"Unfit for Light":
Anne Bradstreet’s Monstrous Birth

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Ah me! Conceiv’d in sin, and born in sorrow,
A nothing, here today, but gone to morrow.
Whose mean beginning, blushing cann’t reveale,
But night and darkness, must with shame conceal.
—Anne Bradstreet, “The Four Ages of Man”

Mistris Hutchison being big with child, and growing towards the time of her labour, as other women doe, she brought forth not one, (as Mistris Dier did) but (which was more strange to amazement) 30 monstrous births or thereabouts, at once; some of them bigger, some lesser, some of one shape, some of another; few of any perfect shape, none at all of them (as farre as I could ever learne) of humane shape.
—Thomas Weld, “Preface” to John Winthrop’s A Short Story

WHEN Puritan dissenter Ann Hutchinson was twice tried in 1637 and 1638, excommunicated, and banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for her outspoken religious views, poet Anne Bradstreet was at home in Ipswich caring for her small children, including, or in expectation of (the exact dates of her children’s births are not known), a new infant. Despite her remoteness, Bradstreet would have been aware of the proceedings in Boston. In November, her father, Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley, and her husband, Simon Bradstreet, made the two-day journey from Ipswich to serve as magistrates at Hutchinson’s civil trial. As public officials, they were also privy to information about Hutchinson’s religious excommuni-

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cation the following March. In either her father's home or her own, Anne Bradstreet must certainly have been exposed to discussions about the trials (Simon Bradstreet was the more liberal of the two men), reports of Hutchinson's ill health (her difficult sixteenth pregnancy), and tales of the "monstrous births" that were reportedly visited upon her and her disciples.

Bradstreet was focused, however, on other concerns: her growing family and her poetry no doubt demanded and rewarded close attention. Over time, both endeavors would continue to proliferate. Thirteen years after the trials, with Hutchinson seven years dead, Bradstreet had seven children (an eighth would be born in 1652), and a book of her poems, *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America*, had been published that year in England. Her brother-in-law, the book's editor John Woodbridge, boasted:

> It is the Work of a Woman, honoured, and esteemed where she lives, for her gracious demeanour, her eminent parts, her pious conversation, her courteous disposition, her exact diligence in her place, and discreet manningaging of her family occasions; and more then so, these Poems are the fruit but of some few houres, curtailed from her sleep, and other refreshments.¹

Small wonder that generations of scholars have discussed Hutchinson and Bradstreet in conjunction only to contrast them.

I will not contribute to that trend. Instead, my project concerns women and illegitimacy. Anne Bradstreet (1612–72) has typically been considered a hyper-legitimate poet, the daughter and wife of Massachusetts Bay Colony officials, a member of the Puritan spiritual elect. Her life and art, we have consistently thought, therefore mirrors the dominant values of her Puritan society. As a chief participant in the Antinomian Controversy of 1636–38, Ann Hutchinson (1591–1643) is Bradstreet's apparent

opposite: heretical, socially and spiritually illegitimate, eventually banished.\(^2\) Indeed, the controversy was deeply divisive. On one side stood a theocracy challenged for valuing “good works” (that is, material evidence such as wealth and property or an outwardly virtuous life) as the essential sign of God’s saving grace; on the other side stood the “Hutchinsonians,” accused of proclaiming that God’s grace is freely given and personally apprehended, a position that could only lead to spiritual and civil anarchy. Although there were many men who shared Hutchinson’s views, even prominently placed men, she was singled out by officials like John Winthrop, who branded her a seductress. The terms in which Hutchinson’s religious activism was cast and the propaganda mounted for her defeat thus had the effect of skewing Puritan perceptions of womanhood in colonial New England, altering the frame through which women were perceived and perceived themselves. When we acknowledge Hutchinson’s influence on attitudes toward women in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, we begin to imagine Bradstreet differently—we begin, in other words, to notice the metaphors of illegitimacy and dissent that permeate her work.

“The Author to her Book” is an excellent place to begin such an exploration. Bradstreet wrote the poem sometime after the publication of The Tenth Muse in 1650, and scholars have often considered it the pivot point on Bradstreet’s timeline: before it, some say, she wrote poems in the male poetic tradition; after “The Author,” she wrote about her womanly experience. In “The Author,” Bradstreet apostrophizes her published volume as a bastard child. Calling it “ill-form’d” and “halt,” she instructs it, “If for thy father askt, say, thou hadst’t none.” With those words, Bradstreet enters a female discourse that extended well beyond womanly fears of childbirth to embrace charges of illegitimacy not unlike those leveled at Ann Hutchinson.

\(^2\)Antinomian means “against the law,” a just description of Hutchinson’s beliefs and behaviors, though she was not so labeled until after her trials. Her judges initially accused her of Familism. The Familists were an English sect that did not practice fidelity in marriage; thus the term impugned Hutchinson’s morals, not merely her religious beliefs.
Anne Bradstreet: “Barren I”

Born in 1612 or 1613, the second child and first daughter of Thomas and Dorothy Dudley, Anne Dudley was raised in Sempringham, England. Her religious training, begun early, was supplemented with secular studies—and aspirations—as well. In a prose memoir, she recalls youthful rebellions when she “found my heart more carnall, & sitting loose from God.”

Because her father served as steward for the Earl of Lincoln, Anne and her older brother were probably educated alongside the nobleman’s children. In any case, her writings amply demonstrate that she was well read: in addition to the Bible, she was versed in the classics and in the medical literature of the day. She read the poetry of Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, and Guillaume du Bartas.

