

"THE DAY OF DOOM," BY MICHAEL WIGGLESWORTH,
VIEWED AGAINST ITS SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English
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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by
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PREFACE

In spite of the widely accepted appraisal of "The Day of Doom" as the most representative poem of its era, both the work and its author have received little critical attention. Few critical articles deal specifically with Michael Wigglesworth and one of these, Arthur Strange's "Michael Wigglesworth Reads the Poets" (1959), is limited to a comment on a single classical image which appears in "Vanity of Vanities."

F. O. Matthiessen's "Michael Wigglesworth, a Puritan Artist" (1928), and Richard Gummere's "Michael Wigglesworth: From Kill-Joy to Comforter" (1966), are helpful because of their emphasis on the poet's purpose in writing and his change of attitude toward life between his creation of "The Day of Doom" and "Meat Out of the Eater." Beyond these three articles, the only source of critical material is Richard Crowder's critical biography, No Featherbed to Heaven (1962).

There is at the present time no complete edition of the works of Wigglesworth although one is in progress by O. M. Brach, Jr. of the Center for Textual Studies of the University of Iowa. He reports that the bibliographical problems surrounding the publication of The Day of Doom, the edition including the title poem, have been difficult to solve and that he has found new information since his report in the 1971 fall issue of Seventeenth Century News.

Because of the lack of information dealing specifically with Wigglesworth and his major poem, I have been forced to rely upon related material concerning other Puritan poets and the Puritan era in general. My feeling, however, is that there is an increasing interest in the poet as indicated by the 1972 textual work by O. M. Brach, Jr.; the 1967 Richard Gummere book, Seven Wise Men of Colonial America, which includes a biographical section on the author; the 1966 article also by Gummere; as well as the 1962 Crowder biography.

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Michael Wigglesworth wrote "The Day of Doom" between 1655 and 1662 when the Puritan spirit of adherence to Biblical authority was felt in government, education, logic, art, and science. The author reflects his age in his writing as he not only chooses the Biblical subject of the Last Judgment but also approaches it in a spirit of unquestioning utilization and acceptance of the details of his source material. The tone of his work is seen as darker than that of his source, however, since he selects primarily those details which emphasize the status of the doomed men and gives only brief mention to those which reflect the rejoicing of the chosen, according to the theological concept of predestination.

The instructional intent of his work, which is again characteristic of his historical period, is revealed in his mnemonic, logical presentation from the opening scene

of the arrival of the Judge to the closing picture of the casting of the chained victims into hell as the Renate ascend to Heaven. The poet's compliance with the seventeenth-century understanding of poetry as the "handmaiden of theology" is apparent in his emphasis on Scriptural accuracy beyond that of poetic beauty.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Michael Wigglesworth's "The Day of Doom,"¹ which Harold Jantz identifies as "the poetic best seller of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century,"² was first published in 1662. The poem, of which 1800 copies sold within a year, expresses in earnest words the theology accepted in its historical period and pictures the terrors of the Judgment Day and the awful wrath of an offended God. James L. Onderdonk calls the piece "the representative poem of an era,"³ and explains its popularity as deriving from the fact that "Its spirit reflected that of the time."⁴

¹ The complete title of "The Day of Doom" is "The Day of Doom: or a poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment."

² Harold S. Jantz, "The First Century of New England Verse," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 3 (1943), 265.

³ James L. Onderdonk, History of American Verse (Chicago: A. C. McClung, and Co., 1901), p. 38.

⁴ Ibid.

Exact details of the original edition are unknown since there is no extant copy, but the volume is assumed to have included six or more pieces in addition to the title poem. A comparison of later editions with the author's diary and personal correspondence indicates that the following short selections probably appeared in the 1662 printing: "To the Christian Reader," "A Prayer unto Christ the Judge of the World," "A Short Discourse on Eternity," "A Postscript unto the Reader," "Vanity of Vanities," "Autobiography," and an introductory poem by Jonathan Mitchell, "On the Following Work and Its Author."⁵ The work went through four more editions in America and several in England before its author's death, and the next two hundred years produced many more editions, the last in 1929.⁶

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Wigglesworth's representative poem, "The Day of Doom," against its

⁵ Richard Crowder, No Featherbed to Heaven (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 110-113.

⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

seventeenth-century background in order to see how it reflects the philosophical concerns of its period; a further purpose is to investigate the poetic elements of this Biblical piece which retained its hold upon people's hearts for more than a century and according to John Ward Dean, in his "Memoir" of the author, accomplished Wigglesworth's theological aim of causing its readers in the darkness of the night to "seek the ark of safety from the wrath of Jehovah."⁷

⁷ John Ward Dean, "Rev. Michael Wigglesworth, His Memoir, Autobiography, Letters, and Library," The New England Historical and Genealogical Register, 17 (1863), 129.

II. PHILOSOPHIES OF GOVERNMENT, EDUCATION, AND LOGIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CULTURE WHICH PRODUCED THE "THE DAY OF DOOM"

The Puritan society, of which Michael Wigglesworth was a part, was in the words of N. H. Chamberlain, "made up of men generally in middle life, married, and with families, with roots deep in the English soil, conservative and prudent in business ventures."¹ This culture, which may sound rather unremarkable in Chamberlain's description, was perhaps made noteworthy by its intense theological concern. This concern expressed itself in the aim to set up a commonwealth where a church, purified of all Romish practices, could thrive and where God's hand would be free to establish the New Jerusalem or the "Good Land," as Governor Winthrop put it, where the Atlantic, if not the Red Sea, was at least "the vast Sea."²

¹ N. H. Chamberlain, Samuel Sewall and The World He Lived In (Boston: DeWolfe, Fiske, and Company, 1897), p. 22.

² Alan Heimert, "Puritanism, the Wilderness, and the Frontier," New England Quarterly, 26 (1953), 361.

This Puritan society of ardent men with holy aspirations, according to Samuel Eliot Morison, "within ten years of the founding of Massachusetts Bay Colony, had a vigorous intellectual life of its own expressed institutionally in a college, a school system, and a printing press; applied in a native sermon literature, poetry, and history."³ The energetic life was growing under the governmental system of a Theocratic Commonwealth established by men who like John Eliot, a Puritan known for his wisdom in dealing with the Indians, "dreamed of a government following the exact and written word of God."⁴ This government, as Richard S. Dunn points out, was particularly remarkable in that it was so completely at variance with the system its founders had left behind them in England.⁵

Perry Miller states, however, that in spite of the

³ Samuel Eliot Morison, The Intellectual Life of Colonial America (Washington Square: New York Univ. Press, 1956), p. 16.

⁴ Vernon Louis Parrington, Jr., American Dreams: A Study of American Utopias (Providence: Brown Univ. Press, 1947), p. 5.

⁵ Richard S. Dunn, Puritans and Yankees: The Winthrop Dynasty of New England 1630-1717 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), p. 13.

lofty aims which the settlers had for their government, they never expected the Commonwealth to be perfect since it was composed of fallible men; rather, their purpose was only to make it as good as they could with the naturally depraved beings who necessarily must compose it.⁶

The highest function of the government was "the loving care of the church, the maintenance of its external being in uniformity throughout the kingdom, and the physical support of its censures."⁷ The Institutes had provided the model for such a government when John Calvin wrote that civil government exists

to cherish and support the external worship of God, to preserve the pure doctrine of religion, to defend the constitution of the church, to regulate our lives in a manner requisite for the society of men, to form our manners to civil justice, to promote our concord with each other, and to establish general peace and tranquility. . . . Its objects are also that idolatry, sacrileges against the name of God, blasphemies against his truth, and

⁶ Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., The Puritans (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 61.

⁷ Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1933), p. 7.

other offenses against religion, may not openly appear and be disseminated among the people.⁸

Calvin's understanding of the reason for the existence of the civil government to protect the church and its body of dogma from attacks without and heresy within was echoed in the first code of laws, drawn up at the request of the General Court of Massachusetts for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was taken directly from the Old Testament, according to J. Gregory.⁹ This code was rejected, however, in favor of a more liberal and discriminating code submitted by Reverend Nathaniel Ward, who had the advantage of a legal as well as a theological background, and thought that something could be learned from Justinian as well as Moses. Ward's code, which was called "The Body of Libertie," was adopted in 1641 and became the foundation of all subsequent New England colonial constitutions.¹⁰ The Biblical commands

⁸ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, quoted by Miller, Orthodoxy, p. 7.

⁹ J. Gregory, Puritanism in the Old World and in the New (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), p. 324.

¹⁰ Ibid.

including such secondary concerns as extravagance of dress and uncomely speech, were made a part of the regulations, and the death penalty was designated for blaspheming the name of God the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost. To deny the infallibility of, or the inspiration of, any part of the Bible was to incur the penalty of stripes, and, in extreme cases, even death.¹¹ Attendance at church assemblies by members as well as all others was compulsory in most communities both for the Sunday morning and the afternoon service, as well as for all special meetings on days of thanksgiving.¹²

Since the Bible was the source of law, there was no need for a legislative body to add to the existing code. Believing that man was corrupt by nature, as Calvin had reasoned and the Puritan society had agreed, he could not hope to improve on any of God's decrees and therefore only magistrates were needed to aid in the interpretation of laws and to attend to their enforce-

¹¹ Ibid., p. 325.

¹² Isabel MacBeath Calder, The New Haven Colony (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1934), p. 89.

ment.¹³ The combination of magistrates and ministers dominated the frontier community and thus the government was ready to play the part assigned to it by its founders of taking over the protection of orthodoxy.

In spite of the heavy responsibility for preserving orthodoxy which the government carried, Daniel J. Boorstin points out that the governing magistrates did not spend their days in theological disputations but rather took a practical approach to the matter. He says, "during the great days of New England Puritanism, there was not a single dispute which was primarily theological"¹⁴; rather, the emphasis was upon the practical application of orthodoxy. The colonials felt that in the New World they at last "could devote their full energies to applying Christianity--not to clarifying doctrines but to building Zion."¹⁵

Suffrage was granted only to church members and

¹³ Parrington, American Dreams, p. 8.

¹⁴ Daniel J. Boorstin, "The Puritan Tradition: Community Above Ideology," Commentary, 26 (1958), 289.

¹⁵ Ibid.

William Warren Sweet says that it was not until Increase Mather went to England in 1688 in hopes of having the Colonial Charter renewed that a compromise was accepted whereby religious tests were forbidden as a requirement for the voting privilege.¹⁶

The limitation of suffrage caused Miller to describe the Puritan government as "autocratic, hierarchical, and authoritarian"¹⁷ as it held that "in the intellectual realm holy writ was to be expounded by right reason, and in the social realm the expounders of holy writ were to be mentors of farmers and merchants."¹⁸ B. Katherine Brown, however, feels that the change in understanding of political terminology since the seventeenth century casts some doubt on Miller's appraisal of the situation. She feels that there was much more democracy and less autocracy than is generally understood since to the Puritans, "if the people governed, it was democracy; if

¹⁶ William Warren Sweet, Religion in Colonial America (New York: Scribner's, 1951), p. 48.

¹⁷ Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 19.

¹⁸ Ibid.

the delegates chosen by the people governed, it was aristocracy,"¹⁹ and that "in form, Puritan aristocracy bears a strong resemblance to our modern democracy."²⁰

The Puritans were, it should be noted, little different in their governmental philosophies from other peoples of their era, and the New England Theocracy was merely a Protestant form of the social ideal which was being upheld all over the world.²¹ Conrad H. Moehlman lists the basic principles upon which Catholicism had claimed its place of authority in the world for centuries and they appear essentially the same as those of the Puritan governmental position. The Catholic rationale was that since the Church was established by Jesus, the infallible Vicar of God on earth, it therefore had powers in matters of religion and morals, and indirect powers over all political, social, and economic

¹⁹ B. Katherine Brown, "A Note on the Puritan Concept of Aristocracy," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 41 (1954-1955), 107.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

²¹ Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 19.

institutions of the nation.²² The difference between the Catholic and Puritan position lay in the latter's belief that the ultimate official authority was not the church hierarchy but rather the consensus of the Biblical interpretations of its constituents. Aaron B. Seidman states that the blending of church and state responsibilities was in the final analysis "a formal one, that under the stress of circumstances might be lost sight of and the two become practically identical."²³

The Puritan Theocracy held no tolerance for those who disagreed with it in theory or practice, but in this attitude it was again no different from governmental systems in other parts of the world in the seventeenth century. The basis of the theocratic rulers' intolerance lay in their conviction that the colony was fighting the Lord's battle in a New Jerusalem created by God for His special purposes and they therefore never understood how

²² Conrad Henry Moehlman, The Wall of Separation Between Church and State (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), p. 3.

