1

The First Americans

American Literature Before and During the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Imagining Eden

"America is a poem in our eyes: its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres." The words are those of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and they sum up that desire to turn the New World into words which has seized the imagination of so many Americans. But "America" was only one of the several names for a dream dreamed in the first instance by Europeans. "He invented America: a very great man," one character observes of Christopher Columbus in a Henry James novel; and so, in a sense, he did. Columbus, however, was following a prototype devised long before him and surviving long after him, the idea of a new land outside and beyond history: "a Virgin Countrey," to quote one early, English settler, "so preserved by Nature out of a desire to show mankinde fallen into the Old Age of Creation, what a brow of fertility and beauty she was adorned with when the world was vigorous and youthfull." For a while, this imaginary America obliterated the history of those who had lived American lives long before the Europeans came. And, as Emerson's invocation of "America … a poem" discloses, it also erased much sense of American literature as anything other than the writing into existence of a New Eden.

Not that the first European settlers were unaware of the strangeness of America: in October 1492, for example, Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) confided to his journals that there were "a thousand kinds of herbs and flowers" in this New World, "of all of which I remain in ignorance as to their properties." His ignorance extended, famously, into areas he was hardly aware of: convinced that he had arrived at the continent of India, he christened the people he encountered Indians. "Their language I do not understand," admitted Columbus. And their customs he found either odd or abhorrent. The "natives" went about "with firebrands in their hands,"

A History of American Literature, Second Edition. Richard Gray.
© 2012 Richard Gray. Published 2012 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Columbus along with other early European explorers observed, “these they call by the name of *tabacos*.” “They draw the smoke by sucking, this causes a drowsiness and sort of intoxication,” but, he concluded, “I do not see what relish or benefit they could find in them.” More seriously, they were “without any religion that could be discovered.” An “inoffensive, unwarlike people,” “without the knowledge of iniquity,” they were nevertheless strangers to the blessings of religion. This, however, was a problem ripe for the solving, since the “gentle race” in the New World could surely be introduced to the truths of the Old. “They very quickly learn such prayers as we repeat to them,” Columbus reported, “and also to make the sign of the cross.” So, he advised his royal masters, “Your Highnesses should adopt the resolution of converting them to Christianity.” Such a project, he explained without any trace of irony, “would suffice to gain to our holy faith multitudes of people, and to Spain great riches and immense dominion.”

Conversion was one strategy Columbus and other early Europeans had for dealing with America and the Americans they encountered. Comparison was another: the New World could be understood, perhaps, by discovering likeness with the Old. “Everything looked as green as in April in Andalusia,” reported Columbus of what he thought was India but was, in fact, Cuba. “The days here are hot, and the nights mild like May in Andalusia,” he added, and “the isle is full of pleasant mountains after the manner of Sicily.” Naming was another ploy: Columbus was not the first nor the last to believe that the strange could be familiarized by being given a familiar label. The strange people he met seemed less strange once he had convinced himself they were “Indians”; the strange places he visited became more understandable once they were given the names of saints. To map the New World meant either to deny its newness, by coming up with a name or a comparison associated with the Old, or to see that newness as precisely what had to be changed. “I have no doubt, most serene Princes,” Columbus reported,

> that were proper devout and religious persons to come among the natives and learn their language, it would be an easy matter to convert them all to Christianity, and I hope in our Lord that your Highnesses will … bring into the church so many multitudes, inasmuch as you have exterminated those who refused to confess the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Fundamental to this project of mapping the New World was the myth of Eden, according to which the European settlers were faced not so much with another culture as with nature, and not really encountering a possible future but, on the contrary, returning to an imagined past. “These people go naked,” Columbus observed, “except that the women wear a very slight covering at the loins”; and, while he was willing to confess that “their manners are very decent,” he could see this only as a sign of their aboriginal innocence. Stripped of culture, as well as clothes and Christianity, they were primitives, a recollection of natural man. In this, Columbus was not unusual; the only difference, if any, between him and many other early European explorers and settlers was that he eventually took the dream of Eden to its

logical conclusion and a literal extreme. All his life, Columbus continued to believe he had discovered the Indies and only had to venture over the next hill or stream to find the legendary cities of gold and silver described by Marco Polo. When one discovery after another failed to confirm this belief, Columbus consoled himself with the conviction that what he had found was, literally, the Garden of Eden. "Each time I sailed from Spain to the Indies," Columbus recalled toward the end of his life, "I reached a point when the heavens, the stars, the temperature of the air and the waters of the sea abruptly changed." "It was as if the seas sloped upward at this point," he remembered; and the odd behavior of his navigation equipment led him to conclude, finally, that the globe was not round. One hemisphere, he claimed, "resembles the half of a round pear with a raised stalk, like a woman's nipple on a round ball." "I do not hold that the earthly Paradise has the form of a rugged mountain," Columbus insisted, "as it is shown in pictures, but that it lies at the summit of what I have described as the stalk of a pear." "I do not find any Greek or Latin writings which definitely state the worldly situation of the earthly Paradise," Columbus wrote, "and I believe that the earthly Paradise lies here" just beyond the strange new world he had found. He did not, he admitted, believe "that anyone can ascend to the top" and so enter the Garden of Eden. But he was firmly convinced that the streams and rivers he had discovered "flow out of the earthly Paradise" and that, accordingly, he had been closer than anyone to the place where "Our Lord placed the Tree of Life."

The evidence Columbus adduced for associating the New World with Eden was an odd but, for its time, characteristic mix of scientific and pseudoscientific argument, biblical exegesis, and imaginative rhetoric. Not of least importance here was his rapt account of the vegetation and the native inhabitants of his earthly Paradise. "The land and trees were very green and as lovely as the orchards of Valencia in April," he remembered, "and the inhabitants were lightly built and fairer than most of the other people we had seen in the Indies"; "their hair was long and straight and they were quicker, more intelligent, and less cowardly." This is natural man as innocent rather than savage, reminding Europeans of their aboriginal, unfallen state rather than inviting conversion. The Indian as savage and the Indian as innocent were and are, of course, two sides of the same coin. Both map Native Americans, and the land they and their forebears had lived in for more than thirty thousand years, as somehow absent from history: existing in a timeless void, a place of nature and a site of myth. But, in mapping the New World and its inhabitants in this way, in trying to accommodate strange sights and experiences to familiar signs and legends, Columbus and other early European explorers were at least beginning a story of American literature: a story, that is, of encounters between cultures that leaves both sides altered. If there is one truth in the history of American writing, it is the truth of process and plurality. The American writer has to write in and of a world of permeable borders and change. Although he was hardly aware of it, Columbus was forging a narrative that was neither precisely Old World (because of the sights he had seen), nor exactly New World either (because of the signs he had used), but a mix or synthesis of both. Telling of meetings between strangers, oddly syncretic in its language and vision, it was in its own way an American tale he was telling.

If Columbus thought some of his Indians were close to Paradise, then some of those Indians thought they came from heaven. Or so Columbus said. Some of the native inhabitants themselves tell a different story. Among some Native Americans of the Southeast, for example, there was the legend that white people came across the water to visit them. Treated hospitably, the whites then disappeared, leaving behind them only "a keg of something which we know was whiskey." The people began smelling it, tasting it, then "some went so far as to drink a little," whereupon "they began to reel and stagger and butt each other with their heads." It was then that the white people came back for their real purpose: trade. Other Native Americans related the Europeans to their own myths of origin. Among the inhabitants of the Southeast, the Yuchis were not unusual in calling themselves "offspring of the sun." If they were from the sun, then, the Yuchis felt, the whites clearly originated from the sea. "It was out upon the ocean," Yuchi legend goes. "Some sea-foam formed against a big log floating there. Then a person emerged from the sea-foam and crawled out upon the log." This was a white man. "Another person crawled up, on the other side of the log." This was a white woman. After meetings on sea and land, many more white people came "with a great many ships." They told the Yuchis "that their land was very strong and fertile" and asked them "to give a portion that they might live on it." The Yuchis agreed, the tale concludes, "the white people came to shore, and they have lived there ever since."

When we read Native American texts, with all due acknowledgment that what we are reading *is* a text and a translation, certain themes and preoccupations tend to recur. There are stories of world creation and the evolution of the sun, moon, and stars; there are tales of human and cultural emergence, involving the discovery of rituals or resources such as corn, buffalo, horses, salt, tobacco, or peyote vital to the tribe. There are the legends of culture heroes, sometimes related to history such as Hiawatha, sometimes purely mythic like the recurring figures of twin brothers; and, not unrelated to this, there are stories of tricksters, such as Coyote, Rabbit, and Spider Man. There are, invariably, tales of love and war, animals and spirits, mythic versions of a particular tribal history and mythic explanations of the geography, the place where the tribe now lives. Along with myths of origin, the evolution of the world out of water and primal mud, there are also myths of endings, although very often the ending is simply the prelude to another beginning. In one tale told among the Brule Sioux, for example, the "Creating Power" is thinking of other endings and beginnings even while he is creating our present world and telling the people "what tribes they belonged to." "This is the third world I have made," he declares. "The first world I made was bad; the creatures on it were bad. So I burned it up." "The second world I made was bad too. So I burned it up." "If you make this world bad and ugly," he warns the men and women he has fashioned out of mud, "then I will destroy this world too. It's up to you." Then:

> The Creating Power gave the people the pipe. "Live by it," he said. He named this land the Turtle Continent because it was there that the turtle came up with the mud out of

which the third world was made. "Someday there might be a fourth world," the Creating Power thought. Then he rested.

Beginnings and endings in these tales are sometimes linked to the coming of the whites: in this case, the ending of peace and primal unity and the beginning of loss and division. "In the old, old days, before Columbus 'discovered' us, as they say," one White River Sioux story goes, "we were even closer to the animals than we are now. Many people could understand the animal languages; they could talk to a bird, gossip with a butterfly. Animals could change themselves into people and people into animals." These are common refrains in Native American tales: the vitality and unity of creation ("The earth was once a human being," one Okanogan story goes. "Earth is alive yet."), the vital thread of language that once connected humans and animals and the equally vital thread of being that still links them, the belief that this is a universe of metamorphosis, motion, and mutuality. What gives stories like that of the White River Sioux an extra edge is this conviction that the white man ruined things, at least for the time being. To the claim of Columbus that the New World was the earthly Paradise, the implicit response is, yes it was but you spoiled it. So, in one story told by the Papago, or Bear People, of the Southwest, the Creator or "Great Mystery Power" is imagined punishing his people by sending "the locust flying far across the eastern waters" to summon "a people in an unknown land" whose "face and bodies were full of hair, who rode astride strange beasts, who were encased in iron, wielding iron weapons" and "who had magic hollow sticks spitting fire, thunder, and destruction." In another, Kiowa tale, the buffalo who "were the life of the Kiowa" finally leave because of "war between the buffalo and the white man." Threatened with extinction at the hands of white soldiers, hunters, and developers, the buffalo retreat into a "green and fresh" world inside a local mountain "never to be seen again." "The buffalo saw that their day was over," the tale relates; and, since "everything the Kiowas had came from the buffalo," the unspoken message is that so too is the day of the Kiowa people.

Stories of apocalypse like this one may rehearse themes and figures common to Native American tales of many ages – creation from the water, the holy mountain, the trickster-prophet – but they do clearly pivot on one significant moment of historical encounter. They are about the time when Columbus "invented America." Many other stories are less bound to a specific time and place – although, of course, they are meant to explain the times and places in which the storytellers live – and among these, notably, are the stories of origin and emergence. These are often complex, symbolic narratives that characteristically project the tribal understanding of the origins of the earth and its people, confirm the fundamental relationships between the different elements of creation from the sun to the humblest plant, define the roles and rituals of the tribe, account for the distinctive climate and terrain of the homeland, and describe the origins of various social processes and activities. In short, they reveal the grounds of being for the storyteller and his audience: they explain the who, what, why, where, and how of their existence. "In the beginning the earth was covered with water," begins a tale of origins told among the Jicarilla Apache. This is a common theme. "And all living things were below in the underworld." This Jicarilla Apache tale, in fact,

brings together the two most recurrent elements in accounts of origin: the emergence story, in which the people are led up from below the earth to find their place on the surface, very often near the place of emergence, and the story that begins with the primal element of water. Here, "all the people" come up from the underworld once the surface of the earth has become dry. "But the Jicarillas continued to circle around the hole where they had come up from the underworld," the tale reveals. "Three times they went around it" before "the Ruler" of the universe took them to "the middle of the earth," "a place very near Taos," where "the Jicarillas made their home."

What the Jicarilla story does not have is the earth diver theme. In many stories that begin with the primal element of water, a creature dives beneath the ocean to bring up enough mud to create the world and its inhabitants. The creature may be a deity, like "the Great Chief Above" in a Yakima tale. It may be an animal, such as the turtle in one story told among the Caddo. Or it may be a figure familiar from many other narratives, such as the trickster hero Coyote who, in one account of origins told by the Crow, "took up a handful of mud, and out of it made people" – dropping his clowning to become a creator. In a Yuma story, it is twins. Twins are common culture heroes in Native American legend. Sometimes, the twins are female – as they are in, say, the story of origins popular among the Acoma people of the Southwest, reflecting the matrilineal nature of their society. More often, as in Yuma myth, they are male; and, in the case of the Yuma myth as in many others, in order to account for the contraries and mysteries of existence, one is good and one is evil – and both are coextensive with their father. "This is how it all began," the Yuma story announces. "There was only water – there was no land, only nothingness." "Deep down" in the waters was "Kokomaht – the Creator." "He was bodiless, nameless, breathless, motionless, and he was two beings – twins." In this densely symbolic tale, the beginning of creation is marked by the emergence of Kokomaht, the Creator as "the first twin, the good twin"; Kokomaht, the Creator then names himself "Kokomaht-All-Father." Having assumed bodily form, he proceeds to create the body of the earth and its inhabitants: "the four directions" of the north, south, east, and west, six series of four tribes, the creatures of the earth and sky, and the moon and stars. All that "Bakutahl, the Evil Blind One," who emerges shortly after his brother, creates are the symptoms of his own incompetence, "creatures without hands or feet, toes or fingers"; "these were the fish and other water animals."

There are touches of sly humor to some later versions of this legend. White people, we are told, Kokomaht "left for last" as the least of his creations. When the white man began to cry "because his hair was faded" and "his skin was pale and washed out," Kokomaht tried to shut him up with the gift of a horse; "so the greedy one was satisfied – for a while." More fundamental, and more characteristic of most tales of emergence, the Yuma legend describes the beginnings of birth and death. "Without help from a woman," Kokomaht, the All-Father sires a son "Kumashtam'hu" and tells men and women "to join together and rear children." "I taught the people to live," Kokomaht, the All-Father declares. "Now I must teach them how to die, for without death there will be too many people on the earth." The lesson is one of example. Kokomaht, the All-Father dies, and his son buries him, in the process teaching the people the proper rituals that follow a man's death: which are, of course, the Yuma

rituals of burning his house and belongings so they may "follow him to the spirit land." Explaining birth and death, this tale of origins is typical also in explaining the special place and destiny of its tellers. Having taught the Yuma people the appropriate rites, Kumashtam'hu offers them the gift of corn and other "useful seeds from the four corners of the world." He scatters the other tribes "over all the world," but keeps the Yuma near him beside the Colorado River "because they were the special people he loved." "I cannot stay with you forever," he warns his people. "I am now only one, but I will become four:" four eagles that, after Kumashtam'hu no longer dwells among the Yuma "in the shape of a man," still keep watch over them and enter their dreams to give them "power from Kokomaht." "Everything that is good comes from Kokomaht," the legend ends, "and everything evil comes from Bakutahl." For Bakutahl, "the Evil Blind One," survives beneath and "does bad things." To him, for instance, are attributable all storms and earthquakes; when such things erupt, "then the people are afraid and say, 'The Blind One is stirring down below.'"

Not all tales of origin resemble those of the Yuma people in attempting to explain the creation of the world, perhaps the evolution of sun, moon, and stars, and human and cultural emergence all in one narrative. There is, for example, the tale told by the Hopi people about a poor little boy who becomes a warrior and kills many. His power comes from his discovery that he is the son of the sun, but the tale is less about this than it is about the specifics of Hopi culture. The enemies the boy kills are all hunter-gatherers, reflecting the fear felt by the Pueblo farmers toward marauding nomadic tribes; and, having killed his enemies, the boy returns to the Hopi village where he proceeds to "teach the people the right way to live." On the other hand, there is a legend popular among the Tsimshian, featuring Raven the Giant, a favorite hero among Northwest coast tribes, which is precisely about how daylight came into the world. A shifting, metamorphic creature, the hero of this legend assumes the form of a raven, cedar leaf, child, and then raven again, while stealing light from "the chief of heaven." More specifically still, there are tales that concentrate on explaining the existence of a staple or ritual. A Blackfoot story tells how a young man called Bull-by-Himself was taught by the beavers how to grow and smoke tobacco: "Bull-by-Himself and his wife brought the sacred tobacco to the tribes," the story ends, "who have been smoking it in a sacred manner ever since." A Brule Sioux story tells of a vision quest that became the foundation of all others. An old woman, journeying to "the top of a lonely hill," finds the "holy herb" of peyote after strenuous prayers and visions; and she returns to the tribe to introduce them to "the sacred herb, the drum, the gourd, the fire, the water, the cedar" – everything needed, from sweat lodge to solitary vigil, to achieve a visionary state. Sometimes, the tone of these stories is humorous. A Pima tale, for instance, suggests that white and black people are a mistake of creation, burned too little or too long in the oven of "the Man Maker," whereas the Pueblo Indian is "exactly right," perfectly baked and beautiful. Sometimes, on the contrary, the tone is serious, even rapt. So a Cheyenne legend simply explains how "Maheu the Creator" first taught the sun dance "that represents the making of this universe," "the great medicine dance" to a medicine man and his wife. And a more complex tale, told among the Brule Sioux, tells how "White Buffalo

Woman" brought the sacred pipe that "stands for all that grows on the earth" to the tribe and then transformed herself from woman into buffalo. "As soon as she vanished," the story goes, "buffalo in great herds appeared" furnishing the people with "everything they needed – meat for their food, skins for their clothes and tipis, bones for their many tools." Having given the pipe that holds creation together, White Buffalo Woman then effectively gives herself to hold the tribe together, offering her flesh that others might live. This story of origins is typical in its celebration of the special nature of the storytellers: in this case, their possession of the pipe and the ties that bind them to what are called here "our relations, the buffalo."

The heroes and tricksters who are described creating humanity out of mud, leading the people to their homeplace, appointing the rituals and furnishing corn or buffalo, are permitted many other adventures and activities. Very often, the birth of the hero is shrouded in mystery. In the legends of the Northern Cheyenne, the hero Sweet Medicine is born to a woman "no man has touched" but who became pregnant after voices and visions appeared to her on four consecutive nights. Even more often, the hero faces trials that vary widely from tribe to tribe: most tribes, though, tell of a ferocious monster that must be evaded – an ogre in a cliff, a sea monster, a gluttonous creature often in the shape of a bull or bear that swallows people – and ordeal by fire or water. Like other legendary beings associated with a different order in time – a time before the floods, perhaps, or before the arrival of Columbus – the hero is able to speak to animals and they are able to speak to him; often, he assumes their shape or they carry and conceal him. Sometimes, the hero is actually an animal, or more likely a human who is at the same time an animal, like Spider Woman, Man-Eagle, Bear-Man, Wakinyan Tanka the Great Thunderbird, or Old Man Coyote. And creatures they have to fight usually assume shapes and personalities as remarkable as theirs. Many tribes, for instance, tell of a great water monster, Unktehi or Uncegila to the Sioux, whose fossil bones are now scattered across the Badlands of Nebraska and the Dakotas. More bizarre is No Body, the Great Rolling Head, a creature who tumbles over mountain and prairie, destroying everything in its way and devouring people with its monstrous teeth. Other legendary monsters include Delgeth, a ferocious man-eating antelope, the Lord Killer of the Whales, Yeitso the terrible giant of the East, and a giant so gigantic that Coyote walks into its belly believing it to be a mountain cave. And in several tales the monster assumes the shape of a white man. In one Chinook legend, for example, the hero is confronted with a "thing" that "looked like a bear" but with "the face of a human being." It emerges from "something out in the water," just like any sea monster: only, in this case, this "strange something" is "covered with copper," has "two spruce trees upright on it" with "ropes tied to the spruce trees." And it loses its power when the "strange thing" carrying it is set on fire.

What these tales of heroes rehearse, among other things, are clearly the fears and aspirations of the tribe. Set in some mythical times, but also a product of collective memory, they describe actions that require not only retelling but ritual reenactment: the tellers would be likely to imitate the heroic maneuvers of the hero, his saving gestures, as the tale is told. And, eliding very often with tales of origin, they may explain life and the location of the tribe: why the tribe is as and where it is, the legendary past that has made

the actual present. In one story told among the Passamaquoddy, for instance, a hero and medicine man called Glooscap destroys a monster, slits open his belly, and the wound he makes becomes “a mighty stream” “flowing by the village and on to the great sea of the east.” “That should be enough water for the people,” Glooscap observes: a comment that acquires its point once we know that the Passamaquoddy were fishermen living on the east coast – their name, in fact, comes from *peskede makadi* meaning “plenty of herring.” Glooscap is ensuring the survival of the tribe.

Fear and awe are mingled in the Cheyenne story of one of their great heroes, Sweet Medicine, the offspring of a virgin birth. Abandoned by his mother on the prairie, raised by an old woman, he already has “grown-up wisdom and hunting skill” when he is only 10 years old. Intimations that he is the chosen one are scattered through the account of his early years. As a child of 10, he kills a miraculous calf and so ends a famine in his village: “however much they ate of the calf,” the tale reveals, “there was always more.” And, although for a time he is banished from the village, a prophet without honor in his own country, he reaps advantage from exile. “Wandering alone on the prairie,” Sweet Medicine is led by a mysterious voice inside “the sacred mountain called Bear Butte.” There he has a meeting with spirits, who instruct him in “the many useful things by which people could live,” give him “the sacred four arrows (“two arrows are for war and two for hunting”), and teach him “how to make a special tipi in which the sacred arrows were to be kept.” With these gifts, Sacred Medicine then makes “the long journey home,” where he finds his people suffering from another famine. “People of the Cheyenne,” he declaims four times as he approaches the village, “with great power I am approaching. Be joyful. The sacred arrows I am bringing.” Instructing his people in “the sacred laws,” teaching them “what the spirits inside the holy mountain taught him,” he establishes “the true Cheyenne nation” and appeases “the One Above.” “At daybreak,” after instruction, ceremony, and the smoking of “the sacred tobacco,” the story reveals, “the people emerged from the sacred arrow lodge” and “found the prairie around them covered with buffalo.” The famine is over. For the duration of four lives, Sweet Medicine lives among his people making the Cheyenne “a proud tribe respected throughout the Plains.” But “only the rocks and mountains last forever.” When he knows his end is near, Sweet Medicine instructs his people to carry him to “a place near the Sacred Bear Butte” and there build him a lodge to die in. He withdraws into the hut to die, but, before doing so, he offers his people one final word of prophecy – or, rather, warning. “I have seen in my mind,” he announces,

> that some time after I am dead – and may the time be long – light-skinned, bearded men will arrive with sticks spitting fire. They will conquer the land and drive you before them. They will kill the animals who give their flesh that you might live.… They will take your land until there is nothing left for you.

The future, as Sweet Medicine describes it, seems inexorably fated. All he can offer the people, by way of advice, is the courage to face it and to fight for survival. “You must be strong,” his parting words are, or “the Cheyenne will cease to be.”

Courage is one strategy of survival, cunning is another. They are by no means mutually exclusive, of course, which is why so often in Native American legend the hero is also a trickster. The trickster is, however, less a lawgiver usually than a breaker of laws, a rebel against authority and a violator of taboos. And one remarkable feature of Native American tales is just how quickly the great culture bringer can turn into an imp, metamorphosing from creator to clown and then back again. The great trickster figure in these tales is Coyote. There are many others. Blue Jay, Rabbit, Raven, Mink, and Ground Squirrel all play their part as troublemakers. So do such human or semi-human characters as Iktome the Sioux Spider Man, Whisky Jack of the Cree and Saultaux, Old Man of the Crow and Blackfoot tribes, Manabozho of the central woodlands and Great Lakes regions, and Veeho of the Cheyenne. But it is Coyote who can be found everywhere in tales of the trickster. Certainly, his character may vary from tribe to tribe. In the Plains and plateau regions, stories about Coyote give equal measure to his cleverness and to his clowning, his lechery and cheating, whereas in the North Pacific Coast area there is more attention given to his sharp wit than to his buffoonery. But, even when a tribe has a trickster of its own, Coyote often appears as his companion in mischief. And certain traits are common to Coyote wherever he is found: not least, his spontaneity, his skill at disguise, and his gift for metamorphosis.

Fundamental to the character of the trickster is resistance to authority, a celebration of the subversive impulse. Authority, after the arrival of Columbus, gradually came to be associated with the whites – or, to be more exact, a claim to authority – and so it is no surprise to find that, in many versions of these stories, the victim of trickery is white. In one variation on the tales of sharp trading popular in Anglo-American folklore as well as Native America, Coyote meets a white man who believes that "nobody ever got the better of him" in a trade. "I've cheated all the Indians around here," he boasts. But Coyote fools and robs him, by persuading the white trader to lend him his horse and his clothes while he goes to get his "cheating medicine" so that they can engage in a cheating contest. This Brule Sioux story of a trickster outwitting a white man, and making an idiot of him into the bargain, finds a more complex variation in a White Mountain Apache tale. Coyote fools some white traders into giving him a horse, clothes, saddle, and pistol, fools some white soldiers into buying a tree on which he has strung up some money, then fools "the big man in charge" of the town by selling him a burro whose excrement, so he claims, is money – "and it comes out of him every day." In stories like this, the boundaries between trickster and hero are more than usually permeable, since Coyote is clearly getting back at and getting even with the figure who, historically, got the better of the encounter between Old World and New. The celebration of the spontaneous in life, cunning and carnival, is here also a reversal of the familiar rhythms of power: for once, the white man gets the raw end of the deal.

Not all the animals that appear in Native American tales are tricksters, of course. Animals are a constant, talkative presence in these stories and their contacts with the human world are incessant and intimate. The animal and human realms merge in Native American belief, humans metamorphose into animals and vice versa, and there are frequent marriages across the shifting, elusive boundaries that divide the two.

In one tale told among the Pomo tribe in northern California, a girl marries a rattlesnake and bears him "four rattlesnake boys." She visits her parents for a while, but then happily returns to "Rattlesnake's house" and, we learn, "has lived there ever since." In other stories circulated in the Southwest and the Plains, people marry buffaloes, in others from the Northwest the spouse is a whale. In Passamaquoddy legend, it is the great horned owl who carries off his human bride, using his skill on the flute to seduce her. The girl, so the legend goes, "eventually became used to being married to the great horned owl. Women have to get used to their husbands, no matter who they are." That laconic, stoical conclusion does not perhaps register the mystery, the magic to be found in many of these tales of marriage between man, or more frequently woman, and beast. More characteristic, in this respect, is the tale of a union between a girl and a bear told by the Haida people. To express his love for his wife, the bear composes a song in her honor, in which he declares, "I will give her berries from the hill and roots from the ground. I will do all I can to please her." "This is the Song of the Bears," the story explains, "whoever can sing it has their lasting friendship"; "that song to this day is known among the children of the Haidas," many of whom claim their descent from the union between the author of the song and its subject. It is a testimony to the vital relation between the human and animal, just as in its way the tale itself is.

Animals are familiar creatures in Native American lore; they are sacred; they are also an important source of food. There is no necessary contradiction here, since the animating belief is that what binds animals and humans together is a living web of mutual aid and respect. A Brule Sioux story illustrates this. It tells of four brothers who go hunting buffalo. They find and kill one and then, all at once, they hear "the voice of the buffalo making human talk." "Take the meat to nourish yourselves," the voice commands, "but put the skin, head, hooves, and tail together, every part in its place." The three older brothers ignore the command, feasting on the buffalo hump and then falling asleep. But the youngest brother obeys. Having put the skin, head, hooves, and tail together, he then sees "all the parts of the buffalo" reunite to form "a fine strong buffalo who bellowed loudly" before disappearing into the hills. The survival of the buffalo, as a source of food and an object of reverence, is assured for the tribe. The three older brothers, having failed to participate in this rite ensuring survival, are punished by being turned into rattlesnakes. Even as rattlesnakes, however, they have their part to play in the tale of mutuality. The youngest brother returns to them "four-times-four-days" after their metamorphosis, and they furnish him with the "snake medicine" that will enable him to become a true warrior. Led by the youngest brother, all the people of the tribe come to them as well, with offerings of "tobacco and good red meat." From then on, so the tale goes, "they protected the people with powerful snake medicine every time we go to war." "Rattlesnakes are our cousins:" that is one lesson learned from this story. They are an intimate and magical wellspring of power for the Sioux. And the buffalo are just as closely, mystically related: that is the other lesson. The buffalo, as this story puts it, "gave his flesh so the people might live." Which is why, having killed the buffalo, the youngest brother then prays to it: it is part of nature, part of him and part of the simultaneously mundane and miraculous connection between the two.

