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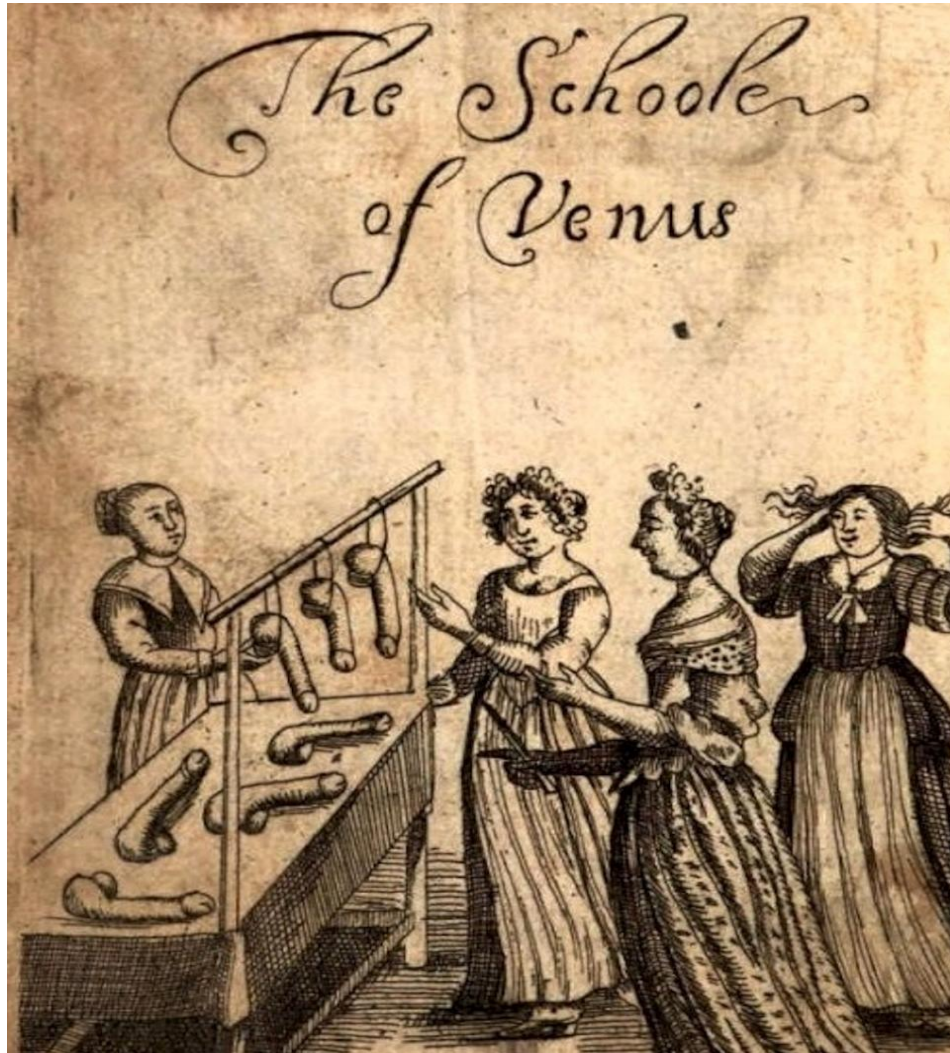
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“Members” of Christ: Myth, Morals, and Masculinity in Puritan New England

Rebecca Farias



*Figure 1: Michel Millot's 1655 sex manual, *The Schoole of Venus: The Ladies Delight, Reduced into Rules of Practice*. While respectable Puritans probably would not have read *Venus*, the proliferation of erotic material shows that sex had entered mainstream dialogue in early modern England.*

Dr. Charlotte Carrington-Farmer

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Introduction: Puritans in Context



Figure 2: Puritan illustration satirizing the rise of Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, far left, ca. 1630s.

“Some rise by sin and some by virtue fall,” explains the pragmatic Escalus to the lustful antagonist Angelo in Shakespeare’s 1604 drama, *Measure for Measure*.¹ The play capitalized on one of the most contentious debates of Queen Elizabeth I’s reign: the increasingly ambiguous nature of sexual morality in England. *Measure* features the betrothed couple Claudio and Juliet, who are virtuous except for the fact that they have engaged in premarital sex, not only considered a cultural taboo but a breach of official English law. Angelo, a deputy and “man of stricture,” contradicts his values and station by arranging a tryst with Claudio’s sister in exchange for Juliet’s pardon, causing his own downfall.² Elizabethan audiences could infer from Angelo’s example that men of virtue must not fall victim to sexual vice, the exact nature of which was left up to popular question.

Shakespeare undoubtedly drew inspiration from the recent agitations of the Puritans, an oppressed minority of zealous Protestant reformers. Scourged as “Precisionists” by the unappreciative mainstream Protestants and Catholics alike, radical Puritans demanded a complete liturgical and moral overhaul of the Church and secular society.³ Their worldview saw the universe as locked in a paradox, an eternal struggle between good and evil, God and the Devil. The Puritans themselves were God’s arbiters of good against the pervasiveness of sin within society and within the soul of the individual, forever susceptible to evil.

Although the Puritans tended to avoid written creeds and formalized doctrine, English Puritan thinkers gathered in the Cambridge Synod of 1646-1648 to codify a

¹ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), II.i.40.

² Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2002), 1-2.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

“confession of faith” to justify their existence to the rest of Europe. The surviving documents show the Puritans’ devotion to God as servants eternally bound in a sacred covenant, a mentality which would characterize their colonization efforts in the New World:

The distance between God and the creature is so great that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to Him as their creator, yet they could have never attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.⁴

Most Puritans traced their religious ideology to John Wycliffe, an English theologian and dissenter who promoted predestination. The core belief of Puritan spirituality, predestination held that men and women were selected by God before birth as members of the “elect” destined for salvation and unity with God. Individuals were utterly and irreversibly depraved during earthly life because of the Original Sin of Adam and Eve described in the Christian creation story within the Book of Genesis. Therefore, Puritans



⁴ Willis

depended entirely on God to randomly elect them as “saints” or damn them to hell for their sins. The Synod explains the Puritan rejection of the concept of free will in favor of God’s individualized interference: “They whom God hath accepted . . . can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace . . . This perseverance of the saints depends not on their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, from the free and unchangeable love of God.”⁵ Despite a lack of agency, Puritans still aspired to live morally to prove to themselves and their peers that they were worthy of salvation. A captioned ink drawing of a chariot battle from the 1560 Geneva Bible, which the New England Puritans brought from England to the colonies, reflects their yearning for personal salvation: “FEAR YE NOT, STAND STIL, AND BEHOLDE the salvation of the Lord, which he will shewe to you this day. THE LORD SHALL FIGHT FOR YOU; THEREFORE holde you your peace -Exodus 14:13-14.”⁶

Figure 3: Chariot battle illustration, Geneva Bible, c. 1650.

Mainstream Protestants embraced predestination to various degrees, but what truly marked Puritans as the “hotter sort of Protestants” was their rejection of the doctrine of the “covenant of works” in favor of the “covenant of grace.” This doctrine followed the tradition of Swiss theologian Jean Calvin, who inspired the Calvinist strain of Protestantism.⁷ While other Protestants and Catholics believed that good works garnered

⁵ Ibid., 382.

⁶ Christine Heyerman, “Puritanism and Predestination,” (National Humanities Center, 2008), <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/eighteen/ekeyinfo/puritan.htm>. Accessed 4 January 2019.

⁷ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies*, (New York: Penguin, 2001), 112.

God's favor and thus increased their chance of entering Heaven, radical Puritans believed in the gift of salvation through God's freely-given grace alone. Actions, whether immoral or moral, could not alter God's eternal plan for all members of humanity. Those elected by God for salvation could not resist- to reject God's will was an impossibility.⁸

Thomas Hooker, prominent magistrate and "Father" of the Connecticut Colony, explained the significance of the subject in his 1649 collection of sermons, *The Covenant of Grace Opened*: "First, what is meant by the covenant of grace?...It is the special communication of God to a people that he will choose by which he engages himself to be their God, and to make them to be his people."⁹ The Puritans were not only chosen by God: according to Hooker, they were bound by an "inward" covenant to "have an interest in God" and an "outward" covenant to become a "choice people" by answering God's laws and modeling their society by Protestant Scripture and faith traditions.¹⁰

Puritans ascribed to the teachings of German dissenter Martin Luther, father of the Protestant Reformation. In 1517, Luther published the *95 Theses*, the famous public condemnation of the Catholic church, lambasting, among other grievances, the politicized hierarchy of bishops and priests and the sale of indulgences to relieve sin.¹¹ Luther's teachings are summarized as follows: "They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clicks into the money chest, the soul flies out of Purgatory...No one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition."¹² Besides their condemnation of the Catholic Church's frivolities and "popery," Puritans also heeded Luther's teachings on the

⁸ Charlotte Carrington-Farmer, "Puritanism: Background Information," (Roger Williams University: 2019).

⁹ Thomas Hooker, *The Covenant of Grace Opened*, (Puritan Publications, 2013).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 162.

¹² Martin Luther, *The 95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*, (1517), 27-30.

necessity of reading the Bible daily, which made the Puritans an especially literate culture among their peers. John Cotton, preeminent theologian of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, advised his people to “FEED upon the WORD.”¹³ Cotton Mather, another famous Massachusetts Bay theologian, wrote, “Let not a day ordinarily pass you wherein you will not read some portion of [the Bible].”¹⁴

Chapter 1: The Plight of the Dissidents

¹³ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as they Really Were*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 1986), 139.

¹⁴ Ibid.



Figure 4: Seventeenth-century North American depiction of a fornicating Puritan couple

I. Rejection of Normality

The tumultuous antebellum period preceding the English Civil War both created the Puritans as a distinct group and made victims of them, which drove their movement to colonize current-day North America. In 1534, King Henry VIII, with the blessing of Parliament's Act of Supremacy, became the head of the independent Church of England, the Anglican church. After the schism, the English monarch commanded a hierarchy of two archbishops, twenty-six bishops, and approximately eight thousand, six hundred parish clergymen in England and Wales. Such exploitation of God's word and the complex hierarchy scandalized the Puritans. Overall, Puritans sought an intimate relationship with God, unmarred by the interference of churches and ecclesiastical hierarchies. But, since the king was head of church and state, Puritan religious dissent "smacked of treason as well as heresy" and put dissenters in danger of being accused of heresy, which could spell disenfranchisement, exile, or death.¹⁵

Roger Williams, theological scholar and future founder of the Rhode Island Colony, reflected on England's upheaval, and the heretical conversions it forced, in his 1645 critique *Christenings Make Not Christians*:

When England was all Popish under Henry the seveneth, how easie is conversion wrought to half Papist half-Protestant under Henry the eight?...From halfe-Proestantisme halfe-Poery under Henry the eight, to absolute Protestanisme under Edward the sixth: from absoluer Protestation under Edward the sixt to absolute popery undet Quegne Mary (just like the Weather-cocke, with the breaty of every Prince) to absolute Protestanisme under Queen Elizabeth &c.¹⁶

Thus, the Crown wielded the Anglican Church to reinforce social conformity, which aggrieved the Puritan minority and marked them as targets of political ire. Church

¹⁵ Taylor, *The American Colonies*, 160.

