

Modestly Appropriating Conventions:

Anne Bradstreet, Phillis Wheatley and the Literary Sphere of Early America

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Contrary to many people's perception that the exclusion of works by women in the canon of Early American Literature reflects the absence of female authors, we can reflect today that women in colonial times did in fact write a great deal and their writings span a range of genres: from polished verse to personal diaries. In addition to the texts that were published in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'rediscovered' manuscripts, diaries, and letters of many women have since been published in the twentieth century. Taken on the whole these primary texts provide insight into the experience of women in Early America.

The exploration of the texts intended for the public sphere is one method for approaching these works. As I examined how women found space to move from the domestic sphere into the public sphere through their writing, one theme that surfaced is of women modestly appropriating conventions, both literary and societal, in order to create a space for their writing. To further limit the scope of my project, I decided to examine this paradoxical notion of finding freedom through conformity in the works of Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley, who both constitute remarkable literary firsts in America. I propose to examine their verse through the framework of the form, the 'Other,' and the spiritual, which were concepts central to these women's creation of a subtle resistance.

Any study of early American women's writings inevitably begins with Anne Bradstreet, whose *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* made literary history in 1650 as the first text written by a woman in the 'new world' to be published (in London). After the initial success and favorable reception, Bradstreet's work was later re-printed in Boston with additional poems in 1678 and has since been re-published in various collections over the last three centuries. Several of the more recent editions include a facsimile of *The Tenth Muse* (1965), an edition with

modern spellings edited by Jeannine Hensley (1967), and the comprehensive *The Complete Works of Anne Bradstreet* (1981), edited by Joseph R. McElrath, Jr.

Bradstreet's refined verse conforms to and perfects many of the standard poetic conventions used by men and is a subtle assertion of women's capabilities in the literary sphere. Furthermore, as Bradstreet's poetic style became more her own, she expanded her subject to reflect matters such as childbirth, family, and earthly desires, which were everyday concerns. Bradstreet looked not only to Heaven for inspiration but also to her natural surroundings. She found a place for uniquely personal expression working both within an acceptable literary format of highly stylized verse and imagery, and through the Puritan values of her society.

Like Bradstreet, Wheatley refined and appropriated various conventional poetic techniques. *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* was published in London in 1773 and has since been reprinted "more than two dozen times" (Robinson *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings* 87). She made frequent use of Biblical allusions, the interpretation of which reveals her abolitionist stance. The dominant strain of Christianity in New England known as Puritanism also had an important influence on Wheatley, who went further than her white counterparts in her critique of religion and society's failure to abolish slavery.

As a black woman writer, Phillis Wheatley was a phenomenon in her day; people from all walks of life used her work for their own ends. The flurry of concern over the publication of Wheatley's verse is indicative of the difficulty in approaching and interpreting the writing of persons labeled as the 'Other.' The response to works by writers such as Wheatley, who seemingly prevailed against all odds, provides a reflection of this country's changing perceptions of race and gender over time. In successfully creating their poetry, Bradstreet and Wheatley, two

of America's earliest female muses, understood the necessity of channeling their creative impulses through appropriate avenues in their society.

On the technical level, Bradstreet and Wheatley used the poetic conventions of the day, which is evident in the form of their poetry. It is not too adventurous stylistically: they use iambic pentameter, rhyming couplets, and similar patterns of self-derision as their male counterparts. Parallels in style exist between these women and their contemporaries such as Sidney, Jonson, and Pope. Similarities in form also exist in the genre choice of the elegy, which they frequently used. These women were not trying to be revolutionary through pushing the boundaries of meter or rhyme. Rather their appropriation and use of poetic forms reflect a keen understanding of how the literary sphere operates. They demonstrate that they should be and are included in the circle of letters through their acknowledgement of how the game is played. Bradstreet and Wheatley recognized the power of words—of writing and of reading—and through offering their texts for the public eye they were granted the authorship and authority that was their due.

