

Beyond the Mayflower: History, Culture, and Encounter in Plimoth Colony

*Class 5: Learning and Legacy: Literacy,
Education, and Influence*

David Lupher, July 2026

THE BRUE FAMILY LEARNING CENTER



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Meet today's presenter



David Lupher
University of Puget Sound

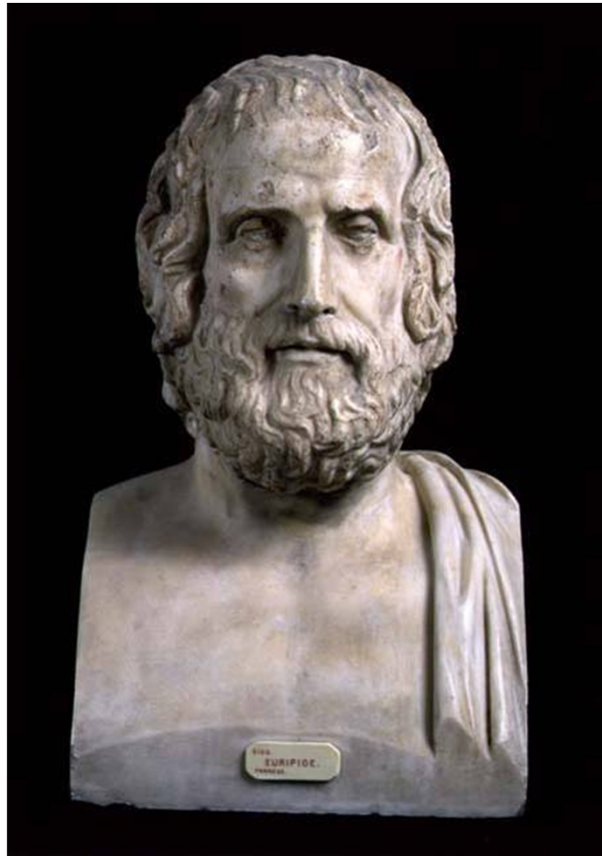
OVERVIEW

- **Presentation** (60 mins.)
 - Plymouth Colony: a cultural backwater?
 - Education in the colony
 - Books in Plymouth Colony:
 - The Evidence of the Probate Inventories
 - Governor Bradford's Use of Secular Books
- **Q&A** (30 mins.)

