

# I

## The First Americans

### *American Literature During the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods*

#### 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 Country,” to quote one early, English settler, “so preserved by Nature out of a desire to show mankind fallen into the Old Age of Creation, what a brow of fertility and beauty she was adorned with when the world was vigorous and youthful.” 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.

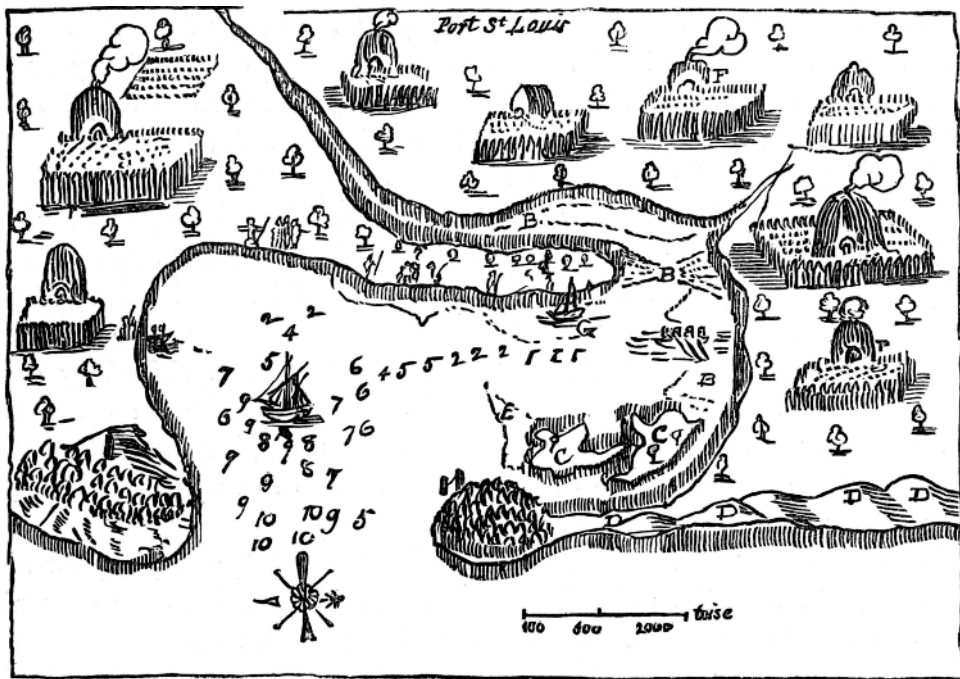
#### Writing of the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods

##### Puritan narratives

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 Iriquois 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. Dominant that vision was, though, and in its English forms, along with the writings of John Smith (1580–1631), 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.” 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 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, 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



**Figure 1.1** Samuel de Champlain's 1605 map of Plymouth Harbor where the Pilgrim Fathers landed. The Granger Collection/Topfoto.

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 Pecquot tribe, and the burning of their village, by the English. 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 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 that was to become characteristic of narratives dramatizing the pursuit of dreams in America. It also pushes *Of Plymouth Plantation* towards 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 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. 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; “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 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.

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 towards 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.” 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.

### **Challenges to the Puritan oligarchy**

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.” 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 “City 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, Morton and his companions cavorted “like so many fairies, or furies, rather.” 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 are said to 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. 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 pled 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. 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; “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’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 measure 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.” 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. A simple diction, driving rhythms, and 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. 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 smooth 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, the language and habits of everyday and the apprehension of eternity. 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. The letter "A," for example, was introduced through the rhyme, "In *Adams* Fall/We sinned all." Clearly, the *Primer* sprang from a belief in the value of widespread literacy as a means of achieving public order and personal salvation. 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

