

«BUT THAT I BE NOT TEDIOUS»: WOMEN'S ROLE,  
REPRESENTATION, AND LACK OF RELEVANCE IN  
*OF PLYMOUTH PLANTATION* BY WILLIAM BRADFORD

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RESUMEN

«But that I be not tedious» (para no ser tedioso) es la excusa que Bradford emplea para explicar su omisión de la perspectiva de las mujeres en el mítico viaje del Mayflower hasta el Nuevo Mundo. En este ensayo analizaré cómo en *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Bradford deliberadamente elige durante la mayor parte de su diario bien minimizar o bien ignorar la participación de las mujeres en la creación de la colonia de Plymouth y la forma negativa en que retrata a las mujeres en las contadas ocasiones en que éstas aparecen. Señalaré que la aparición de mujeres en esta obra es excepcional y como medio para ilustrar las maldades de las sucesoras de Eva.

PALABRAS CLAVE: William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, mujeres puritanas, cuáqueros, Nueva Inglaterra.

ABSTRACT

«But that I be not tedious» is the excuse William Bradford uses to explain his omission of women and their perspective on the Pilgrims' now-mythical journey from the Netherlands to the New World, as well as their thoughts and sufferings and the problems the journey implied. In this essay I will analyze how in *Of Plymouth Plantation* Bradford deliberately chooses for most of his journal to minimize or simply ignore women's participation in the creation of the colony of Plymouth and the derogatory and negative ways in which he portrays women in the very few instances when women appear in his narrative. That way, I will show that women's representation is an exception and, when they appear, more often than not, it is just in order to illustrate the evils of Eve's successors.

KEY WORDS: William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Puritan women, Quakers, New England.

INTRODUCTION.  
WRITING THE HISTORY OF THE NEW WORLD

When William Bradford began to write *Of Plymouth Plantation*, the historical chronicle of the events that led to the foundation of the colony of Plymouth

and the description of its first twenty-seven years of existence, he could not imagine (despite his intention of leaving a document for the perusal of future generations) how extensively it would be read and used. His journal is used not only to learn about this particular period of history but also to help define what being Puritan is like; accordingly, its most Puritan-like elements being emphasized while those considered to be «unpuritan» have been dismissed<sup>1</sup>.

In other words, what Bradford wrote, to a very large extent, has come to be what is known, taught and accepted to be what actually happened, since *Of Plymouth Plantation* is the most complete account of that period in colonial history. Most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents (such as diaries, autobiographies, and saints' lives<sup>2</sup>) that could give scholars an insight on the Puritan character «are generally inaccessible; the published copies are widely scattered, and many of the diaries are still in manuscript»<sup>3</sup>. The result is that, for a number of reasons, what Bradford recorded became to be regarded as what actually happened; what he omitted, misrepresented or silenced, got inevitably lost in most cases, with very few exceptions.

No matter that at the end of the account, disillusioned and disappointed by the course of events, Bradford had changed his mind as to the object of his journal and no longer considered it a public document but a private project, or that the work has been perused uncritically and in excerpts rather than as a whole<sup>4</sup>. It seems to be of scarce importance that, in some instances, Bradford was not as objective as he intended and his personal opinion blurred his impartiality. As an example, his very negative description of Morton, atoned by historians who have been able to recover other contemporary accounts of Morton's life and personality to present him in a light which is very different (and more positive) than Bradford's. These flaws considered and all in all, *Of Plymouth Plantation* remains in many aspects the sole source of information on this particular historical period.

This is why it is fundamental to analyze how women are represented (if at all) in the writings of the second governor of the colony, the type of women that appears, the exceptional circumstances that made women liable to be included and the reasons for surprising omissions. Among these, personal information, most prominently his own wife's controversial death, an omission which has prompted numerous speculations of various sorts. For practical purposes, in the first place I will focus on the instances in which the female members of the Pilgrims' community were ignored and, then, in the cases of women who are present in the pages of the journal.

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<sup>1</sup> A.B. HOWARD, «Art and History in Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*». *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 28, núm. 2 (1971), pp. 237-266, pp. 238-239.

<sup>2</sup> Saints were those belonging to the group of the Elect, not saints in the Catholic sense.