²³ Aaron B. Seidman, "Church and State in the Early Years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony," New England Quarterly, 18 (1945), 211.

any but the most deliberate forces of Satan could oppose the laws of the colony. In their understanding, it therefore followed logically that to oppose Satan with total intolerance for his desired aims was a mark of virtue.²⁴

Increase Mather, in 1861, summarized the Puritan conviction that no good could come from permitting apparently evil men to continue in their opposition to God's cause as he said, "Corrupt minds, though they plead for Toleration and Cry up Liberty of Conscience, yet if once they should become numerous and get power in their hands, none should persecute more than they."²⁵

Clifford K. Shipton feels, however, that the charge of intolerance and lack of liberalism against the Puritan ministry, of which Michael Wigglesworth, as well as Increase Mather, was a part, has been greatly over-stated and he cites the example of Increase Mather's opposition in 1681 to the persecuting of any group "meerly [sic] on

²⁴ Miller, Orthodoxy, p. 23.

²⁵ Increase Mather quoted in Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), p. 145.

account of their Opinion."²⁶ Further, Cotton Mather, in a sermon of 1692, took a strong stand against the persecution of "erroneous and conscientious dissenters by the civil magistrates."²⁷ Such attitudes as expressed in these statements are seen in strict opposition to Vernon Parrington's report that Cotton Mather "did not have a grain of liberalism in his makeup."²⁸

Noteworthy liberalism is further illustrated in the Michael Wigglesworth letter to Increase Mather at the peak of the witchcraft affair as he wrote, "I fear that innocent blood has been shed; and that many have had their

²⁶ Clifford K. Shipton, "The New England Clergy of the 'Glacial Age,'" Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 32 (1937), 33.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. This statement by Vernon Parrington, appearing in The Colonial Mind, p. 113, is cited by Shipton along with the writings of James Truslow Adams as being the source of much general misinformation, as he sees it, regarding the intolerance of the Puritan ministers. In "A Plea for Puritanism," American Historical Review, 40 (1934-1935), 463, Shipton states that the ministers "considered no virtue more laudable or more common among parsons than what they called 'a liberal and catholic mind in matters of religion.'"

hands defiled therewith."²⁹ The Malden pastor, who is too often referred to as totally harsh and unrelenting, goes on to urge that Mather lead the clergy in attempting to persuade the General Court to make all possible restitution for ills created by the witchcraft trials.

While liberalism may be seen in Wigglesworth's attitude toward witchcraft, in general he reflects the influence of an intolerant Theocratic governmental philosophy which accepted the Bible as its total authority and encouraged no enquiry. The conviction underlying "The Day of Doom" is that God has spoken commands to men and those who have not obeyed his instructions will receive just punishments. The attitude of unquestioning acceptance of orthodox Scriptural authority is particularly apparent in the response of each group of the condemned as they receive their sentence of doom from the Judgment throne; they hear the word of authority spoken and they accept it without rebuttal even though their lives are at stake. The group who are designated in the poet's marginal notes as "Those that pretend want of opportunity

²⁹ Michael Wigglesworth quoted in Shipton, "The New England Clergy," p. 33.

to repent,"³⁰ are told that they have willfully rejected the remedy for their condemnation and upon receipt of this information "they dare no more retort" ("Doom," clvi). Similarly, the reprobate children hear their sentence and "they cease, and plead no longer" ("Doom," clxxxi). As the entire company of doomed men huddle together awaiting the moment when they will be cast into hell, the author reveals their total acquiescence to the authoritative judgment in the words:

Thus all men's pleas the Judge with ease
doth answer and confute,
Until that all, both great and small,
are silenced and mute.
Vain hopes are cropt, all mouths are stopt,
sinners have naught to say,
But that 'tis just and equal most
they should be damn'd for aye.
("Doom," clxxxxii)

Wigglesworth not only tells of the harsh judgments but appears at times to express disdain for those who receive them and in such an attitude of contempt he is reflecting his society's thought that none but Satan's

³⁰ Michael Wigglesworth, "The Day of Doom," in The Day of Doom, 6th ed. (1701; rpt. New York: American News Company, 1867), p. 51. Subsequent citations from this poem will be designated in the text by "Doom" and the stanza number.

minions, who are worthy only of scorn, could oppose God's laws. Also, in urgently pressing the certainty of God's Judgment, he was demonstrating the belief that he was a responsible participant, even as other elect men of New Jerusalem, in what Miller describes as "a crusade for what seemed self-evident righteousness."³¹

Wigglesworth was reflecting a further less frequently mentioned concern of his society as he attempted to show the horrors of hell and thus frighten his readers to improve their lives. Edmund Morgan points out in his "Introduction" to the poet's Diary, "The Puritans believed that the outward prosperity of every social group rested upon the prevention of sin among the members,"³² and the poet was in reality protecting himself and his family as he urged holy living upon his neighbors. If God could prosper only a righteous group, surely each offender should be forced away from sin and back to the fold for

³¹ Miller, Orthodoxy, p. 25.

³² Edmund S. Morgan, "Introduction to the Diary of Michael Wigglesworth," Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 35 (1951), 317.

the common good, Wigglesworth and the Puritan society reasoned.

The poet was therefore totally in accord with his age as he wrote in "The Day of Doom" of Biblical laws which were to be accepted without question; he further reflected the Puritan spirit of theocratic government as he urged holy living in order that all could receive God-given prosperity.

The influence of what Morison calls, "the stimulating if restrictive embrace of Puritanism,"³³ is seen in education as well as in government. Cotton Mather, a contemporary of Michael Wigglesworth, demonstrates the restrictive influence in educational philosophy in diary entries from 1706 to 1718, as he lists what he terms "special points relating to the education of children."³⁴ He makes clear that the children must abandon all reliance upon their own intelligence and will and accept instead the authority of their elders as he says,

³³ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 3.

³⁴ Cotton Mather quoted in Elizabeth Deering Hanscom, The Heart of the Puritan (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 88.

Then I make them sensible tis a Folly for them to pretend to any Witt and Will of their own. They must resign all to me, who will be sure to do what is best; my word must be their law.³⁵

Doubtlessly, such a rigid disciplinary attitude was common to the childhood of the poet, and Morgan cites as a point of possible neurosis in the life of the author the accusations which he frequently leveled against himself because of "a lack of natural affection for his father."³⁶ Whether such a lack was due to the unrelenting nature of his upbringing is not known but the antipathy created in the son reached a climax in a diary entry in which the poet confessed that he found himself secretly glad at his father's death.³⁷

Strictness of discipline was coupled with a desire for instruction in the Puritan society, and the widely accepted purpose of education for their youth may be seen in the founding of a college for higher education in 1636 by a people who were struggling for the simple

³⁵ Ibid., p. 89.

³⁶ Morgan, "Introduction to the Diary," p. 314.

³⁷ Ibid.

necessities of life in an inhospitable land. "No other commonwealth of the English speaking world, even our western states, has attempted to provide for higher learning so soon after its foundation,"³⁸ according to Morison.

The Puritan educational system shared a joint inheritance of the Renaissance humanistic tradition with European cultures, Miller says, and he regards it as a paradox that in New England Puritanism preserved far more of the humanist tradition than did nonpuritanism in the other colonies. The paradoxical element is seen in the opposition which would have been present logically in the study of classical literature with its "tendency to accentuate the element of rationalism, and to enlarge the sphere of competency of the natural reason even when not inspired with God's special grace"³⁹; such a principle would seem to be in conflict with the Puritan concept of the necessity for empowering grace. In spite of the

³⁸ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 27.

³⁹ Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 21.

implied conflict, Vincent Buranelli sees the ties with the classical cultures established definitely in early writers as he says, "Edwards leads straight back to Plato and Locke; Johnson to St. Augustine, Descartes, and Berkeley; Colden to Bacon and Newton; and Witherspoon to the Scottish school and their classical source."⁴⁰ The reason for the general Puritan encouragement of humanism and its wide acceptance by its spokesmen even though it relied upon "that heathen commonwealth,"⁴¹ as Winthrop called it, appears to be the "concern for the education of posterity,"⁴² according to Morison.

Evidences of the desire to perpetuate the humanistic tradition, which was a part of the English, as well as the New English educational system, are seen in the curricula of the seventeenth-century institutions from the

⁴⁰ Vincent Buranelli, "Colonial Philosophy," William and Mary Quarterly, S 3, 16 (1959), 355.

⁴¹ John Winthrop used the term in objecting to Nathaniel Ward's classical references in the 1641 Election Sermon as quoted in Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 23.

⁴² Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 17.

grammar schools through the college level; there are further evidences in the listings of books in both private and college libraries of the period.

The grammar schools, which were established by law after 1647 in every community of a hundred families, although according to Louis B. Wright, the system was never so complete as the laws envisioned,⁴³ taught English, Latin and Greek grammar, and readings in Ovid, Caesar, Virgil, and Horace. In 1648 Wigglesworth completed his work in such a course of study under Ezekiel Cheever, who later became known because of his dismissal from the church after his failure to cooperate with the presiding church officers. The record states that he was "censured and cast out of the body, till the proud flesh be destroyed" after he had "refused to vote with the majority of the brethren to clear them of a charge of partiality."⁴⁴

Wigglesworth went on to attend Harvard where the emphasis again lay upon the studies of Latin, Greek, Hebrew,

⁴³ Louis B. Wright, The Cultural Life of the American Colonies 1607-1763 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 103.

⁴⁴ Calder, New Haven Colony, p. 94.

Syriac, and Aramaic languages as well as on the writings of classical poets, historians, and philosophers. Morison summarizes his survey of the classics which were taught in seventeenth-century Harvard by asking, "If Hesiod, Simonides, Theocritus, Homer, and Sophocles are not a humanist program, what are they?"⁴⁵

James J. Walsh sees in addition to the humanist influence an element of the "Scholastic philosophy which survived in the secular universities and colleges up to the American Revolution."⁴⁶ He cites the "thesis sheets," which were a set of propositions to be proved syllogistically by candidates for degrees at Harvard, as an evidence of medievalism in the educational system and further notes that the principal subjects of the freshman and sophomore curricula were grammar, logic, and rhetoric, the "first three of the liberal arts which came down through the Middle Ages."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 59.

⁴⁶ James J. Walsh, "Scholasticism in the Colonial Colleges," New England Quarterly, 5 (1932), 485.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 419.

In addition to the formal academic instruction of Harvard, with its principal humanist influence and its lesser medieval elements, Wigglesworth from 1648 to 1654 had access to the Harvard Library which was the largest single collection of books in New England. According to Morison's Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century, the offerings of that institution included histories, philosophical works, volumes of Latin poetry, rare works such as a manuscript of Dante's teacher, the rhetorician Brunetto Latini, and some 121 copies of Latin and Greek grammars,⁴⁸ to mention only a few of the classical works.

A few private libraries of the Puritan period ran to some two to three thousand volumes and by the end of the century the two largest private collections in Boston belonged to Increase and Cotton Mather, fellow ministers of Wigglesworth. The Malden minister, however, had a library which according to Dean in the "Memoir" was most worthy of notice in regard to its "dearth of poetry."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Samuel Eliot Morison, Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century (2 vols., Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936), I, 295-296.

⁴⁹ Dean, "Memoir," p. 136.

The critic notes that not even the poems of Ann Bradstreet or the epic of Milton on a subject kindred to his own "The Day of Doom" were present. A single volume by Horace, whose polished verses bear little resemblance to his own rugged rhymes, composed his whole poetical library.⁵⁰ Dean feels that "this absence of his brethren of the lyre is significant"⁵¹ since Wigglesworth borrowed little from others and what he did borrow was probably from the commentaries and theological treatises which abounded on his shelves, rather than from the poets. The poet's own library, in fact, rather than the listing of volumes on the Harvard shelves or in the libraries of his contemporaries, may indicate the true interest of Wigglesworth, for it is difficult to see evidences of the poetic Renaissance tradition in "The Day of Doom."

⁵⁰ The terms of Wigglesworth's will state that his library was to be divided between his two sons after Mrs. Wigglesworth had selected "half a dozen English books." Dean feels that it is barely possible that Mrs. Wigglesworth had chosen her English books before the inventory of the library was taken, and that some of the volumes chosen were poetry.

⁵¹ Dean, "Memoir," p. 136.

Not only is the work totally lacking in classical allusions, but also the humanistic attitude of mind which attaches primary importance to man and to natural reason, even when not inspired with God's special grace, is absent. Richard Crowder feels that in the area of his faith, Wigglesworth was still undeniably in the Middle Ages, listening only to "scholastic arguments supporting a creed about to be outworn."⁵² In support of his contention he quotes a part of a hymn from the thirteenth century which in both terminology and tone is very like the seventeenth-century "The Day of Doom." The hymn describes the moment of God's descent to the earth for the judgment of man:

Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth;
Through earth's sepulchres it ringeth;
All before the throne it bringeth.

Death is struck and nature quaking,
All creation is awaking,
To its Judge an answer making.⁵³

⁵² Crowder, No Featherbed, p. 107.

⁵³ This hymn which bears neither title, author, nor date except the statement that it is of the thirteenth century, was translated by William J. Irons in 1849 and published in The Hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church of 1940. It is quoted in Crowder, No Featherbed, p. 107.