Stories of love between humans and animals often modulate into stories of love between humans, one or both of whom may then turn out to be or become animals – or of animals who may then become human. There is, for instance, the tale told by the Coos tribe in Oregon about one of their women who married a merman and gradually turned into a sea creature. "Every summer and winter," the tale reveals, the two lovers "would put ashore two whales as a gift to their kinsmen above the sea." Or there is the Maidu legend of a woman who pursues a butterfly, falls asleep exhausted by the pursuit, and awakens to find the butterfly has turned into a man. "You have followed me this far," the "butterfly man" tells her, "perhaps you would like to follow me always." "If so," he warns, "you must pass through a lot of my people." The woman then chases the man now transformed back into a butterfly again, but, when they approach a valley filled with his "people," the butterflies, she becomes distracted, running after one or other of them, so that she loses the original object of her pursuit. So she dies, still chasing after butterflies; "and now when people speak of olden times," the legend tells us, "they say this woman lost her lover, and tried to get others but lost them, and went crazy and died." These are tales of longing, pursuit of an elusive object of desire, but there are also more straightforward accounts of desire satisfied: love and lust coexist easily in Native American legend. One story popular among the Ponca tribe of South Dakota, for example, plays on the ancient myth of vagina dentata but opts for a happy consummation. The lover, desperate with desire, "knocked out the teeth in the girl's vagina," the story discloses, " – except for one blunt tooth that was very thrilling when making love."

Native American legend is not unusual in frequently linking love and death. There are, for instance, several tales that offer variations on the story associated with Orpheus in western myth. In the variation known among the Zuni people of the Southwest, a young man follows his wife as she passes to the Land of the Dead but, when she sinks to "the spirit land at the bottom of the lake," he is unable to continue. The young man "buried his face in his hands," as the legend has it, "and wept." Presently, an owl appears and takes him to a cave "full of owl-men and owl-women," where he is given sleep medicine which, he is told, will transport him to "some other place" while he slumbers. "When you awake, you will walk toward the Morning Star," the owl advises him. "Following the trail to the middle anthill, you will find your spirit-wife there." As always in versions of this legend, along with the advice there is a warning. "Let not your desire to touch and embrace her get the better of you," the young man is told, "for if you touch her before bringing her safely home to the village of your birth, she will be lost to you forever." And, as always, the warning is eventually forgotten, the taboo is momentarily violated. The owls rescue the spirit wife from the Land of the Dead beneath the lake, bringing her to the appointed place to meet her husband when he wakes up. "When the husband awoke," the legend reveals, "he saw first the Morning Star, then the middle anthill, and his wife at his side, still in deep slumber." When she too wakes up, they begin the long journey home; and "on the fourth day they arrived at Thunder Mountain and came to the river that flows by Salt Town." Here, they lie down to rest. And, at that moment, the young man can no longer control himself. "Gazing at her loveliness," as his spirit wife sleeps, "desire so

strong that he could not resist it" overcomes him "and he stretched out and touched her." At once, she awakens, weeping, and disappears. "If the young lover had controlled his desire," the story concludes, "then death would have been overcome.'"

The Zuni tale of a young man and woman not unlike Orpheus and Eurydice is remarkable in a number of ways that take us back to the heart of Native American legend. There is the acceptance, even celebration, of the cycle of life, the necessity of death, and the inevitability of renewal. Story is inseparable from ritual in Native American life, since both are forms of reenactment – that is, rehearsal of the past in the present to ensure continuance in the future – so it is hardly surprising to find the same celebratory acknowledgment of that cycle in Native American ceremony: in, for instance, the songs as well as the stories of the Zuni. Every year, in a complex and ancient ritual called Shalako, the Zuni work to ensure and praise the renewal of life. The formal title of the ritual means "the Coming of the Gods." And it derives that name from the belief that the kachinas, who are at once patron spirits of the earth's forces and the Zuni ancestral dead, promised at the beginning of time to return every December to the Zuni homeplace in New Mexico with seeds and moisture to renew life for the coming year. The gods return incarnated in the persons of masked, costumed men, who have spent most of the preceding year in rigorous preparation for their duties. And the poem chanted in unison by the Shalako priests, over the eighth night of Shalako, praises "Our father, Kawulia Pautiwa," the creator of life: who, "perpetuating what had been since the first beginning, / Again assumed form / Carrying his waters, / Carrying his seeds" to the people. The performance of the entire poem, with accompanying rituals and repetition, takes about six hours. It confirms that "death happened for the best" because it is a pivotal part of the cycle of life. And it insists on interdependence as well as continuance. That is, it knits sun, earth, water, humanity, plants, and all animate beings together in one complex web of mutually sustaining existence – as in a passage where the growth of the corn is attributed to divine, human, and natural agencies, all working together to ensure that, as the song puts it elsewhere, "the earth is clothed anew."

That sense of the mutuality of all forms of life, announced in the arrival of the corn, is a second remarkable feature of the Zuni tale of the young man and his spirit wife. It is, after all, their friends the "owl-men" and "owl-women" who bring the lovers back together for a while, with magic, advice, and warning. A similar sense animates nearly all Native American song and story. It is at work, for instance, in these lines from an Inuit song, set in the bleak environment of Alaska, about what is called "the Great Weather," a mysterious being that informs sea, wind, and sky and moves human beings in directions they do not always understand:

> The great sea stirs me.
> …
> The sky's height stirs me.
> The strong wind blows through my mind.
> It carries me away
> And moves my inward parts with joy.

And then there is the way the Zuni story of the lovers and their owl friends is anchored in a familiar geography. The young man succumbs to the desire to touch the woman he loves, forgetting the owl's warning, at Thunder Mountain close to "the river that flows by Salt Town." The owl advised him, earlier on in the story, that he would find his spirit wife at "the middle anthill"; and, to catch the resonance of that, we have only to remember that the Zuni myth of origin has their people end their journey from the place of emergence in the Middle, a site of achievement and balance from which no further movement is necessary – and that the sacred name of Zuni Pueblo means the Middle Anthill of the World. Native American myths are about living as and where you are, staying or wandering, and the rhythms that pulse through all creation binding the place where you live to the story of the world and the story of time. They are about continuities between all animate beings, between the living and the dead and future generations, between the mysterious and the mundane – and between the universal and the immediate, furnishing legend with a local habitation and a name. Continuities like these, all of them, are measured in the concluding words of the poem chanted on the eighth night of the Zuni ceremony of the Coming of the Gods: when the man in whom the spirits of the earth and the dead are incarnated, after intense preparation, calls for the life-giving aid ("the breath") of the ancestors ("the fathers") to renew the community ("add your breath") in the here and now. "Let no one despise the breath of the fathers," he declares. "But into your bodies, / Draw their breath." "That yonder to where the road of our sun father comes out," he continues,

> Your roads may reach;
> That clasping hands,
> Holding one another fast,
> You may finish your roads
> …
> To this end, my fathers,
> My mothers,
> My children:
> May you be blessed with light;
> May your roads be fulfilled;
> May you grow old;
> May you be blessed in the chase;
> To where the life-giving road of your sun father comes out
> May your roads reach;
> May your roads all be fulfilled.

Spanish and French Encounters with America

The Zuni were the first Pueblo encountered by the Spanish. A party led by Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca in 1528 had heard tales of an area far to the north where the natives told of the "Seven Cities of Cibula" overflowing with wealth. So when, some

years later, another explorer, the Franciscan Fray Marcos de Niza (1495?–1542), saw the Zuni village from afar, its light adobe walls glistening in the evening sun, he was convinced that he had discovered the Seven Cities, their streets paved with gold; and he reported back to that effect to the Spanish viceroy in Mexico City. "I continued my journey till I came in sight of Cibula," he wrote in 1539 in *A Relation of the Reverend Fray Marcos de Niza, Touching His Discovery of the Kingdom of Ceuola or Cibula*. "It appeared to be a very beautiful city." And although he decided not to enter it at this time, "considering my danger" as he put it, "and that if I died I would not be able to give an account of that country," he was sure that it was "bigger than the city of Mexico," that there was "much gold in it" and that "the natives of it deal in vessels and jewels for the ears and little plates with which they relieve themselves of sweat." Such fabulous wealth clearly had to be in the right hands, and its present caretakers taught the twin blessings of Christianity and civilization. "It occurred to me to call this country the new kingdom of St. Francis," Fray Marcos de Niza recalled; and there, outside the city, "with the aid of the Indians," he "made a heap of stones" with "on top of it" "a small, slender cross." The cross was a sign, he explained, that "all the seven cities" had been taken "in the name of Don Antonio de Mendoza, viceroy and governor of New Spain for the Emperor, our Lord." With one simple stroke, announcing both spiritual dominion and material appropriation, the Old World declared that it would take control of the New.

The accounts of fabulous wealth waiting to be possessed, and a native population ripe for conquest and conversion, encouraged a full-scale expedition in 1540 headed by a protégé of the viceroy of New Spain, one Francisco Vasquez de Coronado. Coronado found no gold, of course, even though some members of the expedition journeyed as far as what would later be Kansas, where they encountered the Wichita tribe. One Native American scout, a Plains Indian nicknamed "the Turk," lured them on with promises that they would soon find the city of their dreams. But eventually, in 1542, the Spanish explorers returned south, having garroted "the Turk" as a punishment for misleading them, their only consolation being that they had subdued and stolen from the Pueblo Indians. They had not found streets paved with gold. However, as the account of the Coronado expedition written by Pedro de Casteneda (1520?–1570?) over twenty years later (translated and published in 1904 as *The Journey of Coronado 1540–1542*) reveals, they had found something else: the vastness of America, the immense emptiness of the plains, over which every now and then great herds of buffalo would appear. "Many fellows were lost at this time," Pedro de Casteneda writes, "who went out hunting and did not get back to the army for two or three days, wandering about the country as if they were crazy, in one direction or another, not knowing where they started from." If space is the central fact of American experience, as writers from Walt Whitman to Charles Olson have claimed, then this was the European discovery of it. Along with that, as in so many American stories and poems, went the discovery of the sense of being lost in America – sometimes exhilarating and at others, as here, genuinely terrifying. The Spanish could not get over the size and strangeness of everything. "All over the plains," Pedro de Casteneda reported, there were vast numbers of bulls: "the number of those that

were without any cows was something incredible." There were also "large numbers of animals like squirrels and a great number of their holes:" the first recorded account of the prairie dog towns common in the Southwest. Pedro de Casteneda's narrative of the Coronado expedition captures the abundance together with the vastness of the New World: herds of buffalo, packs of prairie dogs, great seas of "unripe grapes and currants and wild marjoram," numerous streams all flowing "into the mighty river of the Holy Spirit which the men with Don Hernando de Soto discovered" – in other words, the Mississippi. What is remarkable about accounts of exploration and conquest like those of Coronado or Columbus is that, along with the American dream of success (the Garden of Eden, the Seven Cities), goes the discovery of bafflement. The speech of Europe has no name for either the space or the plenitude of America at this stage. To describe it requires a new language, neither entirely of the Old World or the New: which is another way of describing the evolution of American literature.

"I found myself lost in the woods, going now on this side now on that, without being able to recognize my position." In this case, the European lost in America is French, Samuel de Champlain (1570?–1635), describing his explorations in *The Voyages to the Great River St. Lawrence, 1608–1612* (included in *The Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, 1604–1618* (1907)). There is, however, the same sense of negotiating a terrain that is terrifyingly unfamiliar, uncharted, and unnamed. "I had forgotten to bring with me a small compass which would have put me on the right road, or nearly so," Champlain wrote. "I began to pray to God to give me the will and courage to sustain patiently my misfortune." Eventually, he finds his way back to his Native American companions; and his delight at finding them is matched only by their relief in seeing him again. "They begged me not to stray off from them any more," he explains. This is not, clearly, simple solicitude for his welfare on their part. Nor is this episode as a whole just another rehearsal of a common story: the European lost in a world only too familiar to its native inhabitants. Samuel de Champlain's companions admit to him their fear of being accused of killing him, should he have never appeared again; their freedom, honor, and even their lives would have been put in jeopardy, had he remained lost. Implicitly, they are acknowledging a dependence on him in the new order of things: their lives have been changed by the arrival of the European, so much so that they need him to be there and are fearful when he is not. The European is, in short, assuming centrality and power: something that Champlain registers in the customary way by naming his surroundings as he looks around him, just like Adam in the Garden of Eden – notably, a great expanse of water that he chooses to call Lake Champlain.

As the narrative progresses, Samuel de Champlain offers further revelations of how the encounter between Old World and New transformed both. He comes across a "strange fish," his account tells us, that for now neither he nor any other European has a name for. "This makes war upon all others in the lakes and rivers" and is "called by the savages of the country, *Chaousaroo*"; it will eventually be christened, although not by Champlain, "garpike." "There are also many beavers," Champlain observes: a casual remark that acquires point when we remember that he was involved in the fur

trade. Samuel de Champlain may not have imagined encountering cities of gold but he had his own, more easily realizable dream of success, his own way of making America a site of profit and power. In the course of his *Voyages*, Champlain also reveals how he promoted the French alliance with the Hurons against the Iroquois and introduced his allies to firearms. During one Iroquois attack, he tells the reader, he loaded his musket with four balls and, as a result, killed two of the enemy and fatally wounded a third with one shot. "The Iroquois were greatly astonished that two men had been so quickly killed," he reports triumphantly, "although they were equipped with armor woven from cotton thread, and with wood which was proof against arrows"; and, as more shots rang out from Champlain and his companions, they hastily fled. The Iroquois had begun the attack by walking "at a slow pace," "with a dignity and assurance which greatly amused me," Champlain recalls. For the Native American, warfare was a ceremony, brutal but full of magic. For the European, however, it was or had become a much more practical, more straightforwardly brutal affair. A moment like this marks the appearance of a new element in Native American life: a change that has an immediate, devastating effect on the bodies of Native Americans and other, subtler and more long-term implications for their beliefs and customary behavior.

Samuel de Champlain professed himself amused by the strangeness of the "savages" he encountered. Other early explorers and colonizers claimed simply to be shocked by their savagery and idolatry. So, the French Huguenot Rene Goulaine de Laudonniere (fl. 1562–1582) in his *A Notable Historie Containing Four Voyages Made by Certaine French Captaines unto Florida* (1587), describes a brutal ritual witnessed by some of his men – at the time of establishing a colony in 1564 – with a mixture of incredulity and horror. Invited to a feast, Laudonniere tells us, the white men saw one of the Native Americans, who sat "alone in one of the corners of the hall," being stabbed by some of the others. When "he that had been struken fell down backwards," then the son of the chief appeared "apparelled in a long white skin, fel down at the feet of him that was fallen backward, weeping bitterly half a quarter of an hour." Two others "clad in like apparel" joined him and also began to "sigh pitifully," after which "a company of young girls" appeared and, "with the saddest gestures they could devyse," carried the corpse away to an adjoining house. Asked by the visitors "for what occasion the Indian was so persecuted in their presence," the chief explained "that this was nothing else but kind of ceremony" by which he and his tribe "would call to mind the death and persecution of … their ancestors executed by their enemy." The explanation does not, however, satisfy either those who witnessed the event or Laudonniere who reports it. It remains for all of them just another example of the pointless brutality of the local inhabitants (Laudonniere, in fact, follows this example with several others) and their consequent need to be conquered, converted, and civilized.

While there might be general agreement that, if they were not to be slaughtered, then the Native Americans needed to be converted as well as subdued, there was disagreement about what conversion involved. To the king of Spain, the colony established by Rene Goulaine de Laudonniere represented a violation of the true

faith of Catholicism. What is more, it threatened his power and dominion in the New World, and so he ordered its elimination. Pedro Menendez de Aviles (1519–1574), who became captain-general under Phillip II, carried out the order with ruthless efficiency, in the process founding St. Augustine, the oldest permanent city of European origin in the United States. While carrying out the royal command, however, Menendez de Aviles was also pursuing his own dream, which was to settle as large an area of the conquered territory as possible. Menendez de Aviles overstretched himself; and, in a series of increasingly desperate letters, he wrote back to those with the resources, including Phillip II himself, begging for help. The letters show how very closely the narratives, and the rhetoric, of conversion and conquest were intertwined, and how, in fact, the projects of spiritual dominion and material gain were seen as mutually dependent. The elimination of the French would "leave us more free to implant the Gospel in these parts," Menendez de Aviles explained in a letter to Phillip II written in 1565. It would enable him "to enlighten the natives, and bring them to allegiance to Your Majesty." "Forasmuch as this land is very large," he went on, "there will be much to do these fifty years"; with the proper support and supplies, though, "I hope in Our Lord that He will give me success in everything, that I and my descendants may give these Kingdoms to Your Majesty free and unobstructed, and that the people thereof may become Christians." "Being master of Florida," Menendez de Aviles reminded his king, "you will secure the Indies and the navigation thereto." "I assure Your Majesty that henceforth you can sustain Florida at very little cost," he added, and "it will yield Your Majesty much money, and will be worth more to Spain than New Spain or even Peru." All he asked or rather prayed for at this juncture was "to be provided with great diligence," since he and his fellow settlers were enduring "very great hunger" and, without immediate help, many would "pass away from this world from starvation."

Writing to "a Jesuit friend" in 1565 in a very similar vein, Menendez de Aviles told terrible tales of Native American idolatry. "The ceremonies of these people consist in great measure in adoring the sun and moon," he tells his correspondent, "and the dead deer and other animals they hold as idols." Many of the natives had, however, "begged" him "to let them become Christians"; "and I have replied," he said, "that I am expecting your worships." "It has done the greatest harm," he warned, "that none of your worships, nor any other learned religious" had "come to instruct these people" since they were "great traitors and liars" and desperately needed "the preaching of the Holy Gospel." And to press his point home, Menendez de Aviles even resorted to prayer. "May Our Lord inspire the Good Society of Jesus to send to these parts as many as six of its members," he implored, " – may they be such – for they will certainly reap the greatest reward." Menendez de Aviles was clearly hoping that an investment of priests by the Society of Jesus would be the first investment in a series that would allow his settlement to prosper. To encourage this, he was not averse to suggesting that the return on such an investment would not just be a spiritual one: the Jesuits, he intimated, would reap souls if they came over as missionaries, but also a more tangible harvest. It was the same readiness to associate spiritual and material conquest that had led Fray Marcos de Niza to use the sign of

the cross to announce that Spain had taken possession of the legendary Seven Cities of gold. Mastery of souls and mastery of the land shared a story and a vocabulary; they were part of one great imperial project.

That project was also the subject of and inspiration for the first American epic poem of European origin, *Historia de la Nueva Mexico*, published in 1610. The poem was written by Gaspar Perez de Villagra (1555–1620), who was the official chronicler of the expedition led by Juan de Onate that established Spanish settlements in north central New Mexico. "I sing of arms and the heroic man," the poem begins, echoing the opening lines of the *Aeneid*, the epic poem by Virgil celebrating the founding of Rome. That captures the form, style, and the fundamental aim of the *Historia*. The conventions of the traditional epic poem, and high rhetoric, are deployed here to celebrate the founding of a new empire, the mission of which is to civilize the wilderness and convert its native inhabitants. Addressing the "great King" of Spain in these opening lines, Villagra asks him to lend "attentive ear" while the poet tells him about

> the load of toil
> Of calumny, affliction under which
> Did plant the evangel holy and the Faith of Christ
> That Christian Achilles whom you wished
> To be employed in such heroic work.

The "Christian Achilles" is, of course, Onate; and Villagra presents his expedition as an early religious version of Manifest Destiny. Conversion is seen, in other words, as part of the destined westward expansion of the Catholic Church, moving from Jerusalem to Asia Minor to Rome and, now, to "nations barbarous, remote / From the bosom" of the true faith. What may seem surprising about this poem is that it allows the "barbarous" people whom Onate has to civilize, the Acomas, an epic dignity. During the battles with the Spanish, the Acomas are presented as courageous. Prior to one battle, Zutapacan the Acoma leader – who, for the most part, is the chief villain of the poem – is even allowed a romantic episode, as he takes leave of his bride with elaborate expressions of regret and admiration for her beauty: her eyes, he declares, offer "peace and light" to him, her lips conceal "lovely, oriental pearls." But this, after all, is the dignity of the noble savage, whose strength and weakness derive precisely from his simplicity and simple ignorance of the true faith. To a large extent, the native inhabitants of the West are treated in this poem just as, traditionally, the peoples of the East have been by European writers: as strange, exotic, and above all "other." This is surely why the eventual leveling of the Acoma village, the killing of eight hundred Acomas, and the enslavement of many more are all seen as not only inevitable but right. It is part of an imaginative venture that, like the historical enterprise it celebrates, refuses to see the Native Americans and their culture on anything like their own terms.

Where there was closer contact between the early Spanish settlers and native peoples the story could, however, get more complicated. That closer contact often

meant captivity. An account of the expedition of Hernando do Soto of 1539–1543, for instance, by an anonymous "Gentleman of Elvas" (fl. 1537–1557), *The Discovery and Conquest of Terra Florida* (1557; translated by Richard Hakluyt, 1611), tells how members of the party came upon a group of "ten or eleven Indians." Among them, we learn, "was a Christian, which was naked and scorched with the sunne, and had his arms razed after the Indians, and differed nothing at all from them." When the Spanish party approached, the account goes on, the naked Christian "began to crie out, Sirs, I am a Christian, slay me not, nor these Indians for they have saved my life." The Christian turns out to be Spanish; and he explains how he was captured, prepared for death but saved by the mediation of an Indian woman, a daughter of the chief. His story anticipates one that was to become common, made most famous in the tale of Pocahontas saved by John Smith. Quite probably, it reveals European misunderstanding of a Native American ritual: the visitor is being "saved" in a ceremony of welcome and bonding. Certainly, it allows for acknowledgment of the humanity, the saving graces of at least some of the "savages." What is more remarkable here, though, is the recognition of how the Christian may be changed by the Indian rather than change him. The Christian, so we are told, has come to differ "nothing at all" from his captors; his is a story, not of conquest, but of acculturation.

That story is told at more length by Alva Nunez Cabeza de Vaca (1490?–1556?), who accompanied an expedition to the Gulf Coast in 1528 led by Panfilo de Narvaez. After floating on rafts from Florida to Texas, nearly all in the expedition were lost. Cabeza de Vaca and three companions, drifting somewhere off the coast of Texas or Louisiana, were captured and enslaved by Indians. However, they adapted to Indian customs over the several years of their captivity, so much so that they were trusted to move freely between tribes. Eventually, journeying through the Southwest into northern Mexico, they came across Spanish settlements and were returned to Spain. There Cabeza de Vaca wrote his memoirs, published in 1542 and later translated as *Relation of Alvar Cabeza de Vaca* (1871), which were intended both to justify him and to promote royal support for further expeditions to the New World. He could hardly claim conquest. So what he did was to write a captivity narrative, one of the first, in which the experiences of being lost in America and then living among its natives were all seen as part of one providential plan. As Cabeza de Vaca describes it, his perilous journey through the wilderness was attended by miracles. On one occasion, "thanks to God," he found "a burning tree" in the chill and darkness of the woods, "and in the warmth of it passed the cold night." On another, he survived by making "four fires, in the form of a cross." And, on still another, he prayed and "through the mercy of God, the wind did not blow from the north" any more; "otherwise," he says, "I would have died." "Walking naked as I was born," Cabeza de Vaca recalls, stripped of all the signs of his civilization except his faith, he is captured but then proceeds to convert his captors. Like one of the early saints, he becomes both missionary and savior, using the beliefs of the Old World and the herbs of the New to heal the sick and creating a new religion out of Christian prayer and Native American custom. Captivity tale, in effect, modulates into conversion narrative; and, in a way that was to become familiar in American writing, material failure is

reimagined as spiritual success. The hero is one of God's elect, according to this pattern; and not only his survival, but every moment in his life is reinterpreted as the work of providence.

In the closing chapters of his memoirs, Cabeza de Vaca turns from his captivity, and his life as a missionary, to his return to civilization. It is an uneasy, ambiguous return. Cabeza de Vaca and his fellow captives have some Indians with them; and, when some Spanish soldiers first catch sight of the group, they evidently do not know what to make of what they see. "They were astonished at the sight of me, so strangely habited as I was," Cabeza de Vaca recalls, "and in company with Indians." The unease grows as, it turns out, the Spanish show signs of wanting to make slaves of the Indians. Not only that, despite the threat to their freedom, the Indians make it clear that they want Cabeza de Vaca and the other captives to return with them; "if they returned without doing so," Cabeza de Vaca explains, "they were afraid they should die." "Our countrymen became jealous at this," Cabeza de Vaca goes on, giving the Indians to understand "that we were of them, and for a long time had been lost; that they were lords of the land who must be obeyed … while we were persons of mean condition." The reply to this is simple and forceful. "The Indians," Cabeza de Vaca reports,

> said the Christians lied: that we had come whence the sun rises, and they whence it goes down; we healed the sick, they killed the sound; that we had come naked and barefooted, while they had arrived in clothing and on horses with lances; that we were not covetous of anything …; that the others had only the purpose to rob whosoever they found.

"Even to the last," Cabeza de Vaca concludes later, "I could not convince the Indians that we were of the Christians." What we have here is the tacit admission by the author of this extraordinary account that, according to the perception of most people around them, "we" – that is, he and his fellow captives – are now no longer "Christian" nor "Indian" but in between, a curious and debatable hybrid. Anticipating many later heroes and heroines in American literature, they occupy a border area between one culture, one version of experience and another. They are mixed New World beings now; and their tale, finally, is about neither conquest nor captivity but about the making of Americans.

Anglo-American Encounters

Into that making, from its earliest stages, went not only the Spanish and the Portuguese, the French and the Native Americans, but also the English and their immediate neighbors in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. From the beginning, the story of America is a story neither of a monolith nor a melting pot but a mosaic: a multicultural environment in which individuals negotiate an identity for themselves between the different traditions they encounter. And the tale of American literature

has been one of pluralism: collision, conflict, and even congruence between different languages and literatures, each of them struggling to articulate the experience of being in the world. The congruence is certainly there. English settlers, and those promoting English settlement of America, undoubtedly shared with Columbus and others a dream of Eden. Or, if they were simply trying to sell the idea of colonization to businessmen or aristocratic investors, they at least claimed to believe in that dream. America, one writer quoted earlier on insisted, was a "Virgin Countrey" sealed in its aboriginal state so as to remind humanity, and more particularly visitors from the Old World, what the earth was like when it was "vigorous and youthfull," before it had fallen into decrepitude and dismay, "the Old Age of Creation." It unfolded visions of lost innocence and innocence regained, past perfection and future promise. That writer, the author of this not untypical piece of nostalgic utopianism, was one Edward Williams (fl. 1650). He was writing in 1650, in one of the pamphlets ("Virginia, more especially the South Part thereof Richly and Truly Valued") supporting the colonizing enterprises of the London Company in what was then known as Virginia. And it is in the literature dealing with the English colonization of this area that the sheer abundance of the New World, its fertility and the opportunity it offered for the recovery of a mythical good life, is most energetically and unambiguously expressed.

In the early years of English exploration of Virginia, as it was then understood, this sense that the New World might offer a new start was expressed in a relatively tentative way. So, the elder Richard Hakluyt (?–1591), in a pamphlet for the Virginia enterprise, merely proposed for the reader's consideration the idea that "the poor and idle persons which are either burdensome or hurtfull to this Realm at home may become profyttable members by ymploying theme … in these Countreyes"; while one Sir George Peckham (?–1608) simply mentioned in passing that the "great number of men which doe now live ydely at home" might "imploy [them]selves … in matters of husbandry" across the seas. The younger Richard Hakluyt (1552–1616) was a little more forthright. In his *Discourse Concerning Western Planting* addressed to Elizabeth I (and eventually included, along with the pamphlet of the elder Hakluyt, in *The Original Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts* (1935)), he gave careful attention to the possibility of using the New World as a means of release and revival. He began by citing the example of other countries. This in itself was not a new device. Other writers had suggested a parallel between the condition of England and that, say, of ancient Rome before it became an imperial power. Here, for example, are some typical lines from a poem, "M.J.H., His Opinion of the Intended Voyage," which, like the comments of Sir George Peckham, served as a preface to an account of English adventuring called *The Voyages and Colonising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert* (1610):

> The Romans when the number of their people grewe so great,
> As neither warres could waste, nor Rome suffice them for a seate,
> They led them forth by swarming troops, to foreign lands amaine,
> And founded divers Colonies, unto the Roman raigne.
> Th' Athenians us'de the like devise …

But to this use of example Hakluyt added another element, the sense of rivalry with the two great contemporary powers of exploration and exploitation. "Portingale and Spain," he declared, "… by their discoveries, have founde such occasion of employmente, that this many yere we have not herde scarcely of any pirate of these two nations." Not only that, Hakluyt played on the fear, rife in Elizabethan England, that overpopulation, the enclosure of the common land, and the eviction of those working it might lead to widespread poverty, starvation, and even civil strife. "They can hardly lyve one by another," he said of the English people, "nay they are ready to eat up one another." The only solution was emigration to Virginia, where emigrants could find work "in plantinge of sugar cane, in maynetenaunce and increasing of silk worms, … in gatherings of cotton … in tilling of the soil there for grains, in dressing of vines." A safety-valve for dissent in England, the restoration of individual fortunes and the creation of a new commonwealth would all, as a consequence, be assured.

