed in a last compulsive effort to stay in contact with the history, traditions, and values of her former world.”⁶ I find this explanation unfair, if not even more circumstantial and/or subjective than the textbook/education argument. That Bradstreet could write good poems seems to be regarded only after the 1678 *Several Poems*, and the 1867 “Andover Manuscripts.” By combating Rich’s estimation, I am saying here both that the quaternions are indeed “good” poems, given their cultural context, and that because of their intended use as public poetry in the transatlantic world, the quaternions do not need to be “good” by our standards, or by the standards of her own

These “indelible impressions” to which Rich refers are the historically documented Pequot War, and inquisitions of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson. But Bradstreet remains silent on the great scandals and events of her day. More proof that she intended to write pedagogy, not gossip or news. Other salient human interest events that surely did not escape Bradstreet’s cognition would have been the scandal involving Thomas Morton at his camp at Merry Mount (“Ma-re Mount”). Morton, who had been in conflict with the Plymouth Separatists since the early 1620’s, pre-dating the Boston

⁵ Adrienne Rich, “Foreward.” *Works of Anne Bradstreet*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1967), *xiv*.

⁶ Rich, *xiv-xv*.

settlement, had over-stayed his welcome, and on his third trip to New England, was finally cast aside by Winthrop and the Court of Assistants of Massachusetts Bay. Morton had been accused of trading guns with the natives, as well as in general partying with them, enjoying their women, playing the pagan with his phallic maypole, and of course recording it all in his three volume *New English Canaan* (Amsterdam, 1634), a semi-serious ethnographic account of his decade in New England, which also included a direct critique of the “Brownists of Plymouth.”

Morton is not mentioned in Bradstreet’s early poems. Neither are Williams, Hutchinson, or any of the other lesser characters who stirred things up in the fledgling theocracy. This omission was no accident. Their stories simply would not have been “teachable” or appropriate for the high-minded pursuit of poetry. Even occasional poems were governed by the conventions of content; they had to cover settled history, biblical narratives, post-humous commentary, or classical themes. Based on these criteria, Bradstreet’s shorter (yet still long) early poems which fit this genre of occasional poems suitable for public sphere consumption would include, respectively:

Settled history: The Four Monarchies

Biblical narratives: David’s Lamentation for Saul and Jonathan

Elegy: Du Bartas; Queen Elizabeth; Sir Philip Sidney

Classical themes: The Flesh and the Spirit; The Vanity of All Worldly Things

The only poem contained in the 1650 *Tenth Muse* which is even mildly topical is “A Dialogue between Old England and New; Concerning their Present Troubles, Anno

1642,” which is an interesting discursive exchange between the mother, Old England, and the estranged daughter, New England, about the then raging English Civil War.

In terms of the epistemology of poetry, Bradstreet was likely raised on Sir Philip Sidney’s *Defence of Poesie* (1581):

Poesie therefore, is an Art of Imitation: for so Aristotle termeth it in the word mimesis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth to speake Metaphorically. A speaking Picture, with this end to teach and delight. Of this have bene three generall kindes, the chiefe both in antiquitie and excellencie, were they that did imitate the unconceivable excellencies of God.⁷

According to Sidney, poetry’s chief aims were “to teach, to move, and to delight,” or to teach, to inspire, and to entertain. In referring to the ancient poetry of the Bible, especially King David’s *Psalms*, and Homer’s epic poetry, Sidney elaborates on his Aristotelian thesis, that imitation of nature is the aim of this written or oral art: “For these indeed do meerly make to imitate, and imitate both to delight & teach, and delight to move men to take that goodnesse in hand, which without delight they would flie as from a stranger.” Clearly, the didactic imperative was important to poetry, and certainly Bradstreet, who so admired Sidney, as evidenced by her elegy on his life and heroic death in the Low Countries, would not have lightly parted from his verse composition theory. It fit the aims of her audience, her pupils, and the *de facto* “Stationers” of Massachusetts Bay, circa 1642, including her father Thomas Dudley, as well as Winthrop, members of the Court of Assistants, and possibly even ministers such as John Cotton.

⁷ Sir Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poesie* (1581). Richard Bear, trans. University of Oregon. 1992 <<http://poetry.eserver.org/defense-of-poesie.txt>>.

