One founding fact of American literary history as we have known it is that the conscientious memorials of William Bradford have pretty well succeeded in marginalizing the more whimsical if also more “literary” observations of Thomas Morton. Morton has had his champions, from the timely editing of Charles Francis Adams to the eccentric advertisement of William Carlos Williams to the countercultural sponsorship of Richard Slotkin to the academic explication of Donald Connors; and Bradford has had his share of revisionists, reminding us that his wonderful manner of simple truth-telling covers some blatant misrepresentations, some of them probably deliberate. But a quick roundup of the usual anthologies, including those whose canonic reformism is much in vogue, will quickly establish the point: beginning students of American literary culture are regularly asked to read much more of Bradford’s *Plymouth* than of Morton’s *Canaan*. And over in the research library, a quick “global search” of books and articles will establish a similar preference for Bradford among the scholars.

It would not be difficult to protest, in the scale of this preference, a certain disproportion: surely Morton’s Nature counts as much as Bradford’s Grace in the unfolding of the national literary project. Or, with more political conviction, we could suggest that Morton does better by the Native Americans, in prose and (probably) in fact. Yet we ought also to ask ourselves whether the present critical situation might have been otherwise. Can we imagine that Morton might have won?—not the mock heroic encounter at the much renamed Mount of Merriment but, in the long aftermath, the more important contest for the loyalty of the New England generations and then of the larger American audience. Is this
of those cases—now famous in the literature of canon revision—in which reputation is shaped by the mere pleasure of persons with privilege of gender and power of the press? Or can we actually defend the clear cut of Bradford’s victory?

To ask the question at all is to risk the embarrassment of trying to rewrite Hawthorne’s “May-pole of Merry Mount”; and to do that, as I have taken pains to show elsewhere, is to get caught up in the allegory in which, whenever faced with some dialectical opposite, Puritanism seems destined always to win. Suitably deconstructed, however, what Hawthorne’s little story actually reveals is that Puritanism always wins because Puritans are always there to create the dialectic and to structure their story just so; and because, conversely, no line of prophets has arisen on purpose to dispute their claim, with comparable resources and equal vigor, wherever it should arise. But even this tautological discovery is not without relevance—revealing, as it does, the fact that literary history is no less written than any other sort; and reminding us, perhaps, that Puritans tend to write more profusely, perhaps more uncontrollably, than other social types. But sooner or later we come back to the root question: Granted that history is written by the winners, can we yet discover any apolitical reason why Bradford’s annals of certain weather-beaten Pilgrims have proved more largely repeatable than Morton’s racier account of love and sport in the New World Canaan?

Surely Morton’s text is not without its distinct pleasures; and some of these, it seems fair to observe, may lie closer to Renaissance traditions of witty writing that lent their pleasing example to the formulators of the notion of the beautiful-letters definition of “literature” in the next century. Yet British literature has been as happy to concede the playful Morton to their Americanist colleagues as they have the more sober work of Bradford himself. For the moment, at least, a small paradox: Morton’s book is altogether more literary than Bradford’s without being in any significant sense better. We need to locate the pleasure—or Bradford’s victory will seem empty because uncontested. But unless we can also notice the problems, not much else in the literary history of New England will make sufficient sense.

Only by the famous “Third Book” do we realize that Morton’s gift is not for anthropological insight or even for pastoral evocation but for satire, particularly in the emergent subgenre of Puritan-baiting. There, in an extended account of the author’s Pyrrhic defeat at the hands of certain allegorically named Separatists, who seem to have marked him for some special enmity, Morton makes his bid to discredit the claims of an adversary whose culture he scorns and whose source of
authority he hesitates even to name. But something of his whimsy appears from
the outset, pleasant and playful, and suggestive enough to help us to misidentify
the reasons why Morton has been able to make and maintain a modest canonical
place.

After a verse prologue, assuring us that the rich resources of the New En-
glish Canaan are as eager to be ravished as any “fair virgin” (10), Morton launches
his hyperbolic praise of the geographic bliss of the Zona Temperata in which his
wondrous discovery happens to lie. Zonas Frigida and Torrida are disqualified as
easily as an unlucky demographic guess of Aristotle, and the knightly personage
of “the noble minded . . . Ferdinando Georges” (15) is smoothly enlisted as patron
of Morton’s enthusiastic ideal of the “golden mean.” New Canaan or not, New
England is a middle-class opportunity, as Englishmen already knew from the less
stylized evocations of John Smith. And, though students are often struck by the
ethics of Morton’s very next discovery—that New England’s aboriginal popula-
tion of “Infidels” are “most full of humanity” (17) than the Christians newly
arrived—their sober sensibility is troubled by the quasi-puritanic complacency
with which Morton confesses that a recent plague has indeed made this Canaan
“more fit for the English nation to inhabit in” (24). And what (but unregulated
satire) can anyone make of a zany classicism which discovers that, as the language
of these New World followers of Pan is derived from Latin and Greek, so “the
Natives of New England” may derive from the “scattered Trojans,” after “Brutus
departed from Latium”? (20). Maybe—someone having miscounted—they are
the thirteenth tribe of Israel. Maybe they came from the moon.

Elsewhere, this not unloving anthropology notices that, though they have no
religion properly so called, Algonquians at least have the wit to cover their naked-
ness. Less symbolically, they acknowledge a Creator and hope for a form of im-
mortality. They are by no means a “dull or slender witted people” (43), and their
senses are remarkably well developed. They may indeed incline to “drunken-
ness,” but they have not, Morton insists, been abetted in this practice by himself
or his associates. Then, in conclusion, and as if to specify the out-setting theme of
the golden mean, the “Salvages” of this Canaan are seen to have been living, all
along, an altogether contented life: poor only by some inflated standard of “civi-
lized” luxury, they have learned, without the benefit of Thoreau’s experiment,
that it is “but food and raiment” that living men need and that “the rarity of the
air” they breathe well displaces any imaginable “variety of sauces to procure ap-
petite.” Lacking nothing needful, why cannot these Natives “be said to live
richly?” (56).

Nor is there any falling off from this will to appreciation as Morton moves
into his Second Book, on “the beauty of the country with her natural endow-

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ments.” Elsewhere, criticism might labor to found the episteme of modernism on Columbus’ minimalist discovery that “the farther one goes, the more one learns”; but Morton’s mantra is simpler still. His arrival in “June, Anno Salutis, 1622,” may have been but one more “chance” in the life of a traveling man, but his response was, like any judgment of taste, altogether fatal: “The more I looked, the more I liked it” (60–61). Any justification of this judgment would have itself to be poetical, and thus Morton breaks into a short list of natural occasions for pleasure bordering on transport. Trees, hillocks, and plains, set down in haste, but also

sweet crystal fountains and clear running streams that twine in fine meanders through the meads, making so sweet a murmuring noise to hear as would even lull the senses with delight a sleep, so pleasantly do they glide upon the pebble stones—

all hurrying down, poetically, to “Neptune’s Court.” And then, as if to insist that diction alone cannot a poem make, this preliminary evocation of Pastoral Pleasure and previous invitation to Romantic Joy, this fulsome praise of “Nature’s master-piece” lapses to the meter of its own mimesis:

Her chiepest magazine of all, where lives her store:
If this land be not rich, then is the whole world poor. (60)

The “needless alexandrine,” for those who stay awake to count in Lotus Land. But reason not the need: these lovely facts, themselves the greatest poem.

Or more nearly so, at any rate, than the familiar list of lists thus introduced: “Trees,” so loved of old Columbus, in daunting difference and numberless excess; “herbs” (for “sallets”), if only in a line or two; “birds, and feathered fowls,” including, for the gourmand, “turkeys,” which can hardly keep from crowding themselves into our “cook room,” and which are “by many degrees sweeter than the tame turkeys of England, feed them how you can” (69), and including also, for the American born too soon for a visit to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, a certain “humming bird, no bigger than a great beetle, that . . . lives upon the bee, which he eateth and catcheth amongst flowers” (73); and “beasts of the forest”; and “stones and minerals”; and “fishes,” so abundant that the “inhabitants of New England do dung their grounds with cod,” and which is yet, as Smith had clearly implied, “a commodity better than the golden mines of the Spanish Indies” (86). And so forth. Until one comes to appreciate the wisdom of an honest

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book on the subject of this not-quite-settler literature: sooner or later readers will have to develop an esthetics of “the list.” Evidently it comes with the territory.

