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THE NEW ENGLAND WILDERNESS BETWEEN MYTH AND PARADOX

Abstract: *Encountering New England was, for the seventeenth century Puritans, one of the hardest tests. From the moment of landing on the shore of what they believed and what the promotional tracts described to be their Promised Land, the community of the so-called "visible saints" tried to come to terms with the harshness of the new environment by appealing to metaphor. Wilderness became thus a paradoxical concept designating both a sacred place and the devil's territory. By its predominance in both real life and literary production, wilderness is, together with the frontier at the foundation of the American myth.*

Key words: *colonization, myth, paradox, Puritan, specialness, wilderness.*

"Heterotopia" is, according to Michel Foucault a physical approximation of a utopia. He characterizes it according to five principles: of crisis (privileged, sacred or forbidden places according to various individual crises), of alternating functions (e.g. the cemetery), of spatial juxtaposition (e.g. the theater), temporal (what can be called heterochronies - museums, libraries, fairgrounds), and that related to a system of opening and closing which entails either compulsory entry or prior purification (24-26). The essential feature of the opposition utopia-heterotopia pertains to reality. Whereas the former is a place that does not exist, the latter, even if an "other" in the realm of spatiality, still has a function in relation to all the space that remains, which accounts for its reality. The role of a heterotopia, Foucault states, is that of creating "a space that is other, another real place, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled." (Foucault 27)

The establishment of such a special location, a heterotopia of compensation, was the purpose of the New England settlers who came on board of Mayflower and Arbela in 1620 and 1630 in order to inhabit an "other" place, a sacred, God given space that offered the best site for the fulfillment of the Reformation. Theirs was a special condition and required an appropriate location as long as England was becoming, in Puritans' eyes, a cradle of corruption and sin. The wilderness, as a concept as well as a reality, which heavily influenced American culture, served various and paradoxical functions as we will see in this paper. Entering the community who found the "Church in the Wilderness", was initially conditioned by being purified of Old England's errors and sharing a personal conversion experience with the rest of the community. New England is thus the sacred site of the enactment of the drama of Reformation and redemption, a place impregnated with the possibilities of creating a new order that would influence the evolution of the entire world. In his famous sermon, *A Model of Christian Charity*, John Winthrop envisages the future community as a "city upon a hill" (146), a concept taken from Matthew 5:14. "Ye are the light of the world." The Evangelist proclaims, "A citie that is set on an hill can not be hid." (*Geneva Bible*) In other words, they were to be a guiding lighthouse

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which the world could not ignore but at the same time the scriptural text implies the idea of utter responsibility. This metaphor comes to strengthen the idea of specialness, of the better "other", of separation ("upon the hill") but at the same time openness ("the eyes of all people are upon us"); the city on the hill is the Puritan heterotopia. The characteristics of such a world are the concern of this paper that aims at analyzing the already mentioned concepts of "frontier" and "wilderness" as central to the constitution of New England cultural profile, as mythical entities that bore the mark of the Puritan typological and at the same time paradoxical thinking.

1. Legendary Beginnings

The discussion on the roots of the American mythology may be initially faced with difficulty considering the fact that the only ones having an already articulate mythology at the time of the European settlement were the Indians, and it was a mythology related to the American wilderness, an element that the colonists were to encounter for the first time. They were coming with a different frame of mind; they were carrying with them the myth of their former culture. Moreover, the American nation appeared at the same time with the printing press, whereas mythologies come from pre-literary epochs and arise spontaneously. Bearing in mind the fact that the function of the myth is that of producing an effect on the mind of each individual and then reconcile and unite individualities in a collective identity (Slotkin 10), we may consider wilderness and frontier as constitutive of the American myth. The duality and the paradox were present from the very beginning; there was a fatal opposition between two worlds, two races, two different ways of thinking and feeling.