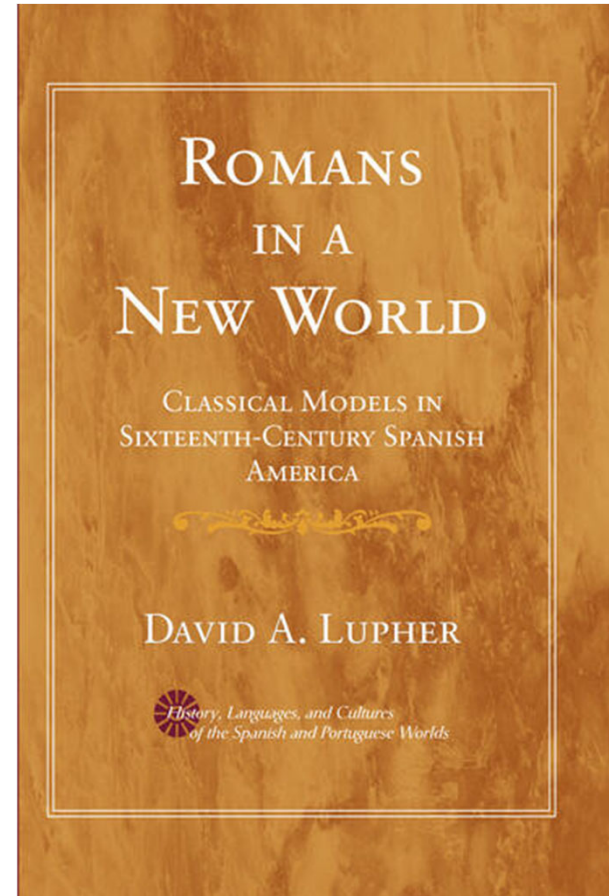
Part 1

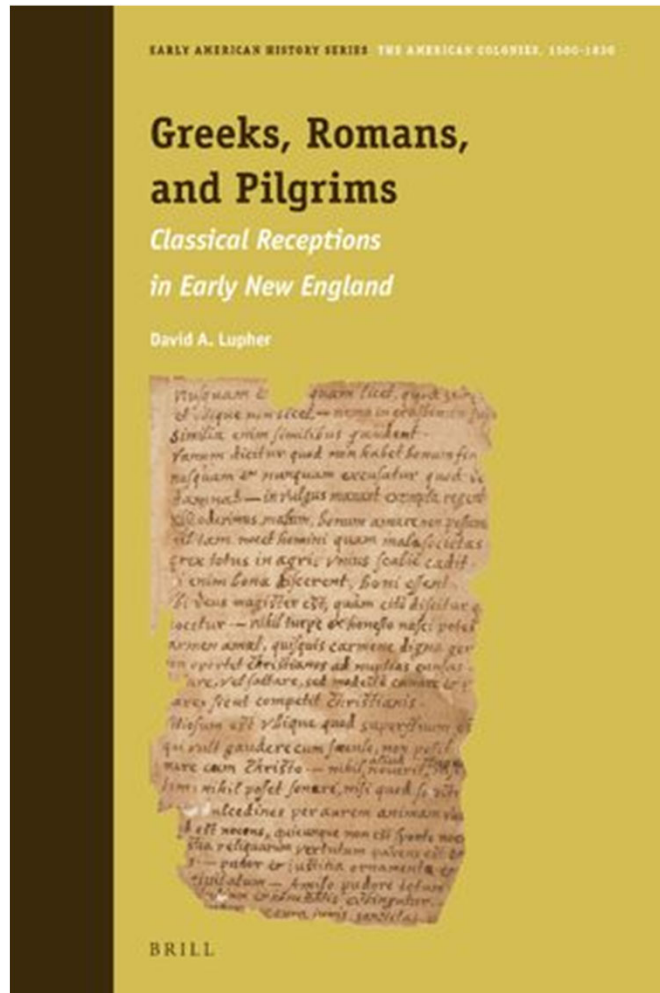
Plymouth Colony: A Cultural Backwater?

Education in the Colony



Euripides





Dialogues, Poetry, Correspondence

and Other Writings

by William Bradford

INTRODUCED AND EDITED BY

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BOSTON

Colonial Society of Massachusetts

New England Historic Genealogical Society

202X

THE HISTORY AND THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL LAW



SEPÚLVEDA ON THE SPANISH INVASION OF THE AMERICAS

DEFENDING EMPIRE, DEBATING LAS CASAS

Luke Glanville, David Lupher, Maya Feile Tomes

OXFORD



"The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth" (1914)

Jennie Augusta Brownscombe (1850-1936)

Leiden, Museum De Lakenhal

Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

"The Insignificance of Plymouth Colony"

If the churches of the Bay then sought the advice of Plymouth about details it would be because they were already predisposed to erect a Congregational regime, and because **they would have proceeded along essentially the same line had there been no Plymouth at all.**

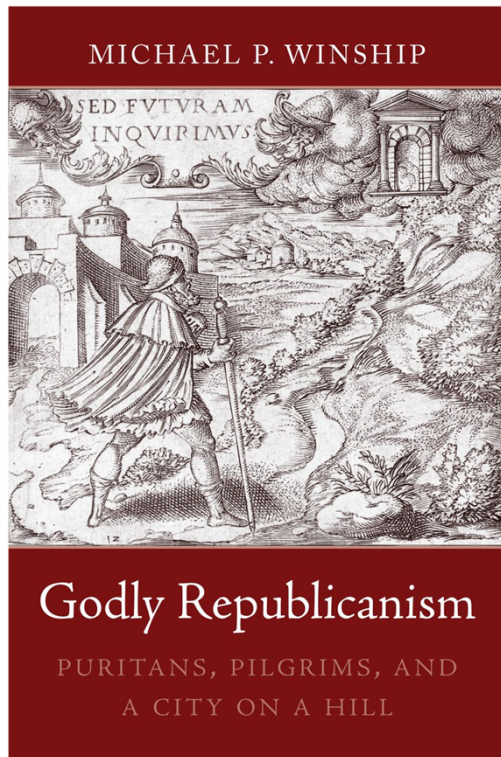
—Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650* (1933), p. 128

