
Unit 1 □ The Puritan Period in the History of American Literature (1607 - 1700)

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
 - 1.1.0. Establishment of the Colonies
 - 1.2.0. The Historical Writers of New England
 - 1.3.0. The Descriptive Writers of the Period
 - 1.4.0. The Theological Writers of the Period
 - 1.5.0. Poetry of the Puritan Period
 - 1.6.0. Conclusion
 - 1.7.0. Questions
 - 1.8.0. Suggested Reading

1.0 □ Introduction

THE COLONIZATION of the eastern seaboard of America in the early 17th century was as much the end of a long process as the beginning of a new chapter in history. The voyages of Columbus followed soon afterward by those of Amerigo Vespucci and lesser-known explorers from Spain, France, Holland and Portugal defined the trajectories of rival imperialisms. The Spaniards had established the settlement of St Augustine in 1565; a small group of Englishmen, at the behest of Walter Raleigh, had tried to found a colony on Roanoke Island off the coast of North Carolina in 1594; an outpost had briefly been set up on the Maine coast in 1607; Captain John Smith in 1614 had surveyed and mapped the entire New England coastline.

The waves of English immigration which brought the Pilgrim Fathers, among others, to the shores of America in the first half of the 17th century have become the defining displacement of the era, creating as they did a dedicated diaspora on alien shores and generating, in the process, a dialogue of discovery typically expressed in the journals, accounts and diaries of the first colonials. The concepts of flight and dream were as effective for these pioneers as they

were for the later generations of immigrants, impelling them beyond latitudinal limits to a near-mythical map whose boundaries they expected to shape. The awareness of the sheer space that was newly available and the wonder at the beauty and rich diversity of the landscape that captured the imagination of the primary planters remain in their literature to this day.

1.1.0. □ Establishment of the Colonies

Between 1607 with the establishment of Virginia (named after the virgin Queen, Elizabeth I of England) the first English colony on American soil, and 1682, which saw the addition of Pennsylvania, the last, there were no less than ten colonies of English blood and speech. They are in the order of their establishment, Plymouth, New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, and South Carolina. The first writers were therefore immigrants who negotiated the new land and the life it offered with a primarily English sensibility and cultural apprehension. This first tract of the pre-national literature may be said to be both of English and American origin in which English agency and American environment came together to give rise to a body of writings that was largely of a historical, religious and descriptive nature.

1.1.1 □ The Establishment of the First English Colony at Virginia

In 1607 a company of enterprising Englishmen, empowered with a royal patent left for the eastern shores of America and established in Virginia the first successful colony on American soil. Captain John Smith, the leader of the group, was the writer of the first book in American literature. He wrote three books of which the first, **A True Relation of Virginia** was, as Tyler maintains “not a literary effort” but “a budget of information for the people at home, and especially the stockholders of the Virginia Stock Exchange”. (A History of American Literature by Moses Coit Tyler, Collier Books, New York, 1962, p 52)

Most notable among the other early writers of Virginia were George Percy of Northumberland whose **Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colony of Virginia by the English** provides a history of the colony from its

departure out of England down to the year 1607. William Strachey's **A true Reportory of the Wrack and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates, KT** was published in July 1610. Gates had set sail for Virginia from England with a fleet of nine ships and five hundred emigrants. In a terrible tempest that subsequently broke out Gates' ship was driven ashore on one of the Bermudas and the few passengers who survived the wreck managed to voyage to Jamestown. Strachey gives an account of this in his little book on the calamity, and the emigrants' experience of it.

Good News from Virginia published by Alexander Whitaker in 1613 cast in the mould of a hortatory sermon, was composed for the enlightenment of people in England and consequently describes the country, the climate, the Indians, and the pioneers' struggle with the daunting conditions of immigrant life. The other notable examples of literature produced during this period in Virginia are John Pory's sketches of pioneer life along the James River and George Sandys' translation of Ovid's 'Metamorphosis'.

These writings, perceptively described by Tyler as having "some noteworthy value as literature, and some real significance in the literary unfolding of the American mind..." are historically important in terms of their positioning at the very beginning of the American literary articulation and their consequent value as record and document rather than as works with an intrinsic literary potential.

The Restoration in England did not bide well for Virginia as the navigation acts passed by Charles II's Parliament went against the commercial and agricultural interest of Virginia. The parliamentary and legal injustices that were meted out to Virginia between 1660 and 1676 under Charles II caused widespread resentment in the colony. Moreover the vast tracts of land that were granted by the English sovereign to his favourites aggravated the situation.

An Indian massacre in the spring of 1676 caused panic among the populace and the people prevailed on the royal governor Sir William Berkeley to restore order in the colony. An alternative centre of authority complicated matters when a number of the inhabitants turned to Nathaniel Bacon to provide leadership during this crisis. Berkeley and Bacon became opponents and the split leadership exacerbated an already difficult situation, the instability at the top in the face of the Indian threat adding to the general disorder. The anonymous manuscripts of the period relating to the massacre and the rebellion constitute documents of historical and sociological

importance affording as they do, a glimpse of some of the most disturbing local events of the time.

The intellectual condition of Virginia was further compromised by the religious intolerance practiced by a section of its inhabitants. Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians and all those who dissented from the Episcopal Church were discriminated against and were fined for detected trespasses. The feudalistic tilt in social relations along with the narrow sectarian emphasis in matters of religion militated against the growth of a socio-cultural atmosphere in which literature could take root. Hence the first colonial period in Virginia saw the sparse offshoots of a limited literary consciousness struggling to emerge and survive in an inhospitable and largely uncongenial atmosphere.

1.1.2 □ The Establishment of the Puritan Colonies at New England

Barely thirteen years after the establishment of the colony in Virginia, four hundred miles to the north of the continent, in that climatically bleaker region of what came to be patriotically christened as New England American civilization planted its second outpost.

The first Puritan colony was founded in Plymouth, Massachusetts by the “pilgrims” who arrived at Cape Cod in 1620 on the *Mayflower*. The next one was set up at Salem in 1628. The more stable and enduring Massachusetts Bay Colony was established in and around Boston in 1630 by the company that came over on the *Arbella* under the leadership of John Winthrop. In the course of time New England expanded from Massachusetts into Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Maine. These communities grew from the hundred or so persons who came aboard the *Mayflower*, and the 600-odd on the *Arbella* under the leadership of John Winthrop a decade or so later in the course of time New England expanded from Massachusetts into Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Maine. By 1640 some twenty thousand Puritans spread across the landscape.

Additional colonies sprang up in the wake of Virginia and Massachusetts. In 1634, Maryland, founded as a refuge for Catholics, was carved out of northern Virginia. Thirty years later, New Netherland was wrested from the Dutch by the English and renamed New York: in the same year New Jersey

came into existence through a grant from the Duke of York. Pennsylvania was born in 1681 when Charles II ceded a large tract of land to the elder Penn for a debt that he owed the latter.

The social structure of New England was one of concentration while that of Virginia was that of dispersion. In New England families settled down in close proximity to each other thus forming neighbourhoods while in Virginia, each settler in imitation of the English lord, occupied vast tracts of land thereby giving rise to geographical and social isolation. The domestic isolation of the latter, in sharp contrast to personal community enjoyed by the New England settlers, hindered the growth of public and civic institutions, which depend on and in turn foster, a sense of kinship and belonging between the social groups.

The popular notion of the Puritans as pioneers may be ascribed to the fact that they dominate the written records of the time. In the first colonial period generally regarded as the years between 1607 and 1676, a considerable body of writing emanated from New England, recording the colonials' negotiation of the new land. There were the historical writers, namely William Bradford, John Winthrop, Nathaniel Morton and Edward Johnson; the theological ones, prominent among who were Thomas Hooker, John Cotton and Cotton Mather; the descriptive writers and poets such as Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor. 'The one grand distinction between the English colonists in New England and nearly all other colonists in America' maintains Tyler "was this, that while the latter came here chiefly for some material benefit, the former came chiefly for an ideal benefit. In its inception New England was not an agricultural community, nor a manufacturing community, nor a trading community: it was a thinking community". (A History of American Literature by Moses Coit Tyler, Collier Books, New York, 1962, p109)

1.1.3.