These stanzas, when compared with Wigglesworth's lines which are quoted below, reveal a close similarity not only of acceptance of Biblical information but also of darkness of tone as sinful man stands before a perfect God. The lines from "The Day of Doom" describe the same scene as that of the medieval hymn in the words:

For at midnight breaks forth a light,
 which turns the night to day,
 And speedily an hideous cry
 doth all the world dismay.
 Sinners awake, their hearts do ache,
 trembling their loins surpriseth;
 Amaz'd with fear, by what they hear,
 each one of them ariseth.
 ("Doom," v)

The intent of both pieces may be seen as an effort to instruct the readers in dogmatic fact as man is portrayed to the readers not as a reasoning being who is plotting his own course; instead, in the medieval tradition, he is revealed as a part of the over-all plan of God, a plan which has developed to that point of time in which a judgment is to be held. There is no defense of man's position; there is only a review of his acts which have failed to measure up to God's standards. With total authoritarianism the Judge pronounces the awful sentence

on the doomed:

Ye sinful wights, and cursed sprights;
 that work iniquity,
 Depart together with me forever
 to endless Misery;
 Your portion take in yonder Lake,
 where Fire and Brimstone flameth:
 Suffer the smart, which your desert
 as it's [sic] due wages claimeth.
 ("Doom," cci)

The absence of classical references in the poem can perhaps be attributed to Wigglesworth's purpose for writing which was to give Biblical instruction to children and adults, both educated and uneducated, who would not be familiar with the allusions. F. O. Matthiessen says of the aim behind the creation of "The Day of Doom," "Michael Wigglesworth's purpose as a poet was correctly described by Cotton Mather; it was an 'effort to set forth truth and win men's souls to bliss,'"⁵⁴ and the simple, direct form of the work indicates that the poet felt that unadorned instruction in literal Biblical events would best accomplish his aim.

That Wigglesworth did not reject the use of classical

⁵⁴ F. O. Matthiessen, "Michael Wigglesworth, A Puritan Artist," New England Quarterly, I (1928), 493.

references in all his work can be seen in his "Vanity of Vanities," in which great figures of history are described as coming to naught:

Where are Scipio's Thunderbolts of War?
Renowned Pompey, Caesars [sic] Enemie [sic] ?
Stout Hannibal, Romes [sic] Terrour known so far?
Great Alexander, what's become of thee?
("Vanity of Vanities")

The poet's usage of heroes as examples of the vanity of existence may indicate a lack of appreciation of their exploits; however, it is just as likely that the references only imply that these outstanding men, like all others, are fallible and inglorious creatures according to the Calvinistic understanding of the depravity of men.

Arthur Strange further notes the use of the classical image of the paralleling of dropsy with the desire for worldly gain in "Vanity of Vanities." The critic says that this image, which he feels is one of the better in the poem, is "reminiscent of passages in Ovid, Horace, and other classical writers."⁵⁵

Further, Wigglesworth's creation of "the easiest

⁵⁵ Arthur Strange, "Michael Wigglesworth Reads the Poets," American Literature, 31 (1959), 326.

ing a place of honor to heathen gods:

Oh what a deal of Blasphemy,
And Heathenish Impiety,
In Christian Poets may be found,
Where Heathen gods with praise are crown'd!
They make Jehovah to stand by
Till Juno, Venus, Mercury,
With frowning Mars, and thund'ring Jove,
Rule Earth below, and Heav'n above.

("A Prayer Unto Christ the
Judge of the World")

Wigglesworth's attitude toward the humanistic studies is seen as an ambivalent one. He ranked first in his graduating class at Harvard while pursuing a humanistic curriculum,⁵⁶ which would indicate a deep devotion to his studies, but in view of the lines quoted above it can be assumed that he must have suffered fears that the emphasis was misplaced "Where Heathen gods with Praise are crown'd." Morison points out that "all through the Christian era there was an undercurrent of hostility of Christian fanatics to classical learning, and to the universities that fostered it."⁵⁷ "What has Christ to

⁵⁶ Crowder, No Featherbed, p. 43.

⁵⁷ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 29.

do with Apollo?"⁵⁸ must have been a frequently asked question. Wigglesworth, however, who was both a Harvard graduate and a tutor, could scarcely be placed in the category of opposing classical learning but certainly he must have shared some of the questioning of the relationship of Christ and the heathen deities.

Not only was a humanistic influence present in the educational system of the Puritans but their logic, patterned after that of Peter Ramus, sprang from a humanistic source. In the system of the French philosopher, logical processes and figures were illustrated from classical poets and scholastic disputations were rejected. Miller believes that it is in the realm of Ramean logic that "the revolt against scholasticism left its most important mark upon Puritan culture."⁵⁹ The Protestants felt that scholasticism had become an empty way of thinking and they agreed with the position

⁵⁸ This undocumented question was quoted by President Charles Chauncy in a sermon, "God's Mercy Shewed to his People." It is cited in Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 20.

⁵⁹ Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 29.

of Ramus as it is summarized by Frank Pierrepont Graves:

"What repelled him most was the barrenness of the current dialectical method for any real use in the arts or in life."⁶⁰ The Aristotelian syllogisms no longer seemed adequate in the new land of common sense and practical experience and the colonists found in the French scholar a model for a new type of logic. Basil Willey sees the trend away from the medieval syllogism to the Ramean "disjunctive" and "hypothesis" as a part of a general transference of the age "from metaphysics to physics, from the contemplation of Being to Becoming."⁶¹

Ramus' belief that the principles of logic were present in the writing of classical poets came from his assumption that a simple and comprehensible order permeated the universe and that "the world is a copy or material counterpart of an orderly hierarchy of ideas existing in the mind of

⁶⁰ Frank Pierrepont Graves, Peter Ramus and Educational Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (New York: Macmillan, 1912), p. 21.

⁶¹ Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background: Studies in the Thought of the Age in Relation to Poetry and Religion (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1958), p. 6.

God"⁶²; he therefore reasoned that this hierarchy of ideas was revealed in the writings of good and wise men such as the poets. The concept of the world as an expression of an idea in the mind of God, which was Platonic and in fact led to Ramus' designation as "The French Plato,"⁶³ was coupled with the thought that though men are unstable and life is full of pitfalls, there is a divine wisdom that governs and controls all. These ideas of the nature of the world and of mankind were compatible with the Puritan understanding of the divine wisdom and control of God as well as that of the depravity of man and therefore presented no philosophical conflicts. Roy Harvey Pearce speaks of Ramus as the "official" logician in theocratic, insular New England and states that his system was "Platonic, unitive, and realistic with its key term being invention--the coming upon, the laying open to view of that which was real."⁶⁴

⁶² Peter Ramus, quoted in Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 29.

⁶³ Graves, Peter Ramus, p. 92.

⁶⁴ Roy Harvey Pearce, "Edward Taylor: The Poet as Puritan," New England Quarterly, 23 (1950), 41.

Ramean principles are apparent in "The Day of Doom" in the author's "laying open to view" rather than analyzing Biblical details and also in his approval of the idea of a logical and orderly plan of the universe; the Last Judgment is seen by the poet as a single part of God's harmonious plan for man and the physical earth. As the author explains the inexorable laws of God to the penitent before the throne, he is not only repeating his Biblical source but also echoing a Ramean understanding of the "inherent rationality of all things."⁶⁵

Ramus saw the function of thinking as "primarily discerning and disposing, not investigating or deducing,"⁶⁶ and he viewed knowledge as "a schedule to be filled in."⁶⁷ This filling in of a schedule, Ramus felt, was best accomplished by pairing every idea and object with its counterpart, both those which harmonized and those which were in opposition. He paired sun and moon, man and woman, cause and effect, and subject and adjunct in order that his

⁶⁵ Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 36.

⁶⁶ Pearce, "The Poet as Puritan," p. 41.

⁶⁷ Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 32.

followers might grasp the architecture of the whole and view the diagram of the universe. By this method he felt he was enabling them to distinguish the relative merits of ideas as they were viewed in categorical arrangement.

Wigglesworth, again following both his Biblical source and the Ramean concept, categorized opposites to heighten the tension of his poem. Good and evil are in constant opposition as the saved and the condemned appear before the throne and further pairing of opposites is seen in repeated references to sheep and goats, wise and unwise, and godly and apostate.

In his Commentaria de Religione Christiana, Ramus deals with the topic of the Last Judgment and according to Graves, "gives a minute account of the final abode of the righteous as a definite place"⁶⁸ even as Wigglesworth does. He further deals in the same work with the death of Christ in which he gives a "most graphic description of the mourning of nature over the death of the Savior."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Graves, Peter Ramus, p. 194.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Wigglesworth devotes little time to such a pursuit of the part nature plays in the acts of God but rather mentions the natural catastrophes which accompany the event only in a pedantical repetition of Biblical terminology; in fact, the author appears in his imitation of Scriptural natural images to remove the artistic element which is employed in his source material. The Biblical account of the movement of the earth during the Judgment is given poetically in Revelation 6:14: "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places."

Wigglesworth tells of the same event far more prosaically as he says,

The Mountains smoke, the Hills are shook,
 the earth is rent and torn,
 As if she should be clear dissolv'd
 or from her center borne.
 ("Doom," xv)

Beyond specific reflections of Ramean thought, the essentially logical nature of "The Day of Doom" as a whole is noteworthy. As Pearce says of other Puritan poets' agreement with the Ramean concept of logic, "the world is pictured as one in which a fixed, concretely embodied

logical scheme could be observed,"⁷⁰ and such is Wigglesworth's presentation. Each situation within "The Day of Doom" is explained on the basis of logic as the questioners are answered and satisfied by the logic of the Judge. Men plead for mercy on the logical basis that God can not find pleasure in seeing them condemned:

Can God delight in such a sight
as sinners' misery?
Or what great good can this our blood
bring unto the most High?
("Doom," cxxxii)

The Judge answers the petitioners in an equally reasoned manner that while it is true that God does not enjoy their despair, He does delight in the display of justice revealed in their sentencing:

God hath no joy to crush or 'stroy,
and ruin wretched wights;
But to display the glorious Ray
of Justice he delights.
("Doom," cxliii)

Perhaps one of the reasons for the lack of truly poetic expression in "The Day of Doom" is the heavily logical approach; the aim of the piece was instruction and the method of its accomplishment was logic, and while the

⁷⁰ Pearce, "The Poet as Puritan," p. 42.

success of the aim may not be questioned, poetic art perhaps received little attention in the logical exposition.

The Puritan philosophies of logic, government, and education reflect not only the intense religious orientation of the age but also some of the conflicts and paradoxes which were to increase in the society and eventually cause its downfall; participation in government was limited to a few in a society which applauded every man's involvement in the work of the community, education was humanistic although both classical philosophies and heroes were viewed with suspicion, and logic was revered although the role of reason was always uneasily balanced with that of faith. W. H. Werkmeister says of the inherent areas of conflict within the Puritan culture, "Puritanism was thus essentially antirational and rational at the same time. It was a piety of the heart and an integrated system of propositions appealing to man's understanding through reasoned demonstrations."⁷¹ The Colonists eventually

⁷¹ W. H. Werkmeister, A History of Philosophical Ideas in America (New York: Ronald Press, 1949), p. 13.

developed "a faith in reason,"⁷² the author feels, and they did not see that this faith was bound to undermine the very piety which was the center of their lives.

Michael Wigglesworth appears to have faced the philosophic conflicts and then turned to Biblical authority for security. He, however, shared the efforts of his contemporaries "to transform their creed into a rationally demonstrable system, to make a philosophy out of their piety and objective knowledge out of a subjective mood."⁷³ His work, as a result of his efforts, reveals the anticipated tensions created by the balancing of opposing principles in the seventeenth-century philosophies of government, education, and logic.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 12.

III. PHILOSOPHIES OF ART, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Puritanism, with its emphasis on theology, has been accused of hampering artistic creativity and Moses Coit Tyler speaks with considerable force of the Puritan's negative attitude toward art as he says, "In proportion to his devotion to the ideas that won for him the derisive honor of his name, was he at war with nearly every form of the beautiful. He himself believed that there was an inappeasable feud between religion and art."¹ While Tyler's opinion of the opposition to art is not shared by all critics, it is known that the colonists did entirely ban three art forms from their society: religious instrumental music, erotic poetry, and drama, and in the latter form they were particularly successful in their attempts at suppression. According to Wright, "the very rumor of stage plays was enough to stir some

¹ Moses Coit Tyler, A History of American Literature 1607-1765 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1878), I, 264.

communities to concern for the salvation of their citizens' souls,"² and in 1685 the acting of plays led to a flurry of Bostonian denunciation which reached its peak with Samuel Sewall's temper blazing forth at a dancing master's twitting boast that "by one play he could teach more divinity than Mr. Willard or the Old Testament."³

John Lovell states that some Puritans named the lively theatre of Amsterdam as one of the reasons they could not stay in Holland but he further points out that "drama, although not acted, was definitely known to the Puritans."⁴ He cites as authority for his statement the list of Increase Mather's books of 1664 which included Latin and Greek stage plays.

No specific statement of Wigglesworth's attitude toward drama is available but it can perhaps safely be assumed that a man who confided to his diary, while at

² Wright, The Cultural Life, p. 178.

³ Samuel Sewall's Diary quoted in Hugh F. Rankin, The Theatre in Colonial America (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1965), p. 3.

⁴ John Lovell, Jr., "The Beginnings of American Theatre," The Theatre Annual, 10 (1952), 7.

