

Engendering Puritan Religious Culture in Old and New England

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"It is said, I will poure my Spirit upon your Daughters, and they shall prophesie," she quoted. "If God give me a gift of Prophecy, I may use it." During her trial, Anne Hutchinson spoke of her spiritual journey. After she turned toward God, the Spirit "by his propheticall office" opened scripture to her, and she was led to Christ, "from which time the Lord did discover to me all sorts of Ministers, and how they taught, and to know what voyce I heard, which was the voyce of *Moses*, which of *John the Baptist*, and which of Christ; the voyce of my beloved . . ." ¹

In her self-revelation, Hutchinson claimed that she heard God's word "by an immediate voice," supposedly committing blasphemy. And while I might challenge historians' conclusions that the trial was then over (it appears to have continued through several protracted, complicated arguments), I do think that Hutchinson's claim was the reason that John Winthrop and most of the clergy had determined, even before the trial began, to banish her. ² Many scholars have judged Hutchinson's admissions as weakness, but one might as easily see them as declarations of exceptional strength. Hutchinson seemed to revel in her prophetic moment, and rather than provide evidence against her, the power gathered in her speech appeared to frighten Winthrop, warning him of just how necessary it was for evidence to be found. He almost said as much:

here she hath manifested, that her opinions and practise have been the cause of al our disturbances, & that she walked by such a rule as cannot stand with the peace of any State; for such bottomlesse revelations . . . if they be allowed in one thing, must be admitted a rule in all things; for they being above reason and Scripture, they are not subject to controll. ³

Long suspected of charisma grounded in her prophetic revelations, Hutchinson undermined the authority of secular and sacred officers with her own spiritual power.

While the defeat of the Hutchinsonians did not eliminate dissent from the colony (the Gortonites, Baptists, and Quakers are proof against such facile conclusions), in the resolution of this crisis the New England leadership traversed essential political and spiritual crossings. ⁴ Mechanisms for identifying and silencing dissent were refined, and clerics developed a language for

describing and justifying those processes. More importantly, clerics addressed directly the radical egalitarian implications of their espoused spirituality. In other words, I find in this controversy not only a theological debate concerning salvation and a political discourse about dissent, but also a socio-religious discourse concerning gender, religiosity, and spiritual charisma.

Like other historians of Puritan spirituality, my efforts have been dependent upon the paradigms and language used by those who articulated either their own religious progress or the experiences of others. From Perry Miller's construction of a theological hegemony embracing all but a few cranks to Stephen Foster's elaborate delineation of the development of the region's Puritan culture, the history of New England Puritanism represents one of the most extensive, though not always so sophisticated, historiographies in U.S. colonial history.⁵ While Miller's own reconstruction of first-generation Puritan ideology relied heavily upon layered readings of English theologians, his analysis of post-1650 New England seemed restricted by geographic boundaries. Unfortunately, many historians followed Miller's lead; they began with English sources but soon turned to texts and paradigms produced by and reflecting the particular experience of the colonists. In the past fifteen years Foster has led the way in challenging the exceptionalism model that had come to dominate Puritan scholarship, returning historians to a transatlantic framework of analysis.⁶

The benefits of such a framework are obvious for those studying the founding decade, for how else can the colonizers' culture be understood? The continuous arrival of new immigrants combined with frequent return visits and transatlantic communications indicates that a model that examines New England as one segment of a larger network of English dissenters has a great hope of understanding the ideological world created by the colonists themselves. But like the colonists, these benefits can travel in both directions. Historians of English Puritanism have been finding in New England patterns and developments that throw light on English culture and society.⁷ Unquestionably, in the case of my research, the gendering of early Massachusetts society and Puritan spirituality can only be found through an exploration of English texts and practices. However, I also believe that as Civil War England, like 1635 Massachusetts, was characterized by extraordinary theological, spiritual, and social instability, an exploration of the Hutchinsonian controversy, one of the few extensively-documented gender crises within Puritan culture, can augment historians understanding of gender dynamics within Civil War England and deepen our appreciation of gender turmoil in fomenting cultural disorder.

Despite efforts to dismiss prophesying women to the specific, miraculous years of the early Christian church, the years during which God actively revealed his scriptural word, Puritans were deeply interested in the strength of such seemingly ordinary prophets, women as well as men. They searched out the

source of their charis, their spiritual authority, marvelled at the power of their speech, and found promise in the ability of ordinary persons, like themselves, to see God, to reach God. They revelled in the hope of that astonishing moment when God would touch them in return. This conviction in the ability of individual souls to touch God and their own achievement of communion with the divine provided a sense of spiritual superiority that stood at the center of Puritans' strength and self-confidence. Grounded in this spiritual core, they proved willing to stand against the powers of a corrupt church and a cunning, degenerate monarch, to wage revolution, and to found an overseas colony.

Yet this conviction was also the source of ideological confusion in the face of the New Englanders' struggle to create the perfect patriarchal community. If the outpouring of domestic manuals was any indicator, Puritans were deeply concerned with familial relations, including those of husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, and mothers and sons.⁸ As writers constructed a rigid system of gender relations, they also mapped out a model of female virtue determined, in part, by their own construction of women's weaknesses as well as their desire and need to sustain male authority from the household outward. The leadership found itself required to control women for the good of the community as well as the women themselves. Yet they also accepted and embraced the sacred potential of all individuals, women as well as men, to discover God and attain salvation. The Hutchinsonian crisis arose at this intersection of patriarchy and religiosity, a seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the spiritual authority of individuals and the demands of godly social order.

