

Title: Bradford's Two Histories: Pattern and Paradigm in *Of Plymouth Plantation*

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[(essay date 1978) *In the following essay, Wenska stresses that the two volumes of Of Plymouth Plantation present two distinct histories, the first celebrating new beginnings and the second providing a "retrospective search for significant order" and the meaning of history.*]

Scarcely twenty years after the discovery of his manuscript history in 1855 and its first publication a year later, William Bradford was acclaimed by Moses Coit Tyler as "the father of American history," a man whose account of the Plymouth settlement breathed "justice, breadth, vigor, dignity, directness and an untroubled command of strong and manly speech." Some ten years later, in 1888, Charles F. Richardson chose rather to emphasize Bradford's importance as a "forerunner of literature" and "a story-teller of considerable power."¹ The years since these early literary historians wrote have neither dulled nor lessened our admiration for Bradford as either historian or man of letters. To the contrary, our respect has deepened with a fuller appreciation of Bradford's art and sensibility, of his vision of history, and of the piety that both informs and is skillfully portrayed in *Of Plymouth Plantation*.

But while the history's present status as "an American classic" and "the pre-eminent work of art" in seventeenth-century New England seems assured,² its relation to a continuing tradition of American letters appears less clear. If its many literary virtues (its narrative vigor, its "conscious art") have not gone unremarked, still its importance to American literary history has been less fully examined. Taking what seems a particularly fruitful approach, recent readers have focused on theme and structure in *Of Plymouth Plantation* by way of demonstrating its claim to be regarded as "our first great work of literature" and "a commanding work of literary art." Thus Alan Howard regards "the downward curve of failing strength, the reversal through recognition and submission, and the ascent which measures the force of God's sustaining hand" as the "architectonic shape of the entire history," and John Griffith reads *Of Plymouth Plantation* as "a mercantile epic" whose "fundamental pattern ... is that of the American success story."³ David Levin further notes in Bradford's history "a pattern that has become common in our secular history": "Mobility and prosperity harm the community. New remedies bring on new diseases. Throughout the history, Bradford also records a dialectic in which the chosen people (acting out Christian typology) struggle to find God's will as they move between the perils of disease and remedy, prosperity and adversity, friend and enemy." For Levin, *Of Plymouth Plantation* "is a dual story of flourishing growth 'from small beginnings' and of decline from original purity. That, in Bradford's view, is the pattern of all Christian narrative."⁴

Clearly, in his record of the Plymouth experience Bradford has embodied a number of the patterns that figure so largely in our literature--from Franklin's *Autobiography* and Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* through Cooper's *Deerslayer*, Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, and Mailer's *American Dream*. But *Of Plymouth Plantation* is in fact two histories, written at different times for different reasons and presenting two fundamentally different, paradigmatic responses to the American experience. These differences are to some extent obscured by our continuing to read and speak of *Of Plymouth Plantation* as a running, rather than a retrospective, account of the Pilgrim settlement. As a result, our view of the history as a whole and of the second book in particular remains partial, sometimes confused, and often contradictory. At times even Bradford's most admiring readers boggle at the "loss of focus and accumulation of mere detail in the later sections," and concede that the history "diminishes into a tedious account of unsorted administrative details."⁵ Bradford himself suffers a similar diminishment. He is described as "obsessed" in his later years

with the decline in piety, "shattered" by "the failure of [the Pilgrims'] mission," "disappointed in his expectations for his community." Consequently, the "elegiac" tone of the last annals continues to be remarked: "in the twenty years it took him to write his history, his customary gravity deepened into melancholy," and his annals "turn at the end into elegy."⁶

But Bradford did not work on his history for twenty years, and the annals do not, properly speaking, turn at the end into elegy. The elegiac note--the nostalgia and the sense of decline--is there, certainly, but what has not been sufficiently emphasized is that Bradford writes most of his history out of this nostalgia, long after the decline in Pilgrim fervor and commitment had become apparent. Both the early annals which express his confidence in the Pilgrim mission and the later annals, some of which reveal his dismay and disappointment, were written at about the same time. Forgetting this, some readers have discerned in the annals preceding and after 1632 a shift from "Eusebian providential history" to the "simple recording of fact"--a shift, that is, from a consistently articulated theory of history to a mere listing of "unsorted and uninterpreted events."⁷ But such a view in effect argues that Bradford really had no clear vision of history in the years between 1646 and 1650 when he wrote practically all of the annals of the "Second Book," or that he altered his view of history sometime in the late 1640's, midway through the annals that recount the Pilgrim experience in America from 1621 to 1646. Furthermore, even if we believe that Bradford in the last decade or so of his life was despondent, shattered, and disappointed, the crucial question remains still unasked, much less satisfactorily answered: Why did he bother to write the second book of his history at all?

