Verses upon the Burning of our House

POEM TEXT

In silent night when rest I took,
For sorrow near I did not look,
I waken'd was with thund'ring noise
And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.
That fearful sound of "fire" and "fire,"
Let no man know is my Desire.
I starting up, the light did spy,
And to my God my heart did cry
To straighten me in my Distress
And not to leave me succourless.
Then coming out, behold a space
The flame consume my dwelling place.
And when I could no longer look,
I blest his grace that gave and took,
That laid my goods now in the dust.
Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just.
It was his own; it was not mine.
Far be it that I should repine,
He might of all justly bereft
But yet sufficient for us left.
When by the Ruins oft I past
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast
And here and there the places spy
Where oft I sate and long did lie.
Here stood that Trunk, and there that chest,
There lay that store I counted best,
My pleasant things in ashes lie
And them behold no more shall I.
Under the roof no guest shall sit,
Nor at thy Table eat a bit.
No pleasant talk shall e'er be told
Nor things recounted done of old.
No Candle e'er shall shine in Thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be.
In silence ever shalt thou lie.
Adieu, Adieu, All's Vanity.
Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide:
And did thy wealth on earth abide,
Didst fix thy hope on mouldring dust,
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
That dunghill mists away may fly.
Thou hast a house on high erect
Fram'd by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnished
Stands permanent, though this be fled.
It's purchased and paid for too
By him who hath enough to do.
A price so vast as is unknown,
Yet by his gift is made thine own.
There's wealth enough; I need no more.
Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store.
The world no longer let me love;
My hope and Treasure lies above.

SUMMARY

I was in bed on a quiet night, not looking for or expecting anything bad to happen, when suddenly I was woken up by a booming sound and awful, terrified screams. Nobody ever wants to hear someone repeatedly shouting, "fire!"

I jumped up, and saw the bright light of the fire. I cried out to God, asking him to keep me calm and strong in my distress and to not leave me helpless. I got out of the burning house and watched the flames devour it completely.

When I couldn't look at my ruined house any longer, I thanked God, who both gives and takes, for turning all my possessions to ash. This was God's will, and thus what happened was just and fair. All my possessions belonged to God in the first place, so who am I to complain? Even if he took everything from us, we'd still have what we need.

I often passed by the ruins of my house and took a sad, sidelong glance at the places where I used to eat or rest. Here's where the trunk used to be, and the chest was over there. There's where I kept my favorite things. All my pleasant belongings are now just ashes, and I'll never get to look at them again. The house will never again host any guests under its roof, nor will anyone eat a little something at its table. There will be no more pleasant conversation, or stories about the past. No candles will shine in you, my house, nor will I ever again hear the voice of my husband inside your walls. You will be silent forever. Farewell, farewell—all earthly life is only temporary.

Then I quickly scold myself: did I really think that all my riches existed in this mortal life? Did I set my hopes on fleeting material belongings that inevitably decay? Did I put my trust in fleshly existence? I tell myself to raise my thoughts toward

heaven and so that these negative thoughts that cloud my mind will go away. I *already* have a strong house up on high, designed by God, the greatest architect of them all. This house is furnished with glory, and will never fall down—unlike my house on earth. Heaven's house has already been bought and paid off by God, because God has everything. Who knows how much a house like that would cost, yet God gives it to us for free. That makes me plenty rich, and I don't need anything else. Goodbye to all my earthly goods, which were never really mine. Don't let me love *this* world anymore, because my spiritual hope and wealth await me in heaven.

THEMES

FAITH, SUFFERING, AND ACCEPTANCE

The Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet wrote "Verses upon the Burning of our House" in response to the destruction of her home and possessions by a fire. Though this event is painful and traumatic, the speaker consoles herself by arguing that God gave the speaker everything she has, and thus has the right—and power—to take it all away. In fact, it's all part of God's master plan to teach the speaker a lesson about piety. The poem thus praises trust in God and shows how faith provides humanity with a way of accepting and understanding suffering.

The fire devastates the speaker's entire world, and the poem doesn't pretend otherwise. The speaker describes how she ran out of the house hearing screams, escaping just in time to see everything she has reduced to ash. This home was more than just a physical building, too: it was a place of love and warmth, where friends, family, and neighbors could eat together and exchange stories. Losing her home, then, is extremely painful.

But even as she runs out of the house, the speaker asks for God to help her, foregrounding the strength of her faith even in the middle of tragedy. Rather than *curse* God, she turns *towards* God in this moment, even intensifying her religious devotion in response to her suffering. God may do things that are hard to understand, the poem implies, but this difficulty only proves that God, rather than human beings, knows best.

Without minimizing the human cost of the fire, then, the poem presents God as perfect and "just." The speaker even say that God could leave the speaker with absolutely nothing, and still she and her family would have enough "sufficient." In other words, faith alone is all the speaker needs. That's because, even in life's darkest moments, religious faith can offer solace, direction, and purpose—in the speaker's own word, her faith "straighten[s]" her out.

The speaker also has a clear vision of the afterlife, in which she will live in eternal glory in the heavenly kingdom that God built. In keeping with the speaker's Puritan views, life on earth is a kind of preparation for eternal life in heaven. It follows that no one, the poem argues, should dwell on their suffering too long given that God has prepared for them the "hope and treasure" of the afterlife. The world may be full of tragedy, but this doesn't change the fact that the kingdom of heaven awaits.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20
- Lines 36-54

MATERIAL VS. SPIRITUAL WEALTH

The speaker views the destruction of her house as God teaching her an important spiritual lesson about piety. After losing everything that she owns, the speaker questions the value of *owning* anything at all. Declaring earthly possessions to be nothing but "vanity," the speaker argues that fragile, fleeting material wealth can't compare to spiritual wealth—that is, to the everlasting "hope and treasure" of heaven.

This idea doesn't mean that actually accepting the loss of her home is easy, and the poem shows how material possessions exert a strong, sentimental hold on people's lives and identities. The speaker's house wasn't just a house, but also a place to host guests, have "pleasant" conversations, swap stories, and eat meals. The speaker's memories are wrapped up in her home, which means that its loss feels painful and destabilizing.

