

تتبع جذور الحركة النسوية في شعر آن برادستريت

Tracing the Roots of Feminism in Anne Bradstreet's Poetry

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جامعة تمنراست

ملخص:

كانت آن برادستريت أول شاعرة أمريكية منشورة. وتظل واحدة من الشعراء الأكثر تأثيرا في الأدب الأمريكي. في مواجهة الأعراف البيوريتانية التقييدية ووجهات النظر الضيقة لمجتمعها، لا تزال أعمال برادستريت تجد طريقها لتحدي أدوار الجنسين التي عفا عليها الزمن من خلال تأكيد صوتها الأنثوي وأسلوبها الإبداعي في مجتمع يهيمن عليه الذكور. تستكشف برادستريت في شعرها الصراع بين الصوت الأنثوي ووجهات النظر الاجتماعية التقليدية، وتقدم تصورات عميقة لتعقيدات تجارب المرأة فيما يتعلق بالأمومة والزواج والهوية الأنثوية. قصائدها مثل "المقدمة" و"إلى زوجي العزيز والحب" تنتقد بمهارة القيود المفروضة بشكل منهجي على النساء بينما تشجع وتحتفل بقوة الصوت الأنثوي. تتناول هذه المقالة أعمال آن برادستريت في ضوء النقد الأدبي النسوي، بحجة أن أعمالها لا تعكس فقط التجربة غير السارة لامرأة تكافح في أمريكا في القرن السابع عشر، بل تمهد الطريق أيضاً للحركات النسوية التي ستزدهر خلال القرون القادمة، مما يجعلها شخصية رائدة في تاريخ الأدب النسوي. تعتمد هذه المقالة على منهجية القراءة الدقيقة والنهج النسوي للنصوص المستهدفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البيوريتانية، الشعر، النسوية، النقد الأدبي، الأنثى.

Abstract:

Anne Bradstreet was the first published American female poet. She remains one of the most influential poets in American literature. Against the restrictive Puritan conventions and narrow views of her society, Bradstreet's works still found their way to challenging outdated gender roles by asserting her female voice and creative style in a male-dominated society. In her poetry, Bradstreet explores the conflict between the female voice and the traditional social views, offering profound perceptions of the complexities of women's experiences regarding motherhood, marriage, and female identity. Her poems like "The Prologue" and "To My Dear and Loving Husband" deftly critique restrictions systematically imposed on women while encouraging and celebrating the power of the female voice. The present article examines

Anne Bradstreet's works in light of feminist literary criticism, arguing that her works not only reflect the unpleasant experience of a struggling woman during 17th century America but also pave the way for the feminist movements that would thrive during the coming centuries, thus making her a leading figure in the history of feminist literature. This article employs a close-reading methodology and a feminist approach to the target texts.

Keywords: Puritan, Poetry, Feminism, Literary Criticism, Female.

1. Introduction:

In 1527, the Pope of Rome, Clement VII, refused Henry VIII's appeals to grant him a divorce from his first wife Catherine of Aragon. Determined, Henry VIII publicly announced his disagreement with the Roman Catholic Church, leading to his excommunication from the Church of Rome. Henry VIII did not stop here when he issued the Act of Supremacy in 1534, thus establishing the Protestant Church of England with him as its supreme head .

Henry VIII's reformation led to an endless feud between the Catholics and the Protestants. Years later, when Queen Elizabeth I took the crown, her Protestant followers could not accept giving up their revenge against the Catholics who had blood in their hands and who allegedly dirtied the Church of England with their unbiblical practices. As a result, Queen Elizabeth I persecuted the group, thus forcing them to flee England .

In light of these events, the Puritans —now called Pilgrims— sought refuge in New England, where they could practice their religion without constraints. The new land required newly established laws and regulations, especially regarding gender roles. In this regard, men had to be named subjects, whereas, women were the non-subjects. The Puritans in New England had to indoctrinate the belief that men were the leaders; whereas, women were the ones being led .

Receiving limited access to education and knowledge, Puritan women were only allowed biblical knowledge at the church; otherwise, they would go back to their main mission to look after their husbands and children. This narrow vision regarding gender roles, unjustly imprisoned women's intellect, suppressing their voice to reflect on their experiences and express their true identity properly .