Print History and the dame school

After the 1642 manuscript was incorporated into and published as *The Tenth Muse* in 1650, and was widely circulated in London, it became quite popular: “Eight years after its publication, [it] was listed in the London bookseller’s catalogue along with ‘Mr. Milton’s Poems,’ Du Bartas [*Divine Weeks*], Walton’s *Compleat Angler*, Browne’s *Religio Medici*, and ‘Mr. Shakesper’s Poems.’”⁸ This name-dropping list in some way validates for Bradstreet at least a contemporary readership among male authors, the best-sellers of the day, as it were. Moreover, *The Tenth Muse*’s literary and educational worth was also endorsed by a contemporary, Mrs. Bathusa Pell-Makin, who had been chief tutor to then six-year-old Princess Elizabeth, the second daughter of King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria. According to education historian Michael Alexander, “the most capable person associated with women’s education during the seventeenth century was probably Bathusa Pell [Makin]. Born in 1612, [the same year as Anne Bradstreet] Bathusa Pell seems to have learned most of what she knew [Classical and modern languages] from her father.”⁹ Indeed in 1650, Mrs. Makin, who called herself “a very learned English woman who had tutored the daughters of Charles I,” opened a boarding school for girls, and sometime thereafter, had this to say about *The Tenth Muse*: “How excellent a *Poet* Mrs. Bradstreet is (now in America) her works do testify.”¹⁰ That Makin

⁸ Hensley, xxxiii.

⁹ Alexander, 211.

¹⁰ Hensley, xxxiii.

used Bradstreet's text at her school seems undebatable.

So, as Mrs. Makin taught reading with *The Tenth Muse* at her girls' school, what might have been its success in other London educational applications, or in Boston as a school text? These answers we do not exactly know, but the *Tenth Muse*'s persistence years later in the book stalls and boarding schools of London makes us assume that it was at least a useful piece of writing. Moreover, even though the quaternions are modeled from Latinate prosodic styles and length, using a strict heroic couplet in stichic form, but are not in Latin, the old language of the old order, the dying language of the Catholic Church, makes an even stronger argument for their use as rote learning material in the context of girls' education. Girls did not generally learn Latin except if taught to them by a male family member. Even if *The Tenth Muse* were used for its verse-format, it still would have had pedagogical value, as the mid-seventeenth century saw the rise of the inclusion of English literature into the Humanities curriculum.

In the Novanglian colonies, education took on another emphasis or purpose, in that its very structure sought to reinforce the social hierarchy. According to historian Joel Spring, class distinctions were quickly drawn between "reading and writing schools" or "petty schools" and the "grammar school": "The primary content in colonial reading and writing instruction was religious and moral, whereas the grammar school emphasized the teaching of Latin and Greek"¹¹ so as to prepare (male) students for careers in the ministry, law, medicine, or colonial administration. A petty school taught basic literacy,

¹¹ Joel Spring, *The American School 1642-1985* (New York: Longman, 1986), 4.

to read the Bible, but also to read the community's published notices and laws. A petty school might be taught by a woman, a matron, whose own children would have also been her pupils: "A popular form of the petty school in the colonies was the dame school for neighborhood children. The dame school often was conducted in the kitchen or living room of the teacher's home."¹² No comprehensive research has been done on what kinds of texts or materials the home schools, or "dame schools" would have used, other than the Bible, during the years 1642-1650, as the curriculum of New England's schools was not yet codified.

Indeed, it would not be standardized until the first *New England Primer* was printed in 1690 by Harvard Press. The *New England Primer* was written by church elders and ministers as a response to the Court of Assistants' mandate for a catechism for the colony's youth.¹³ It contains age-appropriate, short prayers for morning and evening and over meals, as well as an alphabet based on Biblical cues, and a polysyllabic vocabulary for older students.¹⁴ For instance, for the letter "Q" the word is "Queen," as in: "Queen Esther sues/and saves the Jews." But Bradstreet was long dead when the *Primer* was published and in use. Again, this publishing gap between the Great Migration's populating of the Massachusetts coast and inland areas (ca. 1630-40), the mandate for parents to teach their children to read (1642), and the *New England Primer* (1680 wide-

¹² Spring, 4.

¹³ Spring, 5.