In spite of this generic demand, however, Book 2 manages a proper climax, on the “goodness of the country and [its] waters,” especially those of the “Great Lake of Erocoise”; and it has proved strong enough to attract the bemused notice of that prophet of “Prophetic Waters,” John Seelye. Everywhere the water “excelleth Canaan by much,” and indeed “at Ma-re Mount, there was a water . . . most excellent for the cure of melancholy” (92–93). No “milk and honey,” to be sure, but this definitional lack is more than supplied by the redundant overflow of every other good thing; so that no sensible man will “hold this land unworthy to be entitled by the name of the second Canaan.” And then, while scholarship pauses to consider how studied may be this insult—to the self-denying Separatists, and to those later Puritan immigrants who stoutly insisted that the only proper fulfillment of Canaan’s typological promise was that otherworldly paradise of heaven itself—Morton goes on to predict that the green and golden venue of some really Great Lake, as yet by him unseen, is surely “the principalist place for a plantation in all New Canaan, both for pleasure and profit” (97). Enticing prediction, indeed: less than is suggested by Seelye’s evocation of “green fire,” perhaps—and far off from Slotkin’s intimation of violent redemption—but quite enough to indicate the possibility of a New World project most unlike either version of Miller’s famous “Errand.”

But as it would be a mistake to stop reading Morton just here—before his climactic and carefully arranged confrontation with that very enterprise—so would it be misleading to think of the enticing and perhaps subversive Project of Nature as beginning with Morton’s witty advertisement. Columbus himself was at times almost distracted from his overwhelming desire to discover treasure (or to meet the Great Khan) by the transporting sight of trees whose green is “so intense that it is no longer green.” Indeed, as Todorov observes, “there is no end to the enumeration of all of Columbus’s admirations,” and the forms of beauty he encounters are everywhere a threat to worldly purpose of any sort: at one moment “the singing of the small birds is such that it would seem that a man would never willingly leave this place”; and again, in the report of Las Casas, Columbus “says that there was such a great pleasure in seeing all this verdure, these forests, and these birds that he could not bring himself to leave”; and again, most emphatically, “This was a thing so marvelous for him, to see the trees and the foliage, the crystal water, the birds and the sweetness of the places, that he said he . . . never again wished to leave the place.” The more he saw, the more he liked as well; so that Morton is not quite original in his discovery that pleasure may well compete with commerce and religion as enticements to emigrate.
Formidably a formalist, Todorov may be somewhat too interested in the “endlessness” of Columbus’ New World admirations, defining his interest as a signal instance of the esthetic as such. “Trees,” he suggests, “are Columbus’s real Sirens: in their presence he forgets his interpretations and his search for gain, in order to reiterate tirelessly what serves no purpose, leads to nothing, and so can only be repeated: beauty.” Static admiration is not the only feature of Columbus’s admiration of New World Nature, to be sure, but it may be the one that has the longest and most productive literary life, especially in the works of explorers and would-or-would-not-be settlers who seek not to transfer some preexistent interest to the American scene but to discover some powerful reason of removal within the scene itself. It may seem a little tendentious to reidentify Columbus, not as the harbinger of empiricist method, but as an exemplar of that yet more recent “rejection of interpretation constituted by intransitive admiration, the absolute submission to beauty, in which one loves a tree because it is lovely, because it is, not because one might make use of it as a mast for one’s ship or because its presence promises wealth.” But it remains cogent to suggest that Columbus may well discover, in the simple fact of pleasure, “a motive that has inspired all the great travelers, whether it was unknown to them or not.”

And, as the example of Columbus has a long history of echoes or uncanny repetitions, it will not do to overpraise Morton’s rediscovery of the prime motive to move.

The New England scene is not much like that of Columbus’ Asiatic Caribbean, but it would be hard to discover this fact from Morton; and this is only to specify what we learned from Howard Mumford Jones decades ago: we do not go to the literature of American advertisement for nicely differentiated descriptions of real and resistant landscapes. Not quite a projection of pastoral, perhaps, the evocation of the terrain of natural pleasure has, everywhere, only the most general contours: plentitude, intensity, availability. Tempting, no doubt, to all tempers but the puritanic, which has, Endicott-like, made a business to identify and resist naturalistic fantasy as such. Succumbing instead, it may be, to fantasies of history and theosophy, but all the more resistant to the lure of Nature for that very reason.

Similarly, the tendency of discovery reports and settlement propaganda to dissolve both observation and argument into a list of lists, aiming at an effect somewhere between numerical exhaustion and the ecological sublime, is already well established. The soldierlike—but also merchantlike—John Smith is everywhere less self-consciously poetic than the leisurely Thomas Morton, but it is im-
possible to read his account of the rich supply of Nature’s bounty, in Virginia and again many degrees of latitude north of the Tidewater, without sensing that even this unabashed booster is not immune to the poetry of the new place and its imaginable produce. Predicting Morton’s via media, Smith places New England at “the very mean betwixt the North pole and the line”; and teaching his successor not to impose too strict a set of political conditions, he earnestly stipulates that, had he “but means to transport a colony,” he would, “of all the four parts of the world[,] . . . rather live here than any where” (208–9). And though he introduces his many-stanza’d hymn to New World plentitude with social observations more worldly than Morton’s prediction of Thoreau—consider what an edifice of more than Spanish wealth the most peaceful Hollanders rear on the humble foundation of fish—the Song of the Someplace Else cannot long be repressed. 13

“First, the ground is so fertile, that questionless it is capable of producing any grain, fruits, or seeds, you will sow or plant”; even these “very hedges do naturally afford us such plenty.” “All sorts of cattle may here be bred and fed in the isles or peninsulas securely for nothing.” The famous New England cod abound in March, April, May, and half of June; and then “in the end of August, September, October, and November, you may have cod again to make cor-fish or poor-John.” (“Hake you may have when the cod fails in summer.”) And

mullet and sturgeon, whose roes do make caviar and puttargo; herring, if any desire them: I have taken many out of the bellies of cods, some in nets; but the salvages compare their store in the sea with the hairs of their heads; and surely there are an incredible abundance on this coast. (211)

And “furs of price” and “mines of gold and silver,” and woods in “plenty of all sorts,” and so forth, past all the limits of reason and on towards the very hungers of the imagination.

Interrupting himself, for a moment, to estimate the “gain” sure to be realized, Smith starts it up again, several pages later: waters “most pure . . . from the entrails of rocky mountains,” “herbs and fruits” to the length of another goodly list, and

eagles, grips, divers sorts of hawks, herons, geese, brants, cormorants, ducks, cranes, swans, sheldrakes, teal, mews, gulls, turkeys, dive-doppers, and many other sorts whose names I know not.

Whales, grampus, porkpisces, turbot, sturgeon, cod, hake, haddock, cole, cusk or small ling, shark, mackerel, herring, mullet, bass, pinnacks, cunners, perch, eels, crabs, lobsters, mussels, wilks, oysters, clams, periwinkles, and divers others, &c.
Moose, a beast bigger than a stag, deer red and fallow, beavers, wolves, foxes both black and other, aroughcunds, wild cats, bears, otters, martins, fitches, musquassus, and divers other sorts of vermin whose names I know not. (216)

Do I repeat myself? Very well then, I repeat myself: I do indeed contain multitudes; so much, in fact, that there is nothing to do but let it all out. And almost nothing for the critic to do, it appears, but repeat the repetition. Even as the lists tend to repeat themselves, in spite of an increasing need for sober critique, from one amazed beholder to the next.14

Searching for an emphasis to end the endless listing of lists, Smith can only suggest that Nature itself seems to require hearty consumers in New England, in numbers, and as quickly as possible; for all this plentitude does

here for want of use still increase and decrease with little diminution, whereby they grow to that abundance, you shall scarce find any bay, shallow shore or cove of sand, where you may not take many clams or lobsters, or both at your pleasure, and in many places load your boat if you please. (216)

And the same for isles and rivers, as it threatens all to begin again. To be sure, Smith is sober enough to confess that access to this luxuriant supply will require some work. Further, his emphasis on middle things is more steadily economic than geographic or meteorologic. So that his poems are human as well as natural, domestic as well as pastoral:

Who can desire more content that hath small means . . . than to tread and plant that ground he hath purchased by the hazard of his life; if he have but the taste of virtue and magnanimity, what to such a mind can be more pleasant than building a foundation for his posterity, got from the rude earth by God’s blessing and his own industry without prejudice to any . . . [?] (216–17)

A familiar religious motive begins to suggest itself at this point—the conversion of the “poor salvages” Morton declares to be rich enough. But if the goal is middle-class wealth, and the means are those well known to English virtue, the premise is nothing other than the poetic promise of Nature’s New World bounty.