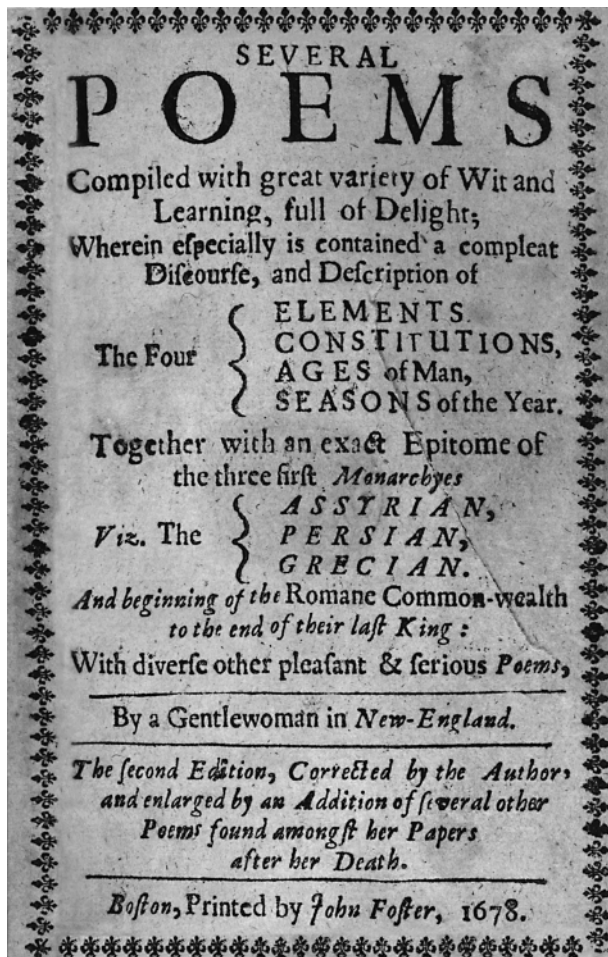


Figure 1.2 Title page of *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* by Anne Bradstreet, Boston, 1678. © The British Library Board. C.39.b.48(1).

primary duties were to her family, as housekeeper, wife, and mother. Bradstreet raised eight children. Despite this, she 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.

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"). 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."

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 towards 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"), and emblematic, allegorical accounts of the smaller creatures of nature and domestic objects ("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 emblemize: 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 perchance 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 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 thirty-five 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. 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.

Taylor belongs in a great tradition of meditative writing, 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 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.

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 200 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. 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 despatched 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.

But Cotton Mather was more than just the author of one of the first American versions of the conspiracy theory. He produced over 400 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.” 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*.” 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 Desert*” 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.” 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 towards the secular and resistance**

The travel journals of two other writers, 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.” 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 Sumptuous city, fill’d with famous Buildings and churches.” 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



1777 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,” another great landowner, Robert “King” Carter (1663–1732), wrote 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 the garden of the South in his letters suggest, 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 once 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.

Byrd is mainly remembered now for *The History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, the 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 is. 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. 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. In the process, they had an enormous impact on how writers write and many others talk about one vital part of the American nation.

The trend towards the secular in the work of Knight and Byrd is also noticeable in the poetry of the period. 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. 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, towards the end of the eighteenth century, at a more specifically poetic epic in *Vision of Columbus*. 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 700 lines later. “Embarqu’d and waiting for a Wind, / I left this dreadful Curse behind,” he declares, damning America as he departs. 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 a 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. 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. 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 towards 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; 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 towards 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; 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 the better to understand the emotional experience of converts. 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 towards 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. Edwards’s relation to the prevailing rationalism of his times certainly drew him towards complex philosophical argument. 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 damnation and redemption.

A sermon like Edwards’s most well-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. 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 Pierrepont. 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.

### **Towards 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.” 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.” 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 re-education 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 forty-two, 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, *Poor Richard’s Almanack*. Almanacs were popular in early America, their principal purpose being to supply farmers 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.” 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, and 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 made 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. 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 at the heart of the American Revolution from its origins to its conclusions. And he shows, more clearly than any other figure of the time does, 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 emblemized, 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 Crevecoeur (1735–1813) in his *Letters from an American Farmer*, published in 1782. Answering his own question, Crevecoeur 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. Crevecoeur 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

abolishing our most <sup>valuable</sup> charters & <sup>altering</sup> <sup>subverting</sup> <sup>undermining</sup> <sup>fundamentally</sup> the forms of our government  
 for suspending our own legislatures & declaring themselves invested with power to  
 legislate for us in all cases whatsoever  
 he has abdicated government here, [withdrawing his governors, & declaring us out  
 of his allegiance & protection]  
 he has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns & destroyed the  
 lives of our people  
 he is at this time transporting large <sup>sold and other</sup> armies of foreign mercenaries to complete  
 the work of <sup>war</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>most</sup> <sup>barbarous</sup> <sup>ages</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>world</sup>  
 by exciting & perpetrating on the heads of a civilized nation  
 he has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian  
 savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of  
 all ages, sexes & conditions of existence  
 he has incited treacherous insurrections of our fellow citizens, with the  
<sup>aid</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>foreign</sup> <sup>armies</sup> <sup>&</sup> <sup>encouragements</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>our</sup> <sup>people</sup>  
 he has waged <sup>war</sup> <sup>against</sup> <sup>human</sup> <sup>nature</sup> <sup>itself</sup>, violating its most sa-  
 cred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never of-  
 fended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemi-  
 sphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This  
 piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the  
 Christian King of Great Britain, determined to keep open a market  
 where MEN should be bought & sold. he has prostituted his negative  
 for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this  
 detestable <sup>trade</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>slavery</sup> <sup>where</sup> <sup>men</sup> <sup>should</sup> <sup>be</sup> <sup>bought</sup> <sup>&</sup> <sup>sold</sup>:  
 he has endeavored to spread <sup>the</sup> <sup>influence</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>most</sup> <sup>degrading</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>dishonorable</sup> <sup>trade</sup>  
 of distinction, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms  
 against us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them,  
 by <sup>promising</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>same</sup> <sup>liberty</sup> <sup>upon</sup> <sup>which</sup> <sup>he</sup> <sup>also</sup> <sup>obtained</sup> <sup>them</sup>, thus <sup>paying</sup> <sup>off</sup>  
 former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes  
 which he urges them to commit against the lives of another  
 in every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble  
 terms; our repeated petitions have been answered <sup>only</sup> by repeated injuries, a prince  
 whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit  
 to be the ruler of a people [who mean to be free]. future ages will scarce believe  
 that the hardiness of one man, adventured within the short compass of twelve years  
 to <sup>the</sup> <sup>provision</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>total</sup> <sup>liberty</sup> <sup>for</sup> <sup>humanity</sup>  
<sup>only</sup> <sup>with</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>aid</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>strength</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>people</sup> <sup>fastened</sup> <sup>&</sup> <sup>fixed</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>minors</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>liberty</sup> <sup>&</sup> <sup>freedom</sup>

