

天國的父親與世間的女兒---Anne Bradstreet 與 Emily Dickinson 的信仰衝突與抗拒 Heavenly Father and Worldly Daughters : The Resistance and Conflict of Anne Bradstreet and Emily Dickinson

劉怡昕

德育醫護管理專科學校

摘要

Anne Bradstreet (1612?-1672) 為美國歷史上第一位正式有詩作出版的詩人。她在十六歲時隨著父親與夫婿，於十七世紀初期離開生活條件優渥的英格蘭，前往新大陸，意欲實現清教徒的宗教理想。為了在新大陸拓荒時期艱困的生活條件下維持良好的社會秩序，嚴謹的清教徒信仰與教規，成為當地居民生活中高於一切的準則。Anne Bradstreet 受過良好的教育，熟讀歷史、文學與自然科學。她雖然成功地扮演一位好女兒、好妻子、以及八位子女的好母親，成為清教徒社區的女性典範，但在她身後再版印行的詩集裏，卻詳實記錄了她內在信仰的衝突。她擁有幸福的家庭生活，深愛她的丈夫與子女。在生活艱困的新英格蘭地區，她經歷了數次失去至親家人的痛苦，老年時的一場大火，焚毀她的住家，奪走了她一生珍藏的美好，使得她開始懷疑 天父神的愛是否為真。清教徒嚴謹的信仰規範，教導信徒們放棄人世間短暫的眷戀，應全心全意尋找天國永生的允諾，亦難以說服她心中的疑問與抗拒。

Emily Dickinson 生於十九世紀初期，她的祖父不惜傾家蕩產，在她的家鄉 Amherst 起造一座合於清教徒理想信仰的神學院，數年後由她的父親接掌該學院的財務運作，其家族於 Amherst 具有極大的影響力量。她十六歲時，Amherst 開始了其後數年間數次的信仰復興，當地的居民、她的家人、以及她的好友們，紛紛於教會中決志宣誓他們的信仰，願意接納 耶穌基督成為他們生命中的主人。年輕的 Emily Dickinson 害怕自己只是盲從這股熱潮，一再拒絕於教會中公開決志，堅持要以最清醒的態度，聆聽心靈真正的聲音。其後她漸漸淡出活躍的社交活動，脫離教會生活，於三十歲後完全離群索居，終生未嫁，只與至親的家人與少數的好友保持親密的往來。Emily Dickinson 終其一生從未停止思考信仰的意義，並從多種角度對於人類的信仰提出詮釋。在她身後出版近兩千多首的詩作與三巨冊的書信集裏，信仰、天父神對於人類的愛與矛盾、聖經典故、以及人類在宇宙中的定位，成為一再出現的主題。

本文將兩位相隔兩百多年的女性詩人的作品並列討論，討論兩位詩人身平與作品的相似與相異之處，藉此討論女性信仰思惟的不安與反動，以及在天國的愛與俗世的眷戀之間，她們終生從未放棄尋找的生命平衡點。

Key words: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, religion, puritan, belief

Introduction

In spite of nearly two centuries between their life spans, Anne Bradstreet¹ and Emily Dickinson shared many similar tracks and experiences in their lives. Both of them came from an economically advantaged family.² Both were New England poets, spending the most important stages of their lives in a New England state: Massachusetts.³ Both wrote without much thought of public audience. They were highly attached to their immediate families by elaborate ties of love and responsibility. Both had socially prominent and powerful fathers who were leaders of their respective communities.⁴ These two authoritative men gave their daughters good education⁵, but also played the role of confining the daughters' talents for not making them to go beyond the female boundaries defined by their society. The two intelligent daughters of conventional obedient mothers⁶ and stern fathers experienced considerable conflicts in shaping their inner world and struggled for the balance between their religious faith and love for this world. They both had to try with great effort for defending their right to literary creativity and establish the religious priorities of their own. Bradstreet was a puritan woman of deep spiritual faith, but the many hardships which she endured would indeed make a well-educated mind to question the existence of the God. Emily Dickinson's doubt and resistance to conversion, which brought her much community pressure and personal anxiety, was clearly recorded in her letters and poems. The conflicts in their lives bore the witness of their reluctant attitude to the 'fathers' – the father in this world and the Father in heaven.

However, there were dramatic differences as well. All through Anne Bradstreet's life, she had tried to be a dutiful daughter of a Puritan governor, a loving wife of Simon Bradstreet - another Puritan governor, a devoted mother of eight children, and a resolute child of God. Her

¹ Anne Bradstreet: 1612? - 1672, Emily Dickinson: 1830- 1886.

² Anne Bradstreet's father, Thomas Dudley, was a well-educated and very capable man. He was a steward to William Lord Compton, Earl of Lincoln and later a governor in New England; her mother owned 'considerable estate'. For more details of their family wealth, see John H. Ellis, introduction, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Verse*, 1932

Emily Dickinson's father, Edward Dickinson, was very capable of financial management. In addition to his prosperous law firm, he was highly active in other 'moneymaking projects', such as real estate. For details see Part One in the biography of *Emily Dickinson* by Cynthia Griffin Wolff, 1988

³ When Anne Bradstreet came to Massachusetts Bay, she was only 18 years old. She spent the rest of her life in Boston. Emily Dickinson lived in Amherst throughout her life.

⁴ Thomas Dudley was a puritan magistrate. Edward Dickinson was a gentleman with high public prominence in Amherst. He was elected a member of the House of Representatives in 1839.

⁵ Anne Bradstreet was able to be exposed to more than 800 books in their house library even during the hardship of early colonization. See Introduction, John Harvard Ellis, 1932. Emily Dickinson was sent to Amherst Academy for secondary-school education, where she was among the best students. Then she attended almost one full year at the new Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley. See Wolff, Part one.

⁶ Anne Bradstreet described her mother as an "obedient wife" in her epitaph for her mother. According to Rosenmeier, the obedience is 'in exchange for submission to her husband's authority, she could expect protection and support.' 1991, p. 15. Emily Dickinson's mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, a quiet and shy woman, came from a prosperous farmer's family with normal education. She was the silent and obedient figure in the Dickinson family. See Wolff, 1986, pp.36-46

responsibility was far more elaborate and time-consuming than Dickinson's. Emily Dickinson remained single and stayed in her parents' house throughout her life. Her family burden was relatively lighter and she could dispose her time with much more freedom. In Bradstreet's later poems, we can see a turning to God in sought of comfort in times of afflictions. However, in Emily Dickinson's world, God was questioned and eternal life was abandoned. The road of Christian pilgrimage carried Anne Bradstreet through confusion and doubt to the final reconciliation with God. By declining the invitation of love from Christ, Emily Dickinson picked up the risk of being independent, remaining solely responsible for her own spiritual life. Bradstreet's voice was sometimes subdued by her religious concerns, to the greatest extent she was only able to express her rage and wonders - in disguise, for not to irritate her Puritan community - about the justice of God's way. Dickinson was able to write poems in her well-protected isolation. She was free to experience extraordinary emotional and aesthetic freedom in her poems.