¹⁶ Roger Williams, *Christenings make not Christians*, (Early English Books Online: 1645), 22.

courts without juries allowed leaders to extort funding and punish dissidents like the Puritans, and local legal authorities swayed parish ministers to preach in support of political issues. For example, in 1620, King James I demanded the preaching of sermons against “the insolency of our [Puritan] women and their wearing of broad-brimmed hats” and claimed he would “harry” Puritans out of England.¹⁷ A severe economic depression and a job shortage among the poor and middle class, in addition to subsequent rise in crime, compounded the social confusion within England. The privilege and favoritism of English monopolies and royal patronage within Parliament led to divisions between royal prerogative courts and the supporters of common law courts.

The English Church, formerly a tolerant body, achieved a new height of ecclesiastical absolutism under Archbishop William Laud, appointed by Charles I as head of the Church in 1633. Laud became an especially notorious critic of the Puritans, and in turn became the subject of their vitriol. Laud made public scapegoats of this minority group. He claimed their reform efforts were an overzealous attempt to destabilize the Crown. The Puritans retaliated by accusing Laud of attempting to reintroduce Catholicism to England, citing, for instance, Laud’s decree that wooden altars should be replaced by stone altars.¹⁸ Those who refused Laud’s decrees faced imprisonment, torture, banishment, or sometimes inglorious public death as a heretic or treasonous criminal.

Williams epitomized the overall Puritan sentiment: hatred of Laud and every crushing law he tried to enforce. After deciding that England was too dangerous, Williams and his second wife Mary fled to Massachusetts with their fellow Puritans,

¹⁷ Sarah Vowell, *The Wordy Shipmates*, (New York: Riverhead, 2008), 8.

¹⁸ “William Laud,” *Spartacus Educational*, (2016). <https://spartacus-educational.com/STUlaud.htm>. Accessed 4 January 2020.

hoping to form a safe “New” England. Williams later reflected a widespread Puritan prejudice in *Christenings*: Bishop Laud pursued him “out of this Land” and Williams’ “Conscience was perswaded” not only against Bishops but also against “the Nationall Church and Ceremonies.”¹⁹ A satirical drawing of Laud eating outspoken Puritan William Prynne’s ears even appeared in an English newspaper. Although Laud was no cannibal, in 1637 Prynne and other dissenters had their ears lopped off for criticizing Laud in writing. The image shows that England had become so religiously polarized that dissenters were willing to make a treacherous eight to ten week journey across the Atlantic to pursue freedom of worship and bodily safety.²⁰

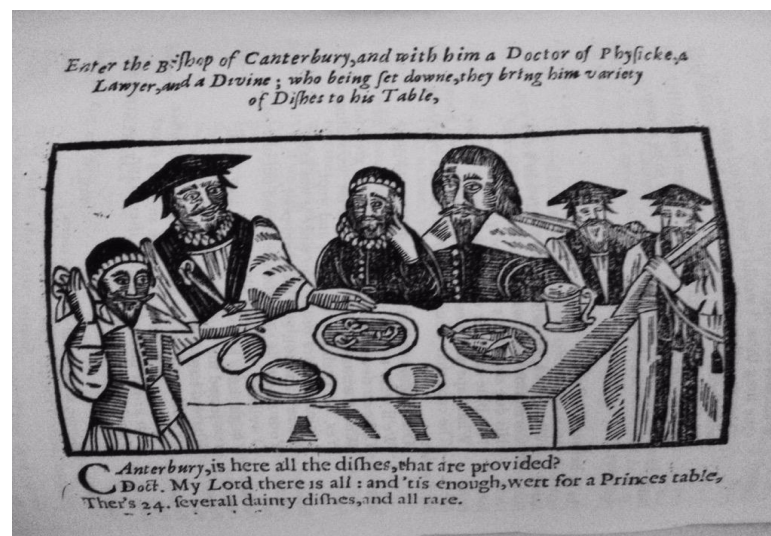


Figure 5: 1637 English cartoon depicting Laud as a cannibal

Chapter 2: Coming to the New World

¹⁹ Williams, *Christenings Make Not Christians*.

²⁰ Ibid.



Figure 6: John Winthrop (1588-1649), first Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony and instrumental Puritan idealist.

I. Honing the Puritan Ideology

Puritan dissenters, unable to freely practice their ideology, couched their political concerns in religious terms. Puritans were thus considered political, spiritual, and economic threats to the English norm: a potentially deadly combination, especially after Laud declared a campaign for “total victory” over nonconformists.²¹ Until the end of the 1620s, the Puritans had believed they could redeem a Hell-bound England from within its continental borders, catalyzing moral reform by example. Now, devastated by the fines, harassment, and forced expulsion from universities and church appointments, some prominent Puritans demanded justice. A group of prominent gentrymen headed by John White created the Massachusetts Bay Company to meet the radical Puritans’ needs.

White’s vision, while mainly centered on economic investment, attracted John Winthrop. He believed that the spiritual and material survival of the Puritans in America would be much better assured than that of their predecessors, the Pilgrims. In a secret conspiracy known as the Cambridge Agreement, Winthrop and twenty-seven compatriots voted that the charter for the possession of the land and government of the new colony should be legally transferred into their own hands. Word of the proposed voyage spread among Puritan families throughout the minor gentry and yeoman farming communities. Much of England remained unaware of this budding migration, but in the spring of 1630, the “Winthrop Fleet” gathered at Southampton and Plymouth had amassed more than one thousand passengers.²² The civil government of the commonwealth, grounded in the theocratic authority of the colonies, was designed to promulgate and enforce public and personal morality.

²¹ Richard Brown, *Massachusetts: A Concise History*. (Amherst: UMASS, 2000), 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

The Puritan political worldview and mission was reflected most famously in lawyer and future governor John Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" sermon, popularly known as the "City Upon a Hill" speech.²³ According to a groundbreaking 2013 article by historian Abram C. Van Engen, the textual and material origins of this treasured speech are actually up to question. There is no original manuscript, and the cover page appears to have been composed by someone else. It is unclear as to if Winthrop read the speech aboard the *Arabella*, as tradition claims, or if he read it to his followers on land much before the Puritans left for the New World. Furthermore, Engen argues that Winthrop did not draw his source material from the King James Bible, as some have assumed, but from the "stalwart" Geneva Bible, to which the Puritans adhered and brought with them to the colonies.²⁴ The very structure of "Charity," in addition to the actual phrasing, reflects the Puritan need to form a family-like political and religious group, a minority against the pressures of the outside world.

His pointedly Puritan choice of biblical source material colors the modern historian's interpretation of the text, and thus raises questions about re-interpreting the Puritan leaders' aspirations for their New World order and the familial "unity of their new society."²⁵ Among other significant findings, Van Engen argues that it is important to recognize Winthrop's usage of the Geneva Bible, because this particular translation justifies resisting authority, like the Puritans resisted Catholicism and the monarchy (the

²³ John Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity*, (Casaarts.org: 1630), <https://www.casa-arts.org/cms/lib/PA01925203/Centricity/Domain/50/A%20Model%20of%20Christian%20Charity.pdf>. Accessed 4 January 2020.

²⁴ Abram Van Engen, "Origins and Last Farewells: Bible Wars, Textual Form, and the Making of American History." *New England Quarterly* 86 (2013).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 543.

word “tyrant” is mentioned several times in the Geneva Bible but does not exist in the King James Version) and that these political undertones helped unify readers into something of a familial structure. These aspects of the speech would be overlooked if the source material was erroneously assumed to be the King James Version. For example, in several publication versions, such as the 1650 edition, the inside title page of the Geneva Bible features an illustration of Moses parting the Red Sea for the Israelites to flee under God’s protection. The illustration includes a representation of God’s presence beckoning the Israelites to the safety of a new land, where they will be set apart to make an example for all people. The Geneva Bible’s framing of Moses and the Israelites would become a clear cultural parallel exploited by Winthrop in his sermon. He ends the speech by referencing Moses’ farewell exhortation:

But if our hearts turn away, soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worshipp and serue other Gods, our pleasure and proffitts, and serve them, it is propounded unto us this day, wee shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possesse it.²⁶

This passage is loaded with political and spiritual meaning. Winthrop hammers home the idea featured throughout the sermon that the Puritans are like a family because they are a small group hand-selected by God, fleeing persecution, but destined to humbly lead the rest of the world. With the repeated use of the word “we,” Winthrop draws his audience into a sense of commonwealth and relation. When he references passing “over this vast sea,” his audience would have clearly understood the fortuitous parallel to founding a settlement in the New World, especially if he did deliver the speech aboard the *Arabella*.

²⁶ Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity.”

In a similar fashion, Winthrop repeats the trope of the “Members of Christ” where “loue and affection are reciprocal in a most equall and sweete kinde of commerce.”²⁷ Contrary to some interpretations, Winthrop and the Puritan leaders did not want to abolish social class and distinction. However, his insistence on brotherly love and unity within Christ shows that Winthrop is trying to frame the entire settlement as one large family under God.

Puritans settled in Massachusetts Bay on the North Coast of Plymouth in what would become known as the “Great Migration.” In the 1630s and 40s, expanding settlements created new colonies, eventually resulting in the settlement of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Hampshire.²⁸ The diverse tenets of Puritan faith translated into a lifestyle of extreme occupational diligence, summarized by the anonymous Puritan maxim: “God sent you unto this world as unto a Workhouse, not a Playhouse.”²⁹ Everyday Puritans tried to embody this hardy work ethic, what seventeenth-century playwright Ben Johnson called “Zeal-of-the-Land-Busy,” by maximizing personal gain and profit without falling temptation to worldliness.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Taylor, “The American Colonies,” 162.

³⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 3: Sex and Scandal in the New World



Figure 7: Illustration of the fictional Puritan Hester Prynne comforting her dying paramour, from an 1878 edition of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel, *A Scarlet Letter*. Puritans have entered the public imagination as sexless wretches, thanks in part to the legacy of this famous book.

The English, especially Puritan reformers, emphasized morality as national concern during this confusing and unprecedented era of civil war and trans-Atlantic expansionism. Exemplified by landmark works like *Measure for Measure*, the topic of sex was not excluded from public debate- especially prominent among religious sects - although it had to be framed in the proper terminology, as a matter of religion. Questions about sexual practice, such as if betrothed couples could engage in sex before marriage, dominated the cultural conversation. These debates became a normative, morally acceptable way to discourse on salacious topics.

Sex became an especially significant topic in the expansive context of colonization: subduing the wild, unknown New World.³¹ Public discussions often framed impending issues such as colonization in terms of the impending doom that could result from immorality. Thus, reformers fighting for sexual propriety saw themselves as gatekeepers of traditional conservative norms, while those who accepted laxity, such as sex between betrothed couples, simply accepted folk traditions and continued to live as they saw appropriate.

Thus, the English felt strong discord between the Church's divine authority and their own private lives, tensions exacerbated by the trials of life in the colonies: a "moral wilderness" devoid of structure and guidance. Here to combat such temptations were the Puritans. Criticized by their contemporaries for their moral absolutism, Puritans today are still stereotyped as nefariously prudish thanks to the bitter cultural legacy fabricated by

³¹ Godbeer, "Sexual Revolution in Early America," 4.

