

HEIKE BRANDT, *Invented Traditions: Die Puritaner und das amerikanische Sendungsbewusstsein*. [Schriften der Forschungsstelle Grundlagen Kulturwissenschaft. Bd. 4] (N.P.: Verlag Karl Stutz, 2011), 292 pp.

“Uppon the first sight of New-England, June 29, 1638”

Hayle holy-land wherin our holy lord
Hath planted his most true and holy word
Hayle happye people who have dispossesst
Your selves of friends, and meanes, to find
some rest
For your poore wearied soules, opprest of late
For Jesus-sake

...
Come my deare little flocke, who for my sake
Have lefte your Country, dearest friends, and
goods
And hazarded your lives o'th raging floods
Posses this Country; free from all anoye
Heare I'le bee with you, hear you shall Injoye
My Sabbaths, sacraments, my minestrye
And ordinances in their puritye.

Thomas Tillam

Escaped from the house of bondage, Israel of old did not follow after the ways of the Egyptians. To her was given an express dispensation; to her were given new things under the sun. And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall; and, besides our first birthright—embracing one continent of earth—God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted. God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. ... Long enough, have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we can not do a good to America but we give alms to the world.

Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* (1850)

Intellectuals wince at the jingoistic rhetoric prevalent in American oratory, especially when unctuous politicians running for high office invoke lofty metaphors of the “Citty upon a Hill”: We Americans are a chosen people on an errand to bring freedom and democracy to the world. Thomas Tillam and Herman Melville—each in their own way and for different reasons—are no exception to this rule. In fact, their versions of manifest destiny embody these matters perfectly.¹

Much has been written on the topic in academic journals and monographs—at least since the Puritan “Errand into the Wilderness” (1956) was made famous in Perry Miller’s eponymous thesis. It has governed much of the historical discourse in the second half of the twentieth century before revisionist historians questioned its soundness.² Briefly, in his essay on the Puritan “errand,” the doyen of early American intellectual history postulated a fundamental difference between the Pilgrims’s exodus to New Plymouth and the migration of John Winthrop’s Puritans to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Pilgrims under William Bradford, Miller claims, “were reluctant voyagers; they had never wanted to leave England, but had been obliged to depart because the authorities made life impossible for Separatists. ... [T]hey did *not* go to Holland as though on an errand; neither can

¹ Thomas Tillam (*d. c.* 1674), a Baptist preacher and Fifth Monarchist, did not stay long in New England and eventually settled a community of fellow Saturday sabbatarians in Heidelberg (Germany).

² Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, Publ., 1964), pp. 1-25. The most prominent example of how Miller’s thesis fostered subsequent scholarship is Sacvan Bercovitch’s *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975). On the economic and political “push” and “pull” factors for emigration to New England, see David Cressy’s *Coming Over: Migration and Communication Between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987). On the quest for pure religion as the principal reason for joining the Great Migration to New England, see Virginia DeJohn Anderson’s *New England’s Generation: The Great Migration and the Formation of Society and Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), pp. 37-46.

we extract the notion of a mission out of the reason which, as Bradford tells us, persuaded them to leave Leyden for ‘Virginia.’” Conversely, the great migration of the Puritans under John Winthrop, Miller continues, is a horse of a different color: The Massachusetts Bay colonists were not just adventurers questing for economic opportunities in the New World, but “an organization of immigrants” with “a positive sense of mission”; they were either “sent on an errand or it had its own intention, but in either case the deed was deliberate. It was an act of will, perhaps of willfulness. These Puritans were *not* driven out of England,” Miller insists, because “thousands of their fellows” remained behind and opposed Charles I; those who went to America left “on their own accord.”³

As is well known, Miller grounds his thesis on John Winthrop’s lay-sermon “Modell of Christian Charity” ostensibly preached aboard his flagship *Arbella* upon the fleet’s departure from Southampton in 1630. It has become the “Ur-text” for American exceptionalism and the much-touted “Citty upon a Hill”—patriotic tropes perennially summoned at Presidential inaugurations and political rallies. Ironically, if Winthrop’s “Modell” is indeed such a foundational document in the Puritan exodus to America, none of his contemporaries—not even those on board of the *Arbella*—mention they heard him deliver the sermon nor refer to it in their private or public communications, but once. As Winthrop’s distinguished biographer, Francis Bremer, points out, the only extant reference to the sermon is that by the English nonconformist minister Henry Jacie, or Jessey (1603-63), who in a letter to John Winthrop, Jr., (c. Feb. 1635), requested “copies of a number of papers relating to the colony, including ‘the Model of Charity.’”⁴ More telling, Winthrop, Sen., himself does not mention this document or speech in his own *Journal* (1630-1649) or correspondence—neither does John White, in his *Planters Plea or the Grounds of Plantations*

³ Miller, *Errand*, pp. 3, 4 (*italics added*).