In this sense, Anne Bradstreet made no exception. However, being in a family of politicians gave her a privilege, where she could access a sort of extended education at home. A rich library at home provided Bradstreet with a deeper knowledge, especially of ancient civilizations and their literature. Yet, despite all her privileges, Bradstreet still struggled with the Puritan restrictions imposed on women at the time .

With her works, Bradstreet shows her disdain towards the male-dominated world where she lives and asserts her powerful female voice. This leaves the female poet prone to criticism; nonetheless, she bravely continues making her female voice loud and clear. Bradstreet eventually succeeded in becoming a pioneer in the history of American literature, making her one of the crucially stoical writers in the world .

Despite living in a patriarchal society, traces of early feminism are to be found in Bradstreet's works. In "The Prologue," for instance, Bradstreet confronts her society's limited expectations by ridiculing the Puritan belief that women's intellect is by nature inferior to that of men: "Cause Nature made it so irreparable".

Bradstreet knew too well that she could not change her society's long-held Puritan beliefs solely with her pen. However, she also realized that her attempts would not be disappointing and would sooner make female voices louder. Not forgetting her domestic responsibilities and affection for her family, Bradstreet's works reveal her intense desire to be more than merely a housewife or a mother. In doing so, Bradstreet rejects the conventional roles women were expected to fulfill.

Although she was not explicitly identified as a feminist writer in the modern sense, Bradstreet's writing truly manifested as an early feminist thought. Her assertive voice and creative agency in a patriarchal world helped lay the foundation for future generations of female and feminist writers. Thus, Bradstreet's true legacy lies in her bravely mastering literary craftsmanship which had long been considered a male craft.

1. Literature Review

Bradstreet's groundbreaking role as a female and feminist writer is undeniable in the literary world. Her poems unfold her serious awareness of the restrictions imposed on women and her aspiration for acknowledgment and appreciation of her creative talent. Writing with an assertive tone, Bradstreet made sure not to go unrecognized in a world dominated by men.

Through her works, Bradstreet reflects on her experiences as a female Puritan writer, but also reflects on her experiences as a Puritan female writer and reveals how 17th-century Puritan women lived in New England. Bradstreet's works, thus, serve as a lens through which one can see the daily struggles of Puritan women during colonial America. In their article, "Women Writers in American Literary History: A Journey of Influence and Resilience," Qizi & Erkinovich (2024) explain how "Anne Bradstreet's poetry provided a glimpse into the struggles and aspirations of Puritan women" (114).

One of the key ideas that Bradstreet strongly advocated in her writing is the importance of faith in God. Besides being good housewives and caring mothers, Puritan women had to show constant gratitude to the grace of God. And even in times of distress, Puritan women were not to show any lack of faith in God. In her poem, "Verses upon the Burning of Our House," Bradstreet again shows the unique faith Puritan women demonstrated. As the reader is watching the image of the burning house, Bradstreet seeks solace within the grace of God, indicating that even Bradstreet did not dare reject God's preaching:

"And to my God, my heart did cry / To straighten me in my Distress."

In their article, "The Imagery Types Analysis of "Verses upon the Burning of our House" Poetry Intrinsic Elements by Anne Bradstreet," Augustina & Laksmi (2024) explain that regardless of her distress, "Bradstreet draws on her Puritan faith to find solace in

the belief that her true home is in heaven" (98). By doing so, Bradstreet reaffirms her carelessness toward earthly belongings, the highest form of piety Puritan women could show.

Anne Bradstreet had a powerful and assertive voice that she was not ashamed to make loud and clear. However, even when feeling strong and confident, Bradstreet knew too well not to wage war against the Puritan systemic beliefs that a woman's most crucial priority is the wellbeing of her household. This probably explains why her brother-in-law published her first-ever poetry collection in London. Many critics consider the act to vouch for Bradstreet as a devout Puritan wife and mother, and her writing was done at the expense of her sleeping time and not at the expense of her husband and children.

In his thesis, "Subtle Pedagogy: The Subversion of Cultural Hegemony in Colonial Poetics," Ian Pinkerton (2023) argues that Bradstreet was not reckless enough to discard her duties as a Puritan mother and housewife, for she was well-accustomed to the Puritan customs. Pinkerton continues to explain that her writing endangered her reputation, immediately threatening her husband who could consider excessive writing frivolous. With her brother-in-law taking the liberty to publish Bradstreet's works in London, he attests to the virtue of Bradstreet as a good Puritan woman, justifying that her writing was only supplemental (20).

