

# **The English literature of colonization**

## **2. The Puritans**

# The Puritans

- They were radical Calvinist who believed that the Church of England had betrayed the spirit of the Reformation
- <http://www.historyguide.org/earlymod/lecture3c.html>

# The Puritans (some historical notes)

- Entered in conflict with Elizabeth I when they demanded more reformation in England
- For the Queen, the national church should be subordinated to royal purposes
- The Church of England should be the church of all Englishmen (but she would make no window into men's souls)

- Escaped English persecution by emigrating to Holland
- In 1620 planned their escape to America (they bought a small ship, *Speedwell*, that proved unsatisfactory for sea travel)
- On 16 September 1620 finally sailed on the *Mayflower* from Plymouth







# Three Puritan Principles

- They wished to have their feelings changed through God's Grace. They wanted to be cleansed of envy, vanity, and lust.
- They valued plainness and simplicity
- They saw their bringing Christianity to America as a divine mission.

# Puritan terms and influences...

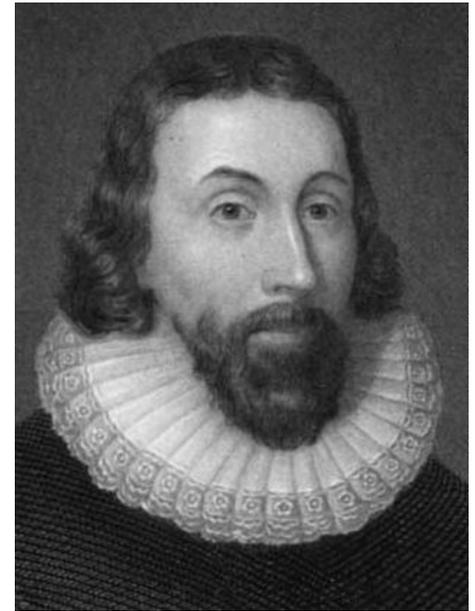
- **From Calvin: Predestination:** the idea that God has willed eternal damnation for some people and salvation for others.
- The Puritans believed that the accumulation of wealth through hard and honest work was a sign of being “elected” to go to heaven.

# The Puritans

- The Bible as a central hermeneutical tool
- Recast their voyage to America in Biblical terms (from the Book of Exodus): They were the new Jews, the “chosen people”
- The notion of the “Divine Providence” as central to Puritan beliefs (articulated in John Winthrop’s famous sermon in 1630)

# DIVINE MISSION

- John Winthrop
  - “We shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through all the world.”



## Two Important New England Settlements

- 1) The Plymouth Colony (1620) (settlers known as Pilgrims)
- Leader: William Bradford
- Provided religious freedom, with ties to the British crown
- 2) The Massachusetts Bay Colony (1630)
- Leader: John Winthrop
- Established a theocracy, free of ties to Great Britain

# The Puritans

- Self-governing communities gathered around a congregation
- In theory upheld religious freedom from external state control
- In practice, a theocratic society, with the clergy ruling over legal, political and moral matters

- Dissenters:

Anne Hutchinson:

Defied the religious authorities

Asserted her spiritual independence

Roger Williams:

Advocated separation between church and state

Founded the colony of Providence (shrine for the persecuted: for Quakers, Baptists, Jews, Indians...)

# Forces undermining Puritanism

- Theocracy suffered from a lack of flexibility
- Change in economic conditions (an expanding economy)
- The presence of the frontier - concept of self-reliance, individualism, and optimism

- Early dissenters revealed the contradictions inherent in the Puritan enterprise: intolerance and individualism ended up compromising the early ideals
- The trials of the “witches” of Salem in 1692

# Puritan Literature

- Common genres were sermons, biographies, diaries and autobiographies
- The style was Protestant; plain and against ornamentation
- This style mirrors the Puritan way of life and their belief that one should not call attention to oneself

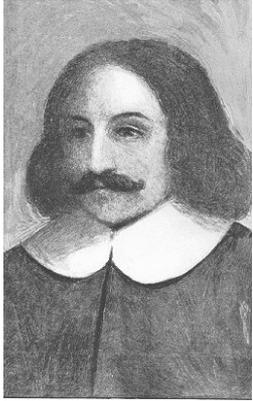
# Puritan literature

- There was a purpose to Puritan writing: to glorify God
- Puritans reinforced in their writings their **religious mission** by using the language of the **Old Testament**, adapted to the realities of the New World
- They believed that events described in the Old Testament anticipated their own experiences

# Puritan literature

- Texts reflected the scope of their readers, who were well-grounded in religious
- Common themes in early Puritan writing:
  - a. Idealism, both religious and political
  - b. Pragmatism, practicality and sense of mission

## Puritan Writers to remember...



- William Bradford *Of Plymouth Plantation* (HISTORICAL NARRATIVE)
- Jonathan Edwards “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (SERMON)
- Anne Bradstreet “Upon the Burning of Our House,” and “To My Dear and Loving Husband.” (POETRY)



# Some aspects of the Puritan legacy

- a. The need for moral justification for public, and governmental acts
- b. The Quest for Freedom - personal, political, economic, and social
- c. The Puritan work ethic (being rich through honest work is a way of winning God's favour)
- d. The city upon the hill - concept of manifest destiny.

# Bibliographical sources

- <http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap1/1intro.html#themes>
- Reuben, Paul P. "Chapter 1: Early American Literature to 1700 - A Brief Introduction." *PAL: Perspectives in American Literature - A Research and Reference Guide*. WWW URL: <http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap1/1intro.html>