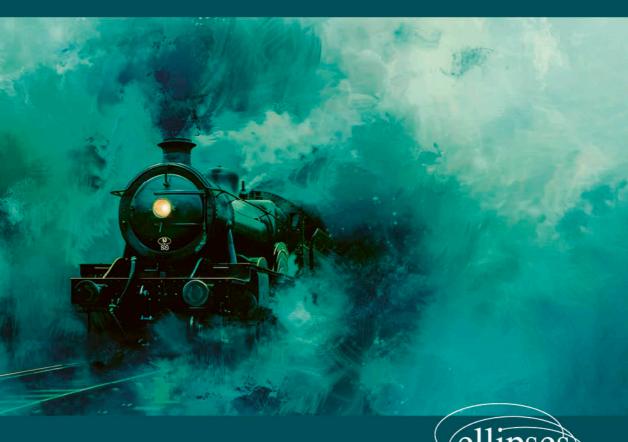Nathaniel Hawthorne

Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales

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Puritanism: "We shall be made a story"

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Part I. Puritans: The Taxonomical Problem

"What's in a name?" asked Patrick Collinson (1929-2011), the founding father of Puritan studies.[1] In the popular imagination, Puritans are thought of as censorious people, "theocrats, regicides, witch-burners, Indian killers, and bigoted heresy hunters" (Bremer, *Puritanism* 1). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they were derided as "gaunt, lank-haired kill-joy[s], wearing a black steeple-hat, and compounding for sins [they were] inclined to by damning those to which [they] had no mind" (Person 16-19). The best cliché is that of the twentieth-century American journalist H.L. Mencken whose tongue-in-cheek definition of Puritanism is "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy" (qtd. in Bremer, *One Small Candle* 6). Hawthorne's contribution to the fashioning and endurance of stereotypes that credited Puritans with fanaticism, superstition, and self-delusion is considerable, from John Endicott's "grisly saints" to Esther Prynne's branding with the scarlet letter of shame. The stereotypes were largely conveyed in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in William Shakespeare's or Ben Jonson's comedies with characters such as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (1601-1602), or Zeal-of-the-land Busy in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). The label Puritan had appeared a few decades earlier and given currency by exiled English Catholics in the 1560s when Jesuits berated the "hot Puritans of the new clergy," "[the] purest and cleanest of all others" (Collinson, *Richard Bancroft* 3).

Puritan was also a term of opprobrium used by the Protestants of the established Church of England: the Elizabethan Archbishop of Canterbury John Whitgift (c.1530-1604) opined that "this name Puritane is very aptly giuen to these men. . . because they thinke themselues to be. . . more pure than others,. . . and seperate themselues from all other Churches and congregations as spotted and defiled" (*An Answere* 42). The term is in fact a scarecrow, a literary and

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1. For an overview of the protean nature of Puritanism and on Puritanism in general, see Bremer, *Puritanism*; Selzner, "Introduction"; Dunan-Page and Parageau; Coffey and Lim, "Introduction"; and Durston and Eales, "Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700," *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* 1-31.

polemical construct, a figure of fun for Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, and of sedition for Episcopalians. If their opponents named them Puritans or precisemen, the Puritans refuted these appellations, preferring to call themselves the godly, gospellers (*évangélistes*), Scripture men (*lecteurs assidus de la bible*), or sincere "professors" of true religion: "In the first instance, 'Puritans' were Puritans in the eye of the beholder" (Collinson, "Antipuritanism" 19). Granted, but who were they?

For all the impressive academic attention directed to the question since the sixteenth century, the meaning of the word Puritan remains unclear. It is an "extremely convenient shorthand term, [but] unavoidably a contextual [and] imprecise. . . one" (Winship, "Were there any Puritans in New England?" 137-38). Revisionist and post-revisionist historians have pointed out that Puritanism was much more diverse than initially thought and due to the multiple fragmented religious identities, or irreducible pluralisms, it was more useful to talk of "Puritanisms."

If the term Puritan existed, the term "Anglicanism" did not: as an invention of the nineteenth century, it is best avoided altogether. Furthermore, the term gives the mistaken impression that "Anglicans" and "Puritans" were two organized and mutually opposed groups. The problem of Puritan pluralities in early modern religion originates in the false homogenization of Protestant identities. If Nonconformists did not conform to the Crown's religious policies, they rejected them in various degrees and for different reasons, and the responses they adopted before the challenge differed greatly. Puritanism cannot be defined solely in its relation to Anglicanism and yet, as Patrick Collinson recognises, Puritanism cannot be defined without its alter-ego: "There is little point in constructing elaborate statements defining what in ontological terms Puritanism was and was not, when it was not a thing definable in itself but only one half of a stressful relationship" (*Birthpangs* 143).

