

1997

Anne Hutchinson and the Economics of Antinomian Selfhood in Colonial New England

Michelle Burnham

Santa Clara University, mburnham@scu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/engl>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Burnham, M. (1997). Anne Hutchinson and the economics of antinomian selfhood in colonial New England. *Criticism*, 39(3), 337+.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Sciences at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in English by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.

Anne Hutchinson and the Economics of Antinomian Selfhood in Colonial New England

If American literary histories so often begin with the New England Puritans, it is because histories with such a starting point are able to tell an appealing national story of coherent community and religious freedom. So, at any rate, suggests T. H. Breen when he notes that beginning the national narrative instead with John Smith and the Virginia colony would require telling a far less pleasing tale of American greed, domination, and exploitation. Philip Gura has likewise wondered how Sacvan Bercovitch's model of an "American self," formulated from exclusively Puritan New England materials, might be complicated by John Smith's mercantilism. Why, Gura asks, have the "economic origins of the American self" been overlooked, and where might we locate the sources of this alternative notion of selfhood?¹ These suggestions were made a decade ago, and have been followed by a series of similar challenges to the continuist, exceptionalist, regionally narrow, and prevailingly religious terms that have dominated the enframement of colonial American studies. A number of critics have joined in the call to displace the cultural and geographic privilege of the Puritans and New England, often explaining such privilege as one effect of a retrodetermined paradigm which imposes on colonial American literature the role of anticipating later events, such as the American Revolution or American Romanticism.² But by setting John Smith against John Winthrop, and Virginia against New England, Breen and Gura run the risk of perpetuating the impoverishment and imbalance they otherwise hope to remedy within studies of colonial America. For the dominant narrative whose terms they seek to revise has historically tended to suppress attention not just to John Smith, but to the pressures of economic conflict, class struggle, and colonial exploitation within early American literature generally, including those Puritan New England texts that have otherwise seemed to represent America's origins in a coherent community dedicated to religious and civil liberty.

Criticism, Summer 1997, Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, pp. 337-358
Copyright © 1997 Wayne State University Press, Detroit, MI 48201

Among studies which have suggested alternative models for American literary history, I find Houston Baker's shift away from implicitly accumulative literary histories structured around a religious "errand into the wilderness," toward an emphasis on the economics of exploitation and "commercial deportation,"³ particularly suggestive for colonial America. While Baker's reformulation successfully foregrounds minority and subaltern texts and peoples, it should also prompt a reconsideration of dominant literary texts and figures within specifically economic terms. New England's Antinomian Controversy, the earliest large-scale social, political, and theological crisis in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, generated a significant number and variety of documents that are noteworthy for their anxious insistence on the stability of the colonial community of Massachusetts and the coherence of its religious mission. Indeed, American exceptionalism might be said to emerge in the aftermath of the Antinomian crisis, when figures such as John Winthrop, John Cotton, Thomas Weld, Thomas Shepard, and Edward Johnson struggled—in print, in public testimony, and under the discerning gaze of England—to define New England by opposing and exiling what New England was not. As Amy Schrager Lang notes, their writings worked to produce the long-dominant cultural consensus that "declared Americans a peculiar people inhabiting a wilderness theirs by promise."⁴ To read the political gesture of exile as well as the language of the Controversy in economic terms is to confront a culture that was fraught with much more than just a glitch in its religious errand. At the center of the Antinomian Controversy was, I shall argue, a tense and fractious contest over the economic terms of selfhood in early modern New England. This contest, between the competing economic ideologies of patrimonialism and mercantile capitalism, was largely played out through attempts to define the highly overdetermined figure of Anne Hutchinson, both as a body and as a subject. At the same time, this debate generated two radically different conceptions of the colony as a body, and of colonial subjectivity: one that imagined a coherent and reproductive community secure from penetration, and one that imagined an unbounded site marked by arrivals, departures, profit, and exchange. Anne Hutchinson's performance of a startlingly modern subjectivity that threatened the very ethos of the Puritan orthodoxy depended on the relations that produced the latter, mercantilist model of coloniality.

1. The Economics of Rhetorical Excess

Virtually every record from and account of the Antinomian Controversy is characterized by startling rhetorical moments that, in their excessive outrage and hostility at the heterodoxy in general and Hutchinson in particular, can only be read as symptomatic. Thomas Weld's fear for the integrity of both individual colonial bodies and the colony itself as a body provides one example. In his preface to John Winthrop's 1644 *Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians*, Weld describes antinomian ideas as a "Physicke" secretly administered to unsuspecting strangers in "stronger & stronger potions, as they found the Patient able to beare."⁵ Prompted by "a spirit of pride, insolency, contempt of authority, division, sedition," the antinomians posed a danger that for Weld put at risk nothing less than the political and religious future of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: "It was a wonder of mercy," he notes, "that they had not set our Commonwealth and Churches on a fire, and consumed us all therein" (211). Weld's characterization of New England antinomianism as a menacing and seductive epidemic gone out of control repeats, even several years after the crisis had passed, the tone of panic and urgency evident in earlier descriptions of Anne Hutchinson, her ideas, and her supporters. During Hutchinson's trial, for example, the Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley declared himself "fully persuaded that Mrs. Hutchinson is deluded by the devil" and feared that her notions would inspire her "hearers to take up arms against their prince and to cut the throats one of another" (343). The Cambridge pastor Thomas Shepard called her "a verye dayngerous Woman to sowe her corrupt opinions to the infection of many" (353), who was "likely with her fluent Tounge and forwardnes in Expressions to seduce and draw away many, Espetially simple Weomen of her owne sex" (365). John Wilson saw her "as a dayngerus Instrument of the Divell rayed up by Satan amongst us," and he warned against "the Misgovernment of this Woman's Tounge" (384). John Cotton, who in the four months between Hutchinson's civil and church trial turned from her defender to her opponent, told her that "your opinions frett like a Gangrene and spread like a Leprosie, and infect farr and near, and will eate out the very Bowells of Religion, and hath soe infected the Churches that God knowes when thay will be cured" (373). Winthrop himself characterizes her as "the breeder and nourisher of all these distempers," as "a woman of a haughty and fierce carriage, of a nimble wit and active spirit, and a very voluble tongue, more bold then a

