

Colonial Literature

The Puritan Period

How did religion shape the literature of the Puritan period?

- We will look into themes, formats, and purposes of the Puritan writers to answer this question.

Important dates

- ❖ 1492 Christopher Columbus
- ❖ 1607 Founding of Jamestown
- ❖ 1620 Mayflower on Plymouth Rock
- ❖ 1636 Harvard College Founded
- ❖ 1692 Salem Witch Trials
- ❖ 1740's Great Awakening

So when was the Puritan Part of the Colonial Period?

- Early 1600s to about 1750 or so
- The reason we call this part of the Colonial Period (which represents all of the time that the British ruled the colonies in North America) the PURITAN period is because of the overarching influence of the Puritans and their specific religious practices.

The North: Puritans

- In 1620, a hundred or so English men and women settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts, fleeing from religious persecution.
- An example of such persecution:
 - One Englishman who had written a pamphlet to reform the Church of England was put in jail, fined, whipped, had the top of his ears cut off, his forehead burned with a hot iron, and his nose slit.



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 we 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.”

- Bay Colony



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—**simplicity**, especially in church.
- They saw their bringing Christianity to America as a **divine mission**.



The Puritan 10 Commandments...

- 1) Thou shalt not miss church and community meetings.
- 2) Thou shalt work hard and support my fellow pilgrims.
- 3) Thou shalt worship a strict and Christian God.
- 4) Thou shalt put the Lord first in my life and obey his words.

The Puritan 10 Commandments...

- 5) Thou shalt live by the 10 Commandments as written in the Holy Bible.
- 6) Thou shalt not dress in bright colors or dance in a wicked manner.
- 7) Thou shalt not perform witchery nor conjure the devil.
- 8) Thou shalt not have any opinions or beliefs not held by the entire community.

The Puritan 10 Commandments...

- 9) Thou shalt build my home simply and not clutter it with decorations.
 - 10) Thou whom shalt disobey these commandments will be banished or be hanged.
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Puritan terms and influences...

- **Predestination:** the idea that God knows where each person will end up in eternity.
 - The Puritans believed that those who were blessed with wealth and prosperous family lives were a part of those “elected” to go to heaven.
 - This concept can be seen in “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” by Jonathan Edwards.

Puritan terms and influences...

- **Protestant work ethic:** The Puritans believed that hard work was a way of winning God's favor, and wealth accumulated through hard, honest work was seen as a sign of Godliness and was encouraged of all Puritans.
 - This “protestant work ethic” is a major foundation of the American way of life.

Puritan terms and influences...

- **Plain style:** Believe it or not, William Bradford (*Of Plymouth Plantation*) is well known for his plain style.
 - This simply means that his prose is not ornamental, and is not intended to be showy.
 - This falls in line with the Puritan belief that one should not call attention to oneself.
 - This is opposite of Shakespeare, whose writing in England was very showy and meant to showcase his skill as a writer.

Styles



- Ornate

- Psalm 23 (King James Version)

- The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me...

Styles

- Plain

- Psalm 23 (Bay Psalm Book)

The lord to me a shepherd is.

want therefore shall not I.

He in the folds of tender grass,

doth cause me down to lie.