By speaking with such an assertive voice, Bradstreet was not aspiring for a revolt against social norms, more than affirming her female identity. Through her works, she realized the importance of having her female voice heard and the more the patriarchal norms grew tighter the more she was determined in her quest. In her thesis: "The Struggle for Identity: How Female Writers Find their Voice," Allison, J. Call (2022) explains that when ignoring women's voices, they are denied the ability to express themselves properly. The author continues to argue that in this regard, male voices were prioritized becoming more relevant, leading to denying women's experiences and, hence, their identities (15).

3. Puritanism and Gender Roles

In 17th-century New England, there was a strong adherence to religious dogma, often accompanied by strict views on gender roles. The Puritan society expected women to embrace total submission to the church and men, emphasizing their domestic obligations. Their piety and faith in God were not complete until accepting the domination of men over the public and intellectual fields. In this male-dominated world, Anne Bradstreet managed to produce her works where she brilliantly blended her female expression with the Puritan values of her time.

Besides being the first published American female poet, Bradstreet is unquestionably a pioneer in American feministic literature. Her touchpoint remains crucial as she touches upon the compromises of gender expectations, within the context of 17th-century Puritan theology. Her works provide a meticulous examination of gender roles often critiquing the restrictive roles given to Puritan women.

Bradstreet's unique perspective on gender and faith is what makes her a pioneer in American literature. In her essay, "A Feminist Reading of Anne Bradstreet's Poem 'The

Prologue," Kara (2023) explains that "in her works, [Bradstreet] addressed the gender-based power dynamic of a patriarchal society, drawing attention to the systemic inequality women were subjected to and highlighting the struggles of navigating a male-dominated world" (Chapter 14, 254).

The Puritan society encouraged women's submission to men, stemming this strongly-held belief from biblical interpretations that viewed women as inferior to men. According to this belief, women existed primarily to be helpmates to their husbands, look after their children, and safeguard the general fabric of the family. The Puritan atmosphere, thus, did not motivate women to publicly display their intellectual potential, believing that would only further distract them from performing their domestic and spiritual duties.

Through her works, Bradstreet recognizes her society's expectations. When she appears to be abiding by the social norms of Puritan society, she deftly critiques them by affirming her female capabilities only to reflect her intellectual depth. In "The Prologue," Bradstreet (1650) downplays her poetic skills when she says:

"I am obnoxious to each carping tongue || Who says my hand a needle better fits."

In her poems, Bradstreet embraces faith. On the contrary, she shapes her perception through her faith in God, which constitutes the framework for her critique of traditional gender roles. Her works often reveal the struggling disparities between divine authority and her passion for a small acknowledgment of her female intelligence. In her poem "In Honor of that High and Mighty Princess, Queen Elizabeth," Bradstreet (1643) celebrates the powerful figure a woman can be, implying that women can achieve intellectual excellence.

Besides asserting her female voice, Bradstreet paved the way for other women to reach for their inner strengths. Her poetry initiated the recognition of women's writing, which would later lead to "women's creative expression following their emancipation from the mundane responsibilities of domestic life" (Sharma, 2023, 214). Bradstreet's faithful insights connect with her personal experiences. In her poem, "Before the Birth of one of Her Children," Bradstreet (1678) contemplates mortality and her role as a mother; thus, combining her fragility with her inner spirituality. She states:

"If any worth or virtue were in me || Let that live freshly in thy memory" (Bradstreet, 1678).

Through the poem, Bradstreet successfully injects faithful doses into her personal and spiritual life, allowing transcendental thoughts of traditional gender roles. By doing so, she attempts to recreate her personal and spiritual experiences within the context of Puritanism.

Moreover, through her works, Bradstreet does not seemingly want to break conventional Puritan beliefs. However, she intends to be defiant to these restrictions. On the one hand, and through her poetry she strongly demands her own space as a woman in a male-dominated world. On the other hand, she boldly explores topics restricted in the Puritan society, such as; love. In her poem, "To My Dear and Loving Husband," Bradstreet (1678) challenges the Puritan society by refusing to downplay romance within marriage. The

emotional intensity in the poem emphasizes Bradstreet's assertive statement, reflecting the rightfulness of her experiences and inclinations.