"The New England Puritan's difference from the Anglican or Catholic in worship and polity dictated differences in literary theory. His literal attitude toward the Bible left little excuse for any religious art not somehow justified by its text; and the ardor of his Protestantism led him to reject anything traditionally associated with the Church of Rome. Organ music, stained-glass windows, incense, rich vestments, ornate altars, religious images —these were all adjuncts to Catholic, and to some extent to Anglican, worship. Their

“Papist” associations were enough to make them anathema to the Puritan. Catholics commonly held that things which appealed to the senses could be fittingly used in the service of religion. The Puritan could not agree. He distrusted sensuous appeals in worship because they usually involved objects and practices not specifically endorsed by Holy Writ, because they smacked of Rome, and because he believed that “fallen man” was likely to become the prey of his senses, subject to the tyranny of passion rather than the dictates of right reason and faith.

This meant that the Puritan writer could not use, as his Catholic and Anglican contemporaries did, a body of material and a set of devices calculated to charm sensuously and to “adorn” his work—such charming and adornment seemed to him dangerous. He wanted to reach men’s reason and to convince them of truth, not to lull them to acceptance by drugging their minds with potions all too likely to stir the carnal passions so powerful in the descendants of fallen Adam. The Puritan usually rejected imagery which served merely to delight, accepting only that which seemed to him to make the truth more easily understood, and preferring that which he could find in the Bible. He would rather talk of plain glass, letting in all the light, than of stained-glass windows, which seemed to him empty adornment symbolizing man’s aptness to dim the light of truth. Anything which appealed to the senses so strongly as to endanger concentration on what must be grasped by reason, was dangerous. Good writing was to teach; its method must make directly and clearly comprehensible what man most needed to know.

Naturally, early New England writers of prose concentrated on sound and logical structure, and on clarity. The logic and rhetoric of Peter Ramus, the great French anti-Aristotelian logician of the sixteenth century, were adopted by Puritan pundits partly because they seemed to offer useful rules for good expository prose. But more immediately important than such rules was the Puritan’s consciousness of the nature of his audience. It comprised men who were neither trained critics nor expert writers, but were, usually, earnest Christians, eager to learn. They were humanly fallible, and if a page, however clear, seemed dull, their thoughts strayed. Therefore the Puritan preacher and writer, although he advocated the “plain style” and objected to adornment for adornment’s sake, seasoned his prose with imagery and used whatever literary devices seemed to him legitimate and necessary to make his instruction palatable. Anything in words which might rouse evil passions was forbidden, but picturesque phrasing and evocative images were allowable

if their associations were innocent or if they had Biblical' precedent.

The last point is important. The Bible had for the Puritan supreme literary value. It was the work of an omnipotent God, who used language perfectly because all that he did was perfect. Allegory, figures of speech— even frankly sexual imagery—crop up often in Puritan writing, sometimes in ways that are startling if we forget that its authors knew that men's "affections" must be charmed if their attention was to be held, and were sure that any literary method used in the Bible had divine sanction. New England authors avoided the rapturous expression of Catholic or Anglican mystics as too sensuous and too redolent of "enthusiasm"; they closed their eyes to much in the great religious literature of seventeenth century England because they did not want to tempt their readers' passions or to cloud their understanding of the truth by too elaborate rhetoric. Moreover, symbols and images, linked with the Mass and with ritualistic forms of worship, were suspect to the Puritan, and, in general, he looked coldly upon the ingenuities ' of style, the extended similes, the complicated metaphors (often sensuous or even sensual in suggestion), the elaborate prose music, and the rhetorical decoration, which characterized much of the best English writing in the late Renaissance. The Puritan was thus cut off from many sources of literary effect; but mercifully the Bible gave him others. He had no qualms about using its imagery, its rhythms, and its stylistic devices for his own pious purposes.

Part of his success with his audience depended on what he learned from Biblical style; he profited also by his understanding of other means by which he could hold his audience's attention without concessions to its baser appetites. He spoke and wrote principally for fishermen, farmers, woodsmen, shopkeepers, and artisans. However little they knew about classical literature or about rhetorical niceties in English prose and verse, they knew a great deal about the sea, gardens, village life, and the concrete concerns of pioneers busily establishing prosperous colonies in a wilderness. They enjoyed seeing an author drive home his point with a simile or a metaphor that touched their familiar experience; and their experience was rich with homely material. When Thomas Shepard wrote in his *Sincere Convert* (1655 edition), "Jesus Christ is not got with a wet finger," he meant, "Salvation cannot be had by mere study of books"; but his metaphor made a commonplace statement expressive and vivid for his readers by calling up the picture of an earnest student wetting his finger whenever he had to turn a page. Such metaphors and similes abound in Puritan writing. Their purpose is obvious; their effect

is to give to pages which might otherwise be abstract and dull the taste of life.

Some New England writers broke away from the usual Puritan conventions of style. They were all to some extent influenced by non-Puritan ways of writing; many of them were English university men, well trained in literary traditions; and those whose work has merit enough to deserve mention today were individuals never completely subjugated by rigid convention. But the variations from orthodox Puritan practice are usually minor, and, so far as the work of any group can be summed up in a formula, the Puritans' can , be. The formula called for clarity, order, and logic as supreme stylistic virtues. It admitted some concessions to the reader's liking for sensuous appeal, but limited that appeal to what was unlikely to stimulate man's baser nature and distract his mind from truth." (Literacy History of the United States, p. 56-58)

1.2.0. □ The Historical Writers of New England

The earliest Puritan records were historical and descriptive accounts of the settlers' response to the new land. The envisaged ideal, the actual America and the linguistic apprehension of the same may be seen as being curiously interconnected "Puritan narratives defined a shape for the writing of America, but they also questioned how and whether language could reveal the extraordinary experience. As a result, from the very beginnings America became a testing for language and narrative, a place of search for providential meanings and hidden revelations, part of a lasting endeavour to discover the intended nature and purpose of the New World" (From Puritanism to Postmodernism, Ruland & Broadbery, Penguin Bks, USA, 1991, p-4)

1.2.1 □ William Bradford (1590-1657)

The writings of William Bradford and John Winthrop may be regarded as the prototype of this early immigrant canon. The tradition that they initiated accommodates various disciplines and interests and essentially reflects the Calvinist origins of American Protestantism. Bradford of the *Mayflower* and Plymouth Rock, regarded as the father of American history, provides in his **History of Plymouth** Plantation the earliest documentation of this colonial period. Bradford's **History** had been left in manuscript and had been used

by his nephew Nathaniel Morton for his book **New England's Memorial**, after which many writers used it as source-material. It disappeared during the British occupation of Boston and was given up for lost till it surfaced in 1855 in the Fulham Library in London.

Bradford's **History** in its minute and painstaking observation of fact and detail remains a faithful chronicle of day-to-day life as it was lived in the colony at Plymouth. During the period of the voyage the history was recorded almost as soon as it was made but upon the completion of the same and with the first sowings of the plantation at Plymouth the entries became less frequent and regular and the observations were largely limited to the more significant of the happenings in the life of the infant colony. This is to be expected in the light of Bradford's growing involvement in the administration of the colony, an exercise that claimed his time and attention to a very large extent.

The exodus of the English Puritans to America has traditionally been likened to the flight of the Israelites to the Promised Land. Like the patriarchs of the Old Testament, William Bradford describes the "choosing" of His people, their exile and wanderings. Inscribed in this primordial parallel are the echoes of previous passages and peregrinations, namely those undertaken by the apostles and missionaries of the early Christian church, men who braved the rigors of strange, often inhospitable, climates and customs to spread their faith across countries. The immigrants from England who, in many cases, had left behind substantial estates, and embarked on a similar project, that of carrying European civilization and Christianity to the New World (as they believed) may, in all justice, be compared to those first missionaries and their rites of passage to the ancient apostolic destinations.

That the patriarchs themselves had a notion of this historic affiliation becomes evident from Bradford's spontaneous identification of the hardships suffered by him and his people with those endured by St Paul. In recalling the plight of the travellers on at last reaching Cape Cod, he observes: "It is recorded in the 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, were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise." (The American Tradition in Literature, Vol I, ed S. Bradley, R.C. Beatty & E. Hudson, Long, W. W. Norton, New York, 1956)

1.2.2 □ John Winthrop (1588-1649)

John Winthrop led the fleet that carried the 600-odd pilgrims across the Atlantic in 1630. One of the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Winthrop, with characteristic scrupulousness, went on to record the minutiae of that migration in his **Journal**. His narrative provides, not only a record of the day-to-day life as it was lived in the colony, but also the workings of the Puritan mind in its negotiation of a changed geographical, historical, social and civil reality on an alien continent. John Winthrop's **Journal**, which developed into **The History of New England** was begun in 1630 and was added to for the next twenty years till a few weeks before the author's death in 1649. Winthrop seeks to register in plain and unadorned prose, through a balanced and dispassionate manner, the events, both momentous and mundane that unfolded in the life of the colony at Massachusetts Bay

1.2.3 □ Edward Johnson (1598-1672)

Edward Johnson, though of humbler stock, yet managed to attain prominence in the governments of Massachusetts Bay. In 1640 he founded the community at Waburn, Massachusetts. He provides his epic account of the trials and tribulations of the Puritan experiment in holy living in the western world in his work **A History of New England** (1653), better known as **The Wonder-Working Providence of Sion's Savior in New England**.

