

SARAH TRYPHENA PHILLIPS LECTURE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

## The Winthrop Variation: A Model of American Identity

SACVAN BERCOVITCH

*Harvard University*

IT IS A GREAT HONOUR to be here. I assume that I owe this privilege to the work I've done on New England Puritan rhetoric and its legacy to the American Way and I've taken the occasion, accordingly, to reconsider the premises behind my work. My concern is with method and approach, with the assumptions implicit in the ways I've tried to link literary and cultural analysis. But since this subject is a broad one—since moreover I'm uneasy with abstract speculation—I will limit my focus to a particular piece of rhetoric, John Winthrop's proclamation of the City upon a Hill. As all Americanists know, this piece of rhetoric comes from 'A Model of Christian Charity', the lay-sermon that Winthrop delivered in 1630 on board the flagship *Arabella*, on the Atlantic Ocean, setting out the terms of settlement for the new colony. Over the centuries his proclamation—'we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of the world are upon us'—has established itself as a national icon in the United States. Indeed, the address itself may legitimately be called a cultural key-text. I speak not only of academic curricula but of established practice and creed. The procession of references and allusions to Winthrop's 'Model' runs more or less unbroken from colonial times to our own, and through all forms of discourse, from protest poetry to presidential orations. His projected City, beacon to the world, has become a commonplace, a cliché, a formulaic (and unfailingly effective) image of national purpose.

How and why did this happen? I mean to highlight the *problem* this involves by my title, 'A Model of American Identity'. The model American here stands for a transparently made-up concept of nationality; for a set of beliefs that has often been challenged and revised; for a vision of community

*Proceedings of the British Academy*, 97, 75–94. © The British Academy 1998.  
Read at the Academy 23 October 1997.

that has repeatedly been shown to falsify or conceal the actual course of history—and yet a concept, a set of beliefs, and a vision that have emerged over the course of history as a very entrenched, very coherent political and economic system, along with demonstrably very successful techniques of persuasion and incorporation. Those techniques derive from a variety of sources, among which the New England Puritan source has remained a constant connective. So the question is: what does that connective tell us about the cultural work of rhetoric? And more ambitiously: what are the advantages it offers as a model of literary and cultural criticism?

It's a question both of practice and of theory: on the one hand, a certain seventeenth-century text; on the other hand, a general approach to literary and cultural study. I would like to join the two by way of a familiar analogy. Theorists of all kinds have made the game of chess a standard trope for linking particulars and generalities. Chess, says Ludwig Wittgenstein, is how we think and speak. Chess, says William James, tells us how human beings, all of us, make choices; Georg Simmel claims that it's a mirror of all institutional structure, anywhere, any time. In poetry and fiction, from time immemorial, chess is the game of life.

Let me ask you, then, to think of chess as a model of literary and cultural studies.<sup>1</sup> And within this model, think of Winthrop's address, his 'Model of Christian Charity', as a test-case: a certain set of moves in a vast transatlantic chess game. I cannot assume that all of you will have read the text lately, but I think you'll find its contours familiar enough to follow my analysis. Basically Winthrop drew up the sort of social blueprint we might expect from a tough-minded Puritan idealist. His Model calls for a civic order compatible with a company of Christian believers: moral behaviour, legal decencies, economic reciprocity, proper deference in church and state, due regard for the spirit. All this, as I said, is couched in more or less familiar terms—and yet with a decisive turn in language and substance, a turn so sharp and compelling as to make it an abiding cultural legacy. Call it the Winthrop Variation.

Now, a variation in chess, like a variation in any other game, including the games of rhetoric, is a move that opens a new set of possibilities within the standard rules and regulations of play. It's a function in context. We say a variation is brilliant not because it transcends the game—not because it reaches to some higher realm beyond the rules—some world elsewhere of free play—but just the opposite. It's brilliant insofar as the variation stems

<sup>1</sup> I have outlined this approach in several essays, including 'Games of Chess: A Model of Literary and Cultural Studies', in Robert Newman, ed., *Centuries Ends, Narrative Means*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 15–58. My notes to this essay (pp. 319–28) document the allusions in this lecture to chess history and to the various uses of the chess analogy. I am grateful to Peter Brown and Rosemary Lambeth for their hospitality and to thank Frank Kermodé and Tony Tanner for their helpful remarks.

from, and thus leads us towards, a deeper sense of how the rules work. In this sense the variation is a model for analysing both the cultural work of the text and the literary fabric of culture.

Consider now the following proposition: 'America' is a rhetorical figure that designates a distinctive social-symbolic system as 'chess' designates a game with distinctive rules. To understand what a chess piece signifies is to engage in concrete and particular questions. For example: in what directions can the knight move? And under what circumstances? So too with America: it points to a dream of absolutes—freedom, opportunity, the good society—but we don't know what *these* abstractions signify unless we understand the function and context of the rhetorical pieces that make up this *particular* dream. This holds true as well for Winthrop's city on a hill. It may sound like a universal abstraction, but it turns out to be a universal with historical rules. It cannot stand, say, for a vision of tribal unity, like Jerusalem of old, or for a feudal ideal. *This* city comes down to us as a certain cultural artefact, an integral part of a national legacy, a key to the social-symbolic game through which the United States has usurped the meaning of America. As for the rules of that game, they involve the reciprocity between: (1) the norms of a certain way of life, associated with capitalism and modernisation; (2) an ambiguous territory, simultaneously confined to the United States, identified with the New World, and defined as boundless; (3) certain strategies of socialisation, rooted in the marketplace and ranging from religious multi-denominationalism to academic multi-culturalism; and finally, (4) certain symbolic structures, such as those inscribed in the City upon a Hill.

How and why did Winthrop's 'Model' become a key player in this game? What does this particular chess-piece signify? One answer is technical and practical, formulated from within the game as we now play it. The knight moves in such-and-such prescribed ways. The city on a hill radiates a certain specifically modern set of promises. Of course, there's plenty of room for ingenuity in expressing these promises: consider the complex negotiations potential in the reciprocities I just mentioned (territory, economy, forms of life) and of the extraordinary potential of language to convey that complexity. Like an effective strategy in chess, an effective social symbology opens up a variety of possible moves in any given situation. But they are rule-bound combinations, performed by rule-bound pieces. They apply to any chess match at any time or place.

