

PURITAN POETRY: BRADSTREET AND TAYLOR

This handout was prepared by Dr. William Tarvin, a retired professor of literature. Please visit my free website www.tarvinlit.com. Over 500 works of American and British literature are analyzed there for free.

I. INTRODUCTION: The poetry of the Puritans of New England largely dealt with religious subjects.

II. ANNE BRADSTREET (1612-1672)

A. INTRODUCTION

1. The first major American poet was a woman.
2. Her major work: The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America.

B. "THE AUTHOR TO HER BOOK"

1. This poem uses the extended metaphor of comparing her book of poetry to a child: As a mother is to her child so is the author to her poetry book.
2. The poem is humorous, as when she says that her poor child/book is dressed in "rags"; a poor child would wear rags for clothes and the paper of cheap books was made from rags.
3. To indicate that she did not consider her poetry sophisticated, Bradstreet compares it humorously to "_____ cloth" (18).

C. "TO MY DEAR AND LOVING HUSBAND"

1. It treats love on two levels:
 - a. Human/earthly love (wife to husband)
 - b. Divine/eternal love (human to God)

III. EDWARD TAYLOR (1642-1729)

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Taylor is the major Puritan poet.

2. His poetry was not published in his lifetime; a manuscript of it was discovered around 200 years after his death; its publication established him as the greatest Puritan poet.

B. PURITAN ELEMENTS OF TAYLOR'S POETRY

1. GOD'S GREATNESS, SOVEREIGNTY, AND GRACE/MERCY.

2. HUMAN DEPRAVITY: Sinfulness of human beings, springing from Adam's Original Sin.

3. TYPOLOGY: Typology is defined as "writing where divine matters are seen in worldly things," as in Taylor's "Huswifery," where the divine path to salvation is compared to the human activity of making clothes, or where (in our earlier reading) Bradford compared the Pilgrims fleeing England to the Biblical Israelites fleeing Egypt.

C. NON-PURITAN ELEMENTS OF TAYLOR'S POETRY

1. Taylor did not seek to publish his poems during his life because he knew they contained elements opposed to orthodox Puritan doctrines.

2. First, his poetry sometimes appeals to the SENSES AND PASSIONS of humans; he mentions "golden altars" and "sweet perfumes." Orthodox Puritans believed in suppressing passions.

3. Second, there is a MYSTICISM in some of Taylor's poems, which suggest that a human being while on earth could achieve a rapturous union with God.

D. "MEDITATION 8"

1. ORIGINAL SIN: The first part of the poem tells the story of Adam's fall through his Original Sin. Through eating the "Fruite _____" (9; Taylor's spelling), Adam and all his descendants gave up their heavenly food, called "soul _____" (16).

2. GOD'S GRACE: However, God's Grace comes forth. He grinds and kneads up His only Son Christ to be the "_____ of Life" (22), sending Christ to

earth to redeem sinful humanity.

E. "PREFACE TO GOD'S DETERMINATIONS"

1. GOD'S GREATNESS: Taylor describes God's creation of the world in terms of human beings' puny arts and crafts; for example, Taylor presents the sky as a "Bowling Alley" into which God "bowld [bowled] the sun" (14), a humorous picture.

2. HUMAN DEPRAVITY THROUGH ORIGINAL SIN: Lines 37-44 state that God gave ALL of the universe to humans, but "NOTHING man" (41)--Adam--sinned and lost ALL that God had given humanity, thereby becoming NOTHING again.

F. "HUSWIFERY"

1. The word huswifery means "housekeeping."

2. PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS and DOCTRINE OF ELECTION: The poem states that the Christian life is the process of making a garment for salvation.

3. There are three stages: (1) Making the yarn on the spinning wheel. (2) Making the fabric on the loom. (3) Sewing the clothes of salvation or the "Holy _____ for glory" (18).