We need to distinguish more carefully between the Bradford who lived through the Pilgrim experience and the Bradford who later wrote about it. Failing to do so, we miss much of the artful complexity of his work. For example, readers of the history are familiar with Bradford's satisfaction in 1630 at seeing the congregationalist principles of the Pilgrims extended into the Bay Colony. The annal for that year is often cited as the high point of his confidence in the special destiny of the Plymouth group: "Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by His hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are; and, as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation; let the glorious name of Jehovah have all the praise."⁸ Bradford's elation here is understandable enough: the arrival of the Bay Colonists augured, though it did not guarantee, the success of the Plymouth Colony. But to appreciate fully the piety and art of Bradford the historian, we need to remember that he wrote these words in the late 1640's, knowing full well that the Puritan migration to New England in the thirties had proved a mixed blessing, that the economic prosperity attendant on "the flowing of many people into the country, especially into the Bay of the Massachusetts" had resulted in a "scattering from this place and weakening of the same" (pp. 252-53). Bradford's piety is thus doubly impressive, as is the skill with which he writes so movingly of a triumph he knows will prove short-lived, and the artful tact with which he suggests ("one small candle") the historian's hindsight awareness of the relative importance of the two colonies.

By attending to the chronology of *Of Plymouth Plantation's* composition, we can see the different impulses behind, and purposes of, the first and second books of the history--differences reflected as well by the changes in the manner of their presentation (the coherent narrative of the first book, the annals of the second), differences that justify our reading *Of Plymouth Plantation* as two histories. Moreover, reading it in this way enables us to perceive and stress its significance for American literature.

I

The first book, begun in 1630 and completed soon afterwards,⁹ is a book of beginnings--of "first beginnings" and new beginnings--which opens with "the first breaking out of the light of the gospel in ... England" and closes with the erection of "the first house for common use" in Plymouth (pp. 46, 3, 72). Despite the illusion of movement fostered by Bradford's accounts of the successive removals to Amsterdam, Leyden, and New England, however, the book is essentially static. It presents a series of still-life portraits of the Pilgrim as unsettled and anxious wayfarer: "grieved, afflicted, persecuted, and ... exiled"; "scoffed and scorned by the profane multitude"; "vexed with apparitors and pursuivants"; forced to endure "wanderings and travels both at land and sea" (pp. 7, 8, 14). Such a rendering, of course, can have

only one ending--on the beaches of New England. Once travails and travels cease, the sketch is complete. The arrival in New England betokens a new and different beginning, for it marks the end of the long, weary pilgrimage, and of the need for pilgrims.¹⁰

That Bradford in 1630 chose to end the first book when and where he did suggests both the artist's sense for the dramatic and the historian's hindsight realization that the beginnings in America marked the end of something. As a whole, the first book is commemorative and celebratory: it ends, fittingly enough, in the moment of triumph, with the Pilgrims lodged safely (and finally) "in a good harbor" (p. 61). Bradford's "intendment" in this book is to impress upon the Pilgrim children the magnitude and significance of their fathers' experience: "I have been the larger in these things ... that their children may see with what difficulties their fathers wrestled in going through these things in their first beginnings" (p. 46). Hence the detail and care with which he depicts, throughout the book, a succession of difficulties and hardships: in England before removing to Holland; upon settling in Holland; in negotiating for the passage to America; and finally in getting under way. The Pilgrim fathers had promised "to walk in all His ways made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them. And that it cost them something this ensuing history will declare" (p. 9). The "cost" of their determination to walk with the Lord, and their eventual deliverance "from all ... perils and miseries" (p. 61)--these are, for Bradford, the determinants of the Pilgrim experience and achievement.

We are entitled, I think, to certain inferences about why Bradford waited until 1630 to begin (and why he *then* began) this part of his history. It seems likely that one of the reasons for the departure from Holland--the Pilgrim fear of assimilation, the fear that "their posterity would be in danger to degenerate and be corrupted" (p. 25)--was likewise a reason for the writing of the first book. It is not improbable that Bradford viewed the great numbers of people who began arriving in the Bay in 1630 as a phenomenon that would blunt the tremendous achievement of what the Pilgrims had accomplished; at the very least it would obscure the singularity of that achievement.¹¹ The Pilgrims were "reluctant voyagers," as Perry Miller has observed, a ragged band of refugees; they were a "poor people" who came not as did the men of the Great Migration--in force and strength.¹² The "hideous and desolate wilderness" that had met them; the country's "wild and savage hue," with its "weather-beaten face" and its winters "sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms"; the "weak hope of supply and succour they left behind them," the "sad condition and trials they were under"--these might well be forgotten by Pilgrim children growing up in a less savage land under less trying circumstances (p. 62). If their place in history was to be "but even as stepping-stones unto others" (p. 25), at least the Pilgrim children would have available in this part of the history the tally sheet of their fathers' sacrifices. The felt singularity of the Pilgrim community and of their achievement--as well as the later impulse to preserve that singularity and identity--is a theme underlying and rung through much of Bradford's history. The Pilgrims were, after all, Separatists.

