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AMERICA, *PURITAN* LITERATURE BEFORE *THE AGE OF REASON*

Abstract: In the American culture in general, the Puritan tradition has been a very interesting feature. The Puritans were neither the first nor the largest group of newcomers, but the arrival of the *Mayflower* on the American shore in 1620 and the creation of the Plymouth Plantation have come to signify the foundations of modern America. In order to understand the power of survival displayed by this group of brave people, this paper tries to explain the motives for their "errand into the wilderness" as well as to show that the life of the 17th and 18th century America was not exclusively gloomy and quiet. The main difficulty here lies in the lack of reliable sources, although poetry in the 17th century was also written by some poets who were of more than a temporary significance. As for the 18th century, histories of American literature never pay much attention to the period, which can perhaps be excused by the lack of literary works of importance until the very end of the century. There were, of course, philosophical and religious works interesting as a record of events that meant the end of the domination of Puritanism and the arrival of the Age of Reason.

Keywords: Puritans, success, poetry, sermons, diaries and chronicles

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INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS THE NEW WORLD

The Puritans were English Protestants, who followed the teachings of Martin Luther¹, however even more deeply accepting the ideas expressed by John Calvin². Luther believed that all men were wicked and God was all-powerful, so man cannot be considered “an equal partner” who through his good deeds can earn eternal life. The Puritans were strongly attracted by Calvin’s doctrine of predestination (Hurwitz, 1974: 91), which became the core of their beliefs: at the beginning of time God had chosen some people for salvation, and it was assumed that there were only a few *elects*, while most people were *preterites*, as the doomed used to be called.

Such a doctrine actually made the Puritans proud of belonging to God’s great enterprise (Miller, 1983). It was also generally accepted that *the elect* will in their earthly life demonstrate signs of their special role, that they will be pious but at the same time also successful in business – filled with the businesslike enthusiasm (Trevelyan, 1974: 360) they simply could not err. This is the essence of Puritan ethics, and the special significance of being successful in life has come to characterize the Americans and American culture ever since.

¹ Martin Luther (1483–1546) – German professor of theology, composer, priest, monk and a seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation. He came to reject several teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, disputing the claim that freedom from God’s punishment for sin could be purchased with money, proposing an academic discussion of the practice and efficacy of indulgences in his *Ninety-five Theses* of 1517. His refusal to renounce all of his writings at the demand of Pope Leo X in 1520 resulted in his excommunication by the Pope and condemnation as an outlaw by the Emperor Charles V. Luther taught that salvation and eternal life are not earned by good deeds but are received only as the free gift of God’s grace. Those who identify with Luther’s teachings are called Lutherans, though Luther insisted on *Christian* or *Evangelical* as the only acceptable names for individuals who professed Christ. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther)

² John Calvin (Jean Calvin, born Jehan Cauvin, 1509–1564) – influential French theologian and pastor during the Protestant Reformation. He was a principal figure in the development of the system of Christian theology later called Calvinism, aspects of which include the doctrine of predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation of the human soul. In these areas Calvin was influenced by the Augustinian tradition. Various Congregational, Reformed and Presbyterian churches, which look to Calvin as the chief expositor of their beliefs, have spread throughout the world. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Calvin)

This sense of being a part of God's great design resulted also in the Puritans' conviction that it was their duty to observe that the Christian faith is not distorted by anything not warranted by the Holy Book. In the second part of the 16th century they assumed it was their mission to *purify* the Church of England of all changes and additions, and it was by such undertaking that they earned their name. They wanted to abolish the episcopal hierarchy and the prayer book, as well as, for instance, the celebration of Christmas, which, the truth is, was not required by the Bible (Restad, 1996).

What really decided American history was when English Puritans, already involved in a controversy with the state³, also discovered a division in their own lines – their study of the Bible resulted in their disagreements concerning the organization of the church. The majority believed in Calvin's system, which instead of the hierarchy of clergy called for a hierarchy of ruling bodies – from the national assembly to the council of elders in a parish church. This requirement was strongly opposed by a very resolute minority, known as Congregationalists, and it was exactly from this group that the original American Puritans came from (Hurwitz, 1974: 129). The Congregationalists accepted basic concepts such as the doctrine of predestination, but they differed from the rest of the Puritans – Presbyterians – in their idea of church organization and church membership. They rejected all structures higher than individual churches, believing that each of these churches was to be individually founded on a separate covenant entered into by its members (SAD, 1967: 33).