In the effort to establish and maintain a biblical patriarchy, Puritan society was greatly assisted by a complex of English common law and custom, founded upon assumptions of marital unity and male superiority. The ideal of female subjection was partially realized in the concept of coverture, through which the legal personhood of a woman was completely subsumed under her husband's identity, and her property under his ownership. A wife's dependence became not only a matter of religious, social, and legal restrictions, but necessarily of concrete economics. Although surrounded by such helpful laws and traditions, although "the common laws here shaketh hand with divinitye," many Puritan writers found it necessary to emphasize the need for women's subordination.⁹ The multitude of domestic manuals produced by Puritans during the seventeenth century provided not concrete instructions about the running of a household so much as prescriptions for a godly family ethos. While it may not be surprising that men were instructed to govern firmly, wisely, and gently while women were told to submit to their husband's rule, it remains noteworthy that these were almost the only guidelines provided.

For example, in his eight-part, seven-hundred page treatise *Of Domesticall Duties*, William Gouge devoted his third treatise on wives' duties to the nature,

substance, and implications of one particular duty: subjection. A woman owed her husband outward reverence in gesture and speech; she should behave toward him with courtesy, mildness, sobriety, modesty, neither lightness nor wantonness. She would obey his commands, come when called, eschewing "Vashtie-like stoutness," and take meekly any reproofs. Gouge even listed appropriate titles to be used by a wife toward her husband: Lord, Husband, or perhaps Master with his surname. She ought not to call him Brother or Friend, nor Sweet or Love, nor by his Christian name, as all these implied an equality. So, too, a man might call his spouse Wife, or perhaps Love, or Dove, but certainly not Lady, Mistress, Dame, or Mother, all of which bestowed too much respect.¹⁰

This Puritan mandate to subordinate wife to husband and, more generally, woman to man, was justified by their conviction of natural female inferiority. The weakness of woman lay in her physical being, an argument supported by science. In a medical vision dominated by humor theory, women were thought to be subject to the overwhelming influence and vagaries of bodily fluids. The specter of menstrual blood certainly influenced such analysis, with menstruation seen as a means through which woman expelled turgid, fermented humors, necessary because her body overflowed with polluting fluids. Unfortunately, the very nature and behavior of women showed that menses itself was less than adequate. Frequently overwhelmed by excess fluids, women became emotional, enthusiastic, and ill. The humors coursing through women's bodies weakened not only their constitutions but also their moral characters, for within the damp swampy atmosphere of their bodies, reason, the mind, and the soul were often unable to exert control over feelings and urges. Why humors were more trapped in women than men was not explained, merely observed as the determinative difference between the genders. That humors were perceived as determinative is intriguing and suggestive, since a theory of gender difference based upon humors rather than reproductive biology delineates a continuum rather than an essentialist dichotomy and implies that gender characteristics, though tied to biology, were not irretrievably tied to one or another sex but could cross sex lines if the humors were out of balance. Women were not qualitatively different from men; they were, perhaps, simply soggy men. Yet in the damp swirl of humors, women were understood as essentially, physically inferior.¹¹

Such weakness also characterized woman's intellect. She was unable to follow complex reasoning or judge intelligently the arguments of others; she simply lacked the mental capacity. The wife of Connecticut Governor Hopkins, for example, was said to have completely lost her understanding and reason, because "of her giving herself wholly to reading and writing . . . For if she had attended her household affairs and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper to men,

whose minds are stronger, etc., she had kept her wits.”¹² No matter how strenuously they searched, women were intrinsically unable to recognize the truth unless it was pointed out to them. They merely acquired “a jangling knowledge, holding of opposition, a knowledge falsely so called.” The proof lay in “the *propension* and *proclivity* of that sexe to take up errors, that women are more easily seduced than men, and have their judgments first, and soonest poysoned.”¹³ Once led into error, women became the leaders of factions and promoters of heresy, unreachable by the calm voices of reason, for women were not only unsophisticated and gullible, but also emotional and willful: “Passion and Affection in [women] either in love or hatred, is much more extream and violent then in Men.”¹⁴

Women could be easily seduced into error; she could not be persuaded from error. Persuasion was, after all, an intellectual enterprise. A man’s ability to be persuaded by theological discourse reflected intellectual strength, while a woman’s determination to stand by her errors, her refusal to listen to reason, further demonstrated her weakness. Likewise, the use of the term seduction reinforced the picture of women led by passions and easily manipulated by evil forces. In fact, the language of seduction worked to move the construction of woman’s soul beyond the condition of pitiable weakness toward a more fearsome malevolence. Ever since Eve had lured Adam into sin, women had displayed a “natural perswasivenesse of such incensing to evill forcibly.”¹⁵ Seduction followed seduction naturally, reproducing wickedness and error across the landscape.