It even appears that the tendency of pro-settlement tracts to lapse from the prose of surplus productivity to a poetry that presses to an intimation of Nature
beyond the pastoral may have become, by the time Morton had published his modest sally into the field of visionary economy, an occasion of parody. The possibility is certainly suggested by a moment of rare interest in the otherwise pedestrian *New England’s Prospect* by William Wood. Consciously meaning to correct the many false, perhaps dangerous impressions left by earlier writers, including Smith, Wood promises to stick to facts, to tell the truth about the place to which not a few readers might wish to voyage in fact and not merely in vision. And for a number of brief chapters—“Bays, Havens, and Inlets,” “Seasons,” “Climate,” and “Soil”—Wood is nearly as good as his word, to eschew the temptation to “voluptuous discourse” in favor of a “faithful relation of some few years travels and experience” (19).15 But then, in chapter 5, a harmless looking, *omnia gath-
 eru m* account of the “Herbs, Fruits, Woods, Waters, and Minerals” of New England, something rather curious happens, something gratuitously “literary,” which will happen several times more in the course of this expressly businesslike account, though never with quite the same sense of discursive paradox and rhetorical surprise.

Brief on the subject of herbs and waters, cautious on the matter of mines and minerals, Wood allows himself to grow expansive on the (Columbian) subject of trees. A long paragraph assures the prudential reader that nothing is lacking which worldly practice could possibly require. But then, as if only full specification could satisfy a certain class of readers, who need to know “what timber and wood of use is in the country,” Wood agrees to “recite the most useful as follows”: in twenty lines of iambic pentameter. Not a *great* poem, perhaps,16 but quite a surprising stroke under the circumstances, and full of diction and device that seem contrived to emphasize the established and steady tendency of nature specification to lapse into poetry. That the oak is “long-lived” may be a practical (if well-known) consideration, but why do we need to learn again the established poetic fact that the cypress tree is indeed “mournful”? Just so, the ash remains as “brittle” as everyone knows, but what purpose is served by the observation that the aspens are “ever trembling”? And while thus we wonder, the modest but needless verse becomes expressive indeed:

```plaintext
The knotty maple, pallid birch, hawthorns;
The horn-bound tree that to be cloven scorns,
Which from the tender vine oft take his spouse,
Who twines embracing arms about his boughs. (39)
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Taking next a plausible but unprepared-for turn to the fruits of these trees, the poem raises its own figurative stakes by calling all of wild New England’s
unregulated forest produce “this Indian orchard.” And with this utterly Thoreauvian reversal, we realize that poetry has indeed occurred.

Intent on its own oxymoron, the poem ends its account of what “it may be necessary for mechanical artificers to know” by assuring us that “The dyer’s sumac, with more trees there be, / That are both good to use, and rare to see.” “Rare” bears several senses, of course, but none of them implies a use more practical than some poem by Ben Jonson. But the boldest assertion—and nicest enactment—of the literary, in flat opposition to the announced dedication to the pragmatic, is nestled snugly, deconstructively, in the very center of the poem’s self-constituting list: “Small eldern” are indeed “by the Indian fletchers sought”; but they have to accompany “the water-spungy alder” which is in fact “good for naught.” Wood omits to observe that, in just-spring, the New England world is “puddle-wonderful” indeed, but we get the point no less: this Nature thing is just enough to turn a sober economic man poetical; and so the books come back to tell the news: the New won’t always say its sense in prose.

Assuredly, now, the Prospect goes on to repeat its genre-defining effect of breaking into measured verse in the midst of chapters full of needful information. “Quill-darting porcupines” introduce a few lines of verse that help to specify the “beasts that live on the land” (41–42). But then as if, once admitted, the need for natural enjoyment had begun to insist upon itself, Wood employs quite a long poem—“The princely eagle, and the soaring hawk”—to introduce an account of the “profit and honest pleasure” to be had from the “birds and fowl of both land and water” (48). And then, self-consciously, the “fish” are accorded a verse account that leads from the natural heroism of “the sea-shouldering whale” down to the social comedy of an Indian squaw who digs for clams “whereby her lazy husband’s guts she crams” (54). And then no more, for the three chapters that remain of part 1, on the country and its produce; and none at all for the twenty light-hearted but prosy chapters of part 2, on the physical appearance and the manners of the native population. Wood apologizes in his preface for treating the Indians in a “light and facetious style,” contending that “their carriage and behavior hath afforded more matter of mirth and laughter than gravity and wisdom” (20); evidently it would require the example of Morton to suggest that Separatists might be the true object of laughter; and, from another quarter entirely, that of Roger Williams to demonstrate that Indians can be the subject of poems.17 But a simpler point will suffice: Wood’s wit goes only so far; and not in all ways so far as Morton’s; but far enough, in all conscience, to notice that, again and again, at the site of discovery and praise of New World resources, poetry happens.
Less well prepared are the laws governing the literary treatment of immigrants who prove deaf to the poetry of American Nature and its natives and who, partly for that reason, mistreat settlers more sensitive. And this, finally, looks like the raison of the New English Canaan, as Morton worked out the logic of his own would-be Americanism. Brave critique might hold out for the staying power of Morton’s very own vision—or, braver still, for the expression of that vision—as such; but in the longer view, of histories, and classrooms, and anthologies, Morton survives as the most curious of Bradford’s many antagonists. Clearly Bradford dissents, if only implicitly, from the gathering consensus concerning the nearly self-sufficient appeal of landscape and ecology in the not uninhabited but not unavailable territory of New England; and so, with him and his not-quite-Separatist successors, one looks elsewhere for an original logic of immigration and settlement. The point, however, is not simple difference but confrontation; and that less over land than over ritual. The maypole is not just a tree. And it is on this ground, of more than available nature, that Bradford chooses to engage with Morton. Further, it is by winning there that Bradford wins the literary battle as, symbol for symbol, historical purpose has proven a more fertile premise than natural symbol.

One could say, of course, that Morton’s maypole is every bit as cultural as Bradford’s: that it, quite like the English prayer book, which Morton defends with equal vigor, signifies not Nature but the king’s right to order all the ways of his subjects on which Scripture is silent; this is, after all, Merry Middle Earth and, as his own “Book of Sports” had seemed to say, my English people must have merry middle things; by the power of my patents and charters my people may indeed migrate, but they must not think to reinvent themselves thereby; May Games remain, a sign less of fertility than of fealty. But such a critical claim, even when made by Morton himself, serves only to threaten the modest coherence of his book. Some of Morton’s rhetoric may charge Bradford’s Separatists with treason, but his best strokes identify them as spoilsports; and the logic of his chapters points to their inability to savor the appeal of the Indian Orchard they have invaded, to hear at all the siren song of Nature.

About as long as Books 1 and 2 together, Morton’s historical-satirical Third Book bears the full sense of validation—so much so that we may wonder if this “Canaan” would ever have been memorialized as such if Morton had not had a run-in with “the people who are planted there,” acquiring, thereby, some sense of “what tenets they hold, together with the practice of their church.” Christopher Gardiner and other like-minded English knights in search of American adventure may well have wished for a logic with which to counter the mounting conviction and deployment of some Puritan Errand, but this work was already being
done, quite well enough, by other hands; and Morton, if his own account is to be trusted, appeared to be enjoying his natural liberty too much to be encumbered by the arduous labor of making a book. Writing, he seems with Thoreauvian insouciance at first to imply, is “not what interests us.” But History, in the costume of Separatism, does indeed intrude on the little idyll of his own creation, as surely it does on the more fictional but more aggressively representative experience of the Lord and Lady of Hawthorne’s socially constructed “May.” Bradford and others go out of their way to make an example of Morton, and this fact, including, as it must, an offended but still humorous response, is our first intimation of the fact of Morton’s radical dependency. Aroused at last to writing—and protest how he may—Morton’s significance remains all but fixed, very near the point at which it found itself arrested. So criticism concludes that Morton was actually quite lucky to have made a literary enemy as powerful as William Bradford. Or else, less prejudicially, that Morton did well to write himself into relation to Bradford, without whose original and steady opposition he might have fallen even further from the center of our notice.