Harvard, that he had given a delinquent student a lecture on the dangers of pleasure and had evaluated other students' desire to play rather than to study Hebrew as "a spirit of unbridled licentiousness"⁵ would have felt opposition to dramatic entertainment. Morgan feels, however, that all Puritans "were not exactly hostile to pleasure, but their suspicion was so close to hostility that it often amounted to the same thing,"⁶ and this attitude is apparent in the life of the poet. His Diary, which is primarily a record of his investigation of his own sins, reveals his suspicion of the whole world as a threat to draw his thoughts from God. He expresses a dread of leaving Harvard for fear his very service to God will become a "snare" to lead his mind from his Redeemer as he says,

Now that I am to goe [sic] out into the world
I am afraid, nay I know I shall lose my heart
and my affection. I can do nothing for God,
receive nothing from Him but tis a snare
unto me.⁷

⁵ Michael Wigglesworth, "The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth," ed. Edmund S. Morgan, Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 35 (1951), 386.

⁶ Morgan, "Introduction to the Diary," p. 319.

⁷ Wigglesworth, Diary, p. 323.

The sins of which the pastor most often finds himself guilty in his Diary finally resolve themselves into pride and over-valuing of himself and these sins are, according to Morgan, "the attitudes involved in the enjoyments of the senses"⁸; hence, any pleasurable or artistic endeavour such as the drama which charmed the senses became suspect as a source of sin.

The attitude of suspicion of pleasure reveals itself in "The Day of Doom" as the men who had intended to reform their ways appear before the Judge and plead that they have not had enough time. The poet answers that their pursuit of pleasure has caused them to waste their time and therefore to forfeit their entrance into heaven. The adjectives which the poet employs to describe pleasure leave little doubt as to his own estimate of its value as he speaks of "vain pastime," "loose, licentious mirth," "fruitless toys," "fading joys," and "carnal pleasure." He questions the pleaders,

⁸ Morgan, "Introduction to the Diary," p. 319.

Could you find time for vain pastime,
 for loose licentious mirth?
 For fruitless toys and fading joys,
 that perish in the birth?
 Had you good leisure for carnal Pleasure,
 in days of health and youth?
 And yet no space to seek God's face,
 and turn to him in truth?
 ("Doom," cxi)

The acute sense of sin and the deep concern for avoiding any activity which might be conducive to sin resulted in no theatres being opened in New England while the authority of the strict Colonials was unquestioned. The drama was slow to develop in other colonies as well as in Massachusetts,⁹ however, and it can be assumed that influences other than Puritanism worked against its progress. Howard Taubman feels that the severe financial condition of the settlers was a factor as he says, "Where moral obloquy did not stand in the way of the first theatres, parsimoniousness did. The Dutch were notably

⁹ The first play performed in America by a regular company of actors was in Williamsburg, Virginia, in September of 1752 according to William Dunlap, History of the American Theatre (3 vols. in 1, 2nd ed., New York: Burt Franklin, 1963), p. 15, although the first play, Androboros, by Robert Hunter, was published in America in 1714 as cited by Bernard Hewitt, Theatre USA 1668-1957, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 3.

frugal and begrudged the expense of theatre tickets."¹⁰

In spite of the Puritans' opposition to the drama, Lovell finds the beginnings of American Drama in the New England Meetinghouse. He points out that the meetinghouse contained the three essential elements of theatre: a building, universally supported performances, and material which was purposely theatrical; thus, he concludes that if we judge by the essentials of public expression, dramatic purpose and fulfillment with coordinated effects, the Puritan religious centers must be seen as the home of American drama.¹¹

Music fared little better than drama in the New England culture, and even though Cyclone Covey states that there are few statements in their literature against music, it is, nevertheless, clear why the Puritan frame of mind would have acted as a depressant to music.¹² Calvin had little to say about music and in his Institutes

¹⁰ Howard Taubman, The Making of the American Theatre (New York: Coward McCann, Inc., 1965), p. 29.

¹¹ Lovell, "Beginnings of Theatre," p. 16.

¹² Cyclone Covey, "Puritanism and Music in Colonial America," William and Mary Quarterly, S 3, 8 (1951), 384.

he states that singing adds dignity and grace to sacred actions but adds, "Yet great caution is necessary, that the ears be not more attentive to the modulations of notes, than the mind to the spiritual import of the words."¹³ Perhaps in accordance with Calvin, the Puritans reduced music in their services to unaccompanied psalmody, and opposed choirs, instruments, and hymns. There was, however, sufficient interest in the singing of psalms to inspire Cotton Mather to write The Accomplished Singer in which he urged his readers to sing better in order that they might express their sentiments more effectively. John Kouwenhoven describes the manner of singing as the alternating response of a deacon and the congregation as the lines of a psalm were read and repeated.¹⁴ John Cotton was perhaps reflecting the general feeling of his society as he said that it was not only a satisfying experience but also that "Scripture

¹³ John Calvin's Institutes quoted in Covey, "Puritanism and Music," p. 384.

¹⁴ John Atlee Kouwenhoven, "Some Unfamiliar Aspects of Singing in New England 1620-1810," New England Quarterly, 6 (1933), 571.

demands psalm singing as a part of worship."¹⁵

Wigglesworth must have felt a general lack of enthusiasm for music since "The Day of Doom" is notable for its lack of musical references in spite of the rich musical imagery of its source. In the opening stanza the carnal men are heard to sing, "Soul, take thine ease, let sorrow cease; / much good thou hast in store" ("Doom," l), as they revel the night away, and in the closing stanzas the saints are seen to ascend to Heaven "with great joy and melody" ("Doom," ccxx). Aside from these brief references, the poet avoids the mention of music in his lengthy poem.

Although erotic poetry was banned in Massachusetts, Tyler says that New England was founded in a period when almost everyone who could read at all, read poetry, and many attempted to write it.¹⁶ The Puritans were agreed, however, Miller feels, that subjects other than moral and divine were unworthy of serious treatment,¹⁷ and therefore

¹⁵ John Cotton quoted in Kouwenhoven, "Some Aspects of Singing," p. 573.

¹⁶ Tyler, A History of American Literature, I, 265.

¹⁷ Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 77.

the subject matter of Puritan poetry as well as prose was frequently restricted to religious matters. Tyler sees an ironic justice in the position of poetry as he says, "If Puritan theology drove poetry out of forms in which it had been used to reside, poetry itself practiced a noble revenge by taking up its abode in his theology."¹⁸ The source of the general interest in poetry among the Puritans perhaps lay in their position as inheritors of the Renaissance classical tradition which led them to think that poetry was directed toward the highest ends within the conception of man, and believing such, to view mere versification as a pleasant accomplishment for their leisure hours. Roger Wolcott, writing about 1730, refers to his verse being composed as "An Improvement of some vacant hours."¹⁹

Michael Wigglesworth, writing in 1662, expresses no such relaxed spirit toward the art of versification but rather seems to embrace it as a form which aids the learning of his readers because of its ease of

¹⁸ Tyler, A History of American Literature, I, 265.

¹⁹ Tyler, A History of American Literature, II, 46.

memorization. His complete acceptance of the form, however, may be seen in the fact that his three principal works, "God's Controversy with New England," "Meat Out of the Eater," and "The Day of Doom," all are written in metrical form. He was not unique in his choice of form, however, for other new England Divines such as John Wilson, Benjamin Thompson, and Urian Oakes all wrote in poetic form. Morison says of their efforts, "Nor did they write poetry for poetry's sake. Their very definite motive was to instruct. They regarded poetry as a handmaid to divinity."²⁰ The critic goes on to point out some of the problems inherent in such a system of making poetry subservient to theology since in poetry written "under such circumstances of servitude it takes the genius of a Milton, a Herbert, or a Donne, to attain beauty and enduring dignity."²¹

In spite of the widespread inclination of the Puritans to write verse, they reached their literary peak in their

²⁰ Samuel Eliot Morison, Builders of the Bay Colony (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), p. 320.

²¹ Ibid.

prose, and Wigglesworth, in his "The Praise of Eloquence," reveals what was doubtlessly a widely held appreciation for using language effectively in any literary form:

Eloquence gives new luster and bewty [sic] , new strength, new vigour, new life unto trueth [sic] ; presenting it with such variety as refresheth, actuating it with such hidden powerful energy, that a few languid sparks are blown up to a shining flame.²²

Little of the eloquence mentioned here is demonstrated in "The Day of Doom," but Wigglesworth did reflect the Puritan desire to deal with noble and divine "trueth" in his compositions. In his utilization of verse forms he was further reflecting his own era in which Tyler notes that nothing was further from the truth than a general impression that in New England the inhabitants were declining the visit of the Muses of poetry.²³

While the arts may have suffered from conflicts with Puritanical principles, Morison states that "The warfare between science and theology found no battle-

²² Wigglesworth, "Praise of Eloquence."

²³ Tyler, A History of American Literature, I, 266.

ground in New England, where the clergy were leaders in liberalism and enlightenment, and purveyors of new learning to the people."²⁴ Miller concurs that from the beginning Puritanism had been hospitable to all physical sciences since the colonists welcomed the aid of physics, as well as astronomy, to help discover the mysteries of God's world; there was, therefore, never any serious threat of conflict in the Puritan conscience between material and divine manifestations.²⁵

Reflecting the early scientific interest of the colonies, the first American Philosophical Society was founded in Boston in 1683. Today, according to Otho T. Beall, Jr., little is known of the organization except that it was dominated by clergymen, that Increase Mather was the founder, and Cotton Mather was a member. Cotton Mather sent "Curiosa Americana" for publication to the London Royal Society and his contributions reveal an interest in science, Newtonian Astronomy, and natural phenomena. There are other references to zoology,

²⁴ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 273.

²⁵ Miller, The New England Mind, p. 437.

geology, and several letters to the Royal Society evidence an interest in mathematics.²⁶

Further proof of scientific interest is seen in the fact that between 1636 and 1783 seventeen Colonials in various fields of science were elected Fellows of the Royal Society of London, and Frederick E. Brasch feels that it was Cotton Mather, whom he sees as "the first scholar in the colonies to catch the real spirit of Newton's philosophy,"²⁷ who led the cooperative scientific thrusts. Brasch points out that while he was not a mathematical scholar, "he was able in his role of prophet, to visualize the mental development of students and he felt that here was something of greater importance than the classics."²⁸

In spite of the interest in scientific matters, however, there were hindrances to the development of science

²⁶ Otho T. Beall, Jr., "Cotton Mather's Early 'Curiosa Americana' and the Boston Philosophical Society of 1683," William and Mary Quarterly, S 3, 18 (1961), 361.

²⁷ Frederick E. Brasch, "The Newtonian Epoch in the American Colonies 1680-1783," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 49 (1939), 317.

²⁸ Ibid.

in the new world. The colonies were founded before the new science had begun to thrive in the English Universities; in fact, there was next to no mathematical or scientific interest at Oxford or Cambridge during the time that most of the university-trained founders of New England had attended. Other sciences were also at their lowest ebb, and as a result it was necessary for the new world to chart its own course in scientific instruction. One 1676 Harvard student wrote that he had to study mathematics by himself, and physics, which included all the physical, chemical, and biological sciences, was little better represented in the curriculum.²⁹

The discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler were some of the most astounding advancements of the age, and astronomy was the "dangerous" subject in the universities around 1620, in that it caused the dismissal of professors who failed to follow established ideas in the field. This situation changed, however, and shortly after 1665 Harvard acquired a telescope and was taking a lively interest in comets, and Increase Mather and the English

²⁹ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 245

Divines were soon carrying on a correspondence on the startling astronomical appearances.³⁰ Continuing his scientific interests, the colonial minister and scholar in his Remarkable Providences of 1683 records detailed observations of thunder, lightning, earthquakes, and tempests, as well as apparitions, daemons, conscience, and sudden death.³¹ In this combination of objective, subjective, observable, and nonobservable material, the elder Mather was reflecting his belief in the permeating presence of God in all matter and areas equally. In 1660 scientific interest received an impetus in the work of Robert Boyle in what later became known as "natural theology." The scientist probed into the secrets of nature and "unfolded the wonder, beauty, and symmetry of the universe created by God for the use of his errant children."³² Boyle's attitude of glorifying God's creative work through the discoveries of science was

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Increase Mather, Remarkable Providences (1684; rpt. London: Reeves and Turner, 1890), Index.

³² Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 269.

in accord with the Puritan theological position of attributing all creation to the direct hand of God,³³ and natural theology thus served as a widely approved stimulus to scientific observation in the Colonies. Cotton Mather spoke at about this time of the wonders revealed by the microscope, and he was moving toward the stand which he later took in The Christian Philosopher of 1721 that the world is completely planned and ordered by an all-wise creator.³⁴

There is no evidence of Michael Wigglesworth's response to the areas of physical science, and perhaps in spite of the generally congenial relationship between the natural sciences and theology it is possible that the strict mind of the author was not completely satisfied with the accommodation of the two spheres.

³³ This position was also that of Bacon in his The Art of Logic in which he, as discussed by Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, p. 35, states that he argued that God had revealed himself to men by means of two systems: first, through the written word, but also, secondly, through his handwork, the created universe.