Following on the younger Hakluyt, later writers became still more positive about the promise of the New World. "God himself is the founder and favourer of this Plantation," asserted one William Crashaw (1572–1626) in 1617, in his "Epistle Dedicatorie" to a pamphlet about Virginia, "Good Newes from Virginia" (1617) by Alexander Whitaker (fl. 1617). In order to drive the point home, Crashaw and others compared Virginia to the Promised Land and its potential immigrants to the Israelites. It became commonplace to "prove" the providential nature of the place by such things as the miraculous escape of two early English explorers, called Gates and Somers, from shipwreck and their subsequent discovery of Bermuda. It became equally commonplace to describe in detail the fertility and beauty of the countryside, as in this passage from "Virginia … Richly and Truly Valued" by Williams, suggesting how the supposed virginity of the new country was accompanied by a pleasing ripeness:

> Nor is the present wilderness of it without a particular beauty, being all over a natural Grove of Oaks, Pines, Cedars, Cypress, Mulberry, Chestnut, Laurel, Sassafras, Cherry, Plumtree, and Vines, all of so delectable an aspect, that the melancholiest eye in the World cannot look upon it without contentment or admiration. No shrubs or underwoods choke up your passage, and in its season your foot can hardly direct itself where it will not be dyed in the blood of large and delicious Strawberries.

In effect, the pamphleteers claimed that, as one Ralph Hamor (fl. 1615) put it in "A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia" (1615), this was "a land more like the garden of Eden, which the Lord planted, than any part also of the earth." A cross between Arcadia and that place "in which it pleased God himself to set the first man and most excellent creature Adam in his innocency" – as a preacher William Symonds (1556–1616?) claimed, in "Virginia: A Sermon Preached at White-Chapel" (1609) – it inspired some to visionary rhetoric. Others were driven to sing their praises of the newly discovered land in verse, as in these rather

creaking lines from "News from Virginia" by Robert Rich (1587–1688), published in 1610:

> There is no fear of hunger here,
>   for Corne much store here grows,
> Much fish the gallant Rivers yield,
>   in truth, without suppose.
> Great stores of Fowle, of Venison,
>   of Grapes, and Mulberries,
> Of Chestnuts, Walnuts, and such like
>   of fruits and Strawberries.
> There is indeed no want at all …

In this ideal atmosphere, observers, pamphleteers, and preachers like William Symonds argued, Englishmen could once more flourish in the occupation of Adam, "that most wholesome, profitable, and pleasant work of planting." All they had to do – and here it is Robert Rich speaking – was "but freely cast corn into the ground, and with patience wait for a blessing." The blessing would be as much spiritual as material. For, working with a land that would "yield much more fruit to independent labours" than the tired, cramped soil of their native land, English settlers would recover their independence, the means and so the will to rely on nobody but themselves. Returned to conditions where "he maie have ground for nothing more than he can manure," each settler would recover his ancient, Anglo-Saxon virtues – his pride, his thrift, his generosity and hospitality. That was intimated or insisted on time and again, in pamphlets like the ones from which the two comments just quoted are taken, "A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia" (1615) by Ralph Hamor and "Good Newes from Virginia" by Alexander Whitaker. What the New World was seen or believed to promise was the newest and yet the oldest of societies, the recovery of an ancient sense of community and sociability:

> If any fall sick and cannot compass to follow his crop which if not followed, will soon be lost, the adjoining neighbour will … join together and work on it by spells … and that gratis. Let any travel, it is without charge, and at every house is entertainment as in a hostelry, and with it a hearty welcome are stranger entertained.

This vision of a return, not just to Eden, but to antique English virtues was announced by John Hammond (fl. 1655–1656) in "Leah and Rachel; or, The Two Fruitfull Sisters, Virginia and Maryland," in 1656. In another pamphlet, "Virginia Impartially Examined" by William Bullock (1594–1650), published a year earlier, the vision was accompanied by an elaborate social program. Following the utopian impulses common among so many writers of the time (Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) was an early example), Bullock devoted most of his attention to an elaborate plan for a social, economic, and political system that had the good farmer at its center and the restoration and perpetuation of self-reliance and self-subsistence as its ultimate aim. The details of the plan, which Bullock seriously proposed for the English colonies in

Virginia, hardly matter. What does matter is that this was symptomatic of a general tendency to see the New World, particularly in the South, as a New Eden that might and should develop into a new commonwealth: a new England in which would be recovered the lost virtues of the old. That tendency was to have a profound impact, not only on individual writers and thinkers like Thomas Jefferson, but on the whole project of imagining America.

The name most often associated with the early English settlement of Virginia is not that of William Bullock, however, or John Hammond – or, for that matter, any of the other pamphleteers – but that of Captain John Smith (1580–1631). In 1606, when the Virginia Company sent out its first colonists, Smith, who already had a life of adventure behind him, sailed with them as one of seven councilors. The organizers of the Virginia Company, and many of the settlers, had the Spanish model of colonization in mind: profit for the company's investors was to be acquired through conquest and the discovery of gold. But, even before he became president of the settlement in 1608, Smith had a very different aim. For him, survival not profit was the priority. To this end, he spent time exploring the region and negotiating with the Native Americans for food. He sent men out to live with the natives to learn their language, customs, and system of agriculture. And he framed a policy summed up in his formula that "he who does not work shall not eat." Smith's policy proved unpopular among many of his fellow colonizers, who were expecting the easy pickings promised by a city of gold or the easy living promised in a New Eden. Smith was replaced by the Virginia Company in 1609. He went back to England, never to return to Virginia. Soon shifting his vision to the region he would name New England, he traveled there in 1614 to gather information about its climate and terrain. And, when his further efforts to colonize New England were stymied, he devoted his time to writing about a project in which he was no longer allowed to participate, in the North as well as the South. *A True Relation of Virginia* had already appeared in 1608. This was now followed by *A Description of New England* (1616), *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624), and *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captaine John Smith* (1630).

Smith was quick to explain in these books how he differed from other travel writers like the Hakluyts. "I am no Compiler by hearsay, but have been a real Actor," he proudly asserted at the beginning of *The Generall Historie*. He had had firsthand experience. So, he felt, he could speak with authority about the New World and "the Salvages" he had found there. As all his books reveal, however, that experience seems only to have compounded his sense of European superiority. The Virginia Company recommended a tactful, even gentle policy toward Native Americans, no doubt because they were aware of just how easily local enmity could threaten their investment. Despite that, though, and despite the fact that Smith and his companions in Virginia were dependent on the local tribe, the Powhatans, for food, Smith never ceased to think of Native Americans as inferior and was never reluctant to intimidate them with a show of force. Even while he was negotiating with the Powhatans for provisions, Smith refused their request for him and his men to lay aside their arms during negotiations. "Many doe informe me," Smith records the

Powhatan chief as saying, "your coming hither is not for trade, but to invade my people, and possesse my Country." "To free us of this feare," the chief implores, "leave aboord your weapons, for here they are needless, we being all friends." Smith proudly remembers how he refused the request, which is dismissed as a "subtill discourse" or probable trick. The "Salvages" were frightened by the guns, and what they might portend, and he wanted to exploit that fear.

Even the most famous story in *The Generall Historie*, of how the daughter of the Powhatan chief, Pocahontas, saved John Smith from execution, is not quite the celebration of Native American courage and grace under pressure that, in the retelling over generations, it has tended to become. As Smith originally tells the story, it has quite other implications that reflect his own sense of his mission, to tame the wilderness and make it fit for civilization. "Two great stones were brought … then as many as could layd hands on him … and thereon laid his head," Smith recalls, here as elsewhere telling the tale of his captivity in the third person. The "Salvages," having dragged Smith to a place of execution, are then "ready with their clubs, to beate out his brains"; and Smith is only rescued when "*Pocahontas* the Kings dearest daughter, when no intreaty could prevail, got his head in her armes, and laid her owne upon his to save him from death." The moment does not occur in Smith's earlier account of his captivity in *A True Relation*, which has led some to doubt that it really happened. Whether it happened or not, though, it becomes here part of a narrative pattern that subsumes it, making it one episode in a tale telling how the "*Barbarians*" were mastered. The chief, Pocahontas's father, is momentarily appeased; and Smith is returned to confinement. Then, a few days later, the reader is told, the chief comes to where Smith is being held. He is dressed up "more like a devill than a man, with some two hundred more as blacke as himself" accompanying him. And he orders Smith to go to Jamestown to acquire "two great gunnes" for the Powhatan. Not having much choice, Smith goes with "12 guides" to keep an eye on him. He expects "every houre to be put to one death or another" by his guards, "but almightie God (by his divine providence) had mollified the hearts of those sterne Barbarians," Smith records with gratitude. He survives, returns with two cannons and then, by the simple expedient of firing them off, persuades the Powhatans not to take them. On hearing the noise of cannon fire, "the poor Salvages ran away halfe dead with fear," Smith explains with a mixture of amusement and contempt. After this terrifying experience, all the Powhatan want by way of gift or trade is not guns but mere "toys." Not for the first time, by his own account, Smith uses the fear and ignorance of the Powhtans to get what he wants, to assert the superiority of his own claims. And, seen in the context of that account as a whole, Pocahontas's saving gesture seems less the act of a noble savage that it later came to be, and more part of an evolutionary tale in which the savage yields to the advance of the civilized. Pocahontas's evident readiness to sacrifice her life for John Smith, in other words, becomes here a romantic variation on the theme that runs through all this particular captivity tale. The Native American, according to this theme, acknowledges both the superiority and the inevitability of the European and is overpowered or, as in this specific case, offers their acknowledgment in the form of personal sacrifice.

The civilization that John Smith anticipated coming to the New World, and pushing aside the Native American, was one that he came more and more to associate with New England rather than Virginia. This was hardly surprising, as the Massachusetts Bay Colony was much more driven by the ideas of settlement, private property, and the establishment of a body politic than many of the early Virginia investors and adventurers were. It came much closer to Smith's own preferences and his emphasis on useful toil. "Who can desire more content, that hath small meanes … then to tread, and plant that ground hee hath purchased by the hazard of his life?" Smith asked in *A Description of New England*. "If he have but the taste of virtue … what to such a mind can bee more pleasant, then planting and building a foundation for his Posteritie, gotte from the rude earth …?" For Smith, appealing for settlers to plant a colony in New England, prosperity would flow naturally to anyone of middling condition who was willing to venture as he had done. It would come "by Gods blessing and … industrie," as a sign of special election and a reward for hard work. Anyone in England with only "small wealth to live on" could "by their labour … live exceeding well" in America, Smith declared. And they could add to the usefulness of their toil by "converting those poor Salvages" who lived there "to the knowledge of God," by instruction, admonition, and the power of example, showing their faith by their works. Like others eager to promote settlement, Smith was not reluctant to use national pride, and a sense of rivalry with other imperial powers, to promote his cause. Nor was the dream of Eden and its recovery ever very far from his thoughts. "*Adam* and *Eve* did first beginne this innocent worke, To plant the earth to remaine to posteritie," he pointed out. "*Noe* [Noah], and his family, beganne againe the second plantation; and their seed as it still increased, hath still planted new Countries, and one countrie another." Without such devotion to the planting of seeds and faith, Smith insisted, "wee our selves, had at this present beene as Salvage, and as miserable as the most barbarous Salvage yet uncivilized"; the European, in short, would have been as benighted and as desperate as the Native American. Now it was up to Smith's own contemporaries to show similar devotion, so that the spread of civilization and Christianity could continue and a plantation much like Eden wrested out of the wilderness of the New World.

Writing of the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods

There were, of course, those who dissented from this vision of a providential plan, stretching back to Eden and forward to its recovery in America. They included those Native Americans for whom the arrival of the white man was an announcement of the apocalypse. As one of them, an Iroquois chief called Handsome Lake, put it at the end of the eighteenth century, "white men came swarming into the country bringing with them cards, money, fiddles, whiskey, and blood corruption." They included those countless, uncounted African-Americans brought over to America against their will, starting with the importation aboard a Dutch vessel of "Twenty Negars" into Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. They even included some European

settlers, those for whom life in America was not the tale of useful toil rewarded that John Smith so enthusiastically told. And this was especially the case with settlers of very limited means, like those who went over as indentured servants, promising their labor in America as payment for their passage there. In a series of letters to his parents the indentured servant Richard Frethorne (fl. 1623), for instance, complained of sickness, starvation, and living "in fear of the enemy every hour" in Virginia. "For God's sake send beef and cheese and butter," he wrote to them in 1623. Shortly after, the entreaties became more urgent. "I pray you … not to forget me, but by any means redeem me," he wrote, "… release me from this bondage and save my life." Frethorne did not suggest that he was alone in his suffering. On the contrary, "people cry out day and night – Oh! That they were in England without their limbs," he averred, " – and would not care to lose a limb to be in England again, yea, though they beg from door to door." His sense of the extremity of his suffering, though, did lead him to compare himself in particular, not to Adam, but to "holy Job." "I … curse the time of my birth," he confessed, "I thought no head had been able to hold so much water as doth daily flow from mine eyes." And the sheer bitterness of his sense of exile in the wilderness offers a useful corrective to the dominant European version of early settlement in the New World.

Puritan narratives

Dominant that version was, though, and in its English forms, along with the writings of John Smith, it was given most powerful expression in the work of William Bradford (1590–1657) and John Winthrop (1588–1649). Bradford was one of the Puritan Separatists who set sail from Leyden in 1620 and disembarked at Plymouth. He became governor in 1621 and remained in that position until his death in 1657. In 1630 he wrote the first book of his history, *Of Plymouth Plantation*; working on it sporadically, he brought his account of the colony up to 1646, but he never managed to finish it. Nevertheless, it remains a monumental achievement. At the very beginning of *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Bradford announces that he will write in the Puritan "plain style, with singular regard to the simple truth in all things," as far as his "slender judgement" will permit. This assures a tone of humility, and a narrative that cleaves to concrete images and facts. But it still allows Bradford to unravel the providential plan that he, like other Puritans, saw at work in history. The book is not just a plain, unvarnished chronicle of events in the colony year by year. It is an attempt to decipher the meaning of those events, God's design for his "saints," that exclusive, elect group of believers destined for eternal salvation. The "special work of God's providence," as Bradford calls it, is a subject of constant analysis and meditation in *Of Plymouth Plantation*. Bradford's account of the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers in the New World is notable, for instance, for the emphasis he puts on the perils of the "wilderness." "For the season was winter," he points out, "and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent." "Besides," he adds, all the Pilgrims could see was "but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men"; "the whole country … represented a wild and savage hue" and, "if

they looked behind them," all these "poor people" could see there "was the mighty ocean which they had passed and was now a main bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world." "What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His Grace?" Bradford asks rhetorically. The survival of the Puritans during and after the long voyage to the New World is seen as part of the divine plan. For Bradford, America was no blessed garden originally, but the civilizing mission of himself and his colony was precisely to make it one: to turn it into evidence of their election and God's infinite power and benevolence.

This inclination or need to see history in providential terms sets up interesting tensions and has powerful consequences, in Bradford's book and similar Puritan narratives. *Of Plymouth Plantation* includes, as it must, many tales of human error and wickedness, and Bradford often has immense difficulty in explaining just how they form part of God's design. He can, of course, and does fall back on the primal fact of Original Sin. He can see natural disasters issuing from "the mighty hand of the Lord" as a sign of His displeasure and a test for His people; it is notable that the Godly weather storms and sickness far better than the Godless do in this book, not least because, as Bradford tells it, the Godly have a sense of community and faith in the ultimate benevolence of things to sustain them. Nevertheless, Bradford is hard put to it to explain to himself and the reader why "sundry notorious sins" break out so often in the colony. Is it that "the Devil may carry a greater spite against the churches of Christ and the Gospel here ...?" Bradford wonders. Perhaps it is the case with evil "as it is with waters when their streams are stopped or dammed up"; "wickedness being stopped by strict laws," it flows "with more violence" if and when it "breaks out." Perhaps, he suggests, it is simply that "here ... is not more evils in this kind" but just clearer perception of them; "they are here more discovered and seen and made public by due search, inquisition and due punishment." Bradford admits himself perplexed. And the fact that he does so adds dramatic tension to the narrative. Like so many great American stories, *Of Plymouth Plantation* is a search for meaning. It has a narrator looking for what might lie behind the mask of the material event: groping, in the narrative present, for the possible significance of what happened in the past.

Which suggests another pivotal aspect of Bradford's book and so much Puritan narrative. According to the Puritan idea of providence at work in history, every material event does have meaning; and it is up to the recorder of that event to find out what it is. At times, that may be difficult. At others, it is easy. Bradford has no problem, for example, in explaining the slaughter of four hundred of the Pequot tribe, and the burning of their village, by the English. "It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fire and the streams of blood quenching the same," Bradford admits, "... but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice." The battle is seen as one in a long line waged by God's chosen people, part of the providential plan; and Bradford regards it as entirely appropriate that, once it is over, the victors should give "the praise thereof to God, who had wrought so wonderfully for them." Whether difficult or not, however, this habit of interpreting events with the help of a providential vocabulary was to have a profound impact on American writing – just as, for that

matter, the moralizing tendency and the preference for fact rather than fiction, "God's truth" over "men's lies," also were.

Of Plymouth Plantation might emphasize the sometimes mysterious workings of providence. That, however, does not lead it to an optimistic, millennial vision of the future. On the contrary, as the narrative proceeds, it grows ever more elegiac. Bradford notes the passing of what he calls "the Common Course and Condition." As the material progress of the colony languishes, he records, "the Governor" – that is, Bradford himself – "gave way that they should set corn every man for his own particular"; every family is allowed "a parcel of land, according to the proportion of their number." The communal nature of the project is correspondingly diluted. "The experience that was had in this common course and condition, tried sundry years and that amongst godly and sober men," Bradford sadly observes, "may well evince the vanity of that conceit of Plato's … that the taking away of property and bringing in community into a commonwealth would make them happy and flourishing." The communitarian spirit of the first generation of immigrants, those like Bradford himself, whom he calls "Pilgrims," slowly vanishes. The next generation moves off in search of better land and further prosperity; "and thus," Bradford laments, "was this poor church left, like an ancient mother grown old and forsaken of her children." The passing of the first generation and the passage of the second generation to other places and greater wealth inspires Bradford to that sense of elegy, the intimations of a vision recovered for a moment and then lost, that was to become characteristic of narratives dramatizing the pursuit of dreams in America. It also pushes *Of Plymouth Plantation* toward a revelation of the central paradox in the literature of immigration – to be revealed again and again in American books – that material success leads somehow and ineluctably to spiritual failure.

Ten years after Bradford and his fellow Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, John Winthrop left for New England with nearly four hundred other Congregationalist Puritans. The Massachusetts Bay Company had been granted the right by charter to settle there and, prior to sailing, Winthrop had been elected governor of the colony, a post he was to hold for twelve of the nineteen remaining years of his life. As early as 1622, Winthrop had called England "this sinfull land"; and, playing variations on the by now common themes of poverty and unemployment, declared that "this Land grows weary of her Inhabitants." Now, in 1630, aboard the *Arbella* bound for the New World, Winthrop took the opportunity to preach a lay sermon, *A Modell of Christian Charity*, about the good society he and his fellow voyagers were about to build. As Winthrop saw it, they had an enormous responsibility. "Thus stands the cause betweene God and us," Winthrop insisted, "wee are entered into Covenant with him for this worke:" that is, they had entered into a contract with God of the same kind He had once had with the Israelites, according to which He would protect them if they followed His word. Not only the eyes of God but "the eyes of all people are upon us," Winthrop declared. They were a special few, chosen for an errand into the wilderness. That made their responsibility all the greater; the divine punishment was inevitably worse for the chosen people than for the unbelievers.

Written as a series of questions, answers, and objections that reflect Winthrop's legal training, *A Modell of Christian Charity* is, in effect, a plea for a community in which "the care of the public must oversway all private respects." It is fired with a sense of mission and visionary example. "Wee shall finde that the God of Israell is among us, when tenn of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies," Winthrop explained; "when hee shall make us a prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England; for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill." To achieve this divinely sanctioned utopia, he pointed out to all those aboard the *Arbella*, "wee must delight in each other, make others Condicions our owne … allwayes having before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke, our Community as members of the same body." This utopia would represent a translation of the ideal into the real, a fulfillment of the prophecies of the past, "a story and a by-word through the world" in the present, and a beacon, a living guide for the future. It would not exclude social difference and distinction. But it would be united as the various organs of the human body were. "All true Christians are of one body in Christ," Winthrop argued; "the ligaments of this body which knitt together are love"; and the community he and his fellows were about to found would be a living analogue of this – a body politic in which, as he put it, "the sensiblenes and Sympathy of each others Condicions will necessarily infuse into each parte a native desire and endeavour, to strengthen, defend, preserve, and comfort the other."

Along with the sense of providence and special mission, Winthrop shared with Bradford the aim of decoding the divine purpose, searching for the spiritual meanings behind material facts. He was also capable of a similar humility. His spiritual autobiography, for instance, *John Winthrop's Christian Experience* – which was written in 1637 and recounts his childhood and early manhood – makes no secret of his belief that he was inclined to "all kind of wickednesse" in his youth, then was allowed to come "to some peace and comfort in God" through no merit of his own. But there was a greater argumentativeness in Winthrop, more of an inclination toward analysis and debate. This comes out in his journal, which he began aboard the *Arbella*, and in some of his public utterances. In both a journal entry for 1645, for instance, and a speech delivered in the same year, Winthrop developed his contention that true community did not exclude social difference and required authority. This he did by distinguishing between what he called natural and civil liberty. Natural liberty he defined in his journal as something "common to man with beasts and other creatures." This liberty, he wrote, was "incompatible and inconsistent with authority and cannot endure the least restraint." Civil liberty, however, was "maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority"; it was the liberty to do what was "good, just, and honest." It was "the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," Winthrop argued. "Such is the liberty of the church under the authority of Christ," and also of the "true wife" under the authority of her husband, accounting "her subjection her honor and freedom." Like the true church or true wife, the colonist should choose this liberty, even rejoice in it, and so find a perfect freedom in true service.

John Winthrop found good reason for his belief in authority, and further demands on his capacity for argument, when faced with the challenge of Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643). A woman whom Winthrop himself described in his journal as being "of ready wit and bold spirit," Hutchinson insisted that good works were no sign of God's blessing. Since the elect were guaranteed salvation, she argued, the mediating role of the church between God and man became obsolete. This represented a serious challenge to the power of the Puritan oligarchy, which of course had Winthrop at its head. It could hardly be countenanced by them and so, eventually, Hutchinson was banished. Along with banishment went argument: Winthrop clearly believed that he had to meet the challenge posed by Hutchinson in other ways, and his responses in his work were several. In his spiritual autobiography, for instance, he pointedly dwells on how, as he puts it, "it pleased the Lord in my family exercise to manifest unto mee the difference between the Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of workes." This was because, as he saw it, Hutchinson's heresy was based on a misinterpretation of the Covenant of Grace. He also dwells on his own personal experience of the importance of doing good. In a different vein, but for a similar purpose, in one entry in his journal for 1638, Winthrop reports a story that, while traveling to Providence after banishment, Hutchinson "was delivered of a monstrous birth" consisting of "twenty-seven several lumps of man's seed, without any alteration or mixture of anything from the woman." This, Winthrop notes, was interpreted at the time as a sign of possible "error"; and he does not resist that interpretation since, after all, Hutchinson has been guilty of a monstrous resistance. She has not accepted that "subjection to authority" that is the mark of the true Christian and the good woman. Rumor and argument, personal experience and forensic expertise are all deployed in Winthrop's writings to meet the challenges he saw to his ideal community of the "Citty upon a Hill." The threat to the dominant theme of civilizing and Christianizing mission is, in effect, there, not only in Bradford's elegies for a communitarian ideal abandoned, but also in Winthrop's urgent attempts to meet and counter that threat by any rhetorical means necessary.

William Bradford also had to face challenges, threats to the purity and integrity of his colony; and Anne Hutchinson was not the only, or even perhaps the most serious, challenge to the project announced on board the *Arbella*. The settlement Bradford headed for so long saw a threat in the shape of Thomas Morton (1579?–1642?); and the colony governed by Winthrop had to face what Winthrop himself described as the "divers new and dangerous opinions" of Roger Williams (1603?–1683). Both Morton and Williams wrote about the beliefs that brought them into conflict with the Puritan establishment; and, in doing so, they measured the sheer diversity of opinion and vision among English colonists, even in New England. Thomas Morton set himself up in 1626 as head of a trading post at Passonagessit which he renamed "Ma-re Mount." There, he soon offended his Puritan neighbors at Plymouth by erecting a maypole, reveling with the Indians and, at least according to Bradford (who indicated his disapproval by calling the place where Morton lived

"Merry-mount"), selling the "barbarous savages" guns. To stop what Bradford called Morton's "riotous prodigality and excess," the Puritans led by Miles Standish arrested him and sent him back to England in 1628. He was to return twice, the first time to be rearrested and returned to England again and the second to be imprisoned for slander. Before returning the second time, though, he wrote his only literary work, *New English Canaan*, a satirical attack on Puritanism and the Separatists in particular, which was published in 1637.

In *New English Canaan*, Morton provides a secular, alternative version of how he came to set up Ma-re Mount, how he was arrested and then banished. It offers a sharp contrast to the account of those same events given in *Of Plymouth Plantation*. As Bradford describes it, Morton became "Lord of Misrule" at "Merry-mount," and "maintained (as it were) a School of Atheism." Inviting "the Indian women for their consorts" and then dancing around the maypole, worse still, Bradford reports, "this wicked man" Morton sold "evil instruments" of war to the Indians: "O, the horribleness of this villainy!" Morton makes no mention of this charge. What he does do, however, is describe how he and his fellows set up a maypole "after the old English custom" and then, "with the help of Salvages, that came thether of purpose to see the manner of our Revels," indulge in some "harmeles mirth." A sense of shared values is clearly suggested between the Anglicanism of Morton and his colleagues and the natural religion of the Native Americans. There is a core of common humanity here, a respect for ordinary pleasures, for custom, traditional authority and, not least, for the laws of hospitality that, according to Morton, the Puritans lack. The Puritans, on the other hand, fear natural pleasure, they are treacherous and inhospitable: Morton describes them, for instance, killing their Indian guests, having invited them to a feast. Respecting neither their divinely appointed leader, the king, nor the authority of church tradition, they live only for what they claim is the "spirit" but Morton believes is material gain, the accumulation of power and property.

New English Canaan, as its title implies, is a promotional tract as well as a satire. It sets out to show that New England is indeed a Canaan or Promised Land, a naturally abundant world inhabited by friendly and even noble savages. Deserving British colonization, all that hampers its proper development, Morton argues, is the religious fanaticism of the Separatists and other Puritans. Morton divides his book in three. A celebration of what he calls "the happy life of the Salvages," and their natural wisdom, occupies the first section, while the second is devoted to the natural wealth of the region. The satire is concentrated in the third section of what is not so much a history as a series of loosely related anecdotes. Here, Morton describes the general inhumanity of the Puritans and then uses the mock-heroic mode to dramatize his own personal conflicts with the Separatists. Morton himself is ironically referred to as "the Great Monster" and Miles Standish, his principal opponent and captor, "Captain Shrimp." And, true to the conventions of mock-heroic, the mock-hero Shrimp emerges as the real villain, while the mock-villain becomes the actual hero, a defender of traditional Native American and English customs as well as a victim of Puritan zeal and bigotry. There is considerable humor here, but that humor can scarcely conceal Morton's bitterness. Confined on an island, just before his removal

to England, Morton reveals, he was brought "bottles of strong liquor" and other comforts by "Salvages"; by such gifts, they showed just how much they were willing to "unite themselves in a league of brotherhood with him." "So full of humanity are these infidels before those Christians," he remarks acidly. At such moments, Morton appears to sense just how far removed his vision of English settlement is from the dominant one. Between him and the Native Americans, as he sees it, runs a current of empathy; while between him and most of his fellow colonists there is only enmity – and, on the Puritan side at least, fear and envy.