<sup>3</sup> C.G. WOLFF, «Literary reflections on the Puritan character». *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 29, núm.1 (1968), pp. 13-32, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> R. DALY, «William Bradford's vision of History». *American Literature*, vol. 44, núm. 4 (1973), pp. 557-569, p. 568, y A.B. HOWARD, *op. cit.* p. 238.

## 1. IGNORING WOMEN

When it was first published in 1856 what is now called *Of Plymouth Plantation*<sup>5</sup> was then referred to as the «Mayflower log». Neither is Bradford's journal merely an account of this mythical journey nor does it start with it. After placing himself within a certain historiographical tradition<sup>6</sup>, Bradford starts by explaining the situation at England that would lead the Scrooby congregation to flee to the Netherlands and ultimately to America. Bradford tells in a very detailed manner the motivations (their imprisonment, the persecution they suffered...) and reasons prompting such a removal but in so doing, his point of view is a male one. This is a decision taken by the male members of the community but, that, obviously, would affect the Scrooby congregation as a whole. But not once are women mentioned, ignoring that they also «had their houses beset and watched night and day, and hardly escaped their hands; and the most were fain to flee and leave their houses and habitations»<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, the Low Countries are described as a place «where they heard was freedom of religion for all men»<sup>8</sup>, as if the female members of the Scrooby congregation were not as devote and pious as their male counterparts. One might be tempted to say that Bradford, because of practices related to the economy of language, only used the form «men» to refer to the community as a whole. However, the following examples will show that he does explicitly refer to women to put the blame specifically on them and not on men or the whole community.

The best example of women not being taken into account in the decision-taking process of the community is the removal to the Low Countries. Then, having decided that men would go on board in the first place, immediately followed by women and children, the possibility of their being apprehended («but after the first boatful was got aboard and she was ready to go for more, the master espied a great company, both horse and foots, will bills and guns and other weapons, for the country was raised to taken them»<sup>9</sup>) made them sail without the women and children. Here Bradford does admit what a desperate condition being left completely alone was for the women and children. Still, though acknowledging this, Bradford seems to be far more concerned for the men's feelings than for those who were left behind:

But the poor men which were got aboard were in great distress for their wives and children which they saw thus to be taken, and were left destitute of their helps; and

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<sup>5</sup> This is the title that appears in the first page of the manuscript, in Bradford's own handwriting.

<sup>6</sup> Eusebian for Daly and Augustinian for Gay and Howard; Daly, *op. cit.*, pp. 557-558.

<sup>7</sup> W. BRADFORD, *Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620-1647 by William Bradford Sometime Governor Thereof*. Samuel Eliot MORISON (ed.), New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1952, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.



themselves also, not having a cloth to shift them with, more than they had on their backs, and some scarce a penny about them, all they had being aboard the bark<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, he seems far more concerned for men's sufferings —both emotional and practical— and their material well-being than for the sufferings of those who had been literally abandoned in the hands of their persecutors, who

after they had been thus turmoiled a good while and conveyed from one constable to another, they were glad to be rid of them in the end upon any terms, for all were wearied and tired with them. Though in the meantime they (poor souls) endured misery enough; and thus in the end necessity forced a way for them<sup>11</sup>.

Bradford does acknowledge women's (and children's) sufferings but gives them less space («to be short»<sup>12</sup>) than their husbands', who were more or less safely carried to the Netherlands and had succeeded in escaping from their persecutors. The physical integrity of women and children, left at the hands of their English persecutors, is obscured by men's material well-being, deprived of their families' assistance. Bradford, who is such a detailed chronicler in almost every other aspect, though recognizing that «pitiful it was to see the heavy case of these poor women in this distress»<sup>13</sup>, still «but that I be not tedious in these things, I will omit the rest, though I might relate many other notable passages and troubles which they endured and underwent in these their wanderings and travels both at land and sea; but I haste to other things»<sup>14</sup>. Bradford, then, chooses to omit women's perspective, though he often concedes that he is too prolix even at the verge of boredom —«the special passages of his [Shirley's] letters I shall here insert as shall be pertinent to these things; for though I am weary of this tedious and uncomfortable subject, yet for the clearing of the truth I am compelled to be more large in the opening of these matters»<sup>15</sup>.

