



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



The Male, the Sun and the Puritan: Psychological aspects of gender and politics in Anne Bradstreet's Contemplations

André Dias

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i2/3878>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i2/3878

Received: 27 Dec 2018, **Revised:** 10 Feb 2018, **Accepted:** 11 Feb 2018

Published Online: 26 Feb 2018

In-Text Citation: (Dias, 2018)

To Cite this Article: Dias, A. (2018). The Male, the Sun and the Puritan: Psychological aspects of gender and politics in Anne Bradstreet's Contemplations. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(2), 334–340.

Copyright: © 2018 The Author(s)

Published by Human Resource Management Academic Research Society (www.hrmars.com)

This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Vol. 8, No.2, February 2018, Pg. 334 - 340

<http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/IJARBSS>

JOURNAL HOMEPAGE

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
<http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/publication-ethics>

The Male, the Sun and the Puritan: Psychological aspects of gender and politics in Anne Bradstreet's Contemplations

André Dias

Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University, United States

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze Anne Bradstreet's *Contemplations* to understand how the pagan idea of a male sun-like god was kept alive through the puritan theology. Applying the concept of political consciousness delineated by Salvador Sandoval it is possible to understand how this idea was applied to keep a structure of beliefs throughout the centuries in order to maintain the status quo. It is possible to conclude that Bradstreet's beliefs and works were shaped by this religious concept.

Keywords: Applied Linguistics, Social Psychology, Puritan Theology, U.S. History, Political Consciousness.

Introduction

Religious beliefs were transmitted from generations alongside the human history and even today religion still plays a crucial role in human society. But it was also responsible for the maintenance of status quo, especially when tradition carries too much weight among a society's members. Educational and coercive processes played a vital role to the perpetuation and expansion of this system. The existence of such phenomenon led to the conservation of a structure of beliefs throughout the centuries. Those beliefs were the bastion for the perpetuation of a huge structure of power and social control. As the french philosopher and psychologist Foucault (1971) stated, "...dans toute société la production du discours est à la fois contrôlée, sélectionnée, organisée et redistribuée..." ("...in every society the production of discourse is simultaneously controlled, selected, organized and redistributed..."). Some rituals and traditions are also taught and perpetuated through this process in order to control what, how and when something could be said or done. This paper aims to analyze how the previously mentioned phenomenon sustained the idea of a male sun-like god through the puritan theology. For this task, it will examine linguistic aspects of Anne Bradstreet's *Contemplations* (1967). Such analysis will take into consideration the concept of political consciousness delineated by Salvador Sandoval, Professor of Social Psychology at the Pontifical University of São Paulo.

The objective of this study is to analyse Bradstreet's piece from the perspective of Social Psychology, taking in consideration the relationship between Politics and Religion; individual and collective. In this sense, it will contribute to filling the gap in literature between Critical Social Psychology and Applied Linguistics on Early United States History and Literature.

Methodology

The methodology applied is the concept of political consciousness developed by Salvador Sandoval in his paper *The Crisis of the Brazilian Labor Movement and the Emergence of Alternative Forms of Working-Class Contention in the 1990s*. Besides the fact that this paper analyzed the labor strikes occurred in Brazil in a decade, it provided the basis for an analysis of the political beliefs of an author.

The potential aspect of this research in part resides in the fact that this is the first time that this political consciousness model is applied to analyse a literature piece. In this sense, the paper opens the doors to a new way to approach not only Sandoval's model but it casts a new light on the relationship between Critical Social Psychology and Critical Applied Linguistics. It is only possible because of the broad nature of this model, making it possible to comprehend the diverse nature of human consciousness.

Salvador Sandoval (2001) claims that:

This model of political consciousness depicts the various social psychological dimensions that constitute an individual's political awareness of society and himself/herself as a member of that society and consequently represents his/her disposition to action in accordance with that awareness. By political consciousness we understand a composite of interrelated social psychological dimensions of meanings and information that allow individuals to make decisions as to the best course of action within political contexts and specific situations (p. 13).

We should also notice that Salvador (2001) stated that this is a multi-faceted model composed by seven dimensions. "These seven dimensions are: collective identity, societal beliefs and expectations, sentiments of collective interests and adversaries, political efficacy, sentiments of injustice, willingness to act collectively, and persuasive action proposals" (p. 13). While all these aspects are of great analytical value, the present analysis will focus on the societal beliefs and expectations.

Ancient origins of Sun Worship

Worshiping the sun as a deity was far from being a puritan creation. Aspects of this kind of belief were present among innumerable cultures and in most cases people were brought up that way by their parents or by a religious State and were taught to believe and worship since they were young. One of the most prominent cult of a sun god was among the Egyptians. Amun-Re's monotheist cult rapidly became powerful in Egypt, pursuing the idea of a solar deity that was represented as king or as a "... a man standing, mummy-formed (like Osiris), with erect phallus..." (Hoffmeier, 2015, p. 43). The deity soon would be considered as having control about life and death, pictured as the "two worlds" (Hoffmeier, 2015, p. 50).

