



Feminism in Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672)

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While women in 17th century England, Holland, and France were writing works arguing that women were reasoning human beings and should be allowed to advance, the only woman in Colonial America to do so was Anne Bradstreet. Her singular voice from the Massachusetts wilderness approached the subject with subtlety and straightforward comment. Her *Prologue* rebuked men for scorning women's writings. Her *Quaternions* presented sisters and daughters disputing with grace and humor the primary principle of the universe and the power of unity. Her *Four Monarchs* celebrated queens for their abilities to lead nations with intelligent skill. Her poem *Dialogue between Old England and New, Concerning their Present Troubles, Anno 1642* again chose women protagonists, the mother country and colonial daughter in political and religious discourse.

In her elegiac *Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory*, Bradstreet argued that chauvinism should be put to rest, as the reign of such a queen demonstrates, and to say that women cannot "reason" should be considered "slander" if not "treason." Aware of ironies, conflicting ideas, uncertainties, and proprieties, she developed a feminist philosophy that determines the nature of women to be reasoning, capable of virtue, of political leadership, and of contributing to family and larger community. An obedient daughter, Bradstreet was fortunately encouraged by her father to be educated and express her opinion, but as a female, discouraged by John Winthrop to write. As a member of the Puritan community, subject to patriarchal authority, she yet found equality with her husband through love, he being "friend," the "two" as "one." As a mother, she granted herself the right to formulate her own Puritan ethics, leaving "nothing but mine" for her children. Thus, she deigned her "legacies"- her progeny and reflections in writing, to raise the level of the worldly community and the glory of the heavenly.

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