Bradstreet's deft critique of the Puritan traditional gender roles sets her apart as a literary and feminist pioneer. Her poetry still echoes as an early feministic expression, in light of a male-dominated community. Her poetry is also considered a quiet rebellion in the face of the Puritan restrictions. Bradstreet's writing style tends to be compelling when it comes to confronting the convoluted dynamics of the Puritan thoughts on gender roles.

Knowing that she would only lose, Bradstreet's most important quest was not to challenge the Puritan predefined thoughts on gender roles. Instead, she "struggled to write poetry in a society that was hostile to the imagination. Her voice was sometimes subdued by religious concerns; nevertheless, she was able to express the range of her feelings" (Martin, 1984, p. 19). By doing so, Bradstreet already succeeded in setting foot on the journey of a thousand miles towards achieving gender equality.

As Bradstreet expresses thoughts of devotion to God, her husband, and children, she subtly displays her complete devotion to the Puritan social and religious norms. On the one hand, she reassures everyone she is not an imminent menace. On the other hand, Bradstreet's poetry demonstrates her inner resentment of the silence imposed on Puritan women; by asserting a strong female voice in her writing.

4. Feminist Elements in Bradstreet's Poetry

Having to live in a hostile environment that was hell-bent on silencing women's voices, was the biggest challenge facing Bradstreet. However, with her unprecedented dedication and willpower, she proved that women can keep up with men, and could even surpass them in the race of excellence; making her poetry feministic par excellence.

Through her writing, Bradstreet often critiques the conventional narrow-mindedness of the Puritan society regarding feminism and gender roles. In "The Prologue," she subtly warns against anyone who tries to dismiss her work based on her gender:

"I am obnoxious to each carping tongue || Who says my hand a needle better fits."

Through these two lines, Bradstreet makes a strong decisive statement that her poetry should not be undermined because of her gender. Her self-deprecating tone covers her assertive voice, and her unnegotiable right to write. In doing so, Bradstreet firmly wants her poetry to be taken seriously, and not treated as an undermined, second-class person.

Besides making her female voice loud and clear, Bradstreet's works showcase the significance of the female voice in a male-dominated world. In "In Honor of That High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory," Bradstreet (1643) praises and honors Queen Elizabeth I for her tremendous achievements. In her poem, Bradstreet presents Queen Elizabeth I as a powerful female leader whose successes continue to resonate over the ages. She writes:

"Nay Masculines, you have thus tax'd us long || But she, though dead, will vindicate our wrong."

In these two lines, Bradstreet emphasizes the concrete achievements of a female ruler (Queen Elizabeth I), thus challenging the Puritan belief of women's inherent weakness compared to men. Bradstreet, then, reveals her indifference to men's insecurities allowing them to feel women's intellectual capabilities. In this poem, Bradstreet is not afraid to show her admiration for Queen Elizabeth I, reflecting her faith in women's potential to achieve greatness that could surpass that of men.

In addition, Bradstreet's works interpret her dedication to trying to explore her agency in parallel to her emotional depth. In her poem, "To My Dear and Loving Husband," she (1678) reveals her deep sense of love and affection, introducing a newer vision of marriage within the context of mutual respect and lifelong partnership. The poem underlines Bradstreet's bold move in her desire to challenge the patronizing thoughts restricting women's roles as submissive wives at the expense of their individuality.

Bradstreet's strong inner voice incessantly grows to the point where she is no longer afraid to bring out her inner feelings and thoughts. In her poem, "Before the Birth of One of Her Children," she (1678) outpours her thoughts on mortality with a degree unprecedented in agency and courage. In this poem, Bradstreet identifies the risks of childbirth while defining her hopes of how she wants to be remembered. She writes:

"If any worth of virtue were in me || Let that live freshly in thy memory."

These two lines emphasize Bradstreet's shifting voice from merely a mother or wife to a deeper sense of her individuality, marking her early feminist tone. However, Bradstreet's early feminism was quite different and did not fit into the modern sense of feminism. The latter broadly challenges the harmonious devotion found between couples, replacing it with a biased affection towards sisterhood among women. In her book, *Anne Bradstreet, Passionate Femininity*, Wilson (2021) explains:

Anne Bradstreet simply does not fit into our contemporary categories. She was not a feminist in the modern sense, and neither was she an early ur-feminist. She was an intelligent woman who objected to boorish behavior in men, and she also was averse to unscriptural criticism of her work. (p. 32)

Bradstreet's works could not be labeled feministic if they did not reject and challenge the patronizing and restrictive thoughts of the Puritan society. While she wrote within the Puritan framework, Bradstreet deftly denies her acceptance of the patriarchal chauvinistic views of her society. Her promotion of women's intellect and their individuality catapults her strong desire to challenge the conventional restrictive gender roles.