⁴ Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America’s Forgotten Founding Father* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), pp. 174, 431 n3. For Jessey’s letter, see “Henry Jacie to John Winthrop, Jr.,” *Winthrop Papers III, 1631-1637*. Edited by Allyn Bailey Forbes (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1943), 3:188-89.

Examined (1630), nor Edward Johnson (both passengers on Winthrop’s flagship *Arbella*), in his *Wonder-Working Providence* (1654), nor William Hubbard, in his *General History* (wr. 1682; publ. 1815), nor Cotton Mather, either in his famous biography of Winthrop or anywhere else in his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) for that matter, nor Daniel Neal, in his *History of New-England* (1720), nor Thomas Prince, in his *Chronological History* (1736), nor Thomas Hutchinson, in his *History of the Colony of Massachusetts* (1764). In fact, the only extant copy of Winthrop’s “Modell” is a manuscript fragment (not in his own hand) apparently circulated in England *before* his departure to New England.⁵ However, the documents that *were* cited (and reprinted) several times in Winthrop’s time and thereafter are John Cotton’s *Gods Promise to His Plantation* (London, 1630) and *The Humble Request* (London, 1630); the former, a farewell sermon preached in Southampton to Winthrop’s departing fleet; the latter, an apologia (attributed to Rev. John White), addressed “To the rest of their Brethren, in and of the Church of England,” dated “From Yarmouth aboard the *Arbella*, April 7. 1630,” and signed by Gov. John Winthrop and several other Puritan leaders.⁶ Arguably, then, Perry Miller’s grand

⁵ *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630-1649*. Edited by Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1996), p. 2, n 11; Bremer, *John Winthrop*, pp. 174-75, 431, n 4. Internal evidence from the “Model,” in which Winthrop refers to “here in England” (“Modell of Christian Charity,” in *Winthrop Papers II, 1623-1660*. Edited by Stewart Mitchell [Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1931]), 2:282-95 (quote appears on p. 287), indicates that it was most likely delivered before his departure. See Hugh J. Dawson’s perceptive article, “John Winthrop’s Rite of Passage: The Origins of the ‘Christian Charitie’ Discourse,” *Early American Literature* 26 (1991): 219-31. Bremer credibly argues that it was delivered in Southampton’s “Holy Rood Church and on a lecture day” (pp. 173, 431-32, n 9).

⁶ *The Humble Request* (London, Printed of John Bellamie, 1630), p. 10. In Mather’s time, this apologia was incorporated in the manuscript of Hubbard’s “General History” and subsequently reprinted in Boston (1815, 1848), pp. 126-28. Cotton Mather gives an ex-

thesis founded on Winthrop's "Modell" bears little resemblance to the regard (or rather disregard) Winthrop or his contemporaries were paying to this document. In fact, the manuscript fragment was completely forgotten and was not printed until more than two hundred years later.⁷

Much the same objection has been raised against Winthrop's trope "a City upon a hill,"⁸ a biblical metaphor adapted from the Sermon on the Mount (Matth. 5:14) and frequently associated with the celestial "New Jerusalem" (Rev. 21:2) in Puritan eschatology. Come the millennium (so the argument goes), this shining city of God would come down from heaven, and Christ would govern his saints for a thousand years from his base in America, most likely from Puritan Boston.⁹ After all, did not Cotton Mather explicitly say so in his *Magnalia Christi* (1702) and in his *Theopolis Americana* (1710)? As a matter of fact, he did not. By now versions of this pious myth proliferated in the scholarship since the 1970s are so entrenched in our national mythology that no matter how carefully historians have contextualized evidence to the contrary, this venerable legend remains as American as apple pie. Ironically, these biblical metaphors were hardly unique in the homiletic literature of the time. Francis Bremer and several of his predecessors have shown that "Matthew's images of a city on a hill, lights, and candlesticks were widely employed in Winthrop's England."¹⁰

tract of the apologia, in *Magnalia* (bk. 1, ch. 5, p. 20, § 2); and Thomas Hutchinson reprints the short apologia as the first item in his "Appendix" to *The History of the Colony* (Boston, 1764), pp. 487-89.

