

## PURITAN

“[1] A member of a group of Protestants that arose in the 16<sup>th</sup> century within the Church of England, demanding the simplification of doctrine and worship, and greater strictness in religious discipline; during part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Puritans became a powerful political party. [2] A person who is strict in moral or religious matters...”

*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (2003)

“As a term, *Puritan* was, in Elizabeth's reign, applied in derision to those who wished to purify the Church of England. The spirit behind *Puritanism* was a outgrowth of Calvinism....a movement that developed in England about the middle of the sixteenth century and later spread its influence into the New England colonies in America.... Their Millenary Petition (1603) requested a reform of the church courts, a doing away with superstitious customs, a discarding of the use of apocryphal books of the Bible, a serious observance of the Sabbath, and various ecclesiastical reforms.... These early English Puritans were...often patrons of art and lovers of music, fencing, and dancing. They were intelligent, disciplined, plainly-dressed citizens who held to simplicity and to democratic principles.

But under the persecution of [King] Charles...they were harried into bitterness.... Some of the 'Brownists,' a group of Puritans who had earlier left England for seclusion in Holland, came to America in the *Mayflower* [1620], wishing to set up a new theocracy [the Pilgrims led by William Bradford].... In one year as many as three thousand rebels left England for the Colonies; in ten years there were twenty thousand English in America. Many of these newcomers were people of education, intelligence, family position, and culture. What now seems a movement toward conservatism, a threat against freedom of speech, art, and individualism, was at that time essentially a radical movement with leanings that have even been characterized as communistic. [They tried communism and it failed.]

Such theologians as John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, John Eliot, Cotton Mather; such historians as William Bradford, John Winthrop, Thomas Hutchinson, and Samuel Sewall; and such poets as Anne Bradstreet, Michael Wigglesworth, and Edward Taylor derive importance from their work and their historical position.... With the Scotch-Irish settlements of the Middle Atlantic and Southern colonies came another and a stronger strain of *Puritanism*, that of the Presbyterians.... As an extreme form of the Reformation sensibility, *Puritanism* exaggerated those Protestant traits—especially industry and frugality—which, according to Max Weber and others, contributed to the rise of capitalism.”

C. Hugh Holman & William Harmon  
*A Handbook to Literature*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition  
(Macmillan 1936-92)

## PURITAN AESTHETICS

“There is an ancient heresy to the effect that the Puritan was ‘hostile’ to art and that one form of this hostility was an indifference to all matters of literary style.... There are many passages which show that the Puritan thought long and hard about the problems of prose style and tried consciously to discover for himself a system of rules for giving adequate expression to his ideas and beliefs. It is interesting and touching to see how often Puritans, when explaining why and how they wrote as they did, confess their own shortcomings as artists, judged by the conventional standards of the literary elite.... Words corresponded to things; the art of style was fundamentally the arrangement of them in an order which agreed with the logical structure of the created universe and with the normal procedure of the mind in dealing systematically with ideas. From the classics Puritan writers, like all well-educated men of their time, learned much about basic qualities of style even though they rejected the more complicated patterns and abstruse rhetorical doctrines of the ancients....

For all good Puritans, the aim of good writing was to be useful [as emphasized by Benjamin Franklin]; time spent on decoration or empty eloquence was time wasted; to waste time that might be devoted to God's service was, in the eyes of a Puritan, to sin. But although the Puritan was scornful of those who

squandered precious hours merely to get literary reputation [like Postmodernist stylists of today], he did insist on definite stylistic values.... If a simile or metaphor made truth more intelligible and rationally more convincing it was good; if it simply tickled the senses and gave pleasure, or if it distracted the reader's attention from the doctrine, it was clearly bad.... Constantly one feels in Puritan literature a conflict between the desire to convince and persuade by the readiest means, and the determination never to cross the line into pleasing the sensual man in such a way as to enslave even momentarily the spirit to the flesh... Anything that seemed to them to amuse or to delight sensuously or intellectually, at the expense of total concentration on theological truth and proper devotional feeling, was to be avoided in writing no less than in worship.... The beauties of the physical world were all too likely to distract men's minds from religious truth or to arouse in them feelings alien to those proper for the study and worship of the divine....

Scattered everywhere throughout Puritan literature, American and English, are reiterations of the idea that the tastes and aptitudes of simple people must be catered to in religious writing.... The New England Puritan had to direct what he wrote to an audience of plain men—sailors, fishermen, farmers, and small shopkeepers—although it made it impossible for him to write as he might have for a more expert literary clientele, called on him for special qualities of style... Thence came the Puritan's love for homely realistic phrasing; for metaphors and similes not drawn from the classics or the world of books but from the common behavior of men and the common experiences of life; for a diction that was close to daily speech, and for figures that served to illustrate and explain rather than to ornament or to please the literary sophisticate.... The world of the New England Puritan writers is one in which the sea, the forest, the field, and the village household appear vividly on every page, even those devoted to the most lofty points of doctrine.... They draw on the simplest material, but they are vivid....