man," who "easily insinuated her selfe into the affections of many" (263). He calls her an "*American Jesabel*" who was given the chance to repent, but instead "kept open a back doore to have returned to her vomit again" (310). The verdicts of banishment and excommunication which resulted from the examinations of Hutchinson at, respectively, the court in Newtown in 1637 and the church in Boston in 1638, are certainly reminders that such rhetoric was accompanied by actions that had profound material consequences for Anne Hutchinson as well as many of her supporters. But those verdicts are reminders as well that the Puritan orthodoxy was convinced that the antinomians posed a profound material danger to the colony.

Clearly, the extraordinary hostility and anxiety evidenced in these characterizations are symptomatic of concerns that extend beyond the well-known theological dispute, whose terms were foregrounded in the long lists compiled by Hutchinson's examiners of her so-called "*Errors*" of religious opinion. They objected primarily, of course, to her support of a covenant of grace theology in which assurance for one's salvation was located within oneself, in an internal and invisible experience of grace. She claimed that John Wilson and other "legalist" ministers were preaching instead a covenant of works, which accepted external markers such as moral and law-abiding behavior both as evidence of an individual's salvation and as a way of preparing for the arrival of grace.⁶ As several commentators on the Antinomian crisis note, however, Hutchinson's ideas were not so radically inconsistent with orthodox Puritanism as the legal and rhetorical responses to them would suggest. Indeed, she was simply advocating—in part through weekly meetings held in her home—ideas preached by John Cotton, whom she had followed to Massachusetts from England two years before the Controversy erupted. Hutchinson repeated and emphasized Cotton's own insistence that works and words were not the same as spirit and grace, and that faith could not be assured without "the seal" of the latter.⁷ As Andrew Delbanco explains, "Anne Hutchinson was saying absolutely nothing at odds with Puritan biblicism" and "was in fact speaking firmly within the Pauline tradition."⁸ But if the difference between Hutchinson's ideas and those of other Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic was, as Philip Gura notes, "only a matter of degree,"⁹ why was this woman convicted of conspiring to destroy the stability of the entire Bay Colony and of undermining the most central tenets of its church? Why was she perceived as a danger so extraordinary that only imprisonment, banishment, and excommunication could pre-

serve the commonwealth from the perils that she posed? In other words, how are we to read the striking excess—of anxiety, rage, and panic—in the response of New England's ministers and magistrates to Anne Hutchinson, her weekly meetings to discuss sermons, and her espousal of a covenant of grace?

Antinomian acts of political resistance and rhetorical statements of spiritual resistance can account only in part for the Puritan orthodoxy's fear. The antinomians did express their support for ousted governor Henry Vane and beleaguered minister John Wheelwright by refusing to participate in and support the colony's Pequot War efforts, primarily in protest over the newly elected governor Winthrop and the minister assigned to the Boston militia, John Wilson.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Wheelwright called in his controversial Fast-Day sermon for "a spirituall combate" which required that "the children of God, . . . have their swords redy, they must fight, and fight with spirituall weapons" (158). If such a battle "will cause a combustion in the Church and comon wealth," Wheelwright insisted, "what then?" He summoned the image of a "Spiritual burning" akin to the "externall burning of Rome" (165) and suggested that such conflict was both necessary and justifiable. Winthrop, for one, read Wheelwright's rhetoric literally. He even defended his literalist reading later in the *Short Story* by arguing that the minister consistently referred to material "swords and hammers" as figures for "spirituall weapons" (293). Winthrop responded to the sermon by ordering the forcible disarming of all antinomian supporters, and instituting a general ordinance against aliens aimed "to keep out all such persons as might be dangerous to the commonwealth" (1:224), namely those sympathetic to the heterodoxy. Winthrop's interpretation of Wheelwright's language might be read as an instance of what Patricia Caldwell, in her analysis of Hutchinson's trials, has called the "antinomian language controversy." Caldwell perceptively reads the conflict between Hutchinson and her adversaries as a linguistic one, in which "Mrs. Hutchinson was speaking what amounts to a different language" that was incomprehensible to her interrogators.¹¹ But the very words deployed by the Puritan orthodoxy evidence another, related conflict that divided the two groups along more specifically economic lines. Ultimately, the theological, linguistic, and economic dimensions of this crisis cannot be treated in isolation, not only because they each repeat the others' terms, but because together they represent a complex articulation of a crisis in subjectivity that registered its effects in all of these domains.

John Winthrop initiates what is arguably the angriest characterization in any account of the Controversy, when he describes Hutchinson's typological self-alignment with the biblical figure of Daniel as "too too vile": "See the impudent boldnesse of a proud dame," he writes, "that *Athaliah*-like makes havocke of all that stand in the way of her ambitious spirit," and who "vented her impatience with so fierce speech and countenance, as one would hardly have guessed her to have been an Antitype of *Daniel*, but rather of the Lions after they were let loose" (275). His account of Hutchinson "vent[ing] her impatience" employs a verb that occurs with remarkable frequency in the texts of the trials and subsequent accounts of the antinomian affair. In fact, the various social, political, and economic tensions that inform the Antinomian Controversy might be said to meet and overlap in the multiple senses of this word. For example, Thomas Weld's description of the arrival from England of those who would eventually make up the antinomian faction invokes an image that, by using a different definition of the verb "to vent," highlights an economic subtext to Winthrop's and others' use of that word. Weld notes that "some going thither from hence full fraught with many unsound and loose opinions, after a time, began to open their packs, and freely vent their wares to any that would be their customers; Multitudes of men and women, Church-members and others, having tasted of their Commodities, were eager after them, and were streight infected before they were aware, and some being tainted conveyed the infection to others" (201-202; emphasis added). Strategically mixing the metaphors of commerce and disease, Weld associates the antinomians with the infectious relations of mercantile capitalism by classifying their "unsound and loose opinions" as "wares" or "Commodities" sold to "customers." His use of the word "vent" to describe this circulation is particularly suggestive. When this verb appears elsewhere either in the trial records or *A Short Story*, it is invariably associated with Anne Hutchinson: "she had thus vented her mind" (273), "she vented her impatience" (275), she displayed "impudency in venting and maintaining" her "delusions" (309), she "vented divers of her strange opinions" (317; all emphases added). Among the many usages for this verb in the seventeenth century, two predominated. On the one hand, it meant uttering, discharging, or emitting words. On the other, it meant to sell or vend, to dispose of commodities by sale, by finding purchasers in a market. Often, these two senses of the word mutually inform each other, as in Edward Johnson's description of the antinomians in

