



# John Winthrop's "City of Women"

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### **John Winthrop's "City of Women"**

American history textbooks often use the story of Anne Hutchinson's trial and banishment as evidence of patriarchal domination of women in Puritan Massachusetts. They tell us that John Winthrop "ruled with an iron hand," that religion "endorsed female subjection," and that Hutchinson's judges "were almost as outraged by her 'masculine' behavior as by her heretical beliefs."<sup>1</sup> These short-hand accounts of a complex story inadvertently lose one of its most interesting dimensions--Hutchinson's ability to unsettle and potentially unseat the iron-handed governor. It would be hard to find another time or place in American history where the theological speculations of a housewife could carry such political weight. Far from endorsing female subjection, the Puritan movement initially encouraged female assertiveness, not by overt questioning of social norms but by nurturing lay engagement in religious discourse.

English settlers were attempting to put the new wine of dissenting protestantism into the old bottle of patriarchal order. As childbearers, sexual partners, passionate believers, good housekeepers, and fragile sinners, Puritan women both challenged and defined the boundaries of appropriate behavior. Although some succumbed to doubt and despair, others used the demanding doctrines of reformation to refigure their lives. Speaking their minds they provoked a conservative leadership to limit the possibilities of religious and political expression. Because religious ideas mattered in Boston

in 1636, a struggle over the meaning of salvation turned presumably subject women into political actors.

John Winthrop's journal reveals the centrality of gender to struggles over social order in the first decades of Puritan settlement. Through his writings, Winthrop not only gave America its first dissenting heroine, he created a panoply of female characters as vivid as those of Boccaccio or Christine de Pisan. Although he wrote more about Zion's troublers than about those who sustained its religious values day by day, his journal is a fuller and more complex document than secondary use of it would indicate. It includes not only the famous story of the Connecticut wife who went mad from too much reading but also pious accounts of a housewife who gave thanks for a fire that destroyed her linen, of a widow who founded her own plantation, and of an aggrieved boarding-house keeper who challenged the wealthiest merchant in Boston over the ownership of a sow. It records Indian war, but its most chilling stories are of violence perpetuated by Englishmen against women and girls.<sup>2</sup>

Winthrop included stories about women in his history because to him women's activities, no less than men's, mattered in the cosmic scheme of things; because the participation of high status women, older women, and godly women was essential to the establishment of the colony, and because stories about female courage, obedience, rebellion, suffering, or defiance offered powerful evidence for the necessity of firm government. His journal is both an account of salient events in early New England history and a repository of moral tales. It portrays a world considerably less "patriarchal" than secondary accounts might lead us to believe, not because Winthrop himself had any doubts about the duty of women to submit to male authority but because so many women *and men* seemed willing to challenge him. To

take Winthrop's stories seriously is to rediscover the ferment and uncertainty of New England's early decades.

In his journal, Winthrop affected humility, removing identifying markers when writing about his own family and referring to himself throughout as "the governor," but his voice comes through--tentative at first and then increasingly passionate. As Richard Dunn has observed, Winthrop's certainty about the correctness of his own position allowed him to record in vivid detail the disorder and conflict of his time. "Winthrop argued for the correctness of his own position, and then he showed how his adversaries were deservedly punished for their sins." Winthrop may have disliked, even feared strong women, but he could not ignore them, nor could he overlook the behavior of men who abused and abandoned those dependent on their care. Caught unaware by the dislocations of the colonial setting, he inadvertently exposed the power of his adversaries. Seeking providential meaning in ordinary events, he "built lasting significance into the seemingly small-scale actions of a few thousand colonists in early New England"<sup>3</sup>

Reading Winthrop's journal in the light of recent scholarship helps us to see seemingly fixed categories as contested terrain. According to law, women were civilly dead, subject to the authority of husbands and fathers. Yet the realities of daily life and the opportunities of a new world constantly undercut formal authority. Innocent gatherings of women became politically dangerous. Would-be rulers succumbed to the enticements of female dissenters. Wifehood became a model both for liberty and submission. As freedom of conscience and patriarchal authority collided, John Winthrop struggled to assert control, winning political battles that left a lasting mark on Puritan institutions. Reading backward, historians have tended to see

patriarchal authority as invincible. The journal, written in the heat of events, shows a world bursting its bonds.

### **Gatherings of Women**

One of the earliest entries in Winthrop's journal records the complex manipulations required to bring a midwife from the *Jewell* to the *Arbella* during the Atlantic crossing in 1630. "A woman in our shippe fell in trevayle & we sent & had a midwife out of the Iewell: she was so farre a head of us at this tyme, (though usually we could spare her some sayle) as we shott of a peece, & lowed our topsayles, & then she brayled her sayles & stayed for us."<sup>4</sup> That Winthrop used feminine pronouns for the ship as well as the woman in labor added unintentional poetry to the story. Winthrop's ship was named for a woman; it carried women--childbearing women--to the new colony. The Puritan adventure, unlike most early New World settlements, would be an emigration of families. Six days later the journal provided the denouement to the story: "A woman was delivered of a Child in our shippe still borne: the woman had diverse children before, but none lived, & she had some mis[c]hance now which caused her to come neere a monthe before her tyme. but she did verye well."<sup>5</sup> This mother would reach port without her cargo.

The summoning of a midwife on the high seas provided a dramatic interlude in an otherwise dreary succession of days. It gave the women involved a rare opportunity to exchange news from one ship to another. They could not know the ways in which it foreshadowed later gatherings of women and childbirth disasters that would not seem so benign. Anne Hutchinson's story, too, involved the comforts and the sorrows of labor and birth. Hutchinson arrived in Boston in 1634, four years after Winthrop's company. She first appears in the journal in October 1636, when Winthrop described

her as "a woman of a ready wit and bold spirit" who "brought over with her two dangerous errors. 1. That the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified person. 2. That no sanctification can help to evidence to us our justification."<sup>6</sup> These seemingly abstruse concepts had explosive power because in elevating spirit over outward behavior they undermined formal religious authority and exposed contradictions in Puritan theology.

Hutchinson's leadership had begun innocently enough. She was a charitable neighbor who frequently attended women in childbirth. She was also a talented exegetist who enjoyed opening out the mysteries of scriptures in gatherings of women. Her initial meetings were fully consonant with Puritan emphasis on lay prophesying and the practice of religiously gifted women, especially elite women, giving counsel to their sisters. As the informal gatherings in her house attracted larger and larger crowds and as she began to critique, as well as explicate, the sermons of John Wilson, the pastor of Boston's First Church, his supporters became alarmed. Even more disturbing, the new governor of the colony, Sir Henry Vane, embraced her teachings. The division for and against Wilson became so intense that in the colony-wide election of 1637 produced, in Winthrop's words, "great danger of a tumult; for those of that side grew into fierce speeches, and some laid hands on others." With the help of deputies from outlying towns, Winthrop defeated Vane for the governorship.<sup>7</sup>

Some scholars have argued that Hutchinson's ideas about the indwelling power of grace were "particularly appealing to women, who were systematically denied education and formal training in theology," and that both her success and her downfall "resulted largely from the combination of her high rank and her identity as a woman."<sup>8</sup> This argument understates the unsettling power of her religious radicalism. Hutchinson was not only a

respected member of the female community, with all the powers accruing to her as a mother, a mistress of a household, and a good neighbor, but also a gifted religious leader whose teachings appealed to male leaders as well as women--at least if we can believe John Winthrop. In a remarkable entry in which he characteristically referred to himself in third person, Winthrop described the continuing resentment of Boston men when deputies from country towns restored him to the governor's chair: "Upon the election of the new governour, the serjeants, who had attended the old governour to the court, (being all Boston men, where the new governour also dwelt,) laid down their halberds and went home; and whereas they had been wont to attend the former governour to and from the meetings on the Lord's days, they gave over now, so as the new governour was fain to use his own servants to carry two halberds before him; wheras the former governour had never less than four."<sup>9</sup> [A halberd was a shafted weapon carried on ceremonial occasions.]