Anne Dudley married Simon Bradstreet when she was only sixteen years old, and in 1630, aged only eighteen, she emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony together with her husband and natal family. Orphans and stewards of others’ estates in England, Thomas Dudley and Simon Bradstreet were among the first tier of colony men in New England. Dudley served as deputy governor to John Winthrop, and both Dudley and Bradstreet eventually served terms as governor.

There is no doubt that Anne Bradstreet’s life was deeply informed by her social position and her faith. The Tenth Muse includes allegorical treatments of religious and political topics and elegies for Sidney, du Bartas, and Elizabeth I. The book’s longest poem, commonly called the quaternions, describes a four-fold, cyclical world of elements, humors, ages, and kingdoms. In her dedication to Thomas Dudley, Bradstreet reports that she composed the quaternions in homage to her father, who had produced a similar effort, not now extant. We have come to treasure The Tenth Muse, however, not for its epic intentions and achievements, which spring from a male poetic bent, but for its powerful personal qualities.


4Simon Bradstreet did not serve as colony governor until after Anne Bradstreet’s death.
tradition, but for its unconventional interludes. The Bradstreet who struggled with the dominant paradigms of patriarchy and Puritanism is the poet who holds our interest. One such moment emerges in “The Prologue.” Although “The Prologue” assumes the form of a conventional poetic apology, its effect is anything but apologetic:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue,
Who says my hand a needle better fits,
A Poet’s Pen all scorne, I should thus wrong;
For such despight they cast on female wits:
If what I doe prove well, it wo’nt advance,
They’l say its stolne, or else, it was by chance.5

In its seventeenth-century context, “obnoxious” means “vulnerable to attack”; the persona is literally illegitimate, lying outside the protection of the law. In defense of this persona, Bradstreet deploys “A Poet’s Pen”—a phallic instrument to which she, a woman, can have no claim—to ward off accusations of criminal behavior. But if no thief, she will be charged with yet another form of illegitimacy; had “by chance,” her poetry is like a child conceived out of wedlock. As Patricia Caldwell asserts in her fine essay “Why Our First Poet Was a Woman,” Bradstreet may wield a needle rather than a sword, but her needle is a weapon.6 She needles her male audience while patronizing their insecurities. The effect is evident in another stanza:

Let Greeks be Greeks, and Women what they are,
Men have precedency, and still excell,
It is but vaine, unjustly to wage war,
Men can doe best, and Women know it well.7

“There, there,” she seems to say; “you really are smarter than I am, Dear.” It is an art that has been practiced by women throughout time. Feminist battle cries, on the other hand, tend to have historic particularity, as in Bradstreet’s 1643 elegy for

Queen Elizabeth I: “Let such as say our sex is void of reason, / 
Know 'tis a slander now, but once was treason.”

Bradstreet’s self-assertions rarely take the form of such daring attacks. Another line I find remarkable for its overt proclamation of self hides within the elegy “In Honour of Du Bartas, 1641.” On the surface, the poem is an intellectual curtsey to a mentor. Bradstreet credits Guillaume du Bartas—“Great, dear, sweet Bartas,” as she calls him—with inspiring her “astonish’d heart” to write. Du Bartas is the master to whom Bradstreet, “barren I,” brings her “Daysey.” She is “ravisht,” held in chains admiring his “Oh pregnant brain.” With Bradstreet, especially, barrenness is an image that gives pause. Although Bradstreet bore eight healthy children in her lifetime, in the first several years of her marriage, she was childless. In The Nightingale’s Burden, Cheryl Walker notes that “childbearing was enjoined upon Church members almost as a religious duty, [and] women regarded their children as proof of their legitimation in the eyes of God and society.” In those early years with Simon, then, Anne must have felt stigmatized. Later in life she remembered that it first “pleased God to keep me a long time without a child, which was a great grief to me, and cost me many prayers + tears before I obtaind one.”

As her childlessness continued, Bradstreet may well have approached her poetry with growing ambivalence. It pleased God, her heavenly father, to withhold a child from her: What had she done? In a desperate search for answers, a lesser poet may have bargained with God and stopped writing. Bradstreet, on the

Bradstreet, “In honour of that High and Mighty Princess, Queen Elizabeth, of most happy memory,” Tenth Muse, p. 203.

Bradstreet, “In honour of Du Bartas, 1641,” Tenth Muse, pp. 196–99. Modernized in the Hensley edition, the archaic spelling, Daysey, emphasizes the homely daisy as “the day’s eye” or the sun, allowing a more ambiguous interpretation. See Rosamund Rosenmeier, Anne Bradstreet Revisited (Boston: Twayne, G. K. Hall, 1991), p. 45, for a discussion of a similar assignment of woman to the sun (rather than to the moon, a more conventional trope) in Bradstreet’s elegy for Queen Elizabeth.


other hand, seems to have been the sort of poet who found self-examination extremely useful—for her poetry. She did not stop writing. After the birth of her first child, Samuel, in 1633 or 1634, the ambivalence through which she had learned to experience the world did not abate; instead, baby Samuel opened Bradstreet's mind to new metaphors. No longer womb-barren, she was free to use the metaphor of barrenness to express her frustration with poetry. Motherhood was conventionally legitimating for a woman; poetry, on the other hand, was not. Bradstreet's use of the vexed image in the du Bartas poem suggests that by 1641 she was already feeling the burden of masculine poetic influences.