By closing at the very outset of the Pilgrim adventure in America, the first book reflects a singleness of structure, theme, purpose, and point of view seemingly lacking in the second book. Bradford introduces this later book by asserting he will include "only the heads of principal things [that] may seem to be profitable to know or to make use of" (p. 73)--a statement that suggests his historical perspective (or retrospective) and encourages us to look to the events of subsequent years to explain the directions and purposes of the annals. He resumed the history in 1644 by writing the annal for "**The Remainder of Anno 1620**" (pp. 80, 75). In that year, we later learn, Winslow succeeded him as governor and perhaps left him free to resume the history, but Bradford probably had other reasons as well for resuming it then. It was in that year that the removal to Nauset was effected--a removal that later (in the subsequent annal for 1644) provoked this comment: "And thus was this poor church left, like an ancient mother grown old and forsaken of her children, though not in their affections yet in regard of their bodily presence and personal helpfulness; her ancient members being most of them worn away by death, and these of later time being like children translated into other families, and she like a widow left only to trust in God. Thus, she that had made many rich became herself poor" (p. 334). The removal to Nauset, as it turns out, followed hard upon the death in 1643 of Elder Brewster, one of the "ancient members"--a "wearing away" which, in the annal for that year, would elicit from Bradford a heartfelt digression on the longevity of the Pilgrim fathers. "What was it then that upheld them?" he would ask; his answer: "It was God's visitation that preserved their spirits" (pp. 328-29).

The removal to Nauset threatened the surety of this preservation:

Many having left this place (as is before noted) by reason of the straitness and barrenness of the same and their finding of better accommodations elsewhere more suitable to their ends and minds; and sundry others still upon every occasion desiring their dismissions, the church began seriously to think whether it were not better jointly to remove to some other place than to be thus weakened and as it were insensibly dissolved. ... Some were still for staying together in this place, alleging men might here live if they would be content with their condition, and that it was not for want or necessity so much that they removed as for the enriching of themselves. Others were resolute upon removal and so signified that here they could not stay; but if the church did not remove, they must.(p. 333)

What death did not undo, men would, leaving the "ancient mother" a "widow left only to trust in God." Bradford's essentially paternal investment in the identity of the Pilgrim family¹³ may thus be seen as probable cause for his taking up the history again when he did, though there may have been other, less clearly personal, reasons for resuming the history--such as the continually vexing "Indian question" and the seemingly interminable wranglings with the Adventurers. With no end to these trials in sight and old age upon him (he was in his mid-fifties at this time), Bradford may have felt impelled to record, for the sake of the Pilgrim posterity, their fathers' sides to these questions. But these reasons exhibit the same concern for the identity of the Plymouth family. More precisely, his resumption of the history in 1644 may be viewed as the pained response to the dissolution of this identity--the identity so lovingly and painstakingly established and celebrated in the first book some fourteen years earlier.

With the exception of the annal for "The Remainder of Anno 1620," however, all of the second book was written after 1646 (p. 87). In the annal eventually written for that year can be found further instances of this dissolution. The only events recorded for 1646 are the arrival of a pirate fleet and the departure of Edward Winslow for England. If the arrival was a "right emblem" of the disorderliness of the times, the unwarranted departure of Winslow, Bradford's most trusted advisor and the sometime governor of the colony, must have seemed the cruelest betrayal. The "ancient mother" was again forsaken. The work so painfully undertaken and maintained was being abandoned--through either death or defection--even by Old Comers like Winslow. Moreover, sometime in 1646 Bradford learned of "the downfall of the Bishops, with their courts, canons and ceremonies, etc.," a "root[ing] up" which he immediately commented on in "**A Late Observation as it Were, by the Way, Worthy to be Noted**" and added to his history (p. 351). "May not the People of God now say," he wrote, "and these poor people among the rest, 'The Lord hath brought forth our righteousness; come, let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God'" (p. 351). That the good news of "great things" at hand should issue from the old England "these poor people" had fled must have startled Bradford even while it gladdened him¹⁴ ("Full little did I think that the downfall ... had been so near ... or that I should have lived to have seen or heard of the same"); that the "joyful harvest" was being reaped elsewhere than Plymouth, however, could not have surprised him much in 1646 (pp. 352, 351).