Relevant history—which for Bradford begins, long before the formation of a separatist church at Scrooby near Austerfield in Yorkshire, with the outbreak of Reformation, coupled, by some law, with a corresponding outbreak of persecution in sixteenth-century England, both in echo of what happened, long ago, at the beginning of the Christian era—begins for Morton with “a great league made with the Plymouth Planters . . . by the Sachem of [the] territories” (103). And then, before we find out who these Planters may be, or how their curious motives or various travels may have thrown them in the way of this great sachem, it moves abruptly to the arrival of “a company of servants” sent by a merchant named Thomas Weston “to settle a plantation there” (105). The uninstructed reader can tell that the “entertainment” of these sturdy good Englishmen, with “court holy bread,” by the settled group referred to only as “the Brethren,” was nothing but a “show,” hypocritical at the outset and prejudicial in the aftermath; but the exact identity of all these participants is a little mysterious. And we might ask ourselves what we would make of Morton’s report of Bradford’s “Brethren” if the Canaan provided our only account. Or if students of literary history were obliged to read it first—appearing in print, as it did, more than two hundred years before Bradford’s much-traveled Plymouth finally became fully public.

Significant uncertainties persist, even as portentous events now follow one another in profusion: a “battle”—puzzlingly said to be “between the English and the French”—the preparations for which the author sets forth in an invented “oration” about what a sachem has seen in a “vision”; a “parliament,” in which the
Weston group decides to put to death a man old and sick instead of the one who had actually committed an offense against Indian property; and a “massacre” of “salvages at Wessaguscus,” made not by Weston’s men, many of them admitted to be “lazy,” but by those increasingly nefarious “Plymouth Planters.” Some strategy there may be to this dizzying dose of action without prior characterization or employment, which we begin to sense only when, at the end of chapter 5, Morton proposes that

the savages of Massachusetts that could not imagine from whence these people should come, or to what end, seeing them perform such unexpected actions; neither could they tell by what name properly to distinguish them, did from that time afterwards, call the English planters Wotawquenange, which in their language signifieth stabbers or cut-throats. (112)

We know them, that is to say, not by their a priori declarations, however pious, but after the fact of their own first fruits. A nice point in the logic of moral identity, yet the risk turns out to be very great. Modern students, who do not like to hear of massacres, on either side, are more likely to accept the historical fact of bloody crime than the ideal possibility of heroic virtue, and thus they often look for ways to translate Bradford’s holy ends into worldly means; and those trained up as proper Marxists occasionally demand a more “material” account than Bradford provides; but no one with skill enough to read the idioms of seventeenth-century English ever responds to Bradford’s careful identification and placement of his group of holy-historical protagonists by asking, simply, “Huh?”

Now savage, now sly, Morton means to write satire rather than proper history, we readily conclude; and no doubt some coterie audience back in London needed no scorecard to know the names and numbers of all the players. Yet satire itself is one of the most historical of the literary genres we know enough to name, and any writer banking on the long-term reception of the values that validate his mockery can scarcely afford to leave his eventual readers too much on their own; or, worse still, to trust that the object of the satire will somewhere identify himself without at the same time creating an identity rather more subtle than the reductive one required by satire as such. What if some member of these “Brethren” should have the power to make good on exactly that claim to relational identity? To turn a term of polite scorn into the kind of strong value for which only the cynical manage utterly to lose respect? Unlikely, perhaps, as it might require nothing short of a sustained and convincing book to turn that trick; but you never
know. As satire is always of something specific, and as posterity must indeed be the judge, it seems unwise to presume too much on the steady tendency of Royalist prejudice: one man’s Cutthroat is another man’s Pilgrim.

With the arrival of “the Merchant” himself, in chapter 6, the basis of Morton’s opposition to the Brethren begins to be clear: receiving Weston with pretended “love and zeal,” they inaugurate a policy to which they will adhere consistently, blaming the savages for the misfortunes that have befallen his people and insisting, furthermore, that as they are “a dangerous people, subtle, secret, and mischievous, and that it is dangerous to live separated, but rather together, and so be under their lee” (113–14). Pretending Christianity, they mind the main chance of the beaver trade, slandering the natives in the process, whom Morton himself has found “more full of humanity than the Christians.” And to any who shall premise that “where two nations meet, one must rule and the other be ruled,” Morton lets it be known that, in New Canaan at least, the pro-Christian bias might well be set aside; for in his experience, “the more savages the better the quarter, the more Christians the worser quarter”; and, he thinks, “all the indifferent minded planters can testify” the same. And then, while the Merchant wonders whose country he has come to now, the “sharp witted” Brethren confiscate his ship and goods, threaten to return him as a prisoner to England, and even declare him mad. And so was it believed by “those that did not know the Brethren could dissemble”; for are they not, “all of them honest men in their particular,” and every one of them “bound to seek another’s good”? (115).

Stung by the force of this perfect anticipatory mocking of Bradford’s grandest claim, the instructed reader may find himself paging back through Bradford’s *Plymouth*—and even *Mourt’s Relation*—anxious to find a way to reconcile this version of the Weston story, some archival reason to split the difference. None readily appears and, momentarily at least, a bit of literary luster is lost. But then that is exactly the way the reading of Morton has to work: on his own he has accused some corporate Somebody of blatant hypocrisy, small and large. But unless we know the Bradford story in advance, we have no real idea of who is being taken sternly if perhaps fairly to task—or, if the thought happens to occur, whose fair reputation is being slandered. The simple fact is that Morton nowhere works hard enough to establish and adumbrate the identity he would challenge, the reputation he would mar. We cannot praise duplicity, and we guess there must have been some of that in New England, spoiling at the outset the rich possibilities of Canaan’s natural reinvention; but without Bradford’s full-dress Christian pretense, we have no real idea what ox is being gored.

Nor is this protohistorical account of brotherly deception and inhumanity much more cogently circumstantial when it comes (in chapter 7) to Morton’s own
“entertainment at Plymouth.” Lured there by “news of a Town that was much praised,” Morton seems satisfied enough with his “sallet of eggs in dainty wise, a dish not common in the wilderness,” but he is clearly upset when the (nameless) inhabitants of Plymouth seek to convince his servants that having their Master read from the Bible and “the book of common prayer” represents an altogether insufficient attention to the “means” of salvation; and he is especially irritated when this advertisement for the need of a plain and powerful preaching does “like the serpent . . . creep and wind into the good opinion of the illiterate multitude” (116–17), causing them to desire and then to plot ways of freeing themselves to join the holy community at Plymouth. Their plot—to desert this Master upon an island—is foiled by the Master’s superior wit, but we cannot be entirely certain whether the Master in question is Morton himself or someone of greater authority (such as the Captain Wollaston of Bradford’s account), and we are left wondering just what sort of liberty these would-be deserters hoped to find at Plymouth, especially as Bradford will hold that the real temptation was for his own servants to run off to Merry Mount. All we can say is that Morton has, without benefit of Bradford, his own countertheory of how the subtle serpent “insinuates” himself and that, telling quite different stories, both men appear to agree, with D. H. Lawrence, on the prime temptation of New World settlement: “Henceforth be masterless.”

By now it appears that the person who reads Morton without benefit of Bradford has pretty much to trust to his instincts, including his sense of style: Morton steadfastly declines to make plausible (or even to identify) his adversaries, so that we have no standard by which to measure his political or moral intelligence; sharing or not his wish to embarrass the very godly, we either enjoy his manner of insider satire or we do not. The instructed reader, on the other hand, can readily learn that there can be another side to many of Bradford’s stories, but he may have a hard time constructing a compromise version of what really went on in the years before the episode of the Maypole. And it will require of him an anti-Puritan bias at least as strenuous as Morton’s own to conclude that Bradford loses in the battle of who, what, when, where, and why. Bradford the steady (if biased) historian identifies, situates, explains, emplots; Morton the sometime satirist merely presumes his own wit.

Morton’s account of the careers of “Master John Layford [Bradford’s Lyford] and John Oldham”—even when the reader can tell which exactly is which—is so brief as to offer even the Puritan-hostile reader far less evidence against Bradford than he himself provides: both writers agree that the religious loyalty of these mysterious, oddly Melvillean drifters is to the religion of England; and both agree that the Brethren suspect them of being spies; but Morton’s account of Oldham’s