Despite his future intention to dwell further into this matter («I might relate many other notable passages and troubles»<sup>16</sup>), Bradford will not fulfil his promise and his subsequent numerous depictions of the Pilgrims' sufferings will mention only the problems undergone by the community as a whole, or more specifically, even exclusively, by the male members, but not women's plights (or children's, for the same reason). Bradford, himself on the ship, could not know by then women's perspective but he chose never to include it; but he could have asked

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 256. As a result of this tediousness, in his edition, Morison places most of these additions in the appendixes rather than in the text itself.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

women what their own point of view was, given that he started the writing of his journal in 1630, twenty years after the removal to the Netherlands.

This is just the very first instance of women being ignored when taking such an important decision as the removal to a foreign land is. Once more, when leaving for America, women are ignored. The only mention to women is their being an obstacle for some of the men to partake in the voyage since «the length of the voyage was such as the weak bodies of women and other persons worn out with age and travail (as many of them were) could never be able to endure»<sup>17</sup>. Not only are women's opinions not taken into account when it comes to decide the removal to America («this proposition being made public and coming to the scanning of all, it raised many variable opinions amongst men and caused many fear and doubts among themselves»<sup>18</sup>) but they are perceived as obstacles preventing the due course of events. Women are made responsible for the delay of the journey just as they were when going to the Netherlands. Then, «it so fell out that they were there a day before the ship came, and the sea being rough and the women very sick, prevailed with the seamen to put into a creek hard by where they lay on ground at low water»<sup>19</sup>. In two instances, Bradford makes clear that women are an obstacle for the carrying out of their (male-made) plans.

This situation of women's discrimination that begins in their journeys will be extrapolated to the New World. There, women will be consistently ignored when it comes to the social organization of the new community, when we are told how «they» [doubtless, the men] chose their government, constructed their houses, «met and consulted of laws and orders, both for their civil and military government as the necessity of their condition did require»<sup>20</sup>. In matters relating to gender roles and division, the Puritans faithfully followed St. Paul, their favourite theologian, who demanded women's absolute compliance and «it was unlikely that Puritans could ever reject the notion that God required submission of women»<sup>21</sup>. They opposed any reinterpretation of biblical commands in reference to women's role either in church or in society<sup>22</sup> while regarding themselves as Old Testament patriarchs<sup>23</sup>. That a typological reading of the Bible (*i.e.*, drawing parallelisms between oneself and Biblical characters or situations) was one of the founding stones of Puritanism also helped to encourage this. Finally, women's submission to their husbands was further reinforced by the importance Puritans attributed to the *pater*

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 76.

<sup>21</sup> M.M. DUNN, «Saints and sisters: Congregational and Quaker women in the early colonial period». *American Quarterly*, vol. 30, núm. 5 (1978), pp. 582-601, p. 584.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 596.

<sup>23</sup> M.J. WESTERKAMP, «Puritan patriarchy and the problem of revelation». *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 23, núm. 3 (1983), pp. 571-595, p. 573.

*familias* in religious terms<sup>24</sup>: «the wife submitted to her husband, just as a female soul<sup>25</sup> gave herself up to Christ»<sup>26</sup>.

This discrimination of women was more of a Puritan invention rather than a translation of European or generalized Protestant practices. This series of circumstances prevented Puritan women from enjoying a freedom that, for instance, the women in the Chesapeake region had, since in the New England area «environmental and economic factors conspired to prevent patriarchal family practice (as opposed to ideals) from taking root, at least during the first three-quarters of the 17<sup>th</sup> century»<sup>27</sup>. This submission of Puritan women to their husbands or fathers prevented their having the freedom from social constraints and conventions the removal to America involved for other Protestant women (and for men in general). It also made it impossible for Puritan women to share religious and church organization in an equal basis with men, as the Quaker women did<sup>28</sup>.

To understand women's role in Puritanism, we have to take into consideration that, despite their lack of a voice, «women shared fully in the excitement that creation of a new religious settlement produced, and they responded to the challenge with intelligence, vigour and enthusiasm»<sup>29</sup>. Actually, Puritanism's appeal to women, up to a large extent, was «because it gave them an important hand in shaping Puritan culture and offered them many opportunities to exercise indirect influence over others and establish their social authority as exemplary Christians»<sup>30</sup>.