To waters calm me gently leads,

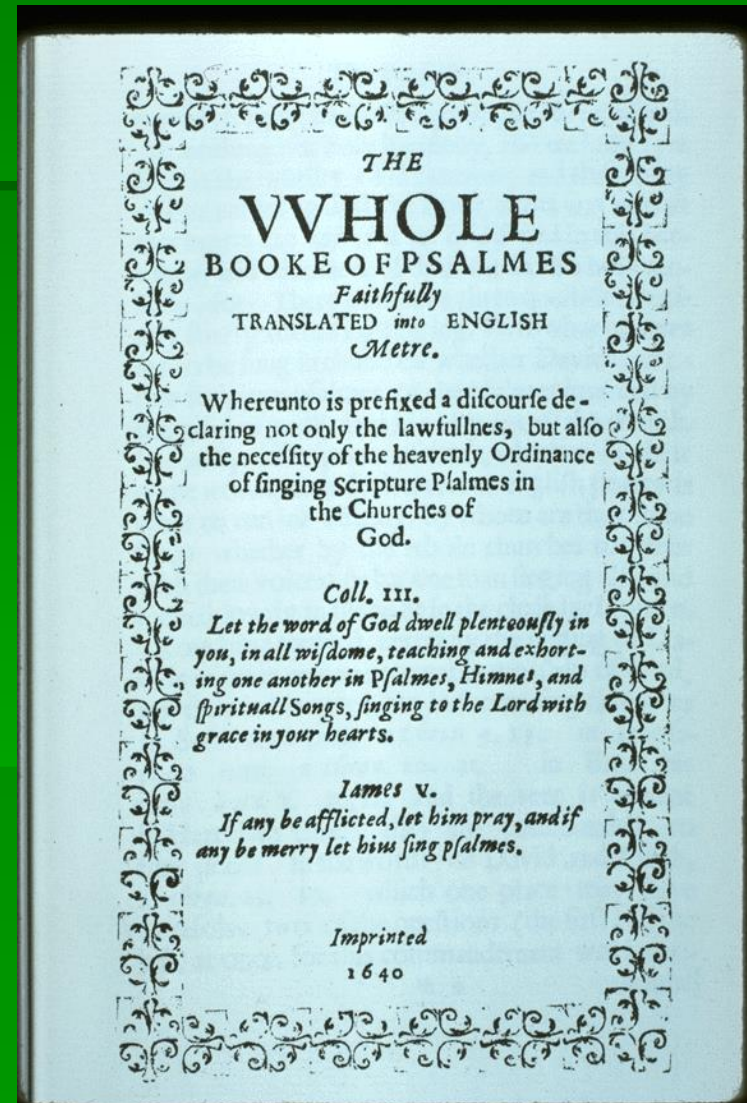
restore my path does he.

Yea though in valley of death's shade

I walk, none ill I'll fear;

Because thou art with me, thy rod

and staff my comfort are.



Puritan terms and influences...

- Genres that the Puritans favored:
 - sermons (e.g. “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”)
 - religious poetry (e.g. “To My Dear and Loving Husband”)
 - historical narratives (e.g. “Of Plymouth Plantation”)

NOTE: THEY DID NOT FEEL THAT LITERATURE WAS FOR ENTERTAINMENT. Novels and plays were frowned upon, due to a perceived lack of practical religious value.

How did religion shape the literature of the Puritan period?

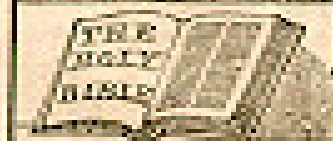
- Religious values were put above all else in every area of these people's lives.
 - This led to a focus on practical literature (sermons, historical narratives, poetry with a spiritual message).
 - This also led to a certain style of writing that mirrored the Puritans style of living. (plain style)
 - Themes were religious in nature and reflected Puritan values.

The New England Primer

In Adam's fall
We sinned all.



Thy life to mend,
God's Book attend.



The Cat doth play,
And after slay.



A Dog will bite
A thief at night.



The Eagle's flight
Is out of sight.



The idle Fool
Is whipped at school.

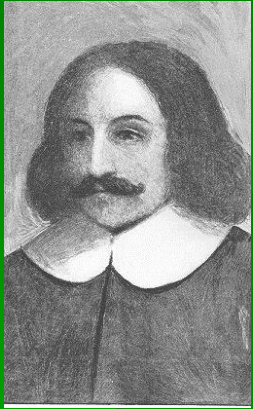


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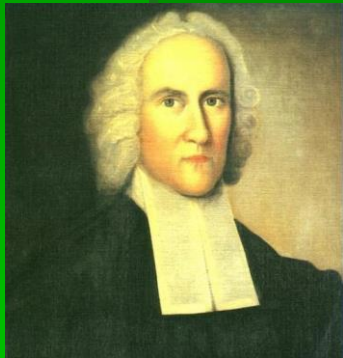
The New England Primer

- This text is indicative of how large a role religion played in these people's lives.
 - The religious subtexts began for young Puritans as early as the time that a child began to learn the ABC s.
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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)

Puritan Writing



The Purpose of
Literature is
To Educate

The End of Puritanism

- No longer need for theocracy.
- Puritans became guilty of religious persecution themselves.
- Salem Witch Trials
- 1740s-A revitalization of Puritanism called the Great Awakening



How did religion shape the literature of the Puritan period?

- Using your notes and your knowledge of what we've read and discussed so far, answer this question on your own paper.
 - Answer in complete sentences, and use specific examples.

How did religion shape the literature of the Puritan period?

- (Sample answer): The Puritan religion shaped the literature during this time by making writers produce mostly sermons and religious poetry, because they felt that literature had to be practical. Additionally, since religious values were put above other values, most of the writing was both instructive and religious. The writing style was very plain as anything ornate was viewed as sinful.)