In these events and in the events of the early forties--particularly the "breaking out of sundry notorious sins" in 1642--we can find reasons enough for Bradford's nostalgia. But since this feeling clearly antedates the writing of the second book, it should be read not as the unconscious unfolding of a gradual decline that ends in elegy and lament, but as an attempt to discover the significance of that decline. Bradford was often struck by how "uncertain are the mutable things of this unstable world," by how "unsearchable" God's judgments are, His pleasure evinced in often unfathomable ways, to be read in decline and sorrow as well as in triumph and celebration (pp. 119, 177). The second book thus serves as the necessary prelude to understanding God's will in the present, and stands as the dramatic enactment of Bradford's attempt to puzzle the meaning of Plymouth's history. Perhaps the beginnings of its declension in piety and commitment could be found in a step mis-taken, in a sign misread. That the attempt fails is the tragedy of Bradford's history. That it was made at all is surely a mark of Bradford's greatness.

In this way the second book presents a portrait of an intelligent, self-effacing public man grappling with the meaning of history. It is the considered response of a Pilgrim father forsaken of his children. Its notes may be tragic, but they are also lyric and hopeful. Bradford's optimism and strength are nowhere more clearly or succinctly expressed than in his account of the despondency that overtook the colony following news of the

deaths of John Robinson and Robert Cushman (the passage appears in "Anno Dom: 1626" and thus was written sometime after 1646, when things surely appeared bleakest): "All which things before related, being well weighed and laid together, it could not but strike them [the Pilgrims] with great perplexity, and to look humanly on the state of things as they presented themselves at this time. It is a marvel it did not wholly discourage them and sink them. But they gathered up their spirits, and the Lord so helped them, whose work they had in hand, as now when they were at lowest they began to rise again ..." (p. 181). In the margin, at "lowest," in what is certainly an aside to himself, Bradford writes: "Note." But when he comes to chronicle the events of 1646, the year that saw him take up his history in earnest, this moving optimism and confidence give way to an admixture of regret, censure, and perplexity as he writes of Winslow's departure and subsequent detainment in England: "But by reason of the great alterations in the State, he was detained longer than was expected, and afterwards fell into other employments there; so as he hath now been absent this four years, which hath been much to the weakening of this government, without whose consent he took these employments upon him" (p. 347). These words are followed by:

Anno 1647

And Anno 1648

Nothing else. Rather than fill out the annals for those years Bradford turns, in 1650, to listing "the names of those which came over first, in the year 1620, and were by the blessing of God the first beginners and in a sort the foundation of all the Plantations and Colonies in New England; and their families" (p. 441). The significance of the Pilgrim decline is, apparently, no clearer to Bradford in 1650 than it was in 1646, God's intentions no less "unsearchable." That His meaning is there to be puzzled is certain, but Bradford, after four years of determined chronicling, is still unable to read it. And so he returns, by this time perhaps compulsively, to 1620--to the "first beginnings" and the "first beginners." In his beginning is his end.

II

Some two hundred and seventy-five years after Bradford's voice had trailed off into silence, a young man would cry: "Can't repeat the past? ... Why of course you can!" Gatsby, Nick Carraway reflects, "talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was. ..." ¹⁵ Like Gatsby, Bradford in the "Second Book" is engaged in a quest for meaning, the writing of that book of his history is a retrospective search for significant order. In this he anticipates other notable attempts to puzzle the meaning of the past: Cooper's Leatherstocking novels culminating in the nostalgic evocation of lost possibilities that is *The Deerslayer*; Hawthorne's and Faulkner's intense broodings over their respective regional histories; Adams' *Education*, which concludes at one point: "In plain words, Chaos was the law of nature; Order was the dream of man." ¹⁶

Confronted by an equivalent collapse of values in the 1640's, Bradford responds with the invocation to order that is the second book of his history. Calvinism, it has been argued, offered unsettled men a pattern that explained in theological terms the chaos threatening to engulf them, and provided a possible way out of that disorder. ¹⁷ *Of Plymouth Plantation* presents a number of patterns, a number of ways for confronting chaos. The pattern the first book discloses, as I have indicated, is static: it is the pattern of history itself, fixed and eternal, the unfolding of God's preordained plan. One of the patterns of history--the pattern that opens the book--is what a later New Englander would term the "pattern called war": Satan vs. the saints, heathens vs. Christians, the corrupt vs. "zealous professors," and finally the "profane multitude" vs. the godly, "enlightened" North countrymen. Another related pattern, equally evident, is that of loss and recovery, grave peril and triumph. The Pilgrims, simply by being part of history, were part of the first pattern, and their experience until their arrival in New England was part of the second. That experience, moreover, justified their confidence in the former pattern, their belief that "they might expect the blessings of God in their proceedings," that He would "graciously prosper [their] endeavours" (pp. 3-8, 27, 33).