Up to now, we have seen cases in which women appeared in regards to the community; in a more personal tone, Bradford even silences his own wife's existence. Among the most astonishing omissions, Bradford's failure to register his wife's death ranks high. In fact, the only contemporary account of Dorothy Bradford's death appears in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*<sup>31</sup>: Bradford's «dearest consort, accidentally falling overboard, was drowned in the harbor» (quoted in XXIV). For Morison, this omission is «consistent with his modest reticence about his own rôle of leadership in the colony»<sup>32</sup> but it has given way to the suspicion that Dorothy May Bradford might have committed suicide, a hypothesis Morison does not deny. Actually, he almost seems to embrace by pointing out the differences

<sup>24</sup> M.B. NORTON, «The evolution of white women's experience in early America». *The American History Review*, vol. 89, núm. 3 (1984), pp. 593-619, p. 596.

<sup>25</sup> All souls were female for the Puritans.

<sup>26</sup> E. REIS, «The Devil, the body, and the feminine soul in Puritan New England». *The Journal of American History*, vol. 82, núm. 1 (1995), pp. 15-36, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> NORTON, *op. cit.*, p. 597.

<sup>28</sup> DUNN, *op. cit.*, p. 583.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 585.

<sup>30</sup> A. PORTERFIELD, «Women's attraction to puritanism». *Church History*, vol. 60, núm. 2 (1991), pp. 196-209, p. 209.

<sup>31</sup> D.H. KELSO, «William Bradford». Pilgrim Hall Museum. 14 July 1998. Date of access: 14 July 2005. Available at «<http://www.pilgrimhall.org/bradfordwilliam.htm>».

<sup>32</sup> BRADFORD, *op. cit.*, p. XXIV.

these women encountered when compared to their native land<sup>33</sup>. However, others fiercely oppose this idea, such as George Ernest Bowman in his article «Governor William Bradford's First Wife Dorothy Bradford Did Not Commit Suicide» (1931), especially since the primary source for the idea of suicide «retracted his claim»<sup>34</sup>. And although there are no statistics about suicide rates among female inhabitants of the Plymouth colony (or of the male ones), «in New England, where the theocracy insisted upon it with unusual vigour —where anxiety about election was not only normal but mandatory— hysteria, breakdowns, and suicides were not uncommon»<sup>35</sup>. Also, mortality rates show that a year later, almost all the women who had come in the *Mayflower* had perished<sup>36</sup>. Whether it was a suicide or just an accidental death, the fact that remains is that Bradford concealed it, thus testifying to women's neglect in his journal.

What are the reasons for all these omissions? For Daly, «the principle governing Bradford's selection, then, is clear enough. He records only those events which affect or clarify the progress of his colony»<sup>37</sup>. Similarly, for Perry Miller «to chronicle the providence of God in the settlement of New England was the entire purpose of New England historians»<sup>38</sup>. This would also explain why Bradford omitted his second wedding, the birth of his children from his second marriage, or the fact that his first child (a son) by his first wife was among those left behind when the first group moved to America. However, that principle of selection is not always so clear-cut throughout the whole narrative. Multiple and often repetitive series of documents are sometimes included to illustrate one single event, like the three documents by three ministers he includes to explain that adultery is both a sin and a crime<sup>39</sup>. They are not so absolutely necessary and so enlightening as to justify the inclusion of them all. As the author of the history, Bradford chooses to include what he considers relevant<sup>40</sup>, and this for Bradford means relevance for the progress

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<sup>33</sup> Bradford's omission not only of his wife's death but of women's distress when arriving at the New World has also had literary outcomes. Poet Sophie Cabot Black, to help re-create what Dorothy Bradford's feelings and thoughts might have been, retells the *Mayflower* voyage from her perspective in *The Misunderstanding of Nature* (1994).

<sup>34</sup> «William Bradford (1590-1657)». Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia. 8 Oct. 2005. Date of access: 10 October 2005. Available at «[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Bradford\\_\(1590-1657\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Bradford_(1590-1657))».

<sup>35</sup> S. BERCOVITCH, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1975, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> BRADFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 77, editor's note.

<sup>37</sup> DALY, *op. cit.*, p. 562.

<sup>38</sup> P. Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth-Century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1939, p. 360.

<sup>39</sup> BRADFORD, *op. cit.*, pp. 404-413.

<sup>40</sup> This is what provokes that Miller, according to Murphey, though having read all the documents of any sort written by the Puritans, still «could not observe the majority of the community, and his generalizations therefore involved an inferential leap». M.G. MURPHEY, «American civilization in retrospect». *American Quarterly*, vol. 31, núm. 3 (1979), pp. 402-406, p. 403.



of the colony (following Daly's hypothesis). Therefore, given that women are ignored, we must necessarily infer that women's actions did not help in any possible way the colony to go forward and, in some cases, were just a hindrance and an impediment to the colony.