Despite this humiliation, Winthrop moved to reassert his authority. As the journal explains it, "The court also sent for Mrs. Hutchinson, and charged her with divers matters, as her keeping two public lectures every week in her house, whereto sixty or eighty persons did usually resort." Winthrop's concept of Hutchinson's conventicles as "public lectures" was crucial to the case against her. When she retorted, "I teach not in a publick congregation," she acknowledged the inability of a woman to be a "publick" teacher and at the same time denied the authority of the state to interfere with informal gatherings in her house. In Winthrop's view any large gathering constituted a public meeting, regardless of the composition of the group or the place of meeting.<sup>10</sup>

After losing both a state trial and a church trial in which she was excommunicated from Boston's First Church, Hutchinson and her followers

founded a new colony at Aquidneck (now Portsmouth, Rhode Island, in the s[romg pf 1638.) Even there, they remained too close for Winthrop's comfort. Until her death, Winthrop tracked her disturbing influence over men who unaccountably abandoend Massachusetts. "Mr Collins and one Mr. Hales (a young man very well conceited of himself and censorious of others) went to Aquiday," he wrote, "and so soon as Hales came acquainted with Mrs. Hutchinson, he was taken by her and became her disciple." In his effort to discredit his former associates, Winthrop no doubt exaggerated the gender and social reversals in Rhode Island, but he undoubtedly feared the disruptive power of Hutchinson's ideas. He used the language of captivity ("taken by") and of illness ("infected") to describe her religious influence.<sup>11</sup>

Nor did Hutchinson represent the only female carrier of infection. "At Providence things grew still worse, for a sister of Mrs. Hutchinson, the wife of one Scott, being infected with Anabaptistry, and going last year to live at Providence, Mr. Williams was taken (or rather emboldened) by her to make open profession thereof, and accordingly was rebaptized by one Holyman, a poor man late of Salem. Then Mr. Williams rebaptized him and some ten more. They also denied the baptizing of infants, and would have no magistrates."<sup>12</sup> Given the fury in Winthrop's accounts of Hutchinson and her cohort, the journal is surprisingly dispassionate in its references to the "lady Moodye, a wise and anciently religious woman," who "being taken with the error of denying baptism to infants, was dealt withal by many of the elders and others, and admonished by the church of Salem." Perhaps Winthrop had less to say about this case not so much because it took place in another town but because, unlike Hutchinson, Moody quietly removed herself from Massachusetts, to "avoid further truble." He used the disease metaphor once again, however, in describing her followers: "Many others, infected with



anabaptism, removed thither also." <sup>13</sup> In contrast, Mary Oliver of Salem attracted few followers. Winthrop attributed her failure to her social status: she was "(for ability of speech, and appearance of zeal and devotion) far before Mrs. Hutchinson, and so the fitter instrument to have done hurt, but that she was poor and had little acquaintance."<sup>14</sup>

Winthrop ridiculed the dissenters' belief in the indwelling power of the holy spirit, recording in his journal a hearsay account of their response to an earthquake in Rhode Island: "Mrs. Hutchinson and some of her adherents happened to be at prayer when the earthquake was at Aquiday, etc., and the house being shaken thereby, they were persuaded, (and boasted of it,) that the Holy Ghost did shake it in coming down upon them, as he did upon the apostles."<sup>15</sup> Winthrop alluded to the experience described in the second chapter of Acts when on the day of Pentecost the sound of rushing wind and "cloven tongues like as of fire" filled the house where Peter and the apostles lodged. Possessed with the power of the Holy Ghost, they began speaking "as the Spirit gave them utterance." When onlookers mistook religious enthusiasm for drunkenness, Peter answered them with the prophecy of Joel:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. (Acts 1-18)

Winthrop surely understood the social implications of this scripture. The example of Pentecost allowed religious dissenters of many stripes to claim that the indwelling spirit of Christ dissolved all distinctions of age, gender, and status.<sup>16</sup>

Social conservatives contained the radical implications of Pentecost by focusing on the next section of the same chapter, in which listeners "pricked in their heart," turned to Peter and the Apostles to ask, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" The answer was obvious, "Repent and be baptized." Rather than celebrate the liberating potential of the Holy Spirit, they emphasized its capacity to convict men of sin. Repentance was the salient act. Thomas Hooker said that in the original Greek "pricking" meant "a shivering and pulling all asunder" as in the body of a laboring woman "wounded with the sorrow of Childbirth."<sup>17</sup> The birth metaphor was central to Christian doctrine. In his last instructions to his disciples, Jesus foreshadowed his own death and resurrection by analogy to a woman in labor: "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." (John 16:21-22) Religious radicals emphasized the joy of spiritual birth, their opponents the labor of repentance.

Winthrop mistrusted those who appeared too certain of their own salvation. An earthquake should inspire humble contemplation of God's power, not an assertion of a prophetic calling. In his view, the religious demonstrations at Aquidneck exemplified false pride. His use of the verb boast, like his earlier reference to Hutchinson as "a woman of ready wit and bold spirit" and his dismissal of her follower Hales as a man "very well conceited of himself," shows the value he placed on submissiveness.<sup>18</sup> The image of a woman in travail modeled the condition of sinful humanity. Persons who resisted the labor of repentance, setting themselves above the covenanted authority of ministers and elders, risked God's judgment. When

news of a "monstrous birth" to one of Hutchinson's followers reached Winthrop, he had no doubt but what God had spoken through a woman's womb.

On the day of Hutchinson's excommunication in March of 1638, a stranger asked who the young woman was who walked out of the church with her. Someone answered that it was Mary Dyer, "the woman which had the monster." Winthrop pounced on this information, investigating then exposing details of a deformed fetus that Hutchinson and other women present at Dyer's stillbirth had kept secret since October (though they had confided it to Wilson's rival in the First Church, John Cotton.) Winthrop gleefully reported the condition of the supposed monster. It had a face, but no head," four horns over the eyes "hard and sharp," on the body "sharp pricks and scales," and other deformities. The body "had arms and legs as other children; but, instead of toes, it had on each foot three claws, like a young fowl, with sharp talons." He reported that when the infant died, "the bed whereon the mother lay did shake, and withal there was such a noisome savor, as most of the women were taken with extreme vomiting and purging." Little wonder that Jane Hawkins, the midwife present at this delivery, was soon banished from the colony. Winthrop exulted: "indeed it was time for her to be gone, for it was known, that she used to give young women oil of mandrakes and other stuff to cause conception; and she grew into great suspicion to be a witch, for it was credibly reported, that, when she gave any medicine, (for she practised physic,) she would ask the party, if she did believe, she could help her." In retrospect, Winthrop found it significant that "the father of this monster, coming home at this very time, was, the next Lord's day, by an unexpected providence, questioned in the church for divers monstrous errors, as for denying all inherent righteousness, etc., which he maintained, and was for

the same admonished." Hutchinson's own delivery of a "monster" three years later confirmed the power of God to write women's errors on their bodies.<sup>19</sup>

While current scholarship tends to discount the notion that female healers, including midwives, suffered more accusations of witchcraft than other women, Winthrop's stories suggest that midwives and healers may have faced particular scrutiny in early Boston. Perhaps the association of religious deviance with "monstrous births" called attention to practices that might otherwise have been kept within the community of childbearing women. Or it may be that the same reforming impulses that created conflicts over the nature of religious conversion shaped perceptions of what constituted appropriate behavior in childbirth or illness.