Anything but a monolith, Puritanism was only one component of a set of fluid and dynamic polarities. The English Church of this age was a spectrum in which the ultimate extreme colours are clear enough, but the immediate tones merge imperceptibly. The differences may rather be considered in terms of a continuum, not with rigid points of demarcation since we are dealing with dynamic expressions of faith and ecclesiology, and individuals themselves did not always remain rooted to a single spot on this continuum.

To try to define such a slippery, "more-Protestant-than-thou" creature (Winship, *Hot Protestants* 123), the contextual factor needs to be addressed so as to grasp the chronologically evolutionary nature of the movement.

Part II. Puritanism: A Chronology

The Stirrings of Puritanism: The pre-Elizabethan Period

If, as claimed by John Craig, "Puritanism [is] above all, an Elizabethan story," its narrative began well before the accession of the Tudor Queen (35).

John Wycliffe (c.1330-1384) and Martin Luther (1483-1546)

The English Reformations differed from the continental ones due to the indelible marks left by Lollardy, a home-grown tradition of dissent that might have shaped the Puritan movement. The Oxford theologian John Wycliffe regarded the Bible as the only guide to God's truth: for their salvation, Christians had to rely on the Scripture rather than on the accretion of subsequent patristic literature that had obscured the original pristine message. The Bible thus had to be made available thanks to translations, a wider circulation of manuscripts, collective reading, and intense and itinerant preaching. Wycliffe and his followers the Lollards also questioned on scriptural grounds central tenets of Roman Catholic orthodoxy such as papal authority, transubstantiation, clerical celibacy, pilgrimages, or the praying to saints.

With the German monk Martin Luther, the indictment of Rome took on a European dimension and yet, the original purpose of the 1517 Ninety-five theses was to start a disputation on indulgences in the hope of initiating a reformation of the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.[2] After Luther's excommunication for heresy, what had been intended as an academic debate ended up in a schism that would spawn Protestant Reformations in Northern Europe.

The bedrock of Luther's theology is formed by five *solas*: *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus,* and *Soli Deo Gloria*. The Christian theological principles in themselves were not new but the addition of the word "*sola*" (only) introduced an irreversible break with the Roman Catholic Church. *Sola*

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2. An indulgence was a free full or partial remission of punishment for sins. Breaking with the medieval practice, in 1517, the pope authorised the sale of indulgences which for Luther amounted to selling forgiveness for sins or merchandising souls.

Scriptura is the touchstone of the Lutheran doctrine: the Scripture alone being the final authority, no institutionalised intermediary was needed for salvation. In *The Bondage of the Will* (*Du serf arbitre*, 1525) written to refute Erasmus's *The Freedom of the Will* (*Diatribe sur le libre arbitre*, 1524), Luther argued that in a post-lapsarian world, free will was impossible due to the indelible stain the original sin had left. Only through God's grace and forgiveness (*Sola gratia*) could man be saved and freed from sin. *Sola gratia* was concomitant with *sola fide* since man was justified by faith alone and not by good works (*bonnes oeuvres*) as upheld by the Catholic doctrine. *Solus Christus* is the teaching that salvation is by Christ alone: Christ alone has saved mankind once and for all with his sacrifice on the cross. Salvation being accomplished solely through God's will and Christ's sacrifice, glory is due to God alone: neither saints, angels nor Mary, the Mother of Jesus, should be venerated.

Sola Scriptura entails that the Word of God has to be read and preached. Just as Wycliffe, Luther rejected all the tenets that had no scriptural grounds and found fault with traditional soteriology: if the seven sacraments, purgatory, indulgences, good works and prayers to saints were paltry and outrageous fabrications, so were papal supremacy and monopoly.[3] Luther toppled medieval ecclesiastical structure and redefined ecclesiology: the Church was no longer headed by the pope, and the anointed priesthood's distinction and power to sacrifice were denied in favour of the universal priesthood of all believers (*sacerdoce universel*). The Church no longer had an institutional character, it was a communion, a gathering of believers. Still, the True Church must have a hierarchy and Luther promoted the taking over by temporal authorities.