³⁴ Theodore Hornberger, "Cotton Mather's Interest in Science," American Literature, 6 (1935), 413-14.

Robert Ellrodt notes, "A poet's response to science ultimately depends on his personal position in the age-old debate between faith and reason,"³⁵ and Wigglesworth's often wavering faith in his own status before God may have caused him to stand apart from the general scientific world for fear it might draw him from orthodoxy. In the field of medicine, however, the poet, as well as Cotton Mather and other members of the Puritan clergy, expressed a deep interest. In his undergraduate days before his conversion Wigglesworth even considered becoming a physician, and he had studied the "simples," which were the common cures of the townspeople, and the minerals such as nitre, antimony, sulphur, and calomel which were used in treatment.³⁶ At the time of his death his library contained volumes on bleeding, the scurvy, drugs, fevers, and stomach disorders. He is known to have consulted with other physicians throughout the Colonies in his pursuit

³⁵ Robert Ellrodt, "Scientific Curiosity and Metaphysical Poetry," Modern Philology, 61 (1964), 191.

³⁶ Crowder, No Featherbed, p. 125.

not only of his own health but the well-being of his congregation. The poet's tombstone bears further witness of his medical interest:

Here Lies Interred in Silent Grave Below
Maulden's Physician for Soul and Body Two.³⁷ [sic]

Cotton Mather's work in medicine, however, is far better known than that of Wigglesworth. He attempted to interest the town's physicians in the practice of smallpox inoculation during the Boston epidemic of 1721. The process, which had never been tried in America, had come to Mather's attention through the reports of some African slaves, and later it was recalled to his mind through communication in the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. The reports indicated that some success had been achieved with the procedure in Turkey, and with the cooperation of Doctor Zabadiel Boylston, the process was tried in Boston. Although the Puritan proponent of the inoculation experiment was persecuted, even to the extent of having a lighted bomb thrown into his home, the test did gain some measure of

³⁷ Crowder, No Featherbed, p. 266.

success during the epidemic,³⁸ and has caused Cotton Mather to be hailed by two Johns Hopkins medical historians as the first significant figure in American medicine.³⁹ Morison says that Cotton Mather could never eradicate from his mind the conception that there was no natural law which God could not and did not frequently set aside according to his good pleasure.⁴⁰ Wigglesworth, in agreement with the earlier conception which the seventeenth-century Puritans had inherited from medieval theology, surely would have agreed with Mather that the hand of God was actively at work in all matter. Perhaps, in fact, his preoccupation with the Last Judgment rather than the laws of physics and the paths of the comets may be seen as an expression of his priority of interest in "the hand of God" and not as a rejection of the scientific spirit of his age; perhaps his devotion to his theological mission may

³⁸ Laurence Farmer, "When Cotton Mather Fought the Smallpox," American Heritage, 8 (1957), 41-42.

³⁹ Miller, The New England Mind, p. 354.

⁴⁰ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 120.

simply have eclipsed his interest in scientific phenomena.

As hospitable as the Puritans were to science, it was as Tyler says, "toward religion, as the one supreme thing in life and in the universe, that all of this intellectuality of theirs and all this earnestness, were directed,"⁴¹ and surely it was toward religion that Michael Wigglesworth directed his intellectual fervor. This fervor was grounded on a single text, the Bible, for as Randall Stewart states, "The foundation of both the religious and the literary cultures of Puritan New England was the English Bible which was read in the Geneva version until about 1680, and thereafter in the King James."⁴² While this source of the religious culture is not questioned, the exact doctrines derived from the Scripture are probably over-simplified as they are lumped under the term "Calvinistic," for although few would deny that the teachings of John Calvin influenced the New England mind, there is considerable disagreement as to

⁴¹ Tyler, A History of American Literature, I, 101.

⁴² Randall Stewart, "Puritan Literature and the Flowering of New England," William and Mary Quarterly, S 3, 3 (1946), 319.

the extent to which the colonists agreed with the tenets expressed in Calvin's Institutes.

Miller gives qualified assent to the Puritans' position as Calvinists by saying, "It is true, the Puritans were Calvinists, if we mean that they more or less agreed with the great theologian of Geneva."⁴³ Morison even less readily accepts the blanket term "Calvinistic" with its associated tenet of predestination in the words: "after reading some hundred of puritan sermons, English and New English, I feel qualified to deny that the New England puritans were predestinarian Calvinists."⁴⁴ Morison continues his evaluation of Puritan beliefs as expressed in their sermons: "The sermons assume (when they do not directly teach) that by virtue of the Covenant of Grace, and through the efforts of the churches, salvation lay within the reach of every person who made an effort; Christ helped those who helped themselves."⁴⁵

⁴³ Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 56.

⁴⁴ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Wigglesworth, perhaps to a similar degree with other Puritans, accepted Calvin's teachings, and the list of tenets which were embraced by the poet can at least partially be observed in "The Day of Doom." The interpretation of the poet's lines, however, has led Tyler and Morison to widely differing appraisals of his theological beliefs. Tyler sees him in his poem of the Last Judgment as "the explicit and unshrinking rhymers of the Five Points of Calvinism,"⁴⁶ while Morison feels that in only one place in the 224-stanza poem does Wigglesworth "touch on predestination,"⁴⁷ perhaps the cardinal doctrine of Calvinism. It is in the poet's consigning of the "reprobate infants (not the unbaptized infants as is commonly said) to the 'easiest room in hell'"⁴⁸ that the critic sees the single acquiescence to predestination.

Herbert Blau feels that a real understanding of the

⁴⁶ Tyler, A History of American Literature, p. 23.

⁴⁷ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Puritan doctrine is made difficult by "the Calvinist's habit of contradicting the letter of the law."⁴⁹ The critic cites denials of widely held beliefs as he says, "Had Jonathan Edwards interpreted rigorously the doctrine of God's decrees (of predestination) he could not have preached repentance. Had Edward Taylor remembered it properly his 'Sacramental Meditations' would have been considerably different from what they were."⁵⁰

In spite of the difficulties involved in identifying the extent of Puritan agreement with Calvin's teachings, at least some of the Geneva theologian's tenets helped to shape the Colonial society; therefore, a comparison of the tenets of Calvinism with Wigglesworth's beliefs, as expressed in "The Day of Doom," may serve to give a picture of the poet's response to the religious philosophy of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The five tenets of Calvinism are as follows: predestination, particular redemption, total depravity,

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵⁰ Herbert Blau, "Heaven's Sugar Cake: Theology and Imagery in the Poetry of Edward Taylor," New England Quarterly, 26 (1953), 337.

irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints.

Calvin, in the Institutes, sees predestination as God's eternal decree by which He "determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others."⁵¹

Wigglesworth, in stanza xliii of "The Day of Doom" which is quoted below, appears to agree with Calvin's belief that some men are arbitrarily chosen for heaven while others are foreordained to hell; however, in stanza cl, also quoted, he denies the arbitrary aspect of God's choice and introduces a discussion of God's ethical grounds for damning men only on the basis of their wickedness. Still later, he says that no man who truly seeks for salvation will be condemned. The stanza appearing to express a belief in God's arbitrary predestination of some men to heaven and others to hell reads:

⁵¹ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill (London: S. C. M. Press, 1961), II, 1002.

My grace to one is wrong to none;
 none can Election claim;
 Amongst all those their souls that lose,
 none can Rejection blame.
 He that may choose, or else refuse
 all men to save or spill,
 May this Man choose, and that refuse,
 redeeming whom he will.
 ("Doom," xliii)

The stanza which indicates that man can escape hell by
 avoiding "willful wickedness" follows:

God did ordain sinners to pain,
 yet he to Hell sends none
 But such as swerv'd and have deserv'd
 destruction as their own.
 His pleasure is, that none from Bliss
 and endless happiness
 Be barr'd, but such as wrong'd him much,
 by willful wickedness.
 ("Doom," cl)

The thought that it is man who shuts himself from heaven
 by his failure to seek salvation is presented thus:

Twas no vain task to knock and ask,
 while life continued.
 Who ever sought heav'n as he ought,
 and seeking perished?
 The lowly, meek, who truly seek
 for Christ and for Salvation,
 There's no decree whereby such be
 ordain'd to condemnation.
 ("Doom," clii)

Any of these quoted stanzas could be isolated to
 demonstrate that Wigglesworth assented to one of three

conflicting doctrinal positions concerning predestination and salvation: man's selection for heaven or hell on the basis of an arbitrary decision by God, his selection by God on the basis of his deeds, or his selection on the basis of a mental attitude of seeking for or believing in God. The possibility of discovering what appears to be such varying attitudes within "The Day of Doom" no doubt accounts for the earlier noted differences of critical opinion as to the beliefs of Wigglesworth.

Such apparently ambivalent attitudes toward predestination were by no means limited to Wigglesworth but were, as Katherine Ann Porter notes, a matter of general conflict in the society. She says, "the struggle set up by the doctrine of predestination had resolved itself to a mere Manichean warfare between almost equally matched, separate and authoritative powers."⁵² Smith also opposes the often expressed idea that it was the New England Clergy which clung determinedly to the

⁵² Katherine Ann Porter, "Affectation of Praehiminincies," Accent, Part 2, 2 (1942), 226.

Calvinistic tenet of predestination. He states that there was often conflict because the ministers too quickly accepted Arminianism which "hedged so far against predestination as to destroy it,"⁵³ as it insisted on man's works as the basis of God's choice of his elect.

The critic goes on to say that "this heresy was usually lurking somewhere in the churches from the earliest days to the final collapse of Calvinism."⁵⁴ Morgan comments further on the conflicting attitudes which seem to have been shared by Wigglesworth and others as he says,

The history of New England theology for a century and a half after its founding is the history of the steady tendency toward Arminianism (with its insistence on 'preparation' for salvation), punctuated by periodic reassurances of the Calvinistic dogma of divine omnipotence and human helplessness.⁵⁵

⁵³ Chard Power Smith, Yankees and God (New York: Hermitage House, 1954), p. 59.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1958), p. 136.

Particular redemption, the second tenet of Calvinism, essentially means that each believer's redemption is an individual matter, dealt with on a personal basis by God. The roots of this belief lie in a rebellion against the Catholic position which held that the church was instrumental in the salvation of the soul. In "The Day of Doom" Wigglesworth displays a belief that salvation is a personal matter as the defendants appear before the judgment seat and are judged individually; the poet is therefore in accord with Calvin in this second tenet.

The poet further assents to the doctrine of total depravity, the third tenet. Depravity means that man is born of sin and is dependent upon the grace of God to effect his release from sin. Wigglesworth explains both the existence of the state of depravity and the Adamic historical background as the infants first plead their innocence and then are answered by the Judge. The infants speak:

Not we, but he (Adam) ate of the Tree,
 whose fruit was interdicted;
 Yet on us all of his sad Fall
 the punishment's inflicted.

How could we sin that had not been
 or how is this sin our,
 Without consent, which to prevent
 we never had the pow'r?
 ("Doom," clxviii)

The Judge, expressing the doctrine of depravity, answers that the children are mistaken to think Adam's sin was only his own since he stood in all men's stead. He says,

He (Adam) was design'd of all Mankind
 to be a public Head;
 A common root, whence all should shoot,
 and stood in all their stead.
 He stood and fell, did ill or well,
 not for himself alone,
 But for you all, who now his Fall
 and trespass would disown.
 ("Doom," clxxxii)

Irresistible grace, the fourth tenet, is defined by James Hastings as "a positive belief in the power of God growing out of a conviction that the Holy Spirit is both able and good in exerting His will upon mankind."⁵⁶ While Wigglesworth does not make a definite statement concerning this belief, God's efficacious qualities doubtlessly were not questioned by the poet who spoke of his powers with such awe in the following lines:

⁵⁶ James Hastings, ed., Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (New York: Scribner's, 1928), II, 151.

The excellence of whose Presence
 and awful Majesty,
 Amazeth Nature, and every Creature
 doth more than terrify.
 ("Doom," xiv)

The final tenet of Calvinism, that of the perseverance of the saints, is based upon a confidence in the strength of God in preventing elected man's withdrawal from his ordained condition. Wigglesworth makes clear his belief that man was chosen by God before the day of creation and that his election remains intact throughout eternity as he says,

These Men be those my Father chose
 before the World's Foundation.
 And to me gave, that I should save
 from Death and Condemnation.
 ("Doom," xl)

Thus, the Five Points of Calvinism may be seen as an integral part of the poet's doctrine which underlay "The Day of Doom." Perhaps of deeper significance, however, than his specific identification with Calvinism is his personal reflection of the seventeenth-century belief "that religion was the chief thing in life and that God's plan was personal, exact, and comprehensible."⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Tyler, A History of American Literature, I, 101.