This is the traditional application of the chess analogy. As a model for examining texts in context, it derives from the social sciences. The system dictates the moves. It's a view that depends on systematicity—which is to say, on a concept of the game from within, as an inherited set of rules. I would call this the short view of chess. And I've rehearsed its premises in order to contrast it with another, historically-oriented set of premises, what may

properly be termed the long view of chess. For historically considered—as a game whose origins have not yet been recovered, and whose development spans some three thousand years and all corners of the globe—historically considered, chess is the most unstable of systems, the game of chance and change par excellence. Of all games, it's the one most susceptible to the vicissitudes of time and place. That long view is what I mean to convey: chess in all its bewildering trans-national, inter-cultural, multi-linguistic diversity: *the game of chess, as distinct from just modern chess—chess, that is, as a model of linguistic and cultural volatility.*

This use of the analogy is counter-conventional, perhaps counter-intuitive, but I hope you can entertain it for an hour. It's the best image I've found (particularly in its reversal of the traditional, systemic image of chess) for expressing the approach I took to the matter of New England. The particular advantage of studying 'America' for me was its transparently fictive quality and the relatively recent period of its creation. What fascinated me was the extraordinary prospect this offered for explaining the process of cultural formation. To study the history of the rhetoric of America is not to see the power of a tried-and-tested system. It is to watch step by surprising step the growth of a modern, text-based symbolic system-in-the-making.

How could we pose the question of the knight's function in these terms? Well, we would have to begin at the point before the knight came into play, in the territories of what would become the United States before the United States became America. Imagine chess, then, as a game with knights, bishops, rooks, and queens, in which there were once no knights on the chess board; in which for that matter there was once no chess board; and in which rooks and bishops had many other names and shapes, designating an astonishing variety of functions. That's the long view, chess historicised. As for the queen, it's pertinent to my argument to note that she entered the game rather late in time and that she was declared (what we now know her to be) the dominant figure on the board only in the 1490s, the Columbus era, somewhere in Isabella's Spain.

In sum, the value for me of the chess-analogy is that, without at all denying the importance of the rules—indeed, while highlighting their importance (for to speak of chess is *ipso facto* to invoke rules and regulations)—the long view of the game nonetheless sets the main emphasis on agency and process. For my purposes, chess is a model of the shifting sands of culture on which we build our houses of rhetorical absolutes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> It may be well to note that this is not a polemic against universalism. My concerns are limited to literary-historical issues, and I'm well aware that such limits themselves suggest, if only by contrast, a realm of experience that lies outside the scope of games altogether—a dimension of the universal which may be foundation in some pre-ludic sense, and which may even be said to influence the play of text and context.

The question of the knight here is a problem in symbolic transformation. Consider first the current scene, the game as we know it. 'American', understood as a figure of identity, is the great modern instance of the rhetoric of nationality. Its range of moves is emblazoned in its official logo, 'out of many, one'; and the effectiveness of its strategies is documented in the processes by which such risky catchwords as 'individualism', 'independence', 'revolution', and, nowadays, 'subversion' have been made a summons to conformity. And yet, only three hundred ago, 'American' meant a heathen savage or else the hemisphere at large, North and South. Like the game of chess as we now play it, the current figure of 'America' represents a dramatic transformation of meanings which, however, has drawn perforce on many earlier models of meaning. One of these, a persistent and influential one, is the model of Christian charity.

I have in mind both the general model and Winthrop's distinctive variation on it. In either case it involves both literary and cultural issues—the rules of expression that Winthrop had at his disposal in 1630, and the rules for authority and control (legal, social, economic) with which he had to contend. I treat these forms sequentially in the course of my talk, but I hope it will become clear that each is a function of the other.

The literary rules for Christian charity may be briefly summarised. We might call it the incarnation-game. The model of Christian charity is Christ. The participants agree upon a common game-plan: namely, a double reality, material and spiritual, which is paradoxically one. The goal of play is to make the paradox visible, while at the same time to maintain the qualitative difference between material and spiritual realities, as between Caesar and God, death and life. Broadly speaking, two kinds of moves are allowed. These are usually described as horizontal (in and of this world) and vertical (connecting heaven and earth). No doubt this description took hold because the linear-vertical intersection is a picture of the cross. Let me alter the picture somewhat to fit the game of chess. Think of two different chess pieces: first, the bishop, which moves only in a diagonal direction—let's say, the line that connects heaven and earth; and then, the rook, which moves only in straight-linear directions (lateral or up-and-down)—let's say, directions in and of this world, denoting varieties of social ranks. Augustine called these worldly directions the realm of linear time (as opposed to the view of eternity granted to those bound by charity in Christ), and following that tradition I will speak of the rook's move as linear. Linear, then, rather than horizontal; and diagonal rather than vertical. It's the picture of an angle, not a cross; or of the cross at an angle. I hope this slight change will seem neither cumbersome nor offensive.

The first point to make is the obvious one: the chess analogy reminds us that we are dealing with entirely conventional terms. The difference between linear and vertical is as standard in the game of rhetoric as the difference in

chess between rook and bishop. The linear move is a form of indirect representation, by simile or by analogy: for example, the rich, like the elect, are few in number; or, Charles I is king of England as God is king of heaven. Representation here is oblique, metonymic; it assumes a basic disparity between the two parts of the comparison. We are confined, you recall, to the City of Man. Charles, we know, is not really God: We understand a priori that the rich are not *actually* the elect. They are *like* them—figurally *like*, as opposed to essentially *alike*.

The diagonal move has something like the contrary intent. It is a form of direct representation, as by *figura* or synecdoche: for example, Moses is a type of Christ; or, the true believer is an image of God's people. Here we are to understand that the true believer *is* one of God's people—is actually and substantially chosen by God. The point of this move is to bridge the apparent gap between the City of Man and the City of God. Whether or not Moses appears to you or me to be *like Christ*, he and Christ are essentially alike. Moses re-presents Christ literally *and* spiritually, both historically and under the aspect of eternity.