Covenant was the term describing a relationship between God and Christians. God is under no obligation to a small and limited man, while each individual church of Puritan Congregationalists was related directly to God. In turn, church membership was offered only to those who had the power to make a public confession of their faith, and swear to the covenant. They were called *visible saints* and would presumably also belong to the category of *the elect*, though the decision in that sense had been made by

³ Their bitter attitude made them enemies of the state. The "Elizabethan Settlement" of 1559 accepted a compromise between Protestant and Roman Catholic creeds. Such *impurity* was not acceptable for the Puritans, and their opposition culminated in the outbreak of open warfare in 1642. The subsequent beheading of King Charles I (1600–1649) and the rule of Cromwell (1599–1658, Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland from 1653 to his death), changed the course of world history. (Hurwitz, 1974)

God at the beginning of time and no human effort could possibly change it (Miller, 1983).

This opposition offered by the Congregationalists to any national church contradicted broader political goals of the whole Puritan movement. The doubled pressure, exerted by both the Presbyterians and the government, often led to persecution and some of the Congregationalists, not wishing to risk beheading, chose to leave England. After eleven years of living in the Netherlands, in 1620 one such group decided to go on setting off from Plymouth to America (Živojinović, 1971: 9). Out of 102 people aboard the Mayflower only one third were *Saints* (Bode, 1971: 37), while others were a separate group referred to as *Strangers*. On arrival, however, almost all of them, the 41 male passengers (Hurwitz, 1974: 434), jointly signed the so-called Mayflower Compact, which established the foundations of their life in the Plymouth Plantation. Later on, all Mayflower settlers came to be referred to as *Pilgrims* (or *Separatists* – Hurwitz, 1974: 526), *Pilgrim Fathers*, or *Forefathers*. In 1630 a much larger expedition of over four hundred people, led by John Winthrop⁴ on his flagship *Arbella*, arrived in Massachusetts Bay, and during the Great Migration, i.e. during the reign of the Stuart King Charles I (1629–1640) (Hurwitz, 1974: 303) almost twenty thousand people settled around the Bay.

The arrival of the Mayflower Pilgrims in America was a result of their flight from intolerance and the domination of political enemies (Trevelyan, 1974: 287), while John Winthrop's group, and different subsequent ones, opted for a journey towards new economic possibilities, but also towards the New World in the original, religious sense of the term. This element of the myth of America is crucial for understanding not only the reasons for the early migration, but also numerous literary works treating the myth of America as the Promised Land⁵.

⁴ John Winthrop (1587/88–1649) – English Puritan lawyer and one of the leading figures in the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the first major settlement in what is now New England after Plymouth Colony. Winthrop led the first large wave of immigrants from England, and served as governor for 12 of the colony's first 20 years. His writings and vision of the colony as a Puritan *city upon a hill* dominated New England colonial development, influencing the governments and religions of neighboring colonies. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Winthrop)

⁵ The Promised Land, or “The Land of Milk and Honey” – the land which, according to the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible), was promised and subsequently given by God to Abraham and his descendants. In modern contexts: an image and idea related both to the restored Homeland for the Jewish people, and to salvation and liberation. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promised_Land)

This hope for the New World was really stimulating, but it was frequently marred by everyday's hardships and suffering: rough weather conditions, Indian wars, and the colonists' lack of experience decimated them. Their faith and self-discipline were their best defense, but then very little room was left for relaxation, enjoyment, sense of humor. This, at least, is the popular image of the Puritan life that was most vividly expressed by H. L. Mencken⁶ in his well-known jocular definition of Puritanism as "the haunting fear that somebody, somewhere, may be happy" (Mencken, 1982).