But the speaker goes on to admit that the seeming security of material possessions was always an *illusion*. Looking at the "Ruins" of her house, the speaker chides herself for "fix[ing]" her "hope on mouldering dust" and "arm[s] of flesh"—in other words, for sticking her joy to things that would inevitably decay and disappear. The destruction of her home provides the speaker with a stark reminder of the fact the pleasures of life on earth are transient, ephemeral, and, compared to the riches of the afterlife, insignificant.

What's more, the speaker says, earthly possessions don't actually belong to people anyway! All creation is God's creation, which is why the speaker calls her house and belongings "pelf"—an archaic word which means *stolen* goods or money. Her possessions really belonged to God the whole time, and the speaker thus tells herself to "raise up [her] thoughts above the sky"—to let go of material attachments to the earthly realm and consider the heavenly.

Nothing on earth can live up to what God has created for humanity, the speaker says, insisting that her "hope and treasure lies above." God's "house" (i.e., heaven itself) is "richly furnished" with "glory" and, unlike the speaker's, "[s]tands permanent"—lasts forever. Thus though she grieves the loss of her material possessions, she understands that these pale in comparison to what is to come in the afterlife. In fact, the

speaker only really misses her "Table" because it was the site of communion and companionship—and if it's these that she longs for, she will be truly rich in the afterlife because she will be closer than ever to God. If a house represents security and comfort, no house could be more secure and comfortable than the one created by "that might Architect" in the heavens "above."

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-54

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-6

In silent night when rest I took,
For sorrow near I did not look,
I waken'd was with thund'ring noise
And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.
That fearful sound of "fire" and "fire,"
Let no man know is my Desire.

The poem gets underway with two lines of scene-setting. Though it's told retrospectively (in the past-tense), there's an immediacy to the descriptions in these lines that make them feel raw and recent.

Not long ago, the speaker was sleeping peacefully through a "silent night" (this is *not* an allusion to the Christmas hymn!). She was happy with life, not anticipating "sorrow" to rear its ugly head any time soon. Her sleep was interrupted, however, by terrifying screams and the "thund'ring noise" of a fire.

The sounds of these lines captures the immediate, visceral horror of the flames as they consume the speaker's house. The fire seems to be all around the speaker, reflected by the diacope of the word "fire" itself (which gets repeated in line 5), as well as by the alliteration and consonance of the /f/ sound in "fire" and "fearful." The word "thund'ring," meanwhile, might subtly foreshadow how the speaker comes to view this traumatic event as part of God's master plan (given that God is often symbolically linked to thunder).

The speaker then says in line 6 that, naturally, she didn't want this to happen! This might seem like an obvious point, but it's important to state this up top so that the speaker can develop the *transformation* of her perspective. She *was* scared and traumatized, but, by the end of the poem, will reframe this event as something positive.

LINES 7-12

I starting up, the light did spy,
And to my God my heart did cry
To straighten me in my Distress
And not to leave me succourless.
Then coming out, behold a space
The flame consume my dwelling place.

As the speaker escaped her burning house, her heart called out to God, whom she asked to "straighten" her in her "Distress" and not to leave her helpless ("succour" refers to help in times of hardship—the speaker doesn't want to be "succourless," or with that help).

The capitalization of Distress emphasizes the sheer trauma the speaker feels upon seeing her home—and everything she owns—go up in flames. At the same time, this moment reveals that the speaker's instinct was to turn to God for assistance in a time of great terror. She didn't curse God or doubt her faith. The poem thus balances an earthly, human reaction (terror, sadness, fear, etc.) with an ultimate trust in God.

Meanwhile, the sibilance in words like "spy," "Distress," "space," "consume," and "place" imbue the speaker's description with a hissing, spitting quality that evokes the ferocious appetite of the fire itself. Luckily for the speaker, she escapes the house in lines 11 and 12, just in time to see the flames create "space" where once there was something solid and sturdy: her house. This negative space foreshadows the poem's later contrast of *material* possessions with *spiritual* "treasure" (as it's called in the last line).

LINES 13-16

And when I could no longer look,
I blest his grace that gave and took,
That laid my goods now in the dust.
Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just.

In lines 13 to 16, the speaker frames what happened within the context of her religion. Rather than dwell on her loss, she blessed the "grace" of God, accepting the fire as part of God's plan for her. This wasn't easy to do! The speaker says that she turned to God after she "could no longer look" at the spot her house once stood, and the fact that she couldn't look at the destruction any longer implies the immense pain of her loss. The speaker also implies that God "gave" the speaker everything she once had, and thus had the right and power to take it all away.

This section reveals a lot about the speaker's Puritan perspective. The Puritans believed that the relationship between humankind and God was based on a covenant, or, rather, series of covenants. Think of these as contracts between people and God; if an individual serves God faithfully, they'll be well looked after in this life and the next. Embracing what's happened is a fundamental part of how the speaker sees the world, and, according to her beliefs, being angry at God would put God's plan for her at risk.

This passage is also dense with biblical allusions. There are numerous references in the Bible to God's capacity to "giveth" and "taketh away" (line 14's "gave and took"), but it's likely that

the speaker has the Book of Job in mind specifically:

- Job was a man who had everything—a big, loving family, money, thousands of animals, land, and so on—and had it all taken away by Satan (with God's permission).
- This was a test to prove or disprove Satan's theory that Job only loved God because he had a good life, and that he would turn his back on God if that good life was taken away.

The speaker in this poem faced a near-identical situation (although this is *probably* not the work of Satan, despite the flames!). Like Job, the speaker rose to the challenge, bearing her suffering without every truly questioning her faith in God. She instead insists that it was God's divine prerogative (his right) to decide what happened to the speaker—and the speaker was not about to risk her place in heaven by doubting God's work.

The Bible also frequently mentions dust. Here, dust is both literal—the house *really* is a pile of ashes—and symbolic. Genesis 3:19 (King James Version) states that: "for dust thou □art□, and unto dust shalt thou return." In other words, the human body itself is just a temporary state. It might seem solid, but ultimately it's ephemeral. The destruction of the house, then, provided a spiritual lesson to the speaker by *reminding* her not to be too attached to this earthly life, given that the kingdom of heaven, and union with God, still awaited her. Line 16 expresses this matter-of-factly: the fire happened, and so the fire happening was "just" (fair and right). In other words, God knows what's best. Notice how the rhyming couplet reinforces this idea: the "dust" is "just."

LINES 17-20

It was his own; it was not mine.
Far be it that I should repine,
He might of all justly bereft
But yet sufficient for us left.