being forced to leave town between “a lane of Musketeers,” receiving “a bob upon the bum” (120) by every one, is far less damaging to the Puritan cause than Bradford’s confession of the Special Providence that led him to break into certain letters about to be carried back to England.27 And the story of “Master Bubble,” without any competing version in Bradford, continues to defy explanation. It gives Morton the chance to create a sort of independent “character”: “approved of the Brethren” and sent over to be “Master of the Ceremonies,” this mysterious personage commanded an oratory which could lull “his audience fast a sleep, as Mercury’s pipes did Argus eyes,” and once said grace “till all the meat was cold” (122–23). And—given the conscientious preservation of certain of Bubble’s possessions by the Indians he affected to distrust—it serves to raise again the (rhetorical) question of whether the savages “are not full of humanity” and not at all the “dangerous people [that] Master Bubble and the rest of his tribe would persuade you” (128).

This, then, is the context which the prior portions of the Canaan will provide for the chapters which, thanks to the (de)mythological power of Bradford, continue to express our determination to tell “the other side of the story”: temperate New England has all the appeal of another Canaan, whether the immigrant population shall approve this less-than-typological equivalence or not; the natives are altogether fit inhabitants of this rare and remarkable place, and their savage ways bid fair to embarrass the Civilized Men who might like to discredit or displace them; and evidently a certain falsely pious “Brethren” mean to do just that. Intemperate souls, dead to the appeal of place and people, their ways are almost entirely hurtful; yet their utter failure to fit the place where they have (somehow) arrived cannot altogether escape the mode of social comedy. And—Morton implies, trusting the established morale of an English party of church and court and king—we know who they are. Spoilsports, essentially.

And now, their predictable (though not quite intelligible) response to “the Revels of New Canaan.” About which, for once, Morton appears to wax full and explicit:

The inhabitants of Pasonagessit (having translated the name . . . from that ancient savage name to Ma-re Mount; and being resolved to have the new name confirmed for a memorial . . . ) did devise amongst themselves to have it performed in a solemn manner with revels & merriment after the old English custom, prepared to set up a maypole upon the festival day of Phillip and Jacob: & therefore brewed a barrel of excellent beer . . . with other good cheer, for all comers of that day. (132)
Innocent enough, this new English celebration, unless we regard the violence of naming. Yet full of cultural matters enough to keep Anglican and Puritan busy attacking one another for a month of Sabbaths: solemnity through merriment, indeed. What Morton chooses to defend first off, however, is nothing about the propriety of maypoles themselves, or of decorating them with “a pair of buck-horns,” or of covering their “country” significance with the fiction of a couple of minor saints, or of the survival of the Roman Catholic calendar in the properly Protestant Church of England, or of its projection into the wilds of New England; but something about the poem “fixed to the Maypole,” which “puzzled the Separatists most pitifully to expound” (132–33).

Eager to get on to that literary performance, we may well forget to wonder why the Brethren are now referred to, for the first time, as “Separatists”: have we come, at last, to a scene of religion and culture in which their separatism will express itself as such? And in which it begins finally to make anthropological sense? Nor will it help much to pause over the strategy by which the principal antagonist of these Separatists now begins to be referred to as “mine Host”: is this indeed someone else or merely Morton’s latest way of referring to himself as some subaltern third person? But somewhere between the actual response of Charles Francis Adams and the hypothetical one of Henry James, we give up and go on to the poem—not yet the insouciant “Io to Hymen” but the murkier “Rise, Oedipus” which, after ten couplets of mythological mishmash, ends with the ordinary enough proclamation “that the first of May / At Ma-re Mount shall be kept holiday.”28 Perhaps the meaning is that May Day will be kept in New England too, whatever the objections of the “precise separatists . . . at new Plymouth” (133–34).

But if the Separatists do not quite know what to make of the poem—which Morton, fallaciously or not, will go on to “illustrate . . . according to the true intent of the author of these revels” (136)—they have no trouble recognizing the maypole itself as “an Idol,” calling it “the Calf of Horeb,” or in (re-)renaming the place “Mount Dagon, threatening to make it a woeful mount and not a merry mount” (134). For once our authors agree: symbolists chiefly in the mode of typology, Puritans see Paganism everywhere.

Next, in this same (long) chapter 14, comes the famous little song—“Drink and be merry, merry, merry boys; / Let all your delight be in the Hymens joys”—which, fashionably, “was sung with a chorus, every man bearing his part; which they performed in a dance, hand in hand about the maypole, while one of the company sung and filled out the good liquor, like Gammede and Jupiter” (134). “Like so many fairies, or furies, rather,” Bradford will retort, “as if they had anew
revived and celebrated the feasts of the Roman goddess Flora, or the beastly practices of the mad Bacchanalians” (205–6). Bradford’s terse reference to “worse practices” may be homophobic, but to Morton this is nothing but the “harmless mirth” of young men living “in hope to have their wives brought over to them” (92). On the other hand, Morton’s invitation to “lasses in beaver coats” may lie behind Bradford’s charge that Morton’s men somehow “abused Indian women” but, though the language of the invitation may well be obscene, no “abuse” could ever be proved against him. Possibly Bradford thought it consisted in inviting them at all: Pagans they already were, he must have thought, by gift of American Nature; but perhaps they could be spared from participating in that miscegenation of religion by which the cults of the classical world had extended their weird half-life into the unreformed Church of England.

In the end, however, the surprising thing about the entire Maypole episode is not that Bradford and Morton represent its motives and effects so differently, but (as I have argued elsewhere) that Bradford’s response to Morton in the Plymouth is so unlike the one preserved in his earlier letters to England, explaining the reason of Morton’s deportation. Furnishing the natives with guns and rum might well constitute a clear and present danger, but the “foundation for a philosophical romance” lies elsewhere—in Endicott’s after-the-fact and indeed hysterical response to “the only maypole in New England”; and also, perhaps, in Morton’s (intervening) insistence, that the symbolic and ceremonious item in such a hot and heavy question is not only innocent but also, like the forms of the Canaan itself, quintessentially English. So that, even as Hawthorne implies, some choice of national identity may lie barely disguised in the choice of cultural heroes at just this point—the single point, it could be argued, where, adumbrating one another in about the same degree, Bradford and Morton come close to being dialogic equals.

Here, perhaps, but never again. For as Bradford marches on to the other occasions of triumph and then of sobering reversal that constitute his originary experience in, not Canaan, but an England made significantly new, Morton slides back into his status as running critic of the alien persons and uncouth events that seem, strangely, sadly, to possess a drive to success altogether foreign to his own most uncompulsive lifestyle. Unable to arrange any other comparably symbolic conflict, he manages only to carp and cavil for seventeen more chapters, ill satisfied with his marginal position but unable to command any other. And as he retreats, his manner becomes even more (annoyingly) literary than ever, as if in recognition that his only victories will lie in satire’s domain of reductive characterization and oblique allegorical naming. Bradford writes the will of God. Morton seems intent to make himself into a book.

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Identifying himself (rather than the maypole) as the supposed “great Monster” at Ma-re Mount, and still referring to himself as “mine Host,” Morton accuses the Separatists of something like beaver envy—out of which, and to embarrass any further attempts to “advance the dignity of the Church of England” (138), they set upon him at Wessaguscus, make him a prisoner to show that they are now “become masters and masterless people,” and reveal their inhumanity in making sport of a man who “meant them no hurt.” He escapes, by superior wit, but is pursued by “their grand leader Captain Shrimp” (140), who is anxious to restore his military honor. Taking eight men with him, he (Standish) and they become “the nine Worthies of New Canaan” (141), to whom “mine Host” surrenders so as to avoid bloodshed. For their part, the Nine Worthies despoil Morton’s plantation and, taking the (king’s) “law into their own hands,” order him “to be sent to England a prisoner”; when this cannot be immediately effected, they set him upon an island, where he is ministered to by the savages—“so full of humanity are these infidels before these Christians” (144–45). Eventually he takes ship for England, but “no man [there] being able to tax him of any thing,” he returns almost at once, to the great dismay of the Separatists, who “hoped they had been rid of him” (145).

But then, before he can go on with his second round of misadventures at the hands of these grim Inhumanists, Morton must reprise the occasions of his complaint—as if repetition could compensate for lack of sufficient motivation or even lucid explanation. And so we have “The Poem” which recaps (and attempts to mythologize) his recent trial and also “The Illustrations” which explicate the poem. Mock-heroic in their imputed villainy, the Ma-re Mount offenders appear, as Hydra, before Judges Minos, Eacus, and Radamantus, for whom identification is possible but not especially useful.30 Once again the Separatists play fast and loose with the laws of England and do not even live up to their own word; and once again the “beaver trade” is offered as the sufficient reason why the men of Plymouth regarded Morton as “a main enemy to their Church and State” (100). No one should conclude that Morton’s stylish but inept account is all false and Bradford’s plain-style presentations are all true. Indeed it is just possible—though past finding out—that the very reverse may be true. The point is simply that the losers, when they have the chance to write at all, have got to learn to write a better sort of history. Starting, in this case, with the prose.