If the life of the 17th- and 18th-century America was really gloomy and without any laughter is not easy to say. The main difficulty in trying to obtain a full picture lies in the lack of reliable sources. What can be said with certainty is that while American Puritanism dominated the country's life for a limited time only, its influence can be seen even today. Its power is perhaps best explained by the fact that many of its features survived under all kinds of circumstances that followed, thus helping create the general American mind in subsequent centuries (Bode, 1971). The aspiration to succeed and exceed, the belief that hard work is an indispensable ingredient of happiness, the cult of money as the status indicator, and perhaps even a conviction that they are very special people, all these can be taken as the characteristic features of Americans. However, Puritanism and the Puritan ethics did survive long enough to grasp the attention of Nathaniel Hawthorne⁷ in the 19th century, and they can also be recognised

⁶ Henry Louis Mencken (1880–1956) – journalist, satirist, cultural critic and scholar of American English, one of the most influential American writers and prose stylists of the first half of the twentieth century. He commented widely on the social scene, literature, music, prominent politicians and contemporary movements. As a scholar, he is known for *The American Language*, a multi-volume study of how the English language is spoken in the United States. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._L._Mencken)

⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne (born Nathaniel Hathorne, 1804–1864) – novelist and short story writer, born in Salem, Massachusetts; his ancestors include John Hathorne, the only judge involved in the Salem witch trials who never repented of his actions. Nathaniel later added a "w" in order to hide this relation. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825. He published several short stories in periodicals, which he collected in 1837 as *Twice-Told Tales*. His four major romances are *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *The Marble Faun* (1860). Much of Hawthorne's writing centers on New England, often featuring moral allegories with a Puritan inspiration, belonging to Dark Romanticism – cautionary tales suggesting that guilt, sin, and evil are the most inherent natural qualities of humanity. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathaniel_Hawthorne)

as an important element of 20th-century novels such as *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis⁸ or *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon⁹, but the literary legacy of the 17th- and 18th-century America is rather modest. It is interesting to study for historical reasons, and when we wish to illustrate the line of development of American culture.

THREE POETS TO REMEMBER

In the 17th and a large part of the 18th century there were no American novels, which can be partly explained by the fact that the Puritans viewed them as capable of drawing people's attention away from hard work. On the other hand, the same was not true of poetry, and in the 17th century we can speak of at least three American poets who were of more than a temporary importance. None of them can be quoted as really great, however, and it was not until two hundred years later that poetry written in America was really felt as American (Jovanović, 2013b), rather than as English verses that once used to be written on the other side of the ocean.

ANNE BRADSTREET (1612–1672) is generally understood as a pure poetic talent who in her own time was praised both in England, where her poetry was published, and in America, whose shores she reached on the *Arbella* and where her father and husband were both governors of the Bay Colony (Gordon, 2005). As the late poet and feminist

⁸ Harry Sinclair Lewis (1885–1951) – novelist, short-story writer, playwright. In 1930, he became the first writer from the U.S. to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. His works are known for their critical views of American capitalism and materialism between the wars, with also strong characterizations of modern working women. In the Swedish Academy's presentation speech, special attention was paid to *Babbitt* (1922), while his other famous novels include: *The Job: An American Novel* (1917), *The Innocents: A Story for Lovers* (1917), *Free Air* (1919), *Main Street* (1920), *Arrowsmith* (1925), *Mantrap* (1926), *Elmer Gantry* (1927), *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* (1928), *Dodsworth* (1929), *Ann Vickers* (1933), *Work of Art* (1934), *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), *The Prodigal Parents* (1938), *Bethel Merriday* (1940), *Gideon Planish* (1943). (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinclair_Lewis)

⁹ Thomas Ruggles Pynchon, Jr. (born 1937) – novelist, whose fiction and non-fiction writings encompass a vast array of subject matter, genres and themes, including history, music, science, mathematics. For *Gravity's Rainbow*, he won the 1974 U.S. National Book Award for Fiction. After publishing several short stories in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he began composing the novels for which he is best known: *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Mason & Dixon* (1997). Pynchon's most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge*, was published in 2013. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Pynchon)