The place of the Pilgrim Fathers in American history can best be stated by a paradox. **Of slight importance in their own time,** they are of great and increasing significance in our time....The first half of this paradox, **the insignificance of Plymouth Colony in the colonial era,** is one upon which almost all American historians are now agreed.

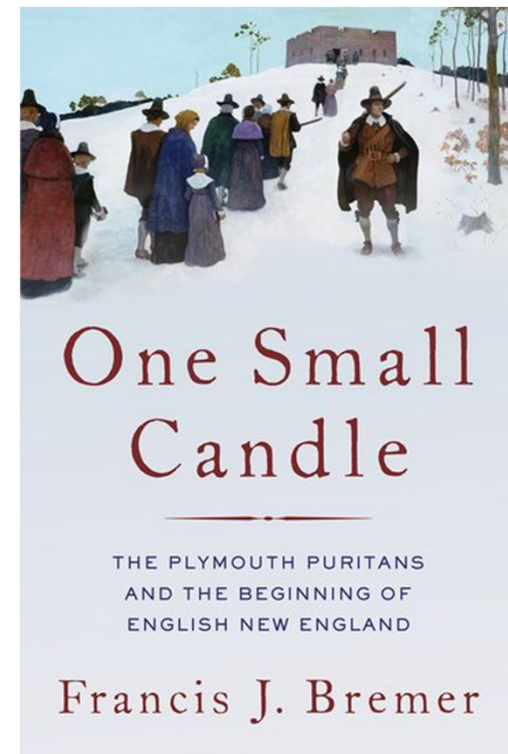
—Samuel Eliot Morison, "The Pilgrim Fathers: The Significance in History,"
address delivered in Plymouth, 1951

When we...discover William Bradford lauding **the pathetically unimportant Plymouth church** as a "small candle" whose "light here kindled hath shone...in some sort to our whole nation," one reasonably may surmise an English rhetorical routine whose occasional appearance in New England does not necessarily entail a great and singular Errand.

—Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (1988), p. 115



Harvard University Press
Oxford University Press
2012



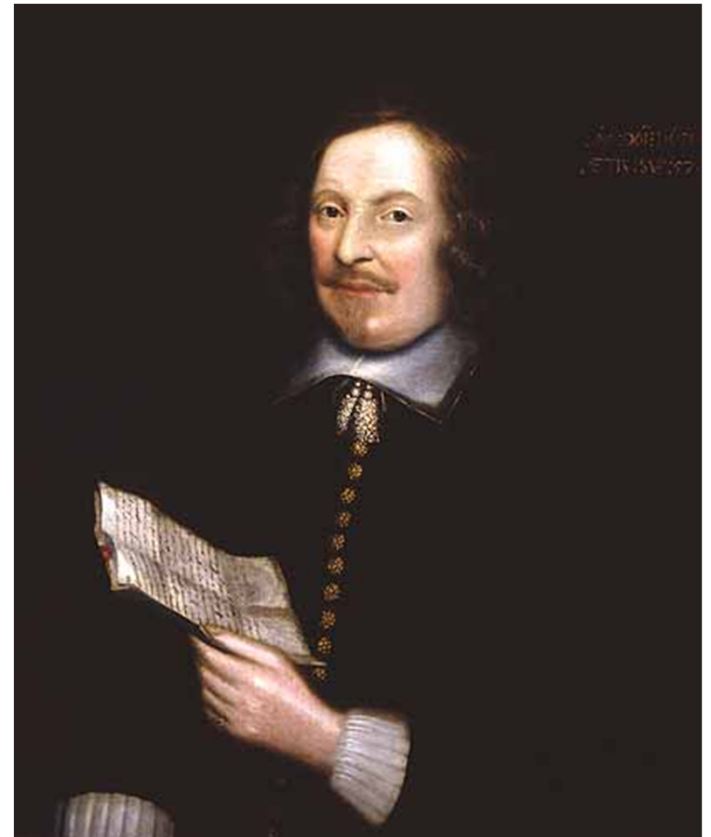
2020

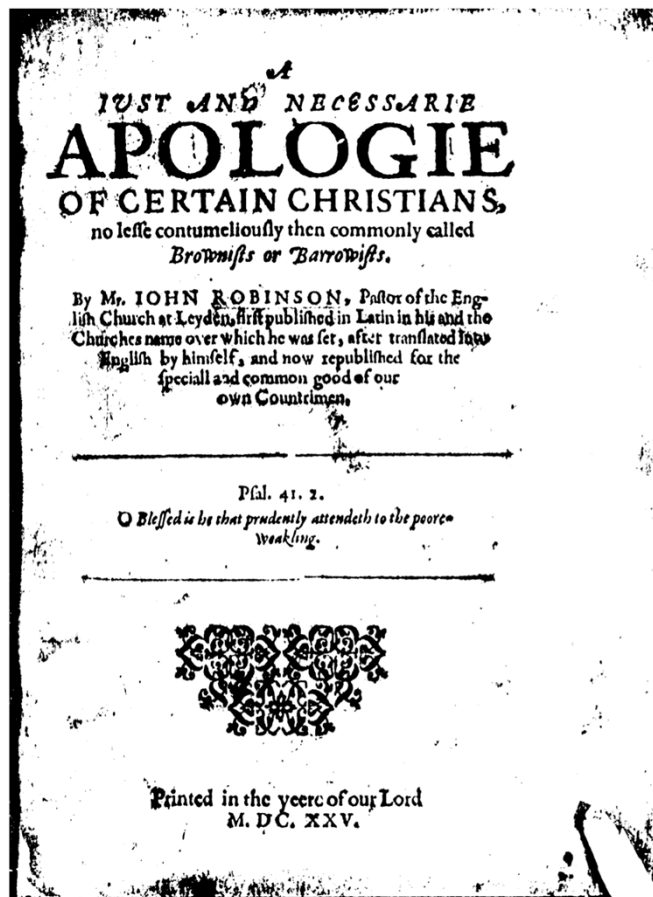
Edward Winslow (1595–1655)

educated King's School, Worcester Cathedral

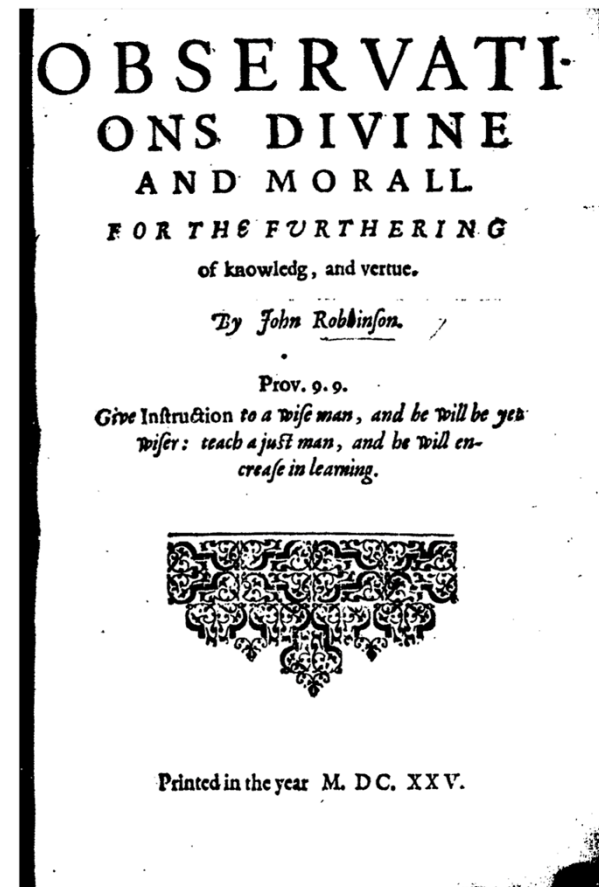
portrait painted London, 1651, now in Pilgrim Hall Museum