However, when people who aren't part of the dominant group write in the context of 'the Other,' their use of convention takes on new meanings. The appropriation of style and language allowed Bradstreet and Wheatley to make their voices heard. The multiplicity within these texts has larger implications for the way we reflect the concept of the 'Other;' which allows for inclusion on one level and simultaneous exclusion on another. When we look at the figures behind the writing, we see that neither woman experienced true equity within her society. For example, recognition of Bradstreet's literary talent and the praise bestowed upon her poetry did not improve the status of women in Puritan New England. Likewise, and perhaps even more blatant, Phillis Wheatley's *Selected Poems* would have appeared on the bookshelves of many

respectable white households, which also owned slaves. Thus, the literary sphere becomes an acceptable way to include groups that represent uncomfortable differences from those in positions of power, while at the same time excluding them from other political and social institutions. In one sense, Bradstreet and Wheatley make great strides, but in the larger picture theirs are only small steps.

Bradstreet and Wheatley used the final concept of the spiritual to grant themselves authority to enter into the public literary sphere. To a certain extent the view of women as spiritual beings gave them space to write within a religious context. In sixteenth and seventeenth century America, sermons created a body of familiar biblical images; through the creative insertion of these biblical allusions, Bradstreet and Wheatley re-deploy the familiar to create meanings beyond the acceptable theological one. Furthermore, scriptural interpretation fell into the male domain in Early America, so women poets' application of biblical references was slightly outside the standard use. It is precisely because of the fine line they were transgressing that Bradstreet and Wheatley made these appropriations in modest ways. One critic suggests that Wheatley's use of the biblical allusion is a 'subtle war' (O'Neale 144); her poems, and to some extent Bradstreet's, offer a strain of resistance while at the same time appearing to conform. Through working within literary and religious conventions of the day, these women found freedom to explore themes and subjects that were central to their daily experience. They subtly questioned society's prescribed natural role for women.

Through this paper I want to demonstrate that a literary tradition by women existed in Early America and that these pioneering women found space within the conventions—literary and social—that surrounded them. Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley achieved a form of resistance through conforming to society and the boundaries of their religion. Perhaps the

appropriation of religious space to create a role for women has had larger implications for the way Americans for centuries have considered the place of women in society.

Anne Bradstreet: Bibliography and Criticism In Context

Several scholars have compiled annotated bibliographies on the literary criticism of Anne Bradstreet and her work. The earliest, *Seventeenth-Century American Poetry: A Reference Guide* (Scheick and Doggett 1977), lists sources published between 1844 and 1975 and is helpful in reflecting the different approaches taken to studying Bradstreet and her works. The essay on Anne Bradstreet by Wendy Martin in *American Women Writers: Bibliographic Essays* (Duke et al 1983) provides a clear comparison of the relative merits of the various editions of Bradstreet's work and explains the alterations to poems that editors have made over three centuries. By far the most comprehensive and up to date annotated bibliography is that of Raymond Dolle, *Anne Bradstreet: a reference guide* (1990). He expanded the range of sources to include citations from the seventeenth century. His helpful overview of literary critics' treatment of Bradstreet identifies the major trends as: "Seventeenth Century Enthusiasm, Eighteenth Century Neglect, Nineteenth Century Condescension, and Twentieth Century Appreciation" (Dolle xix-xxxv). Also explained are the shifts in interpretation and celebration of Bradstreet and her work. At various points in time critics have sought to link Bradstreet to the literary tradition of English female poets of the Renaissance, to proclaim her the "matriarch of American feminist poetry" (xxiii), to name her the creator of American literature (xxv), and to identify her as a precursor to the Romantic Movement (xxv).

Additionally other studies have commented on the works that influenced Bradstreet, while others focus on her influence on future generations of American writers. In the 1970s and

80s some critics interpreted her poetry as within the bounds of Puritan orthodoxy, while others saw strains of creative rebellion against her constrictive society (xxix). With the advent of the women's movement in the late twentieth century, further studies were devoted to analyzing Bradstreet's work as indicative of an early form of feminism. In the introduction to the 1981 edition of Bradstreet's *Complete Works*, McElrath divides the criticism into two camps that alternate between identifying Bradstreet as a stuffy Puritan woman and seeing her as the beginning of feminism in America (xiii). Perhaps, as McElrath suggests, we need to rethink our notions about Puritanism, seventeenth century America, and womanhood before we can reconcile these opposing interpretations.