Before America, the real continent, there was an America of the mind, before the Americans' national dream, there was the American dream dreamt by the Europeans. As Robert Frost claims in a suggestively titled poem, *The Gift Outright,* "The land was ours before we were the land's" (399). People's imagination had time and again appealed to an ideal state in an ideal land especially when passing through times of trial. There were stories about strangely wonderful places inhabited by miraculous beings located in the Far East (Abyssiania, Cathay, Ophir) or beyond the Western seas. The West had long represented a dream before the discovery made by Christopher Columbus. Aristotle had mentioned the fertile, sweet-scented islands discovered by Carthaginian merchants after several days sail "beyond the pillars of Hercules". In *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Plato had spoken about an idyllic island in the western ocean, named Atlantis while Strabo had mentioned a continent beyond the Atlantic (Babbock 2-5). There was also the golden dream of the miraculous land of El Dorado which spurred the Spanish conquistadores. A great influence on the ideas of Christopher Columbus, the one who was aiming at reaching the Garden of Eden, was the myth of Brendan, the story about a sixteenth century monk from Ireland who sailed the Western seas and disappeared there. It was believed that he either heard an angel telling him: "Arise, O Brennain, for God hath given thee what thou soughtest, even the Land of Promise" or was hiding on an island right under Mount Atlas which was the first home of Adam and Eve (Babbock 34-35). For Columbus, the one who emphasized the connection between discovery and prophecy and thus incorporated the new world into the confines of sacred, providential history, Eden was at the end of the East, as described in the book of Genesis and in order to reach the East one had to sail West. In Charles L. Sanford's estimate, "with the discovery of America, the Edenic expectations entered the main stream of history, assured of a prophetic fulfillment in the West" (38).

The wilderness ethic postulates wilderness areas as earthly versions of order and perfection, where man is best able to establish communion with the divine. It represents the earth as it was in the beginning, fresh from the Creator's hands (Graber 15). The wilderness of the

newly found land ignited the imagination of the Puritan dissenters while living within the confines of the Church of England became more and more unbearable. Following Old and New Testament models, they were going to retreat to a place outside the defiling of corrupt human beings, a virgin land ready to offer itself to the Puritan spiritual mission. Geography was thus transplanted from the physical to the spiritual realm and became geopiety, christianography; the community was entering sacred space for living sacred history.

Before presenting the meaning and the function that wilderness was endowed with in the Puritan imaginary, it would be useful to follow the etymology of the word as it is directly linked to the way it was perceived. In his famous book, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash states that wilderness has a "deceptive concreteness" (1) because, even if a noun, it acts like an adjective, it is perceived as rather describing something than being the thing itself. The term comes in fact form the Teutonic and Norse Languages as an adjective: "will" which means self-willed, willful, uncontrollable. "Willed" gave birth to "wild", a state of being lost, unruly, disordered, confused (hence "bewildered"). Also, Samuel Johnson includes the verb "to wilder" in his dictionary, defining it as "to lose or puzzle in an unknown or pathless tract." (Johnson, 347). In *Beowulf*, "wildeor" denotes savage, fantastic beasts and so *wild-deor-ness* is the place of wild beasts. It is also forested land, a place where one can easily lose his track rather than in the field. As Nash records it, the term appears for the first time at the beginning of the thirteenth century in *Laymons Brut* where it was used with a general meaning and then, in the fourteenth century it received recognition through John Wycliffe who inspired the first translation of the Latin Bible and it referred to the uninhabited, arid land of the near East, a treeless wasteland (Nash, 1-3). Long after the first settlement, in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) wilderness was defined as "a desert, a tract of solitude and savageness" (348). In near-Eastern mythologies, wilderness had a non-local, mythical dimension also visible in Biblical usage[2], the one that is of main interest as related to the Puritan migration, where it is viewed paradoxically as either evil or sacred, as either a place of testing or one of providence and tutelage, as not only a place but also a state of the soul. In Exodus and Deuteronomy as well in the prophetic book of Isaiah one learns about the people of Israel as being punished to wonder through the "howling waste of wilderness" (*Geneva Bible, Deut.* 32:10) for forty years after escaping from the Egyptian captivity but at the same time the Old Testament speaks about the transformation of the wilderness into good land as it was during those years that God revealed to the former captives. Wilderness becomes thus a sanctuary from a sinful society equated with urbanism and polytheism, the place of encountering God and a site of purification through repeated trials. The wilderness retained, in Nash's words "its significance as the environment of evil and hardship where spiritual catharsis occurred" (17). It was not only the place where Moses received the two Tables of the Law and John Baptist retreated in order to prepare the path of the Lord as later did other saints and monks with the purpose of being closer to God, but also the ultimate site of temptation where Jesus was lured by the Devil. Wilderness is thus a compound of worldly yearnings, of the natural inclination to sin, and diabolical forces while being at the same time a place of purity and purification. This duality permeates the American wilderness, too. It was first viewed and desired as a land of cornucopia which then became raw material but it was also God's fingerprint that had to be preserved. More specifically, in the perspective of the Puritans, who came to it not for material but for spiritual purposes, the wilderness was both a providential refuge and a God given trial stone as well as a nest of demonic forces.