Still another determining influence on the Puritan artist was his reverence for the Bible.... He tended to limit his diction, his images, and his literary devices to those which he could find in Holy Writ.... The Bible after all used men's language to appeal to men; it used parables, figures of speech, and allegory; it contained poetry and musical devices of style.... Plainly then, a Puritan was free to try his hand at parables, figures of speech, allegories, poetry, and prose harmonies.... The Bible contained so much that was beautiful that it gave him a considerable leeway in his own creative aspirations. His reliance on it for material and for method no doubt stifled his originality, but original or not, much of the soundest Puritan prose is moving in its diction and rhythm because the Scripture had shown the way.... The realism and concreteness of his work, the firmness of its structure, and its dignity of tone, all reflect the profound conviction from which it came....

Biblical style was perfect because it was 'penned by the Holy Ghost.' It was a style of 'great simplicities and wonderful plainness,' 'unpolished,' avoiding 'the flowers of Rhetoricke,' 'the goodly ornaments of humane eloquence,' and 'wittie sharpe conceits'.... Homeliness of imagery, simplicity of diction... God had created an orderly and harmonious world, and...in prose or verse, beauty came from harmony and order in the logical and reasoned statement of truth. Many Puritan writers...wrote prose that is so lucid in its exposition and so firm in its structure that it became a powerful idiom not only for the Puritan but for hosts of men of other faiths who carried on the tradition after him.... He found in 'Holy Poetry' 'somewhat of Heaven,' because it charmed 'souls into loving harmony and concord'....

The work of the best writers in colonial New England shows that they wanted to write well as one way of serving God, and reflects both their zeal and their concern for fundamental stylistic values.... In seventy years they made Boston second only to London in the English-speaking world as a center for the publishing and marketing of books, and they produced a body of writing greater in quantity and quality than that of any other colonial community in modern history."

Kenneth B. Murdock  
*Literature and Theology in Colonial New England*  
(Harvard, 1949; Harper & Row/Torchbook 1963) 31, 36-51, 56-64

#### PURITANS AS SYMBOLS

"There they stood, in the first hour of wedlock, while the idle pleasures of which their companions were the emblems [Maypolers, 17<sup>th</sup>-century hippies], had given place to *the sternest cares of life*, personified by

the dark Puritans...[who] laid the rock foundation of New England... As the moral gloom of the world overpowers all systematic gayety, even so was their home of wild mirth made desolate amid the sad forest. They returned to it no more.... They went heavenward, supporting each other along the difficult path which it was their lot to tread, and never wasted one regretful thought on the vanities of Merry Mount.” [Italics added]

Nathaniel Hawthorne  
“The Maypole of Merry Mount” (1836)

### LITERARY INFLUENCES OF PURITANISM

Beginning in 1636 the New England Puritans established the first colleges in America and graduated ministers and schoolteachers who spread all over the country, promoting education. The most significant influences of Puritanism on later American literature were: (1) establishing a vivid and powerful tradition of Christian faith and morality; (2) modeling excesses of intolerance, censorship and persecution; (3) requiring literature to have an explicit moral; (4) informing *McGuffey's Reader*, the textbook used for about a century throughout the country in most American schools; and (5) creating a tradition of thinking and writing *allegorically* at the highest level of American literature, beginning with Hawthorne and Melville and including, most notably, Faulkner, Porter and O'Connor. Hawthorne is the major American literary analyst of Puritanism and Ahab in *Moby-Dick* (1851) by Melville, the greatest American novel, personifies the traditional characteristics of Puritanism, though he is technically a Quaker.

### PURITANISM IN PSYCHOLOGY

In the 20th century, the metaphors of left brain and right brain to a large extent replaced head and heart in popularity, in part because they do not define gender in relation to social place and in part because they carry the implication of egalitarian balance as an ideal in society and in individuals of both genders. As Scott Sanders observes, right-brain ways of knowing and acting are seen as a “feminine” counterbalance to left-brain “masculine” ways (434). In this new configuration, the left brain tends to be associated with artificial space and with puritan values because the left brain operates most efficiently by “purifying” its own structures and functions of interference by other parts of the brain. The right-brain complex tends to be associated with natural space and pastoral values, because the right brain specializes in felt connection, both natural and social.