1.2.4. □ Nathaniel Morton (1613-1685)

Born in England in 1613 Nathaniel came with his father's family to Plymouth in 1623. In 1645 he was elected secretary of Plymouth Colony and occupied that office till he died in 1685. He published in 1669 **New England's Memorial** based largely on Bradford's **History** and Winslow's **Journal**. It enjoyed fame and a readership till the discovery and publication of Bradford's **History**.

1.2.5 □ Common Features in the Puritan Mediation of History in New England

These writers, not literary in the usual sense and mainly occupied with subduing a wilderness, building homes and creating the instruments of

government and law, were yet the progenitors of a vigorous prose tradition, foreshadowing interesting developments in later writings, and constituting in embryonic form some of the legal and political manifestos of the American system. *The Mayflower Compact* is important as an early American covenant instituting civil government by common consent with reference to the common good. The *Compact with the Indians*, which like 'The Mayflower Compact' a part of Bradford's **History** was the first American treaty with the Wamponaug people and was faithfully kept for 54 years until 1675 when Metacomet began those savage attacks known as King Philip's War and included the Deerfield Massacre. The Narragansett challenge, described in the same book incidentally was an episode that Longfellow had used dramatically in **The Courtship of Miles Standish**.

Though a significant amount of this pre-national literature was produced, it has been argued that it was not in any sense of the term 'American' literature for it did not arise out of an imaginative engagement with America itself- as a society or culture -for America so understood, had not yet been constituted. Which brings one to the paradox that literature existed in America before America (as we understand it) existed a paradox captured by Robert Frost in all its perplexities in his poem *The Gift Outright*.

The land was ours before we were the land's.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people.

In another interesting twist to the conceptualization of America it is felt that even before the continent was discovered by Columbus America existed as a figment of the European imagination, which had long believed in the existence of a fabulous landmass in the west awaiting discovery and exploration.

With the New England Puritans however, this myth took on a Biblical dimension. Even before they arrived in the New World, they had tended to see the nature and purpose of human life in the light of God's plan and promises. The religious and nationalistic imperatives of the colonists' endeavor are clear from their avowal that they had begun the voyage across the Atlantic "for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith" and for the honor of their "king and country". (A History of American Literature, Tyler, Collier Books, N. Yk, 1962, p 130)

The genesis of such thinking may be traced to the two great European theologians of the previous century — Martin Luther and John Calvin. The

Puritans derived the Lutheran idea that men are essentially wicked and God all-powerful with the corollary that no human action is capable of attaining spiritual redemption. It was Calvin however who was more crucial to the development of Puritan thought and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, first published in 1536, was the major text from which the founding fathers drew doctrinal speculation.

Early New England writers operate within the Calvinist theoretical framework, having derived their vision and moral bearings from the attitudes contained therein. Bradford, in his **Of Plymouth Plantation**, presents the Puritan immigration experiment as part of a “great design”, and Winthrop, in his sermon aboard the *Arbella*, emphasized the need to nurture the potential colony as “a model of Christian charity” on the Calvinist assumption that any deviation from it would spell doom. In chapter 32 of his narrative, where Bradford describes the breaking out of wickedness amongst the people, he does so with a typically Calvinistic understanding of human nature. He says: “I say it justly may be marveled at and cause us to fear and tremble at the consideration of our corrupt natures, which are so hardly bridled, subdued and mortified; nay, cannot by any other means but the powerful grace of God’s spirit.” (American History, p 23)

Bradford and Winthrop were governors of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies respectively for repeated terms and were admirably suited for, and indeed did combine most effectively the roles of spiritual and secular leader, guiding their flock to the hallowed pastures, exhorting them to exemplary action, setting the moral pace as it were and, at the same time, administering justice and laying the foundations of a civil society. In their combination of the two roles both men demonstrate an affinity with the biblical archetype Moses who was spiritual leader, lawgiver and chronicler of Israelite history.

There is a constant striving in both men to discharge their sacred and secular offices with the utmost sincerity. Winthrop, in his *Model of Christian Charity*, describes his dual concern thus: “For the work we have in hand, it is by mutual consent, through a special overruling providence and a more than an ordinary approbation of the churches of Christ, to seek out a place of cohabitation and consorts, under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical.” (American History, p 26) In like manner, Bradford, while recounting the first marriage solemnized by him in Plymouth recognizes the civil as well as the sacramental nature of the contract describing the same as

being: “ a civil thing upon which many questions about inheritances do depend with other things most proper to their cognizance and most consonant to the Scriptures...” (Colonial and Federal, p 25)

However, the civil was more often than not subsumed within the sacred in a way that is perhaps possible only in a theocratic society. The Puritans with Calvinist leanings who formed the core of the New England clergy subscribed to the view that the church is the state, and should enjoy primacy in all areas of human life. Not unexpectedly then the New England scheme of punishments was a product of theology rather than of jurisprudence. The social intercourse enjoyed by these people along with the sartorial habits sported by them was likewise tempered by a Puritan narrowness of belief and outlook.

A belief in prayer and providence runs through the entire corpus of writings heightening its affinities with biblical prose. In a scenario where every act of survival was construed as a miracle, and every tribulation overcome, a sign of divine sanction and blessing, providence appears as an agency of affirmation. The literalness and logic with which the New Englanders approached everything were applied particularly to prayer and providence, clear from their belief that God was always near at hand, and more than willing to interpose in their smallest affairs. In the words of Ruland and Bradbury, Bradford and Winthrop’s writings “is the stuff of millenial epic, but it is epic without known outcome”, (Puritanism to Postmodernism, p 11)

1.2.6 □ Literary Style of the New England Historians

Bradford renders his account in “the plaine style”, with singular regard unto the simple truth in all things”. Not only are the boundaries between personal testimony and objective history considerably blurred in Bradford’s *History* the constant need to adjust to the changing parameters of pioneer life imbues the narrative with shifts in tone and tempo. Eventually his history takes the shape of a jeremiad, a fundamental Puritan articulation that assesses the gap between professed intention and final accomplishment and calls for a return to the original vision, chronicling in the process, the hardships encountered along the way.

Though for the most part these writers used plain language and a simple

style to “justify the ways of God to man”, they did take recourse to the occasional metaphor for greater impact. The vivid biblical imagery finds its most frequent and forceful expression in the metaphor of “the city on the hill”. This “city on the hill”, of course, is the visible body of Christ or the New Jerusalem; a model community of Christians expected to act as a beacon to the rest. Winthrop’s reminder to his flock, “for we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us”, (American History, p 27) finds corroboration in chapter 32 of Bradford’s narrative where he refers to his people as those who had been “brought into the light, and set in the plain field, or rather on a hill, made conspicuous to the view of all”. (Ibid, p 23)

Unlike the elegant, often ornamental prose styles of Catholic or Anglican writers the ‘plaine style’ of the Puritan historians was language that was ‘resacralized by its own congregation, shaped by specific theological, social and political assumptions’. (From Puritanism, p 15) The prose of this period therefore is both a history and story of the epic struggle of people consecrated to a vision, a rhetoric of range yet restraint that rates even as it narrates the experience of early colonial life.

1.3.0. □ Descriptive Writing of the Puritan Period.

The first settlers were struck by wonder and excitement at the expanse of land and scenery that confronted them in the new land. Many of them expressed their response to the uncharted continent providing details of the topography, climate, vegetation, fauna and the native inhabitants of the place. The histories written during this period and already referred to are rich sources of such descriptions. The descriptions of land and ocean furnished by the first settlers gain a particular focus from their imperialist assessment and understanding of the same, even as the Puritan, providential view of settlement engendered myths and shaped attitudes regarding the immigrants’ relationship to the new land which survive in the American consciousness even today.

1.3.1. □ Francis Higginson

Francis Higginson, a minister of the Church of England who reached Salem in June 1629 as a religious teacher had maintained a journal of his voyage across the Atlantic and of his observations on his new environment. The contents of this work were compressed into a slim volume called *'New England's Plantation'*. In this book both the voyage and the new country are described through the fresh perceptions of the emigrant who is eager to taste the adventures and novelties of scene and custom that necessarily await him. The first glimpse of the New England coast is thus conveyed: "Now, what with fine woods and green trees by land, and these yellow flowers painting the sea, made us all desirous to see our new paradise of New England, whence we saw such fore-running signals of fertility afar off" (A History of American Literature, M.C. Tylor, p 164).