[2] For a detailed discussion on the term and its Biblical significance, see Robert W.Funk, *The Wilderness*, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, no. 78, 1959, pp. 205-214.

2. New England Wilderness – Garden of Eden or Devil's Territory?

In Joseph Campbell's view, the myth is a traditional metaphor addressed to ultimate questions (15). According to Peter Gay, wilderness was Puritans' favorite metaphor (25). Modified by "howling", "mighty", "desolate", "salvage" it was reminiscent of the desert through which the chosen people of Israel had to go in order to reach Canaan, it led to meditations on God's providence, man's place in universe and the perpetual interior struggle with the frailty and depravity of human nature. It was also refuge and retreat from a society of corruption, a sanctuary for those willing to profess a true, pure worshiping of God. In this respect, the migration to the American wilderness had precedents in the medieval tradition of fleeing into uninhabited country to obtain freedom of worship, more precisely in the practices of twelfth century Waldensians and earlier Christian hermits. However, this simultaneously howling and liberating wilderness had no counterpart in the Old World and this added to the specialness of the Puritan experiment. They were, after all the Church in the Wilderness foreseen in the Book of Revelation. The Puritans left the wilderness of civilization for the wilderness of the hermits, for a land which was going to be transformed precisely through the establishment of the true Church on it.

Before the settlement North America was, for the Europeans, an immense area inhabited by the Indians, the "wildeor". Applying the definition of wilderness as the opposite of civilization, as the epitome of the lack of order, New England was a wilderness because the control of the European civilization was absent. Edward Johnson talks about "this yet untilled Wildernesse"(*Johnson's Wonder-Working*... 49) implying the need of an ordering interference. More than that, the human element was absent as long as the Indians were considered to be one with the wild beasts. However, it was exactly this absence that presented it, before the first concrete encounter between the Puritan colonists and the untamed land, as a pure, untouched place, an earthly paradise awaiting to be inhabited by those worthy of it. In 1498, Annius had identified the American Indians with the ten lost tribes of Israel and this supported the later belief that the New Jerusalem could be founded in America (Alen 119-120). Otto von Freising stated in his *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 AD*, that the origin of knowledge was in the East but was going to reach its end, i.e. fulfillment in the West. Similarly, the Gospel was born in the East and, following the sun's movement, its the spreading would end and reach its climax on the continent beyond the western seas and this prophesized a bright future for America[3]. Saint Jerome's concept of *translation imperii* becomes *translation religionis*. "Eastward I go only by force, but westward I go free" (26) Henry David Thoreau confesses, long after the first settlements, in one of his essays. The East represents the past in his estimate whereas the West is the future, in other words, the fulfillment lies in the West: "Oriente lux; ex Occidente frux" (Thoreau, 27). Also, Dr Twiss wrote to his fellow clergyman, Joseph Mede in March 1635 asking him: "Why may not that be the place of the New Jerusalem" (Neill 178n). Ministerial elites like Increase Mather, Samuel Sewall and Cotton Mather gave an affirmative answer but still, after the first generation, there was the fear that Christianity will return to the Old World "leaving here not a New Jerusalem as Doctor Twiss hoped, but a Gog and Magog as Master Mede feared" and that was because faith had weakened and the youth were permitted "to run wild in our woods" (Mather 137). Nature maintains its dangers that stem from its being depraved since the Fall – an idea belonging to Christian medieval thought which bore

[3] Charles L. Sanford concludes that this approach on the advancement of Christianity shows that the Renaissance standard of nature had merely been absorbed by Christian tradition thus giving way to reconciliation between Christian belief and pagan conception (53).