But since God's will is a constantly unfolding and complex design, its meaning fixed in flux, the problems for the historian who would attempt to read His meaning in the data of historical events are obvious. These

problems point to another difference between the first and second books of Bradford's history. The former *must* end with the arrival at Plymouth because, written some ten years after the landing, it is as much an assertion of providential order as a discovery or confirmation of it. Had Bradford in 1630 chosen instead to conclude the first book with an account of the starving time during the winter of 1620 we would have a markedly different kind of history. It would be open-ended rather than closed: the emphasis would fall appreciably more on the uncertainty of experience than on the certainty of recovery. In a word, the first book is much more intensely an act of piety than the second; written after a decade of hardships and disappointments, it seems less an act of discovery than an expression of confidence in the orderliness of God's plan.

The emphasis in the second book, by contrast, continually falls on the uncertainties of historical experience. The latter book is much denser and less schematic than the first book, primarily because Bradford is more concerned with ascertaining than asserting the meaning of history. As a result, his Pilgrims are less often depicted as players in a universal drama. Their roles reduced from mythic to prosaic proportions, they are seen more often and more clearly as men enmeshed in the circumstantiality of time. And in its confusing particularity, life in Plymouth, as Bradford sees and records it, is less patterned, less orderly, or rather less amenable to patterning. Hence the pathos of Bradford's pointed reminder to himself in 1646 or later than when "they were at lowest, they began to rise again." Hence the significance of Bradford's later addition¹⁸ to the conclusion of chapter 5 of the first book: "A right emblem, it may be, of the uncertain things of this world, that when men have toiled themselves for them, they vanish into smoke" (p. 35).

The assertion of order the first book makes is likewise the celebration of a communal identity against which the defection of the children (and men like Winslow) in the second book must be measured. In a letter to Edwin Sandys from John Robinson and William Brewster that Bradford includes in the first book, this statement appears: "We are knit together as a body in a most strict and sacred bond and covenant of the Lord, of the violation whereof we make great conscience, and by virtue whereof we do hold ourselves straitly tied to all care of each other's good and of the whole, by every one and so mutually" (p. 33). On the blank page opposite in the manuscript Bradford wrote the following "in his aged hand":¹⁹

O sacred bond, whilst inviolably preserved! How sweet and precious were the fruits that flowed from the same! But when this fidelity decayed, then their ruin approached. O that these ancient members had not died or been dissipated (if it had been the will of God) or else that this holy care and constant faithfulness had still lived, and remained with those that survived. ... But (alas) that subtle serpent hath slyly wound in himself under fair pretences of necessity and the like, to untwist these sacred bonds and tied, and as it were insensibly by degrees to dissolve, or in a great measure to weaken, the same. I have been happy, in my first times, to see, and with much comfort to enjoy, the blessed fruits of this sweet communion, but it is now a part of my misery in old age, to find and feel the decay and want thereof (in a great measure) and with grief and sorrow of heart to lament and bewail the same. And for others' warning and admonition, and my own humiliation, do I here note the same.

The "sacred bond" that "knit together" the Pilgrim family, it is important to note, was already--and quite sensibly--being dissolved "by degrees" even before Bradford began writing the first book. The failure of the "common course and condition" in 1623 was perhaps but the first of many indications to Bradford that the Pilgrims, in America, could not be so "straitly tied to all care of each other's good and of the whole." The efforts made in 1627 "to keep the people together as much as might be" suggest a further untwisting of the bond (p. 188). Since the preliminary signs of the dissolution that eventually occurred were clear to Bradford before he took pen in hand in 1630, the first book asserts an order and an identity that already had been seriously compromised. It in this way testifies to a lost, or nearly lost, ideal--a "sweet communion"--shattered by the press of the Pilgrims' experience in America, by men's "enriching of themselves." Like Gatsby's elusive "green light ... that year by year recedes before us," Bradford's "land of Canan" was still "a farr of."²⁰

The second book details this loss while seeking its causes. In Plymouth what Bradford would regard as "unsettledness" kept men moving--to Duxbury and Marshfield and Nauset. The pattern of the Pilgrims' pre-American experience was in that way vindicated, though the spiritual unrest that defined them as Pilgrims

underwent a perhaps inevitable sea-change. In this respect Bradford's remarks on Roger Williams seem an apt summary of the Pilgrim experience in America as well as an adumbration of one of American literature's most durable themes:

Mr. Roger Williams, a man godly and zealous, having many precious parts but very unsettled in judgment, came over first to the Massachusetts; but upon some discontent left that place and came hither, where he was friendly entertained according to their poor ability, and exercised his gifts amongst them and after some time was admitted a member of the church. ... He this year began to fall into some strange opinions, and from opinion to practice, which caused some controversy between the church and him. And in the end some discontent on his part, by occasion whereof he left them something abruptly. Yet afterwards sued for his dismissal to the church of Salem, which was granted. ... But he soon fell into more things there, both to their and the government's trouble and disturbance. ... But he is to be pitied and prayed for; and so I shall leave the matter and desire the Lord to show him his errors and reduce him into the way of truth and give him a settled judgment and constancy in the same, for I hope he belongs to the Lord, and that He will show him mercy.(p. 257)

Godliness and zeal coupled with unsettled judgments, discontents, strange opinions, dismissions, troubles and disturbances, prayers for settled judgments--these mark Bradford's perceptions both of Williams and of the Plymouth whose history he chronicles in the second book.

This restlessness that both Williams and many Plymouth men display is the stuff as well of many of our most memorable literary works. It would seem that the American literary hero, like "the Puritan's image of man," is "inevitably divided--torn between what he hopes to become and what he is forced to be."²¹ He defines himself, it might be said, by refusing to assume a single identity, preserving as long as he can "a certain element of deliberate tentativeness of autonomous choice," convincing himself "that the next step is up to him and that no matter where he is staying or going he always has the choice of leaving or turning in the opposite direction if he chooses to do so."²² In a sense this feeling that there are no roads irrevocably closed is analogous to the psychological uncertainty that characterized the Puritan. Assurance and spiritual repose were fugitive, sometime things for the Puritan; his spiritual case, like the roads taken by our fictional heroes, remained open. Movement, restlessness, change, metamorphosis: if these are not touchstones of salvation, at least they are signs that neither Puritan nor hero has damned himself through a commitment to a corrupt or unsatisfactory reality. In the second book of the history we find--much to Bradford's evident dismay and displeasure--the prototypes of those later Americans who would flee across the American continent²³ as well as through the pages of our literature. The Pilgrims had removed to America, we recall, in part because "many of their children ... were drawn away by evil examples into extravagant and dangerous courses, getting the reins off their necks and departing from their parents. Some became soldiers, others took upon them far voyages by sea, and others some worse courses tending to dissoluteness and the danger of their souls, to the great grief of their parents and dishonour of God. So that they saw their posterity would be in danger to degenerate and be corrupted" (p. 25). But in America the reins still chafed, necks were still galled, and the children kept departing, deserting the poor-widow church at Plymouth.

In Bradford himself, moreover, we find a restless man who would make an end to unsettledness. For if we begin at the very root and rise of Bradford's life, instead of beginning with his history, we may see that he more than most had reasons to fear such unsettledness. The events of his early life suggest that he too was very much a part of the pattern that he abandoned in America, but that the Pilgrim children continued. He was born in 1590. A little over a year later, his father died. When he was four, his mother remarried and sent him to live with his grandfather. Returned to his mother two years later upon his grandfather's death, he lived with her again for a year when she too died, and he was sent off to live with his uncles. Five years later, at the age of twelve, he became a constant reader of the Bible and joined an informal Separatist congregation which met at Scrooby. Four years afterwards, when the group formally organized itself, he joined it despite "the wrath of his uncles" and the "scoff of his neighbors." Another two years found him in Amsterdam, and then another in Leyden. There he and his Separatist brethren, "being thus settled ... continued many years in a comfortable condition, enjoying much sweet and delightful society and spiritual comfort together in the ways of God" (pp. xxiii, 17). He was nineteen at the time. Eleven years later he was in Plymouth.

In the fitful pattern of Bradford's early life we can sense other, later patterns. In his reflections on "the American identity," Erik Erikson has noted as a peculiarly American characteristic a "deep-seated sense of having been abandoned and let down by the mother." If Bradford ever was possessed by this sense, we can certainly appreciate his reasons for being so. But Erikson goes further: in the "troubled" American he finds "the conviction, the mortal self-accusation, that it was *the child who abandoned the mother*, because he had been in such a hurry to become independent."²⁴ It might thus be argued that the second book also functions in some way as catharsis for Bradford. In accusing the Pilgrim children who forsake their widowed mother, Bradford--powerfully if unwittingly--accuses himself for abandoning mother, family, homeland.²⁵ In this light, *Of Plymouth Plantation* reveals a pattern of movement--of consolidation and separation, of knotting and unknotting, of the ideal and the reality--from the first to the second book, a movement that Bradford is powerless to stop, and that finally victimizes him in his old age.