Wonder-Working Providence as “daily venting their deceivable Doctrines.”¹²

A similar doubling informs the word “estate,” which also occurs with extraordinary regularity in accounts and documents of the Controversy. Indeed, the dispute between the two camps over the relationship between justification and sanctification hinged precisely on how a “good estate” (263) might be evidenced and apprehended. It is with this sense—of one’s condition in relation to the experience of conversion or election—that the word is most often used in writings about Hutchinson. Yet even such pointed references to “spirituall Estates” (370) summon up the contemporary resonance of property or wealth, of a more specifically economic condition. Such ambiguity informs, for example, Winthrop’s description of Anne Hutchinson’s husband William as “a very honest and peaceable man of good estate,” particularly considering that on this same page he remembers her son, Edward Hutchinson, declaring in court just before he was fined “that if they took away his estate, they must keep his wife and children” (262). The son is clearly objecting to the loss of wealth, but the father is less clearly being described as either wealthy or as a respectable member of the church, as one of the elect. Winthrop, who had cause to be concerned with both his spiritual and material estates throughout his years in New England, regularly employs the word in both contexts. Just before his first reference to Hutchinson and her “dangerous errors” in his *History*, he mentions the burning of a house owned by Shaw, who was discovered to have “concealed his estate, and made show as if he had been poor,” despite the fact that he had been “the day before admitted of the . . . [Watertown] church” (1:200). Elsewhere, words with unexpectedly economic import, such as “purchase,” “prosper,” or “credit,” are used to formulate theological questions or to represent relations with the divine. Winthrop accuses Hutchinson of mistakenly believing “that the souls of men are . . . made immortal by Christ’s purchase” (254), just as Cotton reprimands her for assuming that “*this Immortality is purchased from Christ*” (355). According to Thomas Weld, the antinomians attempted to swell their ranks by convincing others that those who evidenced “their good estate by Sanctification . . . never prospered” (205). Weld furthermore accuses them of saying one thing and doing another, and “*By this kinde of Jesuiticall dealing, they did not onely keepe their credit with them, as men that held nothing but the truth; but gained this also, viz. that when, afterwards, they should heare those men taxed for holding errors, they would be ready to defend them*” (207). Financial accu-

sations that place the antinomians within scenarios of commercial exchange and monetary accountability echo within such statements and complaints.¹³

Just as these charges of theological error are conveyed in economic language, so is the Antinomian Controversy and its rhetoric undergirded by emergent conflicts over economic ideology. The threat embodied by Hutchinson and her ideas may have been most overtly characterized as theological and political, but those dangers contained and concealed another, almost inarticulable, source of fear: the emergence of a conception of selfhood that was tightly interwoven with the Hutchinsonians' class alignment, particularly their participation in mercantile practice. The vehemence with which her accusers depicted, condemned, and punished Anne Hutchinson can only be understood in the context of the challenge this new articulation of selfhood posed to the dominant modes of ideology and authority in seventeenth-century New England. In other words, the antinomian threat, which became increasingly embodied in the figure of Hutchinson, was the threat of an emergent model of subjectivity—a model constituted in terms of a covenant of grace theology that located religious authority in an invisible experience and, by doing so, divorced the realm of words and works from the world of things and grace. But this selfhood was constituted also in terms of the relatively new world of mercantile capitalism, a world represented by the class to which the Hutchinson family, among others, belonged.

2. Merchants and Gentry in Massachusetts

When Thomas Weld opened his preface to *A Short Story* with the evocative description of antinomians "venting" their "wares" from open packs, he may very well have intended to remind his readers of the predominant class identity of the group who, like the Hutchinson family, consisted in large part of merchants and tradespeople. As Emery Battis notes in his study of the sociology of Hutchinson's supporters, conflicts between the merchant class and the gentry were particularly tense during the years of the Antinomian crisis.¹⁴ But it was differences in economic ideology more than differences in wealth that separated families like the Hutchinsons from those like the Winthrops in 1630s Massachusetts. The two families, who lived across the street from each other in downtown Boston, could both boast signs of affluence such as substantial property holdings and several household servants. What distinguished the Winthrops from

the Hutchinsons instead was the means of acquiring and handling wealth and, even more importantly, incompatible attitudes toward social and political authority that followed from their differences in economic ideology. John White's concerned 1636 letter to Winthrop about the "Superfluity of Shopkeepers Inholders etc." in New England, suggests the source of these ideological differences. White warns that those who reap a profit by "retailing wares" challenge a production-oriented economy "wherein their labours might produce something for the common good"; merchants instead "drawe only one from another and consequently live by the sweat of other mens brows, producing nothing themselves by their owne endeavours."¹⁵ White's objection to mercantile commerce, and his suggestion "that I should reduce it if I were to advise in the government," reflects the patrimonial economics of the gentry class, an ideology John Winthrop shared. When he is approached in the early years of settlement by the Indian Chickatabot, for example, the governor carefully distinguishes between himself and those who regularly trade commodities when he explains to the Indian "that English sagamores did not use to truck" (1:53). The Hutchinsons, on the other hand, owned and operated a successful mercer shop, and their economic success depended on a trans-Atlantic network of family ties and mercantile interests in London, the West Indies, Boston, and inland.¹⁶