When we read “The Author to her Book” within the context of the playful witticisms of her conventional, good-daughter poems, it is disarmed. Also disempowering is the publication history and preface to The Tenth Muse. The story is one of which Bradstreet scholarship is over fond, so I'll be brief. According to her editor, Bradstreet's manuscript of "publick" poems was circulating among family members when he carried it to England in 1648. In his prose preface, Woodbridge claims that certain people “had gotten some scattered papers, affected them wel, were likely to have sent forth broken peices to the Authors prejudice, which I thought to prevent.” Therefore he gathered the manuscript together and had it published without Bradstreet's involvement or approval. In order to avoid the “un-beleif” of readers (“the worst effect [on the reader] will be un-belieif, which will make him question whether it be a womans Work, and aske, Is it possible?”), he prefixed eleven verse tributes, all written by men, attesting to the work's authenticity. One, “An Anagram,” compares Bradstreet to du Bartas:

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12 See Caldwell, “Why Our First Poet Was a Woman,” pp. 14–19, for an analysis of Bradstreet's naming of Samuel as a way of claiming biblical power and "creative selfhood."

13 John Woodbridge, “Kind Reader,” in Bradstreet's Tenth Muse, n.p. Scholars do not agree on the extent of Bradstreet's ignorance about the book's publication. Basing my opinion upon "The Author to her Book," I believe that even if she knew or suspected that it would be published in England, she was nonetheless unprepared for its actual appearance.
An epicene is a noun or person without obvious gender, or an effeminate man. The term was pejorative even in 1650, particularly so (one would think) in a Puritan lexicon. In his verse preface, Woodbridge makes of Bradstreet’s accomplishment an invitation to consider other women’s shortcomings:

If women, I with women, may compare,  
Your Works are solid, others weake as aire;  
Some books of Women I have heard of late,  
Perused some, so witless, intricate,  
So void of sence, and truth, as if to cire  
Were only wisht (acting above their spehar)  
And all to get, what (silly soules) they lack,  
Esteeme to be the wisest of the pack . . .

The publication history and male-authored preface of *The Tenth Muse* are significant because they no doubt influenced how Bradstreet herself viewed her book. When she was confronted with the prefatory verses, some of them diatribes against all women writers except herself, what thoughts flooded her mind? Ivy Schweitzer has deftly noted that the publication of Bradstreet’s work “constitute[d] an appropriation, not merely of her voice, but of her subjectivity and agency, for their [her male relatives] own strategic purposes.” It seems likely that Bradstreet’s male relatives and their theocratic colleagues did so in order to portray and then herald her as a “good” colonial woman: industrious, imitative, “neat.” Indeed, the preface depicts Bradstreet not as her father’s daughter but as a “goodwife,” a conventional colonial woman, spinning and—significantly—breeding. Woodbridge calls his sister-in-law’s book her “fair infant” but assures us that she has not neglected her duties to her husband and children in order to write. The time to write has been “taken from some small moments of her sleep and

other recreations." No one in the family suffered to bring The Tenth Muse into the world, he assures us, save perhaps the poet herself.

All of which brings us to Bradstreet's only recorded response to the publication of The Tenth Muse, "The Author to her Book."

Thou ill-form'd offspring of my feeble brain,  
Who after birth did'st by my side remain,  
Til snatcht from thence by friends, less wise than true  
Who thee abroad, expos'd to publick view,  
Made thee in raggs, halting to th' press to trudge  
Where errors were not lessened (all may judg).

At thy return my blushing was not small,  
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,  
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,  
Thy Visage was so irksome in my sight;  
Yet being mine own, at length affection would  
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:

I wash'd thy face, but more defects I saw  
And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.  
I stretcht thy joynts to make thee even feet,  
Yet still thou run'st more hobling then is meet;  
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,  
But nought save home-spun Cloth, I' th' house I find.  
In this array 'mongst Vulgars mayst thou roam,  
In Criticks hands, beware thou art not known,  
If for thy Father askt, say, thou hadst none:  
And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,  
Which caus'd her thus to send thee out of door.  

Read only within the poetic and historical context of The Tenth Muse, "The Author to her Book" yields such interpretations as "amused," "spontaneous," "truly charming," and "extended with . . . comic detail." Bradstreet depicts herself as the unwed mother of a malformed child, someone "all may

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judg.," poor, fearful of "Criticks hands." That context of obedient daughter, industrious housewife, and witty "needle"—robs the poem, however, of its subversive power; indeed, it robs it to the extent that the editors of one college textbook find it possible to ask students, "Why does the tone of the final lines cause you to smile or even laugh?"17

To read the poem beneath its surface, to tease out its complexity, let's return to Ann Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy.