Romantic authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne. His 1850 novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, epitomizes Puritans as lustful, repressed wretches. Hester Prynne, an independent young woman who carries the visible burden of extramarital pregnancy, is punished by her colonial peers as a lesson in immorality: “Thus the young and pure would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast . . . -at her, who had once been innocent, -as the figure, the body, the reality of sin.”³² Given their tendency towards stringent personal and community regulation, Puritans have somewhat earned this legacy of conformity and repression. But historiography owes it to the Puritans to provide a more accurate and balanced portrait of their sexual lives; proper expression of sex between consenting spouses which was actually a very important aspect of their spiritual and physical well-being. But, like every life choice, sex had to fit into their theological and moral reality, which meant public regulation of private behavior.

Despite their aversion to sinfulness, the Puritans were among the most vocal rabble-rousers against fornication, bastardy, and other ignominies during England’s moral debates. Not content with reforming the law and church doctrine, Puritans called for total moral upheaval or a “reformation of manners,” and sex was not excluded from their critical public dialogue. Early Americanist, Richard Godbeer, author of *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, argues that the Puritans “called for the suppression of maypoles, alehouses, theaters, and brothels; they denounced those who made merry on the Sabbath; and they wanted a crackdown on nonmarital sex.”³³ The question of nonmarital or

³² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, The Norton Anthology of American Literature, 9th ed., edited by Robert S. Levine, (W.W. Norton, 2017), 425.

³³ Godbeer, “Sexual Revolution in Early America,” 2.

otherwise unorthodox sex became especially symbolic of the dangers that faced English society as it entered the Age of Exploration.

I. Sex vs Sexuality: An Important Distinction

Puritans and contemporary Englishmen did not develop a modern ideation of sex, sexuality, and sexual identity. As Godbeer argues, “People living in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not think about their sexual feelings and behavior as a distinct realm of identity. They viewed sex not as a product of sexuality but as a component of spirituality, cultural identity, and social status.”³⁴ Thus, Puritans had no concept of “sexuality.” To them, sex was an action, performed over the course of a lifetime, with the aims of sacredness, pleasure, and procreation. One could have sexual “preferences” as part of a pattern of behavior, but that did not reflect on one’s actual identity. Sex was something performed, not a personalized expression of self. Therefore, the word “sexuality” will not be used in this paper because it was not part of early modern parlance.

A Puritan adherent was more likely to think of a sexual sin as a “pollution” of his Christian values and his masculinity than as a reflection of his “orientation,” another concept that did not exist.³⁵ The most relevant example is homosexuality. An early modern Puritan man who repeatedly engaged in sexual intercourse with another man would not be considered “gay,” “homosexual,” or any other such linguistic label, just as a man who slept with a woman was not considered “straight” or “heterosexual.” The man

³⁴ Godbeer, “Sexual Revolution in Early America,” 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

engaging in sodomy was considered a sinner, of course, and probably would be labeled a criminal, but these sex acts were not a further extension of his personhood. Even a man who professed a sense of sexual love for other men would not consider himself beholden to any special identity or moniker. This distinction between the sex act and the person, and the disassociation of the sex act from the person's identity, allowed lay Puritans to overlook certain unorthodox sex acts.

II. Family and Fornication in England and the New World

Fornication and the exact nature of its sinfulness was the most common and important sexual debate of Puritans and of early modern English religious groups in general. The Puritans carried over many English sensibilities about sexual behavior and childbearing outside of the marriage union, the strictest of which found their way into their legal codes. The revised and expanded 1648 *Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes*, based on the rights and regulations contained in the 1641 *Massachusetts Body of Liberties*, lists the sexual crimes of bestiality, sodomy, and adultery as capital offenses. Although they were seldom enforced to maximum severity, the written code placed sex crimes theoretically on the same level of importance as murder and blasphemy. In this manner of public regulation and surveillance of personal behavior, the "little commonwealth" of the family unit mirrored the strict legal adherence of the overall Puritan commonwealth.³⁶

³⁶ *Massachusetts Body of Liberties*, (Mass.gov, 1641).
<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-body-of-liberties>. Accessed 4 January 2019.

One of the most prevalent debates over sexual morality in England was the question of marriage validity. Although it was technically illegal to sleep together before marriage, many betrothed couples found it acceptable to have sex and even produce children, because they were already promised to each other and “married before God.” Continental English legal and religious authorities found it very difficult to impose formal marriage or criminal penalties on those who practiced the folkish tradition of union before the ceremony; as long as the children did not pose a financial burden to the community, the official reaction was often ambiguous. Around the time the Puritans set sail for the New World in 1630, about one-fifth of all continental English births came out of wedlock.³⁷

Unsurprisingly, this unregulated sexual behavior and the lack of enforcement bitterly scandalized the migrant Puritans, especially those in power. But codifying laws could not stop abuses against manhood, marriage, family, and God. According to literary scholar Claudia Durst Johnson, the most common forms of crimes against the family were bastardy, adultery, and fornication. However, similar to the situation in continental England, the lay Puritans were often more accepting of unusual sexual or familial circumstances. Although lawmakers determined that a marriage must be announced in public to be considered valid in a document called a “bann,” many Puritans shrugged off this tradition and lived together without telling anyone. Unlike their rivals the Catholics, the Puritans did not place as much value on the actual marriage ceremony. It was customary for some parents to allow their betrothed children to sleep together under the

³⁷ Godbeer, “Sexual Revolution in Early America,” 3-4.

covers. Furthermore, a child born to a betrothed couple was usually met with just a fine as long as the parents could support their offspring, because this child would soon grow up in the confines of a proper family and would not represent an undue burden to the commonwealth.³⁸

Even the written law was much less stringent in practice. On October 3, 1632, Nicholas Frost was branded in the hand with an iron, whipped, fined, and banished for fornication, theft, and drunkenness. While these punishments seem harsh, this was an attempt to rid the community of a man of indecent character; fornication was not his only crime. For comparison, on March 7, 1636, William James was set at the bilboes [shackles] in Boston and fine for “knowing his wife before marriage,” and on October 6, 1635, authorities fined two men for “knowing their wives carnally before marriage.” The punishment for this crime was not as strictly enforced as that of other sex crimes, because it did not totally disrupt the sanctity of the family or the marriage union.³⁹ This Puritan reaction to fornication when the laws “on the books” were so strict can best be explained by the disparity between reality and religion and between the folkish customs of the laity and the enforcement of the elite.

³⁸ Claudia Durst Johnson, *Daily Life in Colonial New England*, (Westport: Greenwood, 2002), 50-51.

³⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Rhetoric of Conquest, Miscegenation, and Masculinity

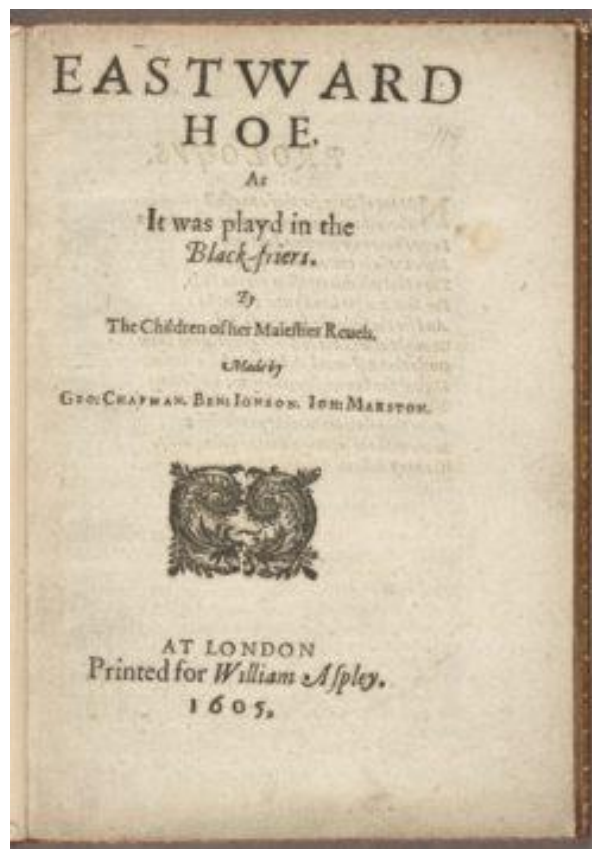


Figure 8: Quarto of Ben Johnson's 1605 stage play, *Eastward Ho!* which deals with themes of interracial sexual attraction- a prevalent topic in the civil discourse of the New World.

I. Miscegenation in Literature

Sexual morality took on a frightening and exhilarating tone in the context of New World colonization. Both Puritans and English Protestant settlers abstractedly envisioned colonization as a divinely sanctioned endeavor of subjugation and conquest of the “virgin” natural world and its “barbarous” indigenous peoples. Underscoring the nationalistic and capitalistic urge to colonize was the English tenet of male dominance, coupled with the need to preserve and spread English notions of morality and civility.⁴⁰ Documents justifying or describing colonization assumed blatant gendered and sexual language. Colonizers longed to exploit the “fruitfull wombe” and “maidenhead” of the New World and to make the lands “fertilized with English art and industry,” according to banished Anglican author and literary celebrity, Thomas Morton, in his seminal 1637 work on the spirit of the New World, *New English Canaan*.⁴¹ He glorifies the use of this

⁴⁰ Godbeer, “Sexual Revolution in Early America,” 3-4.

⁴¹ Thomas Morton, *The New English Canaan*, (Boston: 1637), 114, 179.

“untouched” land for personal, national, and spiritual gain, thus legitimizing colonization efforts to his English readers and their colonial counterparts:

I did inedeavor to take a survey of the Country: The more I looked, the more I liked it...And when I had seriously considered the bewty of the place, with all her faire indowments, I did not thinke that in all the known world it could be paralel'd ... This I consider I am bound in duety (as becommeth a Christian man) to performe for the glory of God... For which cause I must approve of the indeavoures of my Country men, that have bin studious to inlarge the territories of his Majesties empire by planting Colonies in America.⁴²

Settlers also established what Godbeer calls the “assertion of superiority” in their rhetoric involving Indigenous Peoples.⁴³ The original state seal of Massachusetts exemplifies the colonial mentality of justifying colonization by claiming to spread civil English values to New England Indigenous populations. Adopted in 1692 by the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the seal depicted a nude Algonquian man with a bush covering his groin, holding an arrow downward in a show of peaceful subjugation. Issuing from the man’s mouth is “Come Over and Help Us.” The line was probably inspired by the apostle Paul’s missionary vision in Acts 16: 9; it was meant to suggest similar benevolent intentions on part of the English- and gratuitously suggested that Natives needed assistance.⁴⁴

Especially salacious to the colonial Puritans and to mainstream Englishmen was the New World rumor of miscegenation, or intercourse and procreation between people of different races. Continental English leaders voiced exaggerated worries that colonizers could lose their masculinity and their very humanity by intermingling with “barbarians”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Godbeer 5.

