

Early Colonial Ideology - part 2



Clash of Cultures—review

- Native Americans were savages, primitive heathen akin to devils.
- These indigenous people would not be on the saved list, even if they converted.
- The plagues of European diseases (small pox) which decimated the Native population only proved to be a sign of the Puritans' right to claim the lands.
- It has been estimated that 90% of the Native Americans in New England were wiped out by the time of the Puritans' arrival.

Clash of Cultures—review

- The settlers found a somewhat controlled environment of cultivated fields and organized forests.
- The landscape was not a completely vast hostile wilderness.
- As early as 1634, John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony knew of the epidemics wiping out the Native populations.
- In a letter he wrote to a friend in England, he states that plagues was “miraculous”— “But for the natives in these parts, God hath so pursued them, as for 300 miles space the greatest part of them are swept away by the smallpox which still continues among them. So as God hath thereby cleared our title to this place, those who remain in these parts, being in all not 50, have put themselves under our protection...”

Clash of Cultures—review

- Consequently, during the first fifty years no elaborate threat arose from the Native Americans.
- The number of deaths among the people seemed sanctioned by Divine Law.
- William Bradford, governor of the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts, also mentions this:

For it pleased God to afflict these Indians with such a deadly sickness that out of 1,000 over 950 of them died, and many of them lay rotting above ground for want of burial.

Contrast—John Donne

- An example of contrasting thought is a poem by John Donne:
“Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed”
- It is important to compare the writings of colonial America against the writings in England—helps establish a stronger understanding of the Puritan/Separatist mind-set by showing what they opposed.

John Donne || Elegy XIX

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
Until I labour, I in labour lie.

The foe oft-times, having the foe in sight,
Is tired with standing, though they never fight.

Off with that girdle, like heaven's zone glistening 05
But a far fairer world encompassing.

Unpin that spangled breast-plate, which you wear
That th'eyes of busy fools may be stopped there:

Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime 10
Tells me from you that now 'tis your bed time.

Off with that happy busk, whom I envy
That still can be, and still can stand so nigh.

Your gown's going off such beauteous state reveals
As when from flowery meads th'hills shadow steals.

Off with your wiry coronet and show 15
The hairy diadem which on you doth grow.

Off with those shoes: and then safely tread
In this love's hallowed temple, this soft bed.

In such white robes heaven's angels used to be

John Donne || Elegy XIX

Received by men; thou Angel bring'st with thee 20
A heaven like Mahomet's Paradise; and though
Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know
By this these Angels from an evil sprite:
They set out hairs, but these the flesh upright.
License my roving hands, and let them go 25
Behind before, above, between, below.
Oh my America, my new found land,
My kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned,
My mine of precious stones, my Empery,
How blessed am I in this discovering thee. 30
To enter in these bonds is to be free,
Then where my hand is set my seal shall be.
Full nakedness, all joys are due to thee.
As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be
To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use 35
Are as Atlanta's balls, cast in men's views,
That when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem
His earthly soul may covet theirs not them.

John Donne || Elegy XIX

Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings made
For laymen, are all women thus arrayed; 40
Themselves are mystic books, which only we
Whom their imputed grace will dignify
Must see revealed. Then since I may know,
As liberally as to a midwife show
Thyself; cast all, yea this white linen hence. 45
Here is no penance, much less innocence.
To teach thee, I am naked first: why then
What need'st thou have more covering than a man.

Donne, John. "Elegy [XIX]. To His Mistress Going to Bed." *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*.
C. A. Patrides, ed. London: Everyman's Library. Print.

John Donne

(Jan. 1572— March 1631)

- In 1615 was ordained a priest when 43 years old
- honest and frank about his passions and his intellect and his personal life
- wrote numerous poems on large variety of subjects
 1. men chasing women / fertility poems / worship of women
 2. personal love poems to his wife
 3. metaphysical interpretations of life in Jacobean England
 4. and divine or holy poems
 5. numerous satyres and songs

He is considered a metaphysical poet, writing on somewhat obscure themes and mystical notions of the soul and interpretations of private life in the London.

John Donne

- “Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed” is a heavily decorated poem, which makes strong allusions about contemporary times.
Heavily erotic, even for its time. Published in 1654.
- Most important to this poem is the allusion to America.
In lines 27-32 he compares the woman to the lands overseas.
- Embodies her as a full unexplored continent and land of possibilities for adventure.
- This is a very successful metaphor on numerous levels.
 1. sums up the Jacobean mind-set of discovery and journeys to new lands
 2. connects sexual conquest with territorial conquests overseas
 3. by making the mistress his America, his personal territory, then he “possesses” her as a King owns his territory

John Donne

- Donne captures the basic patriarchal stereotype of man-female relations.
- What saves this from drowning in too much “machismo” is the closing couplet:

“To teach thee, I am naked first: why then

What need'st thou have more covering than a man.”

He is showing himself in a vulnerable position—he is in the middle of waiting for her reactions and actions; this is not a demanding, controlling situation, rather it is a gentle seduction, a moment of tenderness between two loving characters.

Puritan Plain-Style re-examined

This poem is *exactly* what the Puritans opposed:

- open declarations of affection, even for a husband to wife
- emotional, passionate sentiments
- heavily decorative metaphors
- erotic sensibilities as a basis for literary themes

The Puritan Plain style requires both writing and artistic senses to be under full control of the *author* and in retrospect, the *reader* as well.

Creative works must:

- display a perspective of the wilderness as pagan and untamed
- display Puritan characters without rashness, without color
- always show them as civilized followers of God

Puritan's View of New World

The New World offered an opportunity to set a chaotic wilderness to a sense of Christian order. They were given the opportunity to claim a region of the world, and reinvent, *reform* the landscape in their own controlled, manicured concepts.

In a recent essay, Robert Boschman notes the English Settlers' motivation based itself on the need “to reform the environment, to Anglicize it, as swiftly as possible” (129).

Among the Puritans, the writings of John Winthrop confirm Boschman's view. Winthrop states in his speech “A Model of Christian Charity”: “Whatsoever we did or ought to have done when we lived in England, we must do that and more also wherever we go” (*Norton Anthology of American Literature* 156).

Boschman, Robert. *In the Way of Nature: Ecology and Western Expansion*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009. Print