Adrienne Rich¹⁰ remarked, Bradstreet's '... individualism lies in her choice of material rather than in her style' (Rich 1967: *xix*), but her individualism should not be taken as some forced originality, unbecoming of a good Puritan. Bradstreet's originality became for the first time duly celebrated as Adrienne Rich in the foreword to the Hensley¹¹ edition of Bradstreet's works proclaimed her 'the first non-didactic American poet, the first to give an embodiment to American nature, the first in whom personal intention appears to precede Puritan dogma as an impulse to verse' (Rich 1967: *xix*). She wrote about two worlds she engaged and participated in on practically equal terms: the reality she shared with her family, and the world of the Bible. Like Emily Dickinson¹² much later (Knapp, 1989), Anne Bradstreet paid due attention to all little things around her and turned them into poetry, although she never approached them as being of metaphysical quality. She was a poet of daily life, of all those little acts that filled her own days as a housewife and a mother of eight children. Her style was plain, perhaps to the point of not exciting directness, however with enough poetic power. In her early poetry she addressed public matters as more becoming to survive for centuries (Gordon, 2005), perhaps not only because she was the first poet of merit to live and write in America – '... she wrote enough respectable and occasionally remarkable poetry to become the first lady of colonial Massachusetts literature' (Bode, 1971: 80).

¹⁰ Adrienne Cecile Rich (1929–2012) – poetess, essayist and radical feminist, one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20th century. Her first collection of poetry, *A Change of World* (1951), was selected by the renowned poet Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1973) for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award. She received tens of recognitions and honors. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrienne_Rich)

¹¹ Jeannine Hensley – former Assistant Professor of English at Wheaton College, Norton, MA. This collection of Anne Bradstreet's extant poetry and prose has long been the standard edition of the poetess' work, including a chronology of her life and an updated bibliography. (https://www.goodreads.com/author/.../3260836.Jeannine_Hensley)

¹² Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (1830–1886) – one of the most significant of all American poets. She briefly attended the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary before returning to her family's house in Amherst, MA. Gradually she became known for her reluctance to even leave her bedroom, while most of her friendships depended entirely upon correspondence. It was not until after her death when Lavinia, her younger sister, discovered her cache of poems that the breadth of her work became apparent to the public. Her first collection of poetry was published in 1890 by personal acquaintances Thomas W. Higginson and Mabel L. Todd, though both heavily edited the content. A complete, mostly unaltered, collection of her poetry became available only when scholar Thomas H. Johnson published *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* in 1955. (Jovanović, 2013a)

MICHAEL WIGGLESWORTH (1631-1705) was born in England, and came with his parents to New England when he was seven, subsequently to graduate from Harvard in 1651. The truth is that Puritans were not really great book-lovers, but they did appreciate knowledge and education, which is proved by the foundation of the Harvard College as early as in 1636 (Živojinović, 1971: 27); William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Brown, and Dartmouth followed by 1769 (Thelin, 2011). Wigglesworth gradually became a well-known public figure, and was also more responsible than any other individual for the popularity of a literary work among his fellow Puritans. His poem *The Day of Doom*, published in 1622, became the first American best seller – ‘the first edition of eighteen hundred copies sold out within the year; frequent reprints appeared throughout the eighteenth century and at least three in the nineteenth.’ (Bode, 1971: 116), so that the poem’s impact upon the New Englanders can never be overestimated.

The Day of Doom seems to us today a harsh work, ‘... one of the most morbid poems ...’ (Bode, 1971: 116) of the author’s generation. Contrary to what could be expected, however, its first readers were not frightened; apparently even children loved it. The reason for such reaction can be found in the belief that those who are prepared for the End have nothing to worry about. As all of Wigglesworth’s readers considered themselves righteous, they did not feel threatened by the poem’s descriptions.

Christ is seen in *The Day of Doom*, and his coming causes terror and panic; lines 105–120 of the 305-line poem (as in Bode, 1971: 119–120) read:

The judge draws nigh, exalted high
upon a lofty throne,
Amidst the throng of angels strong,
like Israel’s holy one.
The excellence of whose presence
and awful majesty
Amazeth Nature and every creature
doth more than terrify.
The mountains smoke, the hills are shook,
the earth is rent and torn,
As if she should be clean dissolved
or from her center borne.
The sea doth roar, forsake the shore,
and shrinks away for fear.
The wild beasts flee into the sea,
as soon as he draws near.