That William Bradford feared and hated Morton is pretty evident. It is also clear that he had some grudging respect for Roger Williams, describing him as "godly and zealous" but "very unsettled in judgement" and holding "strange opinions." The strange opinions Williams held led to him being sentenced to deportation back to England in 1635. To avoid this, he fled into the wilderness to a Native American settlement. Purchasing land from the Nassagansetts, he founded Providence, Rhode Island, as a haven of dissent to which Anne Hutchinson came with many other runaways, religious exiles, and dissenters. Williams believed, and argued for his belief, that the Puritans should become Separatists. This clearly threatened the charter under which the Massachusetts Bay colonists had come over in 1630, including Williams himself, since it denied the royal prerogative. He also insisted that the Massachusetts Bay Company charter itself was invalid because a Christian king had no right over heathen lands. That he had no right, according to Williams, sprang from Williams's seminal belief, and the one that got him into most trouble: the separation of church and state and, more generally, of spiritual from material matters. Christianity had to be free from secular interests, Williams declared, and from the "foul embrace" of civil authority. The elect had to be free from civil constraints in their search for divine truth; and the civil magistrates had no power to adjudicate over matters of belief and conscience. All this Williams argued in his most famous work, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, published in 1644. Here, in a dialogue between Truth and Peace, he pleaded for liberty of conscience as a natural right. He also contended that, since government is given power by the people, most of whom are unregenerate, it could not intervene in religious matters because the unregenerate had no authority to do so. But religious freedom did not mean civil anarchy. On the contrary, as he wrote in his letter "To the Town of Providence" in 1655, liberty of conscience and civil obedience should go hand in hand. Williams used the analogy of the ocean voyage. "There goes many a Ship to Sea, with many a Hundred Souls in One Ship," he observed. They could include all kinds of faiths. Notwithstanding this liberty, Williams pointed out, "the Commander of this Ship ought to command the Ship's Course; Yea, and also to command that Justice, Peace, and Sobriety, be kept and practised." This was "a true Picture of a Common-Wealth, or an human Combination, or Society."

Like Thomas Morton, Williams was also drawn to the Native Americans: those whom writers like Bradford and Winthrop tended to dismiss as "savage barbarians." His first work, *A Key into the Language of America*, published in 1643, actually focuses attention on them. "I present you with a *key*," Williams tells his readers in the preface,

"I have not heard of the like, yet framed, since it pleased God to bring that mighty *Continent of America* to light." "Others of my Countrey-men have often, and excellently … written of the *Countrey*," he concedes. But "this *key*, respects the *Native Language* of it, and happily may unlocke some Rarities concerning the *Natives* themselves, not yet discovered." Each chapter of Williams's *Key* begins with an "Implicit Dialogue," a list of words associated with a particular topic, the Nassagansett words on the left and their English equivalents on the right. This is followed by an "Observation" on the topic; and the topics in these chapters range from food, clothing, marriage, trade, and war to beliefs about nature, dreams, and religion. A "generall Observation" is then drawn, with cultural inferences and moral lessons being offered through meditation and analogy. Finally, there is a conclusion in the form of a poem that contrasts Indian and "English-man." These poems, in particular, show Williams torn between his admiration for the natural virtues of Native Americans, and their harmony with nature, and his belief that the "*Natives*" are, after all, pagans and so consigned to damnation. Implicit here, in fact, and elsewhere in the *Key* is an irony at work in a great deal of writing about the "noble savage." His natural nobility is conceded, even celebrated: but the need for him to be civilized and converted has to be acknowledged too. Civilized, however, he would invariably lose those native virtues that make him an object of admiration in the first place. And he could not then be used as Williams frequently uses him here, as a handy tool for attacking the degenerate habits of society.

Williams was clearly drawn to the simplicity and what he saw as the humility of Native American life. When he writes of the Nassagansett religion in his *Key*, for instance, he points out that the Nassagansetts have instinctively understood the "two great points" of belief: "1. That God is. 2. That hee is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek him." He is even intrigued by what he sees as their apprehension of a spiritual presence in everything. The intrigue, or even sympathy, however, quickly shades into suspicion, since such a custom cannot but remind him, he admits, of the "Papists." And inevitably, inexorably toward the end of his chapter on religion and its vocabularies, Williams feels obliged to point out that the Nassagansetts may well be one of "the wandring Generations of *Adams* lost posteritie:" one of the ten lost tribes of Israel, that is, whose ignorance is a sign of their spiritual exile. The chapter concludes, appropriately enough, with a vision of judgment. "Two sorts of men shall naked stand," Williams solemnly announces, "Before the burning ire / Of him that shortly shalle appeare / In dreadful flaming fire." The Indian belongs with the millions who "know not God" and his fate is a warning. For, "If woe to *Indians*, Where shall *Turk*, / Where shall appeare the *Jew*?" For that matter, "Where shall stand the Christian false? / O blessed then the True." The Native American may have native virtues but they place him, in the hierarchy of final judgment, only slightly above those degenerates of civilization who embrace a false religion or are false to the true one. He remains below all those who follow the true path. Williams's *Key* is an immense and imaginative project, founded on a recognition many later writers were to follow that the right tool for unlocking the secrets of America is a language actually forged there. But it remains divided between the natural and the civilized,

the native and the colonist, the "false" and the "true." Which is not at all to its disadvantage: quite the opposite, that is the source of its interest – the measure of its dramatic tension and the mark of its authenticity.

Some colonial poetry

While Puritans were willing to concede the usefulness of history of the kind Bradford wrote or of sermons and rhetorical stratagems of the sort Winthrop favored, they were often less enthusiastic about poetry. "Be not so set upon poetry, as to be always poring on the passionate and measured pages," the New England cleric Cotton Mather warned; "beware of a boundless and sickly appetite for the reading of … poems … and let not the Circean cup intoxicate you." Nor were such suspicions about the seductions of verse confined to Puritan New England. "At this day / All poetry there's many to gainsay," wrote Elizabeth Sowle Bradford (1663?–1731), a Quaker who settled in New York. "If any book in verse, they chance to spy, /" she observed, "Away profane, they presently do cry." Yet Bradford herself wrote verse, citing the biblical examples of David and Solomon. Poetry, she averred, "hath been the delight of kings," "I'm apt to think that angels do embrace it." The Book of Revelation, she pointed out, foretold that the saints in heaven would sing "a new song before the throne" (Rev. 14:5). Or, as she put it, "And though God give't here but in part to some, / Saints shall have't perfect in the world to come." That was a characteristic defense of those who disagreed with people like Cotton Mather. Poetry was to be found in the Bible; it was a resource of saints and angels; it could be a vehicle for understanding and communicating religious truth. Not all colonists saw poetry in these terms, of course. Some adopted classical models, or imitated popular English poets like Ben Jonson and John Donne, John Milton and John Dryden. John Saffin (1626–1710), an inhabitant of Massachusetts, for instance, wrote poems in praise of women that mixed classical references with elegant wit. "Fair Venus, and Minerva both combine: / Resplendently, to make their graces thine," he wrote in an "Acrostic on Mrs. Winifred Griffin" (unpublished until 1928); "Each in her proper station; Wit and Beauty / Take thee for mistress out of bounden duty." In turn, George Alsop (1636–1673?) from Maryland wrote a poem in praise of trade, "Trafique is Earth's Great Atlas" (1666); "Trafique is Earth's great *Atlas*," it begins, "that supports / The pay of Armies, and the height of Courts." Benjamin Tompson (1642–1714) of Massachusetts composed an epic poem about war with the Algonquin Indians, *New Englands Crisis* (1676), revised as *New Englands Tears* (1676). Richard Steere (1643?–1721) from Connecticut wrote, among other things, allegories of nature like "On a Sea-Storm Nigh the Coast" (1700) and *The Daniel Catcher* (1713), an anti-Catholic response to the English poem *Absalom and Achitophel* by John Dryden. And Sarah Whipple Goodhue (1641–1681) of Massachusetts left some touching "Lines to Her Family" (1681) to be read after her death, as a testament to the "natural affection" she said she felt for them all. Verse was prized among some colonists, at least, as a way of commemorating public events and personal experiences. It could take the form of lyric, elegy, ballad or epic, acrostic, or

satire. It was commonly a means of making sense of things, connecting the particular with the general. But only in New England was the general defined mainly in religious and biblical terms. Elsewhere, and particularly in the South, it was likely to reflect the classical education of the author and their interest in matters of love, politics, and public exchange.

Of the verse that survives from this period, however, most of the finest and most popular among contemporaries inclines to the theological. The most popular is represented by *The Day of Doom*, a resounding epic about Judgment Day written by Michael Wigglesworth (1631–1705), *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640), and *The New England Primer* (1683?). *The Day of Doom* was the biggest selling poem in colonial America. In 224 stanzas in ballad meter, Wigglesworth presents the principal Puritan beliefs, mostly through a debate between sinners and Christ. This stanza, one of the many describing the torments of the damned, is typical:

Luke 13:28 They wring their hands, their caitiff hands
and gnash their teeth for terrour;
They cry, they roar for anguish sore,
and gnaw their tongues for horrour
But get away without delay,
Christ pities not your cry:
Depart to Hell, there may you yell
Prov. 1:26 and roar eternally.

The simple diction, the driving rhythms, and the constant marginal references to biblical sources are all part of Wigglesworth's didactic purpose. This is poetry intended to drive home its message, to convert some and to restore the religious enthusiasm of others. Many Puritan readers committed portions of the poem to memory; still more read it aloud to their families. The sheer simplicity and fervor of its message made it an ideal instrument for communicating and confirming faith. So it is, perhaps, hardly surprising that Cotton Mather could put aside his distrust of poetry when it came to a work like *The Day of Doom*. At Wigglesworth's death, in fact, Mather confessed his admiration for the poet who, Mather said, had written for "the Edification of such Readers, as are for Truth's dressed up in *Plaine Meeter*."

Even more popular than *The Day of Doom*, however, were *The Bay Psalm Book* and *The New England Primer*. Only the Bible was more widely owned in colonial New England. *The Bay Psalm Book* was the first publishing project of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and offered the psalms of David translated into idiomatic English and adapted to the basic hymn stanza form of four lines with eight beats in each line and regular rhymes. Here, for example, are the opening lines of Psalm 23:

The Lord to me a shepherd is,
Want therefore shall not I.
He in the folds of tender grass
Doth cause me down to lie.

The work was a collaborative one, produced by twelve New England divines. And one of them, John Cotton, explained in the preface that what they had in mind was "Conscience rather than Elegance, fidelity rather than poetry." "We have … done our endeavour to make a plain and familiar translation," Cotton wrote. "If therefore the verses are not always so smoothe and elegant as some may desire …, let them consider that God's Altar need not our polishings." What was needed, Cotton insisted, was "a plain translation." And, if the constraints imposed by the hymn stanza form led sometimes to a tortured syntax, then neither the translators nor the audience appear to have minded. The psalms were intended to be sung both in church and at home, and they were. *The Bay Psalm Book* was meant to popularize and promote faith, and it did. Printed in England and Scotland as well as the colonies, it went through more than fifty editions over the century following its first appearance. It perfectly illustrated the Puritan belief in an indelible, divinely ordained connection between the mundane and the miraculous. And it enabled vast numbers of people, as Cotton put it, to "sing the Lord's songs … in our English tongue."

The New England Primer had a similar purpose and success. Here, the aim was to give every child "and apprentice" the chance to read the catechism and digest improving moral precepts. With the help of an illustrated alphabet, poems, moral statements, and a formal catechism, the young reader was to learn how to read and how to live according to the tenets of Puritan faith. So, for instance, the alphabet was introduced through a series of rhymes designed to offer moral and religious instruction:

A In *Adams* Fall
We sinned all
B Thy life to mend
This *Book* attend
…
Y *Youth* forward slips
Death soonest nips

Clearly, the *Primer* sprang from a belief in the value of widespread literacy as a means of achieving public order and personal salvation. "Now the Child being entred in his Letters and Spelling," it announces at the end of the alphabet, "let him learn these and such like Sentences by Heart, whereby he will be both instructed in his Duty, and encouraged in his Learning." Equally clearly, as time passed and the *Primer* went through numerous revisions, the revised versions reflected altering priorities. The 1758 revision, for instance, declares a preference for "more grand noble Words" rather than "diminutive Terms"; a 1770 version describes literacy as more a means of advancement than a route to salvation; and an 1800 edition opts for milder versified illustrations of the alphabet ("A was an apple pie"). But this tendency to change in response to changing times was a reason for the durability and immense popularity of the *Primer*: between 1683 and 1830, in fact, it sold over five million copies. And, at its inception at least, it was further testament to the Puritan belief that man's word, even in verse, could be used as a vehicle for God's truth.

That belief was not contested by the two finest poets of the colonial period, Anne Bradstreet (1612?–1672) and Edward Taylor (1642?–1729). It was, however, set in tension with other impulses and needs that helped make their poetry exceptionally vivid and dramatic. With Bradstreet, many of the impulses, and the tensions they generated, sprang from the simple fact that she was a woman. Bradstreet came with her husband to Massachusetts in 1630, in the group led by John Winthrop. Many years later, she wrote to her children that, at first, her "heart rose" when she "came into this country" and "found a new world and new manners." "But," she added, "after I was convinced it was the way of God, I submitted to it and joined the church in Boston." What she had to submit to was the orthodoxies of faith and behavior prescribed by the Puritan fathers. Along with this submission to patriarchal authority, both civil and religious, went acknowledgment of – or, at least, lip service to – the notion that, as a woman, her primary duties were to her family, as housekeeper, wife, and mother. Bradstreet raised eight children. She also found time to write poetry that was eventually published in London in 1650 as *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*. Publication was arranged by Bradstreet's brother-in-law, who added a preface in which he felt obliged to point out that the poetry had not been written to the neglect of family duties; poet she might be, but there was no reason to suspect that Bradstreet had forgotten, for a moment, her role and responsibilities as a female.

Writing in a climate of expectations such as this, Bradstreet made deft poetic use of what many readers of the time would have seen as her oxymoronic title of woman poet. One of her strategies was deference. In "The Prologue" to *The Tenth Muse*, for instance, Bradstreet admitted that "To sing of wars, captains, and of kings, / Of cities founded, commonwealths begun" was the province of men. Her "mean pen," she assured the reader, would deal with other matters; her "lowly lines" would concern themselves with humbler subjects. The deference, however, was partly assumed. It was, or became, a rhetorical device; a confession of humility could and did frequently lead on to the claim that her voice had its own song to sing in the great chorus. "I heard the merry grasshopper … sing, /" she wrote in "Contemplations," "The black-clad cricket bear a second part." "Shall creatures abject thus their voices raise /," she asked, "And in their kind resound their Maker's praise, / Whilst I, as mute, can warble forth higher lays?" Playing upon what her readers, and to a certain extent what she herself, expected of a female, she also aligned her creativity as a woman with her creativity as a writer. So, in "The Author to her Book" (apparently written in 1666 when a second edition of her work was being considered), her poems became the "ill-form'd offspring" of her "feeble brain," of whom she was proud despite their evident weaknesses. "If for thy father asked," she tells her poems, "say thou had'st none: / And for thy mother, she alas is poor, / Which caus'd her thus to send thee out of door." Identifying herself as a singular and single mother here, Bradstreet plays gently but ironically with Puritan sensibilities, including her own. This is a gesture of at once humility and pride, since it remains unclear whether Bradstreet's "ill-form'd offspring" have no father in law or in fact. They might be illegitimate or miraculous. Perhaps they are both.

An edition of the poems of Bradstreet was published in Boston six years after her death, with a lot of new material, as *Several Poems Compiled with Great Variety of Wit and Learning*. It contains most of her finest work. It is here, in particular, that the several tensions in her writing emerge: between conventional subject matter and personal experience, submission to and rebellion against her lot as a woman in a patriarchal society, preparation for the afterlife and the pleasures of this world, and between simple humility and pride. The focus switches from the public to the private, as she writes about childbirth ("Before the Birth of One of Her Children"), married love ("To My Dear and Loving Husband"), her family growing up ("In reference to Her Children, 23 June, 1659"), about personal loss and disaster ("Upon the Burning of Our House, July 10th, 1666") and, in particular, about bereavement ("In memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet, Who Deceased August, 1665, Being a Year and Half Old"; "On My Dear Grandchild Simon Bradstreet; Who Died on 16 November, 1669, being but A Month, and One Day Old"). What is especially effective and memorable about, say, the poems of married love is their unabashed intimacy. "If ever two were one, then surely we. / If ever man were loved by wife then thee," she writes in "To My Dear and Loving Husband." And, in "A Letter to Her Husband, Absent Upon Public Employment," she consoles herself while her beloved is gone by looking at their children: "true living pictures of their father's face," as she calls them, "fruits which through thy heat I bore." There is ample time to dwell here on what Bradstreet calls her "magazine of earthly store," and to reflect that, even when she is "ta'en away unto eternity," testimony to the pleasures of the things and thoughts of time will survive – in the "dear remains" of her "little babes" and her verse. And the one dear remain will find delight and instruction in the other. "This book by any yet unread, / I leave for you when I am dead, /" she writes in a poem addressed "To My Dear Children," "That being gone, here you may find / What was your living mother's mind."

The tensions between time and eternity, earthly and heavenly love, are particularly acute in the poems about loss and bereavement. Her poem on the burning of the family home, for example, may end by seeking the conventional consolations. But this seems of only a little comfort, given that most of the poem is devoted to the terrible experience of seeing "pleasant things in ashes lie." Not only that, the sense of loss is rendered acutely sharp and painful by focusing on the destruction, not so much of household goods, as of the delights and comforts of home – and of a possible future as well as a pleasurable past. "Under thy roof no guest shall sit, / Nor at thy table eat a bit," she reflects as she gazes at the ruins. "No pleasant tale shall e'er be told, /" she muses, "Nor things recounted done of old. / No candle e'er shall shine in thee, / Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be." Similarly, in her poems on the deaths of her grandchildren in infancy, the acknowledgment that God's will should and will be done hardly begins to resolve or explain things for Bradstreet – as these lines on the death of her granddaughter suggest:

> Farewell dear babe, my heart's too much content,
> Farewell sweet babe, the pleasure of mine eye,

Farewell fair flower that for a space was lent,
Then ta'en away into eternity.
Blest babe, why should I bewail thy fate,
Or sigh thy days so soon were terminate,
Sith thou art settled in an everlasting state.

The grieving repetitions of the first three lines here yield only slightly to the consolatory note of the last three: a note that is, in any event, muted by the continuing emphasis on love ("Blest babe") and lamentation ("sigh thy days") and by being sounded as a rhetorical question. "Time brings down what is both strong and tall, /" Bradstreet declares at the end of the poem, "But plants new set to be eradicate, / And buds new blown to have so short a date, / Is by His hand alone that guides nature and fate." The acquiescence in the workings of "His hand" is set, finally, against scarcely suppressed astonishment at workings that, in this instance at least, seem so premature, even unnatural. Experiencing the pleasures and pains of this world, Bradstreet's heart rises up, as it does here. It may then try to submit to the will of man or God, in the shape of convention or faith. But it never quite can or will do so. This is the source of the drama and the intimacy of her best poems; and that is why they achieve exactly what Bradstreet herself had hoped for them – the sense that we are listening to a still living voice.

A similar sense of intimacy and engagement is one of the secrets of the work of Edward Taylor, which was virtually unpublished during his lifetime – a collected edition, *The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor*, did not appear, in fact, until 1939. Like Bradstreet, Taylor was born in England; he then left to join the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1668. After studying at Harvard, he settled into the profession of minister for the rest of his life. Marrying twice, he fathered fourteen children, many of whom died in infancy. He began writing poetry even before he joined his small, frontier congregation in Westfield, but his earliest work tended toward the public and conventional. It was not until 1674 that, experimenting with different forms and styles, he started over the next eight or nine years to write in a more personal and memorable vein: love poems to his wife-to-be ("Were but my Muse an Huswife Good"), spiritual meditations on natural events or as Taylor called them "occurants" ("The Ebb & Flow"; "Upon the Sweeping Flood"), and emblematic, allegorical accounts of the smaller creatures of nature and domestic objects ("Upon a Spider Catching a Fly"; "Huswifery"). These poems already manifest some of Taylor's characteristic poetic habits. "Upon a Spider Catching a Fly," for instance, written around 1680–1682, begins with the kind of minute particularization of nature that was to become typical of later New England poets like Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost:

Thou Sorrow, venom elfe
  Is this thy ploy,
To spin a web out of thyselfe
  To catch a Fly?
    For Why?

Gradually, the intimate tone of address is switched to God, who is asked to "break the Cord" with which "Hells Spider," the Devil, would "tangle Adams race." What is memorable about the poem is how closely Taylor attends to both the material facts of the spider and the spiritual truth it is chosen to emblematize: symbolic meaning is not developed at the expense of concrete event. And what is just as memorable is the way Taylor uses an elaborate conceit and intricate stanzaic form as both a discipline to his meditations and a means of channeling, then relaxing emotion. So, in the final stanza, the poet anticipates eventually singing to the glory of God, "when pearcht on high" – "And thankfully, /" he concludes, "For joy." And that short last line, consisting of just two words, at once acts as a counterpoint to the conclusion of the first stanza ("For why?") and allows Taylor to end his poem on a moment of pure, spiritual elation.

The experience of bereavement moved Taylor immensely, just as it did Bradstreet. "Upon Wedlock, & Death of Children," for example, probably written in 1682, explores loss just as Bradstreet's poem about her granddaughter does, by comparing children to the things of nature, in this case flowers. The difference is that Taylor, characteristically, extends the comparison into an elaborate conceit. He plays, among other things, on the connections between the perfume of flowers ascending to the skies, prayers rising on offerings of incense, and the souls of children climbing up to heaven. Also, and equally characteristically, he manages to resolve his loss of spiritual resolve, trust in the will of God, in a way that Bradstreet cannot quite, or will not. Without undervaluing his grief ("Grief o're doth flow," he admits), he seems to find genuine consolation in the belief that his children are now with the Lord – not only that, but also in the belief that, as he puts it, "I piecemeal pass to Glory bright in them." "I joy," he ends by declaring to God, "may I sweet Flowers for Glory breed, / Whether thou getst them green, or lets them Seed." And that simple but striking image, of his children passing "green" to God, is at once elegiac and triumphant, an expression of loss certainly but also of faith.

The experience of faith was, in fact, central to Taylor's life and his work. About 1647, he began writing metrical paraphrases of the Psalms. Recalling the *Bay Psalm Book*, it is nevertheless in these poems that Taylor's distinctively meditative voice starts to be given freer rein. More important, he also began to bring together his vision of the history of salvation to produce his first major work, *Gods Determinations touching his Elect*. A collection of 35 poems, this traces the "Glorious Handywork" of creation, dramatizes a debate between Justice and Mercy over the fate of mankind, then describes the combat between Christ and Satan for human souls. *Gods Determinations* is, in effect, both a visionary narrative and a didactic debate, recording the progress of the soul from the beginnings of life, through the Fall and Redemption, to the triumph of the Resurrection. It is also a work that demonstrates Taylor's ability to domesticate Christian mystery, using humble, everyday imagery to explore the transcendent, the ineffable. This is nowhere more evident than in "The Preface" to the sequence, where Taylor considers the mysteries of time and infinity, aboriginal nothing and original creation. "Infinity," he announces,

when all things it beheld
In Nothing, and of Nothing all did build,

Upon what Base was fixed the Lath, wherein
He turn'd this Globe, and riggalld it so trim?
Who blew the Bellows of his Furnace Vast?
Or held the Mould wherein the world was Cast?

"Who in this Bowling Alley bowld the Sun?" he asks a few lines later. That question is typical of a poet who habitually uses wit to address serious matters and the mundane to anchor the mysterious.

Some years after beginning *Gods Determinations*, in 1682, Taylor turned to what is his finest longer work, *Preparatory Meditations before My Approach to the Lords Supper*. Usually composed after he had prepared a sermon or preaching notes, the 217 poems comprising this sequence are personal meditations "Chiefly upon the Doctrine preached upon the Day of administration." In them, Taylor tries to learn lessons gathered from the sacrament day's biblical text, which also acts as the poem's title. They are at once a form of spiritual discipline, with the poet subjecting himself to rigorous self-examination; petitions to God to prepare him for the immediate task of preaching and administering the Lord's Supper; and a private diary or confession of faith. And, as in so many of his poems, Taylor uses an intricate verse form, elaborate word-play and imagery to organize his meditations and release his emotions. In the eighth meditation, for example, on *Job. 6.51. I am the Living Bread*, Taylor weaves together a series of different biblical texts and themes: Christ's flesh and blood as elements of the Lord's Supper, the manna that God provided daily for the Israelites, Christ's miracle of feeding the five thousand with loaves and fishes. Christ is "the Bread of Life," Taylor intimates, the only way of meeting a "Celestiall Famine sore." "The Creatures field no food for Souls e're gave"; the soul requires "soul bread" not "the Worlds White Loaf," the "Bread of Heaven" ground from "The Purest Wheate in Heaven" and then "Disht on thy Table up by Angells Hands." "Yee Angells, help," Taylor implores, "This fill would to the brim / Heav'ns whelm'd-down Chrystall meete Bowle, yea and higher." In an image at once homely and apocalyptic, the new heavens promised by God are envisioned as an inverted crystal bowl, eternally radiant. And that triumphant vision leads naturally back to the dominant image of the poem, another object on the table "Disht … up by Angells Hands." "This Bread of Life," Taylor announces, "dropt in thy mouth, doth Cry / Eate, Eate, Soul, and thou shall never dy." Characteristically, the meditation is resolved in understanding and joy.

Taylor belongs in a great tradition of meditative writing, certainly, one that includes the English poets George Herbert and John Donne, and an equally great tradition of New England writing: one in which the imaginative anticipation of dying becomes a means of understanding how to live. So it is perhaps not surprising that, after suffering a severe illness in 1720, he wrote three versions of "A Valediction to all the World preparatory for Death 3d of the 11th 1720" and two versions of "A Fig for thee Oh! Death." What perhaps is surprising, and moving, is how these poems acknowledge the loveliness of the world while bidding it farewell. The strength of his feeling for the things of the earth, and even more for family and

vocation, becomes here a measure of the strength of his faith. It is only faith, evidently, and the firm conviction that (as he puts it in one of the *Preparatory Meditations*) his heart "loaded with love" will "ascend / Up to … its bridegroom, bright, & Friend," that makes him content to give up all that he has not only come to know but also to cherish. In Taylor's poems we find not so much conflict as continuity: not tension but a resolution founded on tough reasoning and vigorous emotion, patient attention to the ordinary and passionate meditation on the mysterious – above all, on a firmly grounded, fervently sustained faith. He loves the world, in short, but he loves God more.

Enemies within and without

The Puritan faith that Edward Taylor expressed and represented so vividly found itself challenged, very often, by enemies within and without. As for the enemies outside the Puritan community, they included above all the people the settlers had displaced, the Native Americans. And the challenge posed by what one Puritan called "this barbarous Enemy" was most eloquently expressed by those who had come under the enemy's power, however briefly. In February 1676 a woman named Mary White Rowlandson (1637?–1711) was captured by a group of Narragansett Indians, along with her children. Many of her neighbors and relatives were also captured or killed, one of her children died soon after being captured, and the other two became separated from her. Rowlandson herself was finally released and returned to her husband in the following May; and the release of her two surviving children was effected several weeks later. Six years after this, she published an account of her experience, the full title of which gives some flavor of its approach and a clue to its purpose: *The Sovereignty and Goodness of GOD, Together With the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson*. The book was immensely popular, and remained so on into the nineteenth century; and it helped to inaugurate a peculiarly American literary form, the captivity narrative. There had, of course, been captivity narratives since the earliest period of European exploration. But Rowlandson's account established both the appeal of such narratives and the form they would usually take: combining, as it does, a vivid portrait of her sufferings and losses with an emphatic interpretation of their meaning. The moral framework of the *Narrative* is, in fact, clearly and instructively dualistic: on the one side are the "Pagans" and on the other the Christians. The Native Americans are, variously, "ravenous Beasts," "Wolves," "black creatures" resembling the Devil in their cruelty, savagery, and capacity for lying. Christians like Rowlandson who suffer at their hands are upheld only by "the wonderfull mercy of God" and the "remarkable passages of providence" that enable them to survive and sustain their faith.

"One principall ground of my setting forth these Lines," Rowlandson explains during the course of the *Narrative*, is "To declare the Works of the Lord, and his wonderfull Power in carrying us along, preserving us in the Wilderness, while under the Enemies hand." Another aim of the account, and one that is equally foregrounded,

is to identify the Native Americans as fit inhabitants of "the Wilderness:" these are no noble savages, dwelling in another Eden, but "Barbarous Creatures" whose "savageness and bruitishness" help turn the land where they dwell into "a lively resemblance of hell." There are pragmatic considerations at work here. The translation of the Native American into "bloody heathen" helped to justify their removal from land the whites coveted; while the testimony to the power of Rowlandson's faith, and the precious support God gave to those who believed in Him, was a useful weapon at a time when church membership was declining. The *Narrative* is more than a demonstration of a divine thesis, however. It *is* that, certainly: Rowlandson never misses an opportunity to attribute a fortunate event, such as meeting with her son or the acquisition of a Bible, to the merciful intervention of God; and she rarely finds any redeeming features in her captors. But it is also a remarkable account of one woman's endurance in the face of exile, opposition, and traumatic loss. Not only that, it is thoughtful and reflective enough to present Native Americans as possible instruments of providence, designed by God as "a scourge to his People," and Rowlandson herself as someone indelibly changed by her encounter with them. So, while the "Pagans" of the "Wilderness" are represented in almost entirely negative terms, the idea of a scourge makes the depiction of the Puritans less than totally positive. It also, eventually, complicates Rowlandson's presentation of herself. Returned to her husband and community, her children restored to her, Rowlandson confesses that she remains uncomfortable, even alienated. "When all are fast about me, and no eye open, but his who ever waketh," she reveals, "my thoughts are upon things past." Sleepless, she recalls "how the other day I was in the midst of thousands of enemies, and nothing but death before me: It is then hard work to perswade my self, that ever I should be satisfied with bread again." She has learned from her late encounter with the enemy; and what she has learned has made her not quite a member, any more, of the community from which she was abducted. Captivity has led her into a kind of exile.

The enemy without in the captivity narrative is mainly the Native American, as in the account of Mary Rowlandson and in those, say, of John Gyles and Elizabeth Meader Hanson. It is, however, not always and entirely so. In 1704, for instance, John Williams (1664–1729) was captured after a raid on his village by French Canadians and Abnakis and Caughnawaga Mohawks during the French and Indian wars. Along with his wife and five of his children, he was then marched to Canada. He was, however, a captive of the Indians for only eight weeks. Most of the time, until his release in 1706, he was held by the French. And, according to his account of his experiences, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion* published in 1707, French Jesuits tried earnestly and continually to convert him to "Romish superstition." Williams's book is consequently a description of a desperate struggle against two enemies to truth, the "heathenish cruelty" of one and the "popish rage" of the other. At the time when Williams was suffering capture and then putting down on paper an account of his sufferings, the Puritan community was feeling more threatened than it ever had previously: among other things, by an influx of new immigrants, most of whom had no interest in Puritanism. In 1650 the European population of America was 52,000,

by 1700 it was 250,000, it had more than doubled by 1730, and by 1775 it was to become 2.5 million. So it is perhaps not surprising that Williams's captivity narrative is also a jeremiad. Faced with the irrefutable fact of decline, like many other writers of the time Williams responded by discovering and announcing "the anger of God" toward his "professing people" at work in history. Rowlandson sees her captivity, and the presence and power of the "Pagans," as corrective scourges, personal and communal. But Williams goes further. The story of his captivity is set, for him, in a larger narrative in which events are a sign of divine disfavor and an indication that things must change. For Williams, in *The Redeemed Captive*, "the judgement of God [does] not slumber:" his sufferings are part of a larger providential pattern designed to promote a return to earlier piety – and, in the meantime, to encourage patience among those of true faith who are suffering "the will of God in very trying public calamities."

As for the enemies within, nothing illustrated the Puritan fear of them more than the notorious witch trials that took place in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692, during the course of which 19 people were hanged, one was pressed to death, 55 were frightened or tortured into confessions of guilt, 150 were imprisoned, and more than two hundred were named as deserving arrest. What brought those trials about, the sense of a special mission now threatened and the search for a conspiracy, an enemy to blame and purge from the commonwealth, is revealed in a work first published in 1693, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* by Cotton Mather (1663–1728). Mather, the grandson of two important religious leaders of the first generation of Puritan immigrants (including John Cotton, after whom he was named), wrote his book at the instigation of the Salem judges. "The New Englanders are a people of God settled in those, which were once the devil's territories," Mather announces; "and it may easily be supposed that the devil was exceedingly disturbed, when he perceived such a people accomplishing the promise of old made unto our blessed Jesus, that He should have the utmost parts of the earth for His possession." For Mather, the people, mostly women, tried and convicted at Salem represent a "terrible plague of evil angels." They form part of "an horrible plot against the country" which "if it were not seasonably discovered, would probably blow up, and pull down all the churches." A feeling of immediate crisis and longer-term decline is explained as the result of a conspiracy, the work of enemy insiders who need to be discovered and dispatched if the community is to recover, then realize its earlier utopian promise. It is the dark side of the American dream, the search for someone or something to blame when that dream appears to be failing. Mather was sounding a sinister chord here that was to be echoed by many later Americans, and opening up a vein of reasoning and belief that subsequent American writers were to subject to intense, imaginative analysis.

However, Cotton Mather was more than just the author of one of the first American versions of the conspiracy theory. He produced over four hundred publications during his lifetime. Among them were influential scientific works like *The Christian Philosopher* (1720), and works promoting "reforming societies" such as *Bonifacius; or, Essays to Do Good* (1710), a book that had an important impact on

Benjamin Franklin. He also encouraged missionary work among African-American slaves, in *The Negro Christianized* (1706), and among Native Americans, in *India Christiana* (1721). But here, too, in his encouragement of Christian missions to those outside the true faith a darker side of Puritanism, or at least of the Cotton Mather strain, is evident. Mather's belief in the supreme importance of conversion led him, after all, to claim that a slave taught the true faith was far better off than a free black; and it sprang, in the first place, from a low opinion of both African and Native Americans, bordering on contempt. For example, in his life of John Eliot, "the apostle of the Indians" whom Nathaniel Hawthorne was later to praise, Mather made no secret of his belief that "the natives of the country now possessed by New Englanders" had been "forlorn and wretched" ever since "their first herding here." They were "miserable savages," "stupid and senseless," Mather declared. They had "no *arts*," "except just so far as to maintain their brutish conversation," "little, if any, tradition … worthy of … notice"; reading and writing were "altogether unknown to them" and their religion consisted of no more than "diabolical rites," "extravagant ridiculous devotions" to "many gods." Furthermore, they did not even know how to use the abundant resources of the New World. "They live in a country full of the best ship timber under heaven," Mather insisted, "but never saw a ship till some came from Europe." "*We* now have all the conveniences of human life," he claimed proudly; "as for *them*, their *housing* is nothing but a few mats tyed about poles." Such were "the miserable people" Eliot set out to save and, in view of their condition, he had "a double work incumbent on him." He had, Mather concluded, "to make men" of the Native Americans "ere he could hope to see them saints"; they had to be "*civilized* ere they could be *Christianized*."

Mather's account of Eliot's work among the Indians shows just how much for him, as for other early European settlers, the projects of civilization and conversion, creating wealth and doing good, went hand in hand. It comes from his longest and arguably most interesting work, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or, the Ecclesiastical History of New England*, published in 1702. This book is an immensely detailed history of New England and a series of eminent lives, and it reflects Mather's belief that the past should be used to instruct the present and guide the future. Each hero chosen for description and eulogy, like Eliot, is made to fit a common saintly pattern, from the portrait of his conversion to his deathbed scene. Yet each is given his own distinctive characteristics, often expressive of Mather's own reforming interests and always illustrating his fundamental conviction that, as he puts it, "The *First Age* was the *Golden Age*." This is exemplary history, then. It is also an American epic, one of the very first, in which the author sets about capturing in words what he sees as the promise of the nation. "I WRITE the *Wonders* of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION," Mather announces in "A General Introduction" to *Magnalia Christi Americana*:

> flying from the Depravations of *Europe*, to the *American Strand*. And, assisted by the Holy Author of that *Religion*, I do … Report the *Wonderful Displays* of His Infinite Power, Wisdom, Goodness, and Faithfulness, wherewith His Divine Providence hath *Irradiated* an *Indian Wilderness*.

The echo of the *Aeneid* is an intimation of what Mather is after. He is hoping to link the story of his people to earlier epic migrations. As later references to the "*American Desart*" testify, he is also suggesting a direct analogy with the journey of God's chosen people to the Promised Land. His subject is a matter of both history and belief: like so many later writers of American epic, in other words, he is intent on describing both an actual and a possible America.

Not everyone involved in the Salem witchcraft trials remained convinced that they were justified by the need to expose a dangerous enemy within. Among those who came to see them as a serious error of judgment, and morality, was one of the judges at the trials, Samuel Sewall (1652–1730). An intensely thoughtful man, Sewall wrote a journal from 1673 to 1728, which was eventually published as *The Diary of Samuel Sewall* in 1973. It offers an insight into the intimate thoughts, the trials and private tribulations of someone living at a time when Puritanism no longer exerted the power it once did over either the civil or religious life of New England. Sewall notes how in 1697 he felt compelled to make a public retraction of his actions as one of the Salem judges, "asking pardon of man" for his part in the proceedings against supposed witches, and, he adds, "especially desiring prayers that God, who has an Unlimited Authority, would pardon that Sin" he had committed. He also records how eventually, following the dictates of his conscience, he felt "call'd" to write something against "the Trade fetching Negroes from Guinea." "I had a strong inclination to Write something about it," he relates in an entry for June 19, 1700, "but it wore off." Only five days after this, however, a work authored by Sewall attacking the entire practice of slavery, *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial*, was published in Boston. In it, he attacked slavery as a violation of biblical precept and practice, against natural justice since "all men, as they are the Sons of *Adam*, are Coheirs; and have equal Right unto Liberty," and destructive of the morals of both slaves and masters – not least, because "it is well known what Temptations Masters are under to connive at the fornications of their Slaves." Sewall was a man eager to seek divine counsel on all matters before acting. This was the case whether the matter was a great public one, like the issues of witchcraft and the slave trade, or a more private one, such as the question of his marrying for a third time. His journals reveal the more private side of Puritanism: a daily search for the right path to follow in order to make the individual journey part of the divine plan. They also reveal a habit of meditation, a scrupulously detailed mapping of personal experiences, even the most intimate, that was to remain ingrained in American writing long after the Puritan hegemony had vanished.

Trends toward the secular and resistance

The power of Puritanism was, in fact, waning in New England well before the end of the eighteenth century. The number of "unchurched" colonists had been large to begin with, and they grew in number and power over the years. At the best of times for Puritanism, a high degree of political control had been made possible by restricting the suffrage to male church members. But that practice was soon modified, and

then abolished in 1691 when it was replaced by a property qualification. Outside New England, the absence of one controlling cultural group was still more evident, since by 1775 half the population was of non-English origin. Scotch-Irish, Scottish, German, French Huguenot, and Dutch immigrants flooded the eastern seaboard; the Spanish settled a vast area over which they held dominion stretching from California to the Gulf Coast; and, by the end of the eighteenth century, more than 275,000 African slaves had been brought to America, mainly to the South. A rising standard of living encouraged Benjamin Franklin to claim, in 1751, that in the next century "the greatest Number of Englishmen will be on this side of the water." It certainly helped to promote the growing secular tendencies of the age. Religion was still strong; and it was, in fact, made stronger by a sweeping revivalist movement known as the Great Awakening, in the third and fourth decades of the eighteenth century. "Under Great Terrors of Conscience," as the preacher Jonathan Edwards put it, many thousands of people "had their natures overborn under strong convictions." They were born again, in an experience of radical conversion; and they banded together in evangelical communities, convinced of the power of "Christ shedding blood for sinners" and the incalculable, more than rational nature of faith. The Great Awakening, however, was itself a reaction against what was rightly felt to be the dominant trend: the growing tendency among colonists to accept and practice the ideas of the Enlightenment, albeit usually in popularized form. Those ideas emphasized the determining influence of reason and common sense and the imperatives of self-help, personal and social progress. According to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the universe was a rational, mechanical phenomenon which, as the English philosopher John Locke put it, ran rather like a self-winding watch. Once set in motion by its creator, God or an abstract First Cause, it no longer required His help or intervention. And man, using his reason and good sense, could ascertain the laws of this mechanism. He could then use those laws for his own profit, the betterment of society, and his own improvement since, as Franklin put it, "the one acceptable service to God is doing good to man." It was an ethic with an obvious attraction for new generations of immigrants eager to stake their place and improve their lot in a new land with such abundant resources. And, even for those, the vast majority, who had never heard of the Enlightenment, the secular gospel of reason, common sense, use, profit, and progress became part of the American way.

The travel journals of two writers of this period, Sarah Kemble Knight (1666–1727) and William Byrd of Westover (1674–1744), suggest the increasingly secular tendencies of this period. Both Knight and Byrd wrote accounts of their journeys through parts of America that tend to concentrate on the social, the curious people and manners they encountered along the way. There is relatively little concern, of the kind shown in earlier European accounts of travels in the New World, with the abundance of nature, seen as either Eden or Wilderness. Nor is there any sense at all of being steered by providence: God may be mentioned in these journals, but rarely as a protective guide. Knight composed her journal as a description of a trip she took from Boston to New York and then back again in 1704–1705. It did not reach printed form until the next century, when it appeared as *The Journals of Madam Knight*

(1825), but it was "published" in the way many manuscripts were at the time, by being circulated among friends. Her writings reveal a lively, humorous, gossipy woman alert to the comedy and occasional beauty of life in early America – and aware, too, of the slightly comic figure she herself sometimes cuts, "sitting Stedy," as she puts it, "on my Nagg." She describes in detail how she is kept awake at night in a local inn by the drunken arguments of "some of the Town tope-ers in [the] next Room." She records, with a mixture of disbelief and amused disgust, meeting a family that is "the picture of poverty" living in a "little Hutt" that was "one of the wretchedest I ever saw." "I Blest myself that I was not one of this miserable crew," Knight remembers. Sometimes, Knight is struck by the beauty of the landscape she passes through. She recalls, for instance, how moved she was by the sight of the woods lit up by the moon – or, as she has it, by "Cynthia," "the kind Conductress of the night." Even here, however, the terms in which she expresses her excitement are a sign of her true allegiances. "The Tall and thick trees at a distance," she explains, "when the moon glar'd through the branches, fill'd my Imagination with the pleasant delusion of a Sumpteous citty, fill'd with famous Buildings and churches, with their spiring steeples, Balconies, Galleries and I know not what." Nature is most beautiful, evidently, when it evokes thoughts of culture; "the dolesome woods," as she calls them elsewhere in her journal, are at their best when they excite memories of, or better still lead to, town.

The situation is more complicated with William Byrd of Westover. Born the heir of a large estate in Virginia, Byrd was educated in England and only made Virginia his permanent home in 1726. Byrd claimed, in one of his letters (published eventually in 1977 in *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*), that in America he lived "like … the patriarchs." And, to the extent that this was possible in a new country, he certainly did. For he was one of the leading members of what eventually became known as the "first families of Virginia," those people who formed the ruling class by the end of the eighteenth century – in the colony of Virginia and, arguably, elsewhere in the South. The "first families" claimed to be of noble English origin. Some of them no doubt were. But it is likely that the majority of them were, as one contemporary writer Robert Beverley II (1673–1722) put it in *The History and Present State of Virginia* (1722), "of low Circumstances … such as were willing to seek their Fortunes in a Foreign Country." Whatever their origins, they had to work hard, since as one of them, William Fitzhugh (1651–1701), pointed out in a letter written in 1691, "without a constant care and diligent Eye, a well-made plantation will run to Ruin." "'Tis no small satisfaction to me," wrote another great landowner, Robert "King" Carter (1663–1732), in 1720, "to have a pennyworth for my penny"; and to this end he, and other Virginia gentlemen like him, were painstaking in the supervision of their landholdings. Nevertheless, they were keen to use their painstakingly acquired wealth to assume the manners and prerogatives of an aristocracy, among which was the appearance of a kind of aristocratic indolence – what one writer of the time, Hugh Jones (1670–1760), described in *The Present State of Virginia* (1724) as the gentleman's "easy way of living."

Byrd, of course, did not have to struggle to acquire wealth, he inherited it. Once he had done so, however, he worked hard to sustain that wealth and even acquire more. He personally supervised his properties, once he settled in Virginia, arranging for the planting of crops, orchards, and gardens; he also attended to his duties within his own community and in the county and the colony. And he was just as intent as his wealthy neighbors were on assuming the appearance of idle nobility. When writing back to friends in England, for instance, he tended to turn his life in Virginia into a version of the pastoral As his small hymns to Southern pastoral intimate, the desire to paint plantation life as a kind of idyll sprang from two, related things, for Byrd and others like him: a feeling of exile from the centers of cultural activity and a desire to distance the specters of provincialism and money-grubbing. Exiled from the "polite pleasures" of the mother country, in a place that he elsewhere described as the "great wilderness" of America, Byrd was prompted to describe his plantation home as a place of natural abundance, ripe simplicity, and indolence. Describing it in this way, he also separated himself from the work ethic that prevailed further north. A clear dividing line was being drawn between him and the life he and his social equals in Virginia led and, on the one hand, England, and on the other, New England. In the process, Byrd was dreaming and articulating what was surely to become the dominant image of the South.

That Byrd and the first families attempted to live according to this image there is no doubt. Both Byrd himself and Robert "King" Carter, for example, assumed the role and function of feudal patriarch on their plantations. Considering themselves the guardians of the physical and moral welfare of their slaves – whom they often chose to refer to as their "people" – they considered it an important part of their social duty to act as benevolent overlords: punishing the lazy "children" – as they also sometimes referred to their slave labor – rewarding the industrious, and having all "imaginable care," as one Virginia planter, Landon Carter (1710–1778), put it in his diary for 1752, of such "poor creatures" as were sick. That Byrd and others also felt exiled sometimes, in the Southern colonies, there can be no doubt either. "The Habits, Life, Customs, Computations, etc of the Virginians," declared Hugh Jones, "are much the same as about London, which they esteem their home." Byrd himself never ceased to think of England as, in many ways, the right place for him – a center of culture, entertainment, as opposed to what he called, in a letter written in 1726, "this silent country." His writings are full of references to the scenes and life of London, as if language and more specifically imagery could make up for what he lacked in life. For example, after finding some horses that had strayed near the misty, mainly marshy region known as the Dismal Swamp, Byrd wrote: "They were found standing indeed, but as motionless as the equestrian statues in Charing Cross." The contrast between the scene described and the mode of description could hardly be more striking: on the one hand, a world of immense and disturbing strangeness, on the other a cultural referent that is comfortingly familiar and known. In its own way, the remark appears to sum up the process of accommodation to which so many of the great planters like Byrd committed themselves: their effort, that is, to create a sense of connection, as well as division, between the Old World and the New.

That description of the horses in the Dismal Swamp comes from *The History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, Byrd's account of his participation in the 1728 survey of the southern border of Virginia. In this travel journal, written in 1729 and first published in 1841, Byrd considers a number of divisions quite apart from the one announced in the title. He talks, for instance, about the difference or division between the "Frugal and Industrious" settlers of the Northern colonies and the less energetic settlers to the south. "For this reason," he explains, "New England improved much faster than Virginia." He talks about the division between Indians and whites, particularly the early European explorers. The Indians, Byrd reflects, "are healthy & Strong, with Constitutions untainted by Lewdness." "I cannot think," he adds, "the Indians were much greater Heathens than the first Adventurers." He talks about the divisions between men and women. "The distemper of laziness seizes the men," in the backwoods, he suggests, "much oftener than the women." And he talks about the differences, the division between his homeplace and North Carolina. For him, North Carolina is "Lubberland." "Plenty and a warm sun," Byrd avers, confirm all North Carolinians, and especially the men, "in their disposition to laziness for their whole lives"; "they loiter away their lives, like Solomon's sluggard, with their arms across, and at the winding up of the year scarcely have bread to eat."

Byrd's comic description of the inhabitants of North Carolina anticipates the Southwestern humorists of the nineteenth century, and all those other American storytellers who have made fun of life off the beaten track. It is also sparked off by one of a series of divisions in *The History of the Dividing Line* that are determined by the difference between sloth and industry: perhaps reflecting Byrd's suspicion that his own life, the contrast between its surfaces and its reality, measures a similar gap. Quite apart from such dividing lines, Byrd's account of his journey is as frank and lively as Knight's. And the tone is even franker and livelier in *The Secret History of the Dividing Line*, an account of the same expedition as the one *The History of the Dividing Line* covers, first published in 1929. In *The Secret History*, as its title implies, what Byrd dwells on is the private exploits of the surveyors: their drinking, gambling, joking, squabbling, and their encounters with more than one "dark angel" or "tallow-faced wench." Throughout his adventures, "Steddy," as Byrd calls himself in both histories, keeps his course and maintains his balance, negotiating his journey through divisions with the appearance of consummate ease.

Of course, the ease was very often just that, a matter of appearance, here in the histories of the dividing line and elsewhere. Or, if not that simply, it was a matter of conscious, calculated choice. As an alternative to the ruminative Puritan or the industrious Northerner, Byrd and others like him modeled themselves on the idea of the indolent, elegant aristocrat: just as, as an alternative to the noise and bustle of London, they modeled their accounts of their homeplace in imitation of the pastoral ideal. The divisions and accommodations they were forced into, or on occasion chose, were the product of the conflict between their origins and aspirations, the given facts and the assumed aims of their lives. They were also a consequence of the differences they perceived between the world they were making in their part of

the American colonies and the ones being made in other parts. And they were also, and not least, a probable response to their own sense that the blood of others was on their hands. Anticipating the later Southern argument in defense of slavery, they turned their slaves, rhetorically, into "children" who positively needed the feudal institution of an extended family, with a benevolent patriarch at its head, for guidance, support, and protection. Byrd was, of course, exceptional as far as the range of his interests and his accomplishments as a writer were concerned, but not so exceptional that he cannot stand as an example here. As a planter, his life was not so very different from that of his neighbors: a life combining business activity with at least some attempt to cultivate manners, knowledge, and the arts. Like others, in fact, he tried to apply an inherited model of belief and behavior to new historical circumstances. That model was, in some ways, inappropriate, and destructively so; but, in others, it did help at least to ameliorate the harshness of a strange New World. Byrd expressed an impulse held in common with many of his fellow colonists – an impulse intended to make life more manageable, more tolerable and livable. And, for good and ill, that impulse had an enormous impact on how writers write and many others talk about one vital part of the American nation.

The trend toward the secular in the work of Knight and Byrd is also noticeable in the poetry of the period. In the earlier part of the eighteenth century, the work of Nathaniel Evans (1742–1767) was typical. Evans was an ordained minister. However, the subjects of his poetry, posthumously published as *Poems on Several Occasions* (1772), were rarely religious. He wrote of the changing seasons ("Hymn to May"), illustrious public figures ("To Benjamin Franklin, Occasioned by Hearing Him Play on the *Harmonica*"), and friends closer to home ("Ode to the Memory of Mr. Thomas Godfrey"). Certainly, he could lament what he saw as the greed and immorality of the times. As he put it in an "Ode to My Ingenious Friend," "we are in a climate cast / … / Where all the doctrine now that's told, / Is that a shining heap of gold / Alone can man embellish." But, as these lines indicate, the criticism was framed in terms of an apparently secular morality, and the forms drawn from classical models – the ode, the elegy, the pastoral. More interesting, perhaps, than writers like Evans were those women poets of the time who often brought a self-consciously female perspective to familiar themes, and sometimes wrote about specifically female subjects, such as childbearing or their difficult role in society. "How wretched is a woman's fate, /" complained one anonymous poet of the time in "Verses Written by a Young Lady, on Women Born to be Controll'd" (1743), "Subject to man in every state. / How can she then be free from woes?" The solution, as another anonymous poet, in "The Lady's Complaint" (1736), put it was for "equal laws" that would "neither sex oppress:" a change that would "More freedom give to womankind, / Or give to mankind less." Not many poems of the time were quite as categorical as this. On the contrary, there was a tendency to find satisfaction in the admittedly restricted role reserved for women. "Love, will then recompense my loss of freedom," the anonymously written "The Maid's Soliloquy" (1751) concludes. And this was a consolatory note sounded in other poems, both anonymous ones such as "Impromptu, on Reading an Essay on Education. By a Lady" (1773), and those attributed to a

named or pseudonymous author, like “A Poetical Epistle. Addressed by a Lady of New Jersey to Her Niece, upon Her Marriage” (1786) by Annis Boudinot Stockton (1736–1801). “With reverence treat in every place, / The chosen patron of your future days,” Stockton advises her niece. “For when you show him but the least neglect, / Yourself you rifle of your due respect.”

Stockton also wrote poetry addressed to her friend Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson (1737–1801), one of the best-known poets of the eighteenth century, under Fergusson’s pen name of “Laura” (“To Laura” (1757)). Both Stockton and Fergusson composed poems on married love (“Epistle to Lucius” (1766); “An Ode Written on the Birthday of Mr. Henry Fergusson” (1774)); Stockton also wrote about public figures (“The Vision, an Ode to Washington” (1789)) and Fergusson about conventional and philosophical topics, such as the transience of love (“On a Beautiful Damask Rose, Emblematical of Love and Wedlock” (1789)) and the primacy of self-love (“On the Mind’s Being Engrossed by One Subject” (1789)). Both women were known, as well, for the literary salons over which they presided prior to the American Revolution, Stockton in Princeton and Fergusson near Philadelphia. They belonged, in short, to a coterie of women writers who knew each other, corresponded with each other, and frequently exchanged their work. One of Fergusson’s surviving commonplace books was apparently prepared for Stockton. And, just as Stockton addressed a poem to Fergusson, so another woman poet of the time, Sarah Wentworth Morton (1759–1846), wrote an “Ode Inscribed to Mrs. M. Warren” (1790), that is, Mercy Otis Warren (1728–1814), poet, dramatist, and historian. Warren, in turn, wrote a verse letter to another female writer and critic of the time, Elizabeth Robinson Montagu (1720–1800), titled “To Mrs. Montague. Author of ‘Observations on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare’” (1790), thanking Montagu for praising one of Warren’s plays. What is remarkable about many of these poems written by women is their sense of a shared suffering and dignity, sometimes associated with the core experience of childbirth. “Thrice in my womb I’ve found the pleasing strife, / In the first struggles of my infant’s life: /” observes Jane Colman Turell (1708–1735) in a poem published in 1741 that remained untitled. “But O how soon by Heaven I’m call’d to mourn, / While from my womb a lifeless babe is born?” “What man is there, that thus shall dare / Woman to treat with scorn, /” asks Bridget Richardson Fletcher (1726–1770) in “Hymn XXXVI. The Greatest Dignity of a Woman, Christ Being Born of One” (1773), “Since God’s own son, from heav’n did come, / Of such an one was born.” That sense of shared suffering and dignity can also extend beyond the specifically female sphere. In later life, Morton, for example, acquired a considerable readership for a powerfully expressed antislavery poem, “The African Chief” (1823). While someone from quite outside this privileged circle of educated white women, Lucy Terry (1730–1821), an African slave who eventually settled as a free black in Vermont, composed a poem called “Bars Fight” (published in 1855, after being handed down by word of mouth for nearly a century) that records the pain experienced and the courage witnessed during a battle between whites and Indians.

Cotton Mather had attacked poetry as the food of “a boundless and sickly appetite,” for its fictive origins and sensual appeal. Benjamin Franklin, the presiding

genius of the American Enlightenment, was inclined to dismiss it because it was not immediately useful, functional; it did not help in the clearing of woods or the building of farms, schoolhouses, and character. "To America, one schoolmaster is worth a dozen poets," Franklin argued, "and the invention of a machine or the improvement of an implement is of more importance than a masterpiece of Raphael." "Nothing is good or beautiful but in the measure that it is useful," he explained, and a "more refined state of society" would have to emerge before "poetry, painting, music (and the stage as their embodiment)" could become "necessary and proper gratifications." However, to this charge that poetry makes nothing happen, others replied to the contrary: that it did clear the ground and break new wood – in short, that it helped in the making of Americans. The full force of that reply had to wait until the Revolution, when writers and critics began to insist that the new American nation needed an American literature, and more specifically an American poetry, in order to announce and understand itself. But, even before that, there were poets in the colonies who were trying to turn the old European forms to new American uses. Even Cotton Mather, after all, tried to identify and celebrate the "Wonders" of the New World and so wrote a proto-epic, *Magnalia Christi Americana*. Another writer, Joel Barlow, was to make his own attempt, toward the end of the eighteenth century, at a more specifically poetic epic in *Vision of Columbus*, a much enlarged and revised version of which was to appear early in the next century as *The Columbiad*. And two notable writers, well before that, tried their hands at producing American versions of the two other most common forms of early eighteenth-century poetry besides the epic, both of them also derived from neoclassical models, the satire and the pastoral. The two writers were Ebenezer Cook (1667–1733) and Richard Lewis (1700?–1734).