II. Ann Hutchinson's "Bastard Brood"

Ann Marbury Hutchinson was forty-three (twenty-one years Bradstreet's senior), a midwife, healer, and mother of ten living children when she emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1634. During her four short years in the colony, she was tried three times for speaking her mind about the supremacy of grace over works. She denounced powerful ministers; held meetings in her home that were better attended than church services; and, unlike earlier dissenters, counted among her large following sympathizers in high places. As David D. Hall writes in The Antinomian Controversy, the crisis surrounding Hutchinson "was a struggle for control of Massachusetts."18

Hutchinson had enjoyed both social and religious status in England. According to biographer Selma R. Williams, she ex-

17Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs, eds., Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1987), pp. 687–88. Of course a poem can be spontaneous, witty, and comic while also subversive. In Writing for Your Life: A Guide and Companion to Inner Worlds (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 28, Deena Metzger encourages the creative writer to court spontaneity: "When we allow ourselves to write spontaneously, unexpected associations, connections, and relationships occur. We begin to see the network of meaning among things that is otherwise absent in our narrower, linear world of verifiable cause and effect. It is as if things begin to lean one against the other, to evoke each other in ways we cannot predict. The core of such associations is metaphor. We can say that metaphor describes one thing in terms of another, but more precisely, metaphor finds the hidden, mysterious connections." While I would not wish to compare Bradstreet to late-twentieth-century creative writers, I can imagine that she was startled—perhaps amusingly so—by her poem and by the consequences of her portrayal of her book as an "ill-form'd," bastard child.

pected to be held in the same esteem in the Bay Colony. When the Hutchinson family arrived in Boston, New England, in the late summer of 1634, the colony was in its fifth year, beginning to thrive, and undergoing a revival. William Hutchinson, a textile manufacturer and thus a desirable addition to the colony, was quickly admitted to church membership. Although she underwent close questioning for proselytizing during the Atlantic crossing, Ann was also awarded church membership within a few weeks of landing. Williams writes that the Hutchinson house was the colony’s first to be constructed of colony-made brick, boasted real glass panes, and sat across from Governor Winthrop’s.19

Despite such rosy prospects, tensions that would erupt into the Antinomian Controversy were already present. Native peoples were anxious about new Puritan settlements, and the king was demanding that the colony’s charter be returned to England. Governor Winthrop wrote in his journal that the monarch planned “to call in all Patentes, to make lawes, to rayse Tythes & portions for ministers, to . . . remove & punishe governors, & to heare & determine all Causes, & inflicte all punishmentes, even deathe it selfe. &c.” Perhaps worse, he would “compell us by force, to receive a new Governor, & the Discipline of the Churche of England.”20 The king’s authority would thus supplant and illegitimate the present leadership, civil and spiritual.

Anxiety, never absent from Calvinism, intensified during this period. When the general spirit of religious revival collapsed in 1636, it left in its wake many first-generation converts. Church elders, members of the elite group of propertied men and their families who had heretofore constituted the elect—God’s chosen—responded defensively. They instituted more stringent

19Selma R. Williams’s Divine Rebel: The Life of Anne Marbury Hutchinson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) is the most recent book-length biography of Hutchinson. See also Hall’s introduction to The Antinomian Controversy for a brief account that views Hutchinson as neither villain nor sentimental heroine.

qualifications for church membership, among them the requirement that candidates prove that they had received God’s grace. The challenge raised questions about spiritual legitimacy, most crucially, “Am I saved?” Hall elaborates: “How could they tell if they were saved or not? What evidence could they rely upon? How could they gain assurance of salvation and escape from anxiety about their spiritual estates?” The answers were not simple, the social ramifications profound. Hall quotes from Winthrop’s journal:

A woman of Boston congregation, having been in much trouble of mind about her spiritual estate, at length grew into utter desperation, and could not endure to hear of any comfort, etc., so as one day she took her little infant and threw it into a well, and then came into the house and said, now she was sure she should be damned, for she had drowned her child.21

Clearly this woman, at least, considered a horrid certainty preferable to irresolvable doubt on a matter of such importance.

The daughter of a minister, Hutchinson felt herself called into the midst of the crisis. She began by witnessing to women she attended in illness and childbirth. Eventually she held meetings in her home, where she explained the minister’s sermon to her female auditors, an activity sanctioned by scripture.22 Soon, however, the meetings expanded to two nights per week—one meeting for women, one for women and men. Winthrop and Boston minister John Wilson deplored Hutchinson’s activities for reasons both numerous and complex; prevalent among them was both men’s belief that the Bible directed

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22See Winthrop, A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines, in The Antinomian Controversy, p. 263; also Williams, Divine Rebel, esp. pp. 97–98, and Hall, intro. to The Antinomian Controversy, p. 5. At her trial, Hutchinson defended herself by citing Titus 2:3–5: “Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited” (“The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court of Newtown,” in The Antinomian Controversy, p. 315).
women to be silent. When Hutchinson first appears in Winthrop’s journal, in October 1636, she does so as “a woman of a ready wit and bold spirit,” characterizations not intended as compliments. Winthrop accuses her of “two dangerous errors”: “1. That the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified person. 2. That no sanctification can help to evidence to us our justification.” Ominously, he adds, “From these two grew many branches.” Although Hutchinson was not alone in holding such views, and not alone in standing trial for them, the controversy focused on her. Her centrality, in turn, gendered the controversy.

The powerless and the powerful alike were attracted to Hutchinson. A new governor, Henry Vane (the son of the king’s comptroller), became a Hutchinsonian. So, too, did John Winthrop’s daughter Mary and son-in-law Samuel Dudley, Anne Bradstreet’s older brother. The 1636 arrival of Hutchinson’s brother-in-law, John Wheelwright, a charismatic minister silenced by the Church of England, added fuel to the fire. When the pacifistic Hutchinsonians refused to take up arms against the Pequot tribe in the summer of 1637, the crisis took on a new civil dimension. Had it not been for the interest of men such as Samuel Dudley and Henry Vane, Hutchinson’s gatherings may have been less well attended, less notorious, and more easily brought under control. Vane’s influence, however, was fleeting. In May 1637, his governorship came to an end when elections were moved from Boston to the more conservative town of Cambridge. Winthrop was elected governor and Anne Bradstreet’s father, Thomas Dudley, became deputy governor.