The speaker reiterates that her house and all her possessions ultimately belonged to God anyway. The parallelism of line 17 reflects this idea:

> It was his own; it was not mine.

This line also features anaphora (that repetition of "it was"), as the speaker insists, on one side of the caesura, that her home belonged to God, and then rephrases this exact same idea by saying that it never belonged to her at all.

The speaker takes this sentiment further in the next three lines. She says it would be wrong for her to "repine" (complain or worry) about the fire, because God is so loving and kind that, even if he took away "all" she had, she'd still have enough ("sufficient") left! God's love, and trust in God, are all anyone needs, in the speaker's mind.

It's also worth noting how the speaker makes use of a collective plural pronoun here—"us." This could refer to the speaker's family members, who are *all* affected by the fire, but also gestures towards humanity itself. In other words, the speaker implies that whatever suffering takes place in earthly life is countered by the fact that it's part of God's divine plan—and, most importantly, that heaven awaits the faithful.

LINES 21-24

When by the Ruins oft I past
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast
And here and there the places spy
Where oft I sate and long did lie.

By line 21, the poem has made its main point: that the speaker should accept her loss because her home never belonged to her anyway; everything she has comes from God, and, it follows, she must trust in God's plan. But the speaker doesn't just end the poem there. Instead, the poem *returns* to the speaker's understandably human reaction to the fire—to her sorrow and grief. Faith might help people make sense of the world, this suggests, but that doesn't mean that earthy suffering isn't painful.

Here, then, the speaker admits that she often passed by the "Ruins" (capitalized for dramatic emphasis) of her house. Though she clearly believes that people shouldn't be attached to material possessions, she still acutely felt the loss of her own. She visited the remains of her home out of a kind of traumatic nostalgia, hardly unable to believe that her old life was now nothing but ash and embers.

She would look at the ruins with "sorrowing eyes," but would cast her glance "aside" even as she did so. This sideways glance hints at the twinge of guilt she must have felt about still longing for what she'd lost. The word "spy" suggests something similar—that the speaker would only steal quick glances at her home, perhaps because outright displays of grief would have implied that she doubted God's plan for her.

She'd look at all the "places" that were once an important part of her life, including the rooms where she used to spend most of her time. Though it looks like "sat," "sate" here refers to feeling content. To be *satiated* is to be satisfied, and the speaker may be thinking of meal times specifically (though these are also mentioned later in the poem). She also looked at the empty spaces where she "long did lie," the slow alliterating /l/ sound conjuring an image of the speaker at rest. Both rest and food were important aspects of Bradstreet's Puritan religion, so the *loss* of her house—and the rooms in which she slept and ate—was certainly no small thing. Here, then, the poem describes the *pull* of material possessions, admitting that they *do* have a strong gravitational hold over an individual's

life—even if the lessons of religion argue otherwise.

LINES 25-30

Here stood that Trunk, and there that chest,
There lay that store I counted best,
My pleasant things in ashes lie
And them behold no more shall I.
Under the roof no guest shall sit,
Nor at thy Table eat a bit.

Despite having said earlier in the poem that God had every right to take all her earthly possessions away, the speaker continues to lament what she lost. Like some forensic detective of emotional trauma, she points where her "Trunk," "chest," and "store" once stood—those storage containers that held everything she owned.

In line 27, the speaker calls her possessions "pleasant things." While this is, on the one hand, a simple statement of fact, it also subtly suggests that loving such "things" was always frivolous—that these possessions were never anything more than "things." "Ashes," like the earlier "dust" in line 15, again alludes to the Bible, which in more one than examples stresses how every human being is made from, and will return to, dust. The material world, in other words, is only temporary.

At the same time, these mere "things" held real sentimental value for the speaker. In lines 29 to 30, the speaker regrets how her house will no longer play host to guests, nor will she ever again know the simple pleasure of sharing meals with loved ones under its roof. Feasts (and fasts) were an important part of Puritan religion, and it's quite understandable, then, that the speaker is saddened that she no longer owns a table!

LINES 31-36

No pleasant talk shall 'ere be told
Nor things recounted done of old.
No Candle 'ere shall shine in Thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice ere heard shall bee.
In silence ever shalt thou lie.
Adieu, Adieu, All's Vanity.

Losing her home, the speaker continues, wasn't just the loss of a physical shelter; it was also the loss of all the things associated with that shelter. Just as there will be no more warm meals around the "Table," there will be no more "pleasant talk," or lovely conversations, nor "things recounted done of old" (that is, telling stories about the past).

Addressing the house itself through apostrophe, the speaker says that no candle will ever shine "in Thee" again, suggesting the finality of what's happened; the house is gone forever. Her husband's voice will never echo through its rooms, and the house will forever "lie" in "silence," no longer able to accommodate the family that filled it with noise. The speaker use of end-stop throughout these lines reflects this sense of finality, slowing the poem's pace and coming across almost like the slow procession of a funeral march.

The speaker then says goodbye to the house in line 36, before turning back towards religion as a way of making sense of what's happened. The speaker suffers, but keeps insisting (or trying to convince herself) that such suffering is nothing by "Vanity"—that is doesn't matter. Here, the poem alludes to the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, which says: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Life on earth is not important other than as a preparation for the afterlife. The speaker, then, says goodbye both to her material possessions *and*, more importantly, to a certain way of seeing the world. No longer will she lament the loss of her house—instead, she will thank God for teaching her this lesson.

LINES 37-42

Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide:
And did thy wealth on earth abide,
Didst fix thy hope on mouldring dust,
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
That dunghill mists away may fly.

In lines 37 to 42, the speaker's religious beliefs muscle her emotions out of the way. She puts faith in a higher purpose, and scolds herself for being so sentimentally attached to her home through three rhetorical questions:

1. The speaker asks herself if her "wealth on earth abide[d]"—that is, if it held up or lasted (with the answer, of course, being that it did not!).
2. The speaker then wonders in disbelief whether she had really "fix[ed]" her "hope" on "mouldring dust." Her house is, literally, a pile of dust and ash, but this question also refers to the material world more broadly. Everything in the physical realm is subject to decay and destruction, including people (the mention of "dust" here recalls how, according to the Bible, people are created from dust and will return to dust when they die.) The speaker is asking if she really pinned all her hopes and dreams on something that would inevitably decay.
3. Finally, the speaker asks if she really put her trust in an "arm of flesh"—again, in the physical, human world ("arm" here means something like "help" or "aid"). This final question again alludes to the Bible, specifically 2 Chronicles 32:8. This verse argues that everything is better with God on your side: "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles." In other words, mortal men can't compare with God.