The idealizing thrust of Higginson's survey is clear from his praise for the land and its natural bounty, the physical proportions of the Indians, and most of all for the opportunities for "preaching and diligent catechizing" that it afforded.

1.3.2. □ William Wood

'New England's Prospect' by William Wood published in 1634 is yet another specimen of the descriptive literature of the period. Divided into two parts the book sets out to describe the landscape and topography, the seasons, the flora and fauna of New England and the suitability of the English physiognomy to the climate and soil of the place. In the second part Wood dwells extensively on the Indian tribes of New England documenting their habitat and habits, their customs, livelihoods, moral attributes and predilections.

1.4.0. □ The Theological Writers of the Colonial Period

As history, theology and political governance have been inseparable in the Puritan ethics and outlook the historical writers of the fledgling colonies invariably used the themes and forms of Protestant, specifically Calvinist discourse to express their views. They drew their images and allusions from the same source to illustrate their point, Despite their religious orientation the Pilgrim Fathers were primarily colonists and administrators, and they directed their energies to that end. The theological writers of New England who have gone down in history as the progenitors of a tradition of religious prose are Thomas Hooker, Thomas Shepard and John Cotton during the first colonial period and Cotton Mather in the second colonial era.

1.4.1. □ Thomas Hooker (1586-1647)

Thomas Hooker was a brilliant preacher in London. Later he became religious lecturer and assistant minister in Chelmsford. His non-conformist views earned him the wrath of Archbishop Laud who effectively put an end to all the avenues open to him for preaching in England, as a result of which Hooker had to flee to Holland where he spent two or three years preaching in Delft and Rotterdam. From Holland Hooker made his way in 1633 to the Puritan colony at Massachusetts Bay in New England where he spent the last fourteen years of his life. He preached in the church at Cambridge for three years after which he led his flock of a hundred families or so to Connecticut where he, along with his devoted followers, helped to build the town of Hartford and found the community there.

During this last phase of his life Hooker poured forth his genius in a succession of religious treatises, which at once established his reputation as a major voice in Puritan literature. The twenty-three titles to his credit were without exception on religious subjects. In common with the prevailing Puritan temper and literary tendencies Hooker filled his works with Scriptural quotations and allusions, and subjected his prose to minute divisions, subdivisions and classifications. The conviction of tone and the force and vigour of his argument may be seen in the following extract: "There must be subjection or else confusion. Will you outbrave the Almighty to his face, and will you dare damnation...As proud as you have been.crushed and humbled. Where

are all those Nimrods and Pharaohs and all those haughty monarchs of the world? The Lord hath thrown them flat upon their backs, and they are in hell this day". (Tyler, p 189)

1.4.2. □ Thomas Shepard (1605-49)

Thomas Shepard arrived in New England in 1635 and took charge of the church in Cambridge. Possessed of a powerful intellect and devotion to his vocation, Shepard achieved fame as a writer and pulpit orator. Shepard's works honoured by a modern edition (Boston, 1853) draw for its core message on the Calvinist belief in the fallen and depraved condition of man, the wrath of God and the promise of redemption through man's repentant humility and divine forgiveness.

A couple of brief extracts from some of his writings may serve to exemplify both his theological theme and literary style. "We are all in Adam as a whole country in a parliament man; the whole country doth what he doth". (Works of Thomas Shepard 1.24); "Every natural man and woman is born full of sin, as full as a toad is of poison, as full as ever his skin can hold; mind, will, eyes, mouth, every limb of his body, and every piece of his soul, is full of sin; their hearts are bundles of sin", (Ibid.28)

1.4.3. □ John Cotton (1584-1652)

Archbishop Laud hounded John Cotton from England for his non-conformist views. Cotton arrived in Boston in 1633. He gradually became one of the most powerful leaders of the theocratic society of New England. Cotton's contribution to the Psalter that came to be popularly called the *Bay Psalm Book* is invaluable.

The individualistic streak in the American psyche is seen in the wish of the Puritan leaders to have a Book of Psalms that was at once more literal and Calvinist in its orientation than the several English translations that were available at the time. Accordingly, a project was initiated by the learned divines of the time to bring forth a translation of the scriptural Psalms that would be suited to the particular needs of the colonies, and more in keeping with the beliefs of the colonial citizens.

Eminent theologians such as Richard Mather, John Wilson, Nathaniel Ward,

Thomas Shepard and John Cotton among several others set about the task of diligently translating the Psalms. A collective venture, undertaken in the best spirit of community service this endeavour left little scope for individual claims to authorship except for the instance of John Cotton who was credited with the translation of Psalm 23, and with the composition of the Preface to the **Bay Psalm Book**.

A Puritan manifesto in miniature, on style and intent, the last paragraph of the Preface virtually approximates the status of a classic in its condensed articulation of its avowed objective, namely the achievement of literal accuracy rather than pleasing sweetness of style.

“If therefore the verses are not always so smooth and elegant as some may desire or expect: let them consider that God’s altar needs not our polishings...for we have respected rather a plain translation, than to smooth our verses with the sweetness of any paraphrase, and so have attended conscience rather than elegance, fidelity rather than poetry, in translating the Hebrew words into English meter...” (Colonial and Federal, p 223)

There are numerous titles to Cotton’s credit but in the words of Tyler his place in early American literary history bears no proportion to his place in the early religious and political history of the country.

1.4.4. □ Increase Mather (1639-1723)

Richard Mather, sire of the Mather dynasty contributed sermons, a catechism, letters on church administration and some of the translations in **The Bay Psalm Book** along with various other documents to the contemporary corpus of writings, Increase Mather, the son of Richard Mather had almost a hundred titles to his credit. The one book however that stands out is known by a name not given to it by its author. Called ‘*Remarkable Providences*’ it is a work that was begun in England and Ireland in 1658 and took shape as a compilation of testimonies of Puritan priests about providential interventions in their lives. Discontinued for some time, the work found its way into New York and fortuitously fell in the hands of Increase Mather who developed the project in the new settlement and saw it to its completion, Sound in conception and scientific in implementation, “**Remarkable Providences**’ lacked the critical scrutiny that needs to be applied to personal recollections.

1.4.5. □ Roger Williams (1603-1683)

Roger Williams was born in England where he acquired a liberal education, receiving his B.A. from Cambridge before going on to study divinity. He was a chaplain in Essex for a brief while. He arrived at the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1631 but was refused appointment to a church in Salem for his opposition to the dominant Congregational polity. Williams then spent two years in the Plymouth region living and working in close proximity with the Indians. He demanded, as a matter of principle, the separation of church from state and questioned the right of the colonial administrators to take away land from the Indians in order to build and expand their colonies. For this bold and radical step Williams was banned from Massachusetts Bay colony in 1635. In 1636 Williams fled to Narragansett Bay where he founded the settlement of Providence.

Two of Williams' work that merits mention are **A Key in to the Language of America** (1643) and **The Bloody Tenent of Persecution** (1644).

1.4.6. □ Cotton Mather (1663-1728)

Increase Mather's son Cotton Mather, born in 1663 in Boston followed in the professional footsteps of his father and grandfather. Prodigiously talented, Cotton Mather developed into a scholar and preacher of extraordinary repute. Of the 444 items that Cotton Mather published during his lifetime several are important from a historical point of view. The more important ones among his writings are: ***The Wonders of the Invisible World; Magnalia Christi Americana: Manu ducterio***

Ministerium; and The Negro Christianized.

Cotton Mather's one book which established him as a major writer on theological themes, and which to some extent ensured his name for posterity is *Magnalia Christi Americana* or The Ecclesiastical History of New England from its First Planting (1702). The first book of this mammoth literary enterprise is a history of the settlement of New England; the second deals with the lives of the governors and magistrates; the third dwells on the lives of sixty renowned priests of the Puritan churches of New England; the fifth is devoted to an evocation of "the faith and order of the churches"; the sixth

presents remarkable cases of divine intervention in human lives while the seventh provides an account of the “afflictive disturbances” which the churches of New England have suffered at the hands of their various adversaries ranging from the Devil to sectarian enemies to the Indians.