Tracing along their life histories, there is an evolution of rebellion from Bradstreet's passive acceptance of traditional values and her personal doubt to Dickinson's private resistance against convention and a deep alienation from the community which she lived within. One of the central themes of their poetry is the reverence to this worldly life on earth. Each of them had developed a deeply personal vision that valued fame sensibility on high in a society that often denied women a voice. Anne Bradstreet doubted and resisted the providential destiny that had encouraged the Puritan colonization of the New World. She was so deeply in love with the life on earth that she committed herself to God in the hope that the joy she had in this life would be perpetuated eternally in heaven. Emily Dickinson was uncompromisingly critical of the ideal of religious destiny. She expressed her anxiety, fear, scorn and doubt about Christianity, sometimes in the form of direct and bitter conversation with the One she refused to committed herself to. Unlike Bradstreet, Dickinson didn't place God in the top of a hierarchically ordered universe; instead, hers is a perspective world in which all things in life - family, friends, flowers, the dew in the morning, insects and the most important: her poems - are placed as essential parts of the awesome cosmos.

Anne Bradstreet

...were earthly comforts permanent,
who would look for heavenly?⁷

⁷ "Meditations: Divine and Moral", LXIX, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Verse*, John Harvard Ellis, ed., 1932, p.69.

Anne Bradstreet's family left the security and convenience of their comfortable lives in England and came into the unknown vast wilderness of the New World. Her early life in the manor at Lincolnshire in economic luxury presented a dramatic contrast with the harsh and life-threatening living conditions in the 17th century Massachusetts Bay colony.⁸ When Anne Bradstreet arrived in the New World after the three-month exhausting boat journey in 1630, she admitted that her 'heart rose';

“ I ... came into this covntry, where I fovnd a new world and new manners, at which my heart rose. But after I was convinced it was the way of God, I submitted to it and joined the church at Boston.”

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She didn't subordinately accept all the hardship and disappointments in Massachusetts. She had to be 'convinced'. The grievances that brought the Puritan expedition to New England were not Anne Bradstreet's commitment; rather, it belonged to the two men she loved: her father and her husband. The puritan pilgrimage of the men was to "build a city on a hill", her mission was to build a home in another England for her family in the relatively primitive environment of the New World.

God was at the center of the newly colonized world. That was a society in need of faith in God's providential plan to sustain the mission into the unknown wilderness and enable the Puritans to endure the hard condition of New England. Woman who stepped beyond their domestic confines either by means of reading or by writing would risk being branded as dangerous to themselves and to society. This contemptuous attitude toward women writers was especially hard for Anne Bradstreet to accept. As a daughter of a well-educated man who was deeply involved in the English Puritan community, Anne Bradstreet grew up in an environment in which she was freely exposed to intellectual discussion and independent thoughts before she came to New England¹⁰. Nevertheless, she had to be very cautious for not

⁸ As Adrienne Rich quotes that Thomas Dudley wrote back to England a year after their arrival in New England. "There is not a house where is not one dead, and some houses many ... the natural causes seem to be in the want of warm lodging and good diet, to which Englishmen are habituated at home, and the sudden increase of heat which they endure that are landed here in summer ... for those only these two last years died of fevers who landed June or July, as those of Plymouth, who landed in winter, died of the scurvy." See Foreword, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, Jeannine Hensley ed., 1967

⁹ "To my dear Children", *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Verse*, John Harvard Ellis, New York, Copyright 1932, Reprinted, 1932, p.5. Quoted as the original text. The following quotations follow the same rule.

¹⁰ As Rosamond Rosenmeier implies in her book that when the Dudley family moved to the earl's estate in Lincolnshire, they moved into a situation where the Dudley children would have shared the services of tutors hired for the earl's children and would have had the use of the earl's considerable library. She quotes historian Lawrence Thompson's description of Anne Bradstreet's educational situation when he observes that she was "the luckiest girl of the wealthier classes...who was educated at home, under the supervision of an educated mother, alongside her brothers, at the feet of their tutors. When the boys had gone off to school, she might continue her studies with her father's domestic chaplain or a local clergyman. *Anne Bradstreet Revisited*, 1991, p.23.

to risk the scorn and persecution which visited upon Anne Hutchinson¹¹ who was excommunicated from the community because she had stepped beyond the boundaries of prescribed behaviour by way of speaking her mind openly in the Puritan society.

Therefore, under the ultimate goodness of God, her often illness was paradoxically taken as a form of blessing. She learned to take each suffering and crisis as necessary spiritual *corrections* in which God's love was demonstrated:

Among all my experiences of God's gracious Dealing with me I haue constantly observed this, that he hath never suffered me long to sitt loose from him, I haue expected correction for it, which most commonly hath been vpon my own person, in sicknesse, weaknes, paines, sometimes on my soul, in Doubts and feares of God's displeasure, and my sincerity towards him.

I haue been with God like an vntoward child, that no longer then the rod has been on my back (or at least in sight) but I haue been apt to forgett him and myself, too. Before I was afflicted, I went astray,¹²

However, Anne Bradstreet was not always able to sustain her faith during periods of severe test. Her doubt, at times, was overwhelming:

I haue often been perplexed that I haue not found that constant Joy in my Pilgrimage and refreshing which I supposed most of the servants of God haue ...¹³

As a young woman, she could not persuade herself of the existence of God:

Many times hath Satan troubled me concerning the verity of the scriptures, many times by Atheisme how I could know whether

¹¹ Anne Hutchinson came from a prosperous family. Her family recognized her vigorous intellect and gave her tutorial instructions. In addition to Hutchinson's daily care of her fourteen children, she was highly active among woman prayer meetings. Her popularity was short due to her argument that "Holy Ghost dwells personally in a justified person" which threatened the authority of the newly established church. A court of forty men was summoned to conclude judgement on Hutchinson. She was banished without being convinced. Shortly she was killed in New York at one of Indian's attack. Anne Bradstreet's father, Thomas Dudley, was a magistrate at the trial. He thought Hutchinson was "deluded by the devil". See Adelaide P. Amore, *A Woman's Inner World*, pp. xvii - xix

¹² "To my Dear Children". *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Verse*, John H. Ellis, ed. 1932, pp.5-7

¹³ *Ibid.* p.7

there was a God; I never saw any miracles to confirm me, and those which I read of how did I know but they were feigned.

How should I know he is such a God as I worship in Trinity, and such Saviour as I rely upon?

Sometimes I haue said, Is there ffaith vpon the earth? And I haue not known what to think.¹⁴

All those wonders remained unanswered. Soon, another question was put in her way. The fighting and bloodshed between different sectarians, which was the major reason that brought her to New England, caused greater confusion to her.¹⁵

... that admitt this be the trve God whom we worship, and that bee his word, yet why may not the Popish Religion bee the right? They haue the same God, the same Christ, the same word: they only enterprett it one way, wee another.¹⁶

Under the overwhelming social doctrine of Puritan, a well-educated mind was able to find her own way out. In spite of the burdensome domestic responsibilities and the hostility toward female intellects, Anne Bradstreet found private solutions in writing poetry. After all, poetry was acceptable insofar as it praised God. Her poetic craft also made it easier for her to accept the loneliness and sooth her terrible anxiety during her husband's frequent absences from home while he was on public business for church. Poetry also served for her as a medium for sublimating her emotion as a woman. It also provided her a way of expressing her hidden religious skepticism as a Puritan woman, the happiness and sorrows in her life, and her struggle between her religious commitment and the frustration she faced as she strove to be a Christian daughter.