IV. AN EXPLICATION OF "THE DAY OF DOOM"

"The Day of Doom," Michael Wigglesworth's poem describing the Last Judgment, was published in 1662. The work was regarded as so significant and enduring in its own day that Cotton Mather stated in Wigglesworth's funeral sermon of June 24, 1705, that it would survive and "perhaps find our children, till the day (of Judgment) itself arrive."¹ While Mather's expectations may seem overly optimistic, Matthiessen does say that the work continued to be read for one hundred years and that in the early part of the last century there were still persons to be found who could repeat nearly the whole of it by heart.²

The poem is described by Kenneth B. Murdock as the

¹ Cotton Mather, "Funeral Oration for Michael Wigglesworth," quoted in Matthiessen, "A Puritan Artist," p. 492.

² Ibid.

"most famous in its own way, of any book of Colonial poetry,"³ and by Sculley Bradley as "the most popular Puritan poem."⁴

Samuel Eliot Morison remarks on the significance of the "macabre ballad"⁵ by saying that it has "a social value far transcending its quality as poetry" since it carried home to every reader the Puritan message that "man was free to choose eternal bliss or eternal damanation; that his salvation rested on his will to believe."⁶ He goes on to say that very seldom in history has an intellectual class succeeded so well in breaking through to the common consciousness with its philosophy.

While the Biblical poem has been recognized as significant in its own historical period, it has received

³ Kenneth B. Murdock, "Writers of New England," Literary History of the United States: History, ed. Robert E. Spiller et al., 3rd ed., rev. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 63. Hereafter cited as LHUS.

⁴ Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, eds., The American Tradition in Literature, 3rd. ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967), I, 6.

⁵ Morison, Intellectual Life, p. 11.

⁶ Ibid.

limited critical praise for its artistic contribution and much condemnation for its harsh subject matter. Harrison T. Meserole, however, in defense of the work, says that readers and critics of the post-Puritan period have frequently misinterpreted the poem because they have been unwilling to accept the author's intent in writing, which Cotton Mather stated to be "an effort to set forth truth and win men's souls to bliss."⁷ The critic says that "Perhaps no poem in American literature has been so maligned as 'The Day of Doom,' which has repeatedly been denounced as inexorably stern doggerel by those who would have it be what it is not."⁸ Meserole considers Wigglesworth's discussion of language in his college oration, "The Prayse of Eloquence," and concludes that the poet achieves in the doomsday piece what he states in the oration to be his highest aim in writing, which was to "stir his readers to a heightened emotional

⁷ Cotton Mather, "Funeral Oration for Michael Wigglesworth," quoted in Matthiessen, "A Puritan Artist," p. 492.

⁸ Harrison T. Meserole, ed. Seventeenth Century American Poetry (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), p. 41.

awareness of what they already knew intellectually."⁹ Matthiessen further defends the poem by saying that although it has often been called "sulphurous, the tone of the whole is not sulphurous but logical," and adds that the strongest impression conveyed to him by the work is that of a poet revealing himself as "a hard intellect working within very narrow limits."¹⁰

The variations in critical evaluation of the work include not only such widely differing estimates as sulphurous and logical, but also grim, sensitive, macabre, and lyrical. Perhaps an explanation of the attitudes toward the poem is suggested by Richard Gummere as he questions whether the writer is to be seen as "a morbid humorless selfish busy-body, or to use the Emersonian phrase, 'a disguised angel.'"¹¹ Regardless of whether the poet is ultimately judged as busy-body or

⁹ Michael Wigglesworth, "The Prayse of Eloquence," quoted in Meserole, Seventeenth Century Poetry, p. 41.

¹⁰ Matthiessen, "A Puritan Artist," p. 500.

¹¹ Richard M. Gummere, "Michael Wigglesworth: From Kill-Joy to Comforter," Classical Journal, 62 (October, 1966), 5.

angel, Gummere makes clear the relationship between the author's sincere, and even perhaps angelic, purpose and the darkness of the completed poem as he justifies Wigglesworth's position:

It may be only just to say that this gentle soul steeped himself in the horrors of extreme Calvinism in the hope that his readers would take pains to avoid the tortures of sinners.¹²

Michael Wigglesworth wrote "The Day of Doom" during the first seven years of his pastorate at Malden, from 1654 to 1661, while he was suffering from a physical illness as well as from excessive mental pressures.¹³ His physical problems, which seem to escape diagnosis beyond general references to weakness and "a frail body,"¹⁴ frequently prevented his assuming his pastoral responsibilities, and his mental torments concerning his inability to attain God's standards of perfection

¹² Ibid., p. 6.

¹³ Stanley T. Williams, The Beginnings of American Poetry (Upsala: Aimqvist and Wiksells Boktryckeri A B, 1951), p. 30.

¹⁴ Crowder, No Featherbed, p. 74.

as well as feelings of guilt about his sexual desires, placed further restrictions on him by leaving him exhausted and depressed.¹⁵ It was, therefore, from a situation of discouragement, if not despair, that the poet set out to compose a poem which would convey an easily understood and memorized Biblical message to the community which the pastor could not reach orally and Williams feels that the darkness of the poet's life during these years accounts for the tone of "The Day of Doom." The critic says, "Surveying Wigglesworth's entire career and personality, it is hard to escape the impression of a physical and nervous collapse of which 'The Day of Doom' was the dark flower."¹⁶ Thus, according to Williams, the poem becomes the first in American literature of a number of pieces derived from similar tragic circumstances; as he says, "we think, for example, of certain tales by Poe and Melville."¹⁷

Cotton Mather, in Wigglesworth's funeral oration,

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 72-73, 90-93.

¹⁶ Williams, Beginnings of American Poetry, p. 30.

¹⁷ Ibid.

sees the situation far differently as he lauds the purposes and effectiveness of his fellow minister but he does agree that the poet experienced physical limitations at the time of composing "The Day of Doom." In his eulogy, Mather incorporates an explanation of the pastor's purpose, style, the type of readers for whom he wrote, and tells something of his publication history as he extols the Puritan author:

And that he might yet more Faithfully set himself to do Good, when he could not Preach, he wrote several Composures, wherein he proposed the Edification of such Readers as are for plain Truths dressed up in a Plain Meter. These composures have had their Acceptance and Advantage. . . . and one of them, 'The Day of Doom,' has been often reprinted here and in England.¹⁸

While the desire to communicate Scriptural information, as indicated by Mather's words was undoubtedly paramount in Wigglesworth's mind at the time of his "composures," Matthiessen feels that a further reason for writing the piece is found in the poet's imagination

¹⁸ Cotton Mather, "Funeral Oration for Michael Wigglesworth," quoted in Matthiessen, "A Puritan Artist," p. 492.

"of vast proportion"¹⁹ which long had been feeding upon the prophetic passages and which eventually demanded that its images be brought to structured form. The critic also mentions as an impetus for writing a recurrent dream of the Last Judgment which the poet had experienced some nine years earlier.²⁰

The poem which Cotton Mather saw as the production of a man who had "Faithfully set himself to do good,"²¹ Williams saw as "a dark flower"²² of a physical and nervous collapse, and Matthiessen saw as a creation of an imagination of "vast proportions,"²³ follows the account of the Scriptural Last Judgment as with a flash of light, when men least expect it, the day of reward and punishment arrives. Williams sees the opening lines as genuinely poetic as they describe the night of the Judge's descent

¹⁹ Matthiessen, "A Puritan Artist," p. 23.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cotton Mather, "Funeral Oration for Michael Wigglesworth," quoted in Matthiessen, "A Puritan Artist," p. 492.

²² Williams, Beginnings of American Poetry, p. 30.

²³ Matthiessen, "A Puritan Artist," p. 23.

to earth: "Still was the night, serene and bright, / when all Men sleeping lay" ("Doom," l). The critic, however, feels that the poetic mood is quickly lost as "Theology immediately forces Wigglesworth down, down into the bogs of doctrine."²⁴

The two opening poetic lines lead into an introduction of five stanzas in which is the first of the five uneven sections of the poem. The second section of sixteen stanzas describes the arrival of the Judge; the third part of thirty-three stanzas deals with the judgment of both the doomed and the Renate; the fourth lengthy section of one hundred and sixty-four stanzas presents the record of the trial of the doomed; and the closing six stanzas describe the joys of the blessed as they ascend to where "face to face / Jehovah may be seen" ("Doom," ccxxi). The disproportionate allocation of space to the sins and fate of the doomed in comparison with the stanzas given to the state of the Renate, accounts largely for the dark tone of the poem as the reader is engulfed in the tragedy of condemnation throughout most

²⁴ Williams, Beginnings of American Poetry, p. 29.

of the piece. Even when the lines are not specifically referring to the doomed, the scene is usually evaluated in view of its future effect on the rejected men rather than on the chosen. For example, the introductory words which tell of the unsuspecting men living their lives in "carnal reason" ("Doom," l) foreshadow the sadness of the trial for those who are doomed and ignore the state of those who will receive joyful rewards from the trial.

After the arrival of the Judge whose "mighty voice, and hideous noise" is seen as "more terrible than thunder" ("Doom," vii), all men, both living and dead, are brought before the throne of Christ where in the third section of the poem the saved (the sheep) are directed to the right and the damned (the goats) to the left. Five stanzas are devoted to dividing the sheep into four groups: martyrs for the faith, the physically afflicted who have kept the faith, the loyal able-bodied, and those whose faith is weak but true.

As the Renate appear in groups with others having

their same characteristics, even as the doomed appear later, the poet was perhaps not only reflecting his Biblical source but also what Josephine K. Piercy calls the literary form of "characters."²⁵ She cites the use in early American sermons of characters of the hypocrite, the covetous man, the good ruler, the faithful minister, the good soldier, and the good wife as an employment of character heroes known for their goodness or evil rather than for their adventures.²⁶ She sees classical historians and biographers such as Plutarch, Polybius, and Thucydides as well as the Medieval Church Fathers as a source of the literary form and feels that the use of such characters was a part of the tradition of the Puritans' English contemporaries.²⁷

²⁵ Josephine K. Piercy, "The 'Character' in the Literature of New England," New England Quarterly, 12 (1939), 470.

²⁶ Ibid., 476.

²⁷ Ibid., 470.

As the action of the poem continues, the four companies of blessed "characters" listed above, stand before the Judge with pleasure on their countenances as the poet comments on both the lamentable condition of natural man, who is no more than a "dust heap" ("Doom," xxvi), and also of the glorious state of such men after redemption:

O glorious sight! Behold how bright
 dust-heaps are made to shine,
 Conformed so their Lord unto
 whose Glory is Divine.

 ("Doom," xxvi)

Nine stanzas are then employed in dividing the goats into ten groups, some of which have subdivisions within them. The categories include deserters, those who have never professed the faith even when they had opportunity; worshippers of idols; those who have taken the name of the Lord in vain; breakers of the Sabbath; persecutors of saints; sex offenders; the covetous and ravenous; grossly wicked children and their evil-minded parents who have deliberately reared them in the ways of the unrighteous; liars, murderers, witches, and drunkards; and finally the heathen who have never heard of God. After the division of the defendants into their several groups, the

sheep are then invited to sit on thrones and assist with the sentencing as Christ explains to them that it was for them that he suffered the crucifixion. He then turns to the goats to tell them that they are condemned; each man will, however, be called upon to plead his cause even though he is already doomed, and enlightenment of the judged is seen as the purpose of such a defense after the penalty has been set. Each person will thereby discover the reason for his fate "so that there's no denial" ("Doom," liv).

The next one hundred and sixty-four stanzas are concerned with the trials of the goats as they appear before the judgment bar to plead their own cases. The first group to defend themselves are those who have taught orthodox doctrine but whose souls have been dead all the while; also, in this group are those who have partaken of the Lord's supper without cleansing their hearts of fault. These are followed by those who have recognized their innate sinfulness but who have done nothing about it. The Civil Honest Men come next and are told that they have "fallen short" because they have "thought to

scale Heav'n's lofty Wall / by ladders of your own"
 ("Doom," ci). The men who had good intentions of amending their ways follow and they are told in words which deny the Calvinistic tenet of arbitrary predestination that they had been given time to seek God's grace if they had but accepted it: "You had the season; what was your reason / such precious hours to waste" ("Doom," cx).

The last group to appear are those who will be granted lighter punishments: the heathen who have never heard the word of God and the infants who died before they had either "good or bad / effected pers'nally" ("Doom," clxvi). This stanza of infant condemnation includes the lines concerning "the easiest room in Hell" ("Doom," clxxi). The stanzas regarding the infants are of particular interest since they appear, contrary to previously quoted lines, to show that Wigglesworth was definitely predestinarian.

The poem rises to a climax in the stanza quoted below as the trial is concluded and the sentence pronounced:

Ye sinful wights and curs'd sprights,
 that work iniquity,
 Depart together from me forever
 to endless misery;
 Your portion take in yonder Lake,
 where Fire and Brimstone flameth;
 Suffer the smart which your desert,
 as its due wages claimeth.
 ("Doom," cci)

In the closing stanzas the culprits are bound hand and foot and thrown into the burning lake while the saved ascend to that glorious place where they will reign with Christ because of their regenerate nature:

For there the Saints are perfect Saints,
 and holy ones indeed;
 From all the sin that dwelt within
 their mortal bodies freed;
 Made Kings and Priests to God through Christ's
 dear Love's transcendancy,
 There to remain and there to reign
 with him Eternally.
 ("Doom," ccxxiv)

This poem of reward and punishment is written in the "plain style" which Miller says had been the badge of the Puritans for a century.²⁸ The style, which was characterized by brevity, spirituality, and perspicuity,²⁹ was not

²⁸ Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 65.