1.5.0. □ Poetry of The Puritan Period

The millenarian thrust of the Puritan discourse gave to early colonial literature some of its typical literary forms - history, travel-record, sermon, journals, diaries and jeremiads that do not really qualify as imaginative literature. Believing wholeheartedly in their status as the elect who had been specially called to interpret the divine plan to the multitudes, the New England leaders prized utility over art, and the practical over the imaginative. Imaginative literature was encouraged in so far as it led to the improvement of the moral fibre, and the edification of the people. In the circumstances, it was not surprising that the output of imaginative literature was limited. There is virtually no fiction or drama worth the name. In poetry while Michael Wigglesworth attained renown in his age with his poem **The Day of Doom** the voices that were truly complex, expressing the rich interplay of the old and the new, the Metaphysical and the Puritan, looking back and ahead in a simultaneous sweep of the poetic imagination were those of Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor.

1.5.1. □ Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705)

Michael Wigglesworth's poem '*The Day of Doom*' (1662) as the title suggests was an exercise in righteousness completely in agreement with the religious tenets of contemporary New England. Consisting of 224 eight-line stanzas of doctrinal observations in a rousing ballad meter the poem acquired an astonishing popularity in its day. Dealing with the Calvinist themes of depravity, damnation and deliverance, the poem not only provides a key to the Puritan mentality but also illustrates the 'plaine style' of the historians that was perhaps unconsciously adopted by some of the poets as well.

1.5.2. □ Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672)

Born in England, Anne Bradstreet was the daughter of Thomas Dudley the steward of the Earl of Lincoln. Anne who grew up in an elegant and erudite atmosphere acquired a learning that was unusual for a woman of her time. Her first volume of poems was published in England in 1650 under a very long title not of her own choosing - '*The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America...by a Gentlewoman of those Parts*'. The poems were interesting

reflections not only on the moral ideas held by her but also on some of the emerging scientific theories of the day.

Anne Bradstreet's poems were surprisingly well received by contemporary New England society given the orthodox tilt of the patriarchal dispensation at the helm. They were actually given a second edition that was brought out in Boston in 1687 under a considerably abbreviated title. The new poems that were added to the original ones in this second edition have, with their depth of feeling and complexity of tone, contributed to the lasting reputation of this pioneering poet who, in some measure, resembled and anticipated another New England woman poet, namely Emily Dickinson who was to appear on the scene 200 years later.

Anne Bradstreet articulates in her poetry the problems of the woman writer who has to reconcile her several roles, balancing domestic duties and literary interests, negotiate the world of professional writing, traditionally regarded as a male preserve, and redefine her image and status in the context of her identity as both woman and poet.

From *The Prologue* (Stanzas 1 and 5)

To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings
Of cities founded, commonwealths begun,
For my mean pen are too superior things;
Or how they all, or each, their dates have run;
Let poets and historians set these forth;
My obscure lines shall not so dim their worth,

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits;
A poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on female wits.
If what I do prove well, it won't advance;
They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance. (Colonial, p 228)

From *Contemplations* (Stanzas 30 and 33)

And yet this sinful creature, frail and vain,
This lump of wretchedness, of sin and sorrow,

This weather-beaten vessel wracked with pain,
Joys not in hope of an eternal morrow;
Nor all his losses, crosses and vexations,
In weight, in frequency and long duration,
Can make him deeply groan for that divine translation.



O Time, the fatal wrack of mortal things,
That draws oblivion's curtains over kings,
Their sumptuous monuments, men know them not,
Their names without a record are forgot,
Their parts, their ports, their pomp's all laid in th' dust,
Nor wit, nor gold nor buildings 'scape time's rust;
But he whose name is graved in the white stone
Shall last and shine when all of these are gone. (Colonial, p 235)

1.5.3. □ Edward Taylor (1645-1729)

Born in Leicestershire, England, probably in 1645, Edward Taylor was educated there. He arrived in Boston in 1668 with the aim of acquiring a university education, as British universities were not exactly hospitable to Puritan scholars at the time. He studied in Harvard, graduating from it in 1671 and at Massachusetts started on a dual career as pastor and physician devotedly looking after the needs of his flock for the rest of his life.

When Thomas H. Johnson published selections from Taylor's poems more than 200 years after his death the fusion of an intensely Puritan outlook and a subtly wrought Metaphysical sensibility became apparent. Themes of devotional, piety were mediated in Taylor's poetry through complexities of tone, meter and imagery and a rhetorical fervour that made it significantly different from any comparable poetic expression in colonial America at the time.

The crossing of Puritan priorities with aesthetic ambiguities certainly inflected Taylor's voice and tone with multivalencies of mood and meaning. In the perceptive analysis of Gross and Stern, Taylor "combined the intense sincerity of a William Bradford with the aspiring exaltation of a Jonathan Edwards, merging his fire and humility in the intricate style of the English metaphysicals", (Colonial and Federal, p 259).

Taylor's position in the literary tradition of America is important in that it betokens a heralding of the torn, troubled, questioning metaphysics that came to affect a strain of the American imaginative expression. Ruland and Bradbury explain it thus: "Taylor's poems pass beyond literary artifice to become emblems of transcendent relationships, beyond allegory into the moral, psychological intensity that comes to characterize so much of the richest American writing, from Emerson, Hawthorne and Melville through Emily Dickinson and Henry James to William Faulkner". (From Puritanism to Postmodernism, p 26)

The following excerpts from Taylor's poems may give one an idea of his themes and styles:

Meditation One (Last Stanza)

Oh! That my love might overflow my heart,
To fire the same with love: for love I would.
But oh! my straitened breast! My lifeless spark!
My fireless flame! What chilly love and cold!
In measure small, in manner chilly, see!
Lord, blow the coal! Thy love inflame in me!

(Colonial, p 261)

Meditation Six

Am I thy gold? Or purse, Lord, for Thy wealth;
Whether in mine or mint refined for Thee?
I'm counted so, but count me o'er Thyself,
Lest gold washed face, and brass in heart I be.
I fear my touchstone touches when I try
Me, and my counted gold too overly.

Am I new minted by Thy stamp indeed?
Mine eyes are dim; I cannot clearly see.
Be thou my spectacles that I may read
Thy image and inscription stamped on me.
If Thy bright image do upon me stand,
I am a golden angel in Thy hand.

Lord, make my soul Thy plate; Thine image bright
Within the circle of the same enfoil.
And on its brims in golden letters write
Thy superscription in an holy style.
Then I shall be Thy money, Thou my hoard:
Let me Thy angel be, be Thou my Lord.

(Colonial, p 264)

(angel: English gold coin)

1.6.0. Conclusion

The Puritan diaspora by virtue of its sectarian motivations sought to exist within a limited geographical and ideological compass, excluding in the process elements both from within itself and the unexplored mass of the continent that could, in all likelihood, have contributed to its further growth. While Anne Hutchinson earned the wrath of the orthodox ministers of the church for her critical thinking and dissenting views a preacher such as Roger Williams with his progressive sympathies naturally could not be accommodated within the Puritan theological framework. The great wilderness beyond the plantations was viewed, for the most part, with suspicion by the settlers who tended to regard it as a source of both known and unknown dangers and therefore, best left unexplored.

The spiritual orientation of the Puritan mind with its tendency to read prophetic meanings in every manifestation of nature, and the phenomenal world in general, anticipated the transcendentalism of a later epoch of American writing. However, the lack of sensitivity to the beauty of nature, the rigidly moral outlook, the unimaginative temper of mind, and the exclusionary attitude with the consequent propensity for monologic discourse disqualified the Puritan experiment in New England for engaging in heterogeneous and hybrid exercises that could have contributed to a dynamic cultural exchange.

The limitations of the Puritan literary contribution notwithstanding, it has to be conceded that the providential world-view afforded by the same, along with the belief in renewal and redemption associated with the momentous migration that brought this forth in the first place, imbued American literature as a whole with patterns and paradigms that certainly owe much to this

primary perception. "Puritanism may have set certain limits on the American imagination; it was also one of its essential roots". (From Puritanism, p 32).

1.7.0. □ Questions :

- 1) Examine the moral, political and literary significance of the New England historians.
- 2) "Puritanism may have set certain limits on the American imagination; it was also one of its essential roots", Discuss,
- 3) Comment on the poetic sources as well as contribution of Anne Bradstreet to the poetry of America.
- 4) Trace the intricate mingling of the Puritan and Metaphysical elements in the poetry of Edward Taylor.
- 5) Would you agree with the view that the 'cosmic, transcendental and providential vision' of the New England theological writers "lingers yet in American culture"?