As Hensley indicated, Anne Bradstreet "must have sensed what people were likely to say about female who showed scholarly inclinations. The fate of Anne Hutchinson must have made lively gossip, and poor Mrs. Hopkins, who, according to John Winthrop read and wrote too much and so became insane, was surely a subject for scandal..... The general prejudice

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp.8-9

¹⁵ During the reign of Queen Mary(1553-58), many Protestants were martyred or forced into exile. Puritan's commitment to "purify" the Church of England for remnants of Roman Catholic "popery" eventually led to civil war in England in the 1640s. The conflict between Puritanism and Roman Catholicism was not yet settled in the following centuries. See Britannia Encyclopedia.

¹⁶ "To my dear Children" John H. Ellis ed., 1932, p. 9.

against women who possessed 'wit and learning'¹⁷ must have annoyed Anne Bradstreet."¹⁸ Bradstreet was then not able to repress her ambivalence about the male authorities and literary critics. In the poetic *Prologue* to the poems in *The Tenth Muse*, she sketched several kinds of hostility she expected her writing would confront. A woman was expected to remain confined within her domestic duties. If she persists, or if she write good poems, the works must be merely by chance or by thievery. Bradstreet didn't repress her resentment to the prejudice. Therefore, the *Prologue* serves as an apology for her poetry as well as a defense for her right to poetry:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits,
A Poets pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on Female wit:
If what I do prove well, it won't advance,
They'l say it's stoln, or else it was by chance.¹⁹

The same defense for her poems was also found in the poem dedicated to her father:

Something of all (though mean) I did intend
But feared you'ld judge Du Bartas was my friend.
I honour him, but dare not wear his wealth;
My goods are true(though poor), I love no stealth,
But if I did, I durst not send them you
Who must read a thief, but with his due.²⁰

However, Puritan restrictions on female behaviour had to be obeyed. Therefore, Bradstreet's protest to the devaluation of female writing had to be carefully disguised under witty satire:

Let Greek be Greeks, and women what they are
Men have precedency and still excell,
It is but vain unjustly to wage warre;
Men can do best, and women know it well
Preheminence in all and each is your;

¹⁷ As printed on the cover of the first edition of *The Tenth Muse lately Sprung up in America* by Anne Bradstreet, 1650.

¹⁸ Jeannine Hensley, Introduction, *The works of Anne Bradstreet*, Harvard University Press, 1967, p.xxx.

¹⁹ "Prologue", John H. Ellis, ed. 1932, p. 101.

²⁰ "To her most Honoured Father Thomas Dudley Esq; these humbly presented", *ibid*, pp.98-99.

Yet grant some small acknowledgement of ours.²¹

In contrast to her passive surrender to the strict rule of her society, the poem, *In Honor of the High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory*, is the only one in the first edition of *The Tenth Muse* contains no apologies. She celebrated the pride and capability of the English Queen that excels the great kings in the history:

Who was so good, so just, so learn'd so wise,
From all the Kings on earth she won the prize.
.....
She hath wip'd off th' aspersion of her Sex,
That women wisdom lack to play the Rex:
....
Was ever people better rul'd then hers?
Was ever land more happy freed from Stirrs?
Did ever wealth in England more abound?
.....
Her Nobles sacrific'd their noble blood,
Nor men nor Coyn she spar'd to do them good.²²

Bradstreet's queen is an active, proud, and commanding female figure, none of her accomplishments attributed to God's prestige. The Queen's regal self-assertion is a strong contrast to the fallen Christian woman – Eve's offspring. Such praise without acknowledging providence of God may cause suspect of being idolatrous. Therefore, it was less dangerous for Bradstreet to make this bold declaration praising female abilities in context of human history. Bradstreet carried on to express her praise for a female figure while chiding her male readers with a witty warning:

Now, say, have women worth? Or have they none?
Or had they some, but with our Queen is't gone?
Nay Masculines, you have thus taxt us long,
But she, though dead, will vindicate our wrong.
Let such as say our Sex is void of Reason,
Know tis a Slander now, but once was Treason.²³

²¹ "Prologue", *ibid.* p.102.

²² "In honor of the High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory", *ibid.*, PP.358-359.

²³ *ibid.* p.361.

Much of the materials in the poems published in the first edition of *The Tenth Muse* were separated from Bradstreet's everyday life and experience. They are highly impersonal poems displaying an intellectual woman's knowledge of natural science, history and literature. In her middle-aged years, after her father's death, she began to write those deeply personal poems that celebrated her intensive love for her husband, her pleasure of family life, and the enjoyment she found in the Nature. As Wendy Martin indicates: perhaps her father's death in 1653 as well as the publication of her work in 1650 gave her the psychological freedom necessary to express herself more openly. " ²⁴

The poems were published six years after her death, when the church was more tolerant to personal feelings than it used to be. As the general heading to these personal poems which were published in the second edition of *The Tenth Muse*, "Several other Poems made by the Author upon Diverse Occasions were found among her Papers after her Death, which she never meant should come to public view."²⁵ As a matter of fact, she was able to express herself fully. These poems are a short book of her family history: marriage, childbirth, house burning, and death. They responded directly to Bradstreet's inner world: her love for her husband in their happy marriage, her longing for her husband's safe return, her immediate agony upon the death of beloved young family members and the burning of her treasured home, and after all, her doubt about God's justice of all these afflictions.

As these love poems, elegies, and meditations are grounded in Bradstreet's personal conviction and everyday experience, they demonstrate an overview of Bradstreet's potential poetic achievement had she been unconstrained to the strict social-religious doctrines. When she began to write of her profound attachment to her family and her deep love of 'this life' on earth, rather than heaven, her poetry became emotionally powerful with rich affection.

Most of her love poems for her husband are vivid and passionate, and some even sensational.²⁶ These charming love poems were written with abundant affection. As we can see in the poem *A Letter to her Husband, absent upon Publick employment*, written in straight phrases, the poet write what is imperative for her to write, without striking imagery or simile, without a hint of bitterness or reproach on his frequent absence away from home:

If two be one, as surely thou and I,
How stayest thou there, whilst I at *Ipswich* lye?
So many steps, head from the heart to sever

²⁴ Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych*, 1984, p.17.

²⁵ *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Poetry*, John H. Ellis, ed., 1932, p. 391.

²⁶ Hensley vividly introduces Simon Bradstreet : A Cambridge man one of the rare men who can inspire a (puritan) woman to passionate poetry." 1967, p. xxiii.