What's striking about Winthrop's address—what makes for the remarkable variation I spoke of—is the way he connects both kinds of move. He introduces the indirect form of representation first, through the image of hierarchy. His address opens with a picture of rich and poor, king and ministers. As God (he explains) has ordained variety and difference throughout creation, so it is the 'glory of princes to have many officers'. The analogy tells us that order is pervasive and absolute and at the same time it reminds us of the chasm separating earthly from divine power—'the condition of mankind', as Winthrop puts it, as distinct from that of the kingdom of heaven. Next comes direct figural connection: 'We are all one in Christ', Winthrop intones, 'members of one body', 'knit together in love'.<sup>3</sup> Here the picture he offers is one of essential equality. The community he portrays partakes of the spirit (reflects it in a glass, darkly) and so transcends all worldly hierarchies, along with every limit of time, office, and place.

Of course, these two images—the community as social network, the community as one in Christ—are not contradictory. Indeed, they often appear as complementary forms of speech, secular and sacred. In current literary discourse we have come to designate these forms as metonymy and metaphor. In the tradition that Winthrop inherited, the designations were analogy and type. For him the word 'model' could denote either a replica, as in an architect's design, which represents but is not itself the building, or else a perfected pattern of what we see—a kind of ideal mirror-reflection—as

<sup>3</sup> John Winthrop, 'A Model of Christian Charity', in Stewart Mitchell, ed., *Winthrop Papers* (Boston, 1931), ii, pp. 282–95.

Christ's life re-presents the believer's journey to God. In the first case, the case of metonymy or replica, a given society may be said to represent the divine order, but only as a figure of speech. In the second case, the case of metaphor or ideal reflection, representation signals a unity between the figure and the substance. The divine is re-presented (presented again) in a historical presence. Through grace, the believer, however imperfect, may be said in some sense really and truly to embody the ideal.

Figural representation, then, or actual re-presentation: the 'or' makes all the difference in the world. More precisely, it marks the difference between this world and the next. The representation by analogy, the replica, speaks of what's material, social, transient, like material wealth. The re-presentation of the ideal directs us away from that realm to the realm of the spirit. And yet the two kinds of speech are as close as 'like' and 'alike'. They are complementary pieces in the same game, like rook and bishop. They work together on the premise that their functions are distinct. In order to make all this as clear as possible, Church authorities from Augustine through Aquinas elevated that distinction (representation *or* re-presentation) into a central tenet of Christian hermeneutics. By that rule Luther denied the Pope's right to stand in for Christ. The Holy Roman Empire, he charged, was a replica of the true church, an analogy or trope, not a re-presentation of it. Indeed, the very fact that the Church of Rome claimed to *re*-present the true church made it a *false* replica. It pretended to powers it did not have in order (said Luther) to usurp the realm of the spirit for its own worldly ambitions. By that rule, too, Milton justified regicide by appealing directly to Christ, the true mirror-reflection of God as king—as Charles I (in his view) was emphatically not. It's not too much to say that the hermeneutics of like-versus-alike became a battle-ground of theological and social change. Understandably, the Reformers were charged with blasphemy—appropriately they called themselves *Protestants*, *Dissenters*—but so far as they were concerned, they had come to fulfill the exegetical law, not to break it.

What, then, shall we say of Winthrop's apparent confusion? Representation and re-presentation, trope and type, metonymy and metaphor, blur and shift in his Model. It almost seems like a sleight of hand. His image of Christian charity moves in two directions at once. He identifies this particular community first as a hierarchy in the form of a colonial venture authorised by royal patent, and then (as it were in the same breath) as a spiritual unity *in imitatio Christ*. And then, having set out his basic lines of play—having established his terms of transformation—he proceeds to apply the concept of Christian charity in both senses at once. From either perspective, he asserts, we arrive at the same literal-spiritual end. On the one hand Christian charity *here* represents a contractual agreement. It entails matters of credit and debt, trade and exchange. As political scientists have long recognised, Winthrop's

Model is a landmark in modern contract theory.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, however, and with equal force, his Model re-presents the charity of Christ, God's free love for the elect. Here, in New England, says Winthrop, social order is to be established in all its aspects—business transactions, legalities, social relations—under the aegis of the Gospel, 'according to the example of our Saviour'. He does not mean by this that the social is to be subsumed in the theological, as it is under certain forms of theocracy. Civil structures here retain their own separate sphere of power. But neither does he mean that these two aspects of colonial life are merely different parts of the same venture, co-existent, as they are in other colonies. Rather they are somehow conflated in this model; in some sense the political sphere and the spiritual are made interchangeable.

*Somehow, in some sense*: familiarity has dulled the force of Winthrop's innovation. We need the chess analogy to appreciate its scope and sheer daring. Imagine the argument I just outlined as a game in process. The different rhetorical terms are different pieces on a board. Those pieces are traditional, rule-bound. The rook, which can move only in a linear direction, is the worldly, colonial venture. The bishop, which can move only in a diagonal direction, is the christic ideal. Winthrop moves the piece horizontally, and says: 'My rook goes here'; and then, in his next turn, he moves the same piece diagonally, and says: 'My bishop goes there'; and then, as the game proceeds, he actually renames the piece, calls it alternately his rook-bishop or bishop-rook, and moves it consistently in what by all convention is a strange new linear-diagonal pattern.

How can we explain this behaviour? We cannot call his move a blunder—a 'monumental slippage', as one scholar has charged<sup>5</sup>—since Winthrop was a qualified professional at the game. Nor can we consider it to be a technical mistake, due to distraction or absent-mindedness, since the fact is that Winthrop won. His variation took hold. He won not only the match but the game. His strategy inspired many similar variations. It led to America's City upon a Hill. Here is his famous end-game:

Thus stands the case between God and us: We are entered into a covenant with Him . . . [and if He] shall please to hear us . . . then hath He sealed our commission . . . but if we shall neglect the observation of these articles . . . [and] fall to embrace this present world . . . seeking great things for ourselves and our posterity, the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us.  
 . . .