The Form

In the late nineteenth century Bradstreet's work was condescendingly dismissed as imitative and unimaginative. In 1879 Moses Coit Tyler, one such critic, commented that Bradstreet "was sadly misguided by the poetic standards of her religious sect and of her literary period" (Scheick and Doggett 35). Tyler suggests that Bradstreet should have written on themes more pertinent to her daily existence. Well into the twentieth century, critics still decried Bradstreet as highly derivative. In 1959, Claude M. Fuess remarked her early poems were "influenced by the ridiculous conceits and stilted language of the so-called Metaphysical Poets" (Scheick and Doggett 41). By 1967, Bradstreet's originality became more celebrated as Adrienne Rich in the forward to the Hensley edition of Bradstreet's works, proclaims Anne Bradstreet "the first non-didactic American poet, the first to give an embodiment to American nature, the first in whom personal intention appears to precede Puritan dogma as an impulse to verse" (Rich xix).

Rich further suggests that Bradstreet's originality lies in her subject matter rather than in her poetic style (xix). Critics frequently agree that Bradstreet's poetry and self-expression improved once she did what Philip Sidney's famous line suggests, "'Fool,' said my muse to me, 'look in they heart and write'" (Sidney 14). Her later poems dealt mostly with subjects that were more personal, such as her children, her husband, and her house burning. Rosemary Laughlin in her article, "Anne Bradstreet: Poet in Search of Form" (1970), provides a clear explanation of Bradstreet's development of poetic skills overtime as she progresses from using rhymed couplets in iambic pentameter to more complex forms in her later works. Laughlin also explains the images and themes Bradstreet frequently used, such as the sun and the journey.

For many years Guillaume DuBartas' influence on Bradstreet's writing was widely known; in the twentieth century studies have examined other poets, including Sir Philip Sidney's impact (Dolle xxvi). Bradstreet was very well educated for a woman in the seventeenth century. She had a command of the literary conventions of her day, including form and genre, and she was able to skillfully manipulate this knowledge "to serve her own purposes" (Stanford, *Worldly Puritan* ii).

When we return to texts of Early America it is essential to remember that although the writers might constitute our cultural ancestors they held worldviews radically different from our own. Perhaps we should follow the advice of French cultural historian Robert Darnton that in order to study another culture we should begin at the place seemingly the most opaque. Bradstreet's use of humility in her writings gives us one such point of entry. Robert Daly, who cleverly explicates the function of humility in both Bradstreet and Wheatley's poetry, questions why humility was a convention that was both "vital and viable" for so many years and for so many varied writers (3). The frequent appeal to humility seems so unfamiliar to modern readers

that it may produce a discomfort (4). It was typical for male poets in the sixteenth and seventeenth century to concede their unworthiness through derision of their literary talents, and so when Bradstreet does this in “The Prologue” it is an act of conformity to traditional literary convention (Blackstock 226). Yet it is an act often interpreted as ironic, as many critics have suggested that she calculatedly decried her talent as a way to provide her writing with an authorization. Daly asserts that this interpretation, coming from the context of our power hungry society, is only part of the picture. In Early America a great anxiety existed over the corrupting potential of too much power (Daly 5). Thus, Daly suggests perhaps we should learn from Bradstreet and Wheatley that humility can serve as an “immunization against the derangements of power” (5). Daly’s article offers a challenge to modern readers to avoid interpreting our cultural ancestors as more similar to us than they in fact were.

The ‘Other’

Bradstreet skillfully employed her understanding of how literary conventions operated to grant her the authority to enter into the public sphere as a poet. William Scheick touches upon this concept in his book *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America*, which is preoccupied with a postmodern approach to literary criticism, using terms such as logocentric site, textual locus, logonomic conflict, and ideological complexes, to explore how women’s writings contain a dynamic of multiplicity. He emphasizes that “a delicate balance in speech and action was required for a colonial woman to conform to the prevailing standard of female respectabilities” (9). Furthermore any concessions of conformity to existing notions that they make in their work were “utterly *natural* for them” because their status in colonial society left them little alternative (10).

One example of the multiple layers within Bradstreet's work comes in the poem "Author to Her Book." The central metaphor, similar to the one in Ben Jonson's "To My Book," likens the written work to the author's offspring. Bradstreet's poem takes on additional meanings because she is the mother of eight children and further reflects how her dual role as mother and author overlap the domestic with the public. Kenneth Requa argues that the division between the public voice in Bradstreet's early poems and the private voice in her later works is indicative of the duality of her existence (Scheick and Doggett 52-53). The public voice is more imitative and apologetic and the private voice reflects a greater freedom. "Author to Her Book" can also be interpreted as Bradstreet's response to the publication of her poems, which she did not publicly seek; instead, her brother-in-law John Woodbridge took her works to London (Gilbert and Gubar 27). While this decision does reflect her "modesty and piety," it was also a smart political move to avoid charges of ambition (27).