The Judgement is carried out in the already described mood. The saints are granted eternal bliss, but when all sorts of sinners begin to approach the Judge's throne, they encounter – vengeance. The poet even suggests that the saints will be pleased with witnessing the sinners' punishment and their suffering; such *Schadenfreude*¹³ could go hand in hand with sainthood, and this was one of the really peculiar characteristics of Puritanism. The lines at the poem's end (as edited by Hayes, 2008: 128) read:

The Saints behold with courage bold,
and thankful wonderment,
To see all those that were their foes
thus sent to punishment:
Then do they sing unto their King
a Song of endless Praise:
They praise his name, and do proclaim
that just are all his ways.

Wigglesworth's poem was also responsible for the ridicule to which Puritanism was exposed in the following years. The joylessness of its descriptions was hardly made less repulsive by its monotonous reliance on the ballad meter, which the poet intended '... for those who eventually memorized "The Day of Doom" after reading it or hearing it read or recited aloud' (Hayes, 2008: 128), and unrefined rhymes. Indisputable, however, remains the fact that Wigglesworth himself was a widely read and highly cultured man, who deliberately stooped to the level of a popular reader, which is a trick often employed by authors who hope to produce a best seller.

EDWARD TAYLOR (1645–1729) was certainly the most accomplished, yet also the least known poet of his times, simply because he did not publish any poems in his lifetime. What is more, as Bode (1971: 181) puts it:

He left his works in manuscript with the instruction that they remain unpublished. They were presented to the Yale College Library by Taylor's grandson and Yale's President, Ezra Stiles, in the latter part of the eighteenth century. He was brought to public attention by Thomas H. Johnson in 1937, and after Johnson published *The Poetical Works of*

¹³ As explained by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, *Schadenfreude* is the noun referring to a feeling of enjoyment that comes from seeing or hearing about the troubles of other people; enjoyment obtained from the troubles of others. Obviously borrowed from German language, normally not capitalized in English. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/schadenfreude>)

Edward Taylor (1939) he attracted considerable interest because of the force with which he expressed his genuine piety in various metaphysical conceits.

Edward Taylor is, as Donald E. Stanford¹⁴, his later editor, puts it, “the last important representative of the metaphysical school” (Grabo, 1961). With his brilliant literary taste he knew better than anybody else how non-Puritan his poetry was; although he did not order his poems to be destroyed, he refrained from publishing even a single one of them. He thus made no impact on the development of American literature, and his belated discovery is important only for the scholars of the period who try to understand the mystery of his art that flourished in a most unfavorable environment of American wilderness. What Taylor was known for in his own time were his elaborate sermons that he delivered both to his own congregation of Westfield, Massachusetts, and as guest sermons throughout the colonies.

Sermon-writing became a form of art performed by accomplished preachers in front of interested and, within narrow theological limits, sophisticated audience, and at least some of the sermons can be understood as literary works of considerable merit.

SERMONS

Those who study the beginnings of the American literature today often erroneously assume that the more sophisticated sermons, particularly those prepared by highly educated preachers such as Edward Taylor, were presented to only an ordinary audience of Puritans whose education left much to be desired and who ‘... were asked to practise a piety which involved a complete self-abnegation’ (Bode, 1971: 37). John Cotton¹⁵, Thomas Shepard¹⁶, or Richard Mather¹⁷ were certainly much better educated

¹⁴ Donald Elwin Stanford – born in Amherst, Ma, in 1913. He obtained both his BA and PhD from Stanford and his MA from Harvard, all in English. Before embarking on his teaching career, he was a freelance writer. Donald Stanford gathered together and printed most of Taylor’s poetry in *The Poems of Edward Taylor* (1961); this edition can be complemented by Norman Grabo’s *Edward Taylor* (1961), which appraises Taylor’s poetry and relates it to his life. (<https://www.google.rs/search?q=Donald+Elwin+Stanford>)