⁷ It was first published in the *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*. Third series (Boston, 1838) 7:33-48, and since then more often anthologized than most other documents in American literature.

⁸ Winthrop's "Modell" (Winthrop Papers 2:295).

⁹ For a detailed listing of historians who identify Boston with the millennial New Jerusalem and Winthrop's city upon a hill, see Reiner Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus": The Eschatological Limits of Puritan Typology in New England," *New England Quarterly* 63.3 (1990): 390-93.

¹⁰ Bremer, *John Winthrop*, p. 181, cited several examples; see also Theodore D. Bozeman, "The Puritans' 'Errand into the Wilder-

These metaphors were, indeed, so commonplace in Elizabethan and Jacobean sermons that even John Cotton's closing admonition reminded those en route to Massachusetts, "be not unmindfull of our *Ierusalem* at home, whether you leave us, or stay at home with us."¹¹ In short, when Winthrop invoked in his "Modell" the (by now) famous comparison, "wee must Consider that wee shall be as a City upon a Hill" (295), he intended no more than his clerical colleagues did in the Church of England who warned their parishioners that the church, like "a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matth. 5:14, *KJV*), stands exposed to God's wrath. That Winthrop employed this reference in the same, essentially *negative*, context as it appears in Matthew's gospel is fortuitously forgotten.

To be fair, why should such metaphoric niceties matter? It is perhaps one of those ironies frequently encountered in history that horizons of expectations which reverberate among one generation and in one age accrue radically different meanings in another but are projected back in time as so-called foundational myths. After all, it is a truism by now that we reinvent the past in our own image when old answers become trite and lose their potency, or when new conditions demand revisions of old myths to justify a present expediency.¹² Such, then, is the topic of Heike Brandt's *Invented Traditions*, a 2011 doctoral disserta-

ness' Reconsidered," *New England Quarterly* 59 (1986): 231-51, and his *To Live Ancient Lives*, ch. 3; Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989), esp. 72-73; Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus," pp. 357-61.

¹¹ John Cotton, *Gods Promise to His Plantation* (London, 1630), p. 18.

¹² See, for instance, Bruce Tucker, "The Reinterpretation of Puritan History in Provincial New England," *New England Quarterly* 54.4 (1981): 481-98, who demonstrates that when the Act of Toleration (1689) and Massachusetts' Second Charter (1691) irrevocably established religious toleration as the new imperial policy, New England's divines rewrote the history of their conflict between Puritans and Anglicans as a divinely ordained plan not only to establish a refuge for dissenters in the New World at the beginning of the seventeenth century but also to promote "an Anglo-American Protestant union" at centuries end (482).

tion under the direction of Prof. Dr. Klaus P. Hansen (Universität Passau) published in the series *Schriften der Forschungsstelle Grundlagen Kulturwissenschaft*. Brandt's *Invented Traditions* explores the changing fortunes of well-known religio-political tropes in American primary and secondary literature over a period of 300 years.

In six chapters carefully crafted and amply documented, Brandt traces the biblical concepts of "Spiritual Israel" as a "covenanted people" under God on a westward "errand" to bring the light of Christian civilization into North America's wilderness. As is well known, this medieval theme of *translatio studii et imperii*—celebrated in George Herbert's poem "The Church Militant" (1633)—attained new life in the homiletic literature of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. It became a pervasive trope in American sermons, histories, political speeches, and epics from the colonial period to the present. In fact, its adaptations reverberate in Tillam's doggerel and Melville's antebellum novel just as much as it does in the post-Obama era, when star-struck voters once again are to make up their minds about which candidates' hyperboles are best suited for the White House. To be sure, Heike Brandt's monograph is not concerned with the validity of America's founding myths nor their historical accuracy as much as she surveys how they were rewritten and adapted over time. Moreover, Brandt also provides a running commentary on these issues based on the prevalent historiography since the 1950s. *Invented Traditions*, then, is not a contribution to revisionist scholarship in as much as it provides a useful foundation for those unfamiliar with the debate.