The values of left brain and right brain, the masculine and the feminine sides of every person, are linked to each other in a complementary relationship expressed by primary or “root metaphors” of space, the City and the Garden. Dualisms that define bicameral brain functions [such as Maypolers versus Puritans] have been listed variously by different researchers, and several such lists have been discussed by Anthony Wilden in an analysis of hemispheric specialization as it pertains to communication in general (235-40). The following version of bicameral values is devised to specify features currently associated with the two brain spaces and to suggest their evocation of traditional alignments:

Left Brain	Right Brain
head	heart
puritan	pastoral
focused	diffuse
control	freedom
authority	retreat or revolution
structure	fluidity
discipline	ease
judgment	tolerance
absolutism	relativism
verticality	horizontality
hierarchy	equality
competition	peace
straight	curved

logic  
apart  
exclusion  
dissociation

feeling  
together  
inclusion  
fusion

## PARADIGM

Geographically, however, there are four directions, just as psychologically there are four primary modes of consciousness. Reflecting the need for a more expansive and less binary model, literature configures itself in terms of four primary metaphorical spaces, each of which is the site of a particular kind of consciousness. The first space is the City, associated with a *vertical* mode of consciousness. The second is the Garden, associated with a *horizontal* mode of consciousness. The third is the Wilderness, associated with primal consciousness, in neurophysiology the “mammalian brain,” which contains the “reptilian brain.” Metaphorically, then, City/Garden/Wilderness correspond respectively to the left brain, the right brain, and the primitive brain. The fourth primary space, Sky, is associated with higher consciousness, or transcendence, and does not correspond to any part of the physical brain.

## PURITANISMS

These four primary spaces and modes of consciousness are in turn related to four basic value systems: primitivisms, puritanisms, pastoralisms, and transcendentalisms. A primitivism is an expression of instinctive or animalistic values that is virtually unconscious and in the vertical mode of consciousness is identified with Wilderness. A puritanism is a focused, definite, structured belief system, ideology, or mental set in the vertical mode, and is identified with the City; it is defined by its source of authority, which may be sited in any of the four primary spaces, but usually City or Sky. A pastoralism is a diffused, indefinite complex of feelings and values in the horizontal mode of consciousness, and is defined by the location of a “good place” in the Garden. A transcendentalism is the synergy of a puritanism and a pastoralism attained through transformation in the Wilderness, and is defined by a unique individual expression of holistic consciousness identified with Sky.

## VERTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Of the four modes of consciousness, the vertical mode of the City is the most familiar. Indeed, verticality is evident in the charting of brain-wave activity through electro-encephalograms. Psychologists such as Joseph Pearce refer to the “uppermost” brain waves, busy Beta waves characteristic of ordinary consciousness, as “roof-brain chatter” (121-28). Lakoff and Johnson have demonstrated the ways in which orientational metaphors such as “up” and “down” reflect our experience as vertical creatures (14-21). That ordinary consciousness is vertical and disposed to hierarchy is expressed in figures of speech such as “fall asleep” and “wake up.” The myth of conquering the beast celebrates verticality, the triumph of the conscious over the unconscious, the supremacy of civilization, or the City, over Wilderness. Sigmund Freud’s psychology affirms the priorities of verticality with its emphasis upon subordinating the Id, or Wilderness, to the Superego. Verticality is the evolutionary distinction of *homo erectus*, the achievement that contributed to making us human in the first place.

## INDIVIDUATION

The growth of human consciousness from child to adult may be envisioned as a movement upward through three spaces, Wilderness to Garden to City. Psychologically, in Western civilization growing up is growing vertical. By age two, unconsciousness, the undifferentiated participation in Wilderness, is lost. Consciousness begins to develop vertically as the narrative “I”--or the ego--emerges. Metaphorically speaking, child development involves taming the Wilderness and creating the Garden, synthesizing nature with civilization, as infantile primitivism is disciplined by the puritanism of adults. During the acculturation process, the mythical exile from the Garden, the head acquires top priority in accord with the vertical conception of progress: the evolutionary rise of the race from origins in Wilderness to getting ahead in complex artificial environments epitomized by the vertical City. Vertical consciousness is basic to human survival, as was an erect posture to human evolution. Today more than ever, what must be developed for

success in competitive technological societies is a vertical consciousness dominated by the head, the efficient left hemisphere, in which ordinary thinking is binary. Efficient left-cerebral functioning requires turning off the rest of the psyche, splitting off from it with such consistency that ordinary consciousness tends toward a fixed dissociation (Ornstein 87-92). Adaptation in Western culture induces a condition represented in extreme by epileptics whose brains have been literally split in two by therapeutic surgery. As Pearce says, "Acculturation is a splitting of the corpus callosum" (169).

## DISSOCIATION

The dis-integration of the psyche as a result of verticality has been one of the major themes of modern literature since Nathaniel Hawthorne, in "Ethan Brand," defined the Unpardonable Sin as a separation and tyranny of the head over the heart. Carl Jung diagnosed it as the general condition of the modern mind, and T. S. Eliot observed it as a characteristic of poetry in English since the 17th century, calling it "dissociation of sensibility" (247). More recently, in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, dissociation is the predicament of a woman so shut into her head that she is "detached, terminal. I was nothing but a head..." (129). Holocaust narratives, in which the ideal of the City has been degraded to a concentration camp, are testimony to the horrors that have resulted from extreme dissociation of the head from the heart. In general, dissociation is suggested by confinement in City-like space, by the absence or scarcity of Garden space, and by aridity or devastation caused by humans in the Wilderness.

Michael Hollister

"Model of Metaphors"

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