As faith was "a thing not seen," the marks of the True Church were the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments according to the gospel (*Évangiles*). The sacraments were reduced to two, baptism that marked the admission into Christ's Church and the Eucharist or Lord's Supper, the ceremony of the communion with Christ (*Cène*). Luther found Catholic transubstantiation unpalatable,[4] and did not interpret mass as a rehearsal of the sacrifice of Christ but as a commemoration: Christ's death had absolved man's sins once and for all (*solus Christus*). Luther restored the pure sense of the communion rite by stripping

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3. Soteriology is the theory of collective or individual salvation, and of what is required to be saved. C. Selzner's glossary is helpful for its explanations of possibly puzzling terms in relation to Puritanism (*Émergence* 300-22).

4. The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is the belief in the actual transformation of Christ's flesh and blood into wine and host. In the Catholic ritual, believers were not allowed to partake of Christ's blood.

the host of its magical properties, denying that the ceremony as a fresh act of propitiation (*propitiation, propitiatoire*) to stress its force as a sign and memorial of Christ's promise. Communion was to be in both kinds (*sous les deux espèces*) with the laity partaking of the flesh and blood of Christ.[5]

John Calvin (1509-1564)

The French theologian John Calvin belonged to the second-generation Protestants and his convictions were far more uncompromising than Luther's: first, his interpretation of the Eucharist dismissed any idea of Christ's real presence in favour of a more symbolical or spiritual one, though the exact nature of this presence was not clearly stated. Second, his strict adherence to the third commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," justified his aniconism, a position that encouraged iconoclasm. Finally, Calvin theorised the doctrine of double predestination. In keeping with Luther's soteriology, he harped on divine creation and salvation by grace alone: the elect were saved by God's free act of mercy with the corollary that the faithful could never merit salvation nor exercise any control over their fate after death. The Bible unveiled that God's will was to predestine the elect to heaven and Calvin took this doctrine to its logical conclusion, arguing that He had also chosen even before the Fall from Grace the reprobate, those who were destined to hell. The doctrine of supralapsarian double predestination posited God's implacable division of mankind: whatever your earthly actions and thoughts might be, you were before your birth marked to be either saved or damned (see Hawthorne's "The Birthmark").

Numerous marginal notes in the Geneva Bible published in 1560 expounded Calvin's doctrine of double predestination:

> Albeit God in his eternal counsel appointed the death and damnation of the reprobat, yet the end of his counsel was not their death only, but chiefly his own glory (marginal note, Ez 18:23).
> The onelie wil & purpose of God is the chief cause of election & repro-bation: so his fre mercie in Christ is an inferior cause of saluation & the hardening of the heart, an interior cause of damnacion (marginal note, Rom 9:15). (341, 73v)

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5. A. de Mézerac-Zanetti offers an overview of the various theories and discourses on faith and salvation in "Contexte de l'émergence du mouvement puritain: société, politique et religion en Angleterre au début du XVIe siècle."

On the on-going controversy about whether Puritanism can be equated with a belief in the doctrine of predestination, Christopher Duston and Jacqueline Eales come to the conclusion that "there was in fact a broad 'Calvinist consensus' within the Elizabethan and Jacobean church, [and] between 1560 and 1625 the doctrine of predestination was accepted without question by virtually all of the most influential clergymen in England, puritan and non-puritan alike," we ought therefore to think in terms of a "Protestant mind" (6-7).

The Henrician Schism

The apex of the break with Rome in England occurred with the Henrician Act of Supremacy (1534) that enabled the monarch, now Supreme Head, to have full power and authority over the newly-created Church of England, a national and independent Church. Henry VIII (1509-1547) and his successors could determine orthodoxy, impose practices and doctrine, order visitations, and set up courts to judge offenders. With the advice and support of the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), and Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540), Henry's chief minister, the King fashioned the theology of the Church of England with reforms that were ambiguous and often contradictory: if between 1536 and 1540 the King sponsored a programme of translation of the Bible in the vernacular with the publication of Mathew's Bible, the Great Bible and Cranmer's Bible, he embraced anew strict Catholic doctrine with the 1539 Six Articles reaffirming transubstantiation, prohibiting clerical marriage, and returning to communion in one kind. The punishment for heresy was being burned at the stake: the first persecutions of evangelists (Protestant reformers) started in 1530 and intensified after 1539. Refusing to comply, fearing for their lives, English evangelists such as John Hooper (c.1495-1555) fled to the continent.

