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# REVIEWS

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William J. Scheick. *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998. 150p.

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William Scheick's book is part of the current project of revision in studies of colonial America and the broader revision of literary history based on gender. In addition to addressing the establishment of authority in Puritan culture and its diversity, this book takes part in literary archeology — documenting the work of previously unheralded women writers. Scheick asserts that women's voices were both "evident" and "distinctive" during the colonial period, and he pays special attention to women's assertions of identity and responses to authority. However, Scheick's attention to gender is not essentialist; in addition to a close consideration of texts written by women, he considers a text written for women — Cotton Mather's *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* — as an example of the conflict between divine and individual authority during the colonial period.

In his previous study, *Design in Puritan American Literature*, Scheick advanced the notion of the "logogic site" (a textual locus where author or reader pauses to consider the confluence of secular and divine meanings), and in this book he takes that concept a step further. Employing a New Critical attention to texts, Scheick reveals sites of "logonomic conflict" where an anxious negotiation between orthodox and personal authority is evident. These sites of conflict can be "unconscious resistant impulses" which tarnish aesthetic design or conscious exploitations which signal "deliberate resistance and revision" (3). The book goes on to catalog examples of logonomic conflict, both unconscious and deliberate, in the work of Cotton Mather, Mary English, Anne Bradstreet, Esther Edwards Burr, Elizabeth Hanson, Elizabeth Ashbridge, and Phillis Wheatley.

Chapter One, "Authority and Witchery," focuses on Mather's *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* and Mary English's sole surviving poem. Scheick points out that the authorship of Mather's conduct manual is itself indicative of logonomic conflict. Mather's attention to female piety created a sense of uneasiness — a concern that his authority may be diminished by his concentration on women. His conflict, suggests Scheick, is represented by his use of Eve (a figure of female disempowerment) rather than Mary as an example of female identity and empow-

erment. The second author Scheick focuses on in the chapter, Mary English, was better known for her imprisonment as a witch than for her writing; however, in one surviving poem which uses the letters of her name as the beginning of each line, her negotiation of orthodox and personal authority is evident. In the second stanza the poem shifts, both in its content and form; the author suggests she may “stray” rather than “obey” and asks for protection from such temptation. According to Scheick, this slight suggestion of disobedience, in addition to the “prosodic chaos,” of the second stanza is a sign of logonomic conflict in the poem.

Chapter Two, “Love and Anger” focuses on well-known colonial poet Anne Bradstreet and letter-journal writer Esther Edwards Burr. In a very convincing argument, Scheick shows that both women struggled to focus their attention and love on God rather than on their earthly lives and treasures. In their writing, however, we find “deformations . . . that intimate the underground existence of contesting sentiment” (53). Among Scheick’s most convincing examples is his consideration of Anne Bradstreet’s poem “Upon the Burning of our House, July 10th, 1666” where he points out the tension between emotion and belief. The poem includes an extended lament for lost belongings interrupted finally by the line “Adeiu, Adeiu; All’s Vanity” (56). This tension between sentiment and belief marks the logonomic conflict in her poem. In other works by Bradstreet, biblical allusions also interrupt the poet’s voice and identity. Similarly, Burr’s writing focuses on her love for people around her, including her husband and a dear friend, Sarah Prince: thus revealing emotional attachment to the earthly as the center of her narrative performance and making her work potentially transgressive of Puritan codes, but always still concerned with those codes.

Chapter Three, “Captivity and Liberation” offers a fascinating analysis of two Quaker women and their negotiation of the “theocratic logonomic system in which they lived” (82). Hanson’s *God’s Mercy Surmounting Man’s Cruelty*, a transcribed colonial captivity narrative, is evaluated as an example of the problems with the authorization of personal sentiment and expression. The narrative reveals the same kind of “elegiac sense of loss” for the worldly (Hanson’s family) as does Bradstreet’s “Upon the Burning of our House” (87). Just one simple example of its logonomic conflict among the many cited by Scheick is its ending. He notes that the narrative closes with a submission to God which is similar to Hanson’s submission to her captors — thus revealing the problematic confluence of the divine and secular. Chapter Three closes with a consideration of Elizabeth Ashbridge’s very interesting autobiography, *Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge*. Using multiple examples Scheick points out that

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Ashbridge's attained voice as a Quaker preacher never fully displaces her previous voicelessness, resulting in a curious anxiety of authority.

Finally, Chapter Four, "Subjection and Prophecy," focuses on conscious and deliberate resistance and revision in Phillis Wheatley's writing. The chapter examines, specifically, two verse paraphrases found in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*—"Goliath and Garth" and "Isaiah LXIII. 1-8"—and "On Being Brought from Africa to America." Based on Scheick's analysis, Wheatley's deliberate use of Scripture for social criticism and assertion of authority is clear. Scheick notes the presence of a subversive "second voice" embedded "within her surface compliance with authorized biblical and poetic traditions" (127). For example, in "Goliath and Garth" Wheatley uses David as exemplary of the "slave poet" whose victory represents a victory of Christ's church as well as an emergence from servitude and release from bondage. She reverses the common use of scripture to support slavery, using it instead to suggest the immorality of the institution. Thus, the encounter between David and Goliath is "a site of logonomic conflict, a place of friction between official and unlicensed applications of scriptural authority" (114).

Scheick's introduction clearly and aptly sets up his thesis without being heavy-handed in jargon. His explanation and analysis of Elizabeth Ashbridge's autobiography is compelling, for both its revelation of a fascinating story of a Quaker woman preacher and its insistence of the problematic position of a woman trying to assert her power, authority and identity in the world. In summary, *Authorship and Female Authority in Colonial America* reveals a great deal about the presence of female voices and the struggle between orthodox and individual authority. I think it would interest any scholar of women's literature and be a valuable asset to an American literature scholar/teacher who wishes to expand his or her concept of the colonial American period. ✨