Some European cultures, as the Roman and the Greek were influenced and absorbed some characteristics of this cult; it's also possible that the Hebrews were somehow influenced (Hoffmeier, 2015, p.255), although that doesn't support the freudian theories portrayed on

Moses and Monotheism (Freud & Strachey, 1991). It's impossible that the Hebrews were directly influenced by the Egyptian monotheistic cult of sun because there is huge a time gap between these events (Hoffmeier, 2015, p. 244).

After the birth of the Early Christian Church, the bishops needed a calendar for the spreading new faith; especially "when it became clear that the Lord's return would be delayed indefinitely, the Church shouldered the burden of planning for centuries and even millennia" (Heilbron, 1999, p. 27). . It "...forced the bishops into arithmetic" (Heilbron, 1999, p. 28) and prepared the basis for a both solar and lunar liturgy. The Roman Catholic Church invested heavily in astronomy, but kept it for itself while monuments, cathedrals and obelisks were built to worship a sun-like deity. Nevertheless, the applied mathematics would be latter tolerated in England "...owing to a harmony between the values of science and Protestant ethics" (Heilbron, 1999, p. 21), as for the Roman Catholic Church these ideas were initially viewed as subversive.

Bradstreet's Poetry

Therefore, taking these facts into consideration, we are able to understand Bradstreet's weltanschauung. Anne Bradstreet came to America with her family in 1630. She was eighteen years old. "Bradstreet's father and husband were prominent members of a Puritan community seeking freedom from persecution by the Church of England" (Martin & Hinrichs, 2012); they would later become important politicians in New England. It's crucial for our analysis the understanding of this dialectic relationship between old and New England, as the "New England offered a refuge from hated church practices without leaving the settlers open to the accusation of separatism, yet to undertake such a journey spoke loudly of rejection of English clerical practice" (Wiseman, 2006, p. 186).

This zeitgeist - i. e., the world view of an era - of political and religious struggle and imbalance created a spectrum of ambiguity that shaped Bradstreet's beliefs. In this new land, she could not consider herself neither as an American; nor a British: then, she turned to religion and stated herself as being a Puritan (Richardson, 2015, p. 10). As we will see, the Puritan ideology that was taught played a major role in her poetry. As she was a member of a wealthy and influential family, she had access to some formal education. Most women weren't allowed to study and we can notice that she is worried about being considered subversive for writing poetry.

"Puritanism was a culture of hard work and self-discipline, and Anne's education was clearly a rigorous one. ... So, too, did the rhetorical performances of the Puritan preachers who played a large part in her family life. The radical Protestantism of the day was, to some extent, a rhetorical culture, defined as much by its habits of expression as by the content of its doctrines. Indeed, the poetic works of devoutly Protestant poets such as Philip Sidney and George Herbert vividly attest to the expressive power of the more extreme forms of Protestantism that flourished in England in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. Religious writing and preaching were often stylistically innovative and compelling, and the young poet could not help but be influenced by the fiery and often quite powerful sermons of her family's circle. Her interest in worldly matters—love, devotion, suffering, desire—reflects a religious practice that was hardly ascetic." (Parini and Leininger, 2005)

Despite Bradstreet's religious zeal, some pagan imagery can be found in her poetry. In the first stanza of *Contemplations*, she referred to the sun as "Phoebus" (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 204), that in Latin means "bright" and is used as a "poetic personification of the sun" (Collins English Dictionary, 2014) or to refer to Apollo as the sun god. She also mentioned other deities, such as Thetis (Bradstreet 1912, p. 211), Neptune (Bradstreet 1912, p. 211) and Philomel (Bradstreet 1912, p. 212).

She would also portray in the fourth stanza an image of the sun as something so marvelous that it could be easily mistaken as a deity. The depiction of a sun that's glorious, superior, that act as the "soul of this world, this universe's eye" (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 205), represented in constant relation with nature and life; this depiction of sun is the depiction that should be addressed to a deity. Bradstreet herself pointed in the end of the stanza: "No wonder some made thee a deity; / Had I not better known, alas, the same had I" (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 205). Then she would explain that if God's creation is so sublime, we should wonder how glorious is her God: "How full of glory then must thy Creator be, / Who gave this bright light luster unto thee?" (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 206).

Some lines denote a huge dichotomy between the secular and the spiritual, characterizing a manicheist opposition the imagery of heaven and the imagery of earth, as in the lines "...humble my eyes to lofty skies..." (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 206) and "When I behold the heavens as in their prime, / And then the earth (though old) still clad in green," (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 209). This manicheism dichotomy was probably transmitted through Puritan ideals. As mentioned before, Puritans were rigorous and they were famous for their religious zeal. It must be taken in account when analysing Bradstreet's piece in order to understand the "...social representations about the nature, the structure, the practices and finalities of the social relations that constitute the society" (Sandoval, 2001, p. 187) in which she lived.