⁴⁴ <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/presea/sealhis.htm>

such as Native Americans and enslaved Africans, far from the constraints of “civilized” Europe. Fear and hatred of darker-colored skin was a mainstay of English culture, but Godbeer argues that intertwined “lust and disgust” for Indigenous and Black women often made settlers question the normative sexual value of same-race sexual activity.⁴⁵ These unions, and possible offspring, would rarely be considered lasting or legitimate by both parties involved, because of the difference in class and race.



Figure 9: The original seal of Massachusetts, 1692.

Of relevance to the miscegenation paradox is Ben Johnson’s 1605 stage play, *Eastward Ho!* A crew of English drunkards, criminals, and ne’er-do-wells promise to reform themselves by going “eastward ho!” to the colonies, but run into hilarious misfortune, including shipwrecks and cuckoldry. Surprisingly, the edgy satire was not censored for its references to miscegenation, but for its anti-Scottish sentiment, which

⁴⁵ Godbeer, “Sexual Revolution in Early America,” 14.

angered King James I of Scotland.⁴⁶ Captain Seagull, a fictional protagonist tasked with sailing to Virginia, declaims that English swashbucklers had already:

Married with the Indians, and make ‘em bring forth as beautiful faces as any we have in England; and therefore the Indians are so in love with ‘em, that all the treasure they have, they lay at their feet.⁴⁷

Not only does Seagull praise the beauty of Native women, but he equates the legitimacy of their interracial unions and offspring with that English people. In his view, coupling with Native women would not make colonists less masculine, but would represent a favorable match- a sentiment in direct opposition to the fears of the New England Puritans and that of the English mainstream. Given the satirical overtones of the play, it would be easy to dismiss Seagull’s comments as bawdy humor, were it not for the fact that other works of the time mirror his opinion, even crossing the line into romanticizing trysts with African women.

The seventeenth-century obscene novel *Isle of Pines* is the best example of countercultural attitudes and tension between the risks and benefits of miscegenation. Henry Nellville’s 1688 book dramatizes the repressed desires of colonists upon encountering foreign women, who might tarnish their civility and social standing should they engage in this kind of sex. Like other works of the period, it does not consider the sexual needs and culture of the Indigenous People, but only of the white colonizing Englishmen. The symbolism is heavy-handed and the “forbidden fruit” of miscegenation is erotically exploited for English indignation.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

Troubled protagonist, George Pine, is shipwrecked on a gorgeous virgin island with four women: the fourteen-year-old daughter of a mercantile agent, two servants, and a “negro female slave.” Pine persuades the two servant women to “lie with [him], which I did at first in private; but after, custom taking away shame, there being none but us, we did it more openly, as our lust gave us liberty.”⁴⁸

Worse, the mercantile agent’s underage daughter joins the debauchery, followed by the black slave, Phillipa. By age sixty, Pine is said to have sired 545 children and peopled the island by “the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth.”⁴⁹ With all this scandal of group sex, fornication, and sex with children, the author’s one reservation about enjoying unorthodox island pleasure is the racial difference between Phillipa and Pine. Pine is only “willing to try the difference” when an aroused Phillipa approaches him under cover of darkness without the others, thinking this will make the act less scandalous. While Pine lies with the other women all day, he can only “stomach” Phillipa “at night and not else” although she is “one of the handsomest blacks I have ever seen.” While the other women become companions and wives, Phillipa is still “my negro.”⁵⁰ The ambiguity intrinsic in this fictionalized relationship shows English attitudes towards sex and conquest at the time: men are entitled to Indigenous and black female bodies as aspects of the new land they have conquered. However, despite the allure of these women, explorers run the risk of tainting their manhood by shameful sexual knowledge.

II. Sex and Slavery

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

But the sentiments of racism, conquest, and lust were not confined to the realm of fiction. Atlantic historian, Wendy Warren, opens her groundbreaking account, *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America*, by describing the prevalence of Puritan sexual abuse of newly enslaved African women with a gut-wrenching anecdote.⁵¹ Warren likens the early importation of slavery in the New World, beginning in Virginia in 1619, to the “mirror process of Indian removal.”⁵² The first slaves imported into Massachusetts arrived in 1638 on the Salem-based ship *Desire*. That same year, Samuel Maverick, a Boston landowner and one of the first slaveowners of the area, sought to expand his slave population of two women and one man without buying more.

“Desirous to have a breed of Negroes,” recalled a friend, “and seeing [that the woman] would not yield by perswasions to company with a Negro young man he had in his house,” Maverick ordered the young male slave, whom he also owned, to rape and impregnate the female slave so she would bear a child into his service.⁵³ Their names were not recorded. The male slave complied. She fled to a houseguest of Maverick’s, John Josselyn. Josselyn recalled the incident in his diary: that after the rape, she complained in a “very loud and shrill voice.” A bemused Josselyn noted that she felt “grief . . . in high disdain beyond her slavery.”⁵⁴

Although it is noteworthy that Josselyn even recorded a slave woman’s complaint of sexual assault, but the next breath he writes about being attacked by a wasp. Less than

⁵¹ Wendy Warren, *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America*, (New York: Norton, 2016).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

two decades after the founding of the Plimoth Colony, in neighboring Massachusetts, a colonist encouraged rape to breed his slaves. Josselyn recorded the incident in his diary, but with the detached observation that the female slave was somehow acting above her station by complaining. Note that in Massachusetts in the 1630s, when this episode took place, a man could be fined and whipped if he was caught fornicating with his future wife. But laws of sexual purity and conformity did not apply to slaves, who did not hold the moral protections conferred to Puritan citizens of the commonwealth. Men like Maverick who ordered the rape of their slaves for “breeding” went unpunished, because his actions were not defined as a crime and were thus not a threat to his masculinity, but an extension of it. In the Puritan’s New World, white European men set the standards for consensual and nonconsensual sex, and enslaved and Indigenous women held little or no sexual agency.⁵⁵

III. Sex and Indigenous Peoples

Thus, notions of sex and civility were intertwined in the New World: although privy to the virgin land’s spoils, a colonial man’s sexual choices could become detrimental to his social standing. Although they are a crucial component of society and culture, the sexual practices of Indigenous men and women and their subsequent reactions to the sexual behavior of white newcomers are often impossible to discern due to limited source material and the overabundance of biased English accounts.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 6.

English colonizers sometimes wrote with ambivalent or even admiring attitudes towards Indigenous sexual customs, albeit often in a manner of limited understanding. Although himself an Anglican (not a Puritan), Thomas Morton, controversially romanticized conjugal relationships between English settlers and Native American women at his settlement, Ma-re Mount. Delighted by sex in very non-Puritan manner, some believe that Morton's colony was a play on words for a mare being mounted by a stallion, or "merry making."⁵⁶

Morton was widely reviled by Puritans and mainstream Englishmen for his insistence on seasonal maypole celebrations, which included drinking, dancing, and physical pleasure. Such revelries were considered illegal in Puritan society and frowned upon in mainstream continental European society. During a maypole celebration, it was acceptable among practitioners for young men and women to dance around the pole, which Puritans scorned as leading to fornication. Another controversial aspect of the Maypole was the idea of mixed-gender dancing (and heavily implied intercourse) between white men and Native American women. In a time when colonists often adopted attitudes of masculine superiority and patronization toward Indigenous women, it is interesting to read Morton's celebration – or perhaps fetishization - of Native women. Morton sang the praises of his maypole festivities featuring eroticism and Native women in his scandalous 1637 work *The Song for Revels*:

Drink and be merry, merry, merry boys,
 Let all your delights be in Hymen's joys:
 Yo! To Hymen the day is come:
 About the merry Maypole take a room ...
 Lasses in beaver coats, come away

⁵⁶ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 155.

Ye shall be welcome to us night and day! ⁵⁷

Morton emphasizes drinking and dancing as entertaining and acceptable extensions of femininity and masculinity. He applauds sexual expression and paganism, citing Hymen, a Greek love god and patron of feasting and song; he also makes the prominent inclusion of “lasses” wearing “beaver,” inviting Native women to participate in the debauchery.

Morton paid for his flippant sexuality; Pilgrim leaders cut down Morton’s maypole, condemned his sale of alcohol to the Native Americans, and banished him from the New World in 1637. Morton is unique among his peers as an Englishman who appreciated Native American sexuality and invited them to participate in his celebrations of masculinity, most infamously the maypole festivities. Thus, it is important to study Morton not as an example of normative Puritan, Pilgrim, or English attitudes towards sex, masculinity, and indigenous women, but as an example of *unacceptable* behavior for a civilized male.



57

Thomas Morton, *The Song for Revels*, (Bartleby: 1637), <https://www.bartleby.com/400/prose/38.html>. Accessed 4 January 2020.

Figure 10: Illustration depicting merrymaking around the maypole, from Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1836 text, *The Maypole at Merrymount*.

The relative lack of primary sources and secondary scholarship on how Indigenous and Black women viewed incoming male colonizers is a serious limitation to understanding sex and masculinity in the New World. Nevertheless, sexual values and virtues on both sides of the Atlantic were culturally specific and self-referential, so Puritan colonizers did not want to pollute their morality in the New World despite the many temptations it presented. To do so could be detrimental to the covenant they created, as sex was a crucial aspect of everyday spiritual life. But it is obvious that Puritan settlers had to adopt their sex culture, laws, and beliefs to their new environment.

Inextricable but distinct from their sexual culture was the treasured Puritan ideal of masculinity, which, like morality, was forced to adapt to the new challenges of colonial life. The ideal Puritan man embodied paradoxical sexual values: virility and dominance counterbalanced by temperance and a sense of religious duty. Men lived these values as heads of households and as members of the Body of Christ. Puritan officials defined and enforced this strict vision of masculinity in the New World through intertwined legal codes and spiritual norms. However, lay Puritans, against the culture of the elite, subverted and reinvented masculinity by engaging in and often tacitly accepting unorthodox sexual behavior such as homosexuality and bestiality. Therefore, these cultural ambiguities destabilize the long-held myth of the Puritan male as totally repressed. Puritans could enjoy sex if it fit within strictly prescribed moral codes- and

could sometimes circumvent these expectations to their own personal agency and satisfaction.

