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ENG 201: (B06)

5 June 2023

Parallel Passions: A Comparative Analysis of Anne Bradstreet's

“To My Dear and Loving Husband and Edward Taylor's “Huswifery”

Love and devotion intertwine in the tapestry of American colonial poetry - Anne Bradstreet's heartfelt words of personal affection and Edward Taylor's reverent expressions of spiritual longing endear readers across time. These distinct yet bonded pieces offer insight into the realms of love and faith, underlining the profound emotions and lyrical craftsmanship that distinguish seventeenth-century works. As such, both Bradstreet and Taylor portray an intimate connection between passion and everyday Puritan life. By exploring Bradstreet's “To My Dear and Loving Husband” and Taylor's “Huswifery,” their shared dichotomous themes of love, evocative period characteristics, and unique narrative devices, we can more fully appreciate the nuanced portraits of Puritan life.

In Bradstreet's hallmark poem, she employs a language of equality and reciprocity to portray marital love. “To My Dear and Loving Husband” explores a profoundly personal and intense passion for her spouse, a sentiment echoed in her declaration: “If ever two were one, then surely we” (Belasco 200). The quote embodies unity and mutual fondness in Bradstreet's marriage, reflecting a shared affection and intimacy uncommon in the male-dominant society of her time. Further, Bradstreet presents a vision of love based on affinity and equality, a novel concept given societal views on women's roles and rules on freedom of expression (Mehler 22). This stance contrasts with Taylor's submissive and service-oriented view of love, in which Furey asserts earthly passion for one's wholly emotional and physical devotion to Christ (216-217).

Taylor's "Huswifery" is thus a fervent plea to God for spiritual refinement - an allegorical approach to love, but passionate, nonetheless. The author sees himself as a tool for God's will: "Make me, O Lord, Thy Spinning Wheel compleate" (Belasco 292). The spinning wheel metaphor portrays Taylor as a literal instrument in God's hand, a perspective that starkly contrasts with Bradstreet's view of love as a shared bond. Yet, his submission and service to God remain paramount, painting a starkly different picture of love compared to Bradstreet's "egalitarian" approach (Mehler 22-23). Finally, in contrast, Martin confirms Taylor's belief that love is willfully binding to the romance of a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ, completely surrendering to divine purpose over attaining temporal passion (49). Despite these thematic differences, both poets showcase a shared thread of Protestant values. These values reflect the Puritan ideal of the "covenant" - a mutual agreement under God's law, which is essential in earthly and divine relationships (Bremer 40). Thus, a variation in subject matter, earthly love versus spiritual devotion, is a significant distinction in both pieces.

Notwithstanding these contrasting themes, however, Bradstreet and Taylor intertwine the worldly and spiritual realms, characteristic of Puritan literature (Wilson viii). This shared undercurrent emphasizes the importance of love and fidelity in their respective lives. Bradstreet asserts in the Belasco text, "Thy love is such I can no way repay" (200), whereas Taylor declares, "Then weave the Web theyselfe. The yarn is fine. / Thine ordinances make my Fulling Mills" (292). Here, the poet's affection shows through his desire to align life entirely with God's law and commandments. These expressions echo the Puritan belief in the primacy of love and the humbling indebtedness it instills.

Further, a noteworthy similarity between the two works is the embodiment of metaphysical conceit. In this poetic device, an analogy is apparent between one's spiritual values

and an object in the physical world, although depicted in an unusual or complex manner (Martin 26). Bradstreet declares, “Thy love is such I can no way repay; / The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray” (Belasco 200). Bradstreet equates her debt of love to an irredeemable one, hoping the heavens could provide sufficient compensation. Taylor, likewise, employs a conceit, but in a religious context: “Then mine apparel shall display before yee / That I am Cloathd in Holy robes for glory” (Belasco 292) – comparing his desired righteousness to a beautiful garment spun by God. Both poets use this device to merge the physical and spiritual; Bradstreet’s conceit emphasizes a human relationship, while Taylor underscores a relationship with Almighty God.

The poets’ use of distinctive language likewise contributes to the disparity in both works. For instance, Bradstreet’s poem is characterized by simplicity and directness, enhancing the emotional intensity of her love. Conversely, Taylor’s poem is complex, laden with extended metaphors that demand careful reading to decode the spiritual meaning (Emerson 126). This contrast in complexity reflects the poets’ expression and audience, with Bradstreet’s primary focus on human emotion and Taylor’s on spiritual enlightenment. In addition, Furey confirms that Taylor’s language conveys a wish for divine transformation, using domestic tasks to symbolize his desire for spiritual sanctity and God’s grace (206). Finally, both poems reflect the profound influence of Puritan religious beliefs. Emerson further affirms that Bradstreet views her marriage as a form of religious devotion and uses it to articulate her spiritual journey; Taylor, on the other hand, directly addresses his spiritual transformation through the metaphor of a housewife’s duties (126). Thus, both imply that love, whether earthy or divine, is a true gift they seek to nurture and treasure - they remain committed.

Exploring American colonial poetry through Bradstreet's "To My Dear and Loving Husband" and Taylor's "Huswifery" exposes the rich emotional depth and devotion underscoring the Colonial literary period. Despite treading separate thematic paths, these poems reveal the breadth of Puritan prose. Bradstreet's intimate portrayal of marital love offers a unique perspective on personal emotions. At the same time, Taylor's sincere religious devotion, steeped in biblical imagery, highlights the significance of faith. Their contributions to American literature prove the Puritan era's complex tapestry of emotional experiences and religious commitments, emerging novel approaches to literature, and its bold and lasting ideals expressed within love and everyday life.

Works Cited

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