In this sense, the biblical imagery can be easily found in her poem. Some of them depict a solar power that is directly related to divine love - "On Abel's gift the fire descends from skies" (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 208). All those traditions would connect her yet more closely with this huge and ancient structure of societal beliefs that perpetuated the maintenance of status quo and, consequently, the dissemination of the idea of male superiority. It's possible that the choice for iambic pentameter when writing this piece was influenced not only by Anne Bradstreet's zeal for her poetry, but because it was very common among poets and she wanted to write at the same level as men. Besides, she is not questioning gender roles directly and the image of a male sun deity was at the core of this poem.

Somehow, this figure of sun-like deity is also presented as omnipresent. When she wrote: "And if the sun ever shine, there would I dwell" (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 210), it's plausible to understand that she was sure that the sun - and her God - would always be there.

It's possible to perceive the clear relationship between the idea of a sun-like deity and the male figure in the second stanza:

How excellent is He that dwells on high
Whose power and beauty by his works we know?
Sure he is goodness, wisdom, glory, light
That hath this underworld so richly dight (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 205)

Another reference can be found in the fifth stanza, where Bradstreet wrote that “Thou as a bridegroom from thy chamber rushes, / And as a strong man, joys to run a race; / The morn doth usher thee with smiles and blushes” (Bradstreet, 1912, 205). The seventh stanza also stated that “Art thou so full of glory that no eye / Hath strength thy shining rays once to behold? / And is thy splendid throne erect so high” (Bradstreet, 1912, 206), presenting the idea of a male sun god through the phallocratic symbol of his “erect” throne.

Bradstreet’s God is also portrayed as life - represented here as light - in opposition to death - that is represented as darkness. Some lines will represent this idea such as: “Thy presence makes it day, thy absence night” (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 206); “But he whose name is graved in the white stone / Shall last and shine when all of these are gone” (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 214); and when Bradstreet referred to death as the “...perpetual night” (Bradstreet, 1912, p. 209).

Conclusion

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the religious influence on Anne Bradstreet’s *Contemplations* shaped her beliefs, turning her to endorse the social representations maintained through millenniums among western societies. As Salvador stated, “though these representations about society are individually held, they are the product of social interactions and experiences which individuals have with the various groups, institutions and contexts in ‘living a society’” (Sandoval, 2001, p. 187).

The idea of a sun-like deity was not invented by her, nor it was a Puritan creation. But the finding of such ideas in her poetry reveals that the core ideas of this social representation were maintained among a structure of beliefs with minor changes. Thus, it makes it clear to perceive how radically the status quo was maintained.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Harvard Library staff and specially Professor Osborne for their assistance.

Corresponding Author

André Dias, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University, United States.

Email: and10.dias@gmail.com; and628@g.harvard.edu

References

- Bradstreet, A. (1967). *The works of Anne Bradstreet*. Cambridge, (Mass.): Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Bradstreet, A., & Hensley, J. (2010). *The works of Anne Bradstreet*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Freud, S., & Strachey, J. (1991). *Moses and Monotheism: an outline of psycho-Analysis and other works*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Foucault, M. (1971). *L'ordre du discours*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Hoffmeier, J. K. (2015). *Akhenaten and the origins of monotheism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heilbron, J. L. (1999). *The sun in the Church: cathedrals as solar observatories*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.
- Martin, W., & Hinrichs, D. (2017). *Oxford Bibliographies*. Harvard University Library.

- doi:10.1093/OBO/9780199827251-0092 Retrieved from:
www.oxfordbibliographies.com.ezp-
prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/document/obo-9780199827251/obo-9780199827251-
0092.xml;jsessionid=D8FCE9DE370EED03D571CA06935E1BE6.
- Bradstreet, A., Parini, J., & Leininger, P. W. (2005). Oxford Reference. Oxford Univ. Press.
Retrieved from: www.oxfordreference.com.ezp-
prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195156539.001.0001/acref-
9780195156539-e-0036.
- Phoebus. Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged (12th ed.). (2014).
HarperCollins. Retrieved from: <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Phoebus>.
- Richardson, M. (2015). The Cambridge companion to American poetry. New York: Cambridge
University Press.
- Sandoval, S. A. M. (2001). The crisis of the Brazilian Labor Movement and the emergence of
alternative forms of working-class contention in the 1990s. *Revista Psicologia Política*,
173-195.
- Wiseman, S. (2006). Conspiracy and virtue: women, writing, and politics in seventeenth-century
England. New York: Oxford University Press.