As Darrett Rutman succinctly states, for Winthrop such "commerce was corrupt."¹⁷ Winthrop's wealth and class status as a member of the English landed gentry derived from a very different set of economic relations. In England, he had presided over the family estate at Groton Hall where he leased land to tenant-farmers, before receiving an office to serve as an attorney in the Court of Wards. There his duties continued to be fully consistent with the patrimonial economics of the aristocracy, since he most often defended clients who were making claims on family inheritances.¹⁸ Only after losing his office, signing on as one of the undertakers for the Massachusetts Bay Company, and emigrating to New England, did he have his son sell the Groton estate, for which he received a disappointing sum.¹⁹ John Winthrop has often been accused of having poor financial sense, of steadily acquiring debts that threatened to outrun his funds, of dying land poor. But his economic decisions, his adherence to the principle of what John White called "Bonum publicum not Privatum Commodum,"²⁰ his application of the benevolent rule of mercy to debts which could not be justly repaid, and his considerable landholdings throughout the commonwealth, might all be seen as consistent with

the socioeconomic ethos of the gentry class.²¹ If the Puritans were, in Stephen Innes' apt phrase, "moving 'crab-like' into the new capitalist world—looking backward in alarm even as they were advancing forward with dispatch," then Winthrop simply appeared to be looking backward more determinedly than most.²²

The social model espoused by the gentry during the seventeenth century not only valued social cohesion and the common good as its preeminent goal, but premised that cohesion on a hierarchy that distinguished the governing authority from those it governed. This sociopolitical dividing line was, for Winthrop, precisely commensurate with the line which divided "rich" and "poore," as he expressed it in his famous lay sermon "A Modell of Christian Charity." But when Winthrop drew the line between the governors and those they governed, even the richest merchants invariably fell into the latter group. For example, although Winthrop allowed deputies to represent the interests of the freemen to the Massachusetts General Court, he insisted that ruling power remain vested in the minority of magistrates. Magistrates, like Winthrop, were invariably members of the gentry and yeoman class, while deputies—one of whom was William Hutchinson—were consistently of the merchant class.²³ The commensurability of this economic fault line with the theological fault line dividing the Hutchinsonians from the Puritan orthodoxy is striking, and the frequent use of the word "vent" by the latter to describe the antinomians might be seen as a way of inscribing and remarking that doubled line.

According to Battis, proponents of the traditional patrimonial system like Winthrop saw the antinomians' espousal of the covenant of grace as allowing "an anarchistic subjectivism" which "elevated the individual conscience above all external authority and exempted the believer from any considerations of conduct."²⁴ In this view, merchants were presumably attracted to Anne Hutchinson's theological position since, by rejecting a covenant of works, it permitted them to engage in self-interested profit-seeking without guilt, and provided them religious tenets with which to counteract the censure of ministers and magistrates who, like John Winthrop, advocated government regulation of wages and fixing of prices as a way of maintaining the public good.²⁵ Battis thus locates the perceived threat of antinomianism in the law-defying opportunities—such as charging prices that exceeded the "common" and therefore just price—made possible by the privileging of justification over sanctification. Yet here, too, the orthodoxy's response seems in vast disproportion to the supposed

dangers they seek to control. Rather than locate Hutchinson's threat, as Battis and others do, in her privileging of the internal and the ineffable over the external and the visible, I locate it instead in her more radical alienation of these two realms from each other. That splitting introduced a gap between the internal and the external self, just as her comments in court presumed a gap between the words and the spirit of scripture. What emerges from the texts of Hutchinson's trials therefore is a contest between a form of selfhood that acknowledges—indeed, is founded on—that gap, and one for which that gap is a source of terror and confusion.

3. Subjectivity and Mercantile Theory

It has generally been acknowledged that the climactic moment in Hutchinson's first trial is her claim to have received "an immediate revelation" which arrived, she says, "[b]y the voice of [God's] own spirit to my soul" (337). But despite the surprised "How!" with which Thomas Dudley responds to her announcement, the court as a whole only gradually, and over the course of several pages of further testimony, works itself into a horrified consensus about the danger represented by this claim and therefore the necessity of banishing the defendant. The movement toward that verdict begins when Winthrop clarifies that "the ground work of her revelations is the immediate revelation of the spirit and not by the ministry of the word, and that is the means by which she hath very much abused the country that they shall look for revelations and are not bound to the ministry of the word . . . and this hath been the ground of all these tumults and troubles" (341-42). The profound error here, for Winthrop, is not just that Hutchinson experienced a revelation, but that "it is impossible but that the word and spirit should speak the same thing" (342). To claim otherwise, he rather melodramatically insists, "overthrows all" (343). Though several speakers subsequently came to her defense, none was able to turn back the tide of opinion against Hutchinson after the governor's assertion.