in public domain through Wikimedia Commons





NB: "First published in Latin"



John Robinson, *Observations Divine, and Morall* (1625)

23. Of Books, and Writings

monly according to the last *Booke* which they read. It is best for ordinarie capacities to travell in some few *Books* (though by occasion they may step into many) and the same picked by good advice, of unpartiall, and experienced men; and those thoroughly to digest, and discourse upon; as it is best for weak stomachs to eat of few, and wholesom dishes : Which may also be done for further use, extention, and applycation, then the Authour himself conceived, or at least, expressed.

9. Of Authoritie, and Reason

With these also we must ioin the consideration of such advantages, as the latter times have of the former, whose helpfull labours they enjoy : by which those which follow them (though in themselves meaner then they) are enabled to discern of many things better then the other that went before them ; as a dwarf set upon the shoulders of a giant can see further then he.

)) You. Now touching y^e question propounded by you. I iudge it not law=
)) full for you, bring a ruling elder, as .rom. 12. 7. 8. & Tim. 5. 17. opposed to
)) the elders, that teach, & exhort, and labors in y^e word and doctrine, to
)) which y^e sacraments are annexed; to administer them, nor convenient,
)) if it were lawfull. Whether any learned man will come vnto you, or
)) not, I know not; If any doe, you must Consilium capere in arena.
)) Be you most hartly saluted, & you wife with you, both from me, & mine,
)) your god, & ours, and y^e god of all his, bring vs together if it be his will, &
)) keep vs in the mean while, and always to his glory; and make vs seruif=
)) able to his maiestie, and faithfull to the end. Amen.

Leyden Des: 20
1623.

your very louing brother
John Robinson.

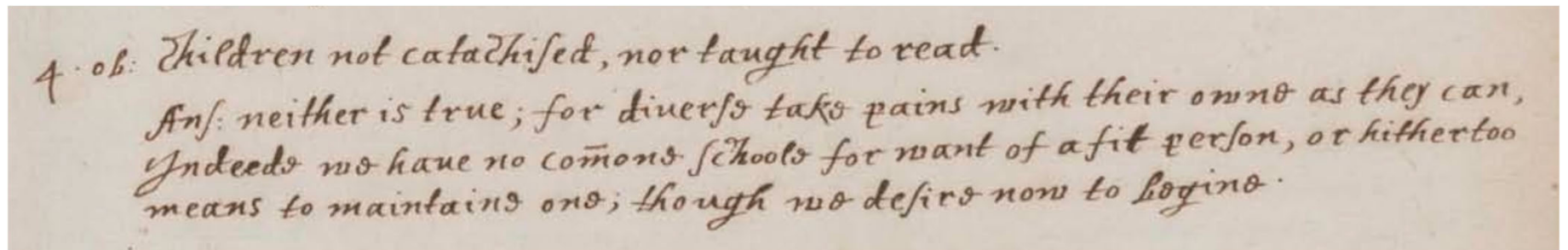
Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, Book 2, Anno 1624, ms. p. 115
Letter of John Robinson to William Brewster

I wonder what madnes hath cought
mens minds too set larning at nought
For when god had great works toe doe
he alwayes fited men theretoe
Moyses in Egypt was learned
when hee from thence gods peopell led
Who mighty was in word & deed
and meete his peopell for too feed... (lines 239-46)

and Christe sente not the twelve abroad
till knowlidge of the tungen they had
And allsoe what was meete from them
the nationes for to wine & gaine
how learned was the apotell [*sic*] paule
imployed in labours more then all
The Heathen Poets he then knew
and great learned men he overthrew... (lines 251-58)