Woman’s general weakness of body and mind translated into weakness in her dealings with God and devil. All humanity may have been deeply depraved, but woman far outdistanced man in her wickedness. Not only was she more likely to sin; her sinning took on an exaggerated, shameless character. When compared to man,

women proves the worst. Its much what, in this sexe, as in the inferiour natures of creatures, the shee-Bear, Lyoness, or Wolfe, is the most savage and fierce: so here, the impotency and unbridelednesse of the sexe, makes her more subject to rage, unrighteousnesse, revenge and wickednesse then a man.¹⁶

Eve may have been the mother of the race, but it was as the tempted and tempting pawn of Satan that she was most frequently memorialized. Yes, woman was inclined toward frivolity, vanity, extravagance, sloth, scolding, scandal-mongering, pettiness, envy, stinginess, and pride. However, such small vices represented but the outer edge of a vast pit of corruption:

And if we but seriously consider the nature and qualities of the generality of that sex, even in all ages from the fall of man unto this present, we may well perceive that they have not been onely extreemly evil in themselves; but have also been the main instruments and immediate causes of Murther, Idolatry, and a multitude of other hainous sins, in many high and eminent men.¹⁷

Evil flowed deeply in woman's body amidst the excess fluids overbalancing her emotional stability and corrupting her reason. In a peculiar linguistic symbiosis, menstrual fluid became one symbol of evil and pollution, as in Peter Bulkeley's comment that the damned "are to [God] as the filthiness of a menstruous woman."¹⁸

Women's essentially evil nature bore frightening fruit. Their predilection toward error, heresy, and blasphemy was matched biologically by the production of monsters. Tales of "monstrous births" were a common (and popular) form of sensationalist literature during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁹ From the extraordinarily graphic descriptions provided in these stories, twentieth-century medical analysts have recognized severe birth defects as well as the expulsion of tumors from the body. While early modern physicians and philosophers were just beginning to understand that such tragedies had natural causes, most Puritans still looked at such events as providential communications from God, sometimes warnings, sometimes punishments, but often the predictable fruit of the sins of a woman.

When Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson both suffered childbirth tragedies, New England leaders had no difficulty interpreting such special providences as reflections upon their wickedness.²⁰ While Cotton saw the stillbirth of Dyer's child as a private rebuke, Winthrop discovered public evidence of divine displeasure in both parents and midwife. "The Father and Mother were of the highest form of our refined Familists . . . The Midwife, One *Hawkins* wife of St. *Ives*, was notorious for familiarity with the devill, and now a prime Familist."²¹ Similarly, after her banishment to Rhode Island, Hutchinson was said to have given birth to some thirty monsters. "And see how the wisdom of God fitted this judgement to her sinne every way, for looke as she had vented mishapen opinions, so she must bring forth deformed monsters." Both Dwyer's and Hutchinson's births were seen as judgments: clear, harsh expressions of divine displeasure. They were also punishments tied to, or perhaps one should say growing out of, their corrupted femaleness, illustrating the connection between mind and body.

God himselfe was pleased to step in . . . as clearely as if he had pointed with his finger, in causing the two fomenting women in the time of the height of the Opinions to produce out of their

wombs, s before they had out of their braines, such monstrous births as no Chronicle (I thinke) hardly ever recorded.²²

The clearest evidence of the intrinsic evil of women was found in the predominance of women among Satan's servants, witches. In New England, approximately 78% percent of accused witches were women; 87% of those tried or convicted of witchcraft were female.²³ Such statistics merely reflected contemporary beliefs that most practitioners of witchery were female (King James I had estimated that the proportion of female to male witches was twenty to one), a perception that grew out of a complicated network of ideas that went beyond the simple conviction of woman's wickedness. The nature of witchcraft as understood during this era played upon contemporary knowledge of women's work, women's character, and the nature of evil. Witches were not merely wicked; their sins were the sins of women writ larger. Both the theological and popular definitions of a witch matched the definition of woman in so many particulars that no one could be surprised that most witches were women or that so many women were inclined toward witchcraft.²⁴

Women tilled the gardens where powerful herbs and roots could be cultivated; they had charge of the hearth and of cookery, where those herbs and roots could be brewed into potions and secreted in charms. Healing and medicine were also within women's domain, and she who could heal could also bring disease. Added to this special knowledge was woman's weakness of character. She was petty, jealous, impulsive; she boasted a short temper, held deep grudges, and nursed "*a secret dislike of, and discontentedness with her present condition*, the condition wherein God himself had set her."²⁵ Moreover, theologians were beginning to understand that all practitioners of magic were heretics and blasphemers, gullible souls seduced into league with Satan. A woman was the sort of envious, vindictive person easily tempted to use magic against her neighbor, and as a knowledgeable housewife she had the skills to do so.

Despite her nature, woman was eligible for salvation, although the pathway favored the male saint. The means toward grace, the "ordinances," including sermons, catechizing, and the sacraments, were justifiably under the control of a male clergy. "Though the knowledge, and the fear of GOD are common to men and women (for women also are in the Covenant . . . especially seeing GOD hath vouchsafed them to be spirituall . . .) yet the administration of sacred things is the peculiar of men."²⁶ So too, the emphasis placed upon studying scripture reinforced the gender hierarchy. For although Puritan leaders urged all believers to read the Bible for themselves, they understood that most people needed assistance. The text was difficult, often abstruse and obscure. Only with formal training in languages, logic, rhetoric, and theology was a man truly prepared to interpret scripture. The attainments

of an Anne Bradstreet or Anne Hutchinson notwithstanding, women suffered from an educational imbalance. In New England, about half as many women as men could read, and in both old and New England women were absolutely excluded from university education.²⁷ By privileging erudition as a primary source of religious authority, Puritans effectively disfranchised women religiously.