With this triple-hit of introspective questioning, the speaker instructs herself to "raise" her thoughts "above the sky." In other words, to think of the next life—not this one. The speaker

even dismisses her natural sorrows as "dunghill mists," determined to make them "fly" away. A dunghill is a heap of waste, an image that relates both to the ruins of the house in front of her *and* to the view that earthly life pales in significance to the heavenly kingdom. "Mists" suggests that regret and sorrow are temporary emotions that make it hard to see, and that now the speaker is coming to her senses.

LINES 43-50

Thou hast a house on high erect
Fram'd by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnished
Stands permanent, though this be fled.
It's purchased and paid for too
By him who hath enough to do.
A price so vast as is unknown,
Yet by his gift is made thine own.

In lines 43-50, the speaker trains her vision on heaven. She imagines this as a metaphorical house constructed by God, "that mighty Architect." This house, in which she will live forever more, is far superior to anything that could be made on earth. And while the speaker's house is gone ("this be fled"), God's house is "permanent."

As if to mirror God's supreme architectural skill, the speaker dials up the poetic volume in these lines through increased assonance, consonance, and alliteration:

Thou hast a house on high erect
Fram'd by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnished
Stands permanent, though this be fled.

These four lines are decorated with sound as a kind of tribute to the "richly furnished" house built by God. The metaphor of God-as-architect also counts as another biblical allusion. In Hebrews 11:10, for example, the Bible describes God as a "builder and maker."

God's house also represents freedom from earthly cares. No longer will the speaker have any money problems, because this perfect heaven-house has already been "purchased and paid for" by God. In other words, God has taken care of everything. The speaker can't even imagine how much a house like this would cost, but, of course, this is more because it exists outside of the limitations of monetary value. Well before MasterCard, God was creating things that were truly priceless. He offers such spiritual riches to humanity as a "gift."

LINES 51-54

There's wealth enough; I need no more.
Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store.
The world no longer let me love;
My hope and Treasure lies above.

The speaker sums up what she has learned from her house burning down. She resolves that, no matter what happens on earth in terms of material possessions, she has "wealth enough" through her Puritan faith. Using diacope, she bids "farewell" to her "pelf" and to her "store." This repeat recalls the earlier "Adieu, "Adieu"—saying goodbye once is hard, but saying it *twice* highlights how difficult this is for the speaker.

"Pelf" is a particularly interesting word choice because it relates to money or goods that have been stolen. In other words, in being attached to material possessions, the speaker engaged in an act of theft. This is because, in the speaker's worldview, *everything* belongs to God; the speaker never owned her home or possessions at all. This also suggests that the speaker had perhaps allowed her interest in material wealth to steal an important part of her spirituality, one that she is now reclaiming. The poem balances these sentiments, leaving up to the reader to decide whether they are completely convinced by the speaker's turn away from her emotional reaction to her house's destruction.

The speaker then extends this rejection of material belongings to life on earth itself:

The world no longer let me love;

In other words, she *defers* her love in this world in anticipation of the far superior love in the next. Through trauma, then, she finds a way to loosen her hold on earthly life—or loosen earthly life's hold on her.

But there is a bittersweet tang to the last line. The speaker's metaphorical "Treasure"—spiritual fulfillment, God's love, eternal life—await her in heaven. But her "hope" lies there too, meaning that she essentially severs her ties with the life she is currently living. Trust in God helps the speaker make sense of what's happened, but it's possible to detect a hint of sorrow as her earthy life becomes devoid of "hope" and "Treasure."

SYMBOLS

THE SPEAKER'S HOUSE AND POSSESSIONS

The speaker's house and all its trappings—the table, trunk, chest, etc.—are of course literal item in the poem. At the same time, all these possessions symbolically represent the earthly, material world more broadly. In the speaker's mind, this world is temporary, whereas God's "house" in heaven is everlasting. The speaker sees the destruction of her house as God reminding her that *all* things on earth, including the speaker herself, will one day turn to "mouldring dust." As such, there's no use grieving the loss of material goods, nor in tying one's happiness to them in the first place.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 11-12:** "Then coming out, behold a space / The flame consume my dwelling place."
- **Line 15:** "That laid my goods now in the dust."
- **Lines 21-24:** "When by the Ruins oft I past / My sorrowing eyes aside did cast / And here and there the places spy / Where oft I sate and long did lie."
- **Lines 25-30:** "Here stood that Trunk, and there that chest, / There lay that store I counted best, / My pleasant things in ashes lie / And them behold no more shall I. / Under the roof no guest shall sit, / Nor at thy Table eat a bit."
- **Line 52:** "Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store."

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

The poem uses alliteration to bring its images to life, whether they're terrifying—like the chaotic scene of the fire itself—or more pleasant, like a day of rest in the house that has since burned down. This device, along with consonance and assonance, also lends the poem a sense of music.

The alliteration in line 3 is likely incidental (in that it's the result of grammatically necessary words like "was" and "with"), but this moment of increased lyricism also might evoke the noise and terror that wakes the speaker up; by repeating the whooshing /w/ sound, it's as though the speaker has suddenly sucked the air out of the poem.

The next example of alliteration is more striking. It comes in line 5, which describes the moment when the speaker was woken up by shouting and screaming:

> That fearful sound of "fire" and "fire,"

Here, the poem turns up its own volume through both alliteration and diacope (the repetition of the word "fire"). The house-burning was noisy and terrifying, and so it makes sense for the poem to try and capture this panic through these quick, flitting /f/ sounds.

Later, alliteration simply draws readers' attention to the speaker's grief—which is so intense that she can "no longer look" at the ruins of her home—and to God's power ("grace") to "give" and "take" from human beings.