## 2. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN: FASTIDIOUS WIVES AND LUSTFUL WOMEN

Up to now, we have dealt with women being ignored. So, now the question is how women were represented in Bradford's journal in the rare instances in which they appear. As I have already noted, women's innate weakness was one of the reasons alleged against the convenience of the journey. Once in America, their presence was perceived as a weak point and a hindrance for the profitability of the Plymouth colony, were it not for God's interest in their succeeding. To illustrate that the success of a given settlement lies more in God's decision than its members' capability, Bradford uses the following example:

This was the end of these [Weston's men], that some time boasted of their strength (being all able, lusty men) and what they would do and bring to pass in comparison to the people here, who had many women and children and weak ones amongst them. And said at their first arrival, when they saw the wants here, that they would take another course and not to fall into such a condition as this simple people were come to. But a man's way is not in his own power, God can make the weak to stand. Let him also that standeth take heed lest he fall<sup>41</sup>.

This way, Bradford underrates the role and importance of women in the management of family affairs and their active participation in the running of the family business. He ignores that the adult woman occupied a clearly defined place in the seventeenth-century family —so much so that she was seen more as a part of that system and less as an autonomous person. Indeed, her authority derived from her role as mistress of the household for she directed the household's daily affairs (under her husband's supervision, of course), and in his absence she could act on his behalf<sup>42</sup>, becoming what Linda Kerber defines as «deputy husband».

If the community succeeds, therefore, in Bradford's eyes, it will be only because God wanted it so, no matter the drain women, children, and others, constitute. However, that women were such a drain is questioned by Norton, who considers that it was women's need to work at the family business which, in turn, made them less independent and not the other way around. Women were ignored at an institutional and public level but at an economical level, since in this pre-

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<sup>41</sup> BRADFORD, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>42</sup> NORTON, *op. cit.*, p. 597.





Industrial Revolution era the home was also the main production centre, the centre of the family business, women had more power and exerted a greater influence on the decisions taken at a domestic level («familial spending decisions»), than their contemporaries in Chesapeake, for instance<sup>43</sup>. This is especially significant because, in contrast, Quaker women did share «religious experience and church governance» on a more equal basis and «were not so bound by either scriptural or society as Puritan women»<sup>44</sup>.

Thus, if we base our understanding of Puritan society on Bradford's journal, wives do not seem to have been much of a help in the establishment of the colony. Rather, they are almost accessory beings, mere companions for the male colonists. This is just the way in which Bradford depicts the death of Mrs. John Carver, who, «being a weak woman, died within five or six weeks after him [her husband]»<sup>45</sup>. Bradford offers an image of widowhood not too different than the traditional Indian ritual of burning the widow alive in her husband's funeral pyre: having lost her function as the governor's wife, it seems to Bradford the most natural resolution her following him in the course of a few weeks, this being further grounded on women's traditional weakness too. Having lost her function as wife, her lack of relevance within the community (her social death) is naturally followed by her physical death.

About wives and husbands portrayed in Bradford's history, we see that the submission of wives to husbands imposed by Puritans made the men free from any possible questioning by their wives about their doings, business, and any other activity in which they might involve themselves. In turn, this practice rendered women ignorant and what is more, exposed to danger and possible divine punishment due to their husbands' faults, for, as in regular court cases, ignorance of the law does not imply immunity. This was the case of Mr. Lyford's wife. Once her husband's actions had been made public («he thought to bring shame and disgrace upon them, but instead thereof opens his own to all the world»<sup>46</sup> [OPP, 166]), Bradford presents her as driven by her distress, which makes women indiscreet and unreliable («his wife was so affected with his doings as she could no longer conceal her grief and sorrow of mind, but opens the same to one of their deacons and some other of her friends, and after uttered the same to Mr. Pierce»). Bradford does not seem to pity this woman at all and, what is more, considers it reasonable her fear of being punished either by God or the Indians («she feared some great judgment of God would fall upon them and upon her, for her husband's cause, now that they were to remove. She feared to fall into the Indians' hands and to be defiled by them»<sup>47</sup>). To compensate for her husband's sins and crimes, the wife is to be pun-

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 600-601.