After recounting at the end of his history the fates of the Old Comers and their families, in his last years he turns to laments mourning the defection of the Pilgrim children, to the "great change at hand" and the "decay" of virtue: "true godliness doth not now so shine, / As some whiles it did, in the former time." He turns his eyes to the Hebrew Bible: "though I am growne aged, yet have I had a longing desire to see with my owne eyes, something of that most ancient language, and holy tongue, in which the Law and Oracles of God were write. ... And though I cannot attaine to much herein, yet I am refreshed to have seen some glimpse hereof; (as Moyses saw the land of Canan a farr of.)"²⁶ A Moses condemned to envision but not enter the Promised Land, Bradford is also prototypally one kind of American. He is the Puritan-in-America, committed to discipline and order (or to a dream of order), fearful of dispersal and unsettledness, critical of disloyal sons who forsake their "ancient mother" and betray the communal ideal, unmindful that he too was once a disloyal son. Forgetful of that, he becomes the Pilgrim father whose response to unsettledness is lament--and the invocation to order that is his history. Both books can be seen as stays against confusion, but the second book, in order to be fully appreciated, must be. The "breaking out of sundry notorious sins" in 1642, the death of Brewster in 1643, the removal to Nauset in 1644--these make up the unsettled background against which the writing of the second book must be viewed. It is the response of a once-anxious man to the dramatic reappearance of unsettledness. The sins of the fathers have thus been visited upon the children, and the history that reveals this truth becomes the first expression of a recurrent American theme. It offers--both in its veiled guilt for having abandoned the mother and in its implicit dramatization of the strife between fathers and sons--a pattern of the American experience and a paradigm for American literature. Bradford's history may end in silence, but in its disillusionment, lament, and bewilderment, as well as in its assertion of a dream of communal order, it stands as the first of many such examinations and critiques of the American dream. As such *Of Plymouth Plantation* is a history from whose corridors we have yet to contrive an escape.

Notes

¹Moses Coit Tyler, *A History of American Literature, 1607-1765* (Ithaca, 1974), pp. 101, 109; Charles F. Richardson, *American Literature, 1607-1885* (New York, 1970), I, 75.

²Kenneth B. Murdock, *Literature & Theology in Colonial New England* (New York, 1963), p. 78; Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., *The Puritans*, rev. ed. (New York, 1963), I, 87.

³Alan Howard, "Art and History in Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 28 (1971), 238, 245-46; John Griffith, "Of Plymouth Plantation as a Mercantile Epic," *Arizona Quarterly*, 27 (1972), 231, 233. Kenneth Alan Hovey also regards *Of Plymouth Plantation* as, in part, Bradford's attempt "to vindicate himself and his business partners," and examines "the whole of *Of Plymouth Plantation* ... as a series of ... cycles of history, even though individual cycles are seldom revealed in their entirety" ("The Theology of History in *Of Plymouth Plantation* and Its Predecessors," *Early American Literature*, 10 [1975], 49, 56). On the "epic reference" of the history, see A. N. Kaul, *The American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New Haven, 1963), in which "the story is also the unfolding of a phase in the endless drama between God and Satan" (p. 15).

⁴David Levin, "William Bradford: The Value of Puritan Historiography," in *Major Writers of Early American Literature*, ed. Everett Emerson (Madison, 1972), pp. 28-29, 25.

⁵Robert Daly, "William Bradford's Vision of History," *American Literature*, 44 (1973), 557. See as well Jesper Rosenmeier, "'With My Owne Eyes': William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*," in *The American Puritan Imagination*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (New York, 1974), p. 98: "The annals are filled with extraordinary scenes from the history of Plymouth's salvation; but they do not stand as parts of a great and coherent whole, as actions in an evolving drama. The years are shining but isolated moments, beads of revelation that remain unstrung."

⁶Peter Gay, *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial America* (Berkeley, 1966), pp. 50, 49, 52; Daly, p. 566; Rosenmeier, p. 106.

⁷Daly, pp. 564, 566. Daly's argument is seconded by William J. Scheick, "The Theme of Necessity in Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*," *Seventeenth-Century Notes*, 32 (1974), 89.

⁸William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), p. 236. All page references included in my text are to this edition.

⁹Samuel Eliot Morison, "William Bradford," *DAB*, 562-63. See also *Of Plymouth Plantation*, p. 351; Rosenmeier, p. 89.

¹⁰On the Puritan (or Pilgrim) as anxious, unsettled wayfarer, see especially Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965); Darrett B. Rutman, *American Puritanism: Faith and Practice* (New York, 1970); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970).

¹¹Norman S. Grabo suggests "that with the arrival of the Massachusetts Bay settlement in 1630, the year Bradford began *Of Plymouth Plantation*, he wrote with a sense of accomplishment, of something finished" ("William Bradford: *Of Plymouth Plantation*," in *Landmarks of American Writing*, ed. Hennig Cohen [New York, 1969], p. 16).