That fall Winthrop and other colony leaders brought Hutchinson to trial. At her civil trial, Winthrop accused her of behavior “not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for

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23Cor. 14:34–35: “The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” See “The Examination of Hutchinson,” p. 316.


25See Hall, intro. to The Antinomian Controversy, pp. 7–9.
[her] sex.” Hutchinson responded provocatively, warning: “You have no power over my body.” But in the eyes of the colonial magistrates, she was a spiritual bastard, and their power to punish her was considerable. Both Hutchinson’s civil trial and her excommunication the following March provide graphic examples of how thoroughly she was illegitimated within the Boston community. Winthrop, in one of the most telling phrases, calls her “an instrument of Satan . . . poisoning the Churches here planted, as no woman, since that mentioned in the Revelation”—that is, the Whore of Babylon. In order to protect his own reputation, even her mentor, John Cotton, who may have first aroused tensions in the Boston church with his teachings on grace, denounced Hutchinson.

After the trials, additional events conspired to give a sexual cast to Hutchinson’s heresies. At the conclusion of the March 1638 excommunication trial, Hutchinson’s disciple Mary Dyer stood and walked out of the courtroom with her friend. In his journal, Winthrop describes overhearing Dyer identified: “a stranger asked, what young woman it was. The others answered, it was the woman which had the monster; which gave the first occasion to some [i.e. Winthrop] that heard it to speak of it.”

Dyer had given birth prematurely five months earlier, before Hutchinson’s November 1637 trial. Only Hutchinson, “the midwife, one Hawkins’s wife, a rank familist also,” and one other woman witnessed the event. When told that Hutchinson had “revealed all” and that the infant body would be exhumed, the third woman gave the following testimony, which Winthrop recorded in macabre detail:

It was a woman child, stillborn . . . it had a face, but no head, and the ears stood upon the shoulders and were like an ape’s; it had no forehead, but over the eyes four horns, hard and sharp; two of them were above one inch long, the other two shorter; the eyes standing out, and

26“The Examination of Hutchinson,” pp. 312, 338.
28Winthrop, Journal, p. 255. With only one or two exceptions, Winthrop refers to himself in the third person throughout his journal.
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the mouth also; the nose hooked upward; all over the breast and back full of sharp pricks and scales, like a thornback; the navel and all the belly, with the distinction of the sex, were where the back should be, and the back and hips before, where the belly should have been; behind, between the shoulders, it had two mouths, and in each of them a piece of red flesh sticking out; it had arms and legs as other children; but, instead of toes, it had on each foot three claws, like a young fowl, with sharp talons.

Although the exhumed “said monster” was “much corrupted,” Winthrop saw in it the features that had been described to him. Puritans considered obstetrical “monsters,” as well as more typical maladies of infancy and childhood, to be signs of God’s judgment against the parents; thus, this body of evidence allowed him to carry forth his suit against the Hutchinsonians. Moreover, because John Cotton gave Hutchinson permission to bury the child secretly, Winthrop leveled the further charge of conspiracy. He conceded that Cotton had acted compassionately: “Consider[ing], that, if it had been his own case, he should have desired to have had it concealed” and that “he thought God might intend only the instruction of the parents” and not the entire colony, Winthrop excused Cotton.29 The women were not so fortunate.

After her trials and banishment, Hutchinson suffered her own “monstrous birth.” Though she was forty-seven years old, she was apparently pregnant during her excommunication trial, and she afterwards miscarried what is now conjectured to have been a hydatidiform mole, a cluster of pre-malignant growths.30 These growths, or “lumps . . . twenty-six or twenty-seven, dis-

30See Emery Battis, Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), pp. 247–48, 346–47, for the first instance of this twentieth-century diagnosis based on the contemporary description of Hutchinson’s miscarriage. See William Rich, “Gestational Trophoblastic Disease” (Online, CompuServe, September 1996), for a detailed description of this phenomenon. According to Rich, a hydatidiform mole, also called a molar pregnancy, results when a “fetus does not develop but placental elements continue to grow.” It is not a menopausal or “hysterical” aberration (or psychosomatic illness), as certain Hutchinson biographers have asserted (Battis, notably), but a precancerous condition that produces exaggerated symptoms of pregnancy consistent with reports of Hutchinson’s ill health during her second trial.
tinct and not joined together," came to be equated with Hutchinson’s heresies. Thomas Weld explicitly compared the two phenomena:

And see how the wisdome of God fitted this judgement to her sinne every way, for looke as she had vented mishapen opinions, so she must bring forth deformed monsters; and as about 30 [o]pinions in number, so many monsters; and as those [opinions] were publike, and not in a corner mentioned, so this is now come to be knowne and famous over all these Churches, and a great part of the world.

Errors had to be publicized—like Mary Dyer’s unfortunate infant; at the same time, women’s faulty opinions had to be silenced, cloaked. In 1643 Thomas Bakewell drew further metaphors from the controversy’s events:

[The Antinomians] being a nest of cursed errors hatched by hereticks, fed and nourished by their proselites: being taken as they were flying abroad were brought as eagle doth her young ones to see if they could endure to looke upon the sunbeams of truth with fixed eyes, the which they could not: were presently adjudged to be a bastard brood, and their necks chopt off, and their carkasses throwne to the dunghill.