If but a neck, soon should we be together:
I like the earth this season, mourn in black,
My sun is gone so far in's Zodiack,
Whom whilst I 'joy'd, nor storms, nor frosts I felt,
His warmth such frigid colds did cause to melt.²⁷

Bradstreet uses the image of Sun to describe her husband who almost replaces God at the center of her life. The third letter (under the same title) was spontaneously composed and written with playful punning and lively imagery from animals. What is more important, there is no indication that she considers her social or domestic role subordinate to his:

The absence of her Love, and loving Mate,
Whose loss hath made her so unfortunate:
Or as the loving Mullet, that true Fish,
Her fellow lost, nor joy nor life do with,
But lanches on that shore, there for to dye,
Where she her captive husband doth espy.
.....

I here, he there, alas, both kept by force:
Return my Dear, my joy, my only Love,
Unto thy Hinde, thy Mullet and thy Dove,
....

Together at one Tree, oh let us brouze,
And like two Turtles roost within on house,
And like the Mulletts in one River glide,
Let's still remain but one, till death divide.

*Thy loving Love and Dearest Dear,
At home, abroad, and every where.*²⁸

The themes of these love poems to her husband were always direct and touching with abundant love, which were never like the unrequited or fickle love of her contemporary

²⁷ "A Letter to her Husband, absent upon Public employment", *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Poetry*, John H. Ellis, ed., 1932, p.394.

²⁸ *ibid* p.397.

English poets, but full of modern touch of the 20th century: passionate, straight, sincere, tender, and homely:

My love is such that Rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee, give recompence.
Thy love is such I can no way repay,
The heavens reward thee manifold I pray.
Then while we live, in love lets so persevere,
That when we live no more, we may live ever.²⁹

Spousal devotion was proof of piety as they follow the instructions to spouse lives in the Holy Bible, therefore Anne Bradstreet's love for Simon Bradstreet was in harmony with God's plan. However, it had to be under one condition that she loves her husband 'in Christ' and not let her emotional or physical desire of Simon to eclipse her greater commitment to God. To love her family for their own sake, rather than the ardent sought for the family in heaven, would indicate a dangerous attachment to this world. The passionate love poems threatens to overshadow a proper love of God by placing a mere creature – her husband – such high a value.

Childbirth has been a threat to woman, particularly when medical support was apparently inadequate. Adrienne Rich had pointed that this poem "voices woman's age-old fear of death in childbirth", which is a "realistic apprehension" in the seventeenth century.³⁰ In the poem *Before the Birth of one of her Children*, we can see a passive acceptance of death as an inevitable end of earthly life. That her husband might feel "no grief" and his "lose shall be repaid with gains" in case of her death in childbirth tell us her hidden jealousy that he might re-marry. Nevertheless, the well being of her children and the continued devotion of her husband was all her concerns. Rather than her spiritual fate in the eternal, she wished to live in her husband's memory and to be loved beyond the grave:

If any worth or virtue were in me,
Let that live freshly in thy memory
And when thou feel'st no grief, as I no harm
Yet love thy dead, who long lay in thin arms:
And when thy lose shall be repaid with gains
Look to my little babes my dear remains.
And if thou love thy self, or loved'st me

²⁹ "To my Dear and loving Husband". *ibid* p.394.

³⁰ Adrienne Rich, Forward, *The works of Anne Bradstreet*, J. Hensley, ed. 1967.

These O protect from step Dames injury.³¹

The conflict between personal feeling and religious commitment is again displayed in the poem, *Upon my Son Samuel his going for England*,

Preserve, O Lord from stormes and wrack,
Protect him there, and bring him back;
And if thou shalt spare me a space,
That I again may see his face,
Then Shall I celebrate thy Praise,
And Blesse thee for't even all my Dayes.³²

The urgent verse-prayer contains a hint of the struggle between her human emotions and her religious faith. The tone of the poem reveals that the poet's devotion to God is actually conditional on Samuel's well being and his safe return. The prayer is a bargain with God: If my son returns safely, then I shall celebrate and bless you.

The deep feeling and intense concern for the safety of her loved ones is again seen in the poem, *'Upon my dear and loving Husband his going into England*,

Lord, let my eyes once Again
Him whom thou gavest me,
That wee together may sing Praise
For ever unto Thee.³³

Once more, Bradstreet requests a bargain with God: if my husband returns to me safely, together we will sing your praise. She pleads for continued happiness on earth – secular concerns take precedence over the obedience to the unpredictable will of God.

Anne Bradstreet's battle between her secular concern and the spiritual commitment was sharply joined in her experience of the catastrophe that cast upon her house. On reading the poem *On the Burning of her House*, the struggle between concerns of earthly treasure and the reluctant obedience to God's will is rendered with agony. Here we see a woman, in her mid-fifties, lost all of her domestic comforts and the cherished memory of the old England. All were gone with the fire:

³¹ "Before the Birth of one of her Children". *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Poetry*, John H. Ellis, ed., 1932, p.393.

³² "Upon my son Samuel his going for England". *ibid*, p. 25.

³³ "Upon my dear and loving husband his going into England". *ibid*, p. 32.

No pleasant tale shall 'ere be told,
Nor things recovnted done of old.
No Candle 'ere shall shine in Thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice ere heard shall bee.
In silence ever shalt thou lye';
Adeiu, Adeiu; All's vanity.³⁴

However, she reminds herself with the promise of a permanent house in heaven to soothe her grief with a resigned acceptance of God's providence:

Thou hast a house on high erect,
Fram'd by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnished,
Stands permanent tho: this bee fled.³⁵

Other bitter losses of her family member came to Anne Bradstreet after the burning of her house. An unfairly early death conceals none of her anguished rage from Bradstreet's hesitant resignation. She tried to control her grief by her resolved belief in a just and merciful God in spite of her experience that appears to contradict her faith:

With troubled heart & trembling hand I write,
The heavens have chang'd my sorrow my delight.
How oft with disappointment have I met,
When I on fading things my hopes have set? ³⁶

The elegy for her month-old grandson reveals deep reservations about the wisdom of God's decisions. Her compliance with God's will is almost close to irony; her head is bowed more in resignation or even bitterness than in reverence. The opening lines of *On my dear Grandchild Simon Bradstreet* suggest a reluctant submission to God's incomprehensible will. She questioned why the good die young:

No Sooner came, but gone, and fal'n asleep,
Acquaintance short, yet parting caus'd us weep,

³⁴ "Upon the burning of our house" *ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁶ "In memory of my dear grandchild Anne Bradstreet Who deceased June 20, 1669, being three years and seven months old", *ibid.*, p.405.