Chapter 5: Constraints on Sex and Manhood

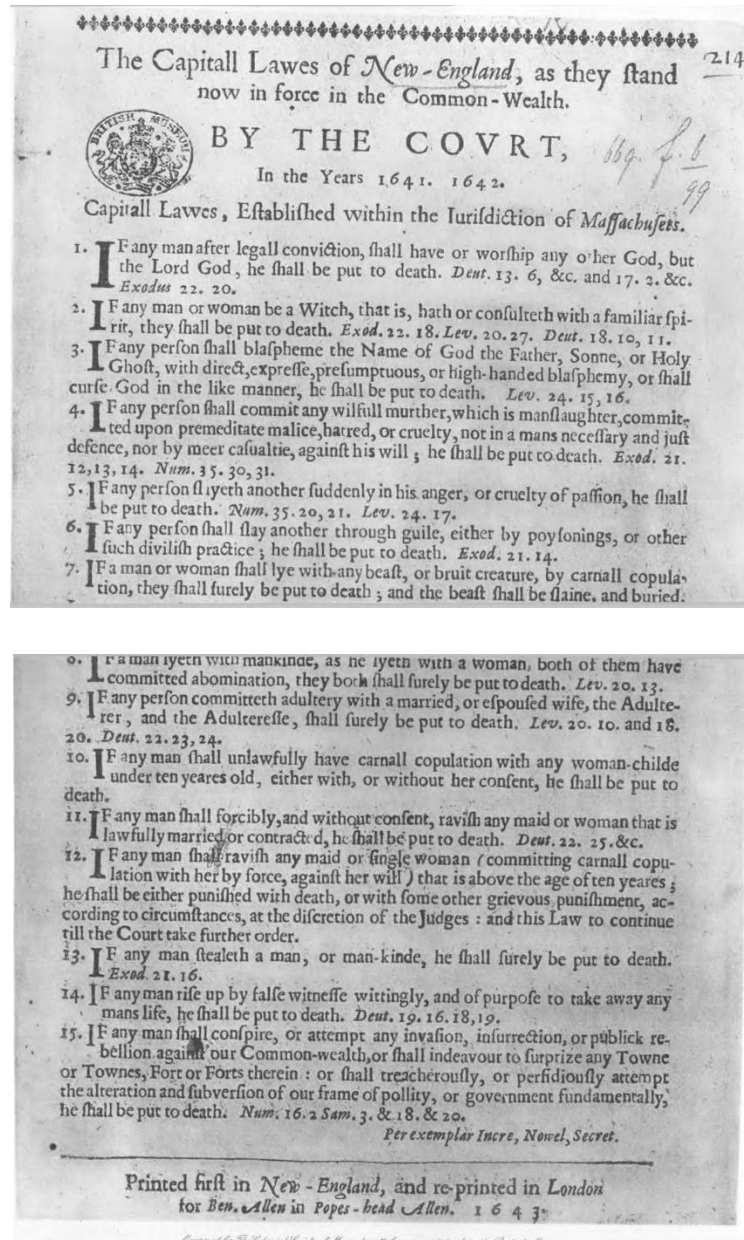


Figure 11: 1642 Massachusetts print of the “Capitall Lawes of New-England,” including adultery, sodomy, and bestiality. <https://www.colonialociety.org/publications/342/march-meeting-1913>

The most commonly committed and convicted crimes in seventeenth century New England were sex crimes. Sex crimes were usually broadly defined as those that took place outside of marriage or abused the sanctity of the marriage bond or sexual union. Across New England, the most reported sex crimes were fornication, adultery, and bastardy. It is not worth rehashing the details of these crimes in this thesis because they have already been given considerable attention, while others, such as sodomy, have gone under-studied. According to literary scholar Claudia Durst Johnson, editor of the Puritan sourcebook *Daily Life in Colonial New England*, sex crimes were just as common as every other recorded crime combined.⁵⁸

The numerical prominence of sex crimes, the importance granted to them within the earliest Massachusetts legal codes, and the retention of these sex crimes throughout the several early reiterations of these Puritan laws, proves that Puritans were unflinchingly concerned with regulating sex and thus personal expression. Broadly, committing sex crimes offered Puritan men (and to a certain extent, women) the opportunity to express personal agency and independence within the strict theocratic hegemony. On the other hand, obeying the law and observing sexual purity and conformity allowed men to assert their masculinity, with defined constraints, in socially acceptable ways as heads of households, lawmakers, and religious leaders.

When tracing the historiography of Puritanism in the early modern Atlantic world, it is important to understand that not every Puritan sect thought and wrote the same way about sex, largely due to differences in social rank and theological approaches.

⁵⁸ Durst Johnson, *Daily Life in Colonial New England*, 211.

More specifically, what was deemed socially acceptable among everyday Puritan folk, even in the colonies, was often unacceptable in the eyes of the law and the religious leaders. This tension between what kinds of sexual and marriage practices were acceptable marked a distinct divide in Puritan culture between the laity and the religious and political leaders; this phenomenon is also marked by generational changes. As the first generation of colonists aged and the colonies themselves expanded in population, Puritan leaders worried, with some validity, that younger Puritans and newcomers were making the settlements morally lax. As a result, the average colonist conceptualized sex, sex crimes, and masculinity much differently than the ruling elites, which means that Puritan sex culture is not so easily generalized.

The 1641 *Massachusetts Body of Liberties* established that any misguided sexual action could turn a Puritan into a sinner and a criminal. As an issue of public scrutiny and community safety, sex represented an integral aspect of the law. Since lawmakers claimed to have based the codified law on the Word of God, Puritans found themselves surrounded by cyclical logic regulating their sexual behavior and thus their identities. The *Body of Liberties* became the formative legislature for the colony after it had reached a substantial and thriving population. Massachusetts Bay needed protection from external foes, like infringement upon their government, but the Puritans also established ground rules for sexual behavior- most of which were not enforced to written severity most of the time.

“Section 94: Capital Laws” lists twelve crimes that could result in execution- three of which are sex crimes. This juxtaposition of sex crimes shows a two-fold intent on

the part of the Puritan authorities: to distinguish sex crimes as singularly sinful and to make a negative example of the perpetrator. Even if the convicted criminal was not executed for the sex crimes - often they were not, because an execution required a strict set of evidentiary procedures during the trial - the authorities could utilize their public wretchedness to encourage future law enforcement in the community. The seventh line of Section 94 prohibits bestiality: “If any man or woman shall lie with any beast or brute creature by carnal copulation they shall surely be put to death.” The animal, unfit for human consumption, must be slain as well. The eighth line prohibits sodomy, or homosexuality and various other kinds of self-pollution:

If any man lyeth with mankind (with another man in homosexual intercourse) as he lyeth with a woman, both of them have committed abomination, and they both shall surely be put to death.⁵⁹

Finally, the ninth line warns against adultery: “If any person committeth adultery with a married or espoused wife, the adulterer and adulteress shall surely be put to death.”⁶⁰

Importantly, these capital sex crimes are placed on the same level of damage and offense as murder, manslaughter “rebellion against our Commonwealth,” and kidnapping.⁶¹

Thus, even so early in Massachusetts history, the Puritans were given the authority to codify their sexual norms, which would continue to influence American attitudes towards sexuality and deviance. Some of these sex penalties remain in the Massachusetts legislature – for example, bestiality, although it is no longer automatically

⁵⁹ *Massachusetts Body of Liberties*. Mass.gov, 1641.

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-body-of-liberties>. Accessed 4 January 2019.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

considered a capital crime. Furthermore, the Puritan encapsulation of sex in the law shows that the elite believed they held the divine and legal authority regulate issues of masculinity/femininity and expressions of sexual desire. Edmund S. Morgan, early historian of the Puritan family, summarizes the Puritan relationship to sex, which is reflected in the strictness of the legislature but the relative laxity of enforcement:

In short, the Puritans were neither prudes nor ascetics. They knew how to laugh, and how to love. But it is equally clear that they did not spend their best hours in either love or laughter. They had fixed their eyes on a heavenly goal, which directed and informed their lives. When earthly delights dimmed their vision, it was time to break off. Yet even this side of the goal there was room for joy.⁶²

⁶² Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, (New York: Norton, 1970), 64.

Chapter 6: Sodomy: Crimes of Homosexuality and Bestiality

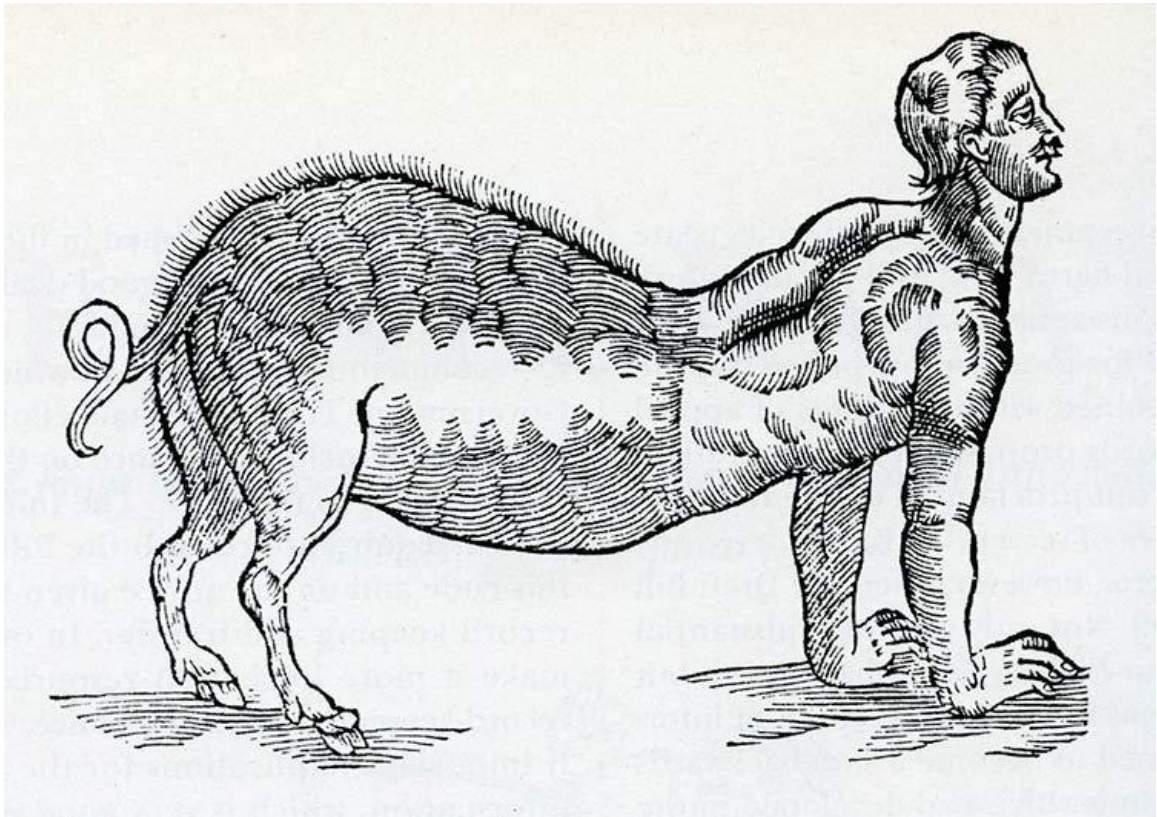


Figure 12: 1573 illustration from Ambroise Pare's *Of Monsters and Prodigies* depicting a "pig-man" said to have been born to a sow in Brussels in 1564. Such an abomination could only be the product of bestiality.

I. The Language of the Crimes

Among the Puritan sex crimes, homosexuality and bestiality were close with each other in terms of spiritual and physical filthiness and overall perversion to the perpetrator's masculinity within the Puritan community. It is very difficult for historians to trace the Puritan reaction to these sex crimes in terms of masculinity. The issues of purposely vague language in describing the actions, the reluctance to follow through with most accusations, and the general shame and scorn on the topic makes it easy to see that Puritans hated the idea of sexual deviance - but it is less easy to find the actual occurrence of these deeds and their impact. What can be inferred from the scant source material mirrors the Puritan reaction to other forms of sex crimes: the common people followed a tradition that was more tolerant towards homosexual tendencies, as they often showed tolerance for fornication and adultery. Therefore, although the law could shame, fine, and sometimes execute men into submission not always in line with the official laws' strict, punishing regulation of sex and masculinity. In other words, Puritans did not always let the law define how they chose to have sex, even if the sex was as irreligious as bestiality; legal codes did not stop some men from expressing their masculinity in wildly nontraditional ways.