Although salvation came through dependence upon God, and knowledge of salvation through conversion, the conversion experience itself came to be defined by the preparatory steps of reading, study, and prayer and the sanctification following conversion. I find this focus upon erudition, preparation, and sanctification to be a game attempt to reconstruct an essentially mystical spirituality as a developmental one. A developmental understanding favored men by privileging men's intellectual and moral superiority as constructed within science and theology. Yet the fact that a reconstruction was necessary at all reflected the basic conflict inherent in Puritan religiosity. The very nature of mysticism, a direct, intense relationship with the divine, a relationship available to anyone, depending only upon the arbitrary choice of God, established a basic egalitarian spirituality that empowered the individual in relation to society.

Women, and other disfranchised believers, often refused to accept the limits of that developmental reconstruction and continued to seek direct communion with God. That was certainly a rational decision in terms of personal power since the alternative placed women in a submissive, suppliant relationship to men. However, I would argue that beyond political reasons, many women found sectarian mysticism to be a particularly attractive, alluring, perhaps even natural spirituality. In the developmental religiosity of education and preparation, God was the father, and the believer his son or daughter. Men could be seen to be more godlike, to have more of the image of God in the same way that sons identified with fathers and daughters with mothers.²⁸ However, in the mystical language of conversion, God was the bridegroom, the believer was the bride. Rather than strive to uncover the image of God in one's own soul, the believer sought ecstatic communion with God.

Puritan theologians had argued that women required restriction and guidance because they were weak, passionate, sexual. Women were first seduced; then they seduced others. The construction of the witch who has had carnal relations with Satan, producing imps and familiars that suck nourishment from the witches' teats on her body, represented only the extreme end of a cosmology that conflated sexuality with evil. Despite their scorn of celibacy and praise for marriage, despite their celebration of the nuptial bed, Puritan theologians carried with them the medieval distrust of female beauty and sexuality. The passionate power of a wife was dangerous enough; sexuality unleashed was terrifying.

Yet mystical engagement with God was sexuality unleashed—heterosexual, even marital sexuality—but unarguably sexual. Puritans often invoked erotic language of the *Song of Solomon*, the Old Testament love poem that described the “love of Jesus Christ, the true Salomon and King of peace, and the faithful soule. . .” John Cotton had delivered (and published) a series of sermons upon these canticles, using the sensuous language as a means of enticing his listeners toward God. Thomas Hooker assured believers that they were spouses of Christ, while Thomas Shephard longed to accept Christ as “Lord and Savior and Husband.”²⁹ Similarly, Anne Hutchinson heard the “voice of my beloved,” while other women wrote that they took “delight in the Image of God,” that “his Spirit . . . has stirred me up. My heavenly bridegroom is come.”³⁰ In the very last poem she composed, Anne Bradstreet looked toward sickness and death as the “bed Christ did perfume,” and awaited with welcome trembling the joys of death:

Then soul and body shall unite
 And of their Maker have the sight;
 Such lasting joys shall there behold
 As ear ne’er heard nor tongue e’er told;
 Lord make me ready for that day,
 Then come, dear Bridegroom, come away.³¹

The most graphic, illustrious example of such emotional outpourings remains the poetry of Edward Taylor who, in his meditations upon Canticles, recorded his experience of the excitement and joys of spirituality as the thrills and pleasures of the marital sexuality:

Thy Saving Grace my Wedden Garment make:
 Thy Spouses Frame into my Soul Convay.
 I then shall be thy Bride Espoused by thee
 And thou my Bridesgroom Deare Espousde shalt bee.³²

In using sexual language to describe spiritual realities, both glorious and terrible, Puritans could speak either analogically or literally. The problem was that they claimed to do both. Marital love was a metaphor for one’s relationship with God; witches actually had carnal relations with the devil. The saint was swept up in the love of God like a bride awaiting her lover; female heretics were mothers of actual monsters. In other words, in their linguistic efforts to portray human engagement with the supernatural, Puritans uttered grammatically parallel statements that were supposed to be understood in radically different ways, sometimes as metaphor and sometimes as fact. The inconsistency is intellectually staggering yet politically predictable; perhaps it

does make a kind of sense in terms of a transitional society turning from a magical toward a scientific view of the universe.

Nevertheless, rather than accept the manifest meaning of these statements as either metaphorical or literal, along with the implication that Puritans always knew which was meant, I would like to explore the possibility that alternative, parallel meanings were heard, and that these plural readings had significant impact upon flowering Puritan spirituality. Seventeenth-century Puritans believed they had the physical evidence of monstrous births, witches' teats, and familiars romping about the landscape, yet few were so simple-minded as to interpret every black cat, pimple, or childbirth tragedy as evidence of supernatural evil. Witch trial examinations, for example, indicate that it was a signed, Faustian contract that mattered, suggesting that carnality had become, in part, a figurative expression of the depth of evil associated with witchcraft, although even here, the legal image works in tandem with the sexual constructions, conveying an image of fluid exchange of woman's blood signature for devil's semen. Moreover, the movement of language meaning between the figurative and the literal was reflected in the frequent sexual accusations leveled at women who had been or would be accused of witchcraft.³³