<sup>4</sup> Scott Michaelsen, 'John Winthrop's "Modell" Company and the Company Way', *Early American Literature*, 27 (1992), 85–100. In this broad survey of the legal literature, Michaelsen discusses Winthrop's address as a pioneering document in contract theory; Winthrop, he shows, was in this respect 'more pointedly modern than his colleagues'.

<sup>5</sup> Michaelsen, 'Winthrop's "Modell"', p. 88.

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck . . . is to follow the counsel of Micah . . . we must be knit together in this work as one man. . . . We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together—always having before our eyes our . . . community as members of the same body. . . . [Thus] God will delight to dwell among us, as His own people . . . and we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness, and truth than formerly. . . . For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall deal falsely with our God . . . we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.

And to shut up this discourse with that exhortation of Moses . . . in his last farewell to Israel, Deut. 30: Beloved, there is now set before us life and death. . . . [If] we will not obey we shall surely perish out of the good land [which] we pass over this vast sea to possess it.

This City is neither a poetic conceit nor a religious commonplace. Rather it stands somewhere in between, an unusual piece of rhetoric that mixes traditionally distinct forms—direct and indirect, re-presentation and representation. Its political analogue is the body politic. But its scriptural origin is the Sermon on the Mount (the Beatitudes), where Christ speaks to the believers ('the salt of the earth') individually and universally. The believer shines as a city upon a hill, a living image of the church spiritual. And as a representation of the universal spiritual church, the city has a further, historical meaning. It is a figure in sacred history, signifying Jerusalem, the holy city, and by extension, the end-time New Jerusalem. And this prefiguration refers in turn back to Moses' so-called 'farewell exhortation'—his final advice to the Israelites (Deut. 30) as they prepare to enter Canaan—for by the rules of this game, the promised land is a figure or type of heaven.<sup>6</sup>

This sweeping configuration, sanctioned by the Church Fathers, by standard practice, and by the Geneva Bible, Winthrop turns into a means of legitimating a particular economic and social order. His address, it cannot be overemphasised, concerns the establishment of a society. He invokes the ideal in order to authorise secular forms. But he does not thereby collapse the distinction between type and analogy. That is the crucial point to observe about Winthrop's game-plan. He uses the combination of rhetorical moves, linear and diagonal, to instate a *tension* between them. His City refers to the figural Jerusalem which cannot fail. And it recalls the old, terrestrial, literal Jerusalem, which did fail, once and for all. Winthrop's City on a Hill signifies both of these—not one or the other, promise or threat, but a wilful conjunction of the two—figural and literal held together in a state of conditionality.

Again, it requires the chess analogy to convey the boldness of Winthrop's

<sup>6</sup> See the gloss to Deuteronomy 30: 18–20 and to Matthew 5: 14–6 in Lloyd E. Berry, ed., *The Geneva Bible* (facsimile of the 1560 Edition) (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

variation. Consider the following scenario: (1) a form of chess that allows for only linear or else diagonal moves; (2) a particular match where one of the players perceives that he *may* win if he can move a certain piece in a direction which is both diagonal and linear, as in fact the knight's move is in modern chess (it can be pictured as a move at a 45-degree angle); and (3) that he succeeds by negotiating a special set of conditions. 'Let's try an experiment', he proposes. 'If I win the game, then we'll agree that this new-fangled move was valid, a legitimate variation in play. If I lose, we'll declare the move to have been illegal, and the piece I used will simply revert to its former linear *or* diagonal status.' Does this sound far-fetched? Let me point out that the history of chess includes a variety of such instances—for example, the dramatic moment, during a period of revolutionary upheavals, when the caste-bound Indian foot-soldier or pawn was permitted to become a queen upon reaching the eighth rank (the opposite end of the board)—on the condition that the pawn *did* reach the eighth rank.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, Winthrop's variation goes one long step further than that. The pawn retains a singular concrete identity at any given time—either pawn or else queen. The goal, we might say, is upward mobility, but basically the game-plan remains class-bound. It is assumed that in principle, as a rule, pawns will remain pawns. Winthrop's move challenges that structure—and even (by indirections) the principle behind it. His emphasis is on provisionality and potential. Indeed, we can say with hindsight that that's precisely the radical crux of his strategy. It was Winthrop's *intention* to blur the line between bishop and rook. His linear-diagonal knight is fundamentally, by definition, contingent. It is founded upon the *if* in 'if I win'. Its context is a game in process. The terms are not win or lose—all or nothing—but rather win *and* lose, all *and* nothing. And those terms, be it noted, shift the very objectives of the match. I spoke earlier of the incarnation-game, but the paradoxes of incarnation deal with heaven and earth. Winthrop's provisional knight is an expression of permanent process—the process of the spirit made manifest in the process of colonisation; a colonial *way* (as in an 'errand into the

<sup>7</sup> I discuss these developments in 'Games of Chess'; here I limit myself to two examples of the volatility of chess (and its analogies) that are pertinent to the Winthrop variation. The first concerns the function of the bishop: see for example Thomas Middleton's *A Game of Chess* (1624), where, despite their opposing actions (as part of a battle of Good versus Evil), both sets of bishops, black and white, function as sinister and treacherous figures, revealing the relatively recent roots of the chess figure in continental Catholicism. The second concerns the notion of chess as the game of love—an analogy that runs from the first published treatise on chess (Luis de Lucena's *The Game of Love*, 1496) through the entire Petrarchan sonnet tradition (e.g., Henry, Earl of Surrey's sonnets of 1547). See in this regard Rowland Greene's discussion of the relation between Petrarchism and Renaissance colonisation, in *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations in the Western Lyric* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991).

wilderness') that embodies the progress of the spirit. Provisionality here works to fudge the distinctions that make for paradox. It transforms these instead into the tensions distinctive to a particular New World venture: tensions in this world between present and future, expectation and experience, migration and possession—between the literal (linear) transition toward a new country and the spiritual (diagonal) rights to its ownership. And the transition itself, so conceived, effects a sea-change in identity—from the related-but-distinct concepts of settlers and saints to the mixed image (ambiguously contractual *and* absolutist) of a company in covenant. What the City upon a Hill makes visible is a far-reaching rhetoric of conditionality: in effect, a ritual of order-to-be that potentially unites a group of colonists in the bonds of grace, and so grants them, provisionally, the good land they have come to claim by prophecy and patent.