¹⁵ John Cotton (1585–1652) – clergyman in England and in the colonies, the preeminent minister and theologian of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. As a Puritan, he wanted to do away with the ceremony and vestments associated with the established Anglican Church and preach in a simpler manner. Cotton’s written legacy includes a large body of correspondence, numerous sermons, a catechism, and a shorter catechism for children titled *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes*,

than an average colonist, but it would distort the picture of New England Puritans if we tried to imagine a kind of a gap lying between them and their clergy. Even if we imagine them as being simple, what we know about them shows that they were quite familiar with theological problems – their great concerns being ‘... the nature of God, the nature of man, and the right relation between the two.’ (Bode, 1971: 36). Although New England was never a true theocracy, its unique system was based not only on a very close correlation between clergy and lay officers, but in particular on the dominance of religion and theological disputes of interest to everybody, within the system of Puritan morality as summarized by John Cotton in his sermon on *The way of Life* (1641) – ‘With the pattern of the traditional Seven Deadly Sins in mind, perhaps, he outlined the seven Puritan virtues: Industry, Dependence, Faithfulness, Humility, Cheerfulness, Modesty and Resignation. Of these the greatest was Industry. It was the duty and compulsion of every Christian to find some calling in which he could labor faithfully.’ (Bode, 1971: 37).

The sermons played also other important roles in the society. In addition to offering new arguments in the contemporary theological debates, they were, for example, a part of the political process – *election day sermons*¹⁸, and they played a

considered the first children’s book by an American. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cotton_\(minister\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cotton_(minister)))

¹⁶ Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) – English, afterwards American, Puritan minister and a significant figure in early colonial New England, regarded as one of the foremost Puritan ministers of his day. He took special interest in Puritan ministry to the Massachusetts Native Americans. His written legacy includes an autobiography and numerous sermons, which in some measure of contrast with others of his day, tended to accent God as an accessible and welcoming figure in the individual life. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Shepard_\(minister\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Shepard_(minister)))

¹⁷ Richard Mather (1596–1669) – Puritan minister in colonial Boston, MA, father to Increase Mather and grandfather to Cotton Mather, both celebrated Boston divines. He was a leader of New England Congregationalism, whose policy he defended and described in the tract *Church Government and Church Covenant Discussed, in an Answer of the Elders of the Severall Churches of New England to Two and Thirty Questions* (written 1639; printed 1643), an answer for the ministers of the colony to 32 questions relating to church government that were propounded by the general court in 1639. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Mather)

¹⁸ Unlike sermons in the Church of England, supposed to *please and inspire*, New England Congregationalists argued that a good sermon was to *inform and convince*. Published colonial sermons show that most ministers did not mix religion and politics on Sundays, but when they were asked to preach an *election day sermon*, that was different. Such sermons asserted that civil

decisive role in attempts to scare the congregation back into the religious life – *jeremiads*¹⁹ (Bercovitch, 1997). Their pattern did not vary much: they consisted of the explanation of the chosen Biblical quotations, interpretation, and finally application thereof to the everyday life of the pious.

It is only natural that the sermons were meant to be delivered orally, but some of them have been preserved in their printed form, so today's readers may find them repetitive, which is only to prove that repetition was, and has always been, a strongly effective rhetorical device. As such, they were meant to be delivered by skillful orators, and reading them silently gives far from right and just impression – '... the textual version of a sermon comes stripped of its church context, and yet it was the sermon's oral delivery by a minister preaching before his congregation that made a sermon a divine ordinance, ...' (Morris, 2005: 55). Be that as it may, the sermons are among the most reliable sources of our knowledge about a culture long gone.

DIARIES AND CHRONICLES

In addition to the sermons preserved to our day, it is from various diaries and chronicles that we derive our knowledge and sense of what life in the 17th-century America was like. Speaking generally, chronicles can be of great value for such purpose, but in the period referred to here they were perhaps too biased to be accepted as fully reliable. Early European chronicles were often shaded by too much praise to the sovereigns and their families, while early American journals, diaries, and histories

government is founded on an agreement between God and citizens to establish systems that promote the common good, so voters and rulers were told that they must do what is needed for their *peculiar circumstances*. The people were encouraged to promise to follow those they had elected, and rulers were to promise to act for the good of all. As long as rulers acted *in their proper character*, subjects were to obey; if rulers acted contrary to the terms of the agreement, people were *duty bound* to resist. (<http://www.ucc.org/election-day-sermons-were-co>)