Three flouers, two scarcely blown, the last i'th' bud,
Cropt by th' Almightyes hand; yet is he good,
With dreadful awe before him let's be mute,
Such was his will, but why, let's not dispute,
With humble berats and mouths put in the dust,
Let's say he's merciful as well as just.³⁷

She was shocked by the apparently wanton demonstration of divine power: the losses " is by his hand alone that guides nature and fate." Although her resignation does not always eliminate her rage, she persuades herself to subdue her skepticism in the name of obedience. The word " I trust " within the brackets in the following poem all the more paradoxically illuminates her distrust on God's mercy and good will:

So with her children four, She's now a rest,
All freed from grief (I trust) among the blest;
She one hath left, a joy to thee and me,
The Heavens vouchsafe she may so ever be.
Chear up, (dear Son) thy fainting bleeding heart,
In him alone, that caused all this smart;
What though thy strokes full sad & grievous be,
He knows it is the best for thee and me.³⁸

Frustrated with overwhelming sorrow of lost beloved, laden with physical pains and old age, Bradstreet's devotion collapses into exhausted acquiescence. The poem *Longing for Heaven* reveals a profound world-weariness; the wearied pilgrim was eager to lay her 'corrupt carcass' down in its grave and waited for the splendor of the resurrection. The tense conflict and arguments between flesh and spirit, earth and heaven are muted; instead, there is a longing for releasing from physical frailty and a hope for eternal life:

A pilgrim I, on earth, perplext
with sinns with cares and sorrows vext
By age and paines brought to decay
and my Clay house mouldring away
Oh how I long to be at rest
and soare on high among the blest.

³⁷ "On my dear Grand-child Simon Bradstreet, who dyed on 16. Novemb., 1669, being but a month, and one day old." *ibid*, p.406.

³⁸ "To the memory of my dear Daughter-in-Law, Mrs. Mercy Bradstreet, how deceased Sept. 6. 1669. in the 28. year of her age." *ibid*, p.407.

This body shall in silence sleep
mine eyes no more shall ever weep
No fainting fits shall me assaile
nor grinding paines my body fraile
With cares and fears ne'r cumbred be
nor losses know, nor sorrowes see
What tho my flesh shall there consume
it is the bed Christ did persume³⁹

Anne Bradstreet accepted her weariness as a chastening reminder of her mortal frailty with less forced resignation. As maturity came, so was a spiritual reconciliation with God reached. She eventually learned to control her troubled faith and agonizing skepticism by committing herself to the religious values of her Puritan culture. No longer bargaining with God, but willingly taking the comfort in the Promise of an eternal life, she is ready to accept mortality and to prepare for death, heaven, and eternity:

I can now say, Return, O my Soul, to thy Rest, upon this Rock
Christ Jesus will I build my faith' and if I perish, I perish.... I
know whom I haue trvsted, and whom I haue believed, and that he
is able to keep that I haue committed to his charge. ⁴⁰

However, her hope for heaven was based on a desire to live forever – a prolongation of earthly joy rather than a renunciation of life's pleasure. It was the beauty of this life that enables her to believe in the eternal:

That there is a God my Reason would soon tell me by the
wondrous workes that I see, the vast frame of the Heaven and the
Earth, the order of all things, night and day, Summer and winter,
Spring and Autvmne, The consideration of these things would
with amazement certainly resolve me that there is an Eternall
Being. ⁴¹

In the following stanza from her poem *Contemplation*, we can also find a suggestion that we as fragile human being, after tormented by 'sorrows, losses, sickness, pain'; troubled 'from foes, from friends, from dearest, near'st relation'; suffering from ambition, restlessness, and

³⁹ "Longing for Heaven". *ibid*, p.43.

⁴⁰ "To my dear children" *ibid*, p.10

⁴¹ "To my dear children" *ibid*, p.8

material things, will realize that only by giving up the world can we approach the peace and joy of eternity:

Fond fool, he takes this earth ev'n for heav'ns bower.
But sad affliction comes & makes him see
Here's neither honour, wealth, nor safety;
Only above is found all with security.⁴²

Finally, the pilgrim in New England came to the end of her life's journey. After wrestling her secular love and religious doubts with the strict social heritage at her time, after self-seeking and conflicting against dogma and struggling to be obedient, she finally determined to seek God's kingdom and rest in his abundant love. The following passage will best annotate the reason that caused her pilgrimage harder and longer than those who go direct to God:

I desire not only willingly, but thankfully, to submit to him, for I trust it is out of his abundant Love to my straying Soul which in prosperity is too much in love with the world.⁴³

Emily Dickinson

OF course - I prayed,
And Did God Care?⁴⁴

As Anne Bradstreet justified her literary writing as an approach to build her 'prepared heart' for praising God, Emily Dickinson turned the traditional idea that confined woman within domestic sphere in the 19th century into a self-imposed isolation, a subject that granted her enormous privacy for her poetic creation. When she gradually resigned from her active social activities at her 30s, she built a kingdom of her own, where she was a queen. She asserted her autonomy and freedom. She was the creator of her poetic universe. That Dickinson's poetry have recorded her inner world and examined her emotions just parallels Bradstreet's meditations on the trial of her spirit and the significance of God's universe. As Wendy Martin

⁴² "Contemplation, Stanza 32". *ibid*, P. 380

⁴³ "Submission to Chastisement from God." *ibid*, p.23.

⁴⁴ *Emily Dickinson: The complete Poems*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, Harvard College, 1951. The following quotation of Dickinson's poems will be indicated as Poems plus numbers. This quotation is from Poem 376.

has observed, Dickinson extended her inner world further than Anne Bradstreet's. In Dickinson's world, 'consciousness replaces the soul, ecstasy parallels grace, human love replaces God's sanctification, and friends form the community of saints; nature is paradise, home is heaven, language is sacramental, and experience crystallized in art creates the possibility of eternal life.'⁴⁵

Through poetry writing, Emily Dickinson was able to explore deeper into her inner life and therefore endowed her daily experience with significance. Like Anne Bradstreet, who intended to express fully the validity of her daily experience, Emily Dickinson wrote poetry that is grounded on her own perceptions and feeling of the universe - in her house and her garden. As a result, the images in her poetry are usually mixed with visual and auditory images from her observation of ordinary everyday life. The joys and sorrows of her human fellowship, celebrations of the wonders in the world, were all adopted as the objects of her meditation of the universe. It was a universe where family, close friends, flowers in the garden were valued most highly by Dickinson, rather than productivity, power, and fame that people pursued during the time of rapid economic growth in the nineteenth century. As Wendy Martin has noted:

"The young rebellious girl who dared to pick "Satan's flowers" became a woman who felt that the blossoms of her carefully tended garden and green house were emblematic of the sacredness of life on earth. ... For Dickinson, the joyous pleasures of this life will supplant the terrors of hell and the promises of heaven. ... Her journey from the polarities of salvation and damnation to the cycle of the seasons was arduous and required unusual vision and her reward was not the revelation of the saints but the revelation of the moment."⁴⁶

Compared with Anne Bradstreet's obedience to her Puritan heritage, Emily Dickinson was more able to be free from the commitment to the morals of nineteenth-century congregational Amherst than Bradstreet was to the Puritan church. However, this does not mean that self-reliance came easily to her. We can see from her poems and letters that fears and panic occupied dark corners of her mind. Often overwhelmed by fears and panic, she repeatedly fell into a psychic abyss. However, she could manage to learn from those spiritual encounters and learned to transit them with her strong will injected into her poems and letters. Her poems therefore served as her theological discourse, defending her choice of not converting. God,

⁴⁵ Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych*, 1984, p.80.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 83.