The tradition of fearing and mistrusting homosexual behavior and other nontraditional sex practices and customs carried over from Europe and stretches far back

into the English cultural imagination. Rather than refer to homosexuality and bestiality explicitly, people often resorted to the umbrella term “sodomy,” which could, although less commonly, include other unclean practices such as anal and oral sex and pedophilia.

The term is drawn from the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah mentioned in the Old Testament, which believers interpreted as real historical places that had been smote by God because of the residents’ perversion and general wickedness, although the exact sin is not described. The men of the city as described as speaking to God’s angels: “Where are the men which came in to thee this night? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.”⁶³ Calvinist Puritans would have interpreted this “knowing” as “carnal knowledge.”

The biblical image of Sodom as the Puritans would have conceptualized it has survived to become a notorious symbol in Western culture; sodomy has been used derogatorily to describe homosexual and unconventional sex in England as late as the twentieth century.

A more lurid, folkish way to refer to sodomy was “pursuing strange flesh.” Despite the informal nature of the phrase and the obvious attempt to avert mention of the subject matter, legates commonly used this phrase in court and on legal documents to invoke charges of homosexuality. The ways in which Puritans referred to specific sins shows their level of comfort with broaching the subject matter. Sodomy is the best example of Puritans projecting shame, both personal, communal, and linguistic, onto this sin of tainted manhood. Puritans were literally so scandalized by the thought of

⁶³ King James Bible, (1611). 19:5.

homoerotic behavior or other “extreme” sexual deviance that they could not refer to it by a standard name that did not project this bias.

II. The Imminent Danger of Homosexual Sex

Although a different topic entirely that deserves its own scholarship, female homosexuality and lesbianism was not even a concept that occurred to the Puritans, or else they denied its existence so much that it went unnoticed because leaders believed it so irrational that it must be impossible. For example, the *Records and Files of Essex County, Massachusetts*, in the large span of time from the years 1636 to 1686, only one instance of female homoerotic behavior appears to be reported, and even then it is only casually referred to as “unseemly practices betwixt [Elizabeth Johnson] and another maid.”⁶⁴

Maintaining “clean,” wholesome sexual behavior was integral to the Puritan male’s reputation and contribution to society and to his family. Men who deviated from the social norm, even in such private matters, would be considered separate from the community and its goals - in which case, moral outcasts. Puritans were encouraged to surveil and spy on their neighbors, even in the case of such intimate matters, as reporting a sex crime often required an actual witness to the act, and doing so would help preserve the integrity of the commonwealth. Homosexuality was a particularly thorny issue. It was the opposite of everything the virile, fertile male wanted to embody. In a worldview

⁶⁴ *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, 1636-1686*, Vol. I, 44.

where traditional heterosexual sex was already so regulated and scrutinized, homosexual behavior represented a clear violation of the marriage institution and of man's natural place in the Great Chain of Being. Male-on-male sex acts violated God's will, degraded the virtue of the participants, and obviously could not bring about procreation, so homosexuality denied every aim of the Puritan sexual union. On a more practical scale, homosexual sex could not result in a marriage or children, so it would not contribute any revenue or social stability to the Puritan community. In other words, condemning homosexuality, from a leader's point of view, simply made sense for regulating personal behavior, ensuring conformity, and keeping the settlement alive.

III. Reporting Sexual Deviance: The Puritan Paradox

However, as common in terms of Puritan masculinity and sex crimes, the everyday people, or Puritans who were not major leaders - were not always ready to condemn their neighbors for sodomitical actions, especially perceived or actual homosexual behavior. Even though male homosexual sex constituted a capital crime by written law, Puritans were usually hesitant to accuse and follow through with their testimonials, if they even decided to push the issue at all. Because it represented an attack on the accused person's manhood, an accusation of homosexual sex was considered very grave and thus could be wielded like a weapon over a man's character and social status. But further, the disparity between the written codes and the more relaxed, almost tolerant lack of reporting among community members shows that everyday Puritans were

sometimes willing to accept an alternative narrative of homosexuality and identity that was much more forgiving than the word of law.

IV. The Curious Case of Nicholas Sension

Sension remains one of the most well-documented and memorable examples of a New England colonist who flouted traditional masculinity norms by allegedly engaging in homosexual sex. More significantly, his community's longtime (if nervous and begrudging) acceptance of his predilections, even when they became obvious by surfacing in predatory sexual behavior, shows that some colonists displayed sexual attitudes independent of the acceptable law. His criminal case study also supports the idea that the social class of the perpetrator affected how his fellows judged his masculinity in relation to sex acts and deviance. In short, colonists were usually more pragmatic than dogmatic when applying sexual mores to individuals; being a man of means, Sension would be less of a target than someone of lower standing.

Sension was a very wealthy, esteemed citizen of Windsor, Connecticut, married to Isabell Sension. He had immigrated from England and settled in New England around 1640. A 1675 tax list shows him in the "first class." However, in 1677, Sension appeared before Connecticut's General Court, saddled with the unthinkable charge of sodomy.⁶⁵ Multiple male deponents claimed that Sension had been attempting to assault them for years. The accounts dated back to the 1640s, alleging a long pattern of unwanted homosexual advances:

⁶⁵ Godbeer, *Sexual Deviance in Early America*, 45.

He told me that if I would let him have one bloo at my breach he would give me a charge of powder (ca. 1640s).

I was in the mill house . . . and Nicholas Sension was with me, and he took me and threw me on the chest, and told hold of my privy parts (ca. 1648).

I went out on the bank to dry myself [after swimming], and the said Sension came to me with his yard or member erected in his hands, and desired me to lie on my belly, and strove with me, but I went away from him (ca. 1658).⁶⁶

Not only did Sension attempt to coerce, bribe, or threaten male community members into illegal sexual activity: he also preyed on the vulnerability of his servants. Nathaniel Pond was Sension's favorite target; Pond testified that he had complained to his brother Isaac on numerous occasions of Sension's "grossly lascivious carriages" towards him. Several witnesses claim they saw Sension attempt sodomy with Pond many times; such testimony was damning, as most successful sodomy charges required at least two witnesses to the act of penetration, a tall request.⁶⁷

Sension's sexual choices had been well known to Windsor residents, yet had gone unreported for at least three decades. Trial transcripts include reports of neighbors being nervous to spend the night in his house, having heard rumors of his aggressive behavior. Thomas Barber, another man's servant, felt justified apprehension when he learned he would be sleeping in a trundle bed with Sension in Hartford; he later reported that Sension tried to rape him, but Barber fought him.⁶⁸ For Sension to attempt to sodomize someone would also bring the ultimate shame upon the victim's masculinity; this idea might also explain why the colonists took so long to hold him legally accountable when

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

he represented a flagrant danger to their society. It was clear that Sension recognized this pressure and the damage to his manhood; he was secretive about sex, especially when caught in the act. When witness John Enno testified that he saw Sension masturbate against a sleeping servant, he claims that Sension went into another room and prayed that God “turn him from this sin he had so long lived in.” Unfortunately for Sension, no fear of God or legal action could deter him from his “sodomitical actings.”⁶⁹

While Windsor town authorities reprimanded him informally in the 1640s and 1660s for reportedly harassing young men of lower standing, no legal action was taken until 1677. After investigating Sension’s behavior towards Pond, town elders fined Sension forty shillings for “abuse” and ordered Sension to shorten Pond’s term of indenture by one year. Here, the primary aim was to compensate Pond, not punish Sension for his homosexuality. The turning point towards fully prosecuting Sension seems to have occurred after Pond’s death in 1675, after which Sension turned his attention towards other young men in Windsor. Clearly, the colonists were aware of Sension’s predilections and did not approve of his behavior towards other men. However, they only gathered to pursue legal action and recite their own embarrassing, emasculating testimonials when it became apparent that Sension’s sodomy would no longer be contained to his home.⁷⁰ Although convicted of sodomy, capital punishment two witnesses to penetration, so Sension got away with whipping, public shaming, and disenfranchisement. He died twelve years later without another mention of his sexual leanings or if he reformed himself.⁷¹ As Godbeer points out:

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The extent to which Sension pursued his sexual inclinations with impunity suggests an attitude on part of his neighbors that was far removed from the spirit of official pronouncements on the subject.⁷²

In short, Sension's case study shows the fluidity of attitudes towards sodomy in lay colonial New England and the willingness to prosecute based on social factors such as perceived shame, community status, and the shared concept of masculine identity.



⁷² Ibid.

Figure 13: Woodcut depicting two Elizabethan men in an embrace. The caption warns men against crossing the line into romantic attraction: “Love of morals won’t let you down.”

V. “The Cry of Sodom Enquired Into:” The Jeremiad Genre and Bestiality

Samuel Danforth, Puritan minister, poet, and Native American liaison of Roxbury, Massachusetts, was renowned for composing sermons with Jeremiad overtones. The Jeremiad was a favorite genre and writing style of the New England colonial elite. Danforth delivered powerful, passionate, and arguably tearful sermons.⁷³ The label “Jeremiad” originates from the Book of Jeremiah, written by a prophet whose literary themes include human sinfulness and depravity of betraying God - and God’s subsequent compassion and mercy as he leads the sinner back to sanctity. The Jeremiad remained so influential among believers because it was broad enough to encompass a range of themes plaguing colonial New England - including sexual deviance, masculinity, bestiality, and sodomy, and, as in this case, all four.

Therefore, the Puritan and early New England Jeremiad was a literary tradition focused on chastising the laity and restoring them to godly behavior that befit their station as members of the elect and contributing members of society. The Jeremiad could be reworked for a variety of themes, but its use to engage the audience about sex crimes is striking. Another important detail pertaining to the composition, writing, and delivery of the Jeremiad is the fact that most of them were written after 1670’s. During this time

⁷³ New England Historical Society, “Samuel Danforth, Star-Gazing Puritan, sees ‘A Herald of Wrath To a Secure and Impenitent World; aka, a Comet,’” (Newenglandhistoricalsociety.org: 2014), <http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/samuel-danforth-star-gazing-puritan-sees-a-herald-of-wrath-to-a-secure-and-impenitent-world-aka-a-comet/>. Accessed 9 December 2019.

period, colonial leaders felt a deep-seated unease as they saw young, first-generation colonists begin to shirk the stricter moral laws of their forefathers. Another way in which this generational unease within the power structure surfaces in the literature is through the declension narrative, a genre in which the subject matter, usually society, is lambasted for becoming progressively more corrupt and immoral. The declension and Jeremiad narratives allowed leaders to try to recapture changing social values as younger generations inevitably trended towards increased toleration, at least in colonial terms.⁷⁴ The delivery of an oral sermon or speech would serve to terrify those present into submission, especially in the case of execution sermons such as the one in question. Written sermons served to advise the sexual behavior of present and future generations; such was the goal of the Puritan elite to reach out to influence morality for as long as possible.