Finally, towards the end of the poem, the speaker reframes her loss by affirming that she already has a far superior house: the heavenly kingdom of the afterlife, created by God. This metaphor coincides with alliteration, as if in tribute to the "mighty[ness]" of that great "Architect" in the sky. Both line 43 and line 47 create this effect:

> Thou hast a house on high erect
> [...]
> It's purchased and paid for too

Both examples are bold and clear, showing the strength of the speaker's faith in the fact that a better world awaits her in heaven.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "waken'd was with"
- **Line 5:** "fearful," "fire," "fire"
- **Line 13:** "longer look"
- **Line 14:** "grace," "gave"
- **Line 15:** "goods"
- **Line 24:** "long," "lie"
- **Line 31:** "talk," "told"
- **Line 43:** "hast," "house," "high"
- **Line 47:** "purchased," "paid"
- **Line 51:** "need no"
- **Line 53:** "longer let," "love"
- **Line 54:** "lies"

ALLUSION

It should come as no surprise that a poem about the relationship between the speaker and her God might contain a number of biblical allusions! Overall, these ground the poem in its religious context—which is exactly what the speaker is doing: finding meaning in an otherwise awful experience by using her faith.

Line 14's "gave and took" recalls numerous references in the Bible to God's capacity to "giveth" and "taketh away," but it's likely that the speaker has the Book of Job in mind specifically:

- Job was a man who had everything—a loving family, money, thousands of animals, land, and so on—and had it all taken away by Satan (with God's permission).
- This was a test to prove or disprove Satan's theory that Job only loved God because he had a good life, and that he would turn his back on God if that good life was taken away.

The speaker finds herself in a similar situation, confronted by events that are about as terrible as they come, the strength of her faith tested to its limit. Like Job, she struggles, but, also like Job, her love for God only grows.

Then, in line 36, the speaker quotes the Book of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." This quote relates to the poem's thematic separation of material possessions (which the speaker has lost) and spiritual "wealth" (which the speaker has increased). In other words, caring too much about the *things* of earthly life is an exercise in

vanity and arrogance.

As she comes to accept the fire through her faith, the speaker asks herself if she really put her trust in an "arm of flesh" (line 40)—in the physical, human world. This alludes specifically 2 Chronicles 32:8, a verse that argues that everything is better with God on your side: "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles." In other words, mortal men can't compete with God.

Line 44's mention of "that mighty Architect" alludes to the idea of God as a builder, which appears throughout the Bible (in Hebrews 11:10, for example, the Bible describes God as a "builder and maker"). And finally, the poem repeatedly mentions "dust" and "ash"—which makes sense on a literal level given that the poem is about a fire, but are also allusions to the Bible and various prayers. Genesis 3:19 (King James Version) states that: "for dust thou □art□, and unto dust shalt thou return," which, for the speaker, is true of both herself and her house. The English burial service also famously includes the phrase "ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 14-15:** "I blest his grace that gave and took, / That laid my goods now in the dust."
- **Line 36:** "Adieu, Adieu, All's Vanity."
- **Lines 39-40:** "Didst fix thy hope on mouldring dust, / The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?"
- **Lines 43-45:** "Thou hast a house on high erect / Fram'd by that mighty Architect, / With glory richly furnished"

CAESURA

This version of the poem is modernized, meaning its grammar and spelling have been updated for the modern reader. There isn't really one definitive version of the poem (check out the Resources section to learn about the poem's journey from the 17th century to this present moment as you read it!), and so any devices that use punctuation should be treated with some caution. Caesura is best detected by looking at the syntax of a line—its words and the order they are put in.

With that in mind, take a look at lines 16 and 17. Here, the speaker shifts from the sorrow and terror she felt about her house burning down to the resolution that this was all God's plan—and therefore "just" (fair). Both lines use caesura to create grammatical balance, as though the lines are taking on the form of the scales of justice:

> Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just.
> It was his own; it was not mine.

The caesurae create a sense of logic and reason: "so it was," and therefore it was fair (because *anything* that "is" is planned by God). The house was God's, therefore it was not the speaker's. The logic of the caesura thus mirrors the divine logic of God.

Caesura can also lend the poem a hint of drama. Take line's 36 and 52, for example:

> Adieu, Adieu, All's Vanity.
> [...]
> Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store.

In both lines, the speaker bids goodbye to the house, and, in a way, to the *idea* of material possessions more generally. Now, her "hope" is fixed firmly on the afterlife that waits "above" (in heaven). In each line, she repeats the goodbye word, as though the occasion is so sad that she must say it twice. Goodbyes are painful, but double-goodbyes are doubly painful!

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 16:** "was, and"
- **Line 17:** "own; it"
- **Line 25:** "Trunk, and"
- **Line 36:** "Adieu, All's"
- **Line 52:** "pelf; farewell"

CONSONANCE

Consonance appears throughout the poem, and works alongside alliteration and assonance to make the poem feel musical and to draw attention to certain words and phrases.

Much of this consonance is more specifically sibilance, as in lines 9-12:

> To straighten me in my Distress
> And not to leave me succourless.
> Then coming out, behold a space
> The flame consume my dwelling place.

This section finds the speaker quite literally in the heat of the action, describing how she escaped the burning house just in time to witness its total destruction. Think about the strange hissing sound that fire makes as it rages (usually because it is causing trapped moisture to escape). The /m/ sounds of "flame consume my" in line 12 also muffles the line, suggesting snuffing out of snorts. Altogether, the consonance here works almost like a sound effect that plays in the background of the scene.

In lines 43 to 46, the speaker uses consonance to bring the image of God's mighty architecture to life. Each syllable in these lines feels meticulously placed:

> Thou hast a house on high erect
> Fram'd by that mighty Architect,
> With glory richly furnished
> Stands permanent, though this be fled.

It's as though the poem briefly absorbs some of God's heavenly architectural skill, flecking the lines with beautiful decoration befitting the image of a "permanent" afterlife within a house that is "richly furnished" with "glory." This is a brief rhetorical flourish that represents the poem at its most positive and hopeful, the increase in consonance evoking the speaker's passionate religious beliefs.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "silent," "rest"
- **Line 2:** "sorrow"
- **Line 3:** "waken'd was with"
- **Line 4:** "piteous shrieks," "voice"
- **Line 5:** "fearful," "fire," "fire"
- **Line 7:** "starting up," "spy"
- **Line 9:** "straighten," "Distress"
- **Line 10:** "succourless"
- **Line 11:** "space"
- **Line 12:** "flame consume my dwelling place"
- **Line 13:** "could," "longer look"
- **Line 14:** "grace," "gave"
- **Line 15:** "goods"
- **Line 21:** "past"
- **Line 22:** "sorrowing," "aside," "cast"
- **Line 23:** "places spy"
- **Line 24:** "sate," "long," "lie"
- **Line 25:** "stood," "Trunk," "chest"
- **Line 26:** "store," "counted best"
- **Line 31:** "talk," "told"
- **Line 43:** "hast," "house," "high," "erect"
- **Line 44:** "Fram'd," "mighty," "Architect"
- **Line 45:** "glory richly," "furnished"
- **Line 46:** "Stands," "permanent," "fled"
- **Line 47:** "purchased," "paid"
- **Line 48:** "him," "hath"
- **Line 49:** "price so vas"
- **Line 51:** "enough," "need no"
- **Line 52:** "Farewell," "pelf," "farewell"
- **Line 53:** "world," "longer let," "love"
- **Line 54:** "lies"