Ordinary women and men as well as magistrates were involved in the prosecution of a female healer named Margaret Jones who was executed in 1648. Like Hawkins, she employed methods that prompted suspicion. As with Hutchinson and Dyer, authorities found evidence of her sinfulness on her body. Winthrop said that she had "such a malignant touche, as many persons (men woemen & children) whom she stroked or touched. . . were taken with deafnesse, or vomitinge or other violent paynes or sickness." Normally "harmlesse" remedies such as "Aniseed, liquoris, &c: yet had extraordinary violent effectes." She also had an unfortunate gift of prophecy: "some thinges which she foretould came to passe accordingly: other thinges she could tell of (as secrett speeches &c)." Even more damning was the presence on her body of an extraneous nipple "in her secrett partes, as freshe as if it had been newly sucked."<sup>20</sup>

Winthrop's voice was powerful and his assumptions widely shared. But it would be a mistake to assume that everyone agreed with his interpretations. Hutchinson's brother-in-law and sometime ally, John

Wheelwright, turned Winthrop's own metaphors against him, dismissing the governor's published account of Hutchinson's heresy as a "monstrous conception of his brain, a spurious issue of his intellect."<sup>21</sup> Margaret Jones also had her defenders. Her friend Alice Stratton warned that those responsible for Jones' prosecution would be punished after death; Stratton's husband went further, charging that the magistrates would "do anything for bribes and [church] members." These were seditious words, and the Strattons eventually recanted, but they retained their influence among a dissenting faction in Watertown's church. When Stratton herself faced charges of witchcraft, a jury of local women defended her, finding no sign of a witch's tit on her body.<sup>22</sup> Although Winthrop and his fellow magistrates succeeded in expelling Jane Hawkins from the colony, petitions signed by 217 Boston and Dorchester women rescued midwife Alice Tilly, who was imprisoned, presumably for malpractice, in the year of Winthrop's death. The petitioners spoke from experience. Assuring the magistrates that they had no desire "to interrupt the Courts proceeding as God shal giude them," they nevertheless begged the court to return Mistriss Tilly to her office, knowing that she would perform well, as she had already done "in or owne various Cases."<sup>23</sup> The voice of women proved powerful when the mysteries of childbearing were not entangled with the mysteries of faith.

For historians, Dyer's and Hutchinson's obstetrical disasters exemplify the intersection of culture and event. Like the seemingly providential epidemics that killed New England's Indian inhabitants, the disordered birth experiences of female dissenters reinforced preconceived notions of female inferiority. There is no question but what Winthrop believed that God had spoken through Mary Dyer's and Anne Hutchinson's wombs. His ferocious

interpretation of their births contrasts markedly with his gentle account of a stillbirth on the *Arbella* during the Atlantic crossing.

## **2. Religious Despair**

The first twenty years of Massachusetts Bay differed considerably from the last years of the seventeenth century. There were a few prosecutions for witchcraft in Winthrop's lifetime but no examples of demonic possession, psychological disturbances being attributed to victim's own indifference to the ordinances of God rather than to the machinations of other persons. There was also far less attention than in later accounts, such as in the writings of Cotton Mather, on exemplary female piety, household industry, and maternal influence. Women were not yet celebrated as "good wives" nor denigrated as witches.<sup>24</sup> Any woman or man could be captured in Satan's snares. Yet the forms depravity took differed for women and men.

The female sinners who appear in Winthrop's journal often succumbed to religious despair, perhaps because, as Elizabeth Reis has argued, women, more than men, internalized the "discourse of depravity" that emanated from Puritan pulpits.<sup>25</sup> Recounting the dramatic story of a woman's death in childbirth, Winthrop intertwined the sins of rebellion and despair. "The wife of one Onion of Roxbury died in great despair: she had been a servant there, and was very stubborn and self-willed. After she was married, she proved very worldly, aiming at great matters. Her first child was still-born, through her unruliness and falling into a fever." The woman's sinned not only through her worldliness and her lack of attention to spiritual matters, but through her attempts to transcend her position in life. Although she had "been a servant," she aimed "at great matters," violating her god-given

station. When the tremors of childbirth brought her to a recognition of sin, she was unable to seize upon salvation.

She fell withal into great horror and trembling, so as it shook the room, etc., and crying out of her torment, and of her stubbornness and unprofitableness under the means, and her lying to her dame in denying somewhat that in liquorishness she had taken away, and of her worldliness, saying that she neglected her spiritual good for a little worldly trash, and now she must go to everlasting torments, and exhorted others to take heed of such evils, etc., and still crying out O! ten thousands worlds for one drop of Christ, etc. After she had then been silent a few hours, she began to speak again, and being exhorted to consider of God's infinite mercy, etc., she gave still this answer, 'I cannot for my life,' and so died.

Winthrop's achieved his dramatic effect by foreshortening the story. The child was born in April; the mother died on June 2. For Winthrop the storyteller these details didn't matter. Collapsing many weeks into a single crisis, he used the terrors of delivery to mirror the terrors of a stillborn soul.<sup>26</sup>

Two of his stories focus on women who attacked their own children, believing themselves damned. In both cases Winthrop attributed the woman's despair to delusions or "trouble of mind," and in both cases he described the attempts of church members to intervene. In December of 1639, he wrote: "Dorothy Talbye was hanged at Boston for murdering her own daughter, a child of three years old." Talby had "been a member of the church at Salem, and of good esteem for godliness, etc.; but, falling at difference with her husband, through melancholy or spiritual delusions, she sometimes attempted to kill him, and her children, and herself, by refusing meat, saying it was so revealed to her, etc." One wonders what domestic conflict, personal

anguish, or psychological disorder lay behind the "etcetera" in Winthrop's account. Winthrop tells us that when "patience, and divers admonitions" failed, the Salem Church "cast her out." Whipping followed excommunication. Although for a time, she "carried herself more dutifully to her husband. . . soon after she was so possessed with Satan, that he persuaded her (by his delusions, which she listened to as revelations from God) to break the neck of her own child, that she might free it from future misery."<sup>27</sup>

David Hall has suggested that the Puritan propensity to collect stories of despair shows their "fascination with the extremes of religion." Satan tempted souls with the depths of despondency as well as the arrogance of false hope. Even for true believers faith was "never safe from doubt."<sup>28</sup> In Talby's case doubt sunk into a despair that soared into astonishing feats of rebellion. She turned her back on her ministers when they read the order of excommunication. She persisted in her rebellion when called before the magistrates, refusing even to speak "till the governour told her she should be pressed to death." Winthrop was, of course, the unnamed governor who issued this threat. He was fascinated by her ability to defy authority in its smallest details. When the magistrates read their verdict, she refused to uncover her face or stand up. When they sentenced her to hang she asked to be beheaded. When the hangman covered her head with a cloth, she pulled it off and tucked it between the rope and her neck. "After a swing or two, she caught at the ladder." For Winthrop, Talby was a terrifying and magnificent sinner.<sup>29</sup>

The story of Anne Hett had a happier ending. It trails through Winthrop's journal, bit by bit. In August 1637, he reported, "A woman of Boston congregation, having been in much trouble of mind about her spiritual estate, at length grew into utter desperation, and could not endure to hear of



any comfort, etc. so as one day she took her little infant and threw it into a well, and then came into the house and said, now she was sure she should be damned, for she had drowned her child; but some, stepping presently forth, saved the child." In the spring of 1642, Hett again tried to drown her child. Taking it to a tidal creek near her house, she tore off its clothing and threw it into "the water and mud. But, the tide being low, the little child scrambled out, and taking up its clothes, came to its mother who was set down not far off." Winthrop drew out the details of the story, exploiting the poignancy of the innocent child returning unawares to the mother who would destroy it. "She carried the child again, and threw it in so far as it could not get out; but then it pleased God, that a young man, coming that way, saved it."<sup>30</sup>

Despite the darkness of the events, a softness in Winthrop's telling sets it apart from his account of Talby, perhaps because even as he wrote, he knew that this story would have a better outcome. When others asked the mother why she had attempted to kill her child, "She would give no other reason for it, but that she did it to save it from misery, and withal that she was assured, she had sinned against the Holy Ghost, and that she could not repent of any sin. Thus doth satan work by the advantage of our infirmities, which should stir us up to cleave the more fast to Christ jesus, and to walk the more humbly and watchfully in all our conversation."<sup>31</sup> Winthrop understood the mother's misery as the Devil's work, but he did not believe she was helpless to change her situation.

In his final entry, he for the first time identified the woman by name, explaining that Boston's First Church, like their counterparts in Salem, had used excommunication as a means of redemption. This time it worked: "whereas before no means could prevail with her either to reclaim her from her wicked and blasphemous courses and speeches, etc., or to bring her to

frequent the means, within a few weeks after her casting out, she came to see her sin and lay it to heart, and to frequent the means, and so was brought to such manifestation of repentance and a sound mind, as the church received her in again." Church records confirm Winthrop's narrative. Anne Hett was excommunicated in August 1642 shortly after her second attempt to destroy her child, and reinstated a year later in July 23, 1643.<sup>32</sup> For the governor, the moral was clear. Humble submission to religious authority could rescue a soul from the devil's machinations.

Winthrop drew the same conclusion from a much briefer story about a man who, "being wounded in conscience at a sermon of Mr. Shepherd's," kept his troubles to himself, being unwilling "to discover his distress to such as might have offered him help." Refusing to attend church regularly, he "went out from his wife on the Lord's day at night, having kept at home all that day, and drowned himself in a little pit where was not above two feet water."<sup>33</sup> Clearly, men as well as women suffered from the self-loathing that led to despair, but for Winthrop, Talby's and Hett's cases left a more vivid impression. Unlike the man who drowned himself, they assailed their would be rescuers, transforming despondency into rebellion.

### **3. Household Affairs**

In the journal as a whole, Winthrop appeared largely indifferent to the economic contributions of women. In 1641, he noted that the decline in immigration and depression in trade during the English Civil War "set our people on work to provide fish, clapboards, plant, etc., and to sow hemp and flax (which prospered very well) and to look out to the West Indies for a trade for cotton." He said nothing, however, nothing about the female labor involved in processing that hemp, flax, and cotton. Through the lens of his

journal, the New England economy is a male economy. The skilled labor of clothworkers from East Anglia received pride of place in a 1643 entry, when Winthrop reported that as supplies from England failed, "men began to look about them, and fell to a manufacture of cotton, whereof we had store from Barbados, and of hemp and flax, wherein Rowley, to their great commendation, exceeded all other towns." The godly wife who "set her hand to the spindle" does not appear in Winthrop's history.<sup>34</sup>

Winthrop assumed that in family affairs, as in virtually every other area of life, men should lead and women follow, though God enjoined both spouses to nurture and care for one another. Trouble came when men or women stepped out of their appointed stations. In a much-quoted passage in the journal, he concluded that Ann Hopkins, wife of Connecticut's governor, lost her wits "by occasion of her givinge her selfe whooly to readinge & writinge, & had written many bookes: her husband beinge very lovinge & tender of her, was lothe to greive her, but he sawe his error when it ws too late: for if she had attended her houshold affaires, & suche thinges as belonge to women, & not gone out of her waye & callinge, to meddle in suche thinges as are proper for men, whose mindes are stronger &c: she had kept her wittes, & might have improved them usefully & honorably in the place God had sett her." Winthrop didn't object to a certain amount of learning in women. He had, afterall, crossed the Atlantic on a ship named for one of the most highly educated English gentlewomen of her day, but like many seventeenth-century writers, he assumed that women in general were ill-suited to intellectual pursuits. Once again, a particular event--the mental instability of Mistress Hopkins--solidified Winthrop's conservatism. Since women's minds were weak, too much engagement with books might lead them to "meddle in such thinges as are proper for men."<sup>35</sup>

Winthrop concluded that if Mistress Hopkins had given more of her time to "household affairs" she might not have lost her wits. Yet he also believed that giving too much attention to household affairs might endanger the soul. In a passage discussing the dangers of fire, he offered this instructive story:

A godly woman of the church of Boston, dwelling sometimes in London, brought with her a parcel of very fine linen of great value, which she set her heart too much upon, and had been at charge to have it all newly washed, and curiously folded and pressed, and so left it in press in her parlor over night. She had a negro maid went into the room very late, and let fall some snuff of the candle upon the linen, so as by the morning all the linen was burned to tinder, and the boards underneath, and some stools and a part of the wainscot burned, and never perceived by any in the house, though some lodged in the chamber over head, and no ceiling between. But it pleased God that the loss of this linen did her much good, both in taking off her heart from worldly comforts, and in preparing her for a far greater affliction by the untimely death of her husband, who was slain not long after at Isle of Providence.<sup>36</sup>

The pride of the woman (who may have been Bridget Pierce, the wife of a sea captain) is easier to understand if we recognize the symbolic importance of linen in genteel households. Like the starched ruff Winthrop wore in his own portrait, well-pressed linen distinguished genteel from ordinary persons. Seventeenth-century gentlewomen sometimes deliberately creased their tablecloths in accordin or checkerboard patterns, artful ironing being as much a part of a table's presentation as the quality of the linen.<sup>37</sup>

Bridget Pierce's story shows the contradictory attitudes toward material life common in early Puritanism. Winthrop drew the same lesson from the fire in Pierce's parlor as the poet Anne Bradstreet did from the burning of her house: too much attention to material possessions could threaten one's salvation.<sup>38</sup> Yet displays of gentility helped to sustain social order. For men, political and religious office compensated in part for the loss of material trappings left behind in England. Women found it more difficult to maintain the authority that high status required. Winthrop's vignette of feathers flying through the door of his house as his daughters plucked fowl under a "heape of logges" in the yard suggests the diminished circumstances of even the governor's family. Mistress Pierce needed the linen that threatened her soul. Winthrop, too, was ambivalent about the virtues of material things. When the Indian leader Chickatabot came to his house with a hogshead of corne, "being in Englishe Clothes the Governor sett him at his owne table, where he behaved him selfe as soberly &c: as an Englishe man." Clothing, like manners, symbolized civility.<sup>39</sup>

Winthrop clearly expected well-born woman to use their social and economic power to support the colony, and when they did he paid them due respect. Because Lady Arbella Johnson, the woman for whom Winthrop's ship was named, died soon after reaching Massachusetts, she remains a shadowy figure in the journal, yet an early entry notes the deference he paid to her at sea, where she with the other "gentle women dyned in the great Cabbin." The journal is filled with references to high-status women who used their resources to sustain the Puritan experiment. Winthrop acknowledged substantial gifts from Lady Mary Amine, wife of a member of the Long Parliament, and Lady Ann Mowlson, widow of the lord Mayor of London, and it casually mentioned "a plantation. . . begun at Tecticut by a gentlewoman,

an ancient maid, one Mrs. Poole." <sup>40</sup> He was obviously intrigued by Madame Francoise-Marie La Tour, wife of the sometime governor of Acadia, who went back and forth from France to Boston, in her husband's service, and because he agreed with her he was more amused than outraged by the behavior of one wife, who when called by her husband to testify in his behalf, "agreed not" with him. This spunky woman not only contradicted her husband, she stood up to the magistrates, after a time refusing "to speak at all, except she might be put to her oath."<sup>41</sup> Independent behavior was not the issue. Women who supported rather than undermined his authority won his praise--or more frequently the dignity of invisibility.