The English Puritan poetess Lucy Hutchinson (1620-1681) disavowed Henry VIII: "I cannot subscribe to those who entitle that king to the honour of the reformation" (*Memoirs* 69), and yet, even if the Henrician schism did not change doctrinal orthodoxy, it did change the structure of the Church of England. Exile on the other hand plunged Henrician evangelists into the laboratory of continental thought and experiments: John Hooper and his coreligionists discovered a new, purer Church in Zurich where there were no statues in churches, where ministers wore simple black gowns and not the surplice (*surplis*) or other elaborate Papist vestments still in use in England.

The Edwardian Protestant Reformations

Henry's son Edward VI (1547-1553) had been educated as a Protestant and the policies he implemented progressively and unrelentingly uprooted what he and his councillors deemed was "reeking" of Roman Catholicism: Parliament voted communion in both kinds and allowed clerical marriage; altars and statues were removed from the churches whose idolatrous paintings were whitewashed over; Bibles and religious books in the vernacular were churned out. Unrestricted bible-reading and preaching were favoured: a collection of sermons entitled *Certayne Sermons, or Homelies appoynted by the kynges Maiestie* released in 1547 spelled out central tenets such as salvation, and provided guiding principles for Christian life and thought. The first *Book of Common Prayer* (aka. *Prayer Book*, *Livre des prières publiques*) was issued in 1549 and imposed by an Act of Uniformity as the only legal source of worship.

The 1549 *Prayer Book* was a theological and liturgical compromise, an interim measure that gave the Protestants an English service cleansed of gross Papist superstitions but with the structure of the mass. For "radical" reformers like John Hooper or the Scots John Knox (1514-1572), the first *Prayer Book* was half Protestant. Under their impulse and pressure, the second *Prayer Book* published in 1552 decisively broke with the past with its Calvinist programme. Most of the ceremonies that had disgruntled the radicals were removed: the structure of the mass was abandoned and so were many prayers of intercession, the word "altar" was replaced by "table" to avoid any reference to a carnal sacrifice of Christ, and ordinary bread replaced the traditional host.

Proto-Puritan John Hooper loathed the traditional clerical garb prescribed by the *Prayer Book*: the surplice, he argued, was a stinking remnant of popery, it was neither mentioned nor forbidden in the Bible and was thus indifferent (adiaphora), that is not necessary for salvation. As a thing indifferent, the decision to wear it or not should be left to individual conscience. God had left such adiaphoric things for human authorities to decide, responded the established Church, and compliance could be obtained through force or duress. In the vestiarian controversy (*controverse des vêtements sacerdotaux*), Hooper reduced to almost nothing the powers of the magistrate in matters of religion, pitting individual conscience against royal will and laws. What had started as a vestiarian issue branched into a controversy about the limits of temporal power over the Church.

The Marian Counter-Reformation (1553-1558)

Martyrdom and Exile

Roman Catholic Mary I unravelled the Henrician schism and Edwardian reforms: papal authority over the Church of England was restored. Protestants were persecuted and driven underground in congregations that kept their faith alive thanks to the invisible networks of true believers. The first burnings took place in February 1555 and in the course of three years and a half, about two hundred and eighty Protestants were executed as heretics: John Hooper and Thomas Cranmer died as martyrs for the Protestant cause and contributed to the psychology of resistance to authority (see Lee 72).

About 800 English Protestants opted for flight: for them, emigration was as much a matter of survival as a matter of conscience. The Marian exiles fled to different Lutheran and Calvinist strongholds in Switzerland and Germany. The continental towns along the Rhine River became incubators for the English reformed theology, with Strasbourg and Frankfurt in particular as the most influential European crossroads. Despite the rigors of poverty and exile, and the shared apprehension of persecution, the English were anything but a united and organized community. Their internal quarrels over the liturgical forms to be employed in their refugee church were profoundly and lastingly divisive: some pushed for the amendment of the second Edwardian *Prayer Book* to be even more specifically reformed along the line of continental Protestant confessions while others dug in their heels and maintained the standards of Edwardian reforms in both liturgy and leadership, desirous to "do as they had done in England; and. . . have the face of an English Church" (Arber, ed. 54).

Frankfurt and Geneva

While in England Catholicism was sucking the marrow out of Protestants' lives, on the continent Protestantism was a house divided. During the Troubles at Frankfurt (1554-1558), "Little Englanders," of a nationalist and royalist persuasion, championed obedience and found themselves in conflict with "Continentals" who advocated an international form of Protestantism. These proto-Puritans championed a theological ethos founded on the rock of primitive apostolic Christianity and not on English history. Their conviction that the source of law was the Scripture led them to rebut any submission of religion to either civil law or national allegiance.