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The Testimony of Anne Hutchinson

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THE TESTIMONY OF ANNE HUTCHINSON

The charges against Anne Hutchinson changed repeatedly during the course of her trials in Boston in 1637 and 1638. Her real crime was her belief that salvation was God's gift rather than the result of the Puritan way of life. Because she had a large following among women for whom she had been both midwife and teacher, and also among the men of Boston, this belief threatened the authority of that theocracy. She was imprisoned and then banished from the Boston colony. She eventually settled in the New York wilderness, where she and five of her 15 children were killed by Indians.

1.

"I did only ask a question."

Laying planks out of England
I came to this tangle
that is the face of a forest.
I read my window, the unstudied snow,
I begin to talk to my table—
fellow prisoner whose scars I will remember.
Dusk is a flood rising and swallowing everything
except my candle,
my white page with its knotted thread;
Boston's first apples under the eaves.

2.

“The elder women should instruct the younger.”

In that loft where women finish what men began,
we greet one flower at a time,
the child we name Necessity,
the secret name of Joy.
We have chewed fear, swallowed its mineral content,
we know life trembles like the water in this glass.

I keep going back.
Send for me, I'll come.
We are searching the Word
as these gentlemen have not done.

3.

“This immortality is purchased.”

Seeing the oaks without their leaves,
I see why the fence posts are cripples
in slow pilgrimage across the fields.
All things suffer, every stone
is dense with pain that has learned
to keep silent, hold still.

Without words, without cure,
the sunset rushes in and dumps gifts at my feet
and then departs,
dissolved in its own being.
Which of us failed?
Weren't my arms outstretched?

Over the leaves' small, choppy waves
I walk home and light my lamp.
In banana light, pineapple light
I write these words:
“The fire kept on lapping at Isaac's heart.
Not I but the sheep bleats to save my life.”

4.

“I think the soul to be nothing but light.”

What touches you every day?
What busies itself among motes?
What walks on water?
What moves through the universe
with the speed of a god?
What is always someplace?
What teaches resurrection?

5.

“I am redeemed from my vain conversation.”

The trees are looking over our heads.
They wave to the ocean
which lands at our beach
without seeking church membership.
The trunks of trees are cracked lips
closed on threads of argument,
the whole world doctrine marched into an ark
striking bottom as an atlas of animals
which debouch into the rocky braille
of a foreign language.