What circumstances prompted that move? How can we account for its success? Historically, it can be shown that Winthrop's concept of potentiality was his response to a desperate situation. The two-stranded model he advanced was intended for a community confronting a double threat to order—a double threat from within, stemming from religious dissent on the one hand and on the other from worldly ambition. Winthrop's appeal to unity-in-love ('knit together as one man') reminds us that the Puritans were militant sectarians, and that their militancy posed clear dangers for the new colony. Predictably, the history of the New England Way turned out to be a history of constant theological debate. And it was also a history of steady economic growth. Winthrop's appeal to hierarchy reminds us that the Massachusetts Bay Company was a business venture. These religious zealots were entrepreneurs intent on rising in the world. Their leaders were college-educated clergy, merchants, and lawyers, like the Cambridge law graduate, John Winthrop, grandson of a self-made businessman, and son of a nouveau-riche merchant fallen on hard times. The statistics of the 1630 Great Migration are: 10 per cent poor (servants), 10 per cent lower class (unskilled labourers), 1 per cent aristocracy and riffraff combined, and the rest (79 per cent) 'middling': artisans, tradesmen, shopkeepers, independent farmers. They came to the New World at a time of severe economic depression in England, not only as rebels against Anglican rituals, but equally as ambitious, mobile professionals (thirty-something on the average), who had been enticed by the promises of a chartered joint-stock corporation. As one historian has put it, quoting Winthrop's arguments in 1629 for migration, they were seeking profits in the wilderness. That's the context for Winthrop's opening insistence on deference. Behind his tough strictures on social distinctions—as also behind his later eloquent appeal for mutuality—lie his well-grounded anxieties about governing a colony of middle-class dissidents. In the address itself he makes it plain, grimly, that the immigrants he was appealing to were company-men keen for

'improvement', eager for 'substance', 'seeking great things in this present world', 'for [them]selves and [their] posterity'.<sup>8</sup>

By what authority could Winthrop impose control on this turbulent community? The answer may be gleaned in antiquarian fashion from the first gloss on his address, the headnote composed by Winthrop's son sometime in the mid-1630s:

Written on board the *Arabella*, on the Atlantic Ocean, by the Honourable John Winthrop, Esquire, in his passage (with the great company of religious people, of which Christian tribes he was the brave leader and famous governor), from the Island of Great Britain to New England in North America.

The key words are 'company', 'Honourable', and 'Esquire'. I refer in general to the well-documented transition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (the Tudor–Stuart Period) from medieval to modern systems of organisation. In particular, I think of that aspect of the transition which is signalled by Winthrop's claim to leadership. 'Company' is a pun on worldly and religious business, but its primary meaning lies in the entrepreneurial profile I outlined earlier. 'Company' for these emigrants meant above all a Company Incorporated, a group of businessmen, bureaucrats, and speculators, many of them Puritans, whose governing board had just voted to invest Winthrop, 'as [a] Justice of the Peace', with 'authority [in the new settlement] as in England'.<sup>9</sup>

Now, the Justice of the Peace is the office designated by 'Honourable' and 'Esquire', and it had taken on a dramatic new importance during the Tudor period. Previously, the chief law enforcer had been the sheriff, who controlled the courts of common law in the medieval village jurisdiction, technically known as the tourn. It was an authoritarian form of control, of course, but it was based largely on local tradition—customs and codes handed down orally from one generation to another—in effect, a medley of Anglo-Saxon, Latin, and Norman-French precedents, locally applied according to village or tourn memory, in more or less consensual ways, within relatively autonomous because relatively insulated communities.

The transition I mentioned from Medieval to Renaissance England might be described legally as a movement from tourn to corporation, and from sheriff to justice of the peace. That movement followed upon profound and lasting cultural changes—economic upheavals, class realignments, demographic shifts, and technological and scientific revolutions. It issued in the centralisation of authority under crown and court. By 1588, when Winthrop was born, a new

<sup>8</sup> John Frederick Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness: Entrepreneurship and the Founding of New England Towns in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Winthrop, 'Particular Considerations in the J:W' and 'Generall considerations for the plantation', in Mitchell, ed., *Winthrop Papers*, ii, pp. 106–11, 121–4.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, ed., *Winthrop Papers*, ii, p. 282 n.

system of law was in place. I quote here from the standard legal history of the period:

In the courts held by the Justices [of the Peace] was vested all the common law jurisdiction of the country, civil and criminal. Royal justice had won a complete victory of the older [feudal and communal] local courts. But [in 1500] there was still left to the old courts and the old officials—[that is,] to the tourn and the sheriff—certain police duties and criminal jurisdiction. Royal justice won its final victory when [under the Tudors] it practically absorbed this last remnant of their jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup>

In practice, this process of absorption entailed a centrally-regulated network of judicial redistrictings—now termed counties, boroughs, corporations, and companies. These were administered by court-appointed justices of the peace, who thus effectually became the watch-dogs of an emergent modern social apparatus, a nation-state in which the law was relatively codified and statutory, and the monarch was titular head of the church.

Among other things, this vast reorganisation was remarkable for two sweeping ironies. The first has to do with cultural contrasts. The process of centralisation reveals that the allegedly static, homogeneous world of the medieval tourn was actually a configuration of relatively independent communities, whereas the highly regulated modern world of boroughs, companies, and corporations was the product of upheaval and fragmentation. The second irony pertains directly to Winthrop's model. In late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century England, the agents of centralisation often turned their jurisdictions into centres of dissent. For the fact is that justices of the peace characteristically came from the class that also characteristically produced the Puritans, who then proceeded to turn their delegated powers against the central authorities. The Court-appointed leaders of Dissenting strongholds (such as the region of East Anglia, from which Winthrop came, along with most passengers of the *Arabella* fleet) used their new-won powers to rally their constituencies against the powers of the Crown.