<sup>44</sup> DUNN, *op. cit.*, p. 583, p. 595.

<sup>45</sup> BRADFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>46</sup> BRADFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 166-167.





ished, as stated in the Bible («I will raise up evil against thee and will take thy wives and give them»<sup>48</sup>). That way, innocent women with no role in the government or organization of the community were made responsible of the activities of their husbands, to whom they were submitted, and may even have to pay for their crimes, which they knew nothing of.

Women are also perceived by Bradford as a potential threat for the community's unity and integrity. To start with, it was them who almost prevented the voyage to America on the grounds of their innate weakness, which made them unable (or, at best, highly unlikely and most unsuitable) to endure the long and perilous voyage. Old people and children can be somewhat excused for their weaknesses lie on a temporary situation —childhood and old age— but Bradford implies that women can be no other thing than weak and feeble beings, regardless of considerations such as age, health... That some men chose, or rather, were forced to stay behind on consideration to their wives' inability to go with them, was the first step for the division of the original Scrooby congregation. And once in America, not only did women threaten the unity of the community but they actually disrupted and destroyed it with the division of the Plymouth church into several smaller ones:

First, those that lived on their lots on the other side of the Bay, called Duxbury, they could not long bring their wives and children to the public worship and church meetings here, but with such burthen as, growing to some competent number, they sued to be dismissed and become a body of themselves<sup>49</sup>.

For Bradford, the split of the community was a severe blow because he thought that nothing good could come out of the division of the community, as he had already stated at the very beginning of the journal by presenting the case of their own congregation in England: «these people became two distinct bodies or churches, and in regard of distance of place did congregate severally»<sup>50</sup>. The result was that this other church, led by Mr. John Smith, «falling into some errors in the Low Countries, there (for the most part) buried themselves and their names»<sup>51</sup>.

Bradford puts all the blame for the formation of new churches (and the subsequent dispersal of the original one) on wives because of the difficulties in bringing them to the original church site. Families are thus presented as a «burthen», a load, and, moreover, a danger for the maintenance and survival of the colony, at least of the colony as a whole. Women (and children) are repeatedly represented almost like objects throughout the history. Already at the beginning of the journey to the Netherlands we are told that «the women and children with the goods were sent to the place in a small bark which they had hired for that end; and the men

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 167.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 253.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

were to meet them by land»<sup>52</sup>. That way, women and children are equalled to objects.

There might have been other good reasons underlying the breaking apart of the community; to start with, the fact that not all them were members of the original Scrooby congregation<sup>53</sup>, and, therefore, might have had —and actually had— different beliefs, ideas, thoughts<sup>54</sup>, not always compatible with those of the Puritans'. But Bradford finds it easier to accept the most at-hand and observable excuse, without taking the trouble to look further for more concealed explanations for such a decisive split. Given that they grew «to some competent number», might this not be a symptom that the original settlement was becoming too populated? Was there room, and more important, financial opportunities for everybody? Was the need for room of these who left the community a need for physical or religious room? Was everybody keen to live under public scrutiny in a place where even private sins were not a private matter but the business of the entire community? For the Puritans, good behaviour was not just a matter of the «chosen» ones —the saints— but of the community as a whole. Whether by natural inclination or by force and coercion, all citizens were to behave in the proper way (no matter if this obedience was external and imposed). To achieve this, the saints were in charge of creating laws and the means to enforce them in the natural inhabitants, with the result that the non-Puritan members were to live by the Puritan rules and laws<sup>55</sup>. But Bradford, so inquisitive most times, in this occasion chooses to accept the trite excuse of his fellow men and not inquire any further.

Women seem to be pernicious influences for the community in many different ways. Quite often, as we have seen, they were used as scapegoats, either collectively or individually. One of these individual scapegoats is William Brewster's own daughter, Fear<sup>56</sup>. Fear, married to Isaac Allerton, is often mentioned in reference to

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> «The old Adam», as the Puritans called them in contrast to members of the congregation. Note that old Adam only has the meaning of natural men (*e.g.*, not saints) whereas female associations with Eve involve seduction, deceit and sinful connotations.