Emphasis on the defendant's "revelation" in the 1637 courtroom has tended to obscure the climactic moment in Hutchinson's second trial, which followed her intervening imprisonment at a home in Roxbury. If the admission of her revelations was the climax of the Newtown trial, then Hutchinson's curious retraction of an earlier statement marks the turning point in the Boston trial. Here, too, Hutchinson's own words appear to invite, almost to necessitate, her

conviction. But in both cases, it is not Hutchinson's words that condemn her so much as the failed relation that she posits between words and their referents. The momentum that ends with John Wilson's pronouncement of excommunication begins pages earlier, when Hutchinson is asked to respond to a series of "errors" with which she has been charged. She accepts Thomas Shepard's correction to her understanding of the *"Inherence of Grace"* (378), by responding that "I doe not acknowledge it to be an Error but a Mistake. *I doe acknowledge my Expression to be Ironious but my Judgment was not Ironious*, for I held befor as you did but could not express it soe" (361). Much later in the examination, she responds similarly to a question put to her by Shepard: "*I confess, my Expressions was that way but it was never my Judgment.*" When asked to clarify, she repeats: "My Judgment is not altered though my Expression alters" (378). Her defense in both instances relies on the same principle as her theological distinction between the spirit and the word; that is, for Hutchinson words are representations or "Expressions," that cannot be equated with "Judgments," with the things they represent. It is this alienation of representation from the thing itself that leads Shepard, despite the fact that Hutchinson is conceding to him at these moments, to take her response as evidence that she is after all "a Notorious Imposter" (383), while Wilson declares "This you say is most dayngerous" (378). They do so not because she retains the heretical misunderstanding of grace they thought she held, but because she has torn signs loose from that which they signify.

By insisting on a potentially radical distinction between "Expression" and "Judgment," Hutchinson here insists that her words could and did misrepresent her self. As Patricia Caldwell has argued, this examination reveals a conflict between what amounts to two different and incompatible notions of language. But those differences correspond also to two profoundly different models of selfhood.²⁶ When Anne Hutchinson insists that her words bear no necessary or organic relationship to her ideas, she speaks within the terms of a remarkably modern subjectivity, and by doing so she throws the most basic assumptions of New England's Puritan orthodoxy into crisis. Her understanding of language remains, however, perfectly consistent with her theological position and with the economic ideology associated with the merchant class.

Hutchinson continued to argue, in both trials, that the word and the spirit could, indeed, speak different things, an argument not unlike that advanced by writers on commerce that the weight and the

value of a coin need not correspond. Such a notion undercut the most fundamental assumptions of the world view articulated by the religious and political orthodoxy in seventeenth-century New England, who defended Winthrop's refusal to separate the word from spirit as well as his periodic refusals, by instituting fixed prices, to allow prices to fluctuate by unseen market forces. What emerges in the documents of these debates is a portrait of Hutchinson as a subject whose distinctively modern depth and interiority derive from her introduction of a potentially irreconcilable gap between an external, social self on the one hand and an internal, invisible self on the other. It is above all to this "monstrous" subjectivity²⁷ that the anxiety and hostility of her examiners is directed.

Contemporary economic debates both in England and New England reveal the emergence of economic principles, derived from the operation of mercantile capitalism, that coincide with the radical innovation of subjectivity I have associated with Anne Hutchinson and New England antinomianism. The massive expansion of commerce, facilitated largely by an exploding Atlantic trade and attendant colonizing ventures, led over the course of the early seventeenth century to the emergence of a new economic paradigm which—in ways that strikingly parallel Anne Hutchinson's religious notions—appeared to challenge the sovereign authority of the king as well as traditional principles of social cohesion and the common good. Joyce Appleby's history of seventeenth-century economic thought locates the development of these ideas in a series of pamphlets written by merchants such as Thomas Mun and Edward Misselden. In Mun and Misselden's discussions, the sphere of economics became divorced from that of the state just as monetary values became divorced from a presumed "order of real things."²⁸ Against the views of an economic writer in the patrimonial tradition like Gerald de Malynes, for example, who defended the sovereign's power to set prices and emphasized the metallic value of coin, Misselden emphasized instead the fluctuating price of commodities determined only by the buying and selling of goods, and implied that the laws of the market were distinct from the laws of the king. As Appleby notes, these pamphlets described a world in which "a sinuous course of things real, felt, imagined, and calculated had replaced the *terrafirma* of weight, purity, and sovereign statement."²⁹ Another way of describing this shift is to emphasize that these writers had, like Anne Hutchinson, introduced a split into a once organic system, and that split opened up a troubling gap between, for example, the static value of a coin as mea-

sured in metallic weight, and its fluctuating value in the marketplace. What was troubling about this split were the hidden dynamics that inhabited this new fissure.

As a result, the new mercantile world seemed a world of secrets, secrets that resided in this gap and that were all but invisible to the common observer, who consequently needed experts to discern and explain the workings of commerce.³⁰ At the same time, the moral imperatives behind a merchant's economic decisions became equally invisible. Adherents of patrimonialism, for whom the production of goods had the virtuous and evident role of sustaining the general good of the commonwealth, saw such invisibility as cause for alarm, as John White's 1636 letter reveals. The case of Robert Keayne, a successful and upwardly mobile New England merchant, illustrated precisely those fears expressed by White and others. Convicted of price gouging in 1639 for selling a bag of nails above the just price, Keayne was accused of exploiting economically the disjunction between price and value, a disjunction analogous to the one that Anne Hutchinson seemed also to be exploiting when she insisted that her expressions did not always or necessarily match her judgment, and that works and words could not be taken as evidence of grace or spirit. Not surprisingly, Keayne was a supporter of Hutchinson.³¹

The rhetorical excess in the New England orthodoxy's response to antinomianism cannot be understood outside the contemporary developments and effects of mercantile capitalism, particularly when one considers that conflicts between Massachusetts' merchant and gentry classes over issues such as the General Court's regulation of prices and wages coincide with, as well as bear striking parallels to, the theological conflicts associated with Anne Hutchinson. When Hutchinson proclaims in the Newtown courtroom that "having seen him which is invisible I fear not what man can do unto me" (338), she places herself—as one whose seal of grace gives her privileged access to the invisible world—in a position analogous to that of a commercial expert. More importantly, by doing so she robs her questioners of authority, just as market experts were perceived as challenging and usurping the authority of the king.

