



Puritanism in Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672)

Therese Boos Dykeman

Puritanism was an interpretation of Christianity that developed as a limited Calvinism. John Winthrop determined that Puritanism should flourish in colonial America as a “city upon a Hill.” As governor and religious leader, he entwined property titles and church membership. Male members elected town’s “selectmen.” A recipient of this vision, Anne Bradstreet was, however, a “thinking” Puritan, a “doubting” one, and so questioned the meaning of the contradictions she observed and lived with, coming to advance a more liberal Puritanism. Bradstreet’s writings minimized the notion of God’s elect, its patriarchy in dictating to women, and its stance on depravity and of distancing parent and child. Her Quaternion poems present women making wide and profound observations on the universe and man from pre-Socratic and Newtonian perspectives. Their judging of the preeminance of spirit and importance of unity, provides a foundation for the “The Four Monarchies” that value the political action of women leaders. Using the logic of “similitude,” Bradstreet formulated her Puritan notions of divinity and morality in seventy-seven aphoristic essays in *The Meditations*.

Her virtue ethics advocated: compassion (love being a word she repeated often), humility as opposed to self-aggrandizement, chastity, and wisdom (educating children by fitting nurture with nature and understanding reflection as inner action), and also the traditional patience, work, cleanliness, simplicity, and plain and truthful speech. God’s desire being sometimes unclear, one should nevertheless practice faith and hope that He be near, just, and merciful. She argued the importance of attitude toward human actions. By human action one gains “spiritual advantage,” especially actions within community, for “God will have us beholden one to another.” Convinced that the Church of England needed reform and that Catholics should be excluded, Bradstreet yet displayed an outlook akin to that of the Catholic nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-95).

Primary Sources:

Bradstreet, Anne. 2010. Jeannine Hensley (ed.). *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*. Cambridge

MA: Belknap Press.

John Harvard Ellis (ed.). 1962. *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Verse*. 1962. NY: Peter Smith.

Secondary Sources:

Cowell, Pattie and Ann Stanford (eds.). 1983. *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*. Boston: G.K. Hall.

Dykeman, Therese Boos (ed.). 1993. *American Women Philosophers 1650-1930: Six Exemplary Thinkers*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Kellogg, D.B. 2010. *Anne Bradstreet*. Dallas: Thomas Nelson.

Lee, Muna. 1960. Steinman Poetry Lecture at Tufts University (13 April).

Morgan, Edmund S. 1965. *Puritan Political Ideas 1558-1794*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Piercy, Josephine K. 1939 *Studies in Literary Types in Seventeenth-Century America*, New Haven: Yale UP.

Shimek, Suzanne. 2000. "The Tenth Muses Lately Sprung up in the Americas: The Borders of the Female Subject in Sor Juana's *First Dream* and Anne Bradstreet's 'Contemplations'". *Legacy*. vol. 17, no.1. 1-17.

Stanford, Ann. 1974. *Anne Bradstreet the Worldly Puritan: An Introduction to her Poetry*. NY: Burt Franklin & Co.

Stikkers, Kenneth. 2006. "Logics of Similitude and Logics of Difference in American and Contemporary Continental Philosophy". *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 20. 115-21

White, Elizabeth Wade. 1971. *Anne Bradstreet: "The Tenth Muse."* NY: Oxford UP.

Keywords:

calvinism, community, divinity, god, humility, love, morality, patriarchy, puritanism, virtues, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz