

Puritan Literature in America

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Period 1

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Puritans

- n Definition: Group of Protestants who wanted to “purify” the Church of England.
- n Believed religion was a “personal, inner experience” and that clergy or government could come between God and the individual (Elements of Literature, Fifth Course 9).
- n Suffered persecution in England.
- n Small group led by William Bradford came to the New World in 1620.

Puritan Beliefs

- n Most of humanity “damned” by sin of Adam and Eve.
- n Select few would be saved. Those people could be identified by their saintly behavior. When God bestowed his grace on them, they were “reborn”.
- n Values: self-reliance, hard-working, moderation, and simple living (Elements of Literature, Fifth Course).

Puritan Politics

- n Contract or covenant exists between God and humanity.
- n Idea of contract between people and government stems from that idea.
- n Rather undemocratic - felt that the “saintly elect” should have great influence in politics (Elements of Literature, Fifth Course).

Characteristics of Puritan Writing

- n Bible provided model - individual life is a “journey to salvation.” Connections between Biblical events and own lives.
- n Used writing to explore their inner and outer lives for signs of God’s work.
- n Diaries and histories most common.
- n Plain style stressed clear expression and avoided complicated figures of speech (Elements of Literature, Fifth Course 12).

Major Authors of the Puritan Period - 1600's-1800

- n William Bradford
- n Mary Rowlandson
- n Anne Bradstreet
- n Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz
- n Edward Taylor
- n Jonathan Edwards

William Bradford



- n 1590-1657
- n Of Plymouth Plantation
- n Described hardships of journey to New World; unshakeable belief in God.
- n Plain Style of writing - few figures of speech or metaphors.

Mary Rowlandson

- n 1636-1678
- n A Narrative of Captivity
- n Story of capture by Native Americans; endured many hardships
- n Saw her story as reflection of Bible stories of hardship- used allusions to Biblical stories.

A
NARRATIVE
OF THE
CAPTIVITY, SUFFERINGS AND REMOVES
OF

Mrs. *Mary Rowlandson,*



Who was taken Prisoner by the INDIANS with several others, and treated in the most barbarous and cruel Manner by those vile Savages : With many other remarkable Events during her TRAVELS.

Written by her own Hand, for her private Use, and now made public at the earnest Desire of some Friends, and for the Benefit of the afflicted.

B O S T O N :

Printed and Sold at JOHN BOYLS'S Printing-Office, next Door to the *Three Doors* in Marlborough-Street. 1775.

Anne Bradstreet

n 1612-1672

n The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in
America...By a Gentlewoman in Those Parts

n Published in England without her knowledge.

n Explores religion and personal relationship with God.

n Difference - Use of metaphor in writing.

Edward Taylor

- n 1642-1729

- n The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor

- n Differed from other Puritan writers - use of metaphor in writing.

- n Explored how his identity was shaped by “God’s Grace”.

Huswifery by Edward Taylor

Make me, O Lord, thy Spinning Wheel complete.

Thy Holy Word my Distaff make for me.

Make mine Affections thy Swift Fliers neat

And make my Soul thy holy Spool to be.

My Conversation make to be thy Reel

And reel the yarn thereon spun of thy Wheel.

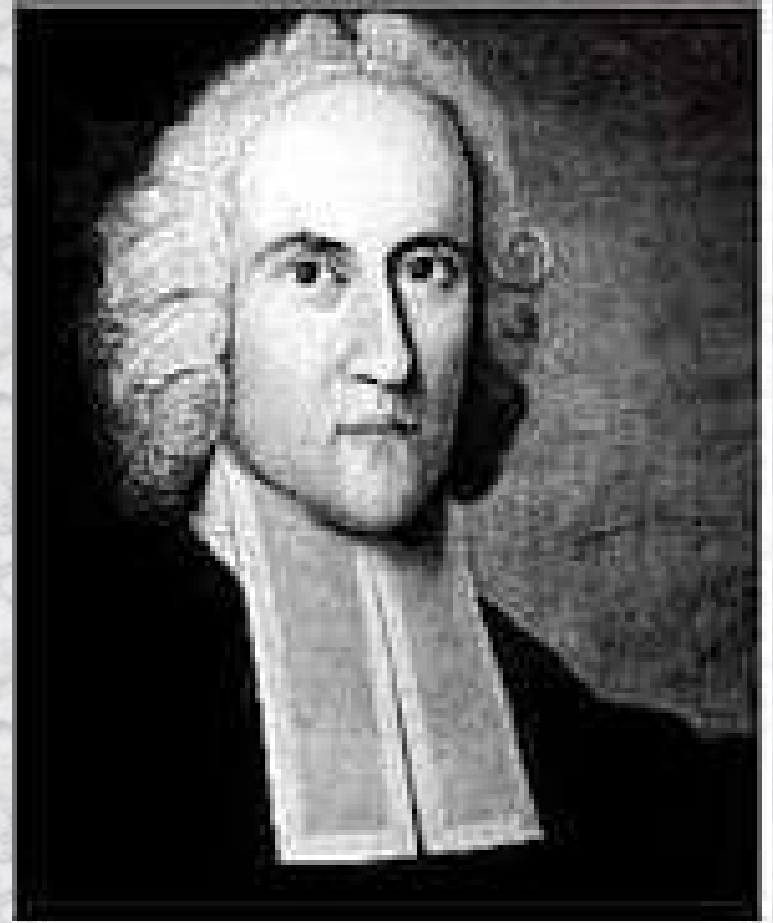
(Elements of Literature, Fifth Course 73).

Analysis of “Huswifery”

- n Examines personal relationship with God.
- n Shows belief in God’s “grace” and rebirth as a “saint” here on earth.
- n Differences: Use of metaphor to compare life and self to weaving and spinning wheel - avoids the “plain style.”

Jonathan Edwards

- n 1703-1758
- n Fire and brimstone imagery.
- n Helped bring about the Great Awakening.
- n Tyrannical pastor - extreme and strict - humans “lowly sinners.”
- n The last Puritan
(Elements of Literature, Fifth Course, 77).



Works Cited

Evler, Mescal, ed. Elements of Literature, Fifth Course. Holt, Reinhart & Wilson. Florida, 1997.

Ong, Fay, ed. English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools. California Department of Education. Sacramento, 1998.