As a result of this splitting of word and spirit, of external and internal selves, possibilities for secrecy, deception, and dissimulation suddenly loom large. For example, in a particularly revealing description, Weld claims that "*it was so frequent with [the antinomians] to have many darke shadowes and colours to cover their opinions and expressions withall, that it was wonderful hard matter to take them tardy, or*

to know the bottome of what they said or sealed" (207). As a result of this sense of bottomless depth—a striking description of the interiority of the modern subject—he ascribes to them generally the habit of "*fearfull lying*" (216) which they share with Hutchinson herself. Winthrop too argues that "shee cunningly dissembled and coloured her opinions" (263), while Shepard accuses her of playing "a Tricke of as notorious Subtiltie as ever was held in the Church" (383). Wilson, too, notes that "she sayth one Thing to day and another thinge to morrow: and to speake falsely and doubtfully and dullye wheras we should speake the Truth playnly one to another" (384). These expressions of frustration indicate her examiners' failed attempts to locate and fix Anne Hutchinson as a subject. While these statements are made in the specific context of her self-defense at the Boston trial, they might also be read as characteristic concerns of early seventeenth-century society generally in response to emergent principles derived from the market. Dangers of dissimulation were associated with the world of commerce, and Hutchinson, repeatedly accused of "venting," is portrayed also as a liar holding secrets from the court. John Wilson's outraged rejection of Hutchinson's explanation exemplifies the orthodoxy's response, as he urges the church "to Ease our selves of such a member, Espetially for her untruth or Lyes, as that she was allways of the same Judgment, only she hath altered her Expressions. Therefor I leave it to the Church to consider how safe it is to suffer soe eronius and soe schismaticall and soe unsound a member amongst us, and one that stands guiltie of soe foule a falshood" (385). In his verdict of excommunication, Wilson proclaims her guilty not just of holding erroneous opinions, but of lying.

4. Reproduction and Colonialism

While investors in joint stock companies such as John Winthrop tended to come from the gentry and nobility, and to operate within patrimonial social relations, a group of smaller and newer merchants emerged during the seventeenth century who took advantage of trade increases and did not subscribe to traditional socioeconomic principles such as the limitation of trade. Robert Brenner traces the shift in power, during the decades preceding the outbreak of Civil War in England, from large merchant companies such as the East India Company which relied on government favor, to an emergent group of new merchants—many of them shopkeepers, artisans, or small producers—who tended to take greater economic risks and,

when successful, to enjoy rapid social and economic advancement. According to Appleby, merchants such as these were often described as “promiscuous,”³² a term that resonates with certain characterizations of Anne Hutchinson.

Amy Schrager Lang has argued that the figure of Hutchinson marks the first site in American culture in which dissent becomes associated with female empowerment, and more specifically with the speaking public woman. Indeed, Hutchinson’s gender figures prominently in the rhetoric of her opponents, who accuse her of stepping out of her place, of encouraging other women to do so, and even of practicing a promiscuous sexuality which, they suggest, must certainly accompany such behavior. Therefore Hutchinson is accused of circulating not only her ideas but her body too freely and too publicly. Cotton warns her that “though I have not herd, nayther do I thinke, you have bine unfaythfull to your Husband in his Marriage Covenant, *yet that will follow upon it*” (372). Thomas Weld similarly compares the antinomians’ seductive strategies to the “*Harlots*” in Proverbs 7.21: “*with much faire speech they caused them to yeeld, with the flattering of their lips they forced them*” (205). Descriptions of Hutchinson’s circulation often betray an economic subtext in their diction as well as their figures. Weld notoriously equated her religious ideas with her so-called “monstrous birth,” for example, explaining that “*God fitted this judgement to her sine every way, for looke as she had vented mishapen opinions, so she must bring forth deformed monsters; and as about 30. Opinions in number, so many monsters*” (214; emphasis added). Here the corruptive force that John White and others associated with commerce and the practice of “venting” leaves its marks on Hutchinson’s body as well as on her theological ideas. For Weld, these multiplied monsters embody the damaging effects of excessive circulation on an economy of (re)production. Similar fears are expressed in Edward Johnson’s *Wonder-Working Providence*, where antinomian “*Errours*” are described as “*their bastardly brat,*” as a “*bastardly brood,*” and as the multiplying heads of “*Hidra*” which “*as fast as one is cut off two stand up in the roome.*”³³

Various seventeenth-century definitions of venting were associated with emissions from the body, but such definitions resonated also in the civic realm, where the nation was often figured as a body.³⁴ The years of the Antinomian Controversy in New England were years of economic crisis in old England, when poverty rates were high and wages low. The literature advocating emigration tended to highlight, for English wage laborers in particular, the possibilities for improved

prosperity in New England. Interestingly, the word “vent” and variations on it often appeared in texts encouraging emigration to the colonies. An early report submitted to the House of Lords, for example, offers the “deducing of colonies” as one means by which to “vent the daily increase” in population that will otherwise “surcharge the State.” Failure to do so, the author of the report warns, will mean that in England, “as in a full body, there must break out yearly tumours and impostumes as did of late.” This same report advocates, in defense of land enclosures in England, that “[l]eaving the employment of the ground to the discretion of the occupants” will improve opportunities for “the vent of such their commodities.”³⁵ In the rhetoric of colonization, expelling people comes into linguistic alignment with the market circulation of goods. The poem-prose piece *Good News from New-England* likewise mixes its descriptions of emigration and trade. It specifically invites those readers whose “earnings are but small,” to “*venter* to this new-found world, and make amends for all.” A page later, the poem pictures these “poore Christians” as they “packe to Sea-ports ships to enter,/A wonderment, in streets they passe, dividing their strange *venter*.” This same tract goes on to tell a brief history of the antinomian affair, indicating that those who supported Hutchinson and her “grosse errors” included “certain persons more affecting trade than truth.”³⁶