Cook divided his time between London and Maryland. He was a prolific writer, as well as a planter and tobacco merchant, but his claim to fame rests on a satirical poem he published in 1708, *The Sot-weed Factor; or, a Voyage to Maryland &c.* Written in the form of Hudibrastic verse – so named after the English poet Samuel Butler's satire of the Puritans, *Hudibras* – *The Sot-weed Factor* presents us with a narrator who visits America only to be robbed, cheated, stripped of his guide, horse, and clothes, and, in general, appalled by what he sees as the anarchy and squalor of his new surroundings. The rollicking tetrameter lines, odd rhymes and syntax help to paint a carnival portrait of life on the frontier and in the backwoods, in small towns and in "*Annapolis*… / A City Situate on a Plain." And, having left "*Albion's* Rocks" in the opening lines, the narrator eagerly returns there at the conclusion some seven hundred lines later. "Embarqu'd and waiting for a Wind, / I left this dreadful Curse behind," he declares, damning America as he departs. Rising to new heights of invective, he then prays for America to be "left abandon'd by the World to starve" and for Americans to "sustain the Fate they will deserve" by turning "Savage, or as *Indians* Wild." Finally, he calls on God to complete the damnation of America. "May Wrath Divine then lay those regions wast /," he prays, "Where no Mans faithful, nor a Woman Chast." The bombastic character of the curses, like the representation of the narrator throughout *The Sot-weed Factor*, alerts the reader to what is happening here. The satire apparently directed at American vulgarity is, in fact, being leveled

at English snobbery, preciousness, and self-satisfaction. Cook has taken an English form and turned it to American advantage. In the process, he has developed a peculiarly American style of comedy in which the contrast between the genteel and the vernacular is negotiated, to the advantage of the latter, through a use of language that is fundamentally ironic.

Richard Lewis was just as prolific a writer as Cook; and, in the time he could spare from being a politician in Maryland, he wrote, among other things, forms of the pastoral that implied or even asserted the superiority of American nature. "A Journey from Patapsko to Annapolis, April 4, 1730" (1732), for instance, begins by acknowledging its illustrious ancestry with a quotation from the first pastoral poem, the *Georgics* of Virgil. Lewis then includes, later on in his poetical journey, allusions to the *Seasons* by the Scottish poet James Thomson and John Dryden's translation of the *Georgics*. But, while deferring in this way to the European model he is using and the European masters who have preceded him, Lewis is nevertheless eager to insist on the specific advantages and special beauties of the countryside around him. So he dwells on the idyllic life lived here by "the *Monarch-Swain*," with "His *Subject-Flocks*" and "well-tilled Lands." In a way, this is a commonplace of European pastoral too. Lewis, however, devotes more attention than his European predecessors tended to do to the ideas of patient toil rewarded, the value of self-subsistence, and the pleasures of abundance. As Lewis turns his attention from the happy farmer and his family to the burgeoning countryside around him, he espies a humming-bird, the beauty of whose "ever-flutt'ring wings" becomes a paradigm for and measure of the superiority of American nature. "Oh had that *Bard* in whose heart-leaping Lines, / The *Phoenix* in a Blaze of Glory shines, / Beheld those Wonders which are shewn in Thee," Lewis tells the humming-bird, "That *Bird* had lost his Immortality! / Thou in His Verse hadst stretch'd thy fluttering Wing / Above all other Birds, – their beauteous King." The phoenix, the bird of classical myth, pales beside the American bird, just as the site of pastoral in the Old World pales beside what Lewis now calls the "blooming Wilderness" of the New. Not content to stop there, the poet then asks us to behold the wonders of "the out-stretch'd *Land*" beyond wood and plantation: a vista "O'er which the Sight exerts a wide Command; / The fertile Vallies, and the naked Hills." We turn our eyes, in effect, to what so many American poets were to take as the primary fact of their land: space, its apparent endlessness. After this, admittedly, the poetical journey concludes in conventional fashion, with references to the journey of life and prayers to the "great CREATOR." But Lewis has already staked a claim for difference. He has already, earlier on in the poem, broken new ground in the depiction of the American landscape and the development of the American pastoral form.

Although the eighteenth century in America witnessed a growing trend toward the secular, it would be wrong to deny the continuing importance and power of religious influences and writing. In the Southwest, for example, the century witnessed a significant growth of interest in and worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe. According to legend, the Virgin appeared to a poor Indian in 1531 on a sacred site associated with an Indian goddess of fertility. She asked for a cathedral to be built to

her over the site of an Aztec place of worship, which it then was. And the first account of this miraculous encounter was eventually written down a century later, in 1649, in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. The Virgin was and remains a syncretic religious figure. The "somewhat dark" face and Indian features attributed to her in the original account, and in the numerous paintings and statues of her created ever since, make her a Native American Virgin; the word "Guadalupe" is itself most probably a hybrid, derived from the Nahuatl word for "snake" and the Spanish word for "crush" and referring to a gesture often given to the Virgin Mary in statues, of crushing the snake. During the eighteenth century, however, the miscegenation of Spanish and Indian that marked the original legend became less important than the use of the Virgin of Guadalupe as an emblem of New World hybridity, the *mestizo*. She became a potent religious, cultural, and political icon for Mexican-Americans. She remains so, her figure turning up everywhere, in churches, homes, and religious and political activities, in Chicano literature. And she is a measure of just how far removed many Americans of the time were from the creed or even the influence of the Enlightenment.

The same is true for some American writers situated further east. In 1755, for instance, *Some Account of the Fore part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge … Written by her own Hand many years ago* was published. Little is known of its author other than what is contained in her book, but from that it is clear that the central fact of her life was her conversion. After emigrating to America as an indentured servant, Elizabeth Ashbridge (1713–1755) discovered that her master, whom she had taken for "a very religious man," was, in fact, cruel and hypocritical. Buying her own freedom, she married a man who, she says, "fell in love with me for my dancing." But, when she embraced the Quaker religion, the dancing stopped; and her husband, in his anger and disappointment, began to beat her. The beatings only ended, Ashbridge explains, when her husband died. Then she was able to marry again, this time to someone who shared her faith. That faith, and her conversion to it, are described with simple power; just as they are in the *Journal* that another Quaker, John Woolman (1720–1772), kept intermittently between 1756 and his death – and which was published by the Society of Friends in 1774. "I have often felt a motion of love to leave some hints in writing of my experience of the goodness of God," Woolman confesses at the start of the *Journal*, "and now, in the thirty-sixth year of my age, I begin the work." What follows is the story of a life lived in the light of faith that is, nevertheless, remarkable for its simplicity and humility of tone. Woolman describes how he eventually gave up trade and his mercantile interests to devote himself to his family and farm, and to work as a missionary. He traveled thousands of miles, Woolman reveals, driven by "a lively operative desire for the good of others." The desire not only prompted him toward missionary work but also impelled him to champion the rights of Native Americans and to attack slavery, which he described as a "dark gloominess hanging over the land." Just like Ashbridge, Woolman shows how many Americans even in an increasingly secular age relied on what Woolman himself termed "the judgements of God" and "the infallible standard: Truth" to steer their lives and direct their choices, rather than the touchstones of reason and use.

The case is more complicated, however, with the greatest American embodiment of faith in the eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Edwards was born in East Windsor, Connecticut. His father and grandfather were both clergymen and, even before he went to college, he had decided to follow their example: not least, because, as he discloses in his *Personal Narrative*, written some time after 1739, he had felt "a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God." After that, Edwards explains, "the appearance of everything was altered" since "there seemed to be … a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything." He felt compelled to meditate, "to sit and view the moon … the clouds and the sky," "to behold the sweet glory of God in these things," as he puts it, "in the meantime, singing forth, with a low voice my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer." He also felt compelled to review and discipline the conduct of his life. Some time in 1722–1723, he composed seventy *Resolutions* designed to improve himself in the light of his faith. "Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help," he wrote at the start of them, "I do humbly entreat him by his grace, to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake." What follows very much reflects the old New England habit of seeing death as the defining, determining event of life. This is a self-help manual of a special kind, shaped by a belief in human impotence and a profound sense of mortality. The experience of conversion confirmed what Edwards had, in any event, learned from his deeply orthodox religious upbringing: that God was the ground and center, not only of faith, but of all conduct and existence.

Further confirmation came when Edwards moved to Northampton, Massachusetts to become pastor there. In 1734 he preached a number of sermons stressing the passivity of the convert before the all-powerful offer of grace from God; and the sermons provoked a strong reaction among many of his congregation, who appeared to experience exactly the kind of radical conversion Edwards was preaching about and had himself undergone. Encouraged to prepare an account of this awakening of faith in his community, Edwards wrote a pamphlet that then became a book, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, published in 1737. "Some under Great Terrors of Conscience have had Impressions on their Imaginations," Edwards reported; "they have had … Ideas of Christ shedding blood for sinners, his blood Running from his veins." But, then, having been convinced of their guilt and damnation, and resigning themselves to God's justice, these same people discovered as Edwards had the power of God's grace. Anticipating the Great Awakening that was to sweep through many parts of the American colonies in the next few years, the Northampton congregation, many of them, found themselves born again, into a new life grounded in "the beauty and excellency of Christ" just as their pastor had been before them.

Both his own personal experience, then, and the "surprising" conversions among his congregation, were enough to convince Edwards of the supreme importance of divine grace and human faith. But that did not make him averse to science and systematic thinking. On the contrary, he made his own contribution to the philosophical debates of the time. In *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*

(1746), for instance, Edwards attempted to construct a clear theory of the place of emotion in religion, so as to better to understand the emotional experience of converts. Similarly, in *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, Which is Supposed to be essential to … Praise and Blame* (1754), he made a conscientious effort to rescue philosophers from what he saw as their confusion, while resolving the potential contradiction between the doctrines of divine omnipotence and human responsibility. Just how much Edwards wanted to harness reason in the service of faith and, if necessary, to defend mystery with logic is nowhere better illustrated than in his arguments – developed in such works as *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758) and *Two Dissertations* (1765) – concerning the total depravity of human nature and the infinite grace of God. True virtue, Edwards argued, borrowing his definitions from Enlightenment philosophers like Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, consists in disinterested benevolence toward humankind in general. It involves pure selflessness. But, Edwards then insisted, humanity can never be selfless. All human actions, no matter how creditable their effects, are dictated by self-interest. Everything a human being does springs from considerations of self because, Edwards went on, now borrowing his definitions from an earlier Enlightenment figure, Descartes, he or she can never get outside the self. A man, or woman, can never escape from their own senses and sense impressions. So, they are incapable of true virtue. Each is imprisoned in his or her own nature. Each is corrupt, fallen, and evil, and the only thing that can save them is something beyond human power to control: that is, the irresistible grace of God. "All moral good," Edwards concluded, "stems from God." God is the beginning and end, the ground and meaning of all moral existence.

And not only moral existence: Edwards was careful to argue that God was the ground of all created life, including our understanding of ourselves and our world. "There is no identity or oneness in the world, but what depends on the *arbitrary* constitution of the Creator," he explained. This was because existence and our knowledge of it depend on continuity, a connection between "successive effects"; and such continuity "depends on nothing but the *divine* will" which, in turn, "depends on nothing but the *divine* wisdom." Without God, as Edwards saw and argued it, the world and life not only became a moral desert; they also ceased to exist. Edwards's relation to the prevailing rationalism of his times certainly drew him toward complex philosophical argument, the use of authorities like Descartes and Locke, and the notion of the human being as a creature dependent on the impressions of the senses. But it never tempted him to deviate from the straight and narrow path of faith, or to surrender a vision of human experience that was rapt and apocalyptic, swinging between the extremes of human impotence and divine power, human unworthiness and divine grace and, above all, damnation and redemption.

A sermon like Edwards's best-known piece of work, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, delivered in 1741 and published the same year, describes the alternative of damnation. In it, Edwards uses all the rhetorical devices at his disposal, above all vivid imagery and incremental repetition, to describe in gruesome detail the "fearful danger" the "sinner" is in. "You hang by a slender thread," he warns his flock, "with

the flames of divine wrath flashing about it," that are "ready every moment to … burn it asunder," consigning all those who hang there to "a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of fire and wrath." The other alternative, of conversions and salvation, is figured, for example, in Edwards's description in 1723 of the woman who became his wife, Sarah Pierrepoint. Like so many of Edwards's writings – or, for that matter, work by others inspired by the Puritan belief that material facts are spiritual signs – it is at once intimate and symbolic. This is, at once, his own dear beloved and an emblem of any redeemed soul in communion with God. "The Son of God created the world for this very end," Edwards wrote elsewhere, in "Covenant of Redemption: 'Excellency of Christ,'" "to communicate Himself in an image of His own excellency." "By this we may discover the beauty of many of those metaphors and similes, which to an unphilosophical person do seem uncouth," he infers; since everywhere in nature we may consequently behold emblems, "the emanations of the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ." That belief in the spiritual and symbolic nature of the perceived world animates Edwards's writing. So does his fervent belief that all existence, natural and moral, depends on God, and his equally fervent conviction that all human faculties, including reason, must be placed in the service of faith in Him. It is all this that makes the writing, and Edwards himself, so typical of his time in some ways and, in others, so extraordinarily exceptional.

Toward the Revolution

It is possible to see Jonathan Edwards as a distillation of one side of the Puritan inheritance: that is, the spiritual, even mystical strain in Puritan thought that emphasized the inner life, the pursuit of personal redemption, and the ineffable character of God's grace. In which case, it is equally possible to see Edwards's great contemporary, Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), as a distillation and development of another side: that tendency in Puritanism that stressed the outer life, hard work and good conduct, and the freedom of the individual will. Another way of putting it is to say that Franklin embodied the new spirit of America, emerging in part out of Puritanism and in part out of the Enlightenment, that was coming to dominate the culture. And he knew it. That is clear from his account of his own life in his most famous work, the *Autobiography*, which he worked on at four different times (1771, 1784, 1788, 1788–1789), revised extensively but left unfinished at the time of his death; an American edition was published in 1818, but the first complete edition of what he had written only appeared nearly a hundred years after his death, in 1867. Uncompleted though it is, the *Autobiography* nevertheless has a narrative unity. It is divided into three sections: first, Franklin's youth and early manhood in Boston and Philadelphia; second, Franklin's youthful attempts to achieve what he terms "moral perfection"; and third, Franklin's use of the principles discovered in the first section and enumerated in the second to enable him to rise to prosperity and success as a scientist, politician, and philanthropist. Throughout all three sections, Franklin is keen to present his life as exemplary and typical: proof positive that anyone can make it, especially in America, "the Land of Labour" where "a general happy

Mediocrity prevails" – as long as they apply themselves to useful toil. Like the good scientist, Franklin the narrator looks at the events of Franklin the autobiographical character's life and tries to draw inferences from them. Or he tries to see how his own moral hypotheses worked, when he put them to the test of action. This means that he is more than just remembering in his *Autobiography*. He is also demonstrating those truths about human nature, human society, and God which, as he sees it, should be acknowledged by all reasonable men.

Just how much Franklin presents his story as a prototypical American one is measured in the first section of the *Autobiography*. His "first entry" into the city of Philadelphia in 1723, for instance, is described in detail. And what he emphasizes is his sorry appearance and poverty. "I was in my working dress," he tells the reader, "my best clothes being to come round by sea." "I was dirty from my journey," he adds, "and I knew no soul nor where to look for lodging." "Fatigued with travelling," "very hungry," and with a "stock of cash" consisting only of "a Dutch dollar, and about a shilling in copper," all he could purchase for himself to eat was "three great puffy rolls." Munching disconsolately on these, he then walked through the streets of Philadelphia "passing by the door of Mr. Read, my future wife's father," Franklin explains, "when she, standing at the door, saw me, and thought I made, as I certainly did, a most awkward, ridiculous appearance." Whatever the truth of this story, Franklin is also clearly constructing a myth here, one that was to become familiar in American narratives. This is the self-made man as hero, on his first appearance, poor and unknown and unprotected, entering a world that he then proceeds to conquer.

That Franklin was able to rise to affluence and reputation from these humble beginnings was due, he tells the reader, not only to self-help and self-reliance but to self-reinvention. In the second section of his *Autobiography* he explains how he "conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection." Wanting "to live without committing any fault at any time," he drew up a list of the "moral virtues," such as "temperance," "silence," "order," "resolution," and "frugality." And he then gave "a week's attention to each of the virtues successively." "My great goal," Franklin says, "was to avoid even the least offence" against the moral virtue for that week, "leaving the other virtues to their ordinary chance." A complicated chart was drawn up for the week; and, if ever he committed a least offense against that week's moral virtue, he would mark it on the chart, his obvious aim being to keep it "clean of spots." Since he had enumerated thirteen virtues, he could "go through a course complete" in moral reeducation in thirteen weeks, and "four courses in a year." Springing from a fundamental belief that the individual could change, improve, and even recreate himself with the help of reason, common sense, and hard work, Franklin's program for himself was one of the first great formulations of the American dream. Rather than being born into a life, Franklin is informing his readers, a person can make that life for himself. He can be whoever he wants to be. All he needs is understanding, energy, and commitment to turn his own best desires about himself into a tangible reality.

And that, as he tells it and indeed lived it, is exactly what Franklin did. By 1748, when he was still only 42, he had made enough money to retire from active business.

By this time, he had also become quite famous thanks to his newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and a little book he published annually from 1733. Almanacs were popular in early America, their principal purpose being to supply farms and traders with information about the weather and fluctuations in the currency. Franklin kept this tradition going, but he changed it by adding and gradually expanding a section consisting of proverbs and little essays, a kind of advice column that reflected his philosophy of economic and moral individualism. Eventually, many of the proverbs were brought together in one book, in 1758, that was to become known as *The Way to Wealth*; this was a nationwide bestseller and was reprinted several hundred times. Always, the emphasis here is on the virtues of diligence, thrift, and independence. "Diligence is the mother of good luck," declares one proverb. "Plough deep, while sluggards sleep," says another, "and you shall have corn to sell and keep." "Beware of little expenses; a small leak will sink a great ship." "The borrower is a slave to the lender." "Get all you can, and what you get, hold." As a whole, the proverbs reflect the single-mindedness that had helped Franklin himself along the way to wealth. But they also show Franklin's wit. As early as 1722, Franklin had perfected a literary style that combined clarity of expression with sharpness and subtlety, and frequently humor of perception, in a series of essays called the "Silence Dogood" papers, after the name of the narrator. In these, Franklin used a fictitious speaker, the busybody widow Silence Dogood, to satirize follies and vices ranging from poor poetry to prostitution. And, throughout his life, Franklin was not only an inventor of proverbial wisdom but a masterly essayist, using his skills to promote philanthropic and political projects (*A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge* (1743); *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* (1749)), to attack violence against Native Americans or the superstition that led people to accuse women of witchcraft (*A Narrative of the Late Massacres* (1764); "A Witch Trial at Mount Holly" (1730)), and to satirize the slave trade and British imperialism ("On the Slave Trade" (1790); "An Edict by the King of Prussia" (1773)). Here, he developed his *persona*, "the friend of all good men," and his characteristic argumentative strategy, also enshrined in his *Autobiography*, of weaving seamlessly together the imperatives of self-help and altruism, personal need and the claims of society.

Here, and elsewhere, Franklin also elaborated his belief in America. His homeplace, Franklin explained in "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" (1784), was a place where "people do not inquire concerning a Stranger, *What is he*? But, *What can he do*?" Anyone with "any useful Art" was welcome. And all "Hearty young Labouring Men" could "easily establish themselves" there. Not only that, they could soon rise to a reasonable fortune. They could increase and multiply, since "the salubrity of the Air, the healthiness of the Climate, the plenty of good Provision, and the Encouragement to early Marriages by the certainty of Subsistence in cultivating the Earth" – all these made the growth of population "very rapid in America." Finally, they could live good lives. "The almost general Mediocrity of Fortune that prevails in America," Franklin explained, obliged all people "to follow some Business for subsistence." So, "those Vices, that arise usually from Idleness, are in a great measure prevented"; "Industry and constant Employment" were the "great preservatives of

the Morals and Virtue" of the New World. For Franklin, America really was the land of opportunity. It was also a land of tolerance, common sense, and reason, where people could and should be left free to toil usefully for themselves and their community, as he had done. Typically, he turned such beliefs into a matter of political practice as well as principle, working on behalf of his colonial home, then his country, for most of his life. In 1757 and 1775, for example, he mad two lengthy trips to England, to serve as colonial agent. After the second trip, he returned to Philadelphia just in time to serve in the Continental Congress and to be chosen as a member of that committee which eventually drafted the Declaration of Independence. He spent two years in Paris, negotiating an alliance between France and America. Then, in 1783, he was one of the three American signatories to the treaty that ended the Revolutionary War. Finally, after some years in France as American ambassador, he became a member of that convention which drafted the Constitution of the United States. Franklin was, in short, at the heart of the American Revolution from its origins to its conclusion. And he shows, more clearly than any other figure of the time, just how much that Revolution owed to the principles of the Enlightenment. By his presence and comments he also suggests just how much the founding documents of the American nation were rooted in a project that he himself embraced and emblematized, based on the principles of natural rights and reason, self-help and self-reinvention.

"What then is the American, this new man?" asked J. Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813) in his *Letters from an American Farmer*, published in 1782. Answering his own question, Crèvecoeur then suggested that "the American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions." That was a common theme in the literature surrounding the American Revolution. As the American colonies became a new nation, the United States of America, writers and many others applied themselves to the task of announcing just what this new nation represented, and what the character and best hopes of the American might be. Crèvecoeur was especially fascinated because of his mixed background: born in France, he spent time in England and Canada before settling as a planter in New York State. He was also, during the Revolution, placed in a difficult position. As a Tory or Loyalist (that is, someone who continued to claim allegiance to Britain), he found himself suspected by the Revolutionaries; as someone with liberal sympathies, however, he also fell under suspicion among the other Tories. So in 1780 he returned to France; and it was in London that *Letters* was first published. Following a form very popular in the eighteenth century, Crèvecoeur's book (which was reprinted many times) consists of twelve letters written by a fictional narrator, James, a Quaker and a farmer, describing his life on the farm and his travels to places such as Charlestown, South Carolina. *Letters* is an epistolary narrative; it is a travel and philosophical journal; and it also inaugurates that peculiarly American habit of mixing fiction and thinly disguised autobiography. James shares many of the experiences and opinions of Crèvecoeur but, unlike his creator, he is a simple, relatively uneducated man and, of course, a Quaker – which Crèvecoeur most certainly was not.

At the heart of *Letters* are three animating beliefs that Crèvecoeur shared with many of his contemporaries, and that were to shape subsequent American thought and writing. There is, first, the belief that American nature is superior to European culture: at once older than even "the half-ruined amphitheatres" of the Old World and, because it is subject to perpetual, seasonal renewal, much newer and fresher than, say, "the musty ruins of Rome." Second, there is the belief that America is the place where the oppressed of Europe can find freedom and independence as "tillers of the earth." America is "not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess everything, and a herd of people who have nothing," the narrator of *Letters* explains. "We are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself." Thanks to this, America offers the pleasing spectacle of a return to "the very beginnings and outlines of human society." Americans have "regained the ancient dignity of our species," we learn; their "laws are simple and just"; and "a pleasing uniformity of decent competence appears throughout" the land. "We are," the narrator triumphantly declares, "the most perfect society now existing in the world." The "new man" at the center of this perfect society reflects the third belief animating this book. The American, as *Letters* describes him, is the product of "the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds." "Americans are the western pilgrims," the narrator proudly declaims; "here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men." And what lies at the end of this journey to a Promised Land, what rises out of the melting pot, is a self-reliant individual, whose "labour is founded on the basis of nature, self-interest." Working with his family in fields "whence exuberant crops are to arise to feed and clothe them all," the American owes no allegiance to "a despotic prince, a rich abbot, or a mighty lord." Even "religion demands little of him" other than "a small voluntary salary to the minister, and gratitude to God." He works for himself and his loved ones; he can think for himself; and the contribution he makes to his community and society is freely given, without fear or favor.

There are, certainly, moments of doubt and even despair in *Letters*. Traveling to South Carolina, James is reminded of the obscenity and injustice of slavery: not least, when he comes across the grotesque spectacle of a slave suspended in a cage in the woods, starving to death, his eyes pecked out by hungry birds. The slave, a "living spectre," is being punished for killing an overseer; and this, together with other experiences in the South, leads James to reflect on a terrible exception to the American norm of just laws and useful toil rewarded. James is similarly disturbed when he visits the frontier. Here, he notes, men are "often in a perfect state of war; that of man against man" and "appear to be no better than carnivorous animals of superior rank." On this occasion, though, he can find consolation in the thought that the frontier represents only the "feeble beginnings and laborious rudiments" of society. This ugly but perhaps necessary first stage in social development will soon give way, James assures his readers and himself, to the "general decency of manners" to be found in a settled farming community. *Letters* does then end on a disconsolate note, dwelling on the threat posed to the "tranquillity" of "this new land" by the Revolution. But, despite that – despite, even, the suspicion that the presence of slavery makes a

mockery of any talk of a "perfect society" – the general thrust of the book is toward celebration of both the promise and the perfection of America. Crèvecoeur's work is driven by certain convictions, about nature and natural rights, a new man and society, that he certainly shared with other American writers of the time – and, indeed, with some of his Romantic counterparts in Europe. But nowhere are such convictions given clearer or more charged expression. *Letters* begins with the claim that to "record the progressive steps" of an "industrious farmer" is a nobler project for a writer than any to be found in European literature. That claim is supported, and the project pursued with enthusiasm in the ensuing pages, where the hero is, quite simply, "the American."

A writer who shared Crèvecoeur's belief in the possibilities of American society was Thomas Paine (1737–1809). Unlike Crèvecoeur, however, Paine was unambiguously enthusiastic about the Revolution. Born in England, Paine arrived in America in 1774. He remained for only thirteen years, but his impact on America's developing vision of itself was enormous. In 1776 Paine published *Common Sense*, which argued for American independence and the formation of a republican government. "In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense," Paine declared in the opening pages. That reflected the contemporary belief in the power of reason, which Paine shared, and the contemporary shift in political commentaries from arguments rooted in religion to more secular ones. It did not, however, quite do justice to, or prepare the reader for, the power of Paine's rhetoric. "The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of the nation cries, 'TIS TIME TO PART," Paine declaims at one point in *Common Sense*. "O! receive the fugitive," he announces elsewhere to those in America who "dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant," "and prepare in time an asylum for mankind." That gift for firing arguments into life, often with the help of an imaginative use of maxims, is even more in evidence in the *Crisis* papers. With Washington defeated and in retreat at the end of 1776, Paine tried to rouse the nation to further resistance in the first of sixteen papers. "These are the times that try men's souls," he began. On this memorable opening he then piled a series of equally memorable maxims, clearly designed for the nation to take to and carry in its heart:

> The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it *now*, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

The last of the *Crisis* papers appeared in 1783, at the end of the Revolution. Only four years later, Paine returned to England. There, he wrote *The Rights of Man* (1791–1792), intended as a reply to *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) by Edmund Burke. It was immensely popular but, because Paine argued against a hereditary monarchy in *The Rights of Man*, he was charged with sedition and was forced to flee to France. There, his protest against the execution of Louis XVI led to imprisonment. He was only released when the American ambassador to Paris, James Madison, intervened. Paine returned to America. But the publication of his last

major work, *The Age of Reason* (1794–1795), led to further notoriety and unpopularity in his adoptive homeplace. In *The Age of Reason*, Paine attacks the irrationality of religion and, in particular, Christianity. In the name of reason, he denies the truth of such primary tenets of the Christian faith as the Virgin Birth, the Holy Trinity, miracles and revelation, and the divinity and resurrection of Jesus. Paine did not deny the existence of "one God" and, like Franklin, he insisted that, as he put it, "religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy." But that did not enable him to escape the anger of many Americans: he was vilified in papers and on pulpits as a threat to both Christian and democratic faiths. "My own mind is my own church," Paine insisted in *The Age of Reason*. "The Creation speaketh an universal language, independently of human speech," he added; "it preaches to all nations and to all worlds; and this *word of God* reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God." Such impeccably deistic sentiments were entirely consistent with all that Paine had ever written; they were marked by his customary belief in the determining importance of reason and his customary use of maxim, epigram, and antithesis to get his point across. There was little here that Franklin or many of the other founding fathers of the republic would have found fault with: but times had changed and, in any event, such an unrestrained and unambiguous assault on Christian mystery would have been likely to provoke a backlash in early America at any time. Not surprisingly, Paine lived his last few years in obscurity.

