

## The Puritan Literature

Religious writing is also an important part of the colonial literature in America. It is represented in the writings of the puritans who traveled and settled in America seeking for religious freedom.

Pilgrims and Puritans initially belonged to the Anglican Church, but they were radical reformers seeking further purification and a return to the Church's original "pure and unspotted" state. They opposed the ornate rituals of the Church of England, reminiscent of Roman Catholicism, including the veneration of images and relics, choirs, bells, music, decorated robes, and crosses. These embellishments, they believed, diverted attention from the sermon and the word of God. Additionally, they objected to the hierarchical structure of the Church, rejecting the authority of the Pope and bishops, as they found no biblical justification for such a hierarchy. Embracing Martin Luther's concept of "the priesthood of all men," they asserted that any individual could serve as a priest. These individuals, devoted to the Bible as the word of God, believed in its governance over their lives, dismissing the authority of kings or popes.

The Puritans who settled in the American colonies were led by a group of English Separatists known as the Pilgrims. The Pilgrims were seeking religious freedom and wanted to separate from the Church of England, which they considered corrupt and in need of further purification. In 1620, a group of Pilgrims, known for the Mayflower Compact, sailed across the Atlantic Ocean aboard the Mayflower. They arrived at what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts, and established the Plymouth Colony. The most prominent leaders among the Pilgrims were William Bradford, who later became the governor of Plymouth Colony, and religious leaders like William Brewster and John Robinson. These early Puritan settlers played a significant role in the foundation of the New England colonies and contributed to the shaping of American history and culture.

The Puritans has a set of beliefs that they represented in their writing and which characterizes their style. They thought of themselves as God's chosen people so they referred to themselves as the **elect**. They believed that they were saints, that they had

salvation, which can only be obtained by God. They thought America was the **promised land**, and everything in the world is predestined by God. Puritan literature was written in the form of diaries, religious journals, poetry, and annals. Some very prominent figures are William Bradford (1540-1657) and Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672).

**William Bradford** wrote **Of Plymouth Plantation** in 1647. It is an account that details the experience of the Puritans while traveling to the New world, their arrival at Cape Cod, and their hardships. The first thing that can be noticed through a reading of his account is the religious aspect of the text and of the beliefs of the puritans. The author believed that the puritan texts will become holy books for the future generations and thought that every detail had to be scripted. Thus, many biblical references are made through the narrative wherein the puritans are themselves sanctified. He uses a very elevated language in a highly formal style and makes references to God and to scripture in almost every line. At moments he introduces some preaching in the text as when he says

What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: “Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity, “ etc. “Let them therefore praise the Lord, because He is good; and His mercies endure for ever. Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, shew how He hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor.

By doing so, the author is instructing the reader to follow the puritan experience because it enlightens the path to the next believers in the next generations.

**Assignment:** Write an essay in which you analyse the excerpt below

**From Of Plymouth Plantation by William Bradford**

Chapter IX: ...Of Their Safe Arrival at Cape Cod

November 9.

*... But to omit other things (that I may be brief) after long beating at sea they fell with that land which is called Cape Cod; the which being made and certainly known to be it, they were not a little joyful.*

*... Being thus arrived in a good harbour, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on firm and stable earth, their proper element. And no marvel they were thus joyful, seeing wise Seneca was so affected with sailing a few miles on the coast of his own Italy, as he affirmed, that he had rather remain twenty years on his way by land than pass by sea to any place in a short time, so tedious and dreadful was the same unto him.*

*But here I cannot but stay and make a pause, and stand half amazed at this poor people's present condition; and so I think will the reader, too, when he well considers the same. Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of trouble before in their preparation (as may be remembered by that which went before), they had now no friends to welcome them nor inns to entertain or refresh their weatherbeaten bodies; no houses or much less towns to repair to, to seek for succour. It is recorded in Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle and his shipwrecked company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them (as after will appear) were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise. And for the season it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast. Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men – and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not. Neither could they, as it were, go up to the top of Pisgah to view from this wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace or content in respect of any outward objects. For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weatherbeaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue. If they looked behind them, there was the mighty ocean which they had passed and was now as a main bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world. If it be said they had a ship to succour them, it is true; but what heard they daily from the master and company? But that with speed they should look out a place (with their shallop) where they would be, at some near distance; for the season was such as he would not stir from thence till a safe harbour was discovered by them, where they would be, and he might go without danger; and that victuals consumed apace but he must and would keep sufficient for themselves and their return. Yea, it was muttered by some that if they got not a place in time, they would turn them and their goods ashore and leave them.*

*... What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: "Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity, " etc. "Let them therefore praise the Lord, because He is good; and His mercies endure for ever. Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, shew how He hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor. When they wandered in the desert wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry and thirsty, their soul was overwhelmed in them." "Let them confess before the Lord His loving kindness and His wonderful works before the sons of men."*