Yet in June of 1642, Winthrop once again found himself in the middle of a controversy with an outspoken woman and her allies. This time the woman was of humble status, and this time the issues were social and economic rather than religious. The affair began in 1636 when Boston's wealthy merchant Robert Keayne impounded a stray sow. Not immediately finding an owner, he kept the animal with his own livestock until slaughtering time. Since Keayne was known in the country "for a hard dealer in his course of trading," some Bostonians were willing to support Elizabeth Sherman when she claimed that Keayne had not only impounded but killed her lost pig. Winthrop believed Sherman had been egged on in her suit by "one George Story, a young merchant of London" who boarded in her house, but her supporters were both numerous and persistent. The case dragged on for years, eventually moving into the General Court where the deputies and magistrates divided, the lower body voting in behalf of Sherman, the magistrates for Keayne. <sup>42</sup>

At its base, Sherman's story shows the importance of women, even well-to-do women, as keepers of small animals. Winthrop expressed outrage

when the court allowed Sherman to testify under oath as to the markings on her sow, when "the defendant and his wife (being a very godly sober woman) was denied the like."<sup>43</sup> It also shows the ability of an assertive woman to pursue justice even in the absence of her husband. Clearly the very nature of the case, which pitted a lone woman against the richest man in Boston, allowed the leveling tendencies inherent in Christian egalitarianism to surface. Goody Sherman, however, was hardly the poor woman described in some contemporary discourse. She ran a successful boarding house, receiving frequent payments from the General Court for housing deputies from outlying towns, and she was a church member. Her religious status as well as her occupation gave her the ear of men who could argue her case. The anti-authoritarian meanings of Sherman's story reverberated as far away as Maine where her struggle against the magistrates symbolized non-Puritan resistance to rule by Massachusetts Bay. One long-time Maine colonist said "they weere as good live in turkie as live undar such a goverment."<sup>44</sup>

Every writer on early Boston has discussed this curious case, but few have explored its gender implications.<sup>45</sup> Norton, whose account gives the most explicit attention to this factor, focuses primarily on two political documents, Winthrop's "Discourse on Arbitrary Government" and his speech "On Civil Liberty." In determining who should prevail when the deputies in the General Court disagreed with the magistrates, Winthrop used the analogy of marriage, arguing that marital liberty gave a woman the right to choose her own husband, but that godly authority required her to obey him. In like manner, the deputies should reverence and respect the authority of the magistrates. "His use of that analogy," Norton observed, "may well reveal a certain wishful thinking that developed after his encounters with. . . outspoken women who were notably independent thinkers and certainly not

the sort of wives his model had in mind."<sup>46</sup> Goody Sherman's ability to persist in her "sow business" despite the seemingly slim evidence upon which her claim was based shows there were other ways of defining Puritan government. Clearly she, like Hutchinson, had the support of a significant proportion of the male population. As an aggrieved woman she symbolized the weakness of an ordinary person against the aggrandizement of the rich and hence the struggle of the deputies against the magistrates.

There were multiple theories of power in Massachusetts Bay in the earliest decades of settlement, some inspired by Christian egalitarianism, some by primitive democracy, and others perhaps by newer notions of personal liberty. The ferment in Winthrop's world forced him to confront the contradictions of Puritan thought and the relationship between the leveling tendencies of Christian brotherhood and inherited notions of social order. In Goody Sherman's case, gender in combination with social status elevated a personal suit into a political cause. Had she been male, her story would have been less compelling. Her sex gave her suit resonance; her toughmindedness and willingness to lend her name to a larger political cause allowed it to flourish. Interestingly, though Winthrop assailed the legal reasoning of her supporters, he neither questioned her integrity nor her right to bring her suit. To do so would have undermined his own self-image as a benevolent and wise protector of the weak.

#### **4. Family Government**

In an oblique entry in the journal, Winthrop noted that at his son Williams' baptism in August 1632, "the Governor himselfe helde the Childe to baptise, as others in the congregation did use." This curious description suggests that the Boston congregation had deviated from English custom by having the



father rather than the midwife or a godparent hold the child during baptism

<sup>47</sup> This intriguing reference suggests a symbolic shift from communal to familial responsibility for the child and perhaps as well from female to male nurture. On another level it displays Winthrop's investment in the religious care of his children. In a particularly revealing entry in the journal, he reported a dream he had of coming into a chamber and finding his wife in bed with three or four children "lyinge by her with moste sweet & smylinge contenances, with Crownes upon their heades & blue ribandes about their neck." To him the vision offered assurance that God would make at least some of his children "fellowe heires with Christ in his kingdome."<sup>48</sup> His vision was both intimate and orderly. The father walked from the outer world into the sanctity of a private chamber, finding his wife safely in bed with beautifully adorned children, the crowns on their heads symbolizing God's love, the blue ribbons around their necks maternal care.

In his waking life, Winthrop dealt with pugnacious, stubborn, lustful, violent, or merely neglectful men, who despite Christian teaching, violated their responsibility to protect female chastity and childhood innocence. He believed that women were capable of great sins, including sexual sins, but he reserved his harshest judgment for men who refused to accept their responsibility to care for and protect (as well as govern and direct) those weaker and less fortunate than themselves.

William Schooler's trial for the rape and murder of Mary Scholy showed the depths to which some men could fall. Schooler's crimes came to the attention of Massachusetts officials almost by accident after they cited him for a lesser offense, making "ill speeches" against the government during the Pequot war. His neighbors at Ipswich, thinking he had been summoned to answer to the death of Mary Sholy, began to tell tales. Their evidence,

though powerful, was largely circumstantial. Winthrop's description of the case exposed his assumptions about male responsibility and female vulnerability. The man, "a common adulterer," had left a wife behind in England, "a handsome, neat woman." He could not have been up to much good when he agreed to guide "a poor maid at Newbury, one Mary Sholy," to her master at Piscataqua.. Although she gave him fifteen shillings for his services, he returned two days later, explaining that "he had carried her within two or three miles of the place, and then she would go no farther." When questioned, he admitted he did nothing to tell the people of the nearest settlement of her presence, nor did he stay by her that night to assure her safety. even though he spotted a bear soon after he left her and knew it might kill her. In fact, after his return, he did not speak of her at all until asked.

An Indian found the girl's body six months later "in the midst of thick swamp, ten miles short of the place he said he left her." Although the flesh had rotted away, her clothes were there "all on an heap by the body." Schooler refused to confess, and although some ministers considered the case against him insufficient to justify taking away his life, the general court ordered his execution. They concluded--and Winthrop obviously concurred--that the man deserved to die, if not for murder, then for "undertaking the charge of a shiftless maid, and leaving her (when he might have done otherwise) in such a place as he knew she must needs perish, if not preserved by means unknown."<sup>49</sup>

An equally chilling story featured the young daughters of John Humfrey, one of Salem's magistrates. Two of the girls, the eldest not yet seven, went often to the house of one "Daniel Fairfield (an half Dutchman)," who abused them "very often, especially upon the Lord's days and lecture days, by agitation and effusion of seed and after by entering the body of the

elder, as it seemed; for upon search she was found to have been forced, and in this course he continued about two years." Soon after, the girls were "put to board and school to one Jenkin Davis of Lynn (who had been servant to Mr. Humfrey,) a member of the church there, and in good esteem for piety and sobriety." They ought to have been safe, but Davis, "hurried by the strength of lust," abused "the elder of these girls (being, then about 9 years of age)." Finally, the girls encountered "one John Hudson, a lusty young man, an household servant to Mr. Humfrey, who working sometimes at the farm" abused the elder daughter "many times, so as she was grown capable of man's fellowship, and took pleasure in it."<sup>50</sup>

Winthrop was horrified by these crimes, but he cast his first blame on the the father himself, who "much neglected his children, leaving them among a company of rude servants." His explanation for the men's behavior exposes his own understanding of marriage as hedge against sin. In Winthrop's view, Fairfield, whose wife was "a lusty young woman" had no excuse for his behavior, but Hudson, being as yet unmarried, was susceptible to sin since he had "no woman to lodge with." Davis's circumstances appeared more complex. When the girls moved into his house, his wife was "quick with child, and scrupulous of having fellowship with her husband in that condition." He fought temptation, begging his wife "when she went forth, to carry the children with her, and put up a bill to the elders, to pray for one, who was strongly tempted to a foul sin." But she did not recognize the danger in her own house. The sin remained secret, the crime unexposed.