END-STOPPED LINE

The vast majority of the poem's lines are end-stopped, which lends the poem a steady, plodding pace. The speaker is trying to be calm and rational about the destruction of her home, and the many end-stopped lines suggests her thoughtfully gathering (or perhaps trying to contain!) her emotions.

There's a clear sense of restraint here, which makes sense given that the speaker believes the fire to have been part of God's plan. If this is the case, an uncontrollable outpouring of grief would be inappropriate. The speaker thus implies a pause at the ends of lines even when describing the horror of the fire itself.

Most of the first six lines, for instance, are end-stopped—despite the fact that the speaker is talking about being woken up in the middle of the night by terrifying "shrieks"! Despite the speaker's panic, the poem remains steady. End-stops also allow for a kind of dreadful silence after both "voice" and "Desire" that evokes the speaker's helplessness—by the time she sees the fire, it's already too late.

Later in the poem, end-stopping suggests logic and purpose. In lines 13-17, the speaker puzzles out the relationship between what has happened and her Puritan faith. As though working through the stages of a philosophical equation, likes 15 to 17 are all end-stopped, each line making an important point about the fairness with which God has acted—and always acts.

When the speaker bids goodbye to her house—and all that it represented—in lines 29-35, the poem also uses end-stops. And notice how *final* line 36 seems, because of that full-stop:

> Adieu, Adieu, All's Vanity.

Line 52 has the same effect, the poem slowing down to match the painful process of saying goodbye to those things that made earthly life seem bearable and worthwhile.

Do note that, as with any poem from this era, it's important to use a degree of caution when looking at devices that relate to punctuation. No one definitive version of this poem exists, and it has been modernized for modern readers. End-stops are best detected by a clear shift from one line to another, when the following line starts a sentence or phrase that is obviously a break with the one that came before.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "took,"
- **Line 2:** "look,"
- **Line 4:** "voice."
- **Line 5:** ""fire,""
- **Line 6:** "Desire."
- **Line 7:** "spy,"
- **Line 10:** "succourless."
- **Line 12:** "place."
- **Line 13:** "look,"
- **Line 14:** "took,"
- **Line 15:** "dust."
- **Line 16:** "just."
- **Line 17:** "mine."
- **Line 18:** "repine,"
- **Line 20:** "left."
- **Line 22:** "cast"
- **Line 24:** "lie."
- **Line 25:** "chest,"
- **Line 26:** "best,"
- **Line 27:** "lie"

- **Line 28:** "I."
- **Line 29:** "sit,"
- **Line 30:** "bit."
- **Line 31:** "told"
- **Line 32:** "old."
- **Line 33:** "Thee,"
- **Line 34:** "be."
- **Line 35:** "lie."
- **Line 36:** "Vanity."
- **Line 37:** "chide:"
- **Line 38:** "abide,"
- **Line 39:** "dust,"
- **Line 40:** "trust?"
- **Line 42:** "fly."
- **Line 44:** "Architect,"
- **Line 46:** "fled."
- **Line 48:** "do."
- **Line 49:** "unknown,"
- **Line 50:** "own."
- **Line 51:** "more."
- **Line 52:** "store."
- **Line 53:** "love;"
- **Line 54:** "above."

METAPHOR

Apart from the extended metaphor that the speaker uses to compare God to an architect and heaven to a glorious house, the poem doesn't use much figurative language. The only true metaphor pops up in line 42, when the speaker instructs herself to think about heaven (to lift her "thoughts above the sky") so that "That dunghill mists away may fly." In other words, focusing on heaven instead of her material losses will help assuage the speaker's grief. Her sorrow is like "dunghill mists"—probably a reference to a swarm of flies over a dunghill (a heap of animal waste). The comparison is purposefully grotesque in order to contrast life on earth with that in heaven.

When the speaker asks whether she set her "hope on mouldring dust," she's being both literal and metaphorical; she really does believe that all earthly life is temporary and will one day become "dust," but she's also referring to the literal remains of her house.

Finally, the speaker uses metonymy when saying that her "heart" calls out to God. The heart here stands in for the speaker herself, or, more specifically, her soul/inner self/emotions. Similarly, in line 41 the speaker chides herself for putting her "trust" in an "arm of flesh"—that is, in this mortal world rather than God.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "my heart did cry"
- **Line 39:** "Didst fix thy hope on mouldring dust,"
- **Line 40:** "The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?"
- **Line 41:** "Raise up thy thoughts above the sky"
- **Line 42:** "That dunghill mists away may fly"

EXTENDED METAPHOR

Again, the poem doesn't use much figurative language. The fire was a traumatic event, and simply telling it as it was helps give the reader a sense of how the speaker felt. The poem does turn to an extended metaphor towards the end, though, which presents God as an architect and the kingdom of heaven as a "house" that is more "richly furnished" and, importantly, more "permanent" than anything on earth.

This idea allows the speaker to come to terms with what has happened, and depicts God as a skilled artisan (which, given the speaker believes he designed *everything*, is fair enough!). The speaker may have valued her earthly house, but she is going to love her heavenly home even more. In heaven, God has taken care of everything, at his own expense. The speaker's material "wealth" is thus replaced by a more valuable, spiritual richness.

Where Extended Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 42:** "That dunghill mists away may fly."
- **Lines 43-50:** "Thou hast a house on high erect / Fram'd by that mighty Architect, / With glory richly furnished / Stands permanent, though this be fled. / It's purchased and paid for too / By him who hath enough to do. / A price so vast as is unknown, / Yet by his gift is made thine own."

