

## CRITICS DISCUSS ANNE BRADSTREET

"Throughout Puritan verse--excluding that which was merely metrical theologizing or plain preaching dressed up with rhyme--there is a sense of tension, arising from the conflict between the Puritan's genuine and passionate emotion and the restraints imposed by his beliefs and his environment. There is a stricter tension too, common to most religious poets, produced by his sense of the inadequacy of any finite means to express the full quality of his feeling or the full beauty of religious truth. The Puritan's theme is always in the last analysis infinite and so beyond the reach of concrete words and images.... Here and there in Anne Bradstreet there can be felt also the strain set up between the essential instinctive emotion and the bonds drawn tight against full expression by elements in the Puritan's way of thought."

Murdock

*Literature and Theology in Colonial New England*  
(Harper, 1949) 150-51

"...Anne Bradstreet's occasional lyrics, inspired by the native setting or the homely incidents of her daily life, show that a Puritan could further combine piety with sexual passion, love of children and good furniture, humor--that the female Puritan, in short, could be both a Puritan and a woman of great charm."

Perry Miller

*The American Puritans*  
(Anchor, 1956)

"...she seems so relaxed when compared to other Puritan poets. In all ways, she is the 'easiest' of Puritan poets, the ease marking her civilized triumph over pioneering conditions which made life terribly hard for a gentlewoman born. Still, she is like her fellows in being essentially the poet of the event, and a not very imaginative one at that.... Perhaps it was because she was so modest, because she demanded so little of herself as a poet, because she could expect so little of herself as woman, that she could move on from the ponderous verses of her interminable interlocking poems on the four elements--constitutions, ages of man, seasons of the year, and chief empires of the ancient world--and other set pieces like them to her gentle 'Contemplations'... She is worth reading principally in poems like this and in those 'personal' poems published after her death, chief among them those to her husband and on her children and the deaths in her family. The argument in such poems is essentially the same as that in the work of Thomson and Wigglesworth, the justice of God's way with his Puritan flock... Mrs. Bradstreet is, above all, gentle, genteel."

Roy Harvey Pearce

*The Continuity of American Poetry*  
(Princeton, 1961) 22-4

"She had apparently read widely, and although she was a faithful Puritan wife, she could not always accept in entire docility the sterner aspects of the New England variety of Calvinism.... Many of her pages are dull; many are merely 'instructive' verse, using the devices of poetry but rarely rising above the attitudes of prose. But there are also pages in which she wrote simply and well of things close to her heart, and let her emotion, although always decorously expressed, warm her lines. Her "Contemplations," for example, although overformal by modern standards, is a brave attempt to express poetically some sense of the physical beauty of Massachusetts... Many a minor English poet of her day, more celebrated than Anne Bradstreet, wrote nothing that is better than her best, even though her best conforms to the Puritan's utilitarian view of art and to his distrust of the frankly sensuous."

Kenneth B. Murdock

*Literary History of the United States*  
(MacMillan, 1963) 63-4

See also "Homage to Mistress Bradstreet," by poet John Berryman.