

Right vs wrong in puritan literature literature review examples

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According to Edmund Morgan, " the central Puritan dilemma was the problem of doing right in a world that does wrong." If this is to be believed, then the works of many important Puritan authors would express this dilemma through prose - their feeble attempts to make right this flawed world that they lived in. In this essay, the concept of right versus wrong will be explored in the works of William Bradford, John Winthrop, Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor.

William Bradford's book *Of Plymouth Plantation* was the perfect example of this dilemma; the Puritans themselves went to Plymouth in order to do right, as the world around them did not respect their own religious beliefs, which they fled to the New World to express. Landing safely at Plymouth Rock, Bradford waxes philosophical about the fact that there was few prospects for them, but the possibility of hope: " they had little power to help them, or themselves; and how ye case stood between them & ye merchants at their coming away, hath already been declared. What could not sustain them but ye spirit of God & his grace?" (Bradford, 1647). Bradford wrote biographically of the Pilgrim experience, sparing no detail and lending a realistic bent to the ideals of goodness and righteousness that the Pilgrims took with them to America.

John Winthrop's sermon " A Model of Christian Charity" is another example of how the Puritans felt America was their chance to set up a righteous beacon of hope in a terrible world. Winthrop writes of a " city upon a hill," watched by the world and envied (Winthrop, 1630). This was America, this new country and home for the Puritans, creating the idea of American

exceptionalism by coining the idea that America was God's country, the home of the pure. In the sermon, Winthrop rejected the ideals of the Church of England, as they were not restrictive enough with their adherence to religious conformance. He wanted the Puritan state to be a model state, and for everyone to be at their best. This was how he wanted the world to see America - as a New England, a better England.

Poet Anne Bradstreet wrote several works detailing the hardships that Puritans endured in the course of their settling into the New World, and of the Puritan righteousness that stood through the trying times. In her poem called " Upon the Burning of Our House July 10, 1666," Bradstreet details how she felt when her home burned down, taking nearly 800 of her own books, which she treasured, with it. Instead of becoming angry and incensed, and falling to the sins of rage and hate, she instead turned to God and consoled herself with the promise of heaven - " And when I could no longer look / I blest His grace that gave and took / That laid my goods now in the dust. / Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just. / It was his own; it was not mine. / Far be it that I should repine" (Bradstreet, 1666).

Instead of focusing on the worldliness of the terrible event, she wished to do right despite the terribleness of the world. Puritan ideals focused on the grace of God and being ever forgiving of transgressions, even acts of God like the burning of her home. Bradstreet sought to find grace and temperance in the arms of the Lord, and see beyond the earthly anger that had the potential to rise within her. As a result, she exemplified the Puritan ideal of staying righteous in the face of wrongdoing.

Edward Taylor's "The Preface to God's Determination" makes major distinctions between righteous and ungodly actions, and takes great pains to outline just how powerful and all-knowing God can be. Speaking of the Creation of the earth, Taylor states that God "filleted the earth so fine" and "in this Bowling Alley bowld the Sun" (Taylor,). The central crux of the text revolves around the greatness and omnipotence of the Lord, and how the righteous man is the servant of the Lord. As the Puritans place a great deal of importance on righteousness, they are meant to dedicate themselves to His service. Those serving the Lord are sainted, and it is the duty of those who serve to overcome their own unworthiness and pledge themselves totally to Puritanism. Since God is so great and man so lowly, Taylor states that it is our responsibility to do good in this world.

In conclusion, the Puritan authors were mostly concerned with their relationship to God as a means to practice their own righteousness. God would grant them the grace to survive the harsh conditions of the New World, of their own sins, and bad things that happen to them. All in all, the dilemma of the Puritan struggle for good vs. evil is exemplified in these authors' works as a means to better themselves in the face of new challenges in the frontier.

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