The timing on the delivery of the Jeremiad was never an accident, as the writer/deliverer often utilized this genre to respond to a discrete rhetorical situation of an issue within their community. Often, public readings of Jeremiads took place after an execution to list the crimes of the individual and deter those from copying him; or leaders presented Jeremiads as sermons designed to warn an audience against a specific social sin. Sometimes written Jeremiads with a lasting impact became celebrated by future generations of colonists and eventually modern scholars. Such is the case with famous Massachusetts preacher and launcher of the Great Awakening, Johnathan Edwards, whose 1741 sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” continues to remind readers

⁷⁴ Donna M. Campbell, "Forms of Puritan Rhetoric: The Jeremiad and the Conversion Narrative," *Literary Movements*, <https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/jeremiadt.htm>. Accessed 9 December 2019.

of the Puritanical Protestant concepts of divine retribution and predestination. For example, Edwards invokes a classic Jeremiad threat and call to action:

Those of you that finally continue in a natural condition, that shall keep out of hell longest will be there in a little time! your damnation does not slumber; it will come swiftly, and, in all probability, very suddenly upon many of you.⁷⁵

While “Sinners” recalls Puritan zealousness and an emphasis on God’s overwhelming omnipotence above the sinner, Danforth’s Jeremiad memorializes the Puritan intolerance of sexual sin and extreme sexual deviance such as bestiality and sodomy. Danforth’s Jeremiad is an execution sermon delivered in 1674 in Massachusetts Bay after the hanging of 17-year old Benjamin Goad, convicted of bestiality. The sermon was published in Cambridge in the same year. It was the first published execution sermon in the New World.

The prodigious full title of Danforth’s sermon is: “The Cry of Sodom Enquired Into; Upon Occasion of the Arraignment and Condemnation of Benjamin Goad, for his Prodigious Villainy. Together with a Solemn Exhortation to Tremble at Gods Judgment and to Abandon Youthful Lusts.”⁷⁶ This written sermon is invaluable to historians and to the preservation of New England history in general because it shows, more succinctly

⁷⁵ Johnathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, (Blueletterbible.org: 1781), https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/edwards_jonathan/Sermons/Sinners.cfm. Accessed 9 December 2019.

⁷⁶ Samuel Danforth, *The Cry of Sodom Enquired Unto*, (EEBO: 1674), https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/edwards_jonathan/Sermons/Sinners.cfm. Accessed 8 December 2019.

than any other Jeremiad, the intersection of sex, criminality, and religion in colonial Puritan society.⁷⁷

For a sense of background, Goad, a Roxbury resident, was convicted of copulating with a mare in broad daylight on April 2, 1674.⁷⁸ The required witnesses testified to the act, and according to biblical precepts, leaders slaughtered the mare in front of Goad. The horse was corrupted by Goad's seed, and as an unclean animal, could no longer serve the community. Goad had confessed that he had "lived in that sin a year." To the Puritans, "self-pollution" like sodomy was a gateway sin that led to disobeying parents, laws, and breaking the Sabbath, among more heinous crimes.

Technically, New Englanders defined "sodomites" as unrepentant sinners unfit for communal life, but the word is most commonly applied to criminal sexual perversion.⁷⁹ Bestiality was probably the most drastic form of sodomy, and the basest violation of the masculine identity, which is why it often constituted capital punishment at the fullest extent of the law, even when other capital sex crimes, such as homosexuality, went unpunished or underpunished. As tradition warranted, Goad came under the care of Danforth, his local pastor, because Danforth's cultural role was to channel Goad's shame into prayers for his redemption and a genuine confession of repentance.

Danforth establishes his intention to advise not only Goad and those present at the execution but also the general community: he opens the published pamphlet by imploring the sensibilities of the "Christian Reader."⁸⁰ This lets the audience know that he is about

⁷⁷ Lisa Lamon, "'Strange Flesh' in the City On a Hill," (Bowling Green State University: 2014), 19.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁰ Danforth, *Sodom*.

to instruct them on the real and present danger sex practices, why immorality is not only damaging but completely corrosive to masculinity, and thus why Goad must suffer and die for his inequities. Prominent theologians, like Danforth, would have pounced on the chance to write a popular and salacious Jeremiad, capitalizing on perversion to show their own manly virtue, knowledge, and authority.

In this sermon, Danforth describes man's fatal degeneracy and total reliance on God's mercy to evoke the Jeremiad theme. He calls the death penalty an act of necessity and method of keeping the community pure from biblical sodomy and from the pollutions of sexual degeneracy and tainted manhood like the sins of Goad. Danforth is clear in setting sodomy apart from mundane crimes and from lesser sex crimes such as adultery. "Sodomy pollutes the company" and "hasteneth Divine vengeance." Sodomy is thus the perfect crime for an especially tititalling Jeremiad execution sermon, because it is a crime that particularly evokes God's wrath and tinges those associated with the sinner.

Since Puritan leaders were normally hesitant to talk about sexual crimes in such an open forum, historians know that Danforth wanted to use Goad's actions to teach the community. He justified reading his execution sermon as both a godly warning and an education against the far-reaching dangers of self-pollution: if the community should ignore sodomitical behavior, God would see this as tacit approval of homosexuality and bestiality, and "God should enter into judgement with us, would bring heavy wrath upon us."⁸¹ The only way to protect against God's wrath on the entire settlement was to execute the sinner. This purge applied to the church as well as the lay social structure. Danforth

⁸¹ Lamon, "'Strange Flesh,'" 21.

insisted: “The Church cannot be cleansed until this wicked person be put away from us,” and “The Land cannot be cleansed, untill it hath spued out this Unclean Beast.” By equating Goad with an “Unclean Beast” like the mare he abused, Danforth shows that the identity of the sodomite, especially those caught in the act of bestiality, is no longer masculine, but animalistic. The sodomite’s identity is like that of a beast. Sexual misdeeds at this severity could relegate a New Englander to a status below manhood, a pollution to himself and the community that must be “cleansed” and “put away” from the collective.⁸²

Near the end of his sermon, Danforth compares Goad’s killing at the hands of the colonists to cutting out the “gangrene” that pollutes the “mind, heart, and conscience” of the collective the “Body of Christ” on earth. “Increased control” by means of surveillance and stringency was the only way to guard against further sodomy and bestiality, as well as other crimes of self-pollution.⁸³ In this way, Danforth could use his wide platform to condemn not only the most extreme sex crimes, but also the more common offenses such as bastardy and fornication. Jeremiad execution sermons, particularly those concerning such shocking sex crimes, allow historians to understand how Puritans sought to guard their communities against different types of sin using religious rhetoric and public spoken warnings.

⁸² Danforth, *Sodom*.

⁸³ Ibid.



Figure 14: Illustration from a 1523 pamphlet by Martin Luther called “The Catholic Monk-Calf,” designed to defame Catholics by explicitly suggesting an association with bestiality.

Chapter 5: Sensualized Religion and Gender Roles in the Home



Figure 15: Image from the quarto of the anonymous Jacobean English stage play written in 1606, *The Puritan Widow or The Puritan, or The Widow of Watling Street*. The play satirizes the Puritan emphasis on marriage as a moral contract.

I. Masculine Sexual Duties

On the other hand, the chaste and pious expression of accepted gender and sex roles was integral to the raising of the “proper” Puritan family. Puritan religious leaders constantly emphasized the importance of expressing oneself appropriately as a

husband/father or wife/mother, which included the fulfillment of complementary spiritual, sexual, and domestic duties. Since men were the leaders in every aspect of public society, Puritans regarded men as the final authority within the little commonwealth as well. This duty included instruction in spiritual matters and keeping the wife, children, and servants in order and away from sin.

In a uniquely Puritan expression of masculinity, according to early American cultural historian, Richard Godbeer, virtuous men took pride in considering themselves “the Bridegrooms of Christ” or “Members of the Body of Christ.” The title of Bridegroom carried homoerotic connotations which were not considered sinful. Furthermore, the reference to “members” of the Body also connotated the importance of the supremacy of the male genitalia. Upon entering the marriage bed in sacred union, the man expected to share in the ecstasy of sex and orgasm, not only with his wife, but with the presence of Christ. Participating in healthy marital sex allowed a man to assert his dominance and share in the “marriage” that also included the spiritual dimension of being married to Christ forever after.⁸⁴

According to Cotton Mather’s sermon, *A Union with the Son of God By Faith*, God redeemed the souls of the married couple in a romantic and familial way; he “firmly engaged” to “carry to us in all things as a father.” So beautiful was Christ that the “believing soul” could not help but become “enamored with him.” In another sermon, Mather draws upon the common theme of phallic imagery as related to male Puritan sex acts, repeatedly referencing the phallus and “heavenly ejaculations,” comparable to the

⁸⁴ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early New England*, 173.

ecstatic union with Christ.⁸⁵ Male sexuality in its proper form was something to be celebrated as a means of growing closer to Christ, even if it meant that men had to embrace a sense of spiritual sexual/gender ambiguity.⁸⁶ Godbeer writes:

Puritan men who understood their theology had no reason to believe that their masculinity would be threatened by their union as brides to Christ : the son of God was to marry not men and women but the souls of men and women.⁸⁷

Fulfilling the sexual duty and providing material goods for the household was known as the man's "due benevolence." Although engaging in procreative (and enjoyable) sex was a husband's role, he was obligated to fulfill it with "good will and delight, willingly, readily, and cheerfully."⁸⁸ Men who dared to fall victim to lust would surely fall into other sins. Preachers used words like "uncleanness," "carnality," and "concupiscence" to describe sex outside of marriage. Contrary to popular stereotypes, thus, sex was a very important aspect of Puritan society and of the family, although it was subject to scrutiny, moralizing, and legal regulation.⁸⁹

II. The Sex Roles of Puritan Women

Puritan women were permitted to enjoy sex within marriage and express their needs to a certain extent. They had more authority within their individual families than they did within the commonwealth. Women were not allowed to participate in town meetings, vote, or make legislative decisions for the community. Thus, like in most if not

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

all early modern European societies, the New England woman's sphere was relegated to the home - as the dutiful and pious wife, mother, and caretaker. However, contrary to popular belief, women did hold a certain degree of sexual agency within these roles. Like men, women could express sexual and romantic love for their husbands, even in writing. One of the best surviving examples of such a poem is Anne Bradstreet's *A Letter to Her Husband, Absent Upon Public Employment*, published in 1678, which would have been considered rich and intensely provocative at the time. She writes, "Flesh of thy flesh, bone of thy bone/I here, thou there, yet both one."⁹⁰ Bradstreet praises the "oneness" of spirit, body, and mission that unites the man and wife and keeps the family alive.

A more radical way in which colonial women found power over their husbands and over men in general was their ability to regulate the sexual act. As sex was considered both unitive and procreative, it was a woman's marital right to feel sexually satisfied. Puritans believed that scientifically, men and women both produced "seed" during sex, so "mixing the seed" through a woman's orgasm was necessary to conception.⁹¹ Even if a man could produce children, if he caused emotional and marital problems such as absenteeism or the refusal of sex, or even if he showed a pattern of medical impotence, a woman could be granted a legal divorce. The improperly performing husband was not treated with kindness; he was a burden to society and to the family unit. He was not even fit enough to be considered a man. Note the unfortunate reality of John Vfootte, whose wife Hannah Beard divorced him for "insufficiency" of manhood in 1657,⁹² or James Mattock's 1640 excommunication from a Boston church

⁹⁰ Durst Johnson, *Daily Life in Colonial New England*, 114.