Just as the sexual signification of evil could not always be read as fact, the rapturous language of mysticism was not entirely metaphorical. Decoding mystical texts has long been recognized as a difficult task, in part because the non-linear, or, as many would have it, impenetrable quality of the texts themselves renders the language inaccessible to rationalist reading. In her writing on medieval religious women, Caroline Bynum has had great success, in part because she takes the narrative and the language seriously and considers the range of possible meanings of the texts. New England Puritans were not medieval mystics; but Bynum's examination of the relationship between spirituality, the body, and sexuality and her emphasis upon the connection between body and spirit in the minds of her religious women offers interpretations beyond a rationalist reading of metaphor to an exploration of spirituality in the seventeenth-century saint's own terms.³⁴

Of course, the image of a believer, particularly a woman, as the bride of Christ has a long history. Hildegard of Bingen, twelfth-century abbess, explicitly identified this role for women in opposition to the priesthood. Yet it must be remembered that such marital language incorporated corporeality and sexuality relating woman to a male God. Margery Kempe, the fifteenth-century English mystic, was only one of many who experienced visions of Christ as true and faithful lover, in opposition to husband. Catherine of Siena experienced her mystical marriage with Christ where his foreskin became her wedding ring. Hadewijch, thirteenth-century poet, described one encounter at the Eucharist in explicitly sexual terms:

After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported.³⁵

I grant that Puritans, like their Catholic forebears, did not believe the converted saint had enjoyed a physical, sexual connection with God. But I would argue that the emotional tensions and exuberance experienced during the ordeal of mystical communion in some ways mirrored his or her personal knowledge of the physical and psychic excitement of sexual relations. In this sense, the sexual nature of mystical communion in some ways mirrored his or her personal knowledge of the physical and psychic excitement of sexual relations. In this sense, the sexual nature of mystical communion was experienced as an intimate, electrifying, and breathtaking reality for the saint. Moreover, I find it plausible that this spiritual experience stimulated not only the same emotions and passions but also the same physical sensations usually aroused during pleasurable sexual relations.

The sexuality of Puritan religiosity becomes profoundly important in light of their construction of masculinity and femininity through sexuality. Within the narrow boundaries of acceptable, heterosexual relations, man was active but reasonable, woman passive but passionate. When Puritans imagined (or actually experienced) their relationship with God as a sexual one, they brought understandings of divine/male activity in opposition to human/female passivity along with expressions of the core passion that believers felt toward God. The sexual language used incorporated not only an extended vocabulary of marital bliss—bridal bowers and comely bridegrooms—and terms of deep affection such as beloved, but also the language of sexual violence. Ravish, a frequent seventeenth-century synonym for rape, appeared again and again in the confessions of saints, but especially men, as if determined to emphasize, in opposition to their active maleness, their own passivity in the wake of God's aggressive love.³⁶

In a society that recognized only marital (or in a pinch, betrothal) sexuality as a legitimate outlet for sexual desires and passions, the Puritans' political and social essentialization of gender might well have interfered with men's ability to experience a mystical, sexualized communion with a male God, even as it may have promoted women's spirituality. True, many male Puritans answered the mystical calling, claiming to have taken on the female role in relation to God, reflecting a spiritual identity that could mimic biology and cross gender lines. Nonetheless, the intimate, personal nature of this experience seemed to have a special affinity for women.³⁷ The seventeenth-century Puritan sectaries, many of them leaning toward the mystical, claimed a membership that often included more women than men. Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer are merely

the better-known New England representatives of a large number of female English religionists empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach, prophesy, and proclaim God's truth.³⁸

This conflation of sexuality and spirituality, and the narrow boundary between the glorious and the despicable, becomes clearest in writings produced by sectarians and in opposition to sectaries. The late sixteenth-century followers of Henrik Niclaes, in communion, or godded, with God, had opposed learning in favor of opening themselves to the spirit of divine love. Niclaes himself once described the spiritual children of God as "not covered with any foreskin of the sinful flesh, nor yet with fleshly or earthly mindes, therefore do they likewise (with their spiritual members) walk naked and uncovered, both before God, and before one another."³⁹ He and his followers called for the creation of a grand family of love, leading several Civil War commentators into scurrilous attacks such as: "Here's a loving sect presented to you they thinke that a man may gaine salvation by shewing himselfe loving, especially to his neighbours wife. . ."⁴⁰

While the sensationalist popular press was unrestrained in its attacks upon sectaries, radical leaders preached and celebrated the plainness of the gospel, the purity of the spirit, and the free love of God. One spokesman for the radicals claimed in astonishment that anyone would want to silence believers "from declaring the sweet injoyments of their transcendant excellencies of their beloved, of their God, of their King, and of their Jesus, communicated to them." Another attacked the erudition and developmental spirituality of his opponents as, of course, dead religion, glorying instead in the divine love enjoyed by himself and his community:

And the more this faith of free justification, and of having on this wedding garment, increaseth: the more this peace and joy in the Holy Ghost increaseth. . . . And the more this peace and joy increaseth, the more the foresaid love increaseth, and inflameth the heart to walk freely, cheerfully, and zealously in all Gods will. . .⁴¹