¹⁹ The term *jeremiad* refers to a sermon or another work that accounts for the misfortunes of an era as a just penalty for great social and moral evils, but holds out hope for changes that will bring a happier future. It derives from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who in the seventh century BC attributed the calamities of Israel to its abandonment of the covenant with Jehovah and its return to pagan idolatry, denounced with lurid and gloomy eloquence its religious and moral iniquities, and called on the people to repent and reform in order that Jehovah might restore them to his favor and renew the ancient covenant. (<https://public.wsu.edu/~campbell/amlit/jeremiad.htm>)

expressed the tendency to see and describe the earthly in terms of the heavenly. The tendency to portray the colonists' life as fulfillment of their holy mission often resulted in the authors' disregard for objective truth in favor of effective lectures and potential symbolic lessons. These accounts offer to us, however, an impression of what it was like to be present there and to participate in the birth of what is the American culture.

Always mentioned as the first, and certainly best known such chronicle is WILLIAM BRADFORD's *Of Plymouth Plantation*.²⁰ Bradford was one of the two leaders of the Mayflower group, subsequently the governor of the Plymouth Plantation for thirty years (re-elected every year), despite his plea for others to serve (Bode, 1971: 24). His history was written between 1630 and 1650, and in addition to being documentary it also offers two elements that gradually became typical of the New World writing: he firmly believed that America had been chosen as the venue for a very special experiment in the spiritual history of Man, at the same time fearing that evil in the people can bring that experiment to ruin. The tone of Bradford's chronicle, where the heroic was frequently intertwined with the melancholic, is well illustrated by his explanation of how the Pilgrims decided to set off for America in the first place (as in Bode, 1971: 27):

... a great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world – yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work.

These and some other like reasons moved them to undertake this resolution of their removal, the which they afterward prosecuted with so great difficulties, as by the sequel will appear.

The price the colonists had to pay was really very high: half of the Mayflower passengers died not having spent a full year in America. Those who came only a decade later, after 1630, to found the Massachusetts Bay Colony, were by far better organized and their arrival was preceded by appropriate preparations. Their experience is of a great interest because they managed to create a much more complex administrative structure. It was an early pattern for the local government which has until this day been

²⁰ The work has carried many different titles. It was originally written as *Of Plimoth Plantation*, and it has also been published as *History of Plymouth Plantation*, *William Bradford's Journal*, and *The Bradford History*.

accepted in some parts of New England as crucial in dealing with a multitude of social problems.

Today we dispose of quite a few accounts of the life in the settlements written at various points of their pioneering days. John Winthrop's *Journal* – occasionally called somewhat too enthusiastically *The History of New England* (Hayes, 2008) – was never interpreted and transformed into a formal history which could possibly be compared with that by Bradford, but its value is immense all the same. Its entries are irregular however very serious, prepared by the leader of the Great Migration, “the chosen Moses of a new, and even mightier Exodus,” as Perry Miller²¹ calls him (Miller, 1983).

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION: TO PROVE AMERICA'S SPECIAL PLACE...

It is rather widely accepted today that perhaps the most important historical portrait of the first period of Puritan colonization of America was presented to the readership by COTTON MATHER (1663–1728), one of the most learned divines in Massachusetts Bay and the most prolific writer in colonial America (Bode, 1971: 139). In his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (*The Great Achievements of Christ in America, or Ecclesiastical History of New England from its First Planting*, 1702) he collected a large number of stories, narratives, and testimonies intended to prove America's very special place in God's project. Mather's works also provide a well of information, numerous biographies of outstanding citizens, and all other sorts of historical data that are precious sources of our knowledge of the beginnings of America.

SAMUEL SEWALL (1652–1730) offered a different, much more personal, account of those times in his *Diary*, which has become the most famous journal of colonial New England (Bercovitch, 1997), covering the years 1673–1729, the crucial period when life in the colonies was becoming increasingly more secularized. It is also important to remember that Sewall was one member of the special court which

²¹ Perry G. E. Miller (1905–1963) – Harvard University professor, an authority on American Puritanism, and a co-founder of the field of American Studies, often referred to as “the master of American intellectual history”. In his most famous book, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939), Miller adopted a cultural approach to illuminate the worldview of the Puritans, unlike previous historians who employed psychological and economic explanations. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perry_Miller)

pronounced “the witches of Salem” guilty²². Having subsequently realized that he had made a terrible mistake, he was strong enough to admit it publicly, and his *Diary* provides us with an insight into the soul of the man regretting what he did and aware of the irrevocability of his wrong judgement.