Ho what great madnes would it bee
and what Confutions should wee see
errour the truth would under mine
to barbarisme all would decline (lines 281-84)

**William Bradford, "On the Various Heresies" (ca. 1655)
from the section on Quakers**



A photograph of a handwritten manuscript snippet. The text is written in a cursive script on aged, slightly discolored paper. The first line reads '4. ob. Children not catechised, nor taught to read.' The second line, which is indented, reads 'Ans: neither is true; for diuers take pains with their owne as they can, yndeede we haue no comon schools for want of a fit person, or hitherto means to maintaine one; though we desire now to beginne.'

4. ob. Children not catechised, nor taught to read.
Ans: neither is true; for diuers take pains with their owne as they can,
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means to maintaine one; though we desire now to beginne.

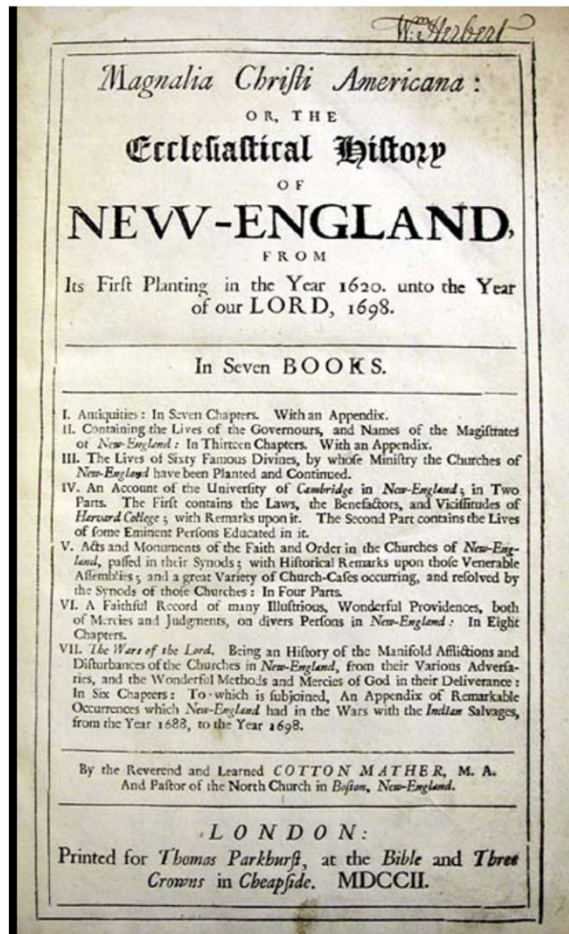
Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, Book 2, Anno 1624, ms. p. 112
Complaint by disgruntled settlers and the Pilgrims' response

A "Dame School" at Plymouth?

"The **11 of Feb: 1635**, Benjamine Eaton, the sone of Francis Eaton, of late deceased, was, by the Governor & Assistantes, with his mothers consent, put to **Bridgett Fuller**, widow, for 14 years, shee being **to keep him at school** 2 yeares, & to imploy him in such service as she saw good & he should be fitt..."

—*Records of the Colony of New Plymouth: Court Orders, Vol. I, 1633-1649* (1855), pp. 36-37

For more on Bridget Fuller, see Donna Watkins, *Weaker Vessels*, pp. 102-4 and 221-24.



§. 2. Sometimes during the *Life*, but always after the *Death* of Governour *Bradford*, even until his own, *Mr. Thomas Prince* was chosen *Governour* of *Plymouth*. He was a Gentleman whose *Natural Parts* exceeded his *Acquired*; but the want and worth of *Acquired Parts* was a thing so sensible unto him, that *Plymouth* perhaps never had a greater *Mecenas* of *Learning* in it: It was he that in spite of much Contradiction, procured Revenues for the Support of *Grammar-Schools* in that Colony. About the time of