⁹¹ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early New England*, 59.

⁹² New England Historical Society, *The Puritan Divorce Allows Escape from the Chain of*

for “having denied conjugal fellowship unto his wife for the space of two years together.”

⁹³ By bringing these charges against their husbands, women could damage the men’s finances, reputation, and status within the church; women clearly had more power in the little commonwealth of the family than they did within greater society; the importance of sex granted women this special power.

Matrimony, (NEHS, 2018),

<http://www.nepuritan-divorce-allows-escape-from-the-chain-of-matrimony>. Accessed 4 January 2020.

⁹³ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Colonial New England*, 59.

Chapter 6: Sex Crimes Case Study: *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, 1636-1686*

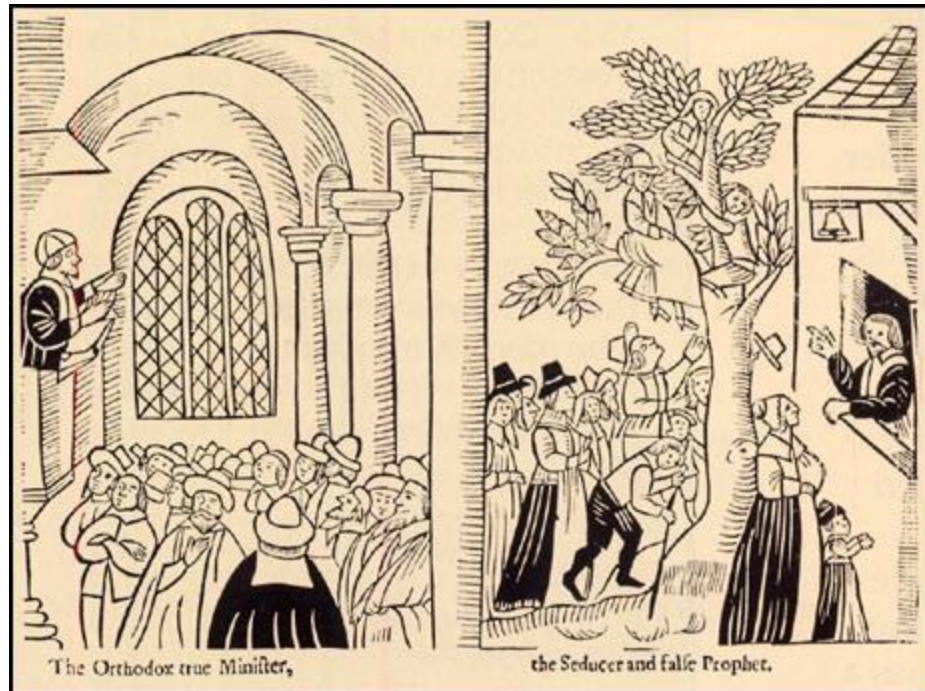


Figure 16: Woodcut from a 1641 Anglican English pamphlet. The right praises the elaborate orthodoxy of the Anglicans, while the left denounces the “false” prophecy of the Puritans, who did not meet in formal churches.

I. Introduction

The *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts, 1636-1686*, reflect the prevalence of colonial sex crimes illicit in a dense, rich microhistory. A primary source repository of crimes in the Salem, Lynn, Wenham, Ipswich, Rowley, Newbury, Gloucester, and Andover townships, the *Records* reveal basic truths about Puritan sexual morality in the invaluable form of personalized legal anecdotes.

II. Research Parameters

This analysis is confined to specific, purposeful research parameters. It examines data from *Volume I, 1636-1656*, from *Volume V, 1672-1674*, and from *Volume IX, 1683-1686*. *Vol. I*, a data set of twenty years, represents, for the most part, a sample of first-generation, New World colonial Puritans. *Vol. V*, a data set of just four years, represents a more discrete sample of younger, second-generation Puritans and their aging first-generation counterparts. Oration from this period shows a marked intensification in blaming the moral decline of the settlements on the flagrancy of the youth. Such sermons were known as Jeremiads, after a biblical narrative of assigning apocalyptic warnings, or declension narratives, glorifications of the past. Finally, *Vol. IX, 1683-1686*, represents another four-year period, the final years published in this version of the *Records*. This data set draws from a time when perhaps the first-generation Puritans were beginning to

die out and the second-generation began having children of their own, and some of the original Puritan stringency was tempered by a comparatively relaxed attitude.

When comparing the recording of sex crimes between the three volumes, it is apparent, firstly, that these three volumes represent eras of noticeably evolving generational social norms, and, secondly, that these changes in moral norms reflect the ways in which Puritans defined, recorded, and prosecuted sex crimes. By this argument, the paper is framed around these questions: How many times are the crimes mentioned throughout each of the three volumes, and how do the statistics of each volume compare to the others? Does the frequency of the crimes correspond to the different moral norms of each time period?

The sex crime search terms used in this study are bestiality, “pursuing strange flesh,” sodomy, “scandalous,” buggery (anal intercourse), lasciviousness/lascivious acts, fornication, adultery, bastardy, and rape (often referred to as “abduction”). *Figure 7* refers only to the explicit mention of the terms within the volumes’ indices.

Figure 17: Frequency of Sex Crime Search Terms by Volume

Volume Number and Years			
	<i>Volume I, 1636-1656</i>	<i>Volume V, 1672-1674</i>	<i>Volume IX, 1683-1686</i>
Sex Crime Search Term by Number of Mentions in Index			
Bestiality	0	0	0
Pursuing strange flesh	0	0	0

Sodomy	0	0	0
Buggery	0	0	0
Rape/abduction	0	0	0
Scandalous	1	1	0
Lasciviousness/ lascivious acts	5	4	0
Fornication	25	35	0
Adultery	3	0	0
Bastardy	4	9	0
Total Number of Sex Crime Search Terms per Volume	38	49	0

III. Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The first barrier is language. The Puritan legates who recorded these sex crimes did not use familiar modern terminology when describing specific acts. For example, it is unsurprising that there were no explicit mentions of bestiality or rape, because rape was often called “abduction,” and bestiality was so unsavory as to warrant the use of euphemisms. Therefore, it was slightly surprising that there were no indexed allusions to abduction or to “pursuing strange flesh,” slang for homosexual sex, bestiality, or other perversions. The second issue is the inconsistency of crime reporting style. Crimes were often indexed by the perpetrator’s names rather than by the name of the crime itself. Thus, finding a specific sex crime is often left up to chance.

This problem leads to a third research complication: sex crimes often went tacitly unrecorded because of fear, personal connection to the perpetrator, or a desire to preserve communal harmony. There is no way of analyzing unreported or quietly resolved sex crimes, because they do not exist in this written record.

IV. Findings

Fornication is the most commonly reported crime, with sixty total mentions in *Volumes III* and *V*. One could infer that this frequency is because Puritans often prosecuted that which violates the sacred union of marriage; to fornicate was a threat to the spouse, the community, and God. Bestiality, sodomy, buggery, pursuing strange flesh, and rape/abduction were not explicitly mentioned in any volume, or at least they were not indexed as such. This absence leads one to conjecture that perhaps such crimes were less commonly reported because of their especially violent, shameful, and salacious nature. Lasciviousness and “scandalous” were noted several times, showing that Puritans monitored and criminalized gestures, speech, and behavior.⁹⁴

In order to make any educated assumptions about the transmission of morality across several Puritan generations, one would require a more in-depth analysis of all available volumes for a larger and more diverse population sample. However, it can be reasonably extrapolated from the given data that the nature and reporting of sex crimes changed throughout these years, supporting the theory of Puritan moral evolution. In *Volume I*, representing first-generation Puritans in the twenty-year period between 1636 and 1656, authorities recorded 38 total sex crimes. In *Volume V*, however, representing

⁹⁴ *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, 1636-1686*, Vol. I-II.

just a two-year span between 1672-1674, authorities recorded a whopping 49 sex crimes- and these are just the crimes indexed by keyword.⁹⁵

This drastic increase lends credibility to the Puritan elders' fears that the youth were becoming immoral in the New World. Conversely, it could show a tightening on regulation of sexual behavior. Equally dramatic is the total absence of the mention of sex crimes in *Volume IX*, spanning from 1683-1686. Sex crimes obviously took place, but in this volume, crimes tend to be listed exclusively under the perpetrator's names and not by individual crime keywords or under the general umbrella of "crimes." One could also attribute the dearth of recorded sex crimes to the gradual move into modernity, but historians know from localized events of hysteria such as the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 that such a relaxing of Puritan ideals was simply not the case. Overall, this project showed that while working with anecdotal data has many downsides, it is possible to make educated generalizations about the time periods represented, even if some aspects must be left up guesswork and further study because of the secretive manner in which Puritans referred to and recorded sexual crimes.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid., I, V.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Vol. IX.

Conclusion



Figure 18: Satirical woodcut from 1650 English text, *The Ranters Ranting*. So-called “Ranters,” or rebellious Englishmen, rebelled against Puritanical and religious monoculture by drinking, dancing, and carousing – but more importantly, by celebrating these vices openly.

It may not be conducive to speculate as to why most historians of early New England have neglected to explore the nuances of Puritan sex and masculinity. However, it must be widely acknowledged that these topics deserve further study, both as a subset of sex and gender studies and as cultural topics within the greater subject of early modern European and Atlantic studies. Since written sources are so plentiful and there has never been a lack of interest in studying the American colonies and the Puritans themselves, there is no longer an excuse to allow stereotypes about Puritan repression and stiffness perpetuate. To do so is to allow the public – and historians – to entertain the notion of a Puritans as a one-sided group of religious zealots, which removes them of their chance to be given a fairer treatment in the public imagination. A group that was so instrumental in establishing the religious, cultural, literary - and sexual- foundations of North America

This thesis represents just a bare starting point of what could be researched within these topics. However, the fact that the evidence was relatively easy to find, sometimes hidden within well-known primary sources, shows that not only is the research necessary, but it is also highly possible. Furthermore, a select group of historians, especially Richard Godbeer, has shown that sexual history of early Americans is both engaging to read and that it remains relevant to the family, gender, and racial interactions of the seventeenth century and beyond. Godbeer especially emphasizes that studying men through the lens of gender history is an important but unrepresented approach to historiography, because

studying only women in this manner neglects the roles and identities of individual men and men as members of societies.

In the case of the early modern English and New England Puritans, studying the unique sexual proclivities of men reveals fascinating cultural paradoxes that could not otherwise be discerned. Puritans, especially men in positions of religious and legal authority, constructed an ideology and eventually a theocratic society based upon the ideals of hard work, chastity, and deference before God. Yet, Puritans cherished the bonds they formed with their loved ones, especially the proper and sanctified expression of sex within the realm of marriage. The most interesting aspect of the Puritan paradox is the relative sexual laxity by which the everyday lay Puritans conducted their normal lives as compared to tradition and orthodox laws. Although society's laws and customs did not allow them to freely practice sexual deviances such as sodomy, bestiality, and fornication, some Puritans found a way to subvert the law and revel in these illicit pleasures. At the same time, Puritan men took pride in their membership in the greater body of Christ. There was a society which, whether through regulation or celebration, indeed placed extraordinary value on the sexual identity and anatomy of men.

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