²⁹ Kenneth Silverman, ed., Colonial American Poetry (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1968), p. 33.

designed to glorify literature. A 1648 anonymous publication, A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline, emphasized the intent of the style by saying it was "not to dazle, [sic] but to make a hard point easy and familiar in explication."³⁰ The employment of the "plain style" did not dictate the form of Puritan expression, however, as Wigglesworth demonstrated by his use of the lyric in "Light in Darkness," the dramatic in both monologue and dialogue in "God's Controversy with New England," the didactic and hortatory in "A Postscript to the Reader," and the autobiographical in "To the Christian Reader" as well as a combination of the hortatory, expository, and dramatic in "The Day of Doom."³¹ Wigglesworth also by no means limited himself to the single ballad stanza form which he used in the doomsday poem but rather wrote elsewhere in couplets (trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter), six-line stanzas, non-ballad eight-line stanzas, and a fourteen-line stanza.³²

³⁰ A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline quoted in Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, I, 65.

³¹ Crowder, No Featherbed, p. 152.

³² Ibid.

The singing ballad stanza of the Judgment piece may be considered a poor choice of form for the serious religious material with which Wigglesworth was working, but it may also be praised as an effective form for clarity of communication and ease of memorization, the two aims of the pastor's writing. The poet selected the stanza form with which his contemporaries were completely familiar from their reading of The Bay Psalm Book, and doubtlessly the early English ballads were sufficiently familiar to the author that the jogging rhymed form seemed a natural choice to him. The eight and six syllable lines rush forward briskly, revealing their narrative without break in thought much as earlier ballads had recounted stories of far different subject matter. A comparison of a stanza from "Get up and Bar the Door," which may have been written as early as the fifteenth century, reveals no obvious differences from the seventeenth-century ballad by Wigglesworth:

It fell about the Martinmas time,
 And a gay time it was then,
 When our good wife got puddings to make,
 And she boild them in the pan.

And wind sae cauld blew south and north,
 And blew into the floor;
 Quoth our goodman to our goodwife,
 Gae out and bar the door.
 ("Get up and Bar the Door")

Wigglesworth's lines in the same stanza pattern read:

They rush from beds with giddy heads,
 and to their windows run,
 Viewing this light, which shines more bright
 than doth the noon-day Sun.
 Straightway appears, they see't with tears
 the Son of God most dread,
 Who with his Train comes on amain
 to judge both Quick and Dead.
 ("Doom," vi)

As the forms of Puritan poetry were varied, the sources of stylistic elements within their "plain style" were also diverse. The "ingenuities," which Wigglesworth seems to have largely ignored, such as anagrams and acrostics, were widely used among the Puritans. According to William R. Manierre II, these puzzle-type writings sprang from a thought pattern which was characteristically seventeenth century: "a word-centered as opposed to a thing-centered epistemology."³³

³³ William R. Manierre II, "Verbal Patterns in the Poetry of Edward Taylor," College English, 23 (Jan., 1962), 296.

The English baroque poetry also was a source of style and its influence, according to Williams, is seen in the "condensation in line, harshness, the audacious figures of speech, the paradox or the antithesis of the learned and the homely."³⁴ An emphasis on paradox is particularly apparent in Wigglesworth's "Riddles Unriddled" which was composed as a part of "Meat out of the Eater." In this work the author develops the paradoxes of spiritual light appearing in darkness, Christian strength arising from weakness, and liberty arising from the confinement of the spirit with God. Paradoxes are also evident in "The Day of Doom" as, to mention only one example, the Judge explains to the Civil Honest Men that though they have lived without fault, still they are guilty of all. The ineffective nature of their deeds is described in the following words:

Such deeds as your [sic] are worse than poor;
 they are but sins gilt over
 With silver dross, whose glist'ring gloss
 can them no longer cover.
 The best of them would you condemn,
 and ruin you alone,

³⁴ Williams, Beginnings of American Poetry, p. 19.

Although you were from faults so clear,
 that others you had none.
 ("Doom, cv)

Far beyond any reliance upon either ingenuities or baroque elements, however, was Wigglesworth's dependency upon the Bible both for style and inspiration. Murdock emphasizes that to the Puritans the Bible was not only a book of instruction, but also of supreme literary value as they reasoned that it was the work of an omnipotent God who used language perfectly since all He did was perfect.³⁵ Further, "The very fact of the extensive imagery in Scripture, the word of God, was proof of its essential relation to truth,"³⁶ Paul R. Baumgartner says. In complete accordance with this belief, Wigglesworth finds the source of his images for "The Day of Doom" in the Bible.

In the opening two stanzas, the Biblical image of a feast is used to picture carnal men reveling in food and wine without thought of God's day of Judgment. The

³⁵ Murdock, LHUS, p. 57.

³⁶ Paul R. Baumgartner, "Johnathan Edwards: The Theory Behind His Use of Figurative Language," P M L A, 78 (March, 1963), 5.

second stanza, in the same manner, portrays the spiritual unpreparedness of the men with a repetition of a scriptural allusion to the foolish virgins who had no oil for their lamps in the words, "The best of men had scarcely then / their Lamps kept in good ure" ("Doom," ll). The bestowal of thrones and crowns, in imitation of Biblical images, is used to indicate approval and reward, and the personification of Wisdom as a voice crying to men is seen as a repetition of the same figure in the Biblical book of Proverbs.

Wigglesworth employs light and dark imagery throughout the poem but his references again are seen to come directly from his source as he speaks of the "light Divine / of God's countenance," ("Doom," vii). He also reprimands men for pretending to "Dimness of sight, and want of light," ("Doom," clxi) in a further employment of Biblical images. The poet paints graphic pictures of a court of law replete with details of judge, evidence, and sentence but the pictures are given in exact repetition of the Biblical account of the judgment bar of God at the time of the Last Judgment and are not original images.

There are references to "bread and wine" and to "heavenly bread" but the words are largely quoted from Biblical passages and refer to specific events of eating. There is a fleeting use of original imagery in the mention of "poison'd darts" but Wigglesworth does not develop the image; again, he uses "You sinful crew" as an original image but he does not furnish further seafaring details. The author's closest touch with developed imagery which is not repeated directly from the Bible, is perhaps seen in the lines in which grief and sorrow are described through water imagery: "Grief's watercourse and sorrow's source / are turn'd to joyful streams" ("Doom," ccxxii).

Thomas Werge mentions the "tree of life" imagery which is common to Wigglesworth and other Puritan poets, and concludes that although much has been said of the metaphor as a literary image, it must be viewed as deriving from a Biblical source. In Edward Taylor's poetry it is sometimes seen in "a unique aesthetic treatment of the image"³⁷ but Wigglesworth's usage in

³⁷ Thomas Werge, "The Tree of Life in Edward Taylor's Poetry: The Sources of a Puritan Image," Early American Literature Newsletter, S 3, 3 (Winter, 1968), 199.

his brief mention of the "tree" reflects a factual understanding of the "in malo" or dark aspect rather than the "in bono" or beneficial relationship of man to the "tree"; man is revealed as a branch growing from Adam with his original sin rather than as a shoot springing from Christ, with his saving grace. The reprobate infants are told of their damning relationship to "A common Root" in the quoted stanza which has been cited previously to illustrate the logical nature of the Judge:

He (Adam) was design'd of all Mankind
to be a public Head;
A common Root, whence all should shoot,
and stood in all their stead.
("Doom," clxxii)

The poet's rhymes are simple and inescapable. He pairs "heart" and "part"; "things" and "brings"; "pray" and "day" and other one-syllable rhymes with such consistency that often the last line can be anticipated because of the established rhyme scheme. At other times he uses slant rhyme such as "word" and "sword"; "pour" and "show'r"; and "howl" and "soul" but these instances are far out-numbered by exact rhymes such as "go" and "woe." The author further uses internal rhyme to a marked degree,

thus intensifying the sing-song effect of his poem as is illustrated by the following stanza in which repeated sounds are underlined:

I may deny you once to try,
 or Grace to you to tender,
 Though he finds Grace before my face
 who was the chief offender;
 Else should my Grace cease to be Grace
 for it would not be free,
 If to release whom I should please
 I have no liberty.

("Doom," clxxvii)

Wigglesworth uses verb forms such as "know'st" and "dwelt" which are reminiscent of the Geneva and King James translations of the Bible. The final "ed" of a verb is always utilized as a separate syllable; for example, the poet speaks of the "depray'ed" nature and the "gall'ed" hearts of men. Often letters are omitted and replaced by an apostrophe as in the line, "Why so defil'd, and made so fil'd" ("Doom," clxix), and the rhythm is often smoothed by the use of "'Tis" at the beginning of a line.

Words which are now archaic but which were doubtless-ly in accepted usage in 1662 when Wigglesworth wrote them, appear infrequently throughout the piece. "Astonied," "maugre," and "limn" are used and "urcase," which is not

listed in the unabridged dictionary, appears in the marginal notes in a context which suggests it means "to reprimand." The vocabulary is for the most part extremely simple as would logically be appropriate in a piece designed for study by the untaught and children.

Wrenched and inverted lines may be found on almost any page of the poem, and at times the distortions accumulate until they may be found side by side as shown in the partial stanza quoted here:

Think you to buy Felicity
 with part of what's due debt?
 Or for desert of one small part
 the whole should off be set?
 ("Doom," xcii)

Primarily, "The Day of Doom" is best seen not as a piece of imaginative poetry but as a narrative which has the advantage of physical movement and dramatic situation. The account of the Last Judgment is moved forward by a dialogistic situation as the penitent come before the throne to plead their cases and the Judge responds with words of reasoned explanation concerning their guilt. The constant shift of attention from the pleaders to the Judge, while giving a sense of fast-paced action to the

poem, emphasizes the rocking motion which has already been set in swing by the heavy accent and regular rhyme of the ballad stanzas.

Hyatt H. Waggoner speaks of the "rude energy and dogged literalness"³⁸ which characterize Wigglesworth's work, and Crowder speaks of his "nervous drive";³⁹ Matthiessen refers further to "the strange intensity of the poet's imagination,"⁴⁰ and it is perhaps a combination of these traits which gives the piece its tone of sincerity and its unified expression of "Man's duty to his creator."⁴¹

There is little evidence in the poem of the personal sensitivity of Wigglesworth, who, according to Matthiessen, "throughout his life was spoken of in terms of affection and whose nature was neither harsh nor blindly relentless but dominated wholly the clearness of his mind and his

³⁸ Hyatt H. Waggoner, "Puritan Poetry," Criticism, 6 (1964), 297.

³⁹ Crowder, No Featherbed, p. 138.

⁴⁰ Matthiessen, "A Puritan Artist," p. 496.

⁴¹ Ibid.

pervading doctrine of love."⁴² The poet's conviction that he was, as Gummere says, "saving souls by his words,"⁴³ far outweighed any other concern in his poetry and created a tone of determined mercilessness in his work. There are, however, a few lines of lyrical sensitivity such as the ones quoted below which, in spite of their harshness, of prophesy, suggest Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner":

And by and by the flaming Sky
 shall drop like molten Lead
 About their ears, t' increase their fears
 and aggravate their dread.
 ("Doom," cxcii)

Perhaps a greater sensitivity than that displayed in any isolated lines is reflected in the tensions which underlie "The Day of Doom." The conflicts frequently center around the concept of the nature of God; is He, in fact, a loving God or a harsh tyrannical Being? Throughout most of the poem, God is seen as a cruel Judge who is angry "with an ire more hot than Fire" ("Doom," xiii), who is seen through tears as "the Son of God most dread" ("Doom," vi), and who has such a threatening demeanor that he causes men to cry, "No, no, alas! and woe!"

⁴² Ibid., p. 494.

⁴³ Gummere, "Kill-joy to Comforter," p. 6.

("Doom," ix) as they try to escape his "Dreaded Presence" ("Doom," xii). One stanza even goes so far as to picture the anger of God literally kindling the fires of hell:

Where God's fierce Ire kindleth the fire,
and vengeance feeds the flame,
With piles of Wood and Brimstone Flood,
so none can quench the same.
("Doom," ccviii)

This same terrifying God is described in the closing stanzas of the poem as filled with love as He dearly embraces the Renate:

For God above in arms of love
doth dearly them embrace
And fills their sprights with such delights,
and pleasures in his Grace.
("Doom," ccxxiii)

The poet attempts to reconcile the cruel and the loving natures of God throughout the trial stanzas by justifying God's harsh actions, first, by simply stating that in spite of evidence to the contrary, it is actually fair and "meet" that God should judge as he deems right and that man will soon understand his justice:

'Twas meet that ye should judg'd be,
that so the World may spy
No cause of grudge, when as I judge
and deal impartially.
Know therefore all both great and small,
the ground and reason why

These Men do stand at my right hand
and look so cheerfully.

