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Bradstreet, Anne. Poems and Meditations. Ed. Margaret Olofson Thickstun

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Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Bradstreet, Anne.

***Poems and Meditations*. Ed. Margaret Olofson Thickstun.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 69 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 563. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2019. Pp. xix, 379. ISBN 978-0-86698-621-2 (paperback) US\$65.95.

With an Introduction that discusses contexts and texts, Margaret Olofson Thickstun has provided a new edition of *Poems and Meditations* by Anne Bradstreet (1612?–72). Bradstreet, an accomplished poet who in 1630 came from England to live at Andover in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was not pleased with the errors when her poems were printed in London under the title *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (xix, 1). John Woodbridge, married to Anne's sister Lucy, took the manuscript back to England in 1647 and, without her knowledge, had them published with a dedicatory poem. Bradstreet's circle exchanged poems in manuscript; the first poem in the volume is addressed to her father, whose own skilful poetry inspired his daughter (1). Thickstun tells us that it is only by luck that we have any of Bradstreet's poems, as poetry in manuscript was often lost; this edition includes all her surviving work (3). Thickstun's notes show the intricacy of Bradstreet's art, the depth of her learning (3–4), and the context of a well-educated social group. Simon Bradstreet, Anne's husband, and others, like John Harvard, had studied at Emmanuel College, Cambridge (7n14). The colonists of the Bay Colony chose John Winthrop as governor and Anne's father, Thomas Dudley, as deputy governor; later, Dudley served a term as governor. Anne's husband, Simon, became governor seven years after her death (10).

Although Bradstreet expresses feelings in her personal poems, for Thickstun she is fundamentally "an intellectual writer" (14). Bradstreet's spiritually autobiographical "My Dear Children" recalls her time with her parents and family when they moved from Northamptonshire to Lincolnshire to be connected to the Earl of Lincolnshire's household—where she was probably educated in part by Elizabeth Clinton, the dowager countess (14–15). At Sempringham, Thomas Dudley served in the household of the earl, Theophilus

Clinton; later, Simon Bradstreet became Dudley's assistant and married the eldest daughter, Anne. Thickstun provides a clear account of Anne Dudley (Bradstreet) and her family over four generations, within the religious, political, social, and material cultures of England and New England, while also giving a sense of the textual history and the composition, editing, and publication of her poetry and prose. Coming to the New World involved hardship; the journey and the winter held devastating challenges. "Meditations Divine and Moral," including the dedicatory letter to her son, Simon, and "As weary pilgrim," a poem, are the only texts in Anne Bradstreet's hand.

Thickstun's Introduction pays close attention to some of the poems, such as "The Author to Her Book," which addresses the unauthorized publication of *The Tenth Muse* as a way into Bradstreet's art (27–28). The reading of this poem, according to Thickstun, provides a "pattern hold throughout Bradstreet's formal, public poetry: pentameter couplets, end-stopped lines, very little enjambment, and only occasional metrical irregularities" (28). The private poetry has a similar form: "She uses the same form in the private poems addressed to her husband and in the elegies on the deaths of her relatives" (28). The only poem in ballad metre to appear in print in the 1600s is the early poem "Upon a Fit of Sickness, Anno 1632, *Aetatis Suae* 19," even though she used that metre in poems responding to illness and crises in the family, including ten poems in the manuscript booklet (28). Thickstun notes the importance of decorum to Bradstreet in her choices of form and content. Fidelity, as opposed to art, in the translation of the psalms seems to differ from decorum in neoclassicism (28–29). Occasions can be domestic or religious or a combination. In a political poem, "The Four Elements," she uses the form of rhyming pentameter couplets. According to Thickstun, Bradstreet was working in a Protestant tradition; she imitated and admired the poet Guillaume Du Bartas (1544–90), whose poem was translated by Joshua Sylvester as *Devine Weekes and Workes* in 1605, in heroic couplets (28–29). In Thickstun's view, the sestet in "The Prologue" derives from that form in Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas's *Epigrams* (30). Thickstun views Bradstreet as an intellectual poet like Lucy Hutchinson and sees her poems as religious but also representing history, alchemy, medicine, humoral theory, physiology, economics, and agriculture. While she may not have been trained in Greek or Latin, Bradstreet's key interest was historical. Her longest poem, "The Four Monarchies of the World," focuses on history, with a thousand of the 3,500 lines representing Alexander the Great. It also

uses Walter Raleigh's *The History of the World* (1614) as a source, one that both engages with classical texts and draws on works by William Pemble, Francis Bacon, and Richard Knolles (30–31). Bradstreet's poem on Elizabeth I employs John Speed and William Camden as sources and is informed by Daniel and Revelation in the King James Version, while her paraphrase of Psalm 139:23–24 combines the KJV with the Geneva Bible (1560) (31–32). "The Four Monarchies" takes up more than half of *The Tenth Muse* (32). For Thickstun, the finest achievement in Bradstreet's literary works—such as the poems on ancient and contemporary history—is "in creating believable voices," by which Thickstun means "a natural, conversational style" (33). She praises Bradstreet for her creations of characters that embrace each other, such as Old and New England, and for her witty and self-deprecating persona in the public poems like "The Prologue" (33).

Thickstun also examines the reception and afterlife of Bradstreet, including male resistance to her in the form of backhanded compliments, like Nathaniel Ward's Apollo calling her "a right Du Bartas girl," and praise by others, such as Bathsua Makin and Cotton Mather, as well as the editions of Bradstreet's works and the scholarship and anthologies into the twentieth century and beyond (34). A note on the text is also helpful and transparent so that readers know what the editor is presenting. The debate over old and modern spelling comes to mind when reading about Thickstun's choices; the modernization of punctuation and capitalization of God might be contested. There is not enough space to discuss Bradstreet's aesthetics, but I close with a few of her lines from Thickstun's significant edition: "Under the cooling shadow of a stately Elm, / Close sat I by a goodly River's side, / Where gliding streams the Rocks did overwhelm, / A lonely place, with pleasures dignified" ("Contemplations" 21, page 256).

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