REPETITION

Repetition appears throughout the poem, starting with the simple diacope in line 5. The repetition of "fire" here captures the speaker's panic as the house went up in flames, and evokes the sound of people desperately calling out to warn one another of the danger.

The most common kinds of repetition in the poem, however, are anaphora and parallelism. Take line 16:

> Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just.

Here, the speaker is coming to terms with what happened, transforming her sadness into an acceptance that whatever happens happens for a reason preordained by God. God is perfect and fair, the speaker says, and thus whatever he does is perfect and fair. Line 17 then uses parallelism again, this time emphasizing that the speaker's possessions never really belonged to her anyway:

> It was his own; it was not mine.

Of course, though she finds this lesson in the fire, the speaker can't help but feel sorrow and pain. When she revisits her house—or rather, the empty space where her house once stood—she remembers everything that she and her family used to do in there. And in lines 30 to 34, the poem uses anaphora to create a list of all the things that the speaker will no longer experience:

> Nor at thy Table eat a bit.
> No pleasant talk shall 'ere be told
> Nor things recounted done of old.
> No Candle 'ere shall shine in Thee,
> Nor bridegroom's voice ere heard shall bee.

Enumerating her losses—counting them out—brings home the poignant tragedy of the fire. Each memory leads to another, each one another unrecoverable joy.

And when the speaker finally says goodbye to the house—and the way of life it represented—she uses repetition as well. In line 36, it's epizeuxis through the immediate repeat of "Adieu;" in line 52, it's the parallelism of "Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store." In both lines, the speaker says goodbye not once, but twice. Saying goodbye is painful, but double-goodbyes are even harder!

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** ""fire"," ""fire,""
- **Lines 16-17:** "Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just. / It was his own; it was not mine."
- **Line 30:** "Nor"
- **Line 31:** "No"
- **Line 32:** "Nor"
- **Line 33:** "No"
- **Line 34:** "Nor"
- **Line 36:** "Adieu, Adieu"
- **Line 38:** "did thy"
- **Line 39:** "Didst," "thy"
- **Line 40:** "didst," "thy"
- **Line 52:** "Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store."

RHETORICAL QUESTION

The poem uses rhetorical questions in lines 38-40. If the poem is a kind of emotional journey through which the speaker plots the course of her response to the fire, this section represents an important moment of self-confrontation. She has already said that God is "just," or fair, but she also freely admits that it's hard to find the positive lesson in the destruction of everything she owned. Just before these three questions, the speaker spends a number of lines lamenting all the individual losses that the house fire has caused: no more "pleasant talk" around the table, no more rest in its comfortable rooms, and so on.

The speaker then rejects these feelings, without minimizing them, first asking herself, "And did thy wealth on earth abide"? In other words, the speaker asks herself if her earthly or material wealth held up or lasted (with the answer, of course, being that it did not!). Earthly "wealth," in other words, is nothing compared to the spiritual "wealth" that awaits the speaker in heaven.

In the second question, the speaker wonders in disbelief whether she had really been so misguided as to "fix" her "hope" on "mouldring dust." Her house is, literally, a pile of dust and ash, but this question also refers to the material world more broadly. Everything in the physical world is subject to decay and destruction, including people (the mention of "dust" here recalls how, according to the Bible, people are created from dust and will return to dust when they die). As such, the speaker rhetorically asks if she was so naive as to pin all her hopes and dreams onto something that would eventually disappear.

Finally, the speaker wonders if she really put her trust in an "arm of flesh"—again, in the physical, human world ("arm" here means something like "help" or "aid"). This final question again alludes to the Bible, specifically 2 Chronicles 32:8: "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles." Basically, the speaker is asking if she really put her trust in the mortal, fleshly world rather than in God himself.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Lines 38-40:** "And did thy wealth on earth abide, / Didst fix thy hope on mouldring dust, / The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?"

VOCABULARY

Thund'ring (Line 3) - Abbreviation of "thundering" (here meaning booming/very loud).

Piteous (Line 4) - Deserving of pity/concern.

Spy (Line 7, Line 23) - See.

Straighten Me (Line 9) - Put me right/calm me down.

Succourless (Line 10) - Helpless.

blest (Line 14) - Archaic spelling of "blessed."

His Grace (Line 14) - God's grace.

Goods (Line 15) - Possessions.

Yea (Line 16) - Yes.

'Twas (Line 16) - It was.

Just (Line 16) - Fair and reasonable.

Repine (Line 18) - Complain about.

Bereft (Line 19) - Deprived.

Oft (Line 21, Line 24) - Frequently.

Sate (Line 24) - Satisfied an appetite (i.e., ate food!).

Thy (Line 30, Line 38, Line 39, Line 40, Line 41) - Your (although the speaker is addressing herself).

Shalt (Line 35) - Archaic form of "shall."

Thou (Line 35, Line 43) - You.

Adieu (Line 36) - Goodbye.

Vanity (Line 36) - Superfluous, vain, temporary.

Straight (Line 37) - Immediately.

'gin (Line 37) - Begin.

Chide (Line 37) - Scold.

Abide (Line 38) - Live/reside, remain/last.

Didst (Line 39) - Did.

Mouldring (Line 39) - Molding, decaying, rotting.

Dunghill (Line 42) - A heap of dirt and waste.

Hast (Line 43) - Archaic form of "has."

High Erect (Line 43) - Standing tall.

That Mighty Architect (Line 44) - The ultimate creator/designer, God.

Thine (Line 50) - Archaic form of "your."

Pelf (Line 52) - Stolen goods or money (highlighting what the speaker sees as the fraudulent nature of material possessions).

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Verses upon the Burning of our House" consists of one long, unbroken, 54-line block of poetry! The poem *does* have a structure through its use of rhyming couplets, but there are no stanza breaks (despite the poem having some quite distinct sections within the text itself).

Many Bradstreet poems do have stanzas, so it's worth thinking about why she chose this uninterrupted form here. The title provides a clue: these are verses (lines of poetry) written "upon" the destruction of her house in the fire. In other words, this is a pretty immediate response, with the word "upon" suggesting that the fire happened recently. With that in mind, the form perhaps lends the poem authenticity as it follows the speaker's thought process from earthly sorrow to spiritual optimism. It allows for changes in direction (the shift from acceptance to nostalgic mourning that occurs between lines 20 and 21, for example) without losing the sense that this is one woman's genuine attempt to find meaning in a tragic event in real-time.