Christ, faith, the Bible, suffering, death, and immortality are fully discussed in her terse verses. As Roger Lundin has discovered, Emily Dickinson's poetry 'is in large measure about belief - about the objects of belief and its comforts, as well as belief's great uncertainties. With daring tenacity, she explored the full range of human experience in the reflections upon such subjects as God, the Bible, suffering, and immortality.'⁴⁷

Emily Dickinson's first encounter with God took place at her adolescent years. In as early as 1846, when Dickinson was fifteen, she understood that she had to face the determination of following the call of commitment to God. The conflict between accepting God as her master and remaining true to her personal convictions was highly strained. In the overwhelming waves of conversion in Amherst, she was afraid that herself might be deceived by her passionate emotion. Emily Dickinson didn't simply rebel for rebellion's sake, which is the general behavior of adolescent youth. On the contrary, she might be far more religious than those people who claimed converted to Christ in Amherst. As we can find in her later poems, God is always the major topic in her poetry. She proves herself to be an ardent believer, and wanted to be honest to herself as well as to God. The spiritual matter was between God and human beings, but not between the church and her.

According to Roger Lundin's research on the historical development of the puritan ceremony of conversion, 'the public testimony was meant to provide compelling evidence of this supernatural second birth in the believer's life.'⁴⁸ In the Seventeenth century, as reflected in Anne Bradstreet's diary, people are required to make lengthy narrative account, in public, of their spiritual struggles and the grace they received from God. In The nineteenth century, church leaders had removed those embarrassing process. A person only needed to offer the briefest assurance of belief in Christ in front of church public, a custom followed and remains prevalent until today. However, in Lundin's words, 'even such a requirement is an obstacle for young Emily Dickinson.'⁴⁹ She was taking religious matters highly personally. There was no point for any public announcement.

Several of her friends and neighbors who had been converted during the Amherst revival in the 1850s repeatedly urged her to accept Christ. With her immediate family members all converted, and despite the social pressure gathered pushing her to join the church, she remained true to her inner voice at whatever cost it may cause. Dickinson's refusal to commit her soul to Christ alienated her from her friends and the community within which she lived. It was not easy for an adult to 'stand along in rebellion'. And Emily Dickinson was just at her

⁴⁷ Roger Lundin, *Emily Dickinson: The Art of Belief*, 1998, p. 3.

⁴⁸ In mediaeval Catholic Church, by comparison, a person is born into the church by birth. He is biologically a member of the church community. Puritan Calvinism emphasizes on individual responsibility, and requires people's testimony of claiming 'rebirth' into the religious community. *ibid.* p. 49.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* pp. 49, 50.

adolescent age. The often-quoted letter, which dated 31 January 1846, could be taken as an apology for her hesitation to convert to God:

I felt that I was so easily excited that I might again be deceived and I dared not trust myself. Many conversed with me seriously and affectionately and I was almost inclined to yield to the claim of He who is greater than I. How ungrateful I am to live along day by day upon Christ bounty and still be in a state of enmity to him & his cause.⁵⁰

And at the end of the letter, Emily Dickinson concluded that she realized:

Although I am not a Christian still I feel deeply the importance of attending to the subject before it is too late.⁵¹

Emily Dickinson was far from being thoughtless. She has never stopped finding the inner truth of 'the subject' all through her life. Instead, with her precocious mind, she discussed her spiritual matters with one of her close friends, Abiah Root, who apparently were more friendly and understanding to her than other members of her circle of friends and members of the immediate family. A letter to Abiah Root, who was converted to Christianity during the Amherst revivals, dated 31 January 1846, proved that Emily Dickinson did love Christ and she had received God's abundant love for her at that time. She even suggested that Abiah become a Christian:

I was almost persuaded to be a Christian. I thought I never again could be thoughtless and worldly - and I can say that I never enjoyed such perfect peace and happiness as the short time in which I felt I had found my savior. ... I had long to hear from you - to know what decision you have made. I hope you are a Christian for I feel that it is impossible for any one to be happy without a treasure in heaven. I feel that I shall never be happy without I love Christ.

.... It was really wonderful to see how near heaven came to sinful mortals.⁵²

⁵⁰, *ibid.* p. 27.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.29.

⁵² *ibid.* p.27.

She further acknowledged the existence of God and the perfect moments she had with God:

I am along with God, & my mind is filled with many solemn thoughts which crowd themselves upon me with an irresistible force.⁵³

Perhaps God's bounty love is too much for her to afford with her delicate, complicated, highly sensitive, and often contradictory emotions. On the one hand, she viewed God's salvation as giving up and sacrificing of her earthly individual being; on the other hand, if she refused the salvation, she feared that she would become hopelessly hardened in sin. Due to the lack of proper guidance, she could only rely on herself, which only pushed her to two extremities: either uncompromising embracing her secular ecstasy, or giving up herself completely to God:

Abiah, you may be surprised to hear me speak as I do, knowing that I express no interest in the all-important subject, but I am not happy, and I regret that last term, when that golden opportunity was mine, that I did not give up and become a Christian. IT is not now too late, so my friends tell me, so my offended conscience whispers, but it is hard for me to give up the world.⁵⁴

And

This self sacrificing spirit will be the ruin of me!⁵⁵

Again and again, the helpless young girl, who was too much in love with secular joy, was trapped into a spiritual dilemma. Echoing Anne Bradstreet's spiritual confession, in which Bradstreet confessed that 'I have not found that constant Joy in my pilgrimage and refreshing which I supposed most of the servants of God have', Emily Dickinson wrote to Abiah Root:

I feel that I have not yet made my peace with God. I am still a stranger - to the delightful emotions which fill your hearts. I have perfect confidence in God & his promises & yet I know not why, I feel that the world holds a predominant place in my affections. I do not feel that I could give up all for Christ, Were I called to die.

⁵⁶

⁵³ *ibid.* p. 30.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* P. 67.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 86.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p. 38.

In fact, Emily Dickinson did not simply give up God's calling to her. She tried very hard to be a good daughter of God. She knew God would understand every effort she had made:

God is sitting here, looking into my very soul to see if I think right tho'ts. Yet I am not afraid, for I try to be right and good, and he knows every one of my struggles. He looks very gloriously, and everything bright seems dull beside him, and I don't dare to look directly at him for fear I shall die.⁵⁷

However, her faith was the plea of a good-bad little girl to the incomprehensible father in heaven:

I hope the father in the skies
Will lift his little girl -
Old fashioned - naughty - everything
Over the stile of 'Pearl'.⁵⁸

The conflict between accepting Christ as her master or remaining true to her personal convictions was highly strained. Dickinson did not simply resist for resistance's sake. The hard battle between God's protection and her fragile independence made her escape from the confusion and listen to the 'Evil voice'. Her longing to be accepted in heaven was explicated clearly:

..... I am far from being thoughtless upon the subject of religion. I continually hear Christ saying to me Daughter give me thine hearts. I hope at sometime the heavenly gates will be opened to receive me and The angels will consent to call me sister. I am continually putting off becoming a christian. Evil voices lisp in my ear - There is yet time enough. I feel that every day I live I sin more and more in closing my heart to the offers of mercy which are presented to my freely.⁵⁹

The battle ended - with Emily Dickinson's decision to take Satan's side. At the bidding of the 'Evil Voice', she has come back to this secular world and indulged herself in its pleasure. In

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p. 86.