While cloth merchants in England were having a difficult time finding a market or “vent” for their product, in New England the prices of goods were soaring, as Winthrop’s journal entry for September 1636 notes: “Cattle were grown to high rates;—a good cow, £25 or £30; a pair of bulls or oxen, £40. Corn was now at 5s. the bushel, . . . Bread was at 9 and 10s. the C.; carpenters at 3s. the day, and other workmen accordingly” (1:206). Such inflation represented the dangers of relaxed wage and price controls while permitting the social advancement of those new merchants who nourished during the 1630s, provoking considerable resentment among others in New England. In 1637, after Winthrop ousted Henry Vane in the election for governor, he immediately passed an order that required any persons arriving in Massachusetts to receive the magistrates’ approval. A strategy for ensuring that the antinomian faction would not receive additional reinforcements, this alien law was also defended by Winthrop as an attempt to seal the borders of the commonwealth to prevent strangers from penetrating and violating “the welfare of the body” (1:224) of the colony. Edward Johnson turns to similar metaphors of boundary building when he opposes those who remove to

New England for “the increase of Trade, and traffique,” to those magistrates who functioned as “stones” to “build up the walls of Jerusalem (that his Sion may be surrounded with Bulworkes and Towres).”³⁷ Winthrop’s notoriously bizarre description of Hutchinson’s “monstrous birth” as “twenty-seven several lumps of man’s seed” (1:271) suggests the dangers to reproduction posed by circulation among and penetration by strangers, dangers linked consistently in contemporary accounts of the Antinomian Controversy with the mixed economic, theological, and social associations of venting.

Narratives of the crisis and its place in New England history written by Johnson, Winthrop, and Weld tell similarly anxious but insistent stories of a religious and communal enterprise whose success was briefly threatened by a “Master-piece of Womens wit.”³⁸ But these histories also reveal that Hutchinson and her followers challenged dominant social, economic, and spiritual authority in New England by invalidating the significance of visible evidence, undercutting the covenant of works preached by authorized Puritan ministers as well as the organic social and economic models subscribed to by the ruling authorities in Massachusetts. By locating authority instead in an internal and invisible self, and by insisting and demonstrating that this self could be inconsistent with and misrepresented by the visible self, Anne Hutchinson performed in her trials a very early and extremely modern notion of selfhood—one crucially linked with the relations of mercantile capitalism and one that provoked panic among the orthodoxy. As Stephen Innes and others have observed, the attitudes and practices of seventeenth-century New Englanders reflected a profound ambivalence toward emergent capitalist relations. Indeed, economic practice in Puritan New England tended to disable the social order whose stable hierarchy it was meant to support, thus producing the very things it most feared.³⁹ This ambivalence helps to account for the excessive hostility that characterizes so many accounts of New England antinomianism. Hutchinson herself almost seems to be suggesting that those who exiled her played a role in producing her ideas, when she insists under examination in Boston that she “*did not hould any of thease Things*” (372) prior to the imprisonment imposed on her by the magistrates following the Newtown trial. The orthodoxy’s exile of Hutchinson aimed to banish the “monstrous” possibilities set loose by the world of trade and commerce in which colonialism necessarily situated them, even while repeating the gesture of venting which they otherwise sought to curtail. A rather different story—of class tensions, commercial profit,

and mercantile interests—presses within and against the narrative of religious community and freedom these texts anxiously tell, a narrative that has been perhaps too easily repeated in subsequent literary histories of colonial America.⁴⁰

Santa Clara University

Notes

1. T.H. Breen, "Right Man, Wrong Place," *New York Review of Books* 33, no. 18 (Nov. 20, 1986): 50; Philip F. Gura, "John Who? Captain John Smith and Early American Literature," *Early American Literature* 21 (1986/87): 265. See also Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

2. For critiques of the continuist, exceptionalist, ecclesiastical, and regional biases of American literary histories, see, for example, Philip F. Gura, "The Study of Colonial American Literature, 1966-1987: A Vade Mecum," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 45 (1988): 305-51; William Spengemann, *A Mirror for Americanists: Reflections on the Idea of American Literature* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989); R.C. DeProspero, "Marginalizing Early American Literature," *New Literary History* 23 (1992): 233-65; and Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

3. Baker, 24.

4. Amy Schrager Lang, *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 16.

5. David D. Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, 2d ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), 206. Future references to this collection will be cited parenthetically within the text.

6. As Edmund Morgan notes, when pushed too far the emphasis on preparation came dangerously close to the heresy of Arminianism, which held that individuals could by force of will invite salvation (*The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* [Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958] 136-37). For analyses which interpret the Controversy as a debate over preparationism, see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 57-67; and Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 118-48, n.279.

7. Cotton insisted, for example, in his *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, that there "is more than the Letter of the Word that is required . . . [for] spiritual grace [to be] revealed to the soul" (qtd. in Delbanco, 135).

8. Delbanco, 135.

9. Philip F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660* (Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press), 258.

10. The antinomians refused also to attend the new governor with due ceremonial conventions, requiring Winthrop to hire his own servants to attend him to public meetings and to signal his arrival into town (John Winth-

rop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649*, ed. James Savage [Boston, 1825], 1:224-25). Considering that, as Larzer Ziff notes, the success of trade in New England relied on sustaining political alliances with Native American tribes, one might read a suppressed economic incentive within the antinomians' Pequot War resistance effort (*Puritanism in America: New Culture in a New World* [New York: Viking Press, 1973], 74). Further references to Winthrop's History are cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page numbers.

11. Patricia Caldwell, "The Antinomian Language Controversy," *Harvard Theological Review* 69 (1976): 346.

12. Edward Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England* (1654), ed. J. Franklin Jameson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 25.

13. The crisis over antinomianism was not the only arena in which economics and theology shared rhetorical space. For a discussion of "the imagery of finance" within Puritan covenantal theology, for example, see Delbanco, 61.

14. Other commentaries focus on the relationship between the merchant class and antinomianism, including Ziff and Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955). Like Battis's, however, these studies all read this relationship as a causal one that enabled merchants to legitimize their pecuniary interests. I am claiming instead that mercantile capitalism and antinomianism provided shared discourses within which a modern subjectivity became articulated.