**Figure 1.3** First draft of the Declaration of Independence, in the handwriting of Thomas Jefferson with alterations and corrections in the handwriting of Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin. Fragment (page 3) of Original Rough Draft, June 1776. Thomas Jefferson Papers, Manuscript Division. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

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.” “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.” The American 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. 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 towards 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 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," Paine declares, "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. 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; and he was condemned to live 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." 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 were 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 the famous assertion that “those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, . . . whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue”: which is, perhaps, 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 towards women. But he insisted on their primitive strength, “their bravery and address in war” and “their eminence in oratory.” 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.”

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 towards 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, involving gradual emancipation. 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.’” 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.” 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 quality. “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 the writings of 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.

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 Sargent 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. “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*. 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.” 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 Americans 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 sixteen. 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.

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 1783), begins by quoting the Declaration of Independence to the effect that "all men are created Equal" with "Certain 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." 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. 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." And

Haynes 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 yokes.”

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.” 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.” 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. Then, as Equiano tells it, came the fall. At the age of eleven, he was seized from his family and sold into slavery. Taken to the African coast, he was terrified by the sight of white people. 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 blacks and the brutality of the whites. 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.

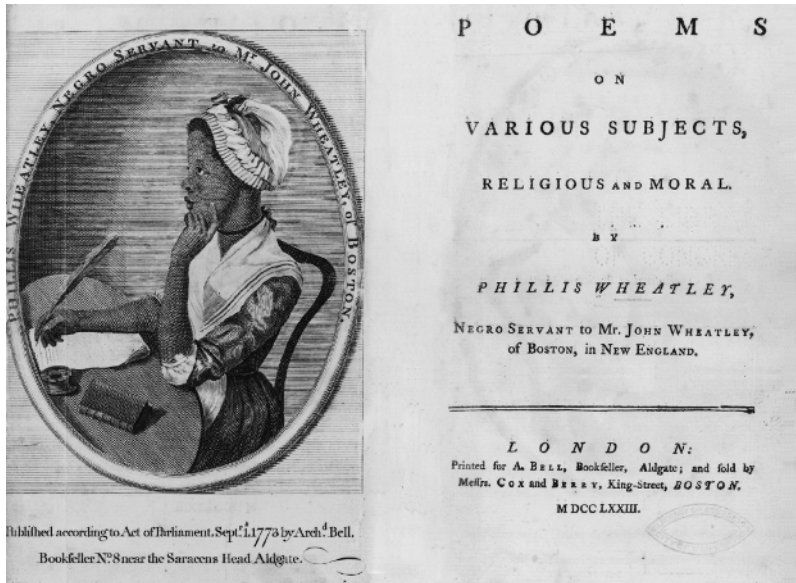
### Writing revolution: Poetry, drama, fiction

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 (1730–1821), an African slave who eventually settled as a free black in Vermont, had become known earlier for a poem called “Bars Fight,” which records a battle between whites and Indians. But Terry’s poem was handed down in the oral tradition until 1855. Hammon was the first African American poet to have his work published. Born a slave, Hammon published a broadside, *Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, With Penitential Cries*, a series of twenty-two 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.” 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 America 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 seven years old, and the Countess of Huntingdon. It was with their help that her *Poems on Various Subjects* 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 towards 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 (“Phillis’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: all of which 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). 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. 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



**Figure 1.4** Title page and frontispiece of *Poems on Various Subjects* by Phillis Wheatley, 1773. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

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,” 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. In effect, *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. 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, a more attentive tone and simpler language. In some of his poetry, at least, Freneau was working towards 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. 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.” But the 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, tranquility 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.” 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. Even the congenitally cautious and skeptical John Adams could dream of such a thing. 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.” Here, in the announcement of this ultimate vision, and elsewhere, the tone and style tend towards 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 deparment 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. 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. 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 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 on 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. The tale that follows this is essentially a simple one. Charlotte, a girl of fifteen 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. 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 bestseller 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 seventy-four 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, 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.” Longing for adventure, 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 clear-sighted 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.” *Modern Chivalry* tends towards 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); 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. And 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 *bilquium*, 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.

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. 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 for 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.