⁵⁸ Poem 70.

⁵⁹ Letters, p. 27.

Spite of the risk of damnation, Emily Dickinson didn't trust herself to God's hands, but followed the rebellious angel – Satan, to pick up the fruits of earthly wonders:

Somehow or other I incline to other things - and Satan covers them
up with flowers, and I reach out to pick them. ... It is so much
easier to do wrong than right - so much pleasanter to be evil than
good, I don't wonder that the good angels weep - and the bad ones
sing songs.

... Where do you think I've strayed, and from what new errand
returned? I have come from 'to and fro, and walking up, and
down' the same place that Satan hailed from, when God asked him
where he's been

Don't be afraid of my imprecations, they never did anyone harm,
and they make me feel so cool, and so very much more
comfortable!⁶⁰

However, she was apparently not happy with her newly gained freedom:

Oh I struggled with great temptation, and it cost me much of
denial, but I think in the end I conquered. not a glorious victory,
but a kind of helpless victory, where triumph would come of
itself⁶¹

Once one chooses to be free from God's kingdom, it will be a way of no return. If people lost their estate, they can always buy it back; however, if people lost their faith in God, they lost it forever:

To lose one's faith - surpass
The loss of an Estate -
Because Estates can be
Replenished - faith cannot -⁶²

Now, the problem is how to live in a Godless world once when one rejects Christ's call. Her religious complex has never been entirely released through her life. Sometimes cynically,

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p.82.

⁶¹ *ibid.* pp. 98-99.

⁶² Poem 377.

sometimes mischievously, she discussed her religious matters with God at an equal level; she protected her right from God's domination; she could speak in a casual way, calling God 'Our Old Neighbor'⁶³; she acted like a child who is too self-conscious to conceal the desperation under her coyness. The relationship between God and human being is cynically regarded as a devouring cat and a helpless rat. She cried out to the 'big cat' for reserving a tiny space for the poor rat. That space may be tiny in the big cat's house, but it would be a mansion to a rat:

Papa above!
Regard a Mouse
O'erpowered by the cat!
Reserve within thy kingdom
A 'Mansion' for the Rat!⁶⁴

She could be hostile enough to ponder God's guilt. Papa above would have become a big cat that torments a helpless mouse. His games of hide-and-seek might entertain Himself, but suppose that His jokes should torture man to death?

But - should the play
Prove piercing earnest -
Should the glee - glaze -
In Death's - stiff - stare -

Would not the fun
Look too expensive!
Would not the jest -
Have crawled too far!⁶⁵

Sometimes, the God is accused as a strong-armed bully bigger boy playing nasty game with weaker ones when He:

On Moses - Seemed to fasten
With Tantalizing Play
As Boy - should deal with lesser Boy -
To prove ability⁶⁶

⁶³ Poem 623.

⁶⁴ Poem 61.

⁶⁵ Poem 338.

⁶⁶ Poem 597.

She pleaded as a helpless mouse, knowing too well that to Him she might seem to be nobody. Her plea was desperate because most of the time that 'Old Neighbor' had taken back 'more than a firmament - from me - ' 'beyond the moon and stars'.⁶⁷ In His remote seat, He seemed a Father to others but not to her. That circumstances reflects Emily Dickinson's parents' role in her family: a silent and reserved mother, a frequently absent father. She was parentless on earth as well as in heaven. At the realization of how small and silly we must look to God, if He sees us all, she wrote:

I prayed, at first, a little Girl,
Because they told me to -
But stopped, when qualified to guess
How prayer would feel - to me -
....
And often since, in Danger,
I count the force 'twould be
To have a God so strong as that
To hold my life for me⁶⁸

In the full fury of puny humanity she would not cease - and in poem after poem she struck out at the face that God showed. When she peeps into His world, she realizes:

Of God we ask one favor,
That we may be forgiven -
For what, he is presumed to know -
The Crime, from us, is hidden -
Immured the whole of Life
Within a magic Prison
We reprimand the Happiness
That too competes with Heaven.⁶⁹

Indeed, religion is neither love nor hope, it is the fanning of fears. We were charged with original sin without knowing why. Word is her weapon to fight for her independence from her Puritan ancestors' view of human's fall from Eden. Presumed to be sinned, we must in the prison of this life ask for forgiveness and remain in repentance. Never be too happy, otherwise the angry God will reject you to the gate of Heaven. However, God didn't answer to her blame. Silence is the only voice we hear from God:

⁶⁷ Poem 240.

⁶⁸ Poem 576.

⁶⁹ Poem 1601

I know that He exists.
Somewhere - in Silence -
he has hid his rare life
From our gross eyes.⁷⁰

Emily Dickinson has her strategy to deal with God's silence, too. She may worship an awesome God, yet she will not pray to the God who gives no response to her:

The Silence condescended -
Creation stopped - for Me -
But awed beyond my errand -
I worshipped - did not 'pray' -⁷¹

She framed her defiance with slang language in a flippant act:

So I pull my Stocking off
Wading in the Water
For the Disobedience's Sake
Boy that lived for 'orator'⁷²

Her character and situation denied her even a temporary release from the spiritual tension. Although she tried to smooth her fears over, they were ineradicable. Emily Dickinson made a direct punch fighting back to God's face. If God made us according to his own image, as written in the Bible, why should he make us born with sin? He is the over-all controller.

'Heavenly Father' - take to thee
The supreme iniquity
Fashioned by thy candid Hand
In a moment contraband -
Though to trust us - seem to us
More respectful - "We are Dust" -
We apologize to thee
For thine own Duplicity -⁷³

⁷⁰ Poem 338

⁷¹ Poem 564

⁷² Poem 1201

How devious is God, she asked. He claims to be our 'Heavenly Father' (the quotation marks at the beginning of the poem give the term 'Heavenly Father' satirical emphasis), but He created not innocent but spotted children. He appears not so much in candor as in hypocrisy. We desire His trust and kindness but must admit that 'We are Dust'. Still, the last admission of immortality might be a bold assertion. In a final endeavor, ironically, man makes his claim to dignity by rising to apologize to God for His own duplicity. Nevertheless, even defiance offered no solution and no respite.