Bradstreet was in love with her female voice. Her poem, "The Author to Her Book" (1678) attests to her deep affection for her pen, cherishing her poetry just as much as she cherished God and her family. In the poem, she personifies her writing as if it were a child, revealing her intricate relationship with her work. She writes:

"Thou ill-form'd offspring of my feeble brain || Who after birth didst by my side remain."

In these two lines, Bradstreet expresses her feelings towards her poetry resembling it to be her offspring. However, her expression of "my feeble brain," translates her frustration with the social limitations, while at the same time strongly reverting to her pride and ability as an intellectual creator.

Bradstreet's poetry might not fit in the modern sense of feminism. However, her early attempts are no less significant, for her sweat and struggles paved the long way for the modern feminist literary movements. Her constant intellectual attempts in a wide-ranging restrictive society, set firm grounds for future generations of women writers. Her celebration of female intellectual power and critique of conventional gender roles continue to inspire discussions in modern feminist thought. In the end, one can safely claim that Bradstreet's biggest triumph lies in the fact that she "was able to express her divergent thoughts towards the patriarchal society by writing as the classical and contemporary male writers, whose works she had the chance read throughout her life" (Thosi, 2018, p. 78).

5. Themes in Bradstreet's Poetry

In her works, Bradstreet broadly explores themes of individuality, love, spiritual reflections, and cultural opinion of her poetry. In her poetry, Bradstreet focuses on themes of faith, loyalty, nature, and the inner conflicts within the Puritan society. Most of Bradstreet's works emphasize the convoluted interplay of her personal experience with her Puritan set of values.

Living in a society that, to say the least, was vehemently religious; Bradstreet sought to closely examine broad human issues, filtering them according to her personal perspective. In doing so, her themes range from individual expressions pertaining to her family to deeper contemplations on faith and mortality. Thus, allowing the reader a glimpse into 17th-century Puritan thought.

This wonderful combination of the heavens and earth is crucial to understanding the critical thinking of Bradstreet. Through her work, she establishes a firm tone that achieving the harmony between the heavens and earth is the sublime thought she aspired for. In her book, *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich*, Martin (1984) argues that "[Bradstreet's] poetry demonstrates that her belief in heaven was a sublimated expression of her love of life on earth" (p. 15).

In addition, Bradstreet focused on the recurrent theme of her faith and devotion to God. Her works often resonate with her higher sense of piety and righteousness. Furthermore, Bradstreet's poetry often tackles questions of faith and the true relationship of humans with God. Despite her hardships of having to live in a strict society, Bradstreet never shows any decline in her reliance on divine grace. In her poem, "Upon the Burning of Our House," Bradstreet (1666) reflects on the image of her now destroyed home, immediately reassuring her utter faith in God's plan. She writes:

"And to my God, my heart did cry || To straighten me in my Distress."

In these two lines, Bradstreet engages in a spiritual divine invocation, while seeking God's providence in her moments of distress. By doing so, she aspires to reach the full potential of her faith in God, which is the core concern of Puritan theology. Bradstreet once again reveals her inseparable connection with God whose providence helped her in many of her distressful times.

Moreover, in many of her works, Bradstreet emphasizes themes of love and family. Her inequivalent affection for her husband and children is a central theme in her work. Her work had a big share of talking about her husband, children, and parents, reflecting her heartfelt love and passion for her family. Her poem, "To My Dear and Loving Husband" (1678) demonstrates her profound love for her husband. She writes:

"If ever two were one, then surely we; || If ever man were loved by wife, then thee."

In these two lines, Bradstreet boldly expresses her deep love and affection for her husband. This move reflects her straightforward behavior in expressing herself openly as long as she is not contradicting God's preaching. By doing so, she is putting the Puritan norms of her society to the test; where they would either accept it or not. In her essay, "A feminist reading of Anne Bradstreet's poem 'The Prologue,'" Kara (2023) explains:

Puritan women were unfamiliar with the language of love even when they were married. They were expected to keep their feelings to themselves and never reveal them to others. In the absence of her husband, Bradstreet began to compose love poems to him. In the poem, she expresses her gratitude to her husband for their loving relationship. (p. 262)

Bradstreet's poetry, thus, challenges the traditional restrictive role assigned to women, forbidding them from even showing their love to their legitimate husbands. This act indicates Bradstreet was ahead of her time both in terms of being a woman and an intellectual.