<sup>54</sup> One of the most notable examples of the problems derived of the differences between the Pilgrims' beliefs and the non-Puritan inhabitants' is the celebration of Christmas. Since English and Scots Puritans did not celebrate it on the grounds of 25<sup>th</sup> December not being Christ's real birth date, this festivity was not celebrated at the colony either. Though those wishing to celebrate it were allowed to do so, conflicts arose the very first year about how it should be celebrated —displaying their leisure in the streets or quietly and devoutly at home. BRADFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 97. This is also an instance of the community establishing rules according to Puritans beliefs, rules to be applied to the Puritan and the non-Puritan members of the community alike.

<sup>55</sup> P. MILLER, «Preparation for salvation' in seventeenth-century New England». *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 5, núm. 3 (1943), pp. 253-286, p. 255.

<sup>56</sup> Fear Brewster is referred to by Bradford as Mr. Allerton' wife (just as he did with Mrs. Carver and Mrs. Lyford) or Mr. Brewster's daughter, but he does not mention her first name. Her being Mr. Brewster's daughter gives her some sort of individuality, though. DUNN (*op. cit.*, p. 589) notes that «in almost most churches, women were referred to as 'wife of'; first names generally went





her husband's more than dubious dealings and commercial agreements as the cause why they continued trusting him (and assigning him the undertaking of their commercial dealings with the English Partners) even after his untrustworthiness had been already proved beyond any reasonable doubt after a number of incidents. Rather than admitting that it was his very own and other prominent (male) citizens' naïveté what made them reluctant to cut off all contact with Allerton, Bradford over and over again reminds us of Allerton's kinship with their respected deceased reverend Mr. Brewster, whom Bradford admired to a large extent<sup>57</sup>. That ignoring the fact that Brewster himself was among the people his son-in-law swindled<sup>58</sup>.

But, by far, the group to which most of the women who appear in the pages of Bradford's journal belong to is that of the lustful, fallen woman. Following the Puritan belief that women were more likely to sin due to their innate weakness, Bradford depicts many instances of sinful women. We are told about the maidservant of Fells, who turned out to be his concubine, as many already believed but couldn't prove<sup>59</sup>, Indian women committing «uncleanness» with white men<sup>60</sup>, Sir Christopher Gardiner's relationship with his «cousin» about whom «it was suspected she, after the Italian manner, was his concubine»<sup>61</sup>, the girl Arthur Peach got pregnant<sup>62</sup>, the girl defiled by Lyford<sup>63</sup>... It is interesting to note that, in their natural predisposition to sin, Bradford considers white women and Indian women alike, when he would have never put himself and his fellow citizens on the same level with Indian men.

These women are thus presented, at best, as stupid creatures likely to be seduced and defiled and, at worst, as people prompt to sin<sup>64</sup> who, just like Eve, make pious men fall into temptation along with them. This second view is the dominant one throughout the whole text given that for the Puritans, women were inferior and, as Eve had proved, «a vehicle for Satan, not able to see through his wiles, wanting in intellect, needing protection»<sup>65</sup>. According to Westerkamp, for the Puritans «women were thought to be characterized by specific evil tendencies, a corrupt strain» they could not avoid, as the precedent set by Eve was evidence of<sup>66</sup>. To this natural tendency it was added their naïveté, which made them be easily

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unrecorded. [...] By 1660, in all of the church records examined [...], silence had been enjoined on women in the matter of relation». Bradford does the same, given that adult females' status in the colonies was established by their marital status. NORTON, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

<sup>57</sup> Bradford's admiration and reverence for Brewster is seen in many instances throughout the text, but most particularly in the elegy he wrote praising his life. Bradford, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-330.

<sup>58</sup> BRADFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 192.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 233.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 247.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 299.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 166.

<sup>64</sup> REIS, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>65</sup> DUNN, *op. cit.*, p. 584.

<sup>66</sup> WESTERKAMP, *op. cit.*, p. 576.

talked into sin and be deluded —though this natural inclination of women's did not constitute a mitigating circumstance at all. Therefore, men were in charge of the duty to enlighten women and guide them spiritually for their salvation.

### 3. WOMEN FOR THE PURITANS

Women's innate weakness and men's greater knowledge and capacity to enlighten women, in the Puritan mind, were best explained by the dichotomy between body and soul. Whereas the body was strong and male, «Puritans regarded the soul as feminine and characterized it as insatiable, as consonant with the supposedly unappeasable nature of women»<sup>67</sup>. This was grounded on another belief at the core of the Puritans' beliefs: that the stronger the body, the more capable the soul would be to resist temptation. That way, while demonizing women, men were depicted as less likely to be tempted by Satan, due to the greater difficulty of this scheme.