Fourteen of Book 3’s thirty-one chapters remain after Morton has his final say about the matter of the Maypole, but they are often murky, mostly tendentious
when they are at all clear, and not always very funny. A newly arrived physician (Samuel Fuller) is said to relieve one unnamed patient “of all the wind he had” and Captain Littleworth (Endicott) “of a disease called a wife” (102). An unnamed minister, come over “to play the spy,” is himself “spied out” (103) by the great Joshua (Winthrop). Then, as if to show that this congeries of ad hoc and, by now, largely ad hominem vignettes really can go wherever it wishes, chapter 20 takes us back to the scene of deportation and the subsequent failure of the Separatists to have Morton discredited in England. Next, the newly arrived and endlessly self-important Littleworth is accused of “making warrants in his own name” and of needing to be reminded that the “godly” laws of Massachusetts are not to contain anything “repugnant to the laws of . . . England” (159); even with this protection, however, mine Host prefers to keep his distance and so refuses to join a general-stock arrangement for the beaver trade. Retaliating, Littleworth creates a pretext under which he can relieve Morton of his copious supply of corn but, trusting to his gun, this resourceful Host is able to feast “his body nevertheless with fowl and venison.”

Then, almost as an afterthought, this small personal triumph is moralized in a way that serves to remind us of the prior, less-than-legal-or-religious difference that separates him from the grim Separatists, namely, his sense of “the plenty of the country, and the commodiousness of the place affording means by the blessing of God,” of a place “so much abounding with plenty of food for an industrious man” (162). Do they not understand—Morton stops just short of demanding—that there is or easily can be plenty of everything for everybody in this land of more than milk and honey? Why this insistence on conforming to a Way so much narrower than the Spirit of the Place? The corn and the wine having been dealt freely to all, be, henceforth, a little less compulsive.

Even as we tease it out, however, this naturalistic reminder is lost in the mock celebration of an event which Morton may have known would tell definitively against him: “A great bonfire made for joy of the arrival of great Joshua surnamed Temperwell into the Land of Canaan.” Of course we cannot expect him to recognize the proper beginnings of a “Great Migration,” and the rules of his defeatist literary game prevent him from saying, in just so many words, “Governor Winthrop, complete with charter and quorum of a General Court”; but we, who know this newer story from other memorials, can instantly see the writing on the wall. Moral sense may favor, but criticism can do little to abet or extend, the momentary effect of Morton’s deconstructive protest:

What [!] are all the 12 tribes of new Israel come: No, none but the tribe of Issacar, and some few scattered Levites. . . . And here comes their Joshua
too among them, and they make it a more miraculous thing for these seven ships to set forth together, and arrive at New Canaan together, than it was for the Israelites to go over Jordan dry-shod. (162)

The last irony here is telling enough, but it cannot alter the facts—of a belief system powerful enough to motivate a mass migration and then to generate a history whose masterful repetition will impose itself on successive generations, including quite a few which will utterly reject its first religious premise. Indeed we may even feel tempted to read amazement as well as scorn into Morton’s satiric gesture. But if we should wish to alter his own “bottom line”—“Now you may think mine Host will be hampered or never” (163)—it could only be to say, “And marginalized too, as part of the same bargain.”

A proper court is promptly called and, caught this time in the “snare” of the “despised” Book of Common Prayer, Morton is judged worthy of a second banishment. Confiscating his goods and burning his plantation satisfies the powerfully augmented Separatists that “the habitation of the wicked [shall] no more be seen in Israel,” but it prompts the “harmless savages” to lament one more “inhumane deed” and Morton himself to remark that “The smoke . . . appeared to be the very sacrifice of Cain.” Then, as if to insist that typology is not his game, he quotes Epictetus and Cicero on the jests of fortune. He might have made a remark about “vanity,” but that too he leaves to his Puritan supplanters—to Anne Bradstreet, perhaps, mourning a fire of a rather different import. Yet if he withdraws to the margins of the text of godly letters, he will not quit the field of religion entirely: staring (in memory) at the ashes of his fallen outpost of English merriment, he calls upon “piety itself [to] add a voice to the bare remnant of that monument, and make it cry for recompense (or else revenge) against the sect of cruel schismatics” (164). Even if that pious voice will have to be entirely his own.

The rest may not be silence—indeed it may even be history—but it certainly is anticlimax. A more-than-Separatist hegemony being now established, nothing remains to the twice-ostracized Morton but to wreak the revenge of satire. For social comedy, see how the beaver trade has virtue to create a new gentry in New Canaan; for invective, witness the brutal punishment of Mr. Innocence Faircloth who, though an agent of Mr. Mathias Charterparty, had the blasphemous nerve to suggest “the Devil was the setter up of [the Puritan] Church” (112). Less well founded, a long chapter on “the practice of their church” begins with an attack on unlearned men (and women) as voices in the church; back in England, Morton may have got word of Anne Hutchinson, but he has certainly not noticed the influx, beginning in 1633, of a whole cadre of Cambridge-trained
intellectuals. A section on New England preaching tries to make fun of Puritan jargon and of the tendency to torture a text into a number of sections and subsections but falls flat for want of cogent examples. And a lengthy list of differences from established English creed and practice (178–79) might serve to confirm the suspicions of William Laud, but they will horrify only those who abhor religious divergence as such. Once again, outsider criticism has presumed entirely too much. And even the sympathetic reader may have to conclude that Morton has stayed too long at the fair.

Chapter 29 represents the political anxiety felt by the “Separatists”—who now include a large majority of conscientious persons prepared to deny they are any such thing—on the eve of Morton’s actual deportation. Chapter 30 briefly recounts the unhappy experience of Sir Christopher Gardiner at the hands of Master Temperwell (Winthrop, without his Joshua hat) and includes “the sonnet” in which Gardiner admonishes the “Wolves in Sheep’s clothing” to study their “own infirmities” and then “be mute,”

Lest great Jehovah with his power,
Do come upon you in an hour,
When you least think and you devour.” (185)

After which, in literary time at least, that Good English Gentleman “disposed of himself for England, and discovered their practices in those parts towards his Majesty’s true hearted subjects” (185), warning them against any plan to make a home in land which Nature made so rich. And a final chapter presents the serio-comic spectacle of Morton posing as Jonah—lodged a long and dangerous while in the belly of some poor excuse for a seagoing vessel, and then emerging at last, to issue a prophetic warning to his personal tormentors, who are also, not incidentally, the fatal corruptors of Earth’s Final Canaan.

The speech may be worth quoting at some length, for only so can we gauge what we may have lost—not, this time, by the inattention of literary historians, overcome by the cumulative power of Puritan self-definition, but by the failure of original criticism to make itself originary. Morton begins by instructing the captain of his ship of deportation to “tell the Separatists that they would be made in due time to repent [their] malicious practices”; as would this Captain Weathercock himself, come to think of it; but here Morton’s figurative language (of baskets and basket makers) and his syntax effectively inhibit the will to quotation. In the next moment, however, Morton’s prose turns clear enough to lodge its final protest and appeal:
A Costly Canaan

And now mine Host, being merrily disposed, having past many perilous adventures in that desperate whale’s belly, began in a posture like Jonas, and cried, Repent you cruel Separatists, repent; there are but 40 days; if Jove vouchsafe to thunder, charter and the kingdom of the Separatists will fall asunder; Repent you cruel Schismatics, repent. And in that posture he greeted them by letters returned into New Canaan; and ever . . . he was both heard and seen in the posture of Jonas against them, crying, repent. (188)

And more to the same effect: dramatic but mannered; admirable in sentiment but overconfident of audience and clumsy in persona; cogent but not inevitable because a little too simple.