Emily Dickinson studied the Bible in unusual details. She transformed the language and myths of the Bible into celebration of secular life. Like Anne Bradstreet, Dickinson incorporates biblical phrases and images in her poems. But her attitude was usually playful. The ironic use of religious mythology characterizes much of her work:

The Bible is an antique Volume -
Written by faded Men
At the suggestion of Holy Spectres⁷⁴

The consistent implication is that the Bible must be considered as a humanly, not a divinely, inspired document. It should be treated as a romance or a myth. Often under the masquerades of a child's mischievous-ness, she took the words from the Holy Scripture so irreverently that her sharp wit would turn them to her own humorous ends. If the New Testament is a myth, then Jesus is not God but a man. The relationship between Jesus and God is transformed into the relationship between agent and director:

God is a distant - stately lover -
Woos, as he states us - by His son -
verily, a vicarious Courtship⁷⁵

If God is a merchant who sells promises to human being, then His trade is not that fair. Emily Dickinson accused God's hypocrisy:

How ruthless are the gentle -
How cruel are the kind -
God broke his contract to his lamb.⁷⁶

⁷³ Poem 1461.

⁷⁴ Poem 1545.

⁷⁵ Poem 357.

⁷⁶ Poem 1439.

The drama of human's fall from Eden and the need to reconcile with an angry God were frequently mentioned in Emily Dickinson's poems. In her poems, Eden has been altered into a casual paradise, which can be found in her home:

Eden is that old-fashioned House
We dwell in every day.⁷⁷

An early poem cheerfully expresses her joy in nature and her religious creed, in which the bee, butterfly and breeze replace Jesus at the end of her pray:

In the name of the Bee –
And of the Butterfly –
and of the Breeze – Amen ⁷⁸

Dickinson's unusual poetic perception captures the surprise and wonder of everyday life. Once again, she wrote about her conviction that 'earth is paradise' in the imagination of a child. Although she lived on earth, her home is a perfect paradise. Even Angels like to be with them wherever they moved:

Who has not found the Heaven - below -
Will fail of it above -
for Angels rent the House next ours,
Wherever we remove - ⁷⁹

Unlike Anne Bradstreet, who looked for earth in Heaven, Emily Dickinson declared that paradise is on earth:

Earth is Heaven -
Whether Heaven is Heaven or not ⁸⁰

Viewing from the context of her religious struggle, this statement read all the more tragic when Heaven is just a broken dream. No longer confined in a divine plan with its false promise of eternal life, the drama of the poet's life focuses on what happens between birth

⁷⁷ Poem 677.

⁷⁸ Poem 18.

⁷⁹ Poem 1544.

⁸⁰ Poem 1408.

and death. Consciousness and self-awareness supersedes salvation, life is no longer a part of the ultimate destiny of heaven or hell. The reward of Dickinson's religious struggle is a privilege to follow her inner voice; to follow her soul's will to build her own spiritual priority:

The Soul selects her own society -
Then - shuts the Door -
To her divine Majority -
Present no more - ⁸¹

With her contradictory needs for independence and protection, when overburdened by self-doubt, Dickinson was often tempted to surrender herself to gain favor from authority. Echoing Anne Bradstreet's self-effacing strategy, Emily Dickinson assumed herself an insignificant figure and belittled herself in a charming image for gaining favor:

I have a little shape - it would not crowd your Desk - nor make
much Racket as the Mouse, that dents your Galleries -

If I might bring you what I do - not so frequent to trouble you -
and ask you if I told it clear 'twould be control, to me -

....

But, will you be my preceptor, Mr. Higginson? ⁸²

Emily Dickinson, like Anne Bradstreet, had experienced the death of their beloved young members of the family. She made no attempt to diminish the intensity of her pain with the false promises of reunion in an afterlife. However, Bradstreet's sorrow could be soothed by resigned acceptance of God's will. Although she questioned God's will of taking the lives of innocent children, she nevertheless depended on the concept of Providence to subdue her own sorrows. Dickinson, rejecting the religious comforts, had no choice but to accept her painful losses. Dickinson didn't argue with God for her loss, since she had turned down God's invitation. She believed that 'Forever - is composed of Nows - '⁸³ Anne Bradstreet's wish was to live forever in her husband's memory, while Emily Dickinson further created an eternal life for her beloved - not through God's mercy, but through the memories of the people who will remember:

⁸¹ Poem 303.

⁸² Letters, Vol. 2, p. 406.

⁸³ Poem 624.

Show me Eternity, and I will show you Memory -⁸⁴

Death made Dickinson even more intensely aware of life's beauty and brevity:

The Men that daily live
Would stand so deep in joy⁸⁵

Instead of discerning God's will, she did not perceive the world as having a divine purpose but as an end in itself. Life is all the more precious because it offers an opportunity to be a part of the immense and complicated universe, however brief:

To be alive - is Power -
Existence - in itself -
Without a further function -
Omnipotence - Enough

TO be alive and Will!
'Tis able as a God -
The Maker - of Ourselves - be what
Such being Finitude!⁸⁶

Unlike Anne Bradstreet, who felt constrained while counting her enjoyment in nature and learned to find God in the incomprehensible universe, Emily Dickinson's Nature is not God's awesome Creation. It is as simple and as lovely as her everyday life, and that is her heaven:

'Nature' is what we see - The Hill - the afternoon - Squirrel -
Eclipse - the Humble bee - Nay - Nature is heaven.⁸⁷

Although Emily Dickinson has a strong will to rival God's supremacy on her life, she couldn't manage to be entirely free from the shadow of original sin, nor can she ignore the existence of the final judgement:

And after that - There's Heaven -
The God Man's - 'Dividend' -
And Bad Men - 'go to Jail' -

⁸⁴ Letters, Vol. 3, p.911.

⁸⁵ Poem 1717.

⁸⁶ Poem 677.

⁸⁷ Poem 668.

I guess - ⁸⁸

I never spoke with God
Nor visited in Heaven -
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the Checks were given - ⁸⁹

To Anne Bradstreet, life was an errand into the wilderness of the New World, but Emily Dickinson was on errand from the labyrinth of human mind. Whereas Bradstreet prayed for guidance through life's snares, Dickinson sought for her spiritual independence and explored the secrets of the mysterious universe. She was grateful for the awesome adventure that life offered her.

With open eyes and free will, she started her mind's adventure, left God in behind, completely on herself own. The adventure was a gamble, either won her the domination of her spiritual territory, or exhausted her to collapse:

Soul, take thy risk,
With Death to be
Were better than be not
With thee ⁹⁰

On her lonely journey of exploration, she realized that she would never find the 'Golden Fleece' that will end her quest. The Golden Fleece is nowhere to be found. It is beyond the reach of human being:

Finding is the first Act
The second, lose,
Third, Expedition for
the 'Golden Fleece'

Fourth, no Discovery -
Fifth, no Crew -
Finally, no Golden Fleece -
Jason - shame – too.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Poem 234.

⁸⁹ Poem 1052.

⁹⁰ Poem 1151.

⁹¹ Poem 870.

After all these spiritual struggles and fights, Dickinson did not regret for her choice. The pleasure she had found in this world would make God jealous of her - the winner of her life:

In the long Paradise of Light
No moment will there be
When I shall long for Earthly Play
And mortal company ⁹²

God is indeed a jealous God -
He cannot bear to see
That we had rather not with Him
But with each other play. ⁹³

⁹² Poem 1145.

⁹³ Poem 1719.

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