As I have already mentioned, for Daly, Bradford's inclusions and omissions in his journal obey to one single reason: recording all that was relevant to the community's progress and leaving out what was not, although it might be crucial for Bradford himself —as his wife's death. So, what could be Bradford's motivation for including all the instances of adultery<sup>68</sup> and fornication among the pages of his journal? The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that he not merely recorded these cases in order to reveal the progressive decay of their unfulfilled ideal of establishing a saints' community in Earth (the «ineluctable declension, the departure of God's special providence, the failure of their mission»<sup>69</sup>), the sinfulness and the rotten character of those others living with them but not being part of the Elect. Bradford records these cases as a sign of the moral decadence of the colony<sup>70</sup> but, also, and more important, because these events reflect the Puritans' obsession with sin, sex, and punishment<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> REIS, *op. cit.*, p. 15. The predisposition of women to sin would later on reach its prime in the witchcraft trials.

<sup>68</sup> The definition of adultery was a very loose one for the Puritans: «to look after a woman with a lusting eye is adultery» because for them «even the smallest sin of the flesh could lead inexorably to the most hideous, unthinkable offences while only the most rigid control over bodily functions could suffice for salvation» (W. PERKINS, *A Golden Chain*. London, 1592, p. 84; quoted in WOLFF, *op. cit.*, p. 19).

<sup>69</sup> DALY, *op. cit.*, p. 566.

<sup>70</sup> According to Schnucker, one of the reasons why Puritans condemned adultery so fiercely was their «three-fold fear that a bastard brood might ruin both the commonwealth and the body of Christ». R.V. SCHNUCKER, «Elizabethan Birth Control and Puritan Attitudes». *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 5, núm. 4 (1975), pp. 655-667, p. 664.

<sup>71</sup> This is the same reason underlying his minute recording of cases of bestiality. Other journal writers or diarists (for instance, John Winthrop and Samuel Sewall, respectively) also included cases of bestiality in their works. Sometimes, these cases were removed by editors; for instance, James Kendall Hosmer did so when editing Winthrop's *Journal of New England*.

Puritans were indeed very concerned with their sexuality and this is reflected in their diaries and journals alike. For Wolff, «journals reflect the Puritans' efforts to control their 'sinful,' natural desires and the pitiful despair when they are unable to do so»<sup>72</sup>. Since Bradford does not compile events of a private, personal nature in his journal (*i.e.*, events about his own life, as a diarist would do) but events dealing with the community (or personal events that had an impact on the community's well-being), it is therefore reasonable that the sins and the temptations he records are not his own but his neighbours'. With the same strength that other diarists chronicle their «struggle to preserve sanity and identity»<sup>73</sup> by thoroughly examining their own character, Bradford thoroughly examines his community and its citizens' moral behaviour and righteousness in order to preserve the sanity and the identity of the community at a time when both were being threatened by the corruption, vices and sins of its members and the creation of new communities.

#### 4. BRADFORD'S WOMEN

The conclusions that can be reached from all this is that colonial women were not as better off as the publishing of Elisabeth Anthony Dexter's book *Colonial Women of Affairs* in 1924 misled to believe, giving raise to a golden age theory, as refuted by Norton in «The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America». As evidenced in Bradford, women's participation in the management of the family (*i.e.*, domestic) affairs was underrated, ignored, and given no importance to the development of the community. Not only this, but women were made scapegoats when things went wrong, and considered a drain on the community, and a threat to its unity and survival, while ignoring the fact that the community was not as homogenous (*i.e.*, not all of them were Pilgrims) as Bradford implies.

As a result, for Bradford, women could only belong to one out of two categories: the pious (somewhat burdensome and fastidious) wife or the slut, two archetypes in use even nowadays. In reproducing this second image, we can see in Bradford's journal not only the progress of the colony but also the Puritans' concern—and most particularly the Puritan diarists'—with the observation of morality, chastity and sexual impulses on the community. Bradford, in his examining the community's sins, transforms Puritan diarists' self-examination of their own individual moral righteousness in the community's and his fellow citizens'.

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<sup>72</sup> WOLFF, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.