1.8.0. □ Suggested Reading:

Colonial and Federal, To 1800 (Ed Milton R. Stern and Semour L. Gross, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1975)

From Puritanism to Postmodernism, A History of American Literature, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury (Penguin Books, New York, Copyright R Ruland and M Bradbury, 1991)

A History of American Literature, 1607-1765 by Moses Coit Taylor, Collier Books, New York, 1962)

Literary History of the United States, Editors : Robert E Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Seidel Caulya Richard M Ludwig, The Macmillan Company 1946.

Unit 2 □ The Enlightenment Period in the History of American Literature (1700-1800)

□ Structure

- 2.0. Introduction
- 2.1.0. The Prose Writers of the Period.
- 2.2.0. The Poetry of the Enlightenment Period.
- 3.0. Conclusion

2.0. □ Introduction to the Enlightenment Period

The Reformation world of Aristotle and More gave way to the rational, empirical values of a different physics and metaphysics. The foundation of the Royal Society in London in 1662 with its espousal of the ideas of Locke, Newton and Burke introduced notions that would deeply influence the shape of the emerging nation. With the great western hinterland of the newly discovered continent awakening curiosity and awaiting exploration spatial focus shifted from east to west, from the seaboard to forest and frontier. Theological imperatives began to be broadened by secular concerns, and narrowly moral preoccupations by mercantile interests. The idealizing thrust of the Puritan mind began to be gradually informed by a pragmatist ethics imbibed both from the mother-country England and also from within its own struggle to come to terms with a changing order.

The Puritan mind in its negotiation of the world could not but be touched by some of the scientific theories of the day. Cotton Mather's 'The Christian Philosopher' (1721) shows the stirrings of a scientific awareness but an awareness that is subjugated to his theology.

"Taylor died in 1729. By then New England had changed greatly. The old religious fervor had abated; the concept of a universe centered in God had weakened before that of one centered on man; and more and more colonists, especially in the prosperous seaboard towns, were interested in trade and in aping the amenities of English society rather than in conquering new lands for Christ. They paid lip service to the old theology, and church membership was still a mark of social respectability; but the zeal for teaching

and the fierce concentration on the dilemma of sinful man had lessened, and literature reflected the change. More and more the grace and urbanity of the English periodical essayists came to be admired; the robust vocabulary and rhetoric of the original colonists were toned down to the level of easy fluency; concrete realism often gave way to well turned generalizations couched in abstract terms. In verse' Taylor's ardor and his love of dramatic contrast were replaced by smooth couplets and neat stanzas obviously reminiscent of Dryden, Watts, and Pope. Between 1700 and 1760 New England produced plenty of good prose and plenty of graceful verse; but much of it seems tame when compared with earlier work because the feeling behind it was less intense. "Good sense" was in vogue; "reasonableness" and "politeness" were more important than they had been to Puritan preachers and tract writers. Compare almost any line of Taylor, or almost any stanza, however clumsy, of *The Day of Doom* with this bit from a "Poetical Meditation" by Roger Wolcott of Connecticut, published in 1725:

Vertue still makes the Vertuous to shine,
Like those that Liv'd in the first week of time.
Vertue hath force the vile to cleanse again,
So hcing like clear shining after Rain.
A Kind and Constant, Chearful Vertuous Life,
Becomes each Man, and most Adorns a Wife.

True enough, any Puritans would have agreed but few earlier Puritan would have put it so blandly with so little sense of man's helpless vileness before God or of the miracle of God's grace vouchsafed to his elect. The change in attitude—and in style—from the earlier writers, shown in Wolcott and many eighteenth century New Englanders, illustrates some of the ways its which deism, the new rationalism; and changed English literary fashions affected the original puritan outlook.

There were some literary gains. The newer theory flowered in Benjamin Franklin's best essays, skillfully written by a "sensible" man for "sensible" folk, with their eyes on this world more than' on the next, and in the scientific and philosophical works of Jonathan Edwards. The brilliance of the prose in which the Reverend John Wise defended the original New England church polity in *The Churches Quarrel Espoused* (1710) and *Vindication of the Government of New-England Churches* (1717), shows how much he had learned from English stylists of the school of Dryden and Swift.

Furthermore the increasing secularization of society, the relaxing of the old dominant preoccupation with religion, opened the door to pleasant excursions in fields unvisited by the earlier Puritans. Mather Byles, for example, the nephew of Cotton Mather, was a minister, but achieved almost as much fame for his punning as for his preaching. He was also a rhymer, and an admirer of Pope and of the English poets of his day, and dashed off a few verses which his ancestors would have considered too trivial—or too frivolous—for a divine. The early Puritans had humor, of course—to take but two examples, Samuel Sewall in his diary and Nathaniel Ward in his *Cobler*, showed theirs; but usually the seventeenth century colonial preacher would have considered it a waste of paper and ink to display wit (in the modern sense) or humor in published writings. Nor were there, in the early days of Massachusetts, merchants like Joseph Green, ready to entertain themselves and their less pious neighbors with verses on the joys of drinking, or on the death of Mather Byles' cat, or with even more direct ridicule in rhyme of the minister of the Hollis Street Church. New England's notion of the purpose of literature changed fast after 1700. Good writing was seen no longer as simply a way of serving God by communicating divine truth as directly as possible; there was room for work designed merely to entertain. There was also an increasing interest in discussions of purely literary and stylistic matters. John Bulkeley, in 1725, wrote for Wolcott's *Poetical Meditations* a preface which is pious enough but devotes more attention than do most earlier colonial writings to purely literary values. Cotton Mather's famous essay on style, inserted in his *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726), a manual for theological students, takes a broader aesthetic view than the preface to the "Bay Psalm Book" or Michael Wigglesworth's unpublished "Prayse of Eloquence."

It is unlikely that more than a few pages of poetry and prose of New England before 1760 will ever achieve popular literary immortality. There are, none the less, memorable passages not only in the chronicles and histories, but in the great mass of sermons, tracts, essays, poems, and pious verse written by the colonists; and there are hundreds of other passages which lack the stamp of greatness but still have interest for, and may give excitement to, the modern reader who can read them with the understanding they deserve. That understanding involves first of all some knowledge of colonial conditions, some realization of the circumstances under which they were written and of the purpose and the audience for which they were designed.

It involves, too, an appreciation of the literary conventions which were accepted by our forefathers and, in spite of serious limitations, had value. Order, logic, clarity, are still virtues in writing, even though the devices by which we try to achieve them are unlike the Puritans'. Homely imagery, earthy phrasing and the use of simple and realistic figures to make abstract ideas or emotions concretely realizable are traits still characteristic of much of the best American writing. Emerson admired "language of nature." He found it in the speech of a "Vermont drover" and said that "in the 17th century, it appeared in every book." For an example he cited Thomas Shepard's "And to put finger in the eye and to renew their repentance, they think this is weakness." Obviously he was thinking of the homeliness so characteristic of Puritan prose; obviously too, much of his own best work shows the same quality. Emerson, and others, found in the Puritan's stylistic theory something adaptable to the needs of the idealist in any age. The early New Englanders' eyes were on God; but they were busy men with a wilderness to subdue and the divine will to carry out on earth.

Jonathan Edwards wrote on science and philosophy more effectively and more attractively, at least for modern readers, than most of his seventeenth century predecessors. Such men were exceptional, but they profited from some of the new methods in English prose popularized in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—methods by which many other New England writers before 1760 made their work palatable. The Puritans' literary practice grew out of the search for some way to express both the spiritual emotion that controlled them and their vigorous desire to make practical use of it, and to teach others to do so, in daily life. They never succeeded, perhaps, in realizing their aim, either in literature or in life, but only those of us who are too limited in vision to see the gallantry of their quest will refuse them respect for what they did and wrote." (Literary History of the United States P. 68-70)

2.1.0. □ The Prose Writers of the Period

In keeping with the rational spirit of the age a body of prose writings gradually came into being. Illustrating the secular tendency of the times much of this earlier writing was matter-of-fact record of travel, an enquiry into contemporary lifestyles, or an examination of the practical and commercial

possibilities that had come to the fore. Benjamin Franklin's deistic preoccupation with the pragmatic imperatives of the changing scenario was a measure of the new beliefs and interests. Where the old Puritan spirit lingered it was tempered by an awareness of the scientific motives and methods of the time as in the writings of Jonathan Edwards. However, it was the political orientation of some of the most important writings of the time, most notably those of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, that inflected the prose with its dominant tone and accent, giving to American literature the fundamental articles of its liberal, secular, democratic polity.

2.1.1. □ William Byrd II (1674-1744)

The changing times were perhaps most conspicuously reflected in the outlook and writings of William Byrd II, one of the greatest landowners of colonial America. Byrd founded Richmond on his family estate by the James River.