Bradstreet was a poet who knew well how to express her emotions and feelings. Her individuality was a central theme in many of her works, expressing every up and down moment in her life. Besides experiencing love and happiness in her life, Bradstreet also witnessed moments of sadness and loss of hope. In such moments, she would explore themes of mortality and temporariness of the human life.

Having to live in a time when death was constantly present, led Bradstreet to frequently contemplate mortality and the transient nature of human life. In her poem, "Before the Birth of One of Her Children," Bradstreet (1678) asserts her Puritan faithful voice. She writes:

"The sentence past is most irrevocable || A common thing, yet oh, inevitable."

In these two lines, Bradstreet strongly connects with her mortality, accepting it as God's providence bestowed upon human beings. Despite its discomfoting impact, the truth remains that humans are more beautiful when they are mortal. Anne Bradstreet recognizes this fact and accepts it. Her contemplations on mortality are frequently tempered by her strong belief in eternal life, revealing the Puritan determination to prepare for the afterlife.

This wonderful combination of life and death in Bradstreet's work is better explained by Matiu (2023), in his essay "Anne Bradstreet's "Marriage" Poems and the Condition of the Puritan Woman in Seventeenth-century America," arguing that in her poem "[Bradstreet] defamiliarizes the subject of childbirth turning the poem into a "practical document, a little testament" indeed, as Rich describes it, but also into a meditation about death and immortality" (p. 26).

Through a diverse variety of her works, Bradstreet proves once again that she is a full poet par excellence. Despite living within the restrictive confines and narrow-mindedness of the Puritan society, Bradstreet defies all hardships and challenges the driving machine of Puritanism.

6. Challenges and Legacy

As argued before, Bradstreet's writing journey was not easy at all. Her works can be said to have been written in sweat and blood, snatching her worth that continues to resonate throughout the ages. Overcoming the harsh criticism of the Puritan society was Bradstreet's most crucial mission. Ultimately, and against all these challenges Bradstreet's poetry remains the backbone of early American literature, while still inspiring modern discussions in literary criticism.

As an English woman living in 17th-century America, Bradstreet had already to survive the new challenges posed by the new environment. The strong impact of detachment alone from her initial environment in England was enough to break the strongest of human beings. Then, besides the unfamiliar hardships of New England, Bradstreet found herself living in a society that relegated women to domestic affairs; while intellectual and literary endeavors were restricted to men.

To make it worse, Bradstreet was fully aware of the harsh criticism she was receiving from her male compatriots, for no reason except being an exceptional woman. In her poem, "The Prologue," Bradstreet (1650) recognizes and acknowledges this criticism for being a female poet. She writes:

"I am obnoxious to each carping tongue || Who says my hand a needle better fits."

Bradstreet's full awareness of the Puritan society made her devise a new strategy, based on individual humility and self-deprecation. By doing so, she allowed more chances for her work to gain more acceptance, while deftly critiquing the unjust biases against women. In her dissertation "Anne Bradstreet: Revisiting Humanist, Puritan, and Feminist Elements in the Poet's Works," Thosi (2018) better explains this strategy, saying:

[Bradstreet] seems to be deprecating her work by saying it is faulty, but that, as she writes, these flaws should be expected from a woman's work (which one may assume not her opinion in fact, but criticism towards men who consider women inferior). (p. 41)

Another challenge Bradstreet had to face while writing was having to balance her gift with the Puritan belief system. According to the Puritan belief system, women had to be

modest and submissive to God and men. For a Puritan woman to write poetry, especially on personal and emotional themes, was perceived as an act of self-pride or vanity. To survive that, Bradstreet had to reconcile her artistic motivation with her Puritan faith, framing her art as God's providence rather than her achievement.

To make sure her male Puritan compatriots understood her stance, Bradstreet often had to feign flaws and miscreation in her work; only this way she could be left to continue writing. In her poem, "The Author to Her Book," Bradstreet (1678) personifies her poetry as a miscreated child. She writes:

"Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain."