Obscurity was never to be the fate of Thomas Jefferson (1724–1826). A person of eclectic interests – and, in that, the inheritor of a tradition previously best illustrated by William Byrd of Westover – Jefferson's very myriad-mindedness has led to quite contradictory interpretations of both his aims and his achievement. What is incontestable, however, is the central part he played in the formation of America as a nation. His *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, for example, published in 1774, was immensely influential. In it, Jefferson argued that Americans had effectively freed themselves from British authority by exercising "a right which nature has given to all men, of departing from the country in which chance, not choice, has placed them." "God, who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time," Jefferson insisted. "Kings are servants, not the proprietors of the people." Such stirring words earned him a place, in 1776, on the committee assigned the task of drafting the Declaration of Independence. And, if any one person can be called the author of that Declaration, it is undoubtedly Jefferson. This founding document of the American nation enshrines the beliefs that Jefferson shared with so many other major figures of the Enlightenment: that "all men are created equal," that they are endowed with certain "inalienable rights" and notably the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; and that "to secure those rights, governments are instituted among men." Like many great American documents, the Declaration of Independence describes an idea of the nation, an ideal or possibility against which its actual social practices can and must be measured – and, it might well be, found wanting.

Jefferson relied on the principle of natural rights and the argumentative tool of reason to construct a blueprint of the American nation. When it came to filling in

the details, however, he relied as Crèvecoeur and many others did on his belief in the independent farmer. "I know no condition happier than that of a Virginia farmer," Jefferson wrote to a friend in 1787. "His estate supplies a good table, clothes himself and his family with their ordinary apparel, furnishes a small surplus to buy salt, coffee, and a little finery for his wife and daughter, … and furnishes him pleasing and healthy occupation." "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens," he declared in another letter, written in 1804. "They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country, and wedded to its interests, by the most lasting bonds." Fortunately, in his opinion, America would remain an agricultural country for the foreseeable future; small farmers would therefore remain "the true representatives of the Great American interests" and the progress and prosperity of the new republic was consequently assured. "The small landowners are the most precious part of a state," Jefferson confided in a letter to his friend and fellow Virginian James Madison in 1772. In a more public vein, he made his famous assertion that "those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue": which is, surely, the definitive statement of a determining American myth.

That statement comes from the one full-length book Jefferson published, in 1787, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Written in response to a questionnaire sent to him about his home state while he was serving as governor, *Notes* is at once a scientific treatise and a crucial document of cultural formation. Jefferson examines and documents the natural and cultural landscape of the New World and, at the same time, considers the promise and possibilities of the new nation. One of his several aims in the book is to rebut the argument embraced by many leading European naturalists of the time that the animals and people of the New World were inherently smaller, less vigorous, and more degenerate than their Old World counterparts. This gives him the opportunity to write in praise of the Native American. Jefferson was willing to accept the idea that Native Americans were still a "barbarous people," lacking such advantages of civilization as "letters" and deference toward women. But he insisted on their primitive strength, "their bravery and address in war," and "their eminence in oratory." As he saw it, they were strong, courageous, "faithful to the utmost extremity," and as far advanced in all respects as their relatively early stage in cultural evolution would allow. Rebutting European claims of this nature also allowed Jefferson to enumerate white American achievements in such fields as "philosophy and war," government, oratory, painting, and "the plastic art," and to express the firm conviction that, in other areas too, America would soon have "her full quota of genius." Of Great Britain, he declared that it had taken a long time for that nation to produce "a Shakespeare and Milton"; "the run of her glory is fast descending to the horizon" and it would no doubt soon be America's turn.

Like Crèvecoeur, Jefferson also felt compelled to confront the challenge to his idyllic vision of America posed by the indelible fact of slavery. He condemned the peculiar institution in his *Notes* and argued for emancipation. But emancipation, for him, was linked to repatriation: once freed, the slaves should be sent to some other

colony, Jefferson insisted, where they could become "a free and independent people." Removal was necessary, Jefferson felt, because the "deep rooted prejudices" of the whites and a lingering sense of injustice felt by the blacks would make coexistence impossible. Not only that, Jefferson was willing to entertain the idea that physical and moral differences between the two races further underlined the need for freed blacks to go elsewhere. "In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection," Jefferson observed of African-Americans. Among other things, this made them deficient as artists and writers. All the arguments that black people were inferior to white "in the endowments both of body and mind" were advanced, Jefferson assured the reader, "as a suspicion only." But the general burden of the argument in *Notes* is clearly toward black inferiority. And the belief that, once freed, blacks should be "removed beyond the reach of mixture" is stated consistently and categorically. So, for that matter, is the belief that, if black people are not freed soon, the American republic will reap a terrible harvest. "Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just," Jefferson famously declared in *Notes*. There might, he thought, be "a revolution in the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation." But then, he added hopefully, there might be a more fortunate turn of events. "The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave is rising from the dust," Jefferson told his readers, and "the way I hope preparing … for total emancipation … disposed … to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation." It was a sign of Jefferson's intellectual honesty that he wrestled with the problem of slavery in the first place. It was also a sign that he was, after all, a man of his times imbued with many of its prejudices that he could not disentangle the ideal of black freedom from the ideas of separation and removal. His doubts about the radical threat to the new republic posed by its clear violation of its own clearly stated belief in natural rights were, in the last analysis, subdued by his conviction that reason, as he construed it, would prevail. That is the measure of his capacity for optimism, and of his belief that, as he put it in *Notes*, "reason and free inquiry are the only effective agents against error." It is also, perhaps, a measure of a capacity for self-delusion that was by no means uniquely his.

In 1813 Jefferson began a correspondence with John Adams (1735–1826), repairing the breach in their friendship that had occurred when Jefferson defeated Adams in the presidential elections of 1800; they were published separately and in full in 1959. The first vice president and the second president, Adams was a lively intellectual of a skeptical turn of mind and the founder of a family dynasty that would produce another president, John Quincy Adams, and the historian, novelist, and autobiographer, Henry Adams. Discussing literature, history, and philosophy, Jefferson pitted his idealism against Adams's acid wit and pessimistic turn of mind. To Jefferson's insistence that "a natural aristocracy" of "virtue and talents" would replace "an artificial aristocracy founded on wealth and birth," Adams replied that the distinction would not "help the matter." "Both artificial aristocracy, and Monarchy," Adams argued, "have grown out of the natural Aristocracy of 'Virtue and Talents.'" "The five pillars of Aristocracy, are Beauty, Wealth, Birth, Genius, and Virtues"; and, Adams suggested, "any one of the three first, can at any time over bear

any one of the two last." Adams's skepticism and, in particular, his sense that in time the purest republic becomes tainted by the hereditary principle or, at least, the evolution of a ruling class, led him to think less well of the American future than Jefferson did. Part of this stemmed from a patrician distrust of the people. Whatever its sources, it prompted Adams to meet Jefferson's optimism with irony. "Many hundred years must roll away before We shall be corrupted," he declared sarcastically. "Our pure, virtuous, public spirited federative Republick will last for ever, govern the Globe and introduce the perfection of Man."

Alternative voices of Revolution

The letters between Adams and Jefferson reveal two contrary visions of the new American republic and its fate. So, in a different way, do the letters that passed between John Adams and his wife Abigail. Inevitably, perhaps, the tone is more intimate, even teasing. But Abigail Adams (1744–1818) raises, consistently, the serious issue of freedom and equality for women. "I long to hear that you have declared an independency," she wrote to her husband in 1776, "and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies." Abigail Adams urged John Adams and his colleagues, as they prepared the new laws of the nation, to be "more generous and favourable" to women than their "ancestors" had been. "Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands," she wrote. "Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could." If "persistent care and attention" were not taken to observe the rights of women, Abigail Adams warned, "we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation." The tone was playful, but it made adroit and serious use of one of the primary beliefs of the leaders of the Revolution: that, as Jefferson put it in his *Notes*, "laws to be just, must give a reciprocation of rights … without this, they are mere arbitrary rules of conduct, founded on force." Unfortunately, all Abigail Adams received in response was the playful claim from John that he, and all husbands, "have only the Name of Masters." All men, he insisted, were "completely subject" "to the Despotism of the Petticoat."

Adams wrote to his wife, adding gentle insult to injury, that he could not choose but laugh at her "extraordinary Code of Laws." "We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government everywhere," he explained: "that Children and Apprentices were disobedient – that schools and Colledges were grown turbulent – that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters." Now, he added, what she wrote to him made him aware that "another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented" amid the revolutionary turmoil of 1776. The remark was clearly intended to put Abigail Adams down, however playfully, to dismiss her claims for the natural rights of women by associating women with other, supposedly undeserving groups. But, inadvertently, it raised a serious and central point. "All men are created equal," the Declaration of Independence announced. That explicitly excluded women.

Implicitly, it also excluded "Indians" and "Negroes," since what it meant, of course, was all *white* men. An idealist like Jefferson might wrestle conscientiously with such exclusions (while, perhaps, painfully aware that he himself was a slaveholder); a man like John Adams might insist on them, however teasingly. But they could not go unnoticed, and especially by those, like Abigail Adams, who were excluded. The literature of the Revolutionary period includes not only the visionary rhetoric and rational arguments of those men by and for whom the laws of the new republic were primarily framed but also the writings of those who felt excluded, ignored, or left out. As John Adams, for all his irony, was forced to acknowledge, the political and social turmoil of the times was bound to make disadvantaged, marginalized groups more acutely aware of their plight. After all, he had his wife to remind him.

Among the leading voices of the American Revolution, there are some who, at least, were willing to recognize the rights of women. Notably, Thomas Paine spoke of the need for female equality. "If we take a survey of ages and countries," he wrote in "An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex" (1775), "we shall find the women, almost – without exception – at all times and in all places, adored and oppressed." So, at greater length, did Judith Sargent Murray (1751–1820). Murray wrote, among other things, two plays and a number of poems; she also wrote two essay series for the *Massachusetts Magazine* from 1792 to 1794. One essay series, *The Repository*, was largely religious in theme. The other, *The Gleaner*, considered a number of issues, including federalism, literary nationalism, and the equality of the sexes. A three-volume edition of *The Gleaner* was published in 1798; and in it is to be found her most influential piece, "On the Equality of the Sexes" (1790), which establishes her claim to be regarded as one of the first American feminists. Here, Murray argued that the capacities of memory and imagination are equal in women and men and that, if women are deficient as far as the two other faculties of the mind, reason and judgment, are concerned, it is because of a difference in education. If only women were granted equal educational opportunities, Murray insisted, then they would be the equal of men in every respect. Or, as she put it, "if we are allowed an equality of acquirement, let serious studies equally employ our minds, and we will bid our souls arise to equal strength."

Murray's arguments were built on a firm belief in the equality of male and female souls. "The same breath of God, enlivens, and invigorates us," she told her male readers, "we are not fallen lower than yourselves." A young woman should be addressed "as a rational being," she declared in a 1784 essay ("Desultory Thoughts upon the Utility of encouraging a degree of Self-Complacency especially in Female Bosoms"); she should be taught "a reverence for self," and she should be encouraged to aspire, since "ambition is a noble principle." Murray was inspired as many of her contemporaries were by the events and rhetoric of the times. Her other works include, for instance, a patriotic poem celebrating the "genius" of George Washington and anticipating the moment when the arts and sciences would flourish in "blest Columbia" ("Occasional Epilogue to the *Contrast*; a Comedy, Written by Royal Tyler, Esq." (1794)). Unlike most of her contemporaries, however, that inspiration led her to consider the anomalous position of her own sex and to argue that the anomaly

could and should be rectified. Appealing to the principle of equality enshrined in the laws of the new republic, to rational justice and Christian faith, she helped raise an issue that was to be foregrounded in the next century – not least, at the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention. There, at the Convention in 1848, a "Declaration of Sentiments" was framed that gave succinct expression to Sargent's beliefs by making a simple change to the original Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," it announced, "that all men and women are created equal."

"The great men of the United States have their liberty – they begin with new things, and now they endeavour to lift us up the Indians from the ground, that we may stand up and walk ourselves." The words are those of Hendrick Aupaumut (?–1830), a Mahican Indian educated by Moravians. They come from *A Short Narration of my Last Journey to the Western Country*, which was written about 1794 but not published until 1827. Aupaumut, as this remark suggests, was intensely loyal to the United States; and he clearly believed, or at least hoped, that his people would be afforded the same rights and opportunities as "the great men" of the new nation. Because of his loyalty, he served as an intermediary between the government and Native Americans in the 1790s. This involved traveling among the tribes; and it was evidently after a journey among the Delawares, Shawnees, and others that he wrote his book. Often awkward in style, the *Narration* reflects the desperate effort of at least one Native American, working in a second language, to record the history and customs of his peoples – and to convince them, and perhaps himself, that the leaders of the American republic would extend its rights and privileges to those who had lived in America long before Columbus landed. "I have been endeavouring to do my best in the business of peace," Aupaumut explains in the *Narration*, "and according to my best knowledge with regard to the desires of the United States." That best consisted, fundamentally, of assuring the Native Americans he met of the good intentions of the whites. "I told them, the United States will not speak wrong," Aupaumut recalls, "whatever they promise to Indians they will perform." Part of the assurance, we learn, rested on laying the blame for previous injustices on "the Law of the great King of England." "Now they have new Laws," Aupaumut insists, "and by these Laws Indians cannot be deceived as usual." The *Narrative* is, in effect, a powerful declaration of faith in the universality of the principle of natural rights, and an equally powerful statement of the belief that this principle would now be put into practice. In the light of what happened to Native America after this it has, of course, acquired a peculiar pathos and irony that Aupaumut never for once intended.

A Native American who was less convinced that the American Revolution was a good cause was Samson Occom (1723–1792). Quite the contrary, during the Revolutionary War Occom urged the tribes to remain neutral because that war was, he insisted, the work of the Devil. Born a Mohegan, Occom was converted by missionaries when he was 16. He then became an itinerant minister, devoting most of his energies to preaching and working on behalf of the Indian people. Only two books by him were published during his lifetime, but they were immensely successful. The first was a sermon written at the request of a fellow Mohegan who had been sentenced to death for murder, *A Sermon Preached by Samson Occom, Minister of the*

Gospel, and Missionary to the Indians; at the Execution of Moses Paul an Indian (1722). Reflecting Occom's own evangelical convictions, and focusing, in the tradition of all execution sermons, on the omnipresence of death and the necessity for immediate, radical conversion, it was immensely popular. Its popularity encouraged the publication of the second book, *Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1774), which became the first Indian bestseller. All Occom's work is marked by a fervent belief in the power of grace, and by his insistence that, as he put it in the execution sermon, "we are all dying creatures" who had to seek that grace at once. It is marked, as well, by a fervent rhetorical style and an equally fervent belief that all his people, the Mohegans and other tribes, were in particular need of Christian redemption. Passing through it, however, is another current, less openly acknowledged but undeniably there: the suspicion that many of the miseries of his life were there "because," as he expressed it, "I am a poor Indian," that this was true of all other "poor Indians" too, and that the way to deal with this was to build a separate community. Quite apart from consistently arguing that his people should not become involved in the quarrels of whites, such as the Revolution and the War of 1812 between the United States and England, he became an enthusiastic disciple of a project to remove the Christian Indians of New England to a settlement in New York. The project was never realized, but Occom's enthusiasm for it shows how differently he felt from Aupaumut about the promise of the new republic. For him as for many Native Americans – and despite a passionate commitment to a religion learned from white people – the only solution was to come apart and be separate.

The rage felt by many African-Americans, enslaved or freed, at the obvious and immense gap between the rhetoric of the Revolution and the reality of their condition was memorably expressed by Lemuel Haynes (1753–1833). As an evangelical minister, Haynes, along with Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley, helped to produce the first significant body of African-American writing, founded on revivalist rhetoric and Revolutionary discourse. His address "Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping" (written early in his career but not published until 1983) begins by quoting the Declaration of Independence to the effect that "all men are created Equal" with "Ceartain unalienable rights." Haynes then goes on to argue that "Liberty, & freedom, is an innate principle, which is unmoveably placed in the human Species." It is a "Jewel," Haynes declares, "which was handed Down to man from the cabinet of heaven, and is Coeval with his Existance." And, since it "proceeds from the Supreme Legislature of the univers, so it is he which hath a sole right to take away." So, anyone who "would take away a mans Liberty assumes a prerogative that Belongs to another, and acts out of his own domain," he assumes the power and prerogatives of God. In short, "*the practise of Slave-keeping, which so much abounds in this Land is illicit*." Skillfully using the founding documents of the nation, and quotations from the Bible such as the pronouncement that God made "*of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell upon the face of the earth*," Haynes weaves a trenchant argument against slavery. "Liberty is Equally as pre[c]ious to a *Black man*, as it is to a *white* one," he insists; "even an african, has Equally as good a right to his Liberty in common with Englishmen." The message is

rammed home, time and again, that the white people of the new republic are in breach of divine law and their own professed allegiance to "natural rights." "'Twas as Exelent note that I Lately read in a modern piece and it was this," Haynes remembers, "O when shall America be consistantly Engaged in the Cause of Liberty!" And he concludes with a prayer addressed to white Americans: "If you have any Love to yourselves, or any Love to this Land, if you have any Love to your fellow-man, Break these intollerable yoaks."

A similar commitment to the idea of brotherhood characterizes the work of Prince Hall (1735?–1807). Hall was a member of the Masonic order. He considered it the duty of Masons, as he put it in "A Charge Delivered to the African Lodge, June 24, 1797, at Menotomy" (1797), to show "love to all mankind," and "to sympathise with our fellow men under their troubles." The author of numerous petitions on behalf of Masons and free blacks in general, for support of plans for blacks to emigrate to Africa and for public education for children of tax-paying black people, he was also a strong opponent of slavery. His petition "To the Honorable Council & House of Representatives for the State of Massachusetts-Bay in General Court assembled January 13th 1777" (1788) asks for the emancipation of "great number of Negroes who are detained in a state of Slavery in the Bowels of a free & Christian Country." And, in it, like Haynes, Hall uses the rhetoric of the Revolution against its authors. Slaves, he points out, "have, in common with all other Men, a natural & unalienable right to that freedom, which the great Parent of the Universe hath bestowed equally on all Mankind." Freedom is "the natural right off all Men – & their Children (who were born in this Land of Liberty) may not be held as Slaves after they arrive at the age of twenty one years." Hall was tireless in his support of any scheme intended to advance the cause of black freedom and equality. He was also acutely aware of how different were the futures of the different races in "this Land of Liberty:" "thus my brethren," he declared once, "we see what a chequered world we live in." And he was never reluctant to use republican, as well as biblical, rhetoric, to point that difference out.

Haynes was born into freedom. Hall was born into slavery and then freed. Olaudah Equiano (1745–1797) was born into freedom in Africa; he was enslaved, transported first to Barbados and then to Virginia, bought by a British captain to serve aboard his ship, and then finally in 1776 became a free man again. All this became the subject of a two-volume autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Valla, the African, Written by Himself*. Published in 1787 and subscribed to by many of the leading abolitionists, it established the form of the slave narrative and so, indirectly or otherwise, it has influenced American writing – and African-American writing in particular – to the present day. "I offer here the history of neither a saint, a hero, nor a tyrant," Equiano announces. "I might say my sufferings were great," he admits, "but when I compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a *particular favorite of heaven*, and acknowledge the mercies of Providence in every occurrence of my life." As that remark suggests, Equiano follows the tradition of spiritual autobiography derived from St. Augustine and John Bunyan and used by American Puritans and Quakers, but he adds to it the new dimension of social protest. He also begins by painting an idyllic portrait of life

in Africa. The manner of living in the place where he spent his childhood, Equiano explains, was “simple” and “plain”; he and his family and community lived “in a country where nature is prodigal of her favor” and where wants were “few and easily supplied.” Just in case the reader does not grasp the point, Equiano then makes it clear. There is a “strong analogy,” he suggests, between “the manners and customs of my countrymen,” the companions of his childhood, “and those of the Jews before they reached the land of promise, and particularly the patriarchs while they were yet in that pastoral state which is described in Genesis.” This is Eden, a prelapsarian world of innocence, simplicity, and bliss where people enjoy a natural freedom and equality and nobody wants for the fruits of the earth.

Then, as Equiano tells it, came the fall. At the age of 11, he was seized from his family and sold into slavery. Taken to the African coast, he was terrified by the sight of white people. “I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits,” he remembers, “and that they were going to kill me.” And the strange complexions of those into whose hands he had come, “their long hair, and the language they spoke,” all united to confirm him in this belief. He feared he would be eaten, Equiano tells the reader, ironically throwing back upon its authors a common European myth about other peoples; and, when he is not eaten but “put down under the decks” on ship and then transported across the ocean, his distress is hardly alleviated. Beaten savagely, chained for most of the time, gradually learning all the hardships of capture and the “accursed trade” of slavery, Equiano becomes convinced that his new masters are “savages.” Preparing the ground for later slave narratives, Equiano memorably traces the major events of his enslavement and the miseries he shared with his slaves: the breaking up of families, the imposition of new names, the strangeness and squalor, the fear of the black and the brutality of the whites. He also interlaces the narrative with a series of powerful declamatory statements. “O, ye nominal Christians!” he declares while describing a slave market, “might not an African ask you – learned you this from your God, who says to you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you?” There are, certainly, moments of relief. Aboard one ship, Equiano befriends a white man, “a young lad.” Their close friendship, which is cut short by the white man’s death, serves as an illustration of the superficiality of racial barriers, indicates the possibility of white kindness and a better way for free blacks and, besides, anticipates a powerful theme in later American writing – of interracial and often homoerotic intimacy. Gradually, too, Equiano manages to rise up from slavery. He learns to read. He manages to purchase his freedom. Finally, he experiences a religious vision and, as he puts it, is “born again” to become one of “God’s children.” But the horror of Equiano’s capture and enslavement, the long voyage to America and the even longer voyage to escape from the “absolute power” exerted by the white master over his black property: that remains indelibly marked on the reader’s memory. *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano* is the first in a great tradition of American narratives that juxtapose the dream of freedom with the reality of oppression, the Edenic myth (of Africa here, of America usually elsewhere) with a history of fall and redemption – all the while telling us the story of an apparently ordinary, but actually remarkable, man.

In verse, an important tradition was inaugurated by two African-American poets of the time, Jupiter Hammon (1711–1806?) and Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784). Lucy Terry had, of course, become known earlier for her poem "Bars Fight," but Hammon was the first African-American poet to have his work published, since Terry's was handed down for a while in the oral tradition. Born a slave, Hammon published a broadside, *Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, With Penitential Cries*, a series of 22 quatrains, in 1760, and then a prose work, *Address to the Negroe: In the State of New York*, in 1787. The poetry is notable for its piety, the prose for its argument that black people must reconcile themselves to the institution of slavery. Some of Hammon's thinking here is registered in his poem to Phillis Wheatley, "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly, Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston, who came from Africa at eight years of age, and soon became acquainted with the gospel of Jesus Christ" (1778). "O Come you pious youth: adore / The wisdom of thy God, /" the poem begins, "In bringing thee from distant shore, / To learn his holy word." It then goes on to argue that it was "God's tender mercy" that brought Wheatley in a slave ship across the Atlantic to be "a pattern" to the "youth of Boston town." "Thou hast left the heathen shore, / Thro' mercy of the Lord, /" Hammon declaims, addressing Wheatley directly, "Among the heathen live no more, / Come magnify thy God." It is worth emphasizing that all Hammon's publications are prefaced by an acknowledgment to the three generations of the white family he served. Anything of his that saw print was, in effect, screened by his white masters, and, in writing, was probably shaped by his awareness that it would never get published without their approval. That anticipated a common pattern in African-American writing. Slave narratives, for instance, were commonly prefaced by a note or essay from a white notable, mediating the narrative for what was, after all, an almost entirely white audience – and giving it a white seal of approval. And it has to be borne in mind when reading what Hammon has to say about slavery: which, in essence, takes up a defense of the peculiar institution that was to be used again by Southern apologists in the nineteenth century – that slavery could and should be seen as a civilizing influence and a providential instrument of conversion.

African-American writers of the time, and later, were, in effect, in a different position from their white counterparts. The growth in readership and printing presses, the proliferation of magazines, almanacs, manuals, and many other outlets for writing all meant that the literary culture was changing. A system of literary patronage was being replaced by the literary marketplace. Poets like Hammon and Wheatley, however, were still dependent on their white "friends" and patrons. For Equiano, fortunately, the friends, subscribers, and readers were abolitionists. For Hammon, the friends were, quite clearly, otherwise. Phillis Wheatley enjoyed the cooperation and patronage of Susanne Wheatley, the woman who bought her in a Boston slave market when she was 7 years old, and the Countess of Huntingdon. It was with their help that her *Poems* appeared in 1773 in London, the first volume of poetry known to have been published by an African-American. The poetry reflects

the neoclassical norms of the time. It also sometimes paints a less than flattering picture of Africa, the land from which Wheatley was snatched when she was still a child. "'Twas not long since I left my native shore / The land of errors, and *Egyptian* gloom: /" she writes in "To the University of Cambridge, in New England" (1773), adding, "Father of mercy, 'twas thy gracious hand / Brought me in safety from those dark abodes." Sometimes, however, Wheatley leans toward a more Edenic and idyllic image of her birthplace, of the kind favored by Equiano. "How my bosom burns! /" she declares in one of her poems ("Philis's [*sic*] Reply to the Answer in our Last by the Gentleman in the Navy" (1774)), "and pleasing Gambia on my soul returns, / With native grace in spring's luxurious reign, / Smiles the gay mead, and Eden blooms again." A lengthy description of "Africa's blissful plain" then follows, one that transforms it into a version of the pastoral. "The various bower, the tuneful flowing stream," the "soil spontaneous" that "yields exhaustless stores," the "soft retreats," the "verdant shores" and "bending harvest" ripening "into gold:" all this, and more, works against Wheatley's claims made elsewhere (in "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773) and "To His Excellency General Washington" (1776)) that she is grateful to have been taken away from "my *Pagan* land" to "Columbia's state."

Wheatley is, in fact, a far subtler and more complicated poet than is often acknowledged. The pleas for freedom are sometimes clear enough in her prose as well as her poetry. "In every human breast God has implanted a principle, which we call love of freedom," she wrote in her "Letter to Samson Occom" (1774). "It is impatient of oppression … and by the leave of our modern Egyptians I will assert, that the same principle lives in us." That is echoed in poems like "Liberty and Peace" (1785) and "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North America, &c" (1770). In both of these, she links the longing for freedom felt and expressed by the American colonists to her own experience of oppression. "I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate / Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat," she reveals in the latter poem. "Such, such my case. And can I then but pray / Others may never feel tyrannic sway?" Even when the plea is not as clear as that, however, and the description of her present plight not quite so critical, there is still a measured sense of her own dignity, and a quiet intimation of the rights and potential of her race. Despite her references to her own "fault'ring music" and "grov'ling mind" in "To Maecenas" (1770), for instance, she is still ambitious enough to invoke the example of the classical poet Terence (who, Wheatley notes, "was an *African* by birth" – like her), and bold enough to ask Maecenas, the friend and poet of the great Roman poet Horace, to be her patron too. "Then grant, *Maecenas*, thy paternal rays, /" she concludes, "Hear me propitious, and defend my lays." On a broader scale, one of her best-known poems, "On being Brought from Africa to America," may well begin by suggesting that it was "mercy" that brought her "benighted soul" from Africa to experience "redemption" in the New World. But it then goes on to use that experience of redemption as a measure of possibility for all African-Americans. "Some view our sable race with scornful eye," she admits, but then adds, pointing an admonitory figure at her, inevitably white, audience: "Remember *Christians*, *Negros*, black as *Cain*, / May be refin'd and join th'angelic

train." That conclusion is a perfect example of how Wheatley could develop consciousness of self into an exploration of the black community, its experiences and its potential. It is also an illustration of how she could strike a pose, for herself and others of "*Afric's* sable race," that both deferred to white patrons and audience and subtly made a claim for dignity, even equality – that, in short, combined Christian humility with a kind of racial pride.