¹⁴ *The New England Primer*. Paul Leicester Ford, ed. (New York: Teachers College of Columbia U P, 1962), 1-21.

publication) is not something we should simply overlook. These colonists had to read something! *The Bay Psalm Book* was printed at Harvard College in approximately 1640; likely this text was used in both home and clerical applications. According to E. Jennifer Monaghan's fairly recently book length study, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (2005):

[T]he definitions of the two literacy skills implied in so many colonial sources—of reading as a receptive and passive skill, of writing as the repetitious copying of the work of others—were in fact undermined and contradicted by actual practice . . . [and by the 18th century] both reading and writing had emerged as potentially revolutionary practices, challenging every kind of religious and political orthodoxy.¹⁵

However, basic literacy to the New English of the seventeenth century was indeed limited to passive and repetitive skills, both from a dearth of texts, and from the establishment of a theocracy that had as its main text, the Christian reformed Bible.

Moreover, Monaghan's book, while claiming to cover literacy in "orthodox New England," gets the facts wrong about the education of girls, and frankly, the importance of Bradstreet's London-published book to the colony. There is only one reference to Bradstreet in the entire 491 page text, which incorrectly labels her as a "devout Congregationalist," an inaccurate appositive as she openly questioned her faith in her letter, "To my Dear Children," and whose poetry is decidedly unreligious. Monaghan also dishes out the tired contention and typical feminist complaint, that "the colonists

¹⁵ E. Jennifer Monaghan. *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*. (Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 2005), 8.

were part of a culture that consistently undervalued women's intellectual ability, . . . Moreover, the English model from which immigrants derived their ideas of schools precluded the admission of girls. Town-funded schools in England, whether they were petty schools or grammar schools, never included girls.”¹⁶ As my research will show, not only were females educated, they were clearly relied on as dame or petty school teachers, and given her social position, Anne Bradstreet would have been a model pedagogue.

It is likely, thus, that Bradstreet's quaternions, and possibly some of the other pieces in what was to become the 1650 edition were used to fill the textual, curricular and catechetical void, until the *New England Primer* was printed in New Boston and made available throughout Massachusetts Bay. According to education historian Ellwood Cubberley, the legal and institutional ramifications of early public education mandates were met by the colonial dame school model:

The primary teaching at first was done at home, but the dame school developed to supply the place of home instruction in the rudiments of learning. The dame school was a very elementary school, kept in a kitchen or living room by some woman, who in her youth, had obtained the rudiments of an education, and who desired to earn a pittance for herself by imparting to the children of her neighborhood her small store of learning. . . . the beginnings of reading and spelling,

¹⁶ Monaghan, 42.

with the Catechism usually added. Occasionally, a little writing and counting were taught, . . . and not infrequently a little sewing and knitting. . . . In time, the daughters of schoolmasters were fitted purposely to keep a dame school, as preparatory, for boys, for the town grammar school.¹⁷

I have to remark at how eerily familiar sounding this illustration is. One can readily see, (ignoring its slightly paternalistic tone), how easily Anne Bradstreet fits this image, with her “rudiments of an education” and her status as daughter of a writer and civic leader. As she says in “The Prologue,” in her cagey self-deprecation about the “broken” lines of the poems to come, “From schoolboy’s tongue no rhet’ric we expect,”¹⁸ Bradstreet knew that in 1642, she was no poet outright. She certainly must have aspired to poet-status, but at the time, possibly knew more about “schoolboys” and “dame schools,” than professional poetry. In a dame school, no classical rhetoric would have been taught; that was left to the grammar schools and colleges. I am not asserting that I have direct textual or biographical evidence that Bradstreet became a dame school teacher to other than her own brood, but I can speculate confidently that as a writer, mother, and home-school teacher, she was clearly qualified to do so, and with her own home-made texts, the quaternions.

So what about secular learning? According to Hensley, “the topics [of the early

¹⁷ Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 27.

¹⁸ Hensley, 15.

poems and/or Quaternions] fulfill the practical Puritan's need for worldly information about history, heroes, natural philosophy, and [current] political arguments. . . ."¹⁹ In the "Four Elements," the first quaternion in the 4 x 4 set, for instance, Bradstreet makes many educational, not just pretentious, allusions to Classical sciences and humanities, in a kind of survey of the physical world, an encyclopedic kind of knowledge, not interpretative nor analytical, appropriate to early readers. Of "Earth," she writes:

Among my praises this I count not least,
 I am th' original of man and beast.
 To tell what sundry fruits my fat soil yields
 In vineyards, gardens, orchards and cornfields, . . .
 My cities famous, rich, and populous,
 Whose numbers now have grown innumeros.
 I have not time to think of every part,
 Yet let me name my Grecia, 'tis my heart.
 For learning, arms, and arts I love it well,
 But chiefly 'cause the Muses there did dwell.²⁰

Bradstreet clearly has command of her material here, as she offers a simple personification of a kind of bountiful "Mother" Earth, while quickly referencing ancient Greek cities as the earthly source for "learning." Learning and experience are also her

¹⁹ Hensley, xxiv.