We may sympathize with Morton’s feeling that “it is fitter for him to play Jonas in this kind than for the Separatists to play Jonas in that kind as they do” (188) and yet wish mine Host had cultivated, here and elsewhere, a little leaner, steadier prose, further from the redundancies of England’s putative “Renaissance” and closer to the order of “Early Modern.” Less formally, we may wonder why, if Morton’s piety has indeed turned serious, his appeal is to “Jove” in exactly the place where Gardiner had dared to name the great “Jehovah”: does he mean to imply that the true part of earthly religion is to be humble about the historic intentions of the One True God? Or does he mean to flaunt, once again, the pagan sources of his own eclectic religion? Or does his “Jove” refer only to that very earthly monarch named King Charles, more distracted, just then, than God himself, but more likely to intervene, in any event, in affairs of the English realm? The answer to this question—as to so many of similar historical overdetermination—is simply yes: Morton hates (and has reason to fear) the arrogance of history’s New Israelites and, though he may indeed hope for divine sanction, he looks for human solutions to historical questions. God may or may not be English, but Englishmen assuredly are; and Morton imagines only scornful reasons why those living in New England should constitute a separate case. And if you’ll only look for him, not “under your boot-soles,” but “at the next [English] market-town,” he’ll gladly pluck your ears and elaborate. Indeed he may even explain why, in the final line of this other-godly letter, he adopts a name antiquity gave Apollo rarely.32

Above all, therefore, we may wish for a better balance between mockery and knowledge. It might seem pedantic to insist, with Perry Miller, and as we regularly do to all our students, that the Puritans who begin to pour into Massachusetts Bay under the leadership of John Winthrop in 1630 are not so simply
“separatists” as Bradford’s group of doubly expatriated “Pilgrims”; but it is fair to notice that this is exactly the kind of subtlety the broad gauge of Morton’s satire is likely to miss; and this failure may stand for Morton’s more general inability to imagine that his enemies may have solid and sober reasons—for being in New England in the first place and for caring so passionately for who else might wish to establish a book-and-beaver enterprise in the same neighborhood. Morton’s implied audience distrusts, expects the worse of all who actively protest the hegemony of Old England. But one need not be a Puritan to detect a certain complacency within a too well established status quo that is religious and everything else at the same time; and critics of culture may feel free to demur and even to disidentify. Reformers can all be “cruel,” but sometimes the Separatists are right. And as to being “Schismatics,” that is exactly what the pope had thought of King Henry; and worse than that of Luther, who could do no other than stand his ground. Morton wants his fling with American Nature, and a friendly partnership with certain American Natives, but he wants his Merry England too. Which, unless it could be explained, there need not always be.

But Morton loses—to Bradford and his successors, all waiting silently in the wings of that exile drama we know as New England historiography—not because his values are English, or because his cultural loyalties are oddly mixed with a widespread European fantasy about the ur-state of American Nature, but because he obdurately refuses to think about who his enemies really are. Ridiculous in language and private manners but cruelly determined in pursuit of public policy, they seem altogether improbable, incoherent even. The Native Americans may be entitled to wonder, in the beginning at least, “Who are these guys?” but an English Author had better get a theory. And quickly, as these more-than-Separatists are about to set up a New World writing shop that will threaten to turn a delayed English Reformation into a proleptic American Renaissance. Overwhelming by volume but also by energy the literary output of all comparable colonial undertakings, they make their own venture seem in fact incomparable. Surely they must have, somewhere, some point. Did they separate with a view to making themselves absurd? Or migrate to New England on purpose to be cruel? Or was there not a project which some reasonable men might find worth the effort, if not of rational discussion, at least of explicit critique? But if there was, one cannot learn it from the deft but often opaque satire of Thomas Morton.

There is, of course, always the danger of giving one’s enemy too much credit, of entering too sympathetically into the spirit of his opposing thought: one’s reader might make the wrong choice of sympathy; indeed one might even convert oneself. It happened to Perry Miller. But, in a literary sense at least, this danger is no greater than that involved in merely positing the object and presuming the
standard of one’s satire. Morton’s Canaan has its moments, but even these depend to a large extent on knowledge we have from elsewhere. And if we have it from Bradford, who so patiently explains what the Separation was all about, we may well conclude that Morton’s satire, occasionally energetic but often elaborately obscure, is really an unwarranted simplification, an untimely shortcut. Not to oblivion, by any means, whatever Bradford might have wished, but to the margins of Bradford’s own page, and to the subplot of a story that can establish and discredit itself, well enough, all on its own.

Bradford’s more self-sufficient accomplishment needs its own chapter, of course, but a word or two about his relative standing may serve to complete the present perspective. Nothing further on his opposite but equal rendition of the Maypole; only on the spirit and premise of his own project. Made plausible, perhaps, only by his own steadfast account, that premise is most unlike that of Morton and of many other writers of early American literature as well. And we need to mark if not to honor that difference.

It may seem almost enough, given the generally useful distinction among “Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers,” to say that Bradford stands out as one of the very first English settlers of significant literary ambition. Not given to fantasy-at-a-distance, or to wholesome propaganda from the source, he wrote of his American place almost entirely as it appeared to a man who knows that history will scarcely excuse him to move again. His most peculiar situation in the world has been a long time unfolding, and there is nothing now to do but embrace it. And strongly encourage his fellow migrants to do the same. We cannot forget, of course, that Morton may well have intended to take his own final rest at Pes-

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Concealed in this apparently simple fact of life and genre, however, is a subtler difference between Bradford and most who went before and not a few who came after: Bradford expresses almost no interest in the land as such and—though it is naive to discount economic motives—he lends none of his considerable rhetorical power to advertising the richness of American Nature or the wealth it might be expected to produce. Trees almost seduce Columbus from the project of gold and emeralds; Smith and Wood recalibrate New World economics in favor of commodities that favor the middle class without ceasing to revel in their overlapping versions of the ecological sublime; Morton weds English Culture to the State of Nature. Lacking this well-publicized sense of “wonder” almost entirely, Bradford lives and dies by the Reformation: he has no prejudice against wealth as such, and the crucial “New Deal” of 1627 makes him a rich man; but he did not know before the fact that this would be so; and he learns to hate both the cattle market and the allure of land when they threaten to disrupt his particular Church, made up to look like a veritable Act of the Apostles and carried about like an Ark of the Covenant.

No one can now with a straight face say anything like “Ask not what your country can do for you” but, having had the rare good fortune not to know Camelot, Bradford dares organize his own purposes around the theme not of gain but of sacrifice. We cannot say for certain that he and his fellow Pilgrims were, in 1620, entirely proof against the pleasing if extravagant New World advertisements of John Smith and others, but he certainly chose to repress this consideration when he came, in 1630, to look back over his twelve-year sojourn in Holland and his ten-year experiment at Plymouth. Indeed Bradford might be thought to be replying to Smith and his whole tradition at just that critical moment of historical review. Not that he and his Pilgrims rushed to the New World headlong, expecting to suffer and probably die in the prosecution of utopian fantasy; but “Summertime, and the Livin’ Is Easy” is just the song he never did learn to sing.

Any move out of Holland would involve, he knew, a “change of air, diet and drinking of water [which] would infect their bodies with sore sickness and grievous diseases” (26); and the American option conjures an expectation of “savage and brutish men which range up and down, little otherwise than the wild beasts” (25). Some of the Holland group represent Guiana, in terms we recognize, as “rich, fruitful, and blessed with a perpetual spring and a flourishing greenness, where vigorous nature brought forth all things in abundance and plenty without any great labor or of man” (28). But an Anglo suspicion of hot climates prevails, and so the decision is for the northern parts of Virginia—more temperate and
not too close to the Church of England men already planted at Jamestown. And if the Brethren expected the regions around Hudson’s river to be as lush and fruitful as those around the Orinoco, nothing is said of this fond belief.

Further, when the Brethren represent themselves to the London merchants, who have the capital (and may yet find the wisdom) to fund a plantation made by cautious and not unruly Separatists, heavy emphasis falls on their courage and proven endurance. Anticipating no easy time of their American venture, they nevertheless expect to measure up. Unlike the quarreling men who seem to be making a mess of Smith’s Virginia, they are, by reason of the covenant at the center of their religion, doubly and trebly unified in mind and practice. Furthermore, given the remarkable experience in Holland, they are “well weaned from the delicate milk of [their] mother country, and inured to the difficulties of a strange and hard land”; also to the purpose, they are as “industrious and frugal . . . as any company of people in the world”; and so, most generally, “it is not with us as with other men, whom small things can discourage, or small discontents cause to wish themselves at home again” (33). A strong case, the merchants may well have thought, and from a fairly improbable source: one hardly imagined a separate sect could write so well.