Still, stories were published of Adamites who prayed together naked in the woods, ranters whose meetings were spent "in drunkenness, uncleanness, blasphemous words, filthy songs, mixt dances of men and women stark naked," and an unnamed sectary where, following upon satisfaction of their carnal lusts, they fell into a sport called "whipping of the Whore."⁴² Separatists were attacked as conventiclors who met in "secret and obscure places, in which voluptuous wantonnesse has her meeting, where the Spirit enlightens the understanding to see a sister in the darke," as communities where "many chast virgins becom harlots, and the mothers of bastards."⁴³ Hutchinson herself came under such an attack from no other than John Cotton, who warned her of

"that filthie Sinne of the Communitie of Woemen and all promiscuus and filthie cominge together of men and Woemen without Distinction or Relation of Marriage. . . . And though I have not herd, nayther do I thinke, you have bine unfaythfull to your Husband in his Marriage Covenant, *yet that will follow upon it.* . . ."⁴⁴

Puritan theologians saw a clear relationship between heresy, deviant sexuality, and gender. Their vision did not, generally, include the mirror image of that picture, that is, the relationship between mystical communion, celebrated sexuality, and gender. Yet I find the connection strong and demonstrable in the high number of sectarian female adherents and leaders and in the language used by Puritans to describe their religiosity. Of course, in their rejection of erudition and other artificial hierarchies and their emphasis upon the equal ability of all believers to approach God, radical Puritans opened doors to spiritual power that were happily entered by women and members of the lower classes.⁴⁵

Certainly these egalitarian promises were important, but I do not believe that this was the sects' sole attraction. Opponents accused radical sectaries of ideological, behavioral, and sexual excess, an excess they equated with essential femaleness. With an impressive circularity, commentators argued that sectaries were obviously ignorant and oversexed because they were dominated by women, and that women were attracted to sectaries because of their theological and sexual extravagances. In this effort to deprecate ecstatic spirituality, particularly if enjoyed without the guidance and blessing of a learned, institutionalized clergy, Puritan leaders successfully undermined its credibility among and attraction for male believers. Yet in their disparagement of mystical sectaries as female religions, commentators may have inadvertently revealed a deep truth: that Puritan mysticism was sexual in nature, and that this culture's construction of gender along with its understanding of God as male naturally promoted a sexualized piety more accessible to women than men. Perhaps those weaknesses that rendered women easy prey for the devil also made them easy marks for God.

Notes

1. John Winthrop, *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines*, in David D. Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy: A Documentary History 1636-1638* (Middletown, Conn., 1968), 268, 272. A second version of her self revelation can be found in "The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown" in Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, 336-338.
2. For the exchange, see "Examination of Hutchinson," 337. Historians seem to follow Winthrop's lead in their conclusion that Hutchinson, in this moment of weakness, condemned herself. See Edmund S. Morgan, "The Case Against Hutchinson," *New England Quarterly* 10 (1937), 647; Richard B. Morris, "Jezebel before the Judges: Anne Hutchinson Tried for Sedition," in his *Fair Trial* (New York, 1967), 24; Emery Battis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill, 1962), 346; Hall, "Introduction," *Antinomian Controversy*, 10.
3. Winthrop, *Short Story*, 274.
4. On heterodoxy in Massachusetts, see Philip Gura, *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660* (Middletown, Conn., 1984); Carla Gardina Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts* (Cambridge, 1991); Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill, 1991).
5. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1939 and 1956); Foster, *The Long Argument*. See also Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca, 1963); Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven, 1966); David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1972); Robert Pope, *The Halfway Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, 1969); William K. B. Stoever, *A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven: Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, Conn., 1978); Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, 1982); Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Spiritual Conversion* (New York, 1986); Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York, 1986); Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).
6. In addition to Foster, Gura, *Glimpse of Sion's Glory*, depends upon a transatlantic framework.
7. The potential for such analysis, as well as the limits of the transatlantic project so far are reflected in Francis J. Bremer, ed., *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston, 1993). The transatlantic nature of the collection reflects the inclusion of essays on both England and Massachusetts rather than consideration of questions posed by the transatlantic quality of seventeenth-century Puritanism or even some comparative analyses. With one or two exceptions, the essays target either England or New England, occasionally crossing the ocean to acquire a text or event that supports their position.
8. See, for example, *A Godly Forme of Household Government: For the Ordering of Private Families according to the direction of Gods Word* (London, 1598); John Dod and William Hinde, *Bathshebaes Instructions to her Sonne Lemuel* (London, 1614); John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A plaine and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandements* (London, 1615), pages 185-256; Thomas Gataker, *Marriage Duties Briefely Couched* (London, 1620); William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties, Eight Treatises* (London, 1622); Daniel Rogers, *Matrimonial Honour: or the mutuall Crowne and comfort of godly, loyall, and chaste Marriage* (London, 1642).
9. *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights* (London, 1632), as cited in Roger Thompson, *Women in Stuart England and America: A Comparative Study* (Boston, 1974), 162. Thompson provides a good, sound summary of the common law in terms of seventeenth-

century Englishwomen in his chapter "Women's Legal Position and Rights," 161-186. Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill, 1986) is the best, most comprehensive study of this subject for the colonies. Although most of her evidence is drawn from the eighteenth century, she does address the development of the law from the earlier decades, and her understanding of the intricacies of the law combined with her clarity of exposition is unparalleled.

10. Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 271-348. "Vashtie-like" refers to Queen Vashtie in the Book of *Esther*. Vashtie refused to appear before her husband, King Ahazuerus, at his command, leading him to seek a new wife and queen. He married the appropriate counterpoint, Esther.

11. Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, First and Second Parts (1651; London, 1675/1676), 100; Thomas Willis, *The London Practice of Physick* (London, 1685), 614; 633. Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992), 24-27, discusses the seventeenth-century meaning of female wetness in some detail, not merely in terms of physiology but also in terms of personality and moral character. For more detailed descriptions and analyses of scientific and cultural constructions of gender and biology, see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), especially 63-148. There is not space here to discuss in any detail the paradox of a culture that essentializes gender for purposes of political and social order and yet constructs a model of sex continuity in scientific and, I would argue, spiritual terms. The result for the New England Puritans appears to have been some gender confusion and identity insecurity that manifested itself in an aggressively masculine culture and overreaction to any perceived cross-gender behavior, for example the intense hostility toward Hutchinson or Quakers. For interesting looks at this tension, see Roger Thompson, "Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in the Seventeenth-Century New England Colonies," *Journal of American*

Studies 23 (1989), 27-40; Ben Barker-Benfield, "Anne Hutchinson and the Puritan Attitude Toward Women," *Feminist Studies* 1 (1972), 65-98.

12. John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal, "History of New England,"* James Kendall Hosmer, ed. (New York, 1908), 2:225.

13. John Elborow, *Evodias and Syntyche: or, The Female Zelots of the Church of Philippi* (London, 1637), 4.

14. William Hill, *A New-Years Gift for Women Being a true Looking-Glass* (London, 1660), 41.

15. Rogers, *Matrimonial Honour*, 34.

16. *Ibid.*

17. [J]. S., *A Brief Anatomie of Women* (London, 1653), 1.

18. Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel Covenant or the Covenant of Grace Opened* (London, 1651), 79; Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory*, 100. For an excellent discussion of gender and evil, see Elizabeth Reis, "The Devil, the Body, and the Feminine Soul in Puritan New England," *The Journal of American History* 82 (1995), 15-36.

19. Katharine Park and Lorraine J. Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England and France," *Past and Present*, 92 (1981), 20-54; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1971), 90-132; David H. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 71-116; Anne Jacobson Schutte, "Such Monstrous Births': A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985), 85-106. Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (New York, 1991), 124, 143, 165, 288 notes the popularity of this subject in the popular press. She found that such publications, whether broadsides or penny godlies, generally included a picture and always a vivid, detailed description.

20. See Schutte, "Such Monstrous Births," 90-91, n. 13, 14, for a detailed medical discussion of the Dyer and Hutchinson births. Dyer's child has been judged anencephalic with severe spina bifida, while Hutchinson is thought to have expelled a hydatidiform mole.

21. Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:267-268; Winthrop, *A Short Story*, 281.

22. Thomas Weld, "Preface" to Winthrop,

Short Story, 214.

23. Wherever witches were hunted—the European continent, Scotland, England, or New England—communities, churches, and the courts found that most witches were women. In Germany, France, and Scotland, where witch fever ran high, women represented about eighty percent of the accused, while in English counties, where far fewer witches had been sought and discovered, women constituted between ninety and one hundred percent of persons identified as witches. Moreover, men accused of witchcraft were frequently connected, by marriage or kinship, to a female witch. See Christina Lerner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (Oxford, 1984), 84-91; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 620-621; John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York, 1982), 60-64; Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York, 1987), 47-52. For New England, both Demos and Karlsen estimate that about half of the men accused were connected to accused women.

24. The best discussion of the conception of witchcraft in England within the larger ideological and religious frameworks is Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 517-680. For a Puritan discourse on the nature of witchcraft, see William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, 1608).

25. Brinsley, *Looking-Glasse for Women*, 9.

26. Arthur Lake, *Sermons with some Religious and Divine Meditations* (London, 1629), 70.

27. For a basic measure of literacy, see Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England* (New York, 1974). Beginning with the basic evidence of will signatures, Lockridge estimates that the rate of literacy among women was half that of men, 38-42.

28. See, for example, Thomas Taylor, *The Works of that Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, Dr. Thomas Taylor* (London, 1653), 152-153; Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 44-46, 273-278, 346-348; Gataker, *Marriage Duties*, 8-14, 33-34; Rogers, *Matrimonial Honour*, 162, 253-255. Barker-Benfield, "Anne Hutchinson and the Puritan Attitude Toward Women" provides

an excellent outline of the changing Puritan focus from Christ the Bridegroom to God the Father.

29. Introduction to "An Excellent Song which was Salomons," *Geneva Bible*, Facsimile edition, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison, 1969); John Cotton, *A brief exposition with practical observations upon the whole book of Canticles* (London, 1655); Thomas Hooker, *The Unbelievers Preparation for Christ* (London, 1638), 72; Thomas Shepard, *God's Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety, Being the Autobiography & Journal of Thomas Shepard*, ed. Michael McGiffert (Amherst, 1972), 45. Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York, 1992) has identified a superfluity of these sexual allusions in the writings of Cotton, Hooker, and Shepard.

30. Winthrop, *Short Story*, in Hall (ed.), 273, also quoted in "Examination of Hutchinson," in *ibid.*, 337; Susanna Parr, *Susanna's Apology Against the Elders* (1659), 21; Anne Wentworth, *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth* (1677), 9, similar reference on 4.