Banishment did not close the chapter on Hutchinson. In their exile, her family moved to Rhode Island, where the religious nonconformist Roger Williams had earlier gathered a congregation. Although Williams’s colony was noted for its democratic principles and religious tolerance, Hutchinson was not satisfied there. When William Hutchinson died in 1642, she moved with some of her family and followers to the vicinity of the Dutch settlement in New York. There, in 1643, she and several others were killed in an Indian attack. Houses and cattle were burned. One daughter, nine-year-old Susanna, was taken into captivity. Upon hearing news of Hutchinson’s death,

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31Winthrop, Journal, p. 266.
Boston's Puritan leaders felt themselves vindicated. Weld proclaimed, “Thus the Lord heard our groans to heaven, and freed us from this great and sore affliction.”  

Winthrop's response was surprisingly generous: the survival of a few women and children was “a good providence,” and in July 1646 he recorded the return of Susanna Hutchinson, who “had forgot her owne language, & and all her frendes, & was lothe to have come from the Indians.”

Ann Hutchinson was not forgotten. On the contrary, along with her monstrous births, she continued to be reviled throughout the 1640s. A “woman of a ready wit and bold spirit,” she had survived not only banishment but death.

III. Anne Bradstreet in the 1640s

Ann Hutchinson's demonization, so thoroughly performed, had the effect of gendering public discourse in ways that surely must have troubled a sensitive, poetic woman like Anne Bradstreet. The Antinomian Controversy was not, however, the only lesson about female speech and fecundity Bradstreet experienced in the 1640s. Certain events in the Bradstreet and Dudley families kept alive the metaphors that had emerged out of the drama of Hutchinson's trials, banishment, and “monstrous births.”

The most shocking of those events concerned Bradstreet's younger sister, Sarah. In 1638, the same year Hutchinson was banished, Sarah Dudley married Benjamin Keayne. Circumstantial evidence suggests that from the beginning the Dudley and Bradstreet families disapproved of the alliance. Not until 1645, however, did the Keaynes reenter the colony records, when Benjamin abandoned Sarah and went to England. As Sarah followed him, her ship foundered and all their household

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goods were lost. Instead of reducing her to dependency, Sarah's harrowing adventure inspired her to religious fervor. Upon her arrival in London, one Winthrop family member wrote to another: "My she Cosin Keane is growne a great preacher." After Sarah returned to the colony without her husband in 1646, Benjamin Keayne wrote letters to Thomas Dudley and other colony officials in which he accused Sarah of preaching, of not listening to instruction, of poor church attendance, and of having "impoysoned" his body with syphilis. Dudley, then governor of the colony, obtained a divorce for his daughter. Perhaps the 1644 execution of eighteen-year-old Mary Latham for adultery suggested the necessity of pleading the source of Sarah's faults to be mental instability, not moral depravity. Despite her father's influence, Sarah was excommunicated in 1647 for her "odious, lewd [and] scandalous uncleane behavior with . . . an Excommunicated person."37

Bradstreet's biographers are divided in their interpretation of Sarah's misfortunes. Elizabeth White, for instance, writes that Sarah "undoubtedly lacked both intelligence and stability of character."38 Rosenmeier presents a more sympathetic account. She finds evidence of a sisterly bond in Anne naming a daughter Sarah, and she suggests that Bradstreet may have identified with Sarah's enthusiasm.39 We must "factor in," Rosenmeier writes, "the unreliability of Keayne as a witness [and] the misogynous lens through which the Puritan world, old and new, had come by the mid-1640s to view women who 'prophe-sied.'"40 Sarah Keayne, like Ann Hutchinson, walked the margin between constructions of legitimacy and illegitimacy, and she too fell, or was pushed, into the less desirable realm. As Laurel Ulrich notes, "Sarah may have been visionary, or rebel-


39Rosenmeier, Bradstreet Revisited, p. 92. Additionally, Sarah's only child was named Hannah, a form of Anne. See Caldwell, "Why Our First Poet Was a Woman," for a discussion of naming traditions within the Puritan family of sentiment.

40Rosenmeier, Bradstreet Revisited, p. 94.
lous, or simply unlucky. Married to a man threatened by her ardor, she fell victim to jealousy, gossip, and a nasty virus.”41

The 1643 death of Bradstreet’s mother, Dorothy Dudley, preceded Sarah’s public humiliations. In a quiet, restrained elegy, Bradstreet lists her mother’s attributes, all virtues highly valued in the Puritan community:

Here lyes,
A worthy Matron of unspotted life,
A loving Mother and obedient wife.
A friendly Neighbor, pitiful to poor,
Whom oft she fed, and clothed with her store;
To Servants wisely aweful, but yet kind,
And as they did, so they reward did find:
A true Instructer of her Family,
The which she ordered with dexterity.
The publick meetings ever did frequent,
And in her Closet constant hours she spent;
Religious in all her words and wayes,
Preparing still for death, till end of dayes:
Of all her Children, Children liv’d to see,
Then dying, left a blessed memory.42

Just four months after losing this exemplary Puritan wife, however, Thomas Dudley remarried, and not even a year of mourning had passed before the first of three new Dudley heirs entered the family. The dates indicate that the extended family suffered the added embarrassment of a bridal pregnancy, and although he was a colony leader, we cannot assume that Dudley was exempt from disapproval.43 But even if there was no public


censure, there must have been some private dismay. Widows and widowers remarried quickly in the colony “out of sheer functional necessity,” according to John Demos, but Dudley’s five children did not require a new mother; they were grown and, as recorded in Bradstreet’s elegy, each had children of her or his own. Rosenmeier suggests that when Bradstreet writes of “step Dames injury” (i.e., harm done by an unloving stepmother) in her poem “Before the Birth of one of her Children,” she may have had in mind her personal experience with the new Mrs. Dudley.