²⁰ Hensley, 22.

focus in the “Middle Age” section of the “Four Ages of Man” quaternion:

To greater things I never did aspire,
 My dunghill thoughts or hopes could reach no higher. . . .
 Be I of wit, of learning, and of parts,
 I judge I should have room in all men’s hearts.²¹

Here again Bradstreet is unrelenting in the connection between learning and success, that to be learned meant to be accepted and have “room in all men’s hearts.” She is cautioning against having no aspirations, or else “dunghill thoughts” will result. Is this not the tenor of education, not only to learn the content area, but to respect learning itself, and to respect especially Classical learning?

Moreover, according to Hugh Amory from the “book history,” in a section on the role of the Stationers’ Company in London and how literary property might have been protected in the early seventeenth century, school text books were a viable part of the transatlantic print culture: “The Stationers soon patented more lucrative properties -- Bibles, law books, liturgies, schoolbooks, and almanacs -- in this manner. In 1602 they consolidated the patents on psalters, almanacs, and schoolbooks in an ‘English Stock’ and shared it out among the leading booksellers. . . . In 1631, the Company reduced the Cambridge press to printing schoolbooks from the English Stock. . . .”²² Thus the commonplace existence and use of school books as printed text would have been a

²¹ Hensley, 60.

²² Amory and Hall, 35.

cultural habit that the Massachusetts Puritans would have employed soon upon disembarkation. The transatlantic community shared texts as well as values, and Bradstreet's early work simply makes sense as school text, first.

Pedagogical history, applications, and peers

The quaternions are also reflective of her university-like reading, typical for sitting for a B.A. degree at Cambridge, as they directly contain Natural Philosophy and Sciences, Mathematics, Geography, and History (the "quadrivium"); and indirectly are evidence of her studies in classical logic, grammar, and rhetoric (the "trivium"). A further study into the background of English education at the end of the Tudor realm, and into the early to mid-seventeenth century can point us toward more positive connections between *The Tenth Muse* and school textbooks and likely curriculum. According to education historian Craig Thompson, "An anonymous account of life in the 6th and 7th forms [grades] at Westminster between 1610 and 1620 shows that grammar school work in the reign of James I had changed very little from that of 1560."²³ But later, Richard Mulcaster, an influential pedagogue and advocate for a more practical, less Classics-based curriculum, believed in the teaching of English to late Elizabethan pupils: "What of English? . . . For a modern reader, one of the most interesting Elizabethan treatments of the place and teaching of English is Mulcaster's *Elementary* (1582)."²⁴

Mulcaster was an enthusiastic proponent of the English language, which he

²³ Craig Thompson, *Schools in Tudor England* (Charlottesville: U P of Virginia, 1973), 38.

²⁴ Thompson, 32.

called, “a tongue of itself both deep in conceit and frank in delivery.”²⁵ In a concise and revealing, parallel metonymy, Mulcaster wrote:

I love Rome, but London better;
 I favor Italy, but England more;
 I honor the Latin, but worship the English.²⁶

Mulcaster’s *Elementary* text provided a Humanities-based, Latinate, but English curriculum in the form of an essay on the standardization of English spelling and vocabulary. His *Positions* (1581) was a treatise on the general education of English children. Both texts would have been readily available to the Dudley-Bradstreets, wherein the transition of the commonwealth from a post-Catholic framework to a pre-Puritan hegemony or popular leadership, saw the rise of English literature itself, whereas a “knowledge of English literature. . . was something an Elizabethan acquired outside the school-room.”²⁷ That is to say, who needed formal instruction in the poetry of his own age? The steady formal elevation of English over Classical languages brought about the transformation of an all-Latin curriculum. “. . . [T]he learned world assumed that English literature, however agreeable as a recreation, lacked substance, high seriousness, and cultural values of the Classics. In 1550 this [view] was hardly an error; [but] by 1650, the story would be different.”²⁸ Bradstreet’s poems in English had the luck to be published at

²⁵ Thompson, 32.