("Doom," xxxix)

Later, in what appears to be a plea for understanding, the Judge explains the great pain and sorrow which He experienced on the cross when He attempted to save men. Christ reasons, "my Father's ire / I underwent, my Blood I spent / to save them from Hell-fire" ("Doom," xli). Wigglesworth further points out that God is not restricted by man's idea of justice but rather has complete power to "this man choose, and that refuse, / redeeming whom he will" ("Doom," xliii).

Daniel Aaron feels that in reconciling his loving and harsh God, Wigglesworth achieved a "grim sincerity" which gives "something of the ring of poetry" to his lines; however, he feels that if the poet is going to depict a hell of brimstone "there is no use in being finicky about the benevolence of his deity." He goes on to say, "It is only when the prophet of the New World vouchsafes to make concessions to human sympathy that he becomes odious."⁴⁴ It is easy to see justification for

⁴⁴ Daniel Aaron, ed., "The Spirit of Poetry of Early New England," Shelburne Essays on American Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963), p. 20.

Aaron's statement regarding the concessions to sympathy as the pleadings of the heathen are acknowledged and even granted to be partially right though their sentence of doom cannot be reversed. The Judge, in apparent theoretical approval of the men's argument for their lives, explains how they were "almost" worthy of a better fate. The lines which tend to antagonize rather than soothe the reader who is half anticipating mercy for the heathen read:

If you had lov'd, and well improv'd
 your knowledge and dim sight,
 Herein your pain had not been vain
 your plagues had been more light.
 ("Doom," clxv)

Richard P. Blackmur feels that one of the basic concerns of religious poetry is that of the placement of authority and strength as it "has to do with the modes of power and powerlessness; of glory and misery."⁴⁵ Surely the placement of power creates one of the areas of tension of "The Day of Doom" as Wigglesworth explains that God has total power both in man's temporal and eternal life and at the same time reverses himself to tell of man's

⁴⁵ Richard P. Blackmur, "Religious Poetry in the United States," Perspective in American Culture, eds. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), II, 276.

ability to make decisions for good or evil which will determine his ultimate end. As the Judge speaks to the assembled sheep and goats he declares, as noted earlier, that He has power to make all decisions regarding the fate of man for He "May this Man choose, and that refuse, / redeeming whom he will" ("Doom," xliii). Later, however, as the Civil Honest Men appear before the Judge, the poet seems to place the power back in the hands of men as he tells them that they were given time to turn, of their own volition, from the Devil to God:

It was Free Grace that any space
was given you at all,
To turn from evil, defy the Devil,
and upon God to call.

("Doom," cix)

The pleaders who had hated the Renate are told with equal assurance that the power for deciding their fate lay in their own hands:

You had your choice, wherein rejoice;
it was your porti-on,
For which you chose your souls t' expose
unto Perditi-on.

("Doom," cxxviii)

Crowder points out the tension inherent in the Puritan view of the inadequacy of man in his depraved state, as opposed to his responsibility for service and accomplishment. Since man was born sinful, the devout reasoned, he

could not produce meritorious work in either a spiritual or secular capacity except through God's grace. He did, however, as a chosen being bear the heavy and constant responsibility for performing deeds which would evidence his select position; he must, in fact, make his sainthood visible. It followed that he must be vigilant to glorify God and avoid personal pride in his accomplishments.

Michael Wigglesworth experienced personal tension in this area while he was a tutor at Harvard as he both desired to perform his earthly duties well and also feared that he would glory in his work.⁴⁶ His disapproval of pride in accomplishment emerges in "The Day of Doom" in the Judge's response to the Civil Honest Men who have performed their tasks well but who have labored because of personal pride:

Again you thought and mainly sought
 a name with men t' acquire
 Pride bare the Bell that made you swell,
 and your own selves admire.
 Mean fruit it is, and vile, I wiss,
 that springs from such a root;
 Virtue divine and genuine
 wonts not from pride to shoot.
 ("Doom," civ)

Wigglesworth also displays tension in his attitude

⁴⁶ Crowder, No Featherbed, pp. 48-49.

toward others as he sees men suffering in the hands of God. He appears torn between a willingness, and even a self-righteous pleasure, in seeing them receive punishments for disobedience, and a conflicting desire to protect them from harsh treatment. The poet's compliance with what he sees as God's plan for punishment is displayed as one man looks on without pity as his brother is carried off to doom, and as a wife, without grief or questioning, accepts the condemnation of her husband:

One natural Brother beholds another
 in his astonied fit,
 Yet sorrows not thereat a jot,
 nor pities him a whit.
 The godly wife conceives no grief,
 nor can she shed a tear
 For the sad state of her dear Mate,
 when she his doom doth hear.
 ("Doom," cxcvii)

The poet, however, sees the reprobate infants sentenced to hell and instead of accepting their fate at the hand of God, in an apparent reversal of his literal Biblical position creates "the easiest room in Hell" ("Doom," clxxxix) for their abode in the words:

A crime it is, therefore in bliss
 you may not hope to dwell;
 For unto you I shall allow
 the easiest room in Hell.
 The glorious King thus answering
 they cease, and plead no longer;

Their consciences must needs confess
 his Reasons are the stronger.
 ("Doom," clxxxi)

This stanza which creates the unauthorized room is perhaps the most interesting and significant of the entire Puritan poem. In addition to its revelation of the concern which is present in the poet's consideration of man's responsibility toward other men there is an indication of deep compassion in the author, an emotion which is not apparent elsewhere in the work. Wigglesworth appears so sensitive to the condition of the doomed children that he is willing to ignore his Biblical text, the very authority for his writing as well as for his life itself. Throughout the lengthy poem he has cited, with unvarying obedience to authority, the Scriptural verification for his words; however, when he finds no such authority for his design for hell, he fills the margin with a flurry of words which begs the issue of source by diverting the attention of the reader to the fact that the children were silenced as the Judge spoke. The marginal note reads: "The wicked all convinced and put to silence." This remark is followed by the citation of Romans 3:19 and Matthew 22:12, both of which refer to man being silenced

in the presence of God and make no mention of an easy room.

This stanza is further noteworthy as an observation of the presence of tragic vision in the poem. Miller has said that a tragic sense was absent in Early American writing because the "cosmic optimism" created by the theology rendered the Puritan spirit incapable of perceiving tragedy;⁴⁷ William E. Rowley, however, feels that this position is less than accurate. Rowley states that the tragic attitude exists when man "regards evil as a fact rather than as a cross, and endures it rather than uses it,"⁴⁸ and the critic goes on to construct a scale by which to measure the intensity of tragic vision. He places at the bottom of his scale the abject acceptance of evil and then rises through the levels of momentary perception of evil as a fact, conception of the world as a Vale of Tears, understanding that a moral or social order has been violated, and a conception that the cosmic order has been outraged.⁴⁹

A consideration of the Rowley scale reveals that

⁴⁷ Miller, The New England Mind, p. 35.

⁴⁸ William E. Rowley, "The Puritan's Tragic Vision," New England Quarterly, 17 (1944), 403.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 403-404.

Wigglesworth was, at least in this single stanza of infant condemnation, operating on the third level of tragic vision of conception of the violation of a moral order. Perhaps he functioned even on the fourth level of the violation of the cosmic order when he viewed the God-man relationship as essentially unethical as the infants who were without personal sin faced eternal punishment even though "from the womb unto the tomb / they were straightway carried" ("Doom," clxvi). In spite of the poet's awareness of the situation, however, his response to the tragic events is seen as one of avoidance; he refuses to face the two alternatives of heaven or hell which he has described throughout the poem and creates a point somewhere between the two for the eternal home of the infants.

Waggoner sees the concession of the poet's allowing the infants a special place as a "sop to conscience," although he adds, "Wigglesworth would not of course have thought of it that way."⁵⁰ Regardless of how he may have thought of it, however, it is apparent that he experienced an intense tragic vision in this stanza and that he was willing to abandon his previously accepted Biblical interpretation of

⁵⁰ Waggoner, "Puritan Poetry," p. 296.

the two spheres of eternal sorrow or joy in order to prevent the tragic end for the infants.

The tensions expressed by the poet were perhaps common in the minds of many people in the Puritan society as they considered the nature and purposes of God, and Wigglesworth probably spoke for many as he worked poetically within the framework of his orthodox beliefs. He exhibited, without doubt, a sincere pursuit of the aims of the colonial writers who wished to glorify God, to instruct, and to exhort their fellow men; and while "The Day of Doom" may receive little praise for its poetic art, it can be seen as an earnest expression of both the beliefs and the expectations of the Puritan era.

V. SUMMATION

"The Day of Doom" is seen as a representative poem of the Puritan era even as its author, Michael Wigglesworth, is seen as a representative man of the seventeenth century.

In compliance with a widely accepted literary philosophy of his day, the poet's primary aim in writing was the instruction of his readers. In the mnemonic lines of his "plain style" and the simplicity of his vocabulary there is a reflection of his desire to communicate clearly with those who were not trained in either the classics or any complex literary forms. Beyond the instructional intent, the poem may also be seen as an expression of the need of an imaginative spirit to bring to form the surging images which made his mind a turbulent cauldron; the poem is the product of an intellect which was fed on the apocalyptic passages of the Bible and which was stimulated further by a recurrent dream of the events pictured in the doomsday piece.

The poet's choice of the Biblical Last Judgment as his topic further reflects both the Puritan belief that only matters of a moral and divine nature were worthy subjects for literary exposition and the Puritan premise that the Bible was the complete authority in all matters of life and death.

The influence of a theocratic system of government which existed for the purpose of preserving orthodoxy is evident in the lengthy piece which neither questions the authority of its Biblical source nor indeed implies that such questioning is possible.

The poem is primarily a logical presentation which is in accord with the philosophy of a period which embraced the logic of Peter Ramus. The doomsday participants within the dramatic narrative appear before the divine Judge with logical arguments as to why they are not guilty of breaking the law, and the Judge answers always with what is recognized by the penitents as a superior logic, for as the poet says, the Judge's "Reasons are the stronger" ("Doom," clxxxix). It should be noted, however, that the logical arguments never question the existence

or the validity of the law; they are concerned only with the individual's position in relation to the law.

Wigglesworth seems to have shared what may be regarded as a general lack of enthusiasm for art in the New England culture as he ignored musical imagery in his writing. He further chose the poetic form as a vehicle largely because of its effectiveness for teaching and memorization and not for its artistic beauty. He appears to have viewed poetry as the handmaiden of divinity, even as his contemporaries. The lack of lyrical and artistic expression in the piece may be the result of a conscious effort to make the message of the poem superior to its form; perhaps, however, the lack of artistry is due to the intensive effort to make the Biblical details comprehensible and unforgettable.

The poet's response to the scientific interests of his age in general, and of his Harvard community in particular, is seen as limited except in medicine, which he both studied and practiced among his Malden congregation. His attitude toward witchcraft, a field which was related to theology and science, as well as superstition, is a tolerant one as he encouraged his fellow ministers to oppose the rising tide of hysteria which culminated in the Salem

executions of the late sixteen hundreds.

His reflection of the humanistic education which was typical of his period is seen as an ambivalent one. He graduated first in his class from Harvard while pursuing a humanistic curriculum, remained to take a Master of Arts degree, and later served as a tutor, and yet utilized almost none of his classical training in either "The Day of Doom" or his other writings. In a short poem, "Vanity of Vanities," he, in fact, expressed contempt for those who applauded heathen deities and he openly attacked the classical practice of invoking the muses.

It is doubtlessly in the area of religion that Mr. Wigglesworth most completely reflects his age. He chose theological subjects for his three major writings: "God's Controversy with New England," "Meat Out of the Eater," and "The Day of Doom." The latter, his major work, is characterized by darkness of tone far more intense than that of its Biblical source because of the structure of the piece in which a disproportionate section of some one hundred and ninety-eight stanzas is devoted to the activities of the doomed while only twenty-six are concerned with the

celebration of the state of the Renate.

The stanza dealing with the creation of "the easiest room in Hell" ("Doom," clxxxix), as an eternal residence for the reprobate infants, is seen as the most significant single part of the poem. It reveals the poet's compassion for his fellow men, a response which is not apparent elsewhere in the work; in fact, in other stanzas he expresses what sometimes appears as vindictive disdain for the fate of the condemned. In the "easiest room" stanza, however, the poet is willing to abandon even his source material, upon which he based his entire life, as well as his poem, rather than condemn the children to torture. Throughout the poem, he has cited in marginal notes his authority for each statement, but as he creates his own architecture for damnation he falls silent on the issue of texts and diverts the attention of his readers to the secondary issue of the children's willing acceptance of the decision of the Judge.

The tension apparent in this stanza between a surrender of his fellow men to the hand of God and a desire to defend them against what appears to be unjust punishment is only

one of the tensions expressed in the work. The author considers the nature of God, whether in fact He is cruel or loving, and whether the ultimate seat of power on this earth lies with God or with man.

The poem generally reflects the convictions of the culture which produced it: its acceptance of the supreme status of theology, a theocratic form of government, a literary life subservient to theology, and a logical approach to theological matters. The poem also reveals, however, the conflicts which must have existed in the minds of many Puritans, in addition to Michael Wigglesworth, as their intellectuality was directed toward the ultimate relationship of God and man.

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