Young Dorcas Humfrey broke the silence. After her father left for England, she confided in a newly married sister who obviously sought out authorities. When brought before Winthrop, Dorcas not only charged the three men, but accused two of her brothers of "such dalliance." The court

showed no mercy to Fairfield, ordering "that he should be severely whipped at Boston and at Salem, and confined to Boston neck, upon pain of death. . . he should have one nostril slit and seared at Boston, and the other at Salem, and tow ear an halter about his neck visibly all his life, or to be whipped every time he were seen abroad without it, and to die, if he attempted the like upon any person." Davis's seeming sorrow for his sin (and his church membership?) saved him from facial disfigurement, but the court order him whipped at Boston and at Lynn and to wear a halter for a year. John Hudson, too, received a double whipping. Since the brothers were too young to have "any semination," they were "referred to private correction." To the great comfort of the court, all three men acknowledged that their sins were greater than their punishment. For her part, Dorcas Humfrey was "severely corrected." Yet ironically, the neglectful father collected L40 from Fairfield, L40 from Davis, and L20 from Hudson. The court recognized that his daughters' reputations belonged to him, even though he had done so little to protect them.<sup>51</sup>

Although Puritan jurisprudence did nothing to challenge male authority in the household, it did hold men accountable for sexual transgression and it entertained complaints from the lowliest members of society. When she spoke, Dorcas Humfrey was heard. It was perhaps her silence, more than her engagement in sexual behavior, that led to her reprimand. As Cornelia Dayton has argued, female plaintives in seventeenth-century New England "had good reason to believe that their voices would not be ignored and that the men elected to the bench would not reflexively use whatever skeptical views they harbored of woman's nature to shield accused men from exposure and penalty."<sup>52</sup> In Winthrop's view, sexual sin might break out anywhere, even in the home of a schoolmaster and church member.

Only the vigilance of an entire community, pregnant wives included, could prevent abuse. For Mary Scholy, justice came too late, though her story provided a warning to those who thought they could abuse a "shiftless maid" with impunity.

The limits of Winthrop's protectiveness are apparent, however, in his treatment of the case of Joshua Verin, a roper who settled in Salem in 1635 then moved to Providence, Rhode Island, with his wife Jane. In 1638, Winthrop reported on a debate that apparently took place in Providence over Verin's refusal to let his wife attend Roger Williams' meetings as often as she chose. Because Providence statutes guaranteed liberty of conscience, some men thought Verin had no right to restrain his wife. Winthrop disdained this view, noting that William Arnold, "a witty man of their own company," argued that when he supported that order "he never intended it should extend to the break of any ordinance of God, such as the subjection of wives to their husbands." Whereupon "one Greene," a man Winthrop suspected of bigamy, retorted that "if they should restrain their wives, etc., all the women in the country would cry out of them." Arnold answered, "Did you pretend to leave the Massachusetts, because you would not offend God to please men, and would you now break an ordinance and commandment of God to please women?"<sup>53</sup>

Winthrop's retelling of this story left out an essential point. When Rhode Island disenfranchised Verin for his treatment of his wife, he returned to Salem. Learning this, Roger Williams warned Winthrop about this "boysterous and desperate" young man, who "because he could not draw his wife a gracious and modest woman to the same ungodlines with him, he hath troden her under foote tyrannically and brutishly," threatening to haul her "with ropes to Sale.." Williams' accusation was clear. Verin had not only

refused to let his wife attend religious meetings of her choice; he had beaten her. Because of his "furious blowes she went in danger of life." That Winthrop chose to ignore this aspect of Verin's case shows how his disdain for religious dissenters shaped the stories he told.<sup>54</sup>

Winthrop's discussion of Mary Latham's adultery is more complex, since it involved a woman's choice of a husband as well as her behavior after marriage. Mary Latham's upbringing could not explain her problems. Her father "had brought her up well," and at the age of eighteen, she appeared to be "a proper young woman." But being rejected by "a young man whom she had much affection unto," she vowed to marry the next suitor that came along. Against everyone's advice, she "matched with an ancient man who had neither honesty nor ability, and one whom she had no affection unto." She soon fell prey not just to one but to "divers young men" who "solicited her chastity." She began to abuse her husband, "setting a knife to his breast and threatening to kill him, calling him old rogue and cuckold" and vowing to make him "wear horns as big as a bull." In 1644, she was caught in bed with a man named Britton. She and her paramour were the last persons to be executed for adultery in colonial Massachusetts. Although he pleaded for his life, she accepted the sentence of the court, having "attained to hope of pardon by the blood of Christ."<sup>55</sup> Given Winthrop's use of a woman's liberty to choose her own husband as a model for a citizen's relationship to the state, Mary Latham's story offered multiple lessons. She violated both the privilege of choice and the obligation of obedience. In the end, however, she accepted Christ.

The most notorious adulterer in colonial Massachusetts, Captain John Underhill, escaped death. Associated first with Hutchinson and then with the dissenting faction that removed to New Hampshire, he moved in and out of

Boston, alternately repenting from and repeating his sexual escapades. Winthrop, frustrated by the inability of the Boston church to discipline him, explained that "all his confessions were mixed with such excuses and extenuations, as did not give satisfaction of the truth of his repentance, so as it seemed to be done rather out of policy, and to pacify the sting of his conscience, than in sincerity." Finally brought "by the blessing of God" to the point of excommunication, Underhill made an appeal that filled the church with "weeping eyes." Underhill wore his worst clothes, without a neck band or collar, and with "a foul linen cap pulled close to his eyes." Even Winthrop succumbed. "He spake well, save that his blubbering, etc., interrupted him, and all along he discovered a broken and melting heart, and gave good exhortations to take heed of such vanities and beginnings of evil as had occasioned his fall."<sup>56</sup>

Underhill attempted not only to save his own neck but also the reputation of the woman charged with him. In the process he celebrated his own prowess as a lover. The woman had "withstood him six months against all his solicitations (which he thought no woman could have resisted) before he could overcome her chastity, but being once overcome, she was wholly at his will." To reassure the community of the sincerity of his repentance, he went to the woman's husband, "fell upon his knees before him in the presence of some of the elders and others, and confessed the wrong he had done him, and besought him to forgive him." The cuckolded husband not only freely forgave him, he sent Underhill's wife "a token," a gesture that symbolically restored some balance to a system that ignored the interests of wives in cases of adultery.<sup>57</sup> Like Mary Latham, John Underhill produced a compelling drama of penitence, but in his case, the machinations of friends in the General Court saved his life if not his soul.

Winthrop's colorful stories of sexual sins, adultery, and abuse document the reformist struggle to regulate the English community at a time when self-chosen apostles to the Indians were attempting to reform native life. One pastor's suggestion that families in Indian towns partition their wigwams to create separate rooms for husbands and wives, "who formerly were never private in what nature is ashamed of, either for the sun or any man to see," casts an unexpected light on Winthrop's concern about the "secret" pollution of the Humfrey children. Hidden things could redeem or destroy.<sup>58</sup> Although Winthrop considered English houses superior to Indian wigwams, he knew that walls could not keep out sin. He wanted Englishmen and Indians to live by the same exacting standards. In September 1631, he reported that, "a yonge fellowe was whipped for sollicitinge an indian Squa to incontineneye, her husbände & she complayned of the wronge, & were present at the execution, & very well satisfied." During the same session, "one Iosias Plaistowe & 2: of his servantes were Censured for stealinge Corne from Chickatabott & his men, (who were present) the master to restore 2:foulde, & to be degraded from the title of a gentelman & fined 5 li & his men to be whipped."<sup>59</sup> He wanted Indians to observe and approve English justice.

A month later, Winthrop himself had a curious encounter with an Indian woman. "The Governor beinge at his farme house at Misticke, walked out after supper, & tooke a peece in his hande supposinge he might see a woulfe (for they came dayly about the house, & killed swine & Calves &c)." Unfortunately, as dark fell Winthrop lost his way. Although only half a mile from home, he took the wrong path, coming at last "to a little house of Sagamr. Iohn, whiche stode emptye." The account in his journal is both an autumn idyll and a cautionary tale about the virtues of being prepared, the



sort of story a good Scoutmaster might cherish. At first he made himself comfortable in Sagamore John's yard.

there he stayed, & havinge a peece of matche in his pockett (for he allwayes carred about him mtche & a Compasse, & in sumer tyme snake weed) he made a good fire, neer the house & laye down upon some olde mattes which he fonde there, & so spent the night sometymes walkinge by the fire, sometymes singinge psalmes, & sometymes gettinge wood, but could not sleepe, it was (through Godes mercye) a warme night, but a little before daye it beganne to rayne, & havinge no cloake he made shifte by a longe pole to clime up into the house.