In her first two chapters, Dr. Brandt delineates the concepts of Calvinist "Auserwähltheit und Sendung" as they were applied to the Church of England as a whole on the eve of the great migration to North America. The Reformed among the Protestant churches, as is well known, allegorized the "Israel-Paradigm," God's covenant with literal Israel, and transferred it to themselves as God's "Spiritual Israel." Both Separatist and Puritan Non-conformists seeking refuge in New England identified their cause with that of the apocalyptic "woman fleeing into the wilderness," the latter-day remnant of "Visible Saints," for whom God had prepared a hiding place (Rev. 12:6) in the New World. Yet contrary to modern adaptations of this prophesy, neither

group envisioned a permanent settlement in America, let alone claimed that New England (or America) would be the locale of Christ's New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2), his capital and seat of judgment during his thousand-year reign on earth. At best, they aimed at setting up a "primitive church" on the model of the pure teachings of the first-century Christian church to set an example for the churches of Europe. Besides, seventeenth-century millenarians looked toward Jerusalem in Palestine—not America—for the unfolding of Christ's terrestrial reign.

Chapter three "Entstehung einer protestantischen Geschichtsphilosophie und ihr Einfluss auf Konzepte der Auserwähltheit und Sendung bei den Puritanern" is an excursion into the history and evolution of the doctrine of millennialism, the belief in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and his thousand-year reign, from St. Augustine's "a-millennialism" (Christ's spiritual indwelling in the heart of the faithful) to the eighteenth-century idea of "post-millennialism" (Christ's return at the end of a progressively improving earthly society). More to the point, Brandt also covers in this chapter the controversial exclusion of the American hemisphere from the blessings of Christ's reign. An influential English millenarian, Joseph Mede had conjectured that Christ's kingdom would be confined to the boundaries of the ancient Roman Empire in the Old World, whereas America would be the apocalyptic locale of outer darkness, the place of the devil and the damned. How this rejection of the New World rankled American Puritans and their millenarian descendants until the Second Great Awakening is sketched in this chapter just as much as the arguments of the principal combatants in this erstwhile debate.

"Die heilsgeschichtliche Verortung Neuenglands," "das Israel-Paradigma," and "Republicanism" as formulas of collective identity in the political homilies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are the focus of the fourth through sixth chapters—the showpieces of the book. Here Brandt elucidates how New England's clerics responded to the tide of Puritan reverse migration during Cromwell's Interregnum by redefining the avowed purpose of their errand in terms of missionizing Native Americans. When the introduction of the Half-Way Covenant (1662) failed to adequately address the declining admissions to full church membership, the ministers touted

the piety of the first generation as the gold standard from which the rising generation had fallen. The devastations of King Philip's War (1675/76) were hailed as God's punishment for communal backsliding, and the clergy countered with an avalanche of interminable jeremiads (the time-honored "carrot-and-stick" approach) to redress New England's depravities. The Glorious Revolution (1688) and the Toleration Act (1689) both strengthened the bonds of New England's identity even as it curbed the power of the de facto state church. When itinerant preachers triggered massive revivals and impromptu conversions during the First Great Awakening (1735-43), Arminian New Lights battled with conservative Old Lights and expanded the covenant to include members on the sole bases of pious conduct and moral behavior. The turmoil of the French and Indian War (1756-63) triggered yet another widening of the church doors: God's covenanted people and their errand into the wilderness were stretched to their limits by including all faithful and morally upright Americans in all colonies as long as they were Protestants and prepared to rise against the Roman Catholic Antichrist in French Canada. If God's original covenant excluded all but his Visible Saints on their errand to worship him in liberty of conscience, then the Stamp-Act

crisis (1765/66) leading up to the American Revolution prompted yet another redefinition: the intrinsic rights of the American colonists to freedom, liberty, and property were safeguarded by nothing less than the Magna Carta, and the English Parliament's endeavor to curtail these civil liberties was tantamount to a breach of contract between George III and his erstwhile American subjects. In short, the tropes of God's New English Israel and their errand into the wilderness proved concepts pliable enough to be reconfigured and reinvented as the need arose. In the filiopietistic rhetoric of America's civic and ecclesiastical leaders, they still resonate when citizens are called upon to go to the polls.

Aside from the missing index and inconsistent collation of footnote references and bibliography, Heike Brandt's *Invented Traditions: Die Puritaner und das amerikanische Sendungsbewusstsein* is a lucidly written and well-documented survey on identity formation in American homiletic literature. If its contribution to this by now dated debate is diminished by the want of an original thesis, *Invented Traditions* is, nonetheless, a reliable guide to the scholarship on the Puritan errand since the 1960s.

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