Having studied law of the Middle Temple in London, and later the rudiments of the tobacco business in Holland, Byrd spent a substantial portion of his life in England mingling with the rich and the influential. Byrd became a regular at the courts, coffee-houses and other haunts frequented by dramatists, writers and poets such as Wycherley, Congreve, Swift and Pope. Not surprisingly then did he imbibe and import some of the dominant values of Restoration England into the colonies when he returned to Virginia in 1705.

A member of the Royal Society, the exploratory and empirical thrust of Byrd's investigations is quite evident in the nature of his themes. **The History of the Dividing Line** chronicles the charting of the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina, a work in which he had been directly involved having been on the commission that oversaw the division. **A Progress to the Mines** grew out of Byrd's visit to several iron mines in Virginia while the third; **A Journey to the Land of Eden** was a record of his visit to North Carolina. All three records of Virginia, meant for private circulation were not printed till 1841.

The love of travel, the negotiation of different places and people, the cartographical delineation of state boundaries, the enquiry into the ethnicity of Indians and the general perception of plantation life as a pastoral idyll where the scholarly aristocrat may attend to cultural and intellectual pursuits

are some of the traits of this body of urbane records.

It was however, the discovery and decoding of Byrd's Secret Diary as late as 1941 that revealed a whole new perspective on the eighteenth century life of the American South. 'The **Diary** does for southern colonial life what the journals of Bradford and Sewall do for New England' (Colonial and Federal, p 297). Like Samuel Sewall Byrd is a transitional figure looking back to the conventions of a leisurely past even as he inspires and anticipates the Jeffersonian ideal of the active, liberal, public-spirited aristocrat. In the words of Ruland and Bradbury 'Byrd brings us remarkably close to the eighteenth century American mind that owed quite as much to contemporary Europe as to its seventeenth century past'. (From Puritanism, p 36)

2.1.2. □ St. Jean de Crevecoeur (1735-1813)

St. Jean de Crevecoeur was born in Normandy, completed his schooling in England and went to Canada at the age of nineteen. In 1765 he became a colonial citizen of New York, got married and settled down to farm life in Orange County. The outbreak of the revolution necessitated an escape to France, as his political views did not make him popular either in England or in the colonies.

The impressions of America that Crevecoeur sought to publish were finally brought out in a considerably edited version in 1782 under the title **Letters from an American Farmer**. This agrarian metaphysics traces through an epistolary mode the interaction between nature, society and the evolution of a new human being. Crevecoeur's vision of the modern farmer in an open landscape is a Rousseauistic rendering of the American, nourished on civil liberties guaranteed by a just government.

2.1.3. □ Samuel Sewall (1652-1730)

It is in the **Diary** of Samuel Sewall that the documentation of everyday life and the domestic vicissitudes of eighteenth century America received a fresh treatment and succeeded in introducing a new tone and register in the prevailing mode of writing. Sewall's **Diary** presents the mingling of two distinct strains-the spiritual aspiration of the Puritan mind with its providential interpretation of history, and the secular imperatives of a social and commercial life. Ruland and Bradbury note the historical importance of Sewall

in the following observation: “His significance goes further however, for he is a figure on the turn: away from the Puritan past, toward the Yankee commercial, empirical spirit of eighteenth century America” (From Puritanism to Postmodernism, p 35)

2.1.4. □ Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Born in Connecticut into an illustrious line of clergymen Edwards came to represent an original and speculative temper of mind. Graduating from Yale he stayed on to study theology and went on to accept various preaching posts, becoming in the process, very active in the evangelical movement that took hold of American Protestantism at the time.

In Jonathan Edwards one sees the older Puritan metaphysical strain striving to adapt itself to the secular, subjective, pluralistic ethic that began to manifest itself in the expanding cosmos of the New World. It is his open-minded response to ‘contemporary Deism and experimental science’ that widened the scope of the original Puritan discourse and helped ignite the great religious awakening of the late 1730s.

Edwards’ famous sermons with their emotional intensity and contact with the roots of daily living contributed in no small measure to the revivalist and revisionist movement of the time. His **‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’** remains the most famous of Puritan sermons. His defence of Calvinist doctrine is found in **Freedom of the Will**, in which he “combined an older orthodoxy with the new empirical psychology of Locke in order to unify man’s being and knowing”. (Colonial, p 149)

Edwards’ typological interpretation of cosmic, natural, scientific and other phenomena along with his reliance on the subjective as a means of apprehending truth link him to the symbolist, transcendental, Romantic impulse in American writing of a later age.

An extract from Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God:

“You probably are not sensible of this; you find you are kept out of hell, but don’t see the hand of God in it, but look at other things, as the good state of your bodily constitution, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing; if God should withdraw His hand, they avail no more to keep you from falling than

the thin air to hold up a person that is suspended in it". (Colonial, p 195)

The development of this early Calvinist strain into a more measured and reasonable argument is seen in the following extract from Edwards' tract **Freedom of the Will**.

"There are two things contrary to what is called liberty in common speech. One is constraint, otherwise called force, compulsion, and coercion, which is a person's being necessitated to do a thing contrary to his will. The other is restraint, which is his being hindered and not having power to do according to his will. But that which has no will cannot be the subject of these things. I need say the less on this head, Mr Locke having set the same thing forth, with so great clearness in his **Essay on the Human Understanding**". (Colonial, p 208)

2.1.5. □ Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

Benjamin Franklin was a didactic writer of rational prose enshrining his social and moral precepts. His materialism was a reflection of the "general deistic belief that free reason and full attention to this world of the present moment would result in a social altruism that would be the best service to the world" (Colonial, 372). The founder of several of the foremost civil and academic institutions in America, Franklin upheld the developing liberal values of the colonies.

With his numerous enquiries and enthusiasms, his amazing range of interests, his experimental, entrepreneurial attitude to life, he approached the modern American who may well have answered to the famous description of the same by J. Hector St Jean de Crevecoeur: "He is an American, who, leaving behind all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds...The American is a new man, who acts on new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions". (Colonial, p237-8)

Franklin's ability to successfully transmute his Calvinist roots into an altruistic yet pragmatist philosophy demonstrates the flexible and accommodative nature of the emerging American consciousness which was mature and self-assured enough to question, moderate and revise some of its fundamental tenets to stay in tune with the changing historical circumstances.

Franklin's **The Autobiography**, arguably his best-known book, transcends the genre of personal narrative to acquire the allegorical dimensions of national history as it charts the intellectual and commercial trajectories of the unfolding American psyche.

Influenced by Addison's style in 'Spectator' Franklin sought to cultivate the Augustan virtues of wit, balance and urbanity in his own writings. With the spirit of practical application that characterized his endeavours in everything he did Franklin set to crafting and polishing his literary expressions by diligently enlarging his vocabulary, and modulating the 'plaine' style into a more sophisticated instrument of expression and mediation. Promoting the eighteenth century priorities of sense and science Franklin's prose remains one of the classics of an elegant and edifying specimen of the genre.

□ From Franklin's The Autobiography

"Before I enter upon my public appearance in business, it may be well to let you know the then state of my mind with regard to my principles and morals, that you may see how far those influenced the future events of my life. My parents had early given me religious impressions, and brought me through my childhood piously in the dissenting way. But I was scarce fifteen, when, after doubting by turns of several points, as I found them disputed in the different books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself. Some books against deism fell into my hands; they were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle's lectures. It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the deists were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I soon became a thorough deist". (Colonial, p 405)

2.1.6. □ Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

Described as 'the most luminous and heartbreaking figure of the American Revolution' (Colonial, p 440) Thomas Paine followed several occupations in England before making his way to Pennsylvania. The climate of a simmering revolutionary fervour in America was just the element that was required to stimulate Paine's political genius. He began to express his democratic views in Pennsylvania Magazine.

The publication of **Common Sense**, Paine's strident call for immediate

independence from England in 1776 established him as a voice of the Revolution and a political ideologue whose ideas would contribute to the shaping of the emerging nation. **Common Sense** was followed by the sixteen 'Crisis' papers which, appearing at strategic moments in the revolutionary war, served to boost the flagging spirits of the colonial citizens involved in the war effort.

Paine's impassioned rhetoric and powers of persuasion evident in these writings became identifiable features of his literary style. The first part of Paine's **The Rights of Man** was published in 1791. In support of 'France, Revolution and representative republicanism' it was in reply to Burke's **Reflections on the French Revolution**. When the second part of **The Rights of Man** was published the following year, Paine because of his outspoken espousal of revolution and liberty was banished by England. Apprehending this turn Paine had already found asylum in France and remained there till 1802. While in France Paine served a prison sentence for his opposition to the Reign of Terror.