¹²Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York, 1956), pp. 3-4.

¹³See Grabo, pp. 14, 17; Rosenmeier, pp. 77, 103-06; Bradford Smith, *Bradford of Plymouth* (Philadelphia, 1951).

¹⁴Rosenmeier argues that "Bradford's joy at the bishops' downfall is deep and genuine; it is also shrill, almost desperate. God had poured his blessing on England; New England is not the chosen place" (p. 88). Rosenmeier's excellent essay also emphasizes the retrospective nature of the history, though his view of its significance differs from mine: "When he began to write Book Two, he expected to show, as he had in Book One, how magnificently the Holy Spirit had manifested himself in the actions of the Plymouth saints in the preceding fifteen years" (Rosenmeier, p. 104).

¹⁵F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York, 1925), pp. 111-12. The final ellipsis is Fitzgerald's.

¹⁶*The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston, 1961), p. 451.

¹⁷See Walzer, *Revolution of the Saints*.

¹⁸Morison, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, p. 35n.

¹⁹Morison, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, p. 33n.

²⁰Morison, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, p. xxviii.

²¹Cynthia Wolff, "Literary Reflections of the Puritan Character," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 29 (1968), 15.

²²Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (New York, 1963), p. 286. "In the United States," Tocqueville observed in *Democracy in America*, "a man builds a house in which to spend his old age, and he sells it before the roof is on; he plants a garden and lets it just as the trees are coming into bearing; he brings a field into tillage and leaves other men to gather the crops; he embraces a profession and gives it up; he settles in a place, which he soon afterwards leaves to carry his changeable longings elsewhere." Earlier Tocqueville had noted in his diary: "A restless temper seems to me one of the distinctive traits of this people. ... Born often under another sky, placed in the middle of an always moving scene, himself driven by the irresistible torrent which draws all about him, the American has no time to tie himself to anything, he grows accustomed only to change, and ends by regarding it as the natural state of man" (*Democracy in America* [New York, 1945], II, 136-37; quoted in George W. Pierson, "A Restless Temper ...," in *Readings in Intellectual History: The American Tradition*, ed. C. K. McFarland [New York, 1970], p. 453).

²³Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, describes life in Plymouth as "profoundly characterized by elements of movement and change--indeed by a kind of fluidity that is commonly associated with a much later period in our national history" (p. 9).

²⁴Erikson, p. 296. (Erikson's italics.) In her study of "the land-as-woman symbolization in American life and letters," Annette Kolodny cites psychiatrist Joel Kovel on "the experiences of infancy [as] the reference points of human knowledge and the bedrock of the structures of culture" and on the conflict that pits the male child's "active drive for individuation ... against the current driving him toward maternal union" (*The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* [Chapel Hill, 1975], pp. ix, 5, 153). Her observations on the American Farmer's attempt, in Crèvecoeur's *Letters*, "to sustain ... the integrity of the human social community" seem to me to apply as well to Bradford (p. 62). A. W. Plumstead's remarks are also at point here: "Looking back across three centuries of American literature, we can see in the images of the widow forsaken of her children, and the withered Vine, a tension that has haunted American life like a national guilt complex, or split personality" ("Puritanism and Nineteenth Century American Literature," *Queen's Quarterly*, 70 [1963], 214).

²⁵In *Mourt's Relation*, first printed in 1622 and presumed to be the work of Bradford and Winslow, appears an account of "a voyage made by ten of our men to the Kingdom of Nauset, to seek a boy that had lost himself in the woods; and such accidents as befell us in that voyage." One of the "accidents" recounted occurred at Cummaquid: "One thing was very grievous unto us at this place. There was an old woman, whome we judged to be no less than a hundred years old, which came to see us because she never saw English, yet could not behold us without breaking forth into great passion, weeping and crying excessively. We demanding the reason of it, they told us she had three sons who, when Master Hunt was in these parts, went aboard his ship to trade with him, and he carried them captives into Spain (for Squanto at that time was carried away also) by which means she was deprived of the comfort of her children in her old age" (*A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*, ed. Dwight B. Heath [New York, 1963], p. 70). It is tempting to believe that the death (a presumed suicide) of Bradford's wife Dorothy the previous winter is in part responsible for the power (or pathos) of this passage. After all, the Bradfords had left their five-year-old son John behind in Holland. One wonders as well whether Bradford recalled this incident when he later came to write of the poor-widow church being deserted by those removing to Nauset.

²⁶"Verses by Governor Bradford," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 11 (1870), 473; *Of Plymouth Plantation*, p. xxviii.

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