They drew support in doing so from a widespread movement of disaffected rural gentry. The conflict itself, Country versus Court, need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that the Country outlook reflected an alternative set of strategies within the same vast process of modernisation I've just described; that it was directed largely against the growing importance of London; and that it often expressed itself in the rhetoric of arcadia. Squirearchy appears in these writings as a pastoral ideal, an oasis of virtue, benevolence, and peace in a desert of aristocratic corruption and urban chaos. To some extent Puritan spokesmen endorsed this rhetoric, but they also made a distinct and lasting contribution of their own. Perhaps because they had more at stake than others

<sup>10</sup> W. S. Holdsworth, *A History of English Law* (London, 1903–9), i, p. 123.

in defying the Anglican establishment, they turned to a sharper, more vivid alternative to Court authority: namely, the authority of the national past. Their civic appeals, a large and unduly neglected archive—declarations of order, parliamentary speeches, political homilies, and, most remarkably, a long procession of lay-sermons by local dignitaries, especially JPs—lead us as it were beyond utopia into nostalgia. Considered together, they provide a kind of pastoral route into the legendary realm of Old England; the golden days of sheriff and toun; a richly-elaborated fantasy of the harmonious and independent life of the medieval village.<sup>11</sup>

I believe we may trace the myth of the Middle Ages to these documents. They carry in embryo the dream-visions of Morris, Ruskin, and Tennyson—a longing for some quasi-feudal stability and spiritual kinship in a world of change. This is not the place to discuss either their language or their legacy, but one point is worth remarking, in view of the ironies I just mentioned. In rebelling against national authority, the English Puritans reinforced a new, implicitly modernising, emphatically Protestant model of nationalism. Their appeal to the past eventually extended from medieval to antiquarian fable and lore—from sheriff and toun to Robin Hood, King Arthur, Alfred the Great, Druid legends—and so helped provide a secular myth of origins for the modern English state, and what was to be its far-flung empire, reaching in the New World from the tropical Bahamas to Canada's Dominion of the North.

This is precisely what Winthrop's model works *not* to accomplish. Considered as an example of cultural transformation, its most conspicuous aspect is the absence either of the pastoral dream or of medievalist nostalgia. The city on a hill is if anything more distant from the Good Country Life and Arthurian England than it is from seventeenth-century London. It's not that Winthrop shied away from the conflict between real and ideal. Quite the contrary: he magnifies this by substituting Christ for the sheriff. Apparently, however, he considered it inadequate or inappropriate to turn for corporate standards to antiquated feudal ways. And the reason, I've suggested, lay in his peculiar problem of authority. It may be well here to supplement my earlier sketch of those unruly Puritan emigrants with a contrast between them and the

<sup>11</sup> See Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1965); Peter Zagorin, *The Court and the Country: The Beginning of the English Revolution* (London, Methuen, 1968); and Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments: English History, 1509–1660* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971). The lay-sermons I refer to are found in the bibliographies to these and other major historical works of the period, such as Roger Lockyer, *Tudor and Stuart Britain, 1471–1714* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1964); in legal compendia, such as Carl Stephenson and Frederick George Marcham, eds., *Sources of English Constitutional Law* (New York, Harper, 1937); in collections of sermons and parliamentary addresses; and in archives of Dissenting regions such as East Anglia which includes the county of Suffolk.

general population, drawn from the most recent detailed study of the Great Migration:

[The] emigrants . . . [came from] places where commercial activity . . . [and] religious dissent combined to loosen the ties of traditional authority. . . . [In] England as a whole, [for example,] farmers outnumbered craftsmen by more than seven to one; [whereas] among the prospective colonists artisans were nearly twice as numerous as farmers. . . . [Moreover,] these farmers, who comprised 16% of the population, were ‘relatively prosperous’, ‘literate’, and ‘independent’. . . . [As for the artisans, they] usually practiced skilled trades that placed them on the middle rungs of the economic ladder.<sup>12</sup>

In other words: the English country in 1630 was composed of diverse elements, many of them traditional, most of them steeped in residual habits of life. It would have been historically appropriate as well as ideologically expedient for the magistrates to appeal to the ideals of a common past. It would also have been rhetorically sound, an innovation within the traditional boundaries of Christian hermeneutics. The rhetorical connection between sheriff and Justice of the Peace spans space and time, real and ideal; but as a model of identity it remains in and of this world. It is a linear move, confined to the story of England.

The medievalist fantasy was an ingenious variation, but it could not accommodate the circumstances of the *Arabella* emigrants. Winthrop was responding to a special problem in religious and social cohesion, one that required (as Perry Miller noted) an ideal commensurate with the Protestant Ethic. Winthrop’s variation is a dramatic move in that direction. It consecrates the secular tenets embodied in his delegated function as JP, while at the same time legitimating the separatist leanings—the tendencies towards independence, political as well as theological<sup>13</sup>—implicit in his religious company’s

<sup>12</sup> Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *New England’s Generation: The Great Migration and the Formation of Society and Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 31–2.

<sup>13</sup> I refer here to the resistance on the part of all Puritans to the doctrine of the divine right of kings. (See for example T. H. Breen, *The Character of the Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England, 1630–1730* (New York: Norton 1970), p. 37). Winthrop invokes this doctrine at the start of his address, but he proceeds to submerge it within the higher rights of covenant. That is, he uses his office as JP to negotiate on behalf of his ‘great company of religious people’, directly with God as King. Winthrop’s modernity in this regard is remarkable. Three brief annotations must suffice here. (1) The main convenantal concerns are financial (‘giving, lending, and forgiving’) as befits a ‘venture for gain-sake’, as the Massachusetts Bay Company officially described itself. (2) The main objection that Winthrop anticipates concerns self-interest; the questions he frames are mainly addressed to the self-interested individual (‘a man and his family’), rather than to members of different classes or ranks; and his answers are mainly geared towards doctrines of industry and self-help (for ‘he is worse than infidel’, Winthrop points out, ‘who through his own sloth . . . shall neglect to provide’). (3) These answers carefully blend Old and New Testament precedents; and it turns out to be a blend that balances private enterprise and communal welfare, where welfare combines voluntarism, mutual aid, and price and trade regulations.

dissent. And much more than that. In this double process of consecration and legitimation—contract and covenant, rook and bishop, entwined—Winthrop invents a new history for the colony, replacing its secular past, medieval and renaissance alike, with the progress of the church.<sup>14</sup> As he outlines the course of Christian Charity, his narrative runs not from England to New England, but from Eden ('man in the estate of innocency') to the Israelite 'household of faith', to Christian believers 'in the apostles' time' and climactically, in this time, to the covenanted 'community of peril'.