15. John White to John Winthrop, 16 November 1636, *Winthrop Papers* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1943), 3:322.

16. Emery Battis notes that William Hutchinson left the mercer shop in the charge of his sons while he pursued other investment opportunities and fulfilled public responsibilities (75). Hutchinson's brother Richard exported manufactured goods from London to members of his family living in Boston, who not only sold those goods in the Bay colony and further inland, but also exported them to the West Indies where another member of the Hutchinson family exchanged them for sugar and cotton (see Bailyn, 88-89).

17. Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: A Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (New York: Norton, 1965), 6.

18. Robert Charles Winthrop, *Life and Letters of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1866), 219-20.

19. In exchange for a promise to return the original investors' principal within seven years, Winthrop and the other undertakers accepted the company's assets and debts and were to receive control over the transport of goods and emigrants, a percentage of the beaver trade, a monopoly on salt manufacture, and control over a magazine of provisions to be sold at fixed prices (see Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993], 151). For John Winthrop Jr.'s account of the not very lucrative sale of the Groton estate, see R.C. Winthrop, 169-74.

20. *Winthrop Papers*, 3:322.

21. For a survey of Winthrop's landholdings, see Rutman, 87-89. Winthrop's "A Modell of Christian Charity" is of course one central source for

his economic ideas, particularly concerning how the rules of mercy and justice govern loans and debts (*Winthrop Papers*, 2:282-295).

22. Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York: Norton, 1995), 28.

23. For a discussion of the exclusion of merchants from direct involvement in governing institutions, and the political conflicts between gentlemen and merchants in the context of the inflationary prices during the 1630s, see Bailyn, 19-40. Rutman refers to the group of wealthy Boston merchants—including the antinomian supporters William Hutchinson, Coggshall, Colborne, Aspinwall, Baulston, Keayne and others—as “lesser members of the gentry” (75) or a “new breed of gentry” (246). Such classifications, however, by blurring the distinctions between material wealth and economic ideology that I am emphasizing, risk confusing such men with Winthrop and other gentlemen. I prefer instead to classify these wealthy citizens who were never members of England’s landed gentry within Robert Brenner’s category of “new merchants,” who emerged during the seventeenth century, distinct both from the colonizing aristocracy and London company merchants (111-12, 159). I thank Jim Holstun for bringing Brenner’s book to my attention.

24. Battis, 286.

25. I concur with Louise A. Breen’s assessment of Battis’s reading as an “unsatisfying” explanation for the class conflicts that underlie the Antinomian crisis (“Religious Radicalism in the Puritan Officer Corps: Heterodoxy, the Artillery Company, and Cultural Integration in Seventeenth-Century Boston,” *New England Quarterly* 68 [1995]: n.15). Furthermore, Battis’s interpretation fails to accommodate Cotton’s consistent denunciations of profiteering and his support of fixed prices, as well as Hutchinson’s own declarations condemning the association her examiners made between her religious beliefs and the sanction of lawlessness.

26. For a good discussion of subjectivity, language, and violence in the Antinomian Controversy, see Ross Pudaloff’s “Sign and Subject: Antinomianism in Massachusetts Bay,” *Semiotica* 54 (1985): 147-63, which locates the event, *pace* Foucault, in the historical moment of a shift from Renaissance organicism to Classical contractualism.

27. In describing Hutchinson’s subjectivity as “monstrous,” I deliberately invoke the word used by Winthrop, Cotton, Weld, and Johnson to describe the deformed fetuses of Hutchinson and Mary Dyer. For a consideration of this aspect of the Controversy, see Anne Jacobson Schutte, “‘Such Monstrous Births’: A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985): 85-106.

28. Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 44.

29. *Ibid.*, 46.

30. *Ibid.*, 49.

31. See Bernard Bailyn, ed., *The Apologia of Robert Keayne: The Self-Portrait of a Puritan Merchant* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), in which Keayne’s insistence that his possessions and estate be assessed “according to the common worth and value that such goods and lands shall bear at that time in this country” (4) reads as deathbed support for the anti-mercantilist notion of just price.

32. Bremer, 112; Appleby, 106.

33. Johnson, 126, 146, 125.

34. According to the *OED*, the verb "to vent" also signified the discharge or evacuation of organs from a body, while the noun "vent" referred to the opening by which blood issues from the body, or the anus or vulva of an animal.

35. Joan Thirsk and J.P. Cooper, eds., *Seventeenth-Century Economic Documents* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 109, 108. This image of the state as a body which overpopulation will drive to disease helps to put into context the language of disease and infection used by Weld, Cotton and others to describe the antinomian threat to the Massachusetts commonwealth. For other studies of representations of the body politic and its metonymic links with the bodies of women and Indians during the Antinomian crisis, see James Schramer and Timothy Sweet, "Violence and the Body Politic in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Arizona Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (summer 1992): 1-32; and Ann Kibbey, *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism: A Study of Rhetoric, Prejudice, and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

36. [Winslow, Edward?], *Good news from New-England* (London, 1648), 1, 2, 20 (emphases added). The idiosyncratic spelling and usage of words in *Good news* makes it difficult to determine unequivocally the precise meaning of the second use of "venter." My interpretation, that it is used to suggest a division of goods, relies on context as well as on the assumption that the preceding verb "to divide" is employed in a conventional sense.

37. Johnson, 146, 141.

38. *Ibid.*, 132.

39. Innes, 101. I would likewise argue that the hostility aimed at the Hutchinsonians by dominant magistrates and ministers is precisely a function of the likenesses—perhaps especially economic similarities—between the two groups as much as it is of the differences between them.

40. This paper was first presented at the Group for Early Modern Cultural Studies Conference in Dallas, October 1995. I would like to thank conference participants and organizers, as well as Brooks Appelbaum, Chip Herbert, Margaret Kouidis, and Ross Pudaloff for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.