the mark of sin in man and imperfection in nature – but at the same time is seen, through baconian lenses as divine[4]. The paradoxical quality of the wilderness – good but evil, evil but beneficent – seems to have responded to the way people chose to make use of it; it thus became a dynamic character playing one of the main parts in the sacred history of the New England community. The Puritans shared, regarding wilderness, a dual view which plays along the two poles that the Hebraic tradition was situated: the good (nature) and the evil (civilization). They were, in their turn, going from England's civilization towards New England's wilderness, from tyranny to freedom, from corrupt materialism to modest prosperity, from sophistication to simplicity, a movement which would metaphorically equal that from carnal lust to moral rectitude, from the intellect, to the heart, from falsehood to truth. They were to receive grace only after engaging in such a journey as Joseph did not get it until he had outgrown his worldly vanity symbolized by the coat of many colors (Sanford, 30). The dissenters on Mayflower and Arbela took off the coat of rituals and clerical ornaments and put on instead the attire of simplicity eliminating as much as possible all exterior obstacles between them and God.

The promotional tracts advocating the colonizing of this "brave new world" (to use the term Shakespeare employed in *The Tempest*, and Huxley labeled his dystopia) bulwarked Puritan optimism by presenting a promised land reminiscent of the City of God, the realm Saint Augustine speaks of when describing the afterlife: the resurrected body –in this context the purified true worshipers- was going to enjoy loveliness of earth and sky and sea, wondrous qualities of light in the sun, moon and stars, the shades of trees, the colors and perfume of flowers, the songs of multitudinous birds (322-329, 371-372, 385-386, 611). John Smith, John White, Thomas Morton, Francis Higginson, Thomas Groves described the same wonders that New England's land had in store for the colonists. The climate, the fertility, the rich geography were "all fit for a healthy wholesome life" William Hubbard wrote (14). And even if the winters were harsh, "the purity of the aire makes amends for the sharpness of the cold" (Hubbard 21) for "no Countrey yeelds a more propitious ayre for our temper then New-England."(White 23). Thomas Morton calls the new realm "New English Canaan" or "New Canaan" or "Land of Canaan", a "rich and hopeful and very beautiful Country, worthy of the Title of Natures Masterpeece" (Morton 3). Interestingly enough he did not choose the name "New Israel" for the new country, but one reminiscent of pagan people. While the Puritan saw a desert in the wilderness, Morton saw a new Arcadia. In fact he was a concrete example of what the community of visible saints feared: a Puritan-becoming-Indian, of human being giving in to the temptations of the wilderness. However, as any other obstacle or danger that would have compromised the Puritan experiment, he was eliminated – arrested and sent back to England. Other witnesses spoke of "fat, blacke Earth", thick woods, of "the aboundant encrease of Corne" which "proves this Countrey to be a wonderment (…) Josephs encreas in Aegypt is out-stript here with us." (*New Englands Plantation*... p. 6) As it may be noticed the typological perspective is never to be absent. The material endowments made the country stand "in a paralell with the Israelites Canaan" (Morton 61); it is in fact the Promise Land because, in Morton's view, it bears the richest gifts: "A Land of so much worth/ As until now noe traveler seth forth/ Faire Canaans second selfe, second to none/ Natures rich Magazine till now unknowne" (7).

In this New Eden, the colonists come as new Adams and Noahs, they have, according to John White, "their warrant from Gods direction and command; who as soon as men were, set

[4] In *The Proficience and Advancement of Learning* (1605), Francis Bacon claims that Nature should be established as divine rather than satanic and that God has revealed himself by means of to scriptures: first through the written word and secondly through the created universe.

them their taske to replenish the earth and subdue it, Gen I.28" (White 1). John Winthrop places the same idea among the "reason for forsaking England": "The whole earth is the Lord's garden, and He hath given it to the sons of men with a general condition, Gen. 1:28" (*General Considerations* 26). He also adds the fact that the colonists have both natural and civil right upon the New England because "That which lies common and hath never been replenished or subdued is free to any that will possess[5] and improve it." (*General Considerations* 28), "in a vacant soil, he that taketh possession of it, and bestoweth culture and husbandry upon it, his right it is" (Cotton 6). Along with this argument for the colonization of New England, White also invokes those regarding God's gift of the earth to men, the law a marriage according to which the family is a small colony, the benefit that comes to men's outward estates, godliness and honesty as resulted from the shifting into the tough condition of empty lands, the abilities with which God endowed men in order to undertake the task, and, more importantly, the advancement of God's glory. (White 2-6). Besides the arguments pertaining to trade, health and the emptiness of the land, White highlights the providential mission of the colonists when giving reasons for colonizing New England rather than Ireland. White stated:

> "The Countrey of New England", he stated, "is destitute of all helpes and meanes, by which the people might come out of the snare of Satan (…) I must rather provide a Coat for my servant that goes naked, then give my sonne another, who hath reasonable clothing already" (28)

John Smith had before urged the people back home to come and accomplish the godly mission of bringing the word of the Gospels to the heathen:

> "If we have any graine of Faith or zeale in Religion, what can hee doe lesse hurtfull to any; or more agreeable to God then to seeke to convert those poore Salvages to know Christ, and humanitie?" (18).

Such an undertaking seems to have an almost cosmic dimension and to be an essential event in eschatological history as the belief was that

> "when the devil putt out of his throne in the other part of the world, and that the mouth of all his oracles were stopt in Europe, Asia and Africa, he seduced a company of silly wretches to follow his conduct into this unknowne part of the world." (Hubbard 25)

The inhabitants of this land were "idolatrous, abominable, diabolicall" and there was "no sign of any religion befor the English came, butt merely diabolicall." (Hubbard 26). John Smith's call is thus consistent with the general attitude towards the wilderness people whom, John White adds later, "we shall teach providence and industry" (27). There was a long distance between the primitive innocence of the natives depicted in Amerigo Vespucci's and Columbus's letters as living amidst a natural habitat devoid of the taint of sin and demonical powers and the evil creatures roaming in a spiritual as well as literal wilderness.

Words had consequently created a dialectic relationship between the natural abundance of a "good land", the God's gift and the New Jerusalem for believers looking for freedom of

[5] The Indians occupied the land without possessing it because "It is by agricultural labour that man appropriates the soil, and the early inhabitants of North America lived by the produce of the chase" (de Tocqueville 27).

worship on one hand and the devil's territory, the realm of the Antichrist and his Indian slaves on the other. There was a dual perspective on the native inhabitants of the wilderness, too. They were either enemies of God's people or instruments of the divine Providence through which the Puritan superiority was shown. Hence the dual and paradoxical manner of interacting with them by converting[6] or by killing. For the Puritans, whose community, one should not forget, was centered on words, the darker perspective upon the New England wilderness provided a more valuable challenge than the first because it entailed spiritual betterment by presenting them with the chance of taking one of the most important tests of faith. Signs did not cease to appear – and consequently written material to interpret them - supporting the aura of such a pilgrimage. The burst of the violent epidemic among Indians in 1616-1619 (repeated in 1633-34) that left a "vacant soil"- *vacuum domicilium* - was interpreted in the same vein of the providential tradition: it was the way in which God transmitted his wish to see the English settle there. "God cast out the heathen to make room for his people, some parts of the country being thereby made to look like a mere Golgotha" (195) Hubbard declared thus pointing out the messianic aspect of the mission that the colonists were going to engage in. "Where there is a vacant place" John Cotton, one of the leading Puritan ministers claimed, "there is liberty for the son of Adam or Noah to come and inhabit" (6). The reaching of a potential paradise implied a struggle in transforming the wasteland into habitable space. And if they were to be true and faithful to their task and industrious and hard working, than the wilderness hardships would transform into blessings. "God hath not beene a wilderness nor a land of darkness unto them therein, it being a country capeable, with good improvements, to maintayne a nation of people, after once it comes to be subdued." (Cotton 22). The rich land was then not for idle settlers or for adventurers. "If any come hether to plant for worldly ends that canne live well at home hee comits an errour of which hee will soon repent him" (*Governor Thomas Dudley's Letter*…, 12) Thomas Dudley, governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony warns. It was not the adventurer's heaven; it welcomed only industrious, determined people with the sacred purpose of tilling the wilderness in order to transform it into God's garden. This miraculous convertibility of the wilderness into refuge and site of purity has made it such a powerful religious as well as psychological motivation.