Perhaps, too, the shape of the text on the page gently supports the image of a tall, strong, permanent house—the one built by God, "that mighty Architect."

METER

The poem uses iambic tetrameter throughout, meaning each line has four iambs: feet with an unstressed-stressed syllable pattern (da-DUM). For example, line 1 scans:

In si- | lent night | when rest | I took,

Overall, the meter is very steady and consistent. The poem thus feels carefully constructed and controlled, suggesting that the speaker is trying to think through this tragedy clearly and rationally.

Iambs are a very common foot in English poetry because they mimic the sound of regular speech, and the dependable iambic meter might also make the poem feel a bit more authentic, as though it is free from poetic artifice. Bradstreet herself once said that wrote not to "show [her] skill, but to declare the truth...[and] the glory of God." The emphasis is on the spiritual lesson, not on fancy metrical variations.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem uses rhyming couplets from start to finish:

AABBCCDD

...and so forth. These couplets are so steady that they become almost hypnotic, fitting with the idea that this is a kind of meditation "upon" the fire and the destruction it caused. The poem's rhyme scheme and meter are so steady as to almost fade into the background of the poem, which makes sense if the speaker wants to keep the focus on God's lessons.

Occasionally, rhyming pairs chime together with dramatic effect. Take, for example, the "dust"/"just" rhyme in lines 15 and 16. This neatly sums up the speaker's religious views: earthly life comes from and returns to "dust," and anything that happens is "just" (fair) because God planned it that way. Dust, then, *equals* justice.

SPEAKER

Anne Bradstreet wrote this poem in response to the actual burning of her house, so it's safe to say that the speaker is the poet herself! Readers can tell a lot about Bradstreet from what she's written here. This is a woman who clearly loved her home and feels sorrow at its loss, but also seems to feel a bit guilty about that sorrow. As a devoted Puritan, she believes she must trust in God's will, and thus accept the loss of her home with grace.

That doesn't mean it's *easy* to do so, though, and the poem provides an authentic account of one person's attempt to come to terms with trauma. Throughout the poem, the speaker's mood changes. She's made her main point as early as line

14—that whatever people gain or lose in life, it is God's to "giveth and taketh" away. In other words, if your house burns down, it was just and fair that it did so. But soon enough, she looks over the ruins with nostalgia and regret, pinpointing all the possessions and comforts that are gone forever.

The speaker thus wavers between a natural human reaction to loss and the spiritual teachings of her religion. She is self-critical, chastising herself for getting carried away with the former at the expense of the latter, and ultimately resolves to look forward to the afterlife rather than lament what happens during life on earth.

SETTING

The poem is set in the immediate aftermath of a house fire. The speaker has escaped her home in time to see everything she owns reduced to ash and dust. In lines 21 to 36, the speaker looks at the "Ruins" of her house, and nostalgically remembers all the good times she and her family once had there. A home is not just a building, the speaker implies, but also a place where memories are created.

While the poem is very much built around earthly experience (the reader can almost see the smoldering ashes of the house!), the speaker also makes sense of what has happened by looking forward to an entirely different place. Though she has lost her home on earth, the far superior kingdom of heaven awaits her.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Anne Bradstreet, born in England in 1612, is considered America's first published poet. Unlike many women of her era, she had access to a decent library of books from any early age and was well-educated according to the wishes of her father, Thomas Dudley. Early influences include Guillame du Bartas and Sir Philip Sidney, for whom she even wrote an elegy.

This particular poem was written in 1666, six years before Bradstreet's death, and responds to the real-life destruction of Bradstreet's home. Bradstreet had probably lived in the house discussed in this poem for around 20 years. Among the possessions she lost in the fire were her collection of books, and her papers—including, perhaps, poems that will never get to be read!

There is some debate about how Bradstreet's poems came to be published, and for a woman to be published at all was highly unusual. Her one collection, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung in America*, was brought to England for publication by her brother-in-law, John Woodbridge. This poem was written much later, and is Bradstreet's penultimate composition (her final known poem is "As Weary Pilgrim").

As a devout Puritan, religion was nearly always at the center of Bradstreet's poetry. Writing poetry was relatively common among Puritan communities, but it almost always was meant to teach a religious lesson. Bradstreet is one of two poets of the era whose verse has stood the test of time (the other being Edward Taylor; check out his poem "Huswifery"). In 1956, for example, the poet John Berryman composed *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, a long poem that marvelled at her determination to write "high verse [...] in a land that cared and cares so little for it."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Puritan pilgrims were a group of English Protestants who moved to the so-called New World—America—during the 16th and 17th centuries. They disagreed with the religious direction of the Church of England, seeking to purify it of Catholic practices. Doing so, they believed, would also purify humankind's relationship with God.

In 1620, a number of separatists travelled from England to New England in what would become U.S. Known as Pilgrims, they sailed on the famous *Mayflower* and are an important part of the (white) American origin story and folklore. Around a hundred passengers undertook the arduous crossing over the Atlantic, with around half of them surviving to establish a colony in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Once there, they often faced starvation, disease, and conflict with the indigenous population.

Bradstreet herself travelled with her family in 1630 on the *Arbella*, arriving initially in Salem (of witch-trials fame) before settling elsewhere in Massachusetts. Bradstreet recalls how her heart "rose" at the sight of America, meaning not that she felt a burst of optimism, but worry and doubt. For the time, though, she lived a fairly secure and stable life, giving birth to multiple children who in turn had many grandkids. This poem was written near the end of her life, and, by coincidence, in the same year as the Great Fire of London.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- America's First Poet — An NPR piece about the life and work of Anne Bradstreet. (https://choice.npr.org/index.html?origin=https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4616663)
- Homage to Mistress Bradstreet — A poetic tribute to Anne Bradstreet by the Pulitzer-winning poet John Berryman. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48266/homage-to-mistress-bradstreet)
- Searching for Bradstreet's House — An article about the search for the location of Bradstreet's Andover home. (https://apnews.com/article/

32de5af749f44f258e07f79353801985)

- The Puritan Experience — Learn more about Bradstreet's faith. (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Puritanism)
- Bradstreet's Life Story — Check out a more in-depth biography of Bradstreet from the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/anne-bradstreet)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER ANNE BRADSTREET POEMS

- Before the Birth of One of Her Children
- The Author to Her Book
- To My Dear and Loving Husband

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