I want to focus on this last image for a moment, because it is Winthrop's dominant figure for the New England venture. 'Community of peril'—the very antithesis of the benign, harmonious vision of the tourn—is a fit correlative for Winthrop's strategy of probation. It also establishes a distinctive ancestry for his imperilled City upon a Hill. 'Christ', Winthrop explains, gave

a general rule (Math. 7: 22). 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye the same to them.' . . . [That] rule must we observe in case of community of peril. Hence it was that in the primitive church they had all things in common. . . . Likewise in the return of our captivity, Nehemiah exhorts the Jews to liberality in remitting their debts to their brethren. . . . [This] is to be observed [as well] . . . in the latter stories of the churches.

I have omitted a key phrase from this passage in order to stress once more what Winthrop excludes from his genealogy: not just family and friends, sheriff and tourn, but English history altogether. In its place, as New England antiquities, Winthrop offers a procession of communities of peril: the Israelites returning from Babylon to Jerusalem; 'the primitive church' in flight from Roman persecution; and the 'latter-day' Reformers re-establishing the 'true religion' (as the formulaic Calvinist phrase had it) after the 'long night of Papal captivity'. This is no random gathering of *exempla*. It is the official outline of Protestant apocalyptic: the figural continuity from the Old Testament to the New and thence (along the lines of sacred history) to the prophecies of the 'latter-days'—what Winthrop calls the 'latter stories of the churches', meaning the Protestant Reformation.

<sup>14</sup> This new identity more than any other factor explains the conspicuous absence in the Winthrop compact of the usual language of royal prerogative—the traditional homage to colonial hierarchy that marks every other compact of the time, including English Puritan compacts, from Plymouth to Bermuda. A convenient contrast is the *Mayflower* document. In terms of my chess analogy, the Pilgrims conceived of their venture along standard linear-or-diagonal lines. They believed that they were on their way to heaven through the wilderness of this world (now shifting from Amsterdam to Virginia, or as it turned out, accidentally, to Plymouth); and as their compact makes clear, they 'convenanted' strictly in the then-legal sense of the term, as 'loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James', united in a 'civil body'. See (William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morrison (New York, 1952), p. 52).

Now I turn to the phrase I left out, Winthrop's solitary reference to actual historical origins:

That rule must we observe in case of community of peril [as] did some of our forefathers in times of persecution here in England and so did many of the faithful [elsewhere in Europe] in other [Protestant] churches, whereof we keep an honourable remembrance of them [in] latter [day] stories of the [martyrs.]

'Here in England' may be read as a transitional phrase, a gesture toward the old rules of the game. After all, Winthrop's identity as an imperial magistrate, theirs as colonial subjects, required the *Arabella* passengers to think of England as home. By all common sense criteria, they were Englishmen and -women. But we have textual grounds for reading the phrase in quite the reverse sense, as a move on Winthrop's part towards absorbing England, too, into his variation, as a figure for a corrupt Old World. I don't say he intended this. It was a move intended by a nascent social symbology—that is, by the new game rules latent in Winthrop's innovation. But latency also implies agency. To give credit where credit is due, we must note that Winthrop mentions only some 'forefathers', and these few only to elicit memories of religious persecution. They were Protestant saints hounded by the benighted Church of Rome—martyred in England, Winthrop stresses, as the saints had been martyred in pagan Babylon and Rome.

Now, some of these Reformation heroes may really have been related to some of the company then present, but that is not Winthrop's point. His genealogy is a model of spiritual descent; it identifies him as the 'brave leader' of 'Christian tribes' fleeing what he had called a year before, in journals and letters, 'a land of destruction', ripe for some 'catastrophe and punishing plagues from heaven'.<sup>15</sup> In that figural perspective, his phrase 'here in England', spoken in passage to a New World, is a wonderfully revealing moment of the dynamics of rhetorical change. It speaks by negation to the enormous visionary shift underway in Winthrop's model. What is displaced is both fantasy (a medieval utopia) and fact (familial, communal, and geographical origins). What comes into place, once the error is noted and emended, is broadly modern: a community written into existence by contract and consent, through a declaration of principles and rules that bend religious tradition to legitimate a venture in colonial enterprise.

'We must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill': the imperative ('must consider') centres upon a perfectionist future (prefigured by the image of

<sup>15</sup> John Winthrop, 'Conclusions for the Plantation in New England', in vol. 2 of *Old South Leaflets* (Boston, n.d.), no. 50, p. 6; and Winthrop, quoted in Steven Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1991), p. 109.

Moses at Canaan's frontier). In this case, however, perfectionism means self-doubt: the dream of 'we shall be' also entails the threat of being made 'a story and by-word through the world'. And vice-versa: the threat entails the dream of what 'we *shall* be'. Part of the brilliance of Winthrop's transvaluation is the fact that his double-edged rhetoric of peril has it both ways. Its conditional tense defines the community as secular, experimental, and fallible; and that same conditional tense is the premise of spiritual transformation. It is as though (1) an accurate replica might yield an ideal mirror-reflection; and (2) the force of that possibility were not a guarantee of perfection but instead the excitement of living in the 'might be'. If we keep discipline, says Winthrop, we will be a beacon to the world; if not, we will become a by-word for failure. The 'we' is circumscribed by a double 'if'. What we *are* at any time is beacon and by-word. That *and* is a formula for permanent anxiety. And anxiety is Winthrop's formula for empowerment. In game-terms, it is the conditional link that allows for the simultaneity of linear *and* diagonal identity. The 'if' that doubly circumscribes the 'we' affirms that we are already chosen because we are *now* under probation. By that symbolic logic, Winthrop already grants the emigrants, before reaching harbour, the territorial rights to the 'Canaanites'' 'good land', which they, the emigrants, have 'pass[ed] over this vast sea to possess'. By that emphasis on peril, he already releases them, *as emigrants and colonists*, from the burdens of their secular past, much as Moses had released *his* people from Egyptian bondage. And by thus liberating them from history, he establishes an unmediated correspondence between political goals and universal principles. What makes his model perfectionist also specifies perfectionism as modern and entrepreneurial.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to exaggerate Winthrop's achievement. I began by alluding to