The difficult position of African-American poets in the emerging literary marketplace is, perhaps, suggested by Wheatley's failure to find many readers for her published poetry – or, after 1773, to publish any further collections of her work. As late as 1778 she could complain about "books that remain unsold"; her *Poems* were never reprinted during her lifetime; and all her many proposals for publication in Boston were rejected. One projected volume that never saw publication was advertised by the printers with the remark that they could scarcely credit "ye performances to be by a Negro." The work was evidently too good, or too literate, to suggest such a source to them. That measures the extent of the problem poets like Hammon and Wheatley faced. Poetry, even perhaps literacy, was seen as the prerogative of white poets, like Philip Freneau (1752–1832), Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), and Joel Barlow (1754–1826). Of these three poets who set out to explore and celebrate the new republic in verse, Freneau was probably the most accomplished. Born in New York City, of a French Huguenot father and a Scottish mother, he began his poetic career as a celebrant of "Fancy, regent of the mind," and the power Fancy gave him to roam far to "Britain's fertile land," "her proud command" or empire around the globe, then back to "California's golden shore" ("The Power of Fancy" (1770)). Events, however, soon conspired to turn his interests in a more political and less Anglophile direction. With college friends, Hugh Brackenridge and James Madison, he wrote some *Satires Against the Tories* (1775); and with Brackenridge he also wrote a long poem in celebration of *The Rising Glory of America. The Rising Glory of America*, written in 1771, published a year later, then drastically revised in 1786, marked Freneau's full conversion to the American cause: a cause that he was later to serve both as a satirical poet and as a strongly partisan editor and journalist. Yet, for all its rhetorical energy, this poem about the emerging splendor of the New World is as much a tribute to the continuing importance of the Old World, at least in matters cultural and intellectual, as anything else. The theme may be new. The form, however, is basically imitative. So is the style, a pale echo of the English poet John Milton and Miltonic orotundities. "A Canaan here, / Another Canaan shall excel the old, /" the poem announces, "And from a fairer Pisgah's top be seen." "Such days the world, / And such America at last shall have /," it concludes, looking boldly to the future of the nation, "When ages, yet to come, shall run their round, / And future years of bliss alone remain." In short, *The Rising Glory of America* tends to confirm the power of the mother country even while Freneau and Brackenridge struggle to deny it.

Freneau was, as it happened, acutely aware of this power. A poem like "A Political Litany" (1775) is a bitter diatribe against the political domination of Britain, "a kingdom that bullies, and hectors, and swears." More interestingly, a poem such as "Literary Importation" (1788) admits to a feeling of cultural domination. "Can we

never be thought to have learning or grace /," Freneau asks here, "Unless it be brought from that damnable place." The "damnable place" was, of course, Britain; and Freneau must have suspected that his own literary importations of style and manner answered him in the negative. He was writing, as he perhaps sensed, in the wrong place and time. There was the continuing cultural influence of the Old World. And there was also, as Freneau intimates in another poem, "To An Author" (1788), the problem of writing poetry at a moment of conflict and in a society dedicated to common sense and use. "On these bleak climes by Fortune thrown, / Where rigid Reason reigns alone," Freneau asks the "Author" (who is, almost certainly, himself), "Tell me, what has the muse to do?" "An age employed in edging steel /," he adds bitterly, "Can no poetic raptures feel." Yet, despite that, Freneau continued to indulge in "poetic raptures." There are poems on philosophical issues ("On the Universality and Other Attributes of God in Nature" (1815)), on politics ("On the Causes of Political Degeneracy" (1798)), on nature ("On Observing a Large Red-Streak Apple" (1827)), and on moral and social issues such as his attack on slavery ("To Sir Toby" (1792)). There are also pieces in which Freneau makes a genuine attempt to arrive at universal significance in and through a firm sense of the local. "The Indian Burying Ground" (1788) is an instance, one of the first attempts made by any poet to understand the new country in terms of a people who had themselves become an integral part of it – those who are called here "the ancients of the lands." So is "The Wild Honey Suckle" (1788), in which Freneau focuses his attention on a detail of the American scene, the "fair flower" of the title, and discovers in that detail one possible truth about the American psyche: its fundamental loneliness and privacy, the apartness of what Walt Whitman was to call "the essential me." As Freneau meditates on this one, small, frail plant, that chooses to "shun the vulgar eye" in its "silent, dull retreat," he also adopts a quieter style and more attentive tone. In contrast to the florid gestures of his early couplets, there is an inclination toward a more precise and simpler language here, concrete and appropriate to the delineation of minute particulars. In some of his poetry, at least, Freneau was working toward a form of literary emancipation, an approach and aesthetic less obviously learned from "that damnable place."

This modest degree of success was not achieved by Dwight and Barlow, at least not in what they considered their major work. A grandson of Jonathan Edwards, Dwight wrote much and variously, including some attacks on slavery in both prose and verse. His most ambitious work, however, was a poem written in imitation of the pastoral and elegiac modes of British writers of the Augustan period like Alexander Pope and Oliver Goldsmith. Titled *Greenfield Hill: A Poem in Seven Parts*, it was published in 1794, and it offers an idyllic portrait of life in the American countryside. In and around a "sweet-smiling village," the narrator introduces us to a world where "every farmer reigns a little king," where there are no extremes of wealth or poverty and "one extended class embraces all." The poem becomes a hymn to an ideal of self-reliance and modest sufficiency that Franklin and Jefferson also celebrated. Dwight describes it as "Competence." The hymn allows the narrator to attack various social iniquities in passing – and, in particular, what he calls the "luxury," the

brutishness and inequity, of slavery. Time is also found to look back at the earlier inhabitants of this land, the Native Americans, at their sufferings and eventual eviction. But, despite Dwight's references to "Indian woes," his basic message is that their removal was a necessary step in the march of progress. Sympathy for the defeated and banished Native Americans is qualified by the clearly stated belief that they had to give way to the better and brighter forces of civilization represented by the pilgrims, and then later by other Anglo-Americans. For that matter, celebration of this particular American dream is vitiated by the fact that it is conducted in such conflicted and derivative terms. The poet endorses peace, tranquillity, but also necessary, sometimes violent progress. It speaks approvingly of "Competence," modest sufficiency, but also, and with equal approval, of a kind of survival of the fittest. Also, in a familiar pattern, it uses old forms to write about the new: this hymn to American virtues and uniqueness is sung in a voice that is still definitively European.

That is just as true of the attempts Joel Barlow made at an American epic, *The Vision of Columbus* (1787) and *The Columbiad* (1807). Like Dwight, Barlow was a member of a pro-Federalist group known as the "Connecticut Wits." He traveled and wrote extensively. His work includes a number of patriotic poems ("The Prospect of Peace" (1778)) and poems attacking the monarchism and imperialism of Europe ("Advice to a Raven in Russia: December, 1812" (unpublished until 1938)). His most anthologized piece is "The Hasty Pudding: A Poem in Three Cantos" (1793), a work about home thoughts from abroad that praises Yankee virtues by celebrating a peculiarly Yankee meal. *The Columbiad*, his much revised and extended version of *The Vision of Columbus*, was, however, his stab at a great work. "My object is altogether of a moral and political nature," he announced in the preface to his 1807 epic; "I wish to encourage and strengthen, in the rising generation, a sense of the importance of republican institutions, as being the great foundation of public and private happiness." "This is the moment in America to give such a direction to poetry, painting and the other fine arts," he added, "that true and useful ideas of glory may be implanted in the minds of men here, to take [the] place of the false and destructive ones that have degraded the species in other countries." Barlow was not the first to want to write an American epic. And by his time the idea of announcing the new nation in the form traditionally dedicated to such a project was becoming a commonplace. But this was the first major attempt made to realize this ambition, shared by so many, to see something that memorialized the American nation in verse just as, say, Rome and its founding had been memorialized in the *Aeneid*.

The Columbiad begins in traditional epic fashion: "I sing the Mariner who first unfurl'd / An eastern banner o'er the western world / And taught mankind where future empires lay." Contrary to the impression given by these opening lines, however, Barlow does not go on to sing of the actions of Columbus but rather of the inexorable progress of free institutions in the Americas as he anticipates them. To Columbus, in prison, comes Hesper, the guardian genius of the western continent, who leads him to a mount of vision. The poem then proceeds in a series of visions of the American future, extending forward through colonial and Revolutionary

times to the establishment of peace and the arts in a new America. The final vision is of a time when the American federal system will extend "over the whole earth." The American, we are told, finding "FREEDOM" to be "his new Prometheus," will lead the way to utopia. There, in that blessed future, "one confederate, codependent sway" will "spread with the sun and bound the walks of day"; throughout the globe, "one centred system, one all ruling soul" will "live through the parts and regulate the whole." Here, in the announcement of this ultimate vision, and elsewhere, the tone and style tend toward the declamatory, the derivative and didactic. What is more, the poem as a whole lacks the essential ingredient of epic: a hero, or heroic mind, engaged in heroic action. Columbus cannot be a hero. He is from the beginning completely passive. He observes, he is troubled, he hopes for the future and he is reassured by Hesper. He cannot do anything and is, in fact, closer to being an ideal type of the reader of an American epic than to being a hero. *The Columbiad* clearly poses the problem of how to write a democratic epic, a heroic poem of the common man or woman, but it comes nowhere near solving it. That would have to wait for Walt Whitman and *Leaves of Grass*.

While Joel Barlow was busy trying to write an American epic, Royall Tyler (1756–1826) was devoting his energies to establishing an American tradition in drama. Tyler wrote seven plays, but his reputation rests on *The Contrast*, written in 1787, produced in 1790 and published two years later. The first comedy by someone born in America to receive a professional production, it was hailed by one reviewer as "proof that these new climes are particularly favorable to the cultivation of arts and sciences." *The Contrast* was written after Tyler had attended a performance of *The School for Scandal* by Richard Brinsley Sheridan and is clearly influenced by the English social comedies of the eighteenth century. It is, however, impeccably American in theme, since the contrast of the title is between Bill Dimple, an embodiment of European affectation, and Colonel Manly, a representative of American straightforwardness and republican honesty. The intensely Anglophile Dimple, described by one character as a "flippant, pallid, polite beau," flirts with two women, Letitia and Charlotte, despite the fact that a match has been arranged with a third, Maria van Rough, by her father. Manly, a patriot and veteran of the Revolutionary War, is in love with Maria. And when Dimple, having gambled away his fortune, decides to marry the wealthy Letitia instead, Maria's father, discovering Dimple's baseness, gives his blessing to Manly's suit. Dimple is then finally thwarted in his ambition to cure his insolvency when Letitia learns of his flirtation with Charlotte. And he leaves the scene, ousted but unabashed, underlining the contrast between himself and Manly as he does so. "Ladies and gentlemen," he announces, "I take my leave; and you will please to observe in the case of my deportment the contrast between a gentleman who has … received the polish of Europe and an unpolished, untravelled American."

Manly himself underlines this contrast, through his simplicity and natural gentility of manner and through his comments on the times. In one long speech, for example, he attacks the "luxury" to which, as he sees it, far too many Americans, like Dimple, are prone. The aim of the play is clearly to address the different possibilities

available to the new republic and to promote civic virtue and federal high-mindedness. "Oh! That America! Oh that my country, would, in this her day, learn the things which belong to peace!" Manly prays. And he shows what those "things" are in the impeccable character of his beliefs and behavior. A subplot draws a similar lesson, by presenting another contrast in national manners, between Dimple's servant, the arrogant and duplicitous Jessamy, and Manly's servant, Jonathan, who is a plain, goodhearted, and incorruptible Yankee. It is typical of Jonathan that he refuses, in fact, to be called a servant. "I am Colonel Manly's waiter," he insists. And, when Jessamy snootily suggests that this is "a true Yankee distinction, egad, without a difference," he quickly responds. "I am a true blue son of liberty," Jonathan explains; "father said I should come as Colonel Manly's waiter, to see the world … but no man shall master me. My father has as good a farm as the colonel." In the "Prologue" to *The Contrast*, given to the actor playing Jonathan to recite, the didactic and exemplary purposes of the play are emphasized. "Our Author," the audience is forewarned, has confined himself to "native themes" so as to expose "the fashions and the follies of the times" and celebrate the "genuine sincerity" and "homespun habits" Americans have inherited from their "free-born ancestors." Tyler cannily used social comedy to explore issues that were particularly pressing for his fellow countrymen, with the emergence of a new political and social dispensation. In the process, he produced a work that answers Crèvecoeur's question, "What is an American?," in a clear and thoroughly earnest way, and with an occasional wit that Crèvecoeur himself could hardly have imagined.

The urge to point a moral evident in *The Contrast* is even more openly at work in those books that can lay claim to being the first American novels, *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) by William Hill Brown (1765–1793), *Charlotte Temple* (1794) by Susanna Haswell Rowson (1762–1824), and *The Coquette; or, The History of Eliza Wharton* (1797) by Hannah Webster Foster (1758–1840). *The Power of Sympathy*, the first American novel, was published anonymously to begin with. It was originally attributed to the Boston writer, Sarah Wentworth Morton, because it deals with a contemporary scandal of incest and suicide in the Morton family. It was not until 1894 that Brown, also from Boston, was recognized as the author. An epistolary romance, its didactic purpose is announced in the preface: *The Power of Sympathy* was written, the reader is told, "To Expose the dangerous Consequences of Seduction" and to set forth "the Advantages of Female Education." The main plot deals with a threatened incestuous marriage between two characters called Harrington and Harriet Fawcett. They are both children of the elder Harrington, the first by his legitimate marriage and the second by his mistress Maria. When the relationship is discovered, Harriet dies of shock and sadness and Harrington commits suicide. Hardly distinguished in itself, the book nevertheless establishes a currency common to all three of these early American novels: a clear basis in fact, actuality (so anticipating and meeting any possible objections to fiction, imaginative self-indulgence, or daydreaming), an even clearer moral purpose (so anticipating and meeting any possible objections from puritans or utilitarians), and a narrative that flirts with sensation and indulges in sentiment (so encouraging the reader to read on). Even

more specifically, *The Power of Sympathy* shares the same currency as the books by Rowson and Webster in the sense that it places a young woman and her fate at the center of the narrative, and addresses other young women as the intended recipients of its message. This reflected an economic reality: in the new, vastly expanded literary marketplace of America, as in Europe, women constituted the main readership for fiction. It also, perhaps, had an ideological dimension: the novel was where women, and especially young women, could go to find a dramatic reflection of their problems, economic, social, and moral – some sense, and appreciation, of the way they lived, or had to live, now.

This further dimension is more noticeable, inevitably perhaps, in novels actually written by women. Susanna Haswell Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* was published in London in 1791 and then in the United States three years later, where it became the first American bestseller. By 1933 it had gone through 161 editions; and it has been estimated that it has been read by a quarter to a half million people. In the preface to her novel, Rowson explains that the circumstances in which she founded the novel were related to her by "an old lady who had personally known Charlotte." "I have thrown over the whole a slight veil of fiction," she adds, "and substituted names and places according to my own fancy." And what she has written, she insists, has a fundamentally moral purpose. "For the perusal of the young and thoughtless of the fair sex, this Tale of Truth is designed," Rowson declares. *Charlotte Temple* is "not merely the effusion of Fancy, but … a reality" because it is grounded in fact *and* because it is intended as a manual of conduct, a guide to young women as they negotiate their way through life. "If the following tale should save one hapless fair one from the errors that ruined poor Charlotte," Rowson tells the reader, "then she will pronounce herself happy." The tale that follows this is essentially a simple one. Charlotte, a girl of 15 in a school for young ladies, is seduced by an army officer called Montraville. Montraville is aided by an unscrupulous teacher whom Charlotte trusts, Mlle La Rue. After considerable hesitation, Charlotte elopes with Montraville from England to New York. There, she is deserted by both Montraville and Mlle La Rue, gives birth to a daughter, Lucy, and dies in poverty. What adds force, and a measure of complexity, to the tale are two things: Rowson's consistent habit of addressing the reader and her subtle pointers to the fact that, while Charlotte thinks she is in control of her fate, she fundamentally is not – she is at the mercy of male power and the machinations of others.

"Oh my dear girls – for to such only I am writing," Rowson declares early on in *Charlotte Temple*. That is characteristic: the narrator turns constantly from her young woman character to the young women who are reading her story. As she does so, she underlines Charlotte's innocence, her ignorance. "A young woman is never more in danger than when attempted by a young soldier," she points out; "the mind of youth eagerly catches at promised pleasure," she says elsewhere, "pure and innocent by nature, it thinks not of the dangers lurking beneath … till too late." Charlotte believes in the best intentions of both her teacher and her lover. She is ready to confide in the one, unaware that she is intriguing against her pupil; and she believes she can rely on the goodwill and affection of the other when, as it turns out, he is

ready to use force to impose his will on her. Quite apart from establishing the American blueprint for a long line of stories about a young woman affronting her destiny, this is a subtle acknowledgment of the conflicted position in which young women, rich or poor, found themselves in the new republic. A more fluid social position for wealthy women, and relatively greater economic opportunities for the poorer ones, might persuade them all that they had more control over their destinies. Real control, however, still lay elsewhere. Coming to America does not empower or liberate Charlotte; on the contrary, as Rowson shows, it simply subjects her to the discovery of "the dangers lurking beneath" the surfaces of life. This is melodrama with a purpose. And that purpose, conceived within the sentimental constraints of the time and expressed in its conventional ethical language, is to give the people for whom it was written, the "dear girls" whom the narrator constantly addresses, a way of measuring and meeting their condition as women.

Something similar could be said about a brief novel by Judith Sargent Murray, *The Story of Margaretta* (1798), included in *The Gleaner* essays, in which, in a manner clearly meant to illustrate the author's beliefs, the heroine Margaretta manages to escape the usually dire consequences of seduction, thanks to her superiority of soul and education, and is rewarded with a loving husband. More persuasively and interestingly, it could also be said of *The Coquette*, an epistolary novel and a best-seller for which Hannah Webster Foster was not given credit until 1866. Until then, the author was known simply as "A Lady of Massachusetts." In a series of 74 letters, mainly from the heroine Eliza Wharton to her friend Lucy Freeman, another tale of seduction and abandonment is told. Eliza is the coquette of the title, but she is also a spirited young woman. Thoroughly aware of her own needs and charms, she is unwilling to bury herself in a conventional marriage. She is saved from a match with an elderly clergyman, Mr. Haly, when he dies before her parents can get them both to the altar. Another clergyman, the Reverend Boyer, courts her; however, she finds him dull. She would, she protests, gladly enter the kind of marriage enjoyed by her friends the Richmans, who share "the purest and most ardent affection, the greatest consonance of taste and disposition, and the most congenial virtue and wishes." But such intimacy between equals seems rare to her. "Marriage is the tomb of friendship," she confides to Lucy; "it appears to me a very selfish state. Why do people, in general, as soon as they are married, centre all their cares, and pleasure in their own families?" For now, she declares, "let me … enjoy that freedom which I so highly prize." Longing for adventure, though, she meets the self-confessed "rake" Peter Sanford and is entranced. Boyer, discovering the intimacy between Eliza and Sanford, gives Eliza up. Sanford deserts Eliza for an heiress. Still attracted, Eliza has an affair with Sanford; becoming pregnant, she leaves home and friends, and dies in childbirth; and Sanford, now finally admitting that Eliza was "the darling of my soul," leaves his wife and flees the country. The customary claim that the entire story was "founded on fact" is made by the author – and naturally so, since it was based on the experiences of a distant cousin. So is the customary invocation of moral purpose. What stays in the reader's mind, however, is the adventurous spirit of the heroine, despite its tragic, or rather melodramatic, consequences. "From the melancholy

story of Eliza Warton," the novel concludes, "let the American fair learn to reject with disdain every insinuation derogatory to their true dignity and honor. … To associate is to approve; to approve is to be betrayed!" That may be one thematic level of *The Coquette*. But another, slyly subverting it, is Eliza's quest for freedom: her clearsighted recognition of what marriage entails for most women, given the laws and customs of the day, and her ardent longing for what she calls "opportunity, unbiassed by opinion, to gratify my disposition." On this level, *The Coquette* charts the difference between what women want and what they are likely to get. In the process, it poses a question to be explored more openly and fundamentally in many later American narratives: is it possible for an individual to remain free in society or to survive outside it?

Social questions about the new American republic were at the center of another significant prose narrative of this period, *Modern Chivalry* by Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1746–1816). Published in instalments between 1792 and 1815, *Modern Chivalry* was later described by Henry Adams as "a more thoroughly American book than any written before 1833." Its American character does not spring from its narrative structure, however, which is picaresque and clearly borrowed from the Spanish author Cervantes, but from its location and themes. The book is set in rural Pennsylvania and offers the first extended portrait of backwoods life in American fiction. Its two central characters are Captain John Farrago and his Irish servant Teague O'Regan, American versions of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. And, as they travel around, their adventures provide an occasion for satirizing the manners of post-Revolutionary America. Farrago is a rather stuffy, aristocratic landowner, but narrative sympathy tends to be with him, or at least with his politics, since he is presented as an intelligent democrat, part Jeffersonian and part independent, inclining to the ideas of Thomas Paine. O'Regan, on the other hand, is portrayed as a knave and a fool, whose extraordinary self-assurance stems from his ignorance. At every stage of their journey, the two men meet some foolish group that admires O'Regan and offers him opportunities – as preacher, Indian treaty maker, potential husband for a genteel young lady – for which he is totally unequipped. The captain then has to invent excuses to stop such honors being bestowed on his servant; and each adventure is followed by a chapter of reflection on the uses and abuses of democracy. The satirical edge of *Modern Chivalry* anticipates the later Southwestern humorists. The disquisitions on democracy, in turn, reflect debates occurring at the time over the possible direction of the American republic. A notable contribution to these debates were the series of essays now called the *Federalist* papers (1787–1788) written by Alexander Hamilton (1757–1804), John Jay (1745–1829), and James Madison (1751–1836). The authors of these essays argued that, since people were "ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious," a strong central government was required to control "factions and convulsions." Furthermore, Madison (who was, in fact, a friend of Brackenridge) insisted that, in order to control faction without forfeiting liberty, it was necessary to elect men "whose wisdom," as Madison put it, "may best discern the true interests of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice, will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial

considerations." *Modern Chivalry* tends toward similar conclusions. The portrait of Teague O'Regan, after all, betrays the same distrust as the *Federalist* papers do of what Hamilton and his colleagues called "theoretic politicians" who believed that faction could be cured by "reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights." In the novel and in the papers, there is the same suspicion of populism, of ordinary people denied the guidance and control of their natural leaders, and a similar need to emphasize what Madison chose to term "the great points of difference between a Democracy and a Republic."

Brackenridge was not a professional author – he earned his living as a lawyer – and neither were William Hill Brown, Rowson, and Foster; the person who has earned the title of first in this category in America is Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810), although it is now fairly clear that Brown was one among several men and women who labored between 1776 and 1810 to earn their income from their writings. Under the influence of the English writer William Godwin, Brown wrote and published *Alcuin: A Dialogue* (1798), a treatise on the rights of women. Then, further stimulated by Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams* and his own critical ideas about fiction, he wrote his four best novels in just two years: *Wieland; or, The Transformation* (1798), *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799–1800), *Ormond; or, The Secret Witness* (1799), and *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799). All four reveal a confluence of influences: to the moral and social purpose of Godwin was added the sentimentalism and interest in personal psychology of the English novelist Samuel Richardson and, above all perhaps, the horrors and aberrations of the Gothic school of fiction. To this was added Brown's own sense of critical mission. He believed in writing novels that would be both intellectual and popular, that would stimulate debate among the thoughtful, while their exciting plots and often bizarre or romantic characters would attract a larger audience. Brown was also strongly committed to using distinctively American materials: in the preface to *Edgar Huntly*, for example, he talks about rejecting "superstitious and exploded manners, Gothic castles and chimeras" in favor of "incidents of Indian hostility and perils of the Western Wilderness." The result of these ambitions and influences is a series of books that translate the Gothic into an American idiom, and that combine sensational elements such as murder, insanity, sexual aggression, and preternatural events with brooding explorations of social, political, and philosophical questions. These books also make art out of the indeterminate: the reader is left at the end with the queer feeling that there is little, perhaps nothing, a person can trust – least of all, the evidence of their senses.

Brown's first novel, *Wieland*, is a case in point. The older Wieland, a German mystic, emigrates to Pennsylvania, erects a mysterious temple on his estate, and dies there one night of spontaneous combustion. His wife dies soon afterwards, and their children Clara and the younger Wieland become friends with Catharine Pleyel and her brother Henry. Wieland marries Catharine, and Clara falls in love with Henry, who has a fiancée in Germany. A mysterious stranger called Carwin then enters the circle of friends; and, shortly after, a series of warnings are heard from unearthly voices. Circumstances, or perhaps the voices, persuade Henry that Clara and Carwin

are involved with each other; he returns to his fiancée and marries her. Wieland, inheriting the fanaticism of his father, is evidently driven mad by the voices and murders his wife and children. Carwin then confesses to Clara that he produced the voices by the "art" of *biloquium*, a form of ventriloquism that enables him to mimic the voices of others and project them over some distance. He was "without malignant intentions," he claims, and was simply carried away by his curiosity and his "passion for mystery." Wieland, escaping from an asylum, is about to murder Clara when Carwin, using his "art" for the last time, successfully orders him to stop. The unhappy madman then commits suicide, Carwin departs for a remote area of Pennsylvania, and Clara marries Henry Pleyel after the death of his first wife. These are the bare bones of the story, but what gives those bones flesh is the sense that the characters, and for that matter the reader, can never be quite sure what is the truth and what is not. Brown, for instance, was one of the first American writers to discover the uses of the unreliable narrator. Carwin professes the innocence of his intentions, but he also talks about being driven by a "mischievous daemon." More to the point, the entire novel is cast in the form of a letter from Clara, the last surviving member of the Wieland family, to an unnamed friend. And Clara does not hesitate to warn the reader that she is not necessarily to be trusted as a reporter of events. "My narrative may be invaded by inaccuracy and confusion," she confesses. "What but ambiguities, abruptness, and dark transitions, can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters?"

The indeterminacy goes further. "Ideas exist in our minds that can be accounted for by no established laws," Clara observes. And it is never quite clear, not only whether or not she and Carwin are telling the truth, but how complicit Henry Pleyel and the younger Wieland are with the voices they hear. In his portraits of Henry and Wieland, Brown is exploring the two prevailing systems of thought in early America: respectively, the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the mysticism of Christianity. He is also casting both into doubt. When Henry "overhears" something that suggests Carwin and Clara are having an affair, he is convinced, he later admits, "by … the testimony of my ears." He has become accustomed to trusting the evidence of his senses, even though in this case – and many others, Brown intimates – that evidence is wrong. Similarly, when Wieland hears what he takes to be the voice of God commanding him to kill his family as proof of his faith, he eagerly accepts the command. Just as it remains unclear whether or not the voice commanding Wieland has been projected by Carwin with malignant or innocent intention, so it is equally unclear whether or not, given his fanaticism and the history of fanaticism in his family, Wieland would have killed in any event. All that is clear is how unstable the instruments of reason and faith are, and how little we can believe what our senses or our more spiritual premonitions tell us. Like other authors of the time, Brown liked to emphasize that his fictions were based on fact. He pointed out, in his prefatory "Advertisement" for his first novel, that there had recently been "an authentic case, remarkably similar to Wieland." Similarly, in both *Ormond* and *Arthur Mervyn*, he made use of an outbreak of yellow fever that had actually occurred in Philadelphia in 1793; and in *Edgar Huntly* he relied not only on familiar settings, but on the

contemporary interest in such diverse topics as Indians and somnambulism. What Brown built on this base, however, was unique: stories that were calculated to melt down the barrier between fact and fiction by suggesting that every narrative, experience, or judgment is always and inevitably founded on quite uncertain premises and assumptions.

Brown was read eagerly by a number of other, distinguished writers of the time, among them Sir Walter Scott, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. But he never achieved the wider popularity he desired. He wrote two other novels, *Clara Howard* (1801) and *Jane Talbot* (1801), in an apparent attempt to exploit the growing market for sentimental fiction. These were similarly unsuccessful. So, more and more, he turned to journalism to earn a living. In 1799 he founded the *Monthly Magazine and American Review*, which collapsed within a year. He then edited the *Literary Magazine and American Register* from 1803 until 1807, which was more successful. *Memoirs of Carwin*, a sequel to *Wieland*, began to appear in this periodical, but the story remained unfinished at the time of his death. In the last years of his life his interest turned more to politics and history, a shift marked by his starting the semiannual *American Register, or General Repository of History, Politics, and Science*. Deprived of the popularity and income that he craved during his lifetime, Brown has continued to receive less than his due share of attention. This is remarkable, not least because he anticipates so much of what was to happen in American fiction in the nineteenth century. His fascination with aberrant psychology, deviations in human thought and behavior, foreshadows the work of Edgar Allan Poe; so, for that matter, does his use of slippery narrators. His use of symbolism, and his transformation of Gothic into a strange, surreal mix of the extraordinary and the everyday, prepares the way for the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. Even his relocation of incidents of peril and adventure to what was then the Western wilderness clears a path for the romances of James Fenimore Cooper. Written at the turn of the century, the four major novels of Brown look back to the founding beliefs of the early republic and the founding patterns of the early novel. They also look forward to a more uncertain age, when writers were forced to negotiate a whole series of crises, including the profound moral, social, and political crisis that was to eventuate in civil war. The subtitle of the first novel Brown ever wrote, but never published, was "The Man Unknown to Himself." That captures the indeterminism at the heart of his work. It also intimates a need that was to animate so much later American writing, as it engaged, and still does, in a quest for identity, personal and national – a way of making the unknown known.