Bradstreet enjoyed a happy marriage with prosperous and generous Simon Bradstreet. “If ever two were one,” she addresses him in a poem, “then surely we.” Given the strength of that relationship, Bradstreet may well have felt secure with her father’s new family. Still, circumstances would surely have caused her to ponder the ephemerality of the wife’s role. Her mother’s voice and authority had, after a forty-year union, been quickly and rather decisively supplanted. That displacement may have cast a shadow over Sarah’s behavior and aroused Bradstreet’s anxieties about childbirth, child rearing, and (why not?) artistic expression.

In addition to the dislocations within her natal family, Bradstreet suffered disruptions in her own household as well. Even before 1640, the Bradstreets began planning a move from densely settled Ipswich to the frontier of Andover, a move they effected in 1644 or 1645. According to Ann Stanford, the Bradstreets left behind a close-knit, intellectually supportive community as well as the libraries of former neighbors like John Winthrop, Jr. Their new neighbors were situated at a distance, and they no longer lived near Thomas Dudley. Divested of community, Anne Bradstreet was forced to rely on her husband.

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47 Dudley’s new family does seem to have impaired his ability to provide for Sarah, for in his will he exhorts his and Dorothy’s other children to provide for her needs (see White, *Anne Bradstreet*, p. 176).
and children more, her natal family less, Stanford argues. Yet, the move necessitated that the older Bradstreet sons be schooled away from home, and Simon often traveled on government business. Anne Bradstreet was left with increased managerial responsibilities over the family's property, servants, and younger children. Isolated from her former poetic influences and having assumed new household tasks, grieving her mother's death and her sister's difficulties, she nonetheless entered her most productive artistic period.

IV. Women's Influence in "The Author to her Book"

Although raised to the cultured delights of Renaissance poetry and influenced by its male authors, Bradstreet had lived far longer as a New England frontier matron by 1650 than she had as a well-bred English countrywoman. When we approach "The Author to her Book" with an awareness not only of Dyer's and Hutchinson's "monstrous" births but also of subsequent events that touched Bradstreet's life, and which kept the controversy's metaphors alive for her, we can understand her fears and sorrows for the "ill-formed offspring" she feels compelled to cast aside as "unfit." Like Mary Dyer's malformed infant, Bradstreet's book is brought to light against her will and invites a similar postmortem.

When I first read The Tenth Muse in light of the Antinomian Controversy, I wondered whether Bradstreet's male prefacers hadn't themselves read the book as something monstrous, an "Epicene." Perhaps publication was not merely a means of domesticating Bradstreet, as Schweitzer argues, but a necessity. Woodbridge carefully claims complicity in the book's appearance. "Contrary to her expectation," he writes:

I have presumed to bring to publick view what she resolved should never in such a manner see the Sun; but I found that divers had gotten some scattered papers, affected them wel, were likely to have sent forth broken peices to the Authors prejudice, which I thought to prevent, as well as to pleasure those that earnestly desired the view of the whole.

In claiming that Bradstreet had resolved that her poetry should be hidden, Woodbridge recalls Hutchinson keeping secret Mary Dyer's stillborn infant. Moreover, Bradstreet's book consists of "broken peices" which, like the lumps of Hutchinson's miscarriage, will prejudice readers against her. Woodbridge assumes Winthrop's paternalistic role in presenting Bradstreet's book to those who "earnestly [desire] the view of the whole," but whereas Winthrop's intention was to muster additional proof of Hutchinson's depravity, Woodbridge rallies to defend Bradstreet's virtue. He piles up adjectives—"gracious . . . eminent . . . pious . . . courteous . . . exact . . . discreet"—like a bulwark, and he multiplies prefatory verse tributes to a degree excessive for the period. 49 In the process, he constructs Bradstreet's book not as wholly approved but as standing in need of approval.

Woodbridge describes The Tenth Muse explicitly in terms of woman's labor:

If you shall think, it will be to your shame
To be in print, then I must beare the blame:
If't be a fault, 'tis mine, 'tis shame that might
Deny so faire an infant of its right,
To looke abroad; I know your modest minde,
How you will blush, complaine, 'tis too unkinde,
To force a womens birth, provoke her paine,
Expose her Labours to the world's disdaine:
I know you'l say, you doe defie that mint,
That stampt you thus, to be a foole in print. 50

Aside from the interesting unit of sense formed in the line, "If you shall think, it will be to your shame," throughout the poem we witness Woodbridge co-opting Bradstreet's project. "'Tis mine," he asserts, in a blatant act of thievery. Although acknowledging Bradstreet's "Labours," Woodbridge claims that the book has been brought to birth not by a woman but

50 Woodbridge, "To My Dear Sister, the Author of These Poems," in Bradstreet's The Tenth Muse, n.p.
“forced,” as if delivered by cesarean, by himself and the other men who introduce her child.