²⁶ Thompson, 32.

²⁷ Thompson, 34.

²⁸ Thompson, 34.

the height of this popular educational trend, and thus their appearance was met with praise.

Bradstreet's own view of the natural and physical world, as constructed and controlled by her Quaternions, was influenced by a perfection made possible by the quest for Puritan Utopian educational idealism. "Each season hath his fruit, so hath each clime:/Each man his own peculiar excellence,/But none in all that hath preeminence."²⁹ The real Bradstreet, not the one marginalized by print myths, existed in this Utopian-questing environment. But what about education for girls and young women in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries? Could the daughter of the steward to the Earl of Lincoln have been educated as a boy was? The short answer is, yes. Not only did girls' education become more accessible, but ". . . the degree of [public] support for educational institutions had grown steadily during the Elizabethan period, [and] reached its greatest extent between 1601 and 1640."³⁰ Even though "female education had been seriously affected during the last decade of Henry VIII by the dissolution of all nunneries and the nearly 100 schools maintained by them, [and] because the grammar schools of the era rarely admitted girls, a separate system of secondary schools for young females was badly needed."³¹ As Leah Marcus has reminded us in *Childhood and Despair*, children

²⁹ Hensley, 67.

³⁰ Michael V. Alexander, *The Growth of English Education*. (Univ. Park: Penn State U P, 1990), 209.

³¹ Alexander, 210.

were treated as little adults in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with many onerous responsibilities such as performing heavy chores, and learning to read in the languages of the Bible, so as to propagate faith. Yet, “for 17th century Puritans, their children were the best hope for a better England to come. For conservative Anglicans, childhood was a symbolic link with an idealized England gone by.”³² Thus, both factions of English agreed; they must be educated, as childishness was a metaphor for closeness to the Christ-Child, and for the innocence of a child’s faith.

Precisely during this cultural era, when the Dudley family still lived and thrived in England, at the end of the reign of Elizabeth, during the reign of James I, and at the beginning of the reign of Charles I, the greatest transformation of English education for girls was seen, and was surely witnessed by Anne, her mother, her sisters, and their female peers: “. . . [A]n innovation of great potential importance occurred during the last decades before the Civil War [1641-1660], -- the foundation of the first schools intended solely for the education of girls.”³³ Not only were girls schooled in collective academies, but girls of means also had had a long tradition in the use of tutors hired by their parents to teach them individual subjects. Almost exactly like Anne Dudley Bradstreet, a girl named Lucy Apsley (b. 1620), daughter of a minor Sussex gentleman, was tutored extensively at a young age. Her over-all education was supervised by the family chaplain,

³² Leah Marcus, *Childhood and Cultural Despair* (Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh P, 1978), 43.

³³ Marcus, 43-44.

but as Lucy wrote in her journal: When I was about 7 years of age,³⁴ I remember I had at one time eight tutors in several qualities, languages, music, dancing, writing, and needlework³⁵ My father would [also] have me learn Latin.³⁶ Anne Bradstreet was also tutored in music, dancing, languages, and the like, at the same age as Lucy Apsley. And like Lucy, Anne's father played an important role in her "finished" female education, as well as in her continued intellectual growth. There is also reason to believe that her courtship by her husband Simon Bradstreet, a Cambridge graduate, had begun over his possible role as her later tutor, especially in Classical history. The intensity with which she expressed her love to her husband later in their marriage, after many children, is remarkable to even the most cynical reader.

Another capable and well-educated young woman of the day, Anne Clifford, daughter of the third Earl of Cumberland, born in 1590, was tutored by poet and historian Samuel Daniel, (whose sonnet sequence "Delia" she might have read?):

Under Daniel's supervision, Anne Clifford studied history, . . .

Gerard's *Herbal*, Sidney's *Arcadia*, and most of the poetry of

Spenser. In addition, she studied much foreign literature in English

³⁴ We know that this age of training was typical with male English education, "These schools took boys between the ages of 6 and 8, and kept them until they were fit to enter Oxford or Cambridge at the age of 14 or 16" (Armytage 6).