31. Anne Bradstreet, *As Weary Pilgrim Now at Rest* (1669), in *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, Jeannine Hensley, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: 1967), 295.

32. Edward Taylor, *Meditation. Cant. 4.8. My Spouse*, in *The Poems of Edward Taylor* (New Haven, 1960), 39.

33. On the connection between sexual transgression and witch accusations, see Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 134-140. According to Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 517-558, for most people, a witch's formal relation with the devil mattered less than the presence of maleficium, rendering, again, the meaning of the sexual references about witches ambiguous.

34. Caroline Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982) and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991).

35. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 27-150; cit. 156, 40, 86, 120. These represent a very few examples from the vast gallery of late-medieval female religionists who experienced intense, direct communion with

the divine. Although all did not write of mystical communion in sexual terms, overwhelming numbers did. Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption* and *Jesus as Mother* provide a copious list incorporated into an enlightening analysis of female spirituality and corporeality.

36. Again, Porterfield, *Female Piety*, 40-79, points up the importance of the language of male/divine aggression and female/human humiliation in religious discourse.

37. Ironically, most studies of puritan piety do not discuss female piety, despite the predominance of women among sectarians. While Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," *Past and Present* 13 (1958), 42-62, Phyllis Mack, "Women as Prophets during the English Civil War," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982), 19-45, and Mary Dunn, "Saints and Sisters: Congregational and Quaker Women in the Early Colonial Period," *American Quarterly* 30 (1978), 582-601 have focused essays upon female religious activity in old and New England, few historians have incorporated female experience into general studies. Exceptions include Stephen Foster, "New England and the Challenge of Heresy, 1630-1660: The Puritan Crisis in Trans-Atlantic Perspective," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 38 (1981), 624-660 and Philip Gura, *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660* (Middletown, Conn., 1984). I have argued for a connection between gender and the affinity toward mysticism in "Anne Hutchinson, Sectarian Mysticism, and the Puritan Order," *Church History* (1990), 482-496.

38. I have identified more than thirty prophetic or preaching women who either had their writings published or were identified by name in the publications of others; many more have been identified in church records and the polemical literature, and this does not include the more than a hundred women who were known as prophets, missionaries, and writers among Quakers. A fairly complete list of female prophets can be found in Mack, *Visionary Women*, Appendix, 413-420. See also Dorothy P. Ludlow, "'Arise and Be Doing': English 'Preaching' Women, 1640-1660," (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1978).

39. Henrik Niclaes, *Terra Pacis, A True Testification of the Spiritual Land of Peace* (1575; London, 1649), 123; See also Niclaes, *The Prophecy of the Spirit of Love* (1574; London, 1649) and Niclaes, *Revelatio Dei. The Revelation of God* (1575; London, 1649).

40. *A Discovery of 29 Sects here in London* (London, 1641), 4. For similar comments on familists, see Ephraim Pagitt, *Heresiography* (London, 1654), 82-87.

41. Edward Draper, *A Plain and Faithfull Discovery of a Beame in Master Edwards his Eye* (London, 1646), 4; John Eaton, *The discovery of the most dangerous Dead Faith* (London, 1641), 119-120.

42. Samuel Yarb, *A new Sect of Religion Descryed, Called Adamites* (1641); *A Nest of Serpents Discovered* (1641); *The Routing of the Ranters* ([1641]), 2; *Strange news from Newgate and the Old Baily* (London, 1651), 4.

43. *The Anatomy of the Separatists* (London, 1642), 3; Edward Harris, *A True Relation of a Company of Brownists* (1641), 1. See also *The Brownist haeresies Confuted, Their Knavery Anatomized* (1641); *The Brownist Synagogue* (1641); *The Brothers of the Separation* (London, 1641). The 1640s pamphlet literature attacking the sectaries is extensive, incorporating all levels of erudition and taste, from 200+ page discourses by the most eminently respectable and learned divines to anonymous sensationalist 6-pagers complete with titillating woodcuts.

44. "A Report of the Trial of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson before the Church at Boston," March 1638, in Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy*, 372.

45. Although the question of class is beyond the scope of this essay, I recognize that it sets central questions that must be considered, not only upon its own terms, but also in relation to gender. Puritan radicalism crossed class as well as gender lines, and the extensive literature on English radicalism has been far more deeply engaged with class than gender. Moreover, when gender is raised, the evidence is usually considered as an episode apart from the narrative about class. The separation of class and gender into two interpretive categories is a mistake. Not only can one discuss both groups within the broad political language of

disfranchised communities, but sexualized language was a primary rhetorical tool used to dismiss the lower classes. In describing the lower classes as vulgar, uncontrolled, irrational, and oversexed, the attackers were portraying the lower classes as women. On religious radicalism and class, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside-Down: Radicalism and Religion during the English Revolution* (New York, 1972); Arthur L. Morton, *The World of the Ranters: Religious Radicalism in the English*

Revolution (London, 19170); Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London, 1972); J. F. McGregor and Barry Reay, ed. *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (New York, 1984); Christopher Hill, Barry Reay, and William Lamont, *The World of the Muggletonians* (London, 1983); F. D. Dow, *Radicalism in the English Revolution, 1640-1660* (London, 1985); Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (London, 1985).