3. Entering New England - Novelty and Harshness

As Peter N. Carroll pointed out, the need to avoid culpability of other people's crimes authorized the quest for safer lands (20). The journey to what was going to be the site of the fulfillment of Reformation, rejuvenation of the world, and of purification for the coming of the Parousia, prepared the Puritan colonists for the hardships to be encountered on their way to the Promise Land. The first frontier that they met was that of the Atlantic. The voyage initiated the settlers in a variety of new experiences and thus diminished the shock of the novelty of the continent and at the same time accelerated the process of social cohesion and strengthened the Puritans' self-image as chosen saints (Carroll 34). They were, as Edward Johnson called them, Christ' Army[7] engaged in a double war – against the errors of Old England, the lukewarm Laodicea, and against the wilderness as a place where Satan challenges the believer directly.

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[6] Interestingly enough, the Charter of 1629 that the Massachusetts Bay Puritans brought with them specified that the conversion of the Indians was to be made by example, not by evangelism.

[7] "In this very time Christ the glorious King of his Churches, raises an Army out of our English Nation , for freeing his people from their long servitude under usurping Prelacy; and because every corner of England was filled with the fury of malignant adversaries, Christ creates a New England to muster up the first of his Forces in" (*Johnson's Wonder-Working…* 23).

Wilderness implies, besides dangers and temptations, the unknown which is, in fact, newness - one of the main features of the American environment. "What so truly sutes with honour and honestie, as the discovering of things unknown?", John Smith wondered (18). "Est enim natura hominum novitatis avida", William Hubbard avers when writing about the expectations and fantasies connected with the New World (41). For the Puritan experiment, newness entailed spiritual rebirth and purification, a *new* life. They were heading towards a place "where the Lord will create a new Heaven and a new Earth in new Churches, and a new Common-wealth together" (*Johnson's Wonder-Working… 25*). However, the concept implies also lack of familiarity. The people who arrived at Massachusetts Bay "were not much unlike the family of Noah at their first issuing out of the ark, and had, as it were, a new world to people" (Hubbard 140). Wilderness was the renewed earth after the flood of persecutions. Thus America, in Achille Loria's words, "has the key to the historical enigma which Europe has sought for centuries in vain, and the land which has no history reveals luminously the course of universal history." (qtd. by Turner 42).

Nevertheless, testimonials of first encounters with the God given realm, shared the same duality that the wilderness did. It is important to point out though that North America was very different from the southern parts which really resembled a luxurious garden. The place chosen by the Puritans was, in Alexis de Tocqueville's words "grave, serious, and solemn: it seemed created to be the domain of intelligence, as the South was that of sensual delight" (23). The woods here were "dark and gloomy", "the ruins of vegetation were heaped upon each other" and "decay gave assistance to life" (de Tocqueville, 24). When stepping out of the Mayflower, the Plymouth Pilgrims found themselves in "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" in a sharp and violent winter. Caught between ocean and wilderness, with no secure ground under their feet, they were suffering more than their biblical counterparts for "neither could they, as it were, goe up to the tope of Pisgah, to view from this willdernes a more goodly cuntrie to feed their hopes" (Bradford I: 155-156). Roderick Nash claims that by offering this image to the possible readers, William Bradford started a tradition of repugnance (24). There stood before the colonists not an earthly paradise, but a threat to survival, a dark and sinister world. In the letter to her children, when telling about arriving to New England Ann Bradstreet confesses: "I found a new world and new manners, at which my heart rose." (241). On the other hand, the Puritans on Arbela seem to have had a better experience, but that was due to the fact that they were not met with strangeness and lack of any help, but by an entire community that welcomed them and shared openly the support for their mission. Edward Johnson records that "at their arrival those small number of Christians gathered at Salem, greatly rejoycing (…) because they saw so many that came chiefly for promoting the great work of Christ" (*Johnson's Wonder-Working…*64). John Winthrop also has a more optimistic attitude. While approaching land, he notes in his journal: "We had nowe faire sunneshine weather, & so pleasant a sweet ethere, as did much refreshe us. & there came a smell off the shore <which was> like the smell of a garden" (*The Journal…*32). The garden that Winthrop was envisaging was though what Bradford's pilgrims first had a grasp of – a challenging place, a trial, added to that of the ocean, as they still had to prove worthy for godly blessings. The Puritans on Arbela kept a day of thanksgiving for the safe arrival but then had to keep a day of fast because many passengers were sick and dying[8].