In this line, Bradstreet admits that her creation is naturally defective. However, her embarrassment is covered by her undertone of subdued pride. In doing so, she confesses that the challenge of facing the driving machine of Puritanism was immense and that she could not face it alone. However, she was also certain that her relentless attempts would eventually pay off, and that no effort is wasted.

Nonetheless, despite all these growing challenges, Bradstreet's incessant efforts finally paid off. Earning the title of the first American published poet, Bradstreet's pioneering voice continues to resonate in today's world; making her one of the leading figures both in early and modern literary feminist criticism. Her reputation remains intact, while her legacy continues to inspire feminist critical thought.

One of the key legacies of Bradstreet is that her work often transcends her time. At times when women were considered second-class citizens, Bradstreet proved the opposite demonstrating that women also had talent equal to that of men that could sometimes even trespass them. Thus, finding the courage to broach sensitive themes of personal love and affection, showcased Bradstreet's unprecedented resilience and her deep sense of things.

In addition, through Bradstreet's works modern feminist writers now have the chance to see what America was like back in the 17th century. Through her proto-feminist thought, Bradstreet undisputedly sits on top of the pyramid of modern feminist critical thought. Despite her adherence to most of the norms of her time, her critique of the conventional gender roles and celebration of the female voice and their intellect illustrates her growing vision. This wonderful combination found in Bradstreet's works is better explained in Kara's (2023) essay "A Feminist Reading of Anne Bradstreet's Poem 'The Prologue,'" stating:

Anne Bradstreet's poetry has been characterized by a unique combination of two distinct features. Her writings demonstrate a strong foundation in Puritan beliefs, while simultaneously offering a critique of the patriarchal system that seeks to restrict and silence women. Despite the apparent opposition between these two aspects, Bradstreet has managed to combine them in her works, creating a powerful and resonant voice that challenges traditional gender roles and expectation (p. 254).

Despite all that has been said regarding Bradstreet's works, she remains a universally prominent literary figure. Her inequivalent determination and astute dedication add to her

global literary reputation, making her a liable cornerstone both in early American literature and modern feministic critical thought.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Bradstreet's poetry constitutes the backbone of early American feminist thought. Through her work, the poet managed to reflect the roots of this thought, offering a thorough understanding of the ways women dealt with the social expectations in 17th-century America. Being the first American published female poet, Bradstreet's worth manifests not only through her literary merits but also through her mild yet critical stance on the conventional gender roles in the Puritan male-dominated society. Her works often examine themes of individuality, personal experience, faith in God, and her intellectual ambitions; while coming to terms with the limitations imposed on women in her society.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, Bradstreet's poetry appears to provide an intriguing combination of compliance and resistance. While she frequently abides by the Puritan conventional roles assigned to women as wives or mothers, she seeks alternative ways to challenge the submissive role relegated to her as a woman. Through many of her works, Bradstreet explores domestic topics related to her personal experience as a woman, such as; love, spirituality, loyalty, loss, and faith in God; thus, recouring back to the depths of her spiritual and intellectual life.

Bradstreet's work also rejects the Puritan conventional thought on gender roles, and how women were assigned submissive roles pertaining only to domestic duties. In her "The Prologue," for instance, she ironically identifies the gendered conventions of her time, often discouraging women from seeking intellectual excellence. Despite her deliberate self-deprecating technique, she adheres to her right to write. In doing so, not only did she make her voice heard but also engaged in a larger feminist agenda of her time; promoting the true worth of women and their capabilities in achieving intellectual greatness.

In addition, Bradstreet's themes of spirituality indicate her total understanding of the woman's true place within the context of Puritan devotion. In times when many of her works revolve around women's expected piety, her faithful invocations also indicate a degree of intellectual autonomy. This is usually observed through the struggle between her own beliefs and the restrictive expectations of her society on women, explaining how faith and gender are both formed by individual understanding and social norms.

Eventually, Bradstreet's works remain pivotal in understanding the progression of feminist critical thought. Through her poetry, she displays the hardships facing women, and their incessant ways to reinforce their female identities and communicate their creativity within the status quo. Bradstreet's works not only stand out for their literary merit but also serve as a resonating evolutionary historical account, commemorating a timeless testament to the power of women's voices. Through Bradstreet's works, the reader is reminded that feminism is a deeply-rooted, multifaceted trend that could also lie in the discreet experiences of the majority of voiceless women.

8. References

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