Like many other writings by women in the sixteenth century, Bradstreet's poems were prefaced with several disclaimers by men, such as Woodbridge's, which asserts she always fulfilled her family obligations because her writing was "the fruit but of some few hours, curtailed from sleep and other refreshments" (Gilbert and Gubar 27). This preface provides insight into Early American society's concept of women by revealing that the presence of women's writing in the public sphere does not seem natural or befitting a woman's place in society. In effect, the disclaimers offer a way to get around questioning this movement of women from the domestic into the public realm through the assertion that the women may offer inspiration to others, as religion becomes a justifying force to grant women the freedom to have their voices heard.

William Scheick suggests that Anne Bradstreet uses her marginalization to claim her “right to write” (Scheick *Authority and Female Authorship* 16). As women in early America she and Wheatley are “already marginalized and colonialized” and by using this identification they found space for their writing (17). The authors of *Shakespeare’s Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, introduce Virginia Woolf’s metaphor of Judith Shakespeare to explore the subversive tendencies within women’s poetry. This book is part of the movement in the 1970s to rediscover and recover the interpretation of female writers often overlooked in their time and ours. It further represents the shift to feminist-literary criticism that mirrored the increased momentum of the women’s movement in America. Wendy Martin’s chapter on Anne Bradstreet explores the potential for feminist rebellion in her poetry. She also provides a useful look at the restrictive Puritan society in which Bradstreet lived. In 1979, the same year of publication as Gilbert and Gubar’s book, Karl Keller cautioned against trying to read too much feminism into Bradstreet’s work.

The Spiritual

In 1967, Robert D. Richardson interpreted the tensions between the physical and spiritual world in Bradstreet’s poetry not as a conflict with Puritan theology but as a reflection of “the Puritan ideal of living in the world without being of it” (Scheick and Doggett 45). Amanda Porterfield explores the notion of Anne Bradstreet as a religious humanist and concludes that “language was the currency of Bradstreet’s religious life” (107). She further argues that Bradstreet’s poetic ability lies in utilization of Puritan conventions rather than in her “ability to subvert them” (113). In *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America*, Scheick explores the function of biblical allusions in Bradstreet’s work. He argues that it was feasible for

a colonial woman to be “devoutly religious, while at the same time, possibly unconsciously, offering resistance” to the dominant worldview (12). This tension occurs in Bradstreet’s poem “Letter to Her Husband, Absent upon Public Employment.” With the exception of the final couplet the poem is a rather secular conceit on how much she loves her husband. This intense love for something of the physical world is a little outside the Puritan orthodoxy; consequently, in the final couplet Bradstreet seeks “spiritual authorization” with clear biblical reference (67). Yet there remains a discomfort and disjuncture between the conclusion of the poem and what has come before it. The conflict occurs between the systems of belief that operate within the poem and within sixteenth century America; Bradstreet is torn between her personal attachment to earthly things and her religious conviction to look toward heaven for perfection. While Bradstreet might not have been aware of the implications in her concluding couplet, the conflict produced is reflective of the reality of her experience and that of many other Puritan women (70). Thus, what appears as a resolution to Bradstreet reveals a discomfort to us: everything was not as simple in Puritan society as it might at first have appeared. Through her struggle to resolve her internal conflict between material and spiritual desires, Anne Bradstreet reveals her humanity.

Phillis Wheatley: Bibliography and Criticism in Context

William H. Robinson’s *Phillis Wheatley: A Bio-Bibliography* (1981) provides a list with some annotated entries on the texts published between 1761 and 1799 that focus on Phillis Wheatley’s life and her writings (xi). He also includes a comprehensive list of the poems she published before her death (1767-1779). In the introduction to *Critical Essays on Phillis Wheatley* Robinson explores the changes in literary criticism to Wheatley and her writing over

time. He also addresses the many discrepancies over the biographical details of her life. Robinson makes the significant assertion that critics have been less interested in her person and work than in using her as an appraisal of their own stance toward slavery and racial equality (2). In other words, people's response to Wheatley depended largely on their political beliefs. They were more interested in her "race and color" than in her life (5).