Paine was brought back to America through the kind intervention of his friend Thomas Jefferson. Paine had completed the first part of **The Age of Reason** while he had been imprisoned in France. With the publication of part two in 1796 **The Age of Reason** became "the fullest and most radical statement of deistic rational regional" (Colonial and Federal, p 441).

Paine spent the remaining years of his life, vilified for his ideals, which for the most part, were not understood by the majority. He died in 1809 in New York.

□ From The Age of Reason

"I believe in one God and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life. And I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures Happy lest it should be supposed that I believe in many other things in addition to these, I shall, in the progress of this work, declare the things I do not believe and my reasons for not believing them.

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My mind is my own church.

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

I do not mean by this declaration to condemn those who believe otherwise; they have the same right to their belief as I have to mine. But it is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing or disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe". (Colonial, p 451).

2.1.7. □ Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Born into the landed and slave-holding aristocracy of western Virginia Thomas Jefferson was a member of the professional elite. In a surprising negation of the circumstances of his birth and upbringing and the entrenched interests appertaining thereunto Jefferson came to sport a comprehensively democratic outlook that militated against many of the privileges that he was used to take for granted as the prerogatives of his class.

Jefferson occupied several legislative and executive offices in the state of Virginia before distinguishing himself in service to the nation as a whole. He was Secretary of State (1790-93), the Vice-President of the United States (1797-1801) and President (1801-1809).

Guiding the young nation at a crucial stage of its development Jefferson, like Franklin came to exercise an inestimable influence on the moral outlook of the republic, laying in the process, the foundations of a liberal, democratic civil society. Insisting that a 'national aristocracy of worth must replace an artificial aristocracy of station' (Colonial and Federal, p 463) Jefferson developed the concept of a 'populistic, agrarian, republican democracy'. (Ibid)

Jefferson led both by personal example and by precept, championing indefatigably for religious, political and intellectual freedom, for the extension of the franchise and educational opportunities. He died on July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

The following passage from one of Jefferson's famous writings is illustrative of the main features of his prose style.

From **The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America in Congress**, July 4, 1776

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security”. (Colonial and Federal, p 465)

2.1.8. □ The Federalist (1787-1788)

‘The Federalist’ consists of 85 letters published in the New York Independent Journal between 1787 and 1788. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison wrote the articles under the joint pseudonym ‘Publius’. While Hamilton later became the first secretary of the Treasury, Jay was appointed the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Madison went on to become the fourth President of America.

Hamilton and Jay represented conservative opinions on governance and social progress. Sharing the Calvinist belief in the essential depravity of humankind Hamilton in ‘The Federalist’ articles argued for a strong government to maintain civil order and protect the interests of the ruling class. Jay took the same protectionist stand on the interests and prerogatives of the administrating elite. It was Madison who embodied the liberal views of the Enlightenment arguing for the accommodation of diverse, even conflicting beliefs and values within a centralized form of governance that would strive, at all events, to respect the rights of the individual.

The colloquium of voices in ‘The Federalist’ represents the multifarious

public debate on the issues of political governance that naturally affected the young republic at this critical juncture of its history. As a source of constitutional law 'The Federalist'¹ remains an invaluable frame of reference for basic information on the subject as well as clarifications on contentious points.

2.1.9. □ Poetry in the Period of Awakening and Enlightenment

In eighteenth century America the colonial poets were trying to earnestly emulate the best British models. Mather Byles, a leading poet of the age turned to England for inspiration, raising imitation to an art and denouncing dullness in true neo-classical fashion in his poem 'Bombastic and Grubstreet Style: A Satire' (1745). If Byles turned to Alexander Pope for poetic direction the preacher-poet of New Jersey Nathaniel Evans sought inspiration from Milton, Gray, Cowley or Goldsmith. At any event, poetry of this age lacked originality of vision and method, and depended for the most part, on the established conventions of the older British tradition.

An important theme, that of nation-building began to inform the poetic expression of colonial America at this time with the result that this celebration of colonial achievement peaked in the 1770s. The poem entitled 'Poem...On the Rising Glory of America' written jointly by Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau bear testimony to this patriotic tendency.

2.2.0. □ The Connecticut Wits

Around this time a group of poets experiencing the turmoil of transition, and sensing the imminent birth of the Republic, began to reflect the promise of a new dawn in their poetry. John Trumbull, Timothy Dwight, Joel Barlow and David Humphrys of Yale, later christened the 'Connecticut Wits' helped usher in an age that trembled on the brink of possibilities.

John Trumbull (1750-1831) wrote a number of poems of which **The Progress of Dulness** (1773) was the most notable specimen. Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) contributed several poems of which **Greenfield Hill** is remembered. Joel Barlow (1754-1812) wrote the long poem 'The Hasty Pudding'⁹.

Mostly derivative in theme and style these poets "occupy a transitional

and peripheral place in American literary history, and are remembered not so much for the virtues of their own works as for their joint value as representatives of the early stirrings of national literary consciousness". (Colonial, 517)

2.2.1. □ Philip Freneau (1752-1832)

Philip Freneau spent the early years of his life in New Jersey, studied in Princeton, and became a friend and supporter of Madison and the liberal viewpoint. Freneau developed strong anti-British feelings since the Revolution, and his punishment in a British prison ship. He had an interesting and varied career as a journalist and a ship worker. For a while from 1790 he concentrated on journalism taking sides in the ongoing war between Jefferson's and Hamilton's views. He staunchly supported the former. In 1791 Freneau went to Philadelphia to start the National Gazette, an instrument for his liberal, democratic opinions. Freneau went to New Jersey and then to New York to launch successive newspapers but these ventures did not succeed. He went back to life on sea to sustain himself.

Freneau's imaginative pieces such as 'The House of Night': A Vision, (1799); 'The Vanity of Existence, 'The Wild Honey Suckle', (1786); 'On the Religion of Nature', (1815) remain some of his best works.

2.3. □ Conclusion

The Enlightenment Period in America saw the gradual evolution of the American spirit. The religious motivations of the early settlement era became tempered by a sturdy mercantile outlook, which changed the direction of the socio-economic development of the colonies, and introduced the contradictions that lie at the heart of American life and literature.

The eighteenth century saw the processes that led to the change in the equation between Britain and the American colonies. The staging of the Revolution and the subsequent responsibilities of nationhood called for a new attitude to life, one in keeping with the spirit of science and reason that had overtaken Britain and several other parts of the world.

The study of the physical and natural sciences received a special impetus

from the intellectual contributions of men like John Winthrop of Connecticut regarded as a leading physicist at the time and John Bartram, the Quaker naturalist of Pennsylvania.

This age saw the rise of American journalism. Some early literary magazines were also launched, the first of which, 'The American Magazine' was founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1741.

Several prominent American colleges including Harvard and Yale were founded in this era leading to a growth in academic pursuits and scholarly interests in the country.

The eighteenth century in America was an age of change and growth, which saw the development of the secular and scientific spirit and also a practical, mercantile outlook. Like all other ages before and after it, this age too was just a phase in the evolution of the nation, and being subject to the laws of history, was destined to yield to the succeeding era. Stern and Gross are illuminating in their analysis of the changeful nature of American life and literature when they maintain in their General Introduction to **The American Romantics**, "One thing stands out clearly: American literature is a rebellious and iconoclastic body of art. The Puritan rebelled against the Anglican, the deist against the Puritan, the romantic against aspects of deism, the naturalist against aspects of romanticism, the symbolist against aspects of naturalism". (The American Romantics, Light and Life publishers, N. Delhi, 1968)

2.4. □ Questions :

1. Examine the European influences on American thought and literature in the eighteenth century.
2. Discuss the prose of Paine, Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton as primarily political writing that aimed to "declare the causes which impel... separation".
3. Comment on the characteristics that made Benjamin Franklin the most multi-faceted and representative individual of that germinal age-the Enlightenment.
4. Trace the gradual change from Puritan ethics to Enlightenment ethos as seen in the works of the leading writers of eighteenth century America.
5. Comment on the literary contribution of Philip Freneau to the political and poetic consciousness of the developing nation.

2.5. □ Suggested Reading :

Colonial and Federal, To 1800 (Ed Milton R. Stern and Semour L. Gross
Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1975)

From Puritanism to Postmodernism, A History of American Literature,
Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury (Penguin Books, New York,
Copyright R Ruland and M Bradbury, 1991)