

Title – A Reasoned Faith: Comparing Anne Bradstreet’s Confident Christianity With Feminist Historiography

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Abstract: As the first published American poet and first American female poet, Anne Bradstreet is often seen as an icon of female revisionist historiography. Born into an educated English family, Bradstreet traveled with her husband to the wilderness of North America during the “Great Migration” and helped to establish the colony of Massachusetts Bay. Following their publication in England, Bradstreet’s poems quickly became famous for their discussion of her faith, family, and life in the New World. As this essay demonstrates, contextual analysis of Bradstreet’s poetry and writings reveals the compatibility in her mind of her Christianity with her roles as an educated woman and poetess. However, despite the testimony of Bradstreet’s works, feminist historians continue to maintain the presence of a dichotomy between Bradstreet’s outspoken womanhood and her equally outspoken faith. Many argue that, far from reconciling these issues, Bradstreet used poetry to subtly express deviation from the New England way, asserting female empowerment in the face of male supremacy. Certainly, Puritan women faced restrictions in their communities, as did most European women of the 17th century. This paper does not seek to gloss over the cultural limitations of the Massachusetts Bay community or the human inconsistencies of the New England Way. However, Bradstreet’s religious poems demonstrate her underlying commitment to reasoned faith, not to deviant humanism. As she describes the dangers of colonial life, Bradstreet constantly references her factual knowledge of

God's attributes and actions to make sense of the world around her. Thus, a comparison of Bradstreet's frankly Christian poetry with secular feminist historiography illustrates the disconnect between the orthodox Puritan definition of faith and the secular revisionist definition. In the short run, acknowledging this disparity gives us a clearer understanding of Bradstreet's personal and cultural faith. More importantly, it clears the way for us to explore Christian theology in history as a catalyst for personal assurance, rather than internal conflict.