Several recent editions of Wheatley's work have come out, including *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley* (1966, revised 1989), which now includes her prose writing. The most extensive, *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings* (1984), edited by Robinson, includes a useful bibliography, illustrations of Wheatley, and information on the publication and reception of her poetry. A Penguin classic edition of Wheatley's writing came out in 2001 and included newly discovered work in the Wheatley canon. While this edition claims to be "the most complete collection ever assembled of Wheatley's poems and letters," it proves more accessible than previous editions.

The Form

Daly makes the same argument about the function of humility in Wheatley's work as he does in Bradstreet's. Interestingly the presence of humility in her poetry was an essential element for early critics, such as the one who, pleased that Wheatley 'stayed in her place,' commented in 1835 that "she remained as humble as before" (Robinson, *Critical Essays* 6). Thomas Jefferson, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1781, remarks, "Religion, indeed, has produced a Phyllis Whately [sic], but it could not produce a poet" (663). Adding further insult he contemptuously continues, "the compositions under her name are below the dignity of criticism" (663). It appears that Jefferson the slaveholder is unable to recognize the

existence of a talented black writer and thus must dismiss her rather than reconcile this challenge to his worldview. Moses Coit Tyler was equally dismissive of Wheatley's talents as he was of Bradstreet's (Robinson, *Critical Essays* 6). Similar to the earlier treatments of Bradstreet, Wheatley's early critics claimed she failed to offer enough commentary on her personal experience. In 1925, Vernon Loggins remarked that "she neglected almost entirely her own state of slavery and the miserable condition of thousands of her race" (Davis 93).

These critics failed to fully comprehend that Phillis Wheatley was never truly writing as a free woman (Wilcox 25). Her status in society severely limited her ability to choose subjects, especially since she attempted to make a living as a poet. Perhaps the economic necessity underlying her decision to write explains her frequent genre selection of the elegy as it enabled her to attract patrons. Davis, in 1953, responded to Loggins' claim by asserting that Wheatley did address race and personal experiences in her poetry, more often than initially meets the eye. In her conscious identification as 'Afric's muse' Wheatley invokes her race and low social status in her writing (Davis 95). Davis emphasizes Wheatley's humanity by commenting in a paternalistic tone, "this talented little girl made the most of her Christianity, tying it in neatly with the added appeal that her racial and pagan background gave to it" (Davis 97). Gloria Hull's essay in *Shakespeare's Sisters* counters some of Davis' points by asserting that there is more than meets the eye in Wheatley's writing. Her "ironic mode of language, stance, and poetic diction" reveal a challenge to questions of race and identity (Hull 167).

Helen Burke summarizes the symbolic appropriations of convention that Wheatley makes, including the heroic couplet of Pope, Dryden, and Jonson, the elegy as her favored genre, and the notion of the sublime (Burke 33). Wheatley also employed classical themes and techniques as well as biblical symbolism. More important, Burke argues, is Wheatley's

understanding of how the literary sphere works; she must demonstrate her knowledge of convention to gain recognition as a poet (33). John C. Shields identifies Phillis Wheatley's use of imagination and the sublime as evidence that she was a predecessor to the Romantics who emerged in the nineteenth century (Shields, *Critical Essays* 203). He further asserts that her knowledge of the sublime confirms her as "a serious poet" (203). The self-derision that Daly examines also forms one part of this process in entering the literary tradition. Wilcox suggests that Wheatley's calculated presentation of a subservient attitude in her poetry created marketing appeal for her work. Burke comments on how Wheatley continuously used "literary tradition to establish her poetic authority" (Burke 35).

The 'Other'

Helen Burke explores how the form of Wheatley's poetry takes on new dimensions through her label as the 'Other.' Her self-identity as "Afric's Muse," while using the poetic conventions of the day, creates a plurality in the literary, social, and political spheres (Burke 34). Yet Wheatley's careful self-representation could not overcome the circles of exclusion that surrounded her. Burke cautions us not to ignore the historical figure behind the poetry, who had to work within a system to be heard at all (38). Wheatley was never able to speak freely about the difference of her ethnic background, sex, and class and its effect on her ability to express herself in a society that sought to suppress differences. Burke examines the symbolic inclusion on the literary level and the continued exclusion on the political and social levels. She suggests that we have yet to resolve the distance between the ideological and idealistic proclamations of equality and the reality of power structures in our society (41).