[8] Still, John Winthrop writes to his wife in September 9th 1630: We heer enjoye God and Jesus Christ. Is not this enough? What would we have more? I thanke God, I like so well to be heer, as I do not repent my cominge: & if I were to come againe I would not have altered my course , though I had foreseen all these Afflictions: I never fared better in my life, never slept better, never had more content of minde" (Twichell, 170).

Plymouth had to struggle with the same situation as after three months from their landing, Hubbard informs, they lost almost two thirds of the people (57). Governor Dudley later said about the Massachusetts community: "Wee yet enjoy little to bee envied but endure much to be pittyed in the siknes & mortalitye of our people." (*Governor Thomas Dudley's Letter* 12). If there was the belief that God had created oceanic tempests as means of chastising sinful people aboard the ships, then in the view of the Lord's Remembrancers, the new land joined the Atlantic in further selecting the inhabitants of the future heavenly city on earth under the guiding of God's providence. "Such were the solemn trials that God was pleased to acquaint them with in their first adventure, the more to exercise their faith and patience and daily to remind them that they were pilgrims and strangers upon the earth, and must not seek great things for themselves." (Hubbard 58). Faced with the "wetherbeaten face" of the new land, the pilgrim did not lose their trust because they were utterly sure of the divine support. That is why Anne Bradstreet recovered her courage: "But after I was convinced" she says, "it was the way of God, I submitted to it" (241). "What could sustaine them but the spirite of God and his grace?" Bradford asks rhetorically (157). His, as a witness and a historian, was the self undertaken duty of offering a model to the following generation who did not taste the bitter fruit of the harsh beginnings as once the Israel people did when taken out of Egypt:

> "May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: Our faithers were English men which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this willdernes, but they cried unto the Lord, and he heard their voice, and looked on their adversities etc. et them therefore praise the Lord, because he is good, and his mercies endure for ever." (Bradford 158)

For the visible saints the troubles of colonization were a necessary process of humiliation on the way to attaining the status of the elect and accounted for their specialness. **"**God sifted the whole nation that He might send choice grain into this wilderness" William Stoughton avers in an election sermon (qtd. by Lockwood 4). The experiences of the wilderness were conceived as Armaghedon. The walk in this Eden was continuously endangered by Satan's interference, by the possibility of backsliding, a second fall that would transform Paradise regained into Paradise lost. In her *Contemplations*, Anne Bradstreet, daughter of the earlier mentioned Thomas Duddley, and the first American woman poet, reflects on the fall of Adam and the "penalty impos'd on his backsliding Race." (Hambrick-Stowe 105). All Puritan sermons warned against human weakness while the jeremiads would become embittered with disappointment because of the easiness with which new generations were beginning to forget the purpose of the first settlers, that of making out of the wilderness the site for their free worship while waiting for the second coming of Christ.

Again, there was duality, i.e. a double war – the invisible one inside each man's soul and the exterior one for survival. Moreover, to subdue the wilderness was a counter process to that of reverting to a state of near savagery and, in Puritans' view, emptiness of the soul. On the frontier, being an Indian was less dangerous regarding the spiritual evolution of the community than the Puritan-becoming-Indian and this aspect will be further discussed in the part on captivity narrative.

As David Lowenthal puts it, there is the notion of American nature as better, older, and purer than European history. And he adds:

> "Nature served Americans as an ideal type of tradition, older than the human past, untainted with human follies and crimes, and uniquely American in its scenic grandeur.

By the early 19th century many considered wilderness scenery morally superior to history's stage sets." (102).

The Puritan colonist placed his trust in God and had the certitude that he was protected by him so that nothing, not even a demonized wilderness, could prevail against him. "Optimism is a frontier virtue" Lucy Lockwood states, the idea of failure was never welcomed, "the mere mention of untoward circumstances was repelled as treason" (149). The coming of the protestant militant church in New England led to a mingling of the geographical and the spiritual, a kernel moment for the later developing concepts of "religio-geography" and "geopiety". Sacvan Bercovitch asserts that the so often encountered phrase "the discovery of America" reminds of the force a myth has when used by a culture as way of circumventing the most obvious contradictions (15). Paradox and duality intertwined with prophecy and promise as coordinates of the concept of "wilderness" which is at the foundation of the American dream and cultural identity.

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