Apparently, the bark or mats that covered the house were fastened shut and Winthrop was forced to enter through the smoke hole.

The house could not have been completely sealed, however, because in the morning, Winthrop was able discern the presence of a woman outside the door.

in the morning there came thether an Indian squa, but perceivinge her before she had opened the doore, he barred her owte, yet she stayed there a great while assayinge to gett in, & at last she went awaye & he returned safe home, his servantes havinge been muche perplexed for him, & havinge walked about, & shott off peeces & hallowed in the night, but he heard them not.<sup>60</sup>

Historians, too, might be perplexed by this experience. Why did Winthrop bar the door? In a setting where English authority was secure--as in his own house or in one of John Eliot's missionary meetings--he was comfortable in the presence of natives.<sup>61</sup> Was he afraid of frightening the unknown woman? Of being taken as an intruder? Or, even worse, being accused of sexual

overtures? The latter possibility makes sense, given the recent whipping of a man for soliciting an Indian woman. His later descriptions of the heinous sins of Jenkin Davis document his belief that even a righteous man, denied the bed of a wife, might succumb to temptation. His account of Underhill's rationalizations suggest his belief that a man should avoid even the appearance of evil. Whatever his reason, Winthrop was determined not to be discovered by an Indian woman.

In a setting where English authority was secure--as in his own house or in one of John Eliot's missionary meetings--he could be quite comfortable in the presence of natives. In 1646, he described a meeting of "about 200: people Indian & Englishe in one wigwam of Cushamekins." An elder of magistrate gave a prayer in English, then Eliot himself "took a text, & read it first in the Indian language, & after in Englishe," preaching for about an hour, then opening it up for catechizing the children. Eliot gave each of the children "an Apple or a Cake" before he examined them. Finally, he opened the meeting to questions from the audience, neatly responding to each query. When a man asked "if God would receive suche an old man as he," Eliot gracefully explained the parable of the workers in the vineyard, each of whom received a reward.<sup>62</sup>

A more explosive question dealt with marriage practices. If a man had two wives ("which was ordinary with them"), which one should he put away if he became a Christian? Eliot apparently answered that the first wife was the true wife but hedged by suggesting that if such a question arose "they should then repaire to the magistrates, & they would direct them what to doe, for it might be that the 1: wife might be an Adulteresse &c: & then she was to be putt away."<sup>63</sup> Ann Plane has shown us how important such questions were, not only to Puritan missionary work, but to the missionaries

own conceptions of themselves. Indian practices challenged English assumptions because the reformers were themselves engaged in redefining marital practice. Pushed by the questions of their Indian converts, missionaries condemned wife beating as well as fornication, harsh words as well as adultery. "For in seeing marriage as a civil contract, they opened the way for insertion of state authority into troubled households--discouraging wife beating, holding men accountable for premarital fornication, regulating the treatment of servants, and allowing women and men in the New World an access to the legal dissolution of marriage unheard of in the Old."<sup>64</sup>

That Winthrop's stories about adultery and incest focused on male rather than female sexuality shows his concern with establishing a benevolent patriarchy in early Massachusetts. If upstart women seduced men into heterodoxy, wicked men raped, abandoned, and enticed women into sexual sin.

Gender permeates Winthrop's stories not because he and other Puritans acknowledged its important but precisely because they did not. Unexamined notions about female and male responsibility entered by the back door as dissenting faith and a new world setting gave ordinary people opportunities to assert their spiritual visions and carnal desires. Winthrop feared religious dissent not only because it destroyed the unity he considered essential to Christian order but because he believed it encouraged heinous sins. He could not separate the religious hypocrisy of John Underhill from the man's sexual deviance nor the theological speculations of Anne Hutchinson from Mary Dyer's spurious birth.

Winthrop's attentiveness to women--especially outspoken, sinful, or disruptive women--teaches us that gender was a central and unavoidable

issue in seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Puritan metaphors of labor and delivery both enlarged and constrained the meaning of female experience, giving sacred meaning to bodily functions and locking righteous women into humble submission. At the same time, the radical doctrines of reformation released women's spiritual energies and gave both ordinary and well-born women opportunities to assert religious leadership, invest in colonial experiments, or assert a more egalitarian social vision. Unsettled by the social implications of religious doctrine and by the sinfulness of his neighbors, Winthrop embraced a religious and political order that balanced lay authority with institutional constraints.<sup>65</sup>

Before assuming that all Puritans held Winthrop's views, however, we might pay more attention to the divisions and arguments that animated the social and intellectual history of the period. No single "Puritan" attitude toward women existed, as Winthrop's own accounts make clear. His version of the past has survived not only because he was among the winners in the struggle for religious orthodoxy but because his stories are vivid, detailed, and filled with drama.

It is appropriate then to close this reading of Winthrop's journal with one more story, a tale about a man, a woman, and a dog, provides an apt epilogue for this reading of Winthrop's journal.

On a Sunday in 1643, a man named Dalkin and his wife were returning to their home in Medford after attending sabbath services in Cambridge. When they came to a ford in the river, "the tide not being fallen enough, the husband adventured over, and finding it too deep, persuaded his wife to stay a while." But as rain fell, leaving her cold and wet, she decided to try crossing alone and was soon carried past her depth. "Her husband not daring to go help her, cried out, and thereupon his dog, being at his house

near by, came forth, and seeing something in the water, swam to her, and she caught hold on the dog's tail, so he drew her to the shore and saved her life."

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Winthrop did not need to enlarge the moral of this story. One of many "providences" that shaped the lives of women and men in early New England, it conveys an obvious meaning for twentieth-century scholars interested in Puritan concepts of gender. Husbands, responsible for the welfare of their families, had the power to lead, to admonish, and to command their wives. But they did not have the power to save them. Only God--or, in a reversal worthy of James Joyce, a humble dog-- could do that. The history of early Massachusetts is not only a story about powerful men and assertive women; it is a story about seemingly accidental events and the persons who gave them meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> James Henretta and Gregory H. Nobles, *Evolution and Revolution: American Society, 1600-1820* (Lexington, Mass. and Toronto: D.C. Heath, 1987), 18, 19; Nancy Woloch, "Early American Women: A Documentary History, 1600-1900 (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1992), p. 128, 129; Mary Beth Norton, et al, *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States: Brief Edition* Vol. A (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 23.

<sup>2</sup>*The Journal of John Winthrop*, ed. Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1996), hereafter cited as JJJ. There are 79 women listed in the index. The richness of this record is due in part to the editors' careful work. They give full names to persons identified in Winthrop's narration only as "a woman" or "the wife of," but they couldn't have done that if Winthrop himself had not told the stories.

<sup>3</sup> Dunn, "Introduction," JJJ, xxxvii

<sup>4</sup> JJJ, 25,

<sup>5</sup> JJJ, 27, 6.

<sup>6</sup> JJJ, 129, 193.

<sup>7</sup> JJJ, 157, 157n, 215. As Jane Kamensky has explained, English reformers simultaneously liberated and repressed lay speech, on the one hand enjoining believers to share their religious leanings and on the other cautioning against

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unmediated discourse. "The English legacy, broadly speaking, imparted an acute awareness of the power of words and an equally acute anxiety about their perils." Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue* [40, 75];

<sup>8</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mother and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) ,397, 398.

<sup>9</sup> JWJ, 214-215. Richard Dunn has observed that in their important work on the Antinomian crisis neither Emery Battis nor David Hall "take Anne Hutchinson as seriously as John Winthrop did. Battis argues that she was always dependent on the guidance of strong men, and Hall places John Cotton at the center of the theological debate. But JW certainly saw Hutchinson as his chief enemy in 1636-1638."JWJ, 194, n22.