EDWARD JOHNSON (1598–1672) was a pious Indian trader, who arrived in Massachusetts in 1630 and soon became a staunch defender of the theocracy (Bode, 1971: 99). One more text which is worth mentioning here is his *Wonder-Working Providence of Sion’s Saviour in New England* (1654). It is not reliable as a historical source, and has frequently been scorned as simplistic and naïve. Johnson was not a clergyman, and he did not study at the university; he simply expressed the views and positions of less sophisticated, ordinary colonists. His basic intention was to portray America as the place of the final battle between good and evil, Christ and Satan. In that he realized that the duel would be a long one, but he had no doubts about the outcome, the same as he did not doubt the colonists’ special role in the events to come. This firm conviction about the outcome of their “errand into wilderness” was exactly what best characterized the early colonists. The lack of such certainty and growing disillusionment and disenchantment with their own imperfection were, on the other hand, what marked the colonial settlers’ entry into the eighteenth century.

* * *

Histories of American literature seem to go quick over the eighteenth century, generally marked by and remembered for its liberalism (Jovanović, 2014: 87). To explain this perhaps best serves the fact that there were no literary works of great value and significance until the end of the century. The truth is that there were, however, philosophical, religious, and political writings which are important today not as literary works but as a record of different tendencies and events that marked the end of the domination of Puritanism and announced the arrival of the Age of Reason. This is perhaps why historians of early American literature describe the eighteenth century in

²² The *Salem Witch Trials* were a series of hearings and prosecutions of people accused of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts between February 1692 and May 1693. The trials resulted in the executions of twenty people, fourteen of them women. Five others (including two infant children) died in prison. Twelve other women had previously been executed in Massachusetts and Connecticut during the 17th century. The episode is one of the Colonial America’s most notorious cases of mass hysteria. It has been used in political rhetoric and popular literature as a vivid cautionary tale about the dangers of isolationism, religious extremism, false accusations, and lapses in due process. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salem_witch_trials)

the light of the juxtaposition between the two most powerful minds of the period: Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) as the last great proponent of the essence of Puritanism, and Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) as the most widely known eighteenth-century American Deist, intellectual believing that human beings can only know God via reason and observation of nature.

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СЛОБОДАН Д. ЈОВАНОВИЋ

**АМЕРИКА: ПУРИТАНСКА КЊИЖЕВНОСТ ПРЕ ДОБА РАЗУМА И
ПРОСВЕТИТЕЉСТВА**

Резиме: Пуританска традиција у америчкој књижевности, и у америчкој култури уопште, занимљива је појава, пошто пуританци нису били ни прва а ни најбројнија група досељеника на нови континент. Чињеница је ипак да су долазак брода Мејфлауер на обалу Америке 1620. године и каснији настанак Плимутске плантаже, коју је створило стотинудвоје његових путника, временом почели да се узимају као зачетак данашње Америке. У настојању да се схвати она силна снага у борби да се преживи коју су испољили ти малобројни одважни људи, као и сва моћ њихове вере и њихових убеђења, овај рад је намерен да подсети на разлоге који су пуританце повели на овај „задатак у дивљини”; истовремено је потребно показати и да живот у Америци 17. и 18. века није био у свему безбојно смркнут и тужан. Највећу тешкоћу овде налазимо у недостатку поузданих извора и непосредних илустрација, мада се у поезији 17. века јасно истиче присуство троје песника чији су значај и вредност све само не неприметни и пролазни. Кад је у питању 18. век, историчари америчке књижевности као да прелазе преко тог периода – ретко му посвећују више од једног обичног поглавља у својим прегледима, што се објашњава чињеницом да и нема књижевних дела од неког изразитог значаја све до сâмог споја с деветнаестим веком. Наравно, било је

филозофских, верских и политичких списа који су важни не толико као књижевни радови колико као сведочанства о збивањима која су означила крај доминације пуританизма и наилазак квалитативно сасвим новог периода, који се назива Добом разума и просвећености.

Кључне речи: пуританци, успех, поезија, проповеди, дневници и хронике.

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