<sup>16</sup> It seems pertinent here to recall, however briefly, the failure of alternative models of settlement. I have in mind the rhetorics of Latin-America, from Las Casas' christic savagism through Simon Bolivar's Hispanic Confederacy, Jose Marti's 'half-breed' *nostra America*, and Jose Vasconcelo's *raca cosmica*—a magic-realist tradition of disjunctions; a procession of model Americas that keep dissolving under the pressure of the contradictory visions—Aztec antiquities, Roman Catholicism, an 'Atlantean race', Iberian aristocracy, mestizo myths, the liberal Enlightenment. I don't claim that a successful rhetorical formula would have changed all that. My point is that the history of the Americas, North and South, demonstrates the persisting need in modern secular communities for some form of spiritual cohesion; that the game of Latin-American identity never developed a set of rules adequate to that end; that that essentially *literary* failure (what Vasconcelos termed 'the anarchy and solitude of Iberian-American emblems') has had significant practical consequences. By contrast, Winthrop's text highlights the astonishingly resilient rhetorics developed in the United States for connecting culture and society, moral and economic imperatives, and for containing the threat of multiple identities (including most recently Latino-Hispanic identities) within the boundaries of the city upon a hill. References above are to: Jose Marti, 'Our America' (1891) in *The America of Jose Marti* (New York, Methuen, 1953), pp. 138–51; Jose Vasconcelos, the *Cosmic Race: The Mission of the Ibero-American Race* (1925), transl. Didier T. Laen (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979), pp. 1–38.

contemporary uses of his lay-sermon (from, say, Kennedy through Reagan to Clinton)<sup>17</sup> as a ritual of founding, a cultural totem designed both to infuse hope and to establish law and order. But I have assumed throughout that Winthrop's strategies were transitional, not a creation in its own right but a variation. Its sources lie in the rules and regulations of an Old World game: the Bible, the Church Fathers, and the Protestant Reformation. These are the lines along which Winthrop's new-fangled rook-bishop moves. Even when it arrives, hypothetically, at its special destination, 'New England in the North America', it occupies essentially an Old World position: Winthrop has European Protestants in mind when he says that 'the eyes of all people are on us'. It would be another forty years before the colonists would have an indigenous myth of their own—their own legends of a golden age of tribal patriarchs, rivalling the medieval tourney and ancient Rome and even the primitive churches, and located wholly within the 'American strand'.<sup>18</sup> And it would be another seventy years before the identity 'American' would be applied symbolically, exclusively, to white Protestant colonists, and specifically to those 'commissioned' by New England's God. Another generation or two, that is, had to elapse before Winthrop's rhetorical piece could claim a proper place for itself, its own sacred-secular New World Square. And of course a century would have to elapse *after that* before Winthrop's provisional knight could have a proper set of royalty to defend—a group of Founding Fathers, constructed according to Enlightenment rules of power, and eliciting liberal forms of failure and success, every pawn a king potentially.

Still, let us not underestimate Winthrop's achievement. He does say 'all people', as though 'the people' at large were the authorising constituency, and as though all of history were at stake. More important is the geographical shift that follows from his emphasis on process. By the logic of conditionality,

<sup>17</sup> References are to Ronald Reagan's televised debate summation in Fall, 1984, to John F. Kennedy's farewell address as Senator from Massachusetts, and to William Clinton's Second Inaugural, where the Philander Smith College Choir sang 'City on a Hill' (followed by Maya Angelou's poem on 'America's New Beginnings').

<sup>18</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or The Ecclesiastical History of New England* (1702), ed. Thomas Robbins (Hartford: Peter Andrus, 1853), i, 25. The opening of Mather's epic (i, 25–7) is an example both of continuities and of the variations which the rhetoric elicited: The City on the Hill takes the form here of the doubled candelabra, symbol of New Israel; England expands to mean Europe, the Old World whose epic counterpart is fallen Troy; the American wilderness, by extension, assumes the epic grandeur of a New Rome and New Canaan combined; and the genealogy of the Newness follows the lines of descent established by Winthrop: from Eden (the golden age) to Israel (the seven candlesticks) to early Christianity (the *upright* children of Abraham) to the Reformation and thence, climactically, to Puritan America, 'specimen' of New Jerusalem. The key strategic move here comes in the provisional, volatile threat that closes the invocation: 'But we must therewithal ask your prayers that these golden candlesticks may not be quickly removed out of this place.'

Winthrop re-focuses the objective upon the meaning of the New World. *There* is the place of crisis and trial. That is where the spirit may be made visible: diagonally, through the regeneration of individuals; and linearly, through the community's secular-moral growth—in Winthrop's words, a covenant to develop here in this world, in this land, in 'wisdom, power, goodness, and truth'. The City on a Hill is the first ideal to take the fate of the New World as its condition of failure and success. And it is the first New World ideal to invest the very concept of newness with spiritual meaning grounded in a specific, then-emergent, now-dominant way of life. In that double thrust of Winthrop's image lies the explanation—the how and the why—for its continuing usefulness to the culture. As a rhetorical figure, it derives from two traditions that proved inadequate as the ideological framework for modern nationalisms: kingship and Christianity. Winthrop varied both those traditions to accommodate a modern venture, and in the course of variation he opened the prospect for something new under the sun, the America-game.

By now the rules of that game are not only familiar but dominant. Increasingly, they have come to seem natural, even universal. The chess analogy, historicised, offers a point of resistance to that tendency, at least in the area of literary and cultural studies.