³⁵ Apparently, needlework was a regular curricular subject taught in all girls' schools or by tutors. Even Mrs. Makin's school at Putney taught needlework. Thus, when Bradstreet quips her famous line in "The Prologue" to *The Tenth Muse*, "I am obnoxious to each carping tongue/Who says my hand a needle better fits," often descried by feminists as proof of Bradstreet's proto-feminist leanings, this line might instead simply mean that she hadn't yet mastered the curricular skill of needlework in her normal studies.

³⁶ Alexander, 214.

translation, such as Cervantes *Don Quixote* [1601] and Montaigne's *Essays*.³⁷

So Bradstreet's own poems on literature and contemporary history, such as the "Elegy on Sir Philip Sidney" (which makes a reference to Sir Walter Raleigh's own Sidney elegy), the Homage to Queen Elizabeth I, the Homage to Du Bartas, and the "Dialogue between Old England and New," all sit squarely within the the tradition of education sought by her contemporary, Anne Clifford. If Anne Clifford was reading Cervantes, then surely Bradstreet's conventional treatment of imaginative writers and topics would have been a completely acceptable inclusion into standard educational fare.

Girls were either educated at home by tutors, their fathers, older male siblings, ministers, their mothers, or they could attend a day school or a boarding school. At the Ladies Hall at Deptford in Kent, founded approximately 1615, the curriculum included basic literacy and reading in English, possible performance arts such as music and dance, and needlework. Indeed, in the 1610's and 1620's, "boarding schools for girls proliferated, particularly in the Southeast, and in the more heavily populated sections of the Midlands,"³⁸ the area most inhabited by the Puritan community, and by the future members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

According to David D. Hall , in the compendium work with Hugh Amory, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, volume one of the series, *A History of the Book on America* (2000), the connection between the diasporic community and its interest in

³⁷ Alexander, 213.

³⁸ Alexander, 210.

literacy was based in the Protestant Reformation of the previous century. “Another legacy” which the English Puritans carried with them to the New World “was a particular understanding of printing, reading, and writing”:

Famously, the Reformers came to view the invention of printing as a divinely ordained means of emancipating the Church from the “tyranny” of the Roman Popes This understanding of printing prevailed among the Protestants who colonized the mainland British colonies. . . . Because these communities relied on books to sustain their religious practice, they were quick to import them from overseas and to patronize printers on this side of the Atlantic. Thanks to the uses of books within these groups, they were able to maintain a degree of coherence even though they were often decentralized or lacked strong regulating structures.³⁹

Bradstreet herself enters into this transatlanticist culture with her original quaternions, which seem to add to that “particular understanding” of literacy and education, when she has the persona of Blood in the “Four Humours” describe those who “. . . as to the sanguine are inclined,/They’re liberal, pleasant, kind, and courteous,/ [. . .] For arts and sciences they are the fittest.”⁴⁰ She continues in this lengthy, stichic verse, in a pun on “volumes [of books?]” that those who favor the sanguine constitution have a “most

³⁹ Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, *History of the Book in America, Vol. I.* (Cambridge U P, 2000), 2-3.

⁴⁰ Hensley, 42.

voluminous large memory.”⁴¹ They are readers, and Bradstreet’s offering was a strong suggestion that the New English would obey and conform to Old English reading habits, study habits, and biblical scholarship.

Conclusion

According to venerable Novanglian historian Samuel Eliot Morison, “Elementary education became a parental responsibility by act of the Bay Colony in 1642.”⁴² It is perhaps no coincidence then, that Bradstreet’s collection was dedicated to her gubernatorial father in the same year, and that her father might have essentially trained her, while still in Lincolnshire, England, to be a schoolmistress. It is reasonable to assume, then, that *The Tenth Muse*, which of course it was not called that in the eight years between its New England manuscript circulation and its London publication, was used by Anne Bradstreet, and possibly by her adult siblings who were also parents (i.e. by John Woodbridge and Mercy Dudley Woodbridge), primarily as an elaborate mnemonic device for tutelage of their children. The lingering print myths about her early manuscript poems, the nature and circumstances of their composition, their intended readership or audience, and her ignorance of their publication can now be confronted with a new reality: Bradstreet was a purposeful and practical, transatlantic writer, writing poems

⁴¹ Hensley, 42.

⁴² Morison, 113.

which could be taught and learned, in the context of early New English home or dame schools.

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