In 1913, William J. Long expressed his disappointment that Wheatley failed to portray the savage life in wild Africa in her poems (Robinson *Critical Essays* 6). His need to exoticize Wheatley and his subsequent frustration when she failed to live up to his expectation reveals the problematic nature of the response to the 'Other' in literary criticism. In 1972, R. Lynn Matson found in his essay "Phillis Wheatley—Soul Sister?" the beginnings of protest in Wheatley's poetry. The same year, Terrence Collins countered that it is more productive to look at the psychological effects of slavery on Wheatley. He suggests her verse on the whole is mediocre, but it has cultural merit as a place to examine the oppressed mind.

Robert Kendrick explores the paradoxical position of Wheatley as the master of her own writing while still calling another her master (Kendrick 40). Kendrick's greatest complaint about critical treatment of Wheatley is that it focuses predominantly on the issue of her racial

difference rather than exploring how gender and economic status also created the label of ‘Other’ (40). Her poetry intentionally brings up questions of Otherness and forces readers to reevaluate “their relation to her ‘Otherness,’” thus, both reader and author come into a dialogue over the text (47). Using the ideas of the Enlightenment, Wheatley sought to make her readers rethink “the prejudices of tradition” (57). By seeking Phillis Wheatley we find “a powerful perspective on how we can seek out each other in our own moment” (62).

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. provides a clear explication of how Phillis Wheatley fit into the debates over race and racial equality in the eighteenth century. The phenomenon that Wheatley became in her day is indicative of the debates over human’s natural rights versus nature’s placement of them. Gates argues that the historical treatment of Wheatley’s work has “determined the theory of criticism of the creative writings of Afro-Americans from the eighteenth century to the present time” (229).

The Spiritual

Scheick suggests in *Authority and Female Authorships in Colonial America* that Phillis Wheatley consciously used biblical allusions to create a second narrative. One example is her famous poem “On Being Brought from Africa to America” in which the surface meaning seems to be Wheatley’s gratitude for receiving religion and consequently salvation from her white captors. Yet her use of biblical allusions seems to criticize her white counterparts for not practicing the equality that they preach (Levernier 26). Sondra O’Neale comments that Wheatley’s use of color dichotomies was an attempt to transfer the connotations between white and black, light and dark, good and evil, from skin color to a higher spiritual state. Thus, goodness and evil become qualities that exist in the abstract and not in the skin (O’Neale 148). Through the biblical reference to Cain and the placement of “Christians, Negroes” in the final

couplet, Wheatley asserts the equality of all souls for salvation, and by extension, the universal humanity of all regardless of skin color.

However, Scheick points out that it is highly unlikely Wheatley's audience understood fully her intended message in the biblical allusions. He argues that Wheatley may have missed that the implication of her careful insertion "beneath the surface of the conventional was less an act of resistance than a reenactment of the slave's daily experience of oppression" (126). Phillip M. Richards suggests that Wheatley adopts a stance whereby she asserts her equality, even though she is of lower status, with her white patrons because both find common ground through their involvement in the process of seeking salvation (176).

While the use of biblical references was authorized through the importance of religion in early American society, when women, such as Wheatley and Bradstreet, appropriated scriptural interpretation they offered a subtle challenge to the tenets of their society. O'Neale further explores the function of biblical myth and symbol in Phillis Wheatley's work and successfully counters through the examination of her biblical allusions critics' accusations of Wheatley's lack of race consciousness. Phillis Wheatley effectively reaches her audience through using familiar biblical terms, which have taken on new meanings in her work.

Final Thoughts

The 'subtle war' of Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley had to be modest in the way they appropriated conventions with an understanding of their significance. Bradstreet and Wheatley offer us a second narrative, implicit in the text, of subversion and conflict within multiple worldviews. Throughout this bibliographic essay I have emphasized the ongoing importance of taking a closer look at the texts before us. I further suggest that the concept of

appropriating conventions and the themes of the form, the 'Other,' and the spiritual may be applied to the prose writing by women in the colonial era. In the larger scope I believe we should continue to explore how women entered into the literary sphere and what their voices had to say in their time and ours.

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