<sup>10</sup> Norton, *Founding*, 381, 382, and Chapter 8 passim. Norton explains that Winthrop and Hutchinson also had different conceptions of what kinds of conversations should be privileged. Hutchinson objected when statements she had made in conversations with Boston's ministers were used against her in the trial, arguing that a person could not be condemned for things said in *private* , that is in confidence. Winthrop in contrast believed that the context was irrelevant. The authority of magistrates and ministers penetrated beyond the court and the meetinghouse. Hutchinson did not, however, move toward a modern concept of public and private that might have allowed freedom of religious expression. Maintaining a unified view of authority that gave her authority with the informal community of women, she "could not develop a rationale that would protect her from prosecution."

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<sup>11</sup> JWJ, 286.

<sup>12</sup> JWJ, 330.

<sup>13</sup> JWJ, 462-463, Norton, *Founding*, 165-180; Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power* (Urbana, 1980)242-243.

<sup>14</sup> JWJ, 275.

<sup>15</sup> JWJ, 287.

<sup>16</sup>Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992), Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>17</sup>6 Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (New York, 1986), 81.

<sup>18</sup> JWJ, 193.

<sup>19</sup> JWJ, 253-255, 264-266. Useful secondary accounts of Dyer's and Hutchinson's births include, "Anne Jacobson Schutte, "'Such Monstrous Births': A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985): 85-106; Valerie Pearl and Morris Pearl, eds., "Governor John Winthrop on the Birth of the Antinomians' 'Monster': The Earliest Reports to Reach England and the Making of a Myth," *MHSP* 102 (1990): 21-



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37; Koehler, 230-232; Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York, 1987), 16-17; David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* (New York, 1989), 100-103; Norton, *Founding*, 223-224, 383, 394-395.

<sup>20</sup> JWJ, 711-712; Karlsen, 20-21; John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 402; and on the general question of midwifery and witchhunting, Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 46, 374 and David Harley, "Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-witch," *Social History of Medicine*, 3 (1990): 1-26; Edith Murphy, "Skillful Women and Jurymen: Gender and Authority in Seventeenth-Century Middlesex County, Massachusetts (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives* (New York, 1982), 131-135; Koehler, 230-231; Mary Maples Dunn, "Saints and Sisters: Congregational and Quaker Women in the Early Colonial Period," in Janet Wilson James, ed. *Women in American Religion* (Philadelphia, 1980), 33-34.

<sup>22</sup> Edith Murphy, "Skillful Women and Jurymen," 77-87.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Beth Norton, "'The Ablest Midwife That Wee Knowe in the Land': Mistress Alice Tilly and the Women of Boston and Dorchester, 1649-1650," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3d. Series, LV (1998): 105-134, quotation on 122. On a less successful petition by Malden women on behalf of their minister, see Murphy, "Skillful Women and Jurymen," 169-174. On the female healers,

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see Rebecca J. Tannenbaum, "'What is Best to be Done for These Fevers': Elizabeth Davenport's Medical Practice in New Haven Colony", *The New England Quarterly* 1997 70(2): 265-284 and Patricia A. Watson, "The Hidden Ones: Women and Healing in Colonial New England," *Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife*, 1990 15: 25-33.

<sup>24</sup> On this transition see Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, (New York: Norton, 1987), Chapter Five; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735," *American Quarterly* 28 (1976): 20-40, and *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca and London, 1997), 94.

<sup>26</sup> JWJ, 425-426.

<sup>27</sup> JWJ, 271-272; As Helena Wall has observed authorities in all the American colonies felt free to intervene in family conflict, but they gave their support "most emphatically, indeed almost exclusively, to the social functions of marriage. For the sake of order, morality, and its own economic interests, the community demanded stability in marriage, but they showed little respect for psychological needs." So it seems to have been with Talby. Helena M. Wall, *Fierce Communion: Family and Community in Early America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1990), 49, 80.

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<sup>28</sup> Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, 131.

<sup>29</sup> JWJ, 271-2.

<sup>30</sup> JWJ, 229-30, 391-392.

<sup>31</sup> JWJ, 392.

<sup>32</sup> JWJ, 469.

<sup>33</sup> JWJ, 385.

<sup>34</sup> JWJ, 353, 458. For my own work on household manufacturing see "Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., LV (1998): 3-38, and *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of An American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001)

<sup>35</sup> JWJ, 570; Elaine Forman Crane, *Ebb Tide in new England: Women, Seaports, and Social Change, 1630-1800* (Boston, 1998), 55.

<sup>36</sup> *Journal of John Winthrop*, 352.

<sup>37</sup> Pieter de Hooch's famous painting "The Linen Cupboard" displays the wealth of a bourgeois Dutch household both in the ermine trimmed clothing

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of the housewife and in the newly laundered linens she is returning to storage. Although New England cupboards were smaller and less accessible than the large Kases displayed in de Hooch's painting, the social significance of the stack of linens was the same. Francoise de Bonneville, *The Book of Fine Linen*, trans. Deke Dusinberre (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 10, 12, 88, 93.

<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, historians of religion as well as historians of women have pretty much abandoned Anne Bradstreet, arguably as important a representative of Puritan thought as any of the ministers, to literary scholars. On Bradstreet, compare the radically different interpretations of Ivy Schweitzer, *The Work of Self-Representation* (Chapel Hill and London, 1991), 127-181, with the comparison of Anne Hutchinson and Anne Bradstreet in Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England* (New York, 1992), 80-115.

<sup>39</sup> JWJ, 88, 47. Also note his description of Lady Moody's house in Salem, 646, which "beinge but one storye in height & a flatt Roofe, with a brick chimnye in the midst, and the Roofe taken off in 2: partes (with the toppe of the Chimny)" in a storm.

<sup>40</sup> JWJ, 13, 39, 566, 245; Norton, *Founding*, 199.

<sup>41</sup> JWJ, 440, 439, 545-550, 228,

<sup>42</sup> JWJ, 397-398.

<sup>43</sup> JWJ, 397.

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<sup>44</sup> Norton, *Founding*, 316. ;

<sup>45</sup> JWJ, 395-398, 451-458. Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 236-237; T.H. Breen, *The Character of the Good Ruler* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 78-80; James Mosely, *John Winthrop's World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 94-97; Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York, 1995), Chapter 4 and Darren Staloff, *The Making of an American Thinking Class* (New York, 1998), 83-88.

<sup>46</sup> Norton, *Founding*, 312-322, quote on 320.

<sup>47</sup> JWJ, 79.

<sup>48</sup> JWJ, 112, David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> JWJ, 236-238.

<sup>50</sup> JWJ, 370-374.

<sup>51</sup> JWJ, 370-374.

<sup>52</sup> Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 30-34.

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<sup>53</sup> JWJ, 276-277.

<sup>54</sup> *Winthrop Papers IV* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1944)30-31. Koehler, 325, see this as evidence of a "Rhode Island alternative"; Norton, *Founding*, 77-78, downplays the difference between Williams and Winthrop.

<sup>55</sup> JWJ, 500.

<sup>56</sup> JWJ, 319, 334-336. David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1985), 96, 97 gives a brief discussion of the link between Underhill's antinomianism and the charges of adultery. Koehler, 219, 231, 358-59, and Norton, *Founding*, 308-9, 396, both focus on his military and political activities.

<sup>57</sup> JWJ, 336 and on the legal manipulations, note 97.

<sup>58</sup> John Wilson letter, 1651, quoted in Anne Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in early New England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2000), [check page number 42.]

<sup>59</sup> JWJ, 56-7.

<sup>60</sup> JWJ, 57-58.

<sup>61</sup> JWJ, 683-84.

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<sup>62</sup> JWJ, 683-84.

<sup>63</sup> JWJ, 683.

<sup>64</sup> Plane, Colonial Intimacies, [page number] Also see Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of a Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) Chapter One.

<sup>65</sup> Compare, for example, Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994), which virtually ignores gender, with Norton's *Founding Mothers*. One of the most important but least accessible of gender analyses remains Ann Kibbey, *The interpretation of material shapes in Puritanism* (Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>66</sup> JWJ, 504-505.