Most memorable, perhaps, is Bradford’s justly famous but often misunderstood meditation on the aspect of land and reflection of mood at the moment of arrival. Written from the safety of 1630, when physical survival is assured, and ideological imitation seems to be publishing itself, Bradford can afford to make the prospect of 1620 as bleak as possible. The worse, indeed the better: for the degree to which a happy outcome seemed unlikely then is exactly the measure of the remarkable nature, perhaps even the miracle, of the success now enjoyed. And so Bradford lets it all come out, plain as any Puritan stylist might require, but sure of its power, not of “blackness,” exactly, but of a grim experimental realism thrown back in the face of Nature’s bland deceit and theory’s soft desire: a barely figurative “sea of troubles” behind them, they have, just now, no safe place to turn; not back to England or even to the ship, a May Flower most painfully misnamed in the gathering November and December of potential discontent;

[N]o friends to welcome them nor inns to entertain or refresh their weather-beaten bodies; no houses or much less towns to repair to, to seek for succor. . . . And for the season it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast. Besides, what could they see but a hideous
and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men—and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not. (61–62)

Leaving Thoreau to turn New England’s winter back into Morton’s summer, Bradford goes on with more to the same, deliberately dismal effect: the more desperate the “natural” condition—including, emphatically, the condition of physical nature itself—the greater the need, then, for only faith to save; and, not incidentally, the greater the evidence, now, that this faith indeed had saved.

One might go on, of course, to the starving time when, by Bradford’s self-conscious account, it was not the land but only God and a spirit of self-sacrifice that preserved any of them from the ravages of starvation and disease in the first New England winter. But by now the point should be clear: never a poet of plentitude, Bradford writes American literature under the sign of natural lack and spiritual longing—and of a religious project that may compensate the one by richly fulfilling the other. The choice of some region in “America” seems to have been conscious and deliberate, but Bradford is simply not interested in the attractions of the Nature that the literature of early American representation had draped with such allure. For this moment at least, the project of Reformation is vastly more important than any quality in the land. Repeatedly imagined as a yet unspoiled locus of Nature, and often inhabited as a place of actual refuge, Bradford’s New England is simply the scene where ancient Scripture may presently be enacted.

Adventure, wonder, even pleasure to the contrary, surely Smith speaks the implicit sense of whole choirs of “Discoverers” and “Explorers” when, expressing the gathered wisdom of the worldly wise, he stipulates that no “other motive than wealth will ever erect . . . a common wealth, or draw company from their ease and humors at home to stay in New England” (219). So comprehensive is this one brief sentence that the only question is deciding where exactly to lodge the emphasis. Not much given to indulge their “humors,” in plays or in dead earnest, the Pilgrim Brethren have been off from “home,” as they have told the merchant adventurers, for some time now; and “ease” never having been either their ideal aim or their actual condition, perhaps the economic challenge does not apply. But supposing it does indeed survive the Separatists’ collection of very special conditions, Bradford’s answer is ready to hand and very nearly explicit. It prefaces all the distress and potential discouragement that constitute the substance of Bradford’s account up to and including the landing and the starving time. Not in it for wealth—not even for that “esthetic” richness which elsewhere either grounds or disguises or distracts from the lust for king’s gold or entrepreneur’s cod and
beaver—Bradford expects to pay a very high life cost for his curious venture. Not ease but hardship, and no wealth except the rare satisfaction of doing right.

Bradford’s strong thematic claim comes early, just after his summary outline of what reformed churches do and do not look like, and just before he announces the formation of “two distinct bodies or churches.” Dropped as a dare to the cynical reader, it may also be read as an answer to Smith and all others who dream an America of natural richness. At first the conscious claim may seem all jargon, the kind from which a man like Morton must decently avert his gaze: awakened sinners shake off their yoke of antichristian bondage, and as the Lord’s free people [join] themselves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in all His ways made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavors, whatever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.

But then comes the differential boast, in the plainest possible English: “And that it cost them something this ensuing history will declare” (9). Whatever else you may have read, dear reader, expect the story of these pages to emphasize not disinterested pleasure or covetous gain but actual human cost; or, if gain should yet become the leading fact this history has to name, then turn away and read some other book.

To emphasize this daring claim is not at all to suspend economic suspicion or to forswear material analysis. Indeed Bradford’s text is everywhere full of financial detail; and—as Robert Daly has ably argued—Bradford is himself the first to notice that his express ideal of self-sacrifice in the name of holy community goes sadly unfulfilled. It is simply to notice that there is a thematic as well as a generic difference between Bradford and a whole host of wood ‘n’ water prophets. Accordingly, the interest in his narrative cannot concern the question of whether the Canaan place did or did not live up to a certain set of all but a priori expectations; it must concern, instead, the way a project hatched out amidst the complex politics of Old England—a plan “to live ancient lives,” perhaps—could be made to work within, perhaps even to create, a simpler politics in the New. And if it could not, whether any of the reasons for the failure might be called geopolitical. And it is to argue that, fair or not, the vague self-defeat of William Bradford’s hopes makes a more self-sufficient narrative—and marks the beginning of a story more fraught with consequences—than the final, perhaps brutal check handed to those of Thomas Morton.
But to say that Bradford thus marginalizes Morton is not to suggest that he in any sense destroys or obliterates him. Rather, Bradford puts Morton squarely in a place of an ancillary yet in some ways necessary paratext (pre-text, if one recalls that Bradford can have read Morton and not the reverse). More than that, perhaps, Morton may be lucky to have been put in just that place; for, given the difficulties we face in trying to read the *Canaan* all on its own—including the not insignificant problem of a decidedly premodern “style”—far more people seem to read Morton for Bradford’s sake than for his own gnarly and not quite hilarious reason. In any case, the American canon—and even the Puritanist project—is only the richer for the fact that Bradford’s long-arriving book inevitably points to its own critique, less well accomplished, but perched always at the margins of his own.

Nor should it be imagined that Bradford has the power to displace all books seeking pride and primacy of place. Some day, when we know what the project of an Inter-American literature would have to look like, or when we find a credible way to begin the national story itself with the Spanish in Florida or New Mexico, Bradford may slide toward the middle of a story beginning with Columbus and other discoverers but featuring the truly remarkable exploratory *Adventures* of Cabeza de Vaca, who also writes under the sign of “cost.” Sent to keep a record of an expedition bent on discovering whole cities of gold, Cabeza is forced, by a fortune barely recognizable as Providence, to rehearse instead the story of his bare survival and the nearly unbelievable tale of a cultural adaptation that gave him an odd but not dishonorable place in a set of native societies which kings and conquerors could scarcely credit. The cost is to his body, that is to say, but also to his ready assumption of national (and racial) superiority. Even more telling, however, is Cabeza’s account of the cost, to the natives, of colonial intrusion itself. This fundamental consideration is all but absent in Bradford, who imagines his project is altogether metahistorical; and it appears only intermittently in Morton, who harshly judges the Separatist supplantation but seems largely to overlook his own curious but not altogether innocent efforts at cultural miscegenation—as if an Algonquin people, full-time hunters and sometime farmers, were naturalists enough to grasp at once the symbolic sense of their worldly being in the erection of a maypole.

Bradford’s firm rejection of what Morton called Canaan bespeaks a foundational abstinence from the rare and remarkable pleasures of a wonderful place, abundant in supply if imaginative in form. Yet the finality of this refusal produces not the absence or the dullness of sensibility that Morton seems to have supposed but an astonishing fullness of another sort, also recognizable, perhaps, as imaginative in kind. Less heroic than Cabeza’s rare willingness to join and then
to speak for the autonomy of a native people scratching out what some might call a marginal existence at the edges of a most unforgiving landscape, Bradford initiates not the master narrative of European Man in America but only the lesser yet much denser story of British Zealots in New England. A literary story. A story of many books, all turning their attention not to a wonderful land or the strange persons living there but to worldly purposes of a God they seem always and never to have known; and to themselves who, apart from those godly purposes, they could not hope to know at all. Nobler projects are possible, no doubt, but none we see so fully written out. Godlier ways we are free to imagine, but godlier prose we are not to expect.