Bradstreet adopts Woodbridge’s metaphor of her book as child in “The Author to her Book,” but she alters it considerably. Whereas Woodbridge cautiously introduces the word “foole” as a synonym for illegitimacy (“I know you’l say, you doe defie that mint, / That stampt you thus, to be a foole in print”), Bradstreet forthrightly declares the book’s bastardy: “If for thy Father askt, say, thou hadst none.” Woodbridge tropes the book as an infant; Bradstreet presents it as a child, malformed, heretofore sheltered, but already walking and talking, capable of being imperfectly schooled by its mother. Some readers assert that the poem figures its subject as an exclusively female production, like a virgin birth or parthenogenesis. Not so: in her choice of the word “say” to qualify the response she instructs her child to make to expected challenges, Bradstreet constructs her poetic persona as a “fallen” woman choosing to disassociate herself, for whatever reason, from the man who fathered her child. Unlike Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne, Bradstreet seems less eager to protect the father than to claim her own authority. In The Tenth Muse poems she intricately if uncomfortably weaves herself into a male tradition of poetic influence. In “The Author to her Book,” she unravels that pattern.

Instead of writing another male-tradition poem or engaging in witty repartee with her male prefacers, as some critics have read “The Author to her Book,” Bradstreet claims a counter-tradition, a counter-tradition partially visible in poems such as “Before the Birth of One of her Chidden” and other 1640s poems not published in The Tenth Muse. By 1650 the mother of seven children aged sixteen to infancy, Bradstreet was increasingly absorbed in the activities of parenting. Students of Bradstreet discover as much when they read her domestic verse—“the poems which,” Adrienne Rich writes, “rescue Anne Bradstreet from the Women’s Archives and place her conclu-

51 Schweitzer, for example, although she also calls it a bastard. See The Work of Self-Representation, p. 172.
sively in literature." While among her best work, her private or domestic poems border on the sentimental and endear Bradstreet to a broad readership: the elegy for her mother, the poems to her absent husband, a poem in anticipation of childbirth, and later poems about the burning of her house and the deaths of her infant grandchildren. In contrast to the concerns about the male tradition that had infused Bradstreet’s *Tenth Muse* poetry, the strength of her domestic poems and her later, powerfully effective religious poems (“Contemplations” and “A Weary Pilgrim”) lies in their ability to address directly the timeless concerns of the conventional, highly legitimate women’s roles of wife, mother, and Christian believer. The power of “The Author to her Book” thus wells up from its central paradox: writing of a bastard, malformed child, Bradstreet claimed her poetic legitimacy.

Bradstreet’s construction of a new space in which women can claim poetic legitimacy precisely because their talents and accomplishments can be distinguished from those of men again raises the question of chronology. Because *The Tenth Muse* consists wholly of “publick” poems and because “The Author to her Book” is clearly written in response to their 1650 publication, the poem is often assumed to mark a crucial turning point in Bradstreet’s development. Both Patricia Caldwell and Wendy Martin date the inception of Bradstreet’s domestic poems around 1653, the year Thomas Dudley died. Carrie Galloway Blackstock, in her otherwise groundbreaking study of the quaternions, also subscribes to this chronology. “Numerous critics have posited reasons for the more personal nature of Bradstreet’s later poems,” she notes. But as those same schol-

ars notice and then ignore, Bradstreet was already writing personal poems in the 1640s, before *The Tenth Muse* was published, poems such as her elegy for her mother, who died in 1642, poems to her husband, and “Before the Birth of One of her Children,” probably written in 1646. Even in the quaternions, however, Bradstreet makes unconventional use of female personae and invokes illegitimacy as a theme. Her 1641 poem for du Bartas, as I have already argued, demonstrates that Bradstreet’s bastardy poem, “The Author to her Book,” exists on a continuum with other poems about a woman privately making her own way in a hostile world, a continuum that extends back to a time when Ann Hutchinson’s influence on the colony was fresh.

Rosenmeier calls Bradstreet’s 1640s poems, poems of “restoration and reconciliation,” literary attempts to smooth over political divisions among members of her family at the time of the Antinomian Crisis. But Bradstreet’s poetry can also be read as driven by the logic of a female identity under assault. “A Dialogue Between Old England and New,” in which the two places are portrayed as mother and daughter, provides an excellent example, as does Bradstreet’s elegy for Queen Elizabeth. In presenting the neophyte as a rape victim, Bradstreet’s “In Honour of Du Bartas” also depicts the woman poet under attack. Situated thus, Bradstreet’s images become more, not less, complex.

“The Author to her Book” can certainly be understood as playful, but when we view it within its historical context, we do not merely smile or laugh. We begin to understand the complexities women faced in claiming their own authority, their own voices, in a Puritan society whose workings were dominated by men. Whether impugned, like Hutchinson, or appro-

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54 Like Stanford (*Bradstreet: Worldly Puritan*) I am dating the poem to the birth of daughter Mercy. Of course it could be earlier but not if we take seriously the reference to “step Dame’s injury.”

55 Rosenmeier, *Bradstreet Revisited*, p. 87.
priated, like Bradstreet, women fought for their legitimacy with the only tools at their disposal, the written and the spoken word. If in deploying those words, one woman was direct and defiant and the other discrete and playful, we must not be fooled into seeing only their strategic differences, for one very serious purpose united them: to take their place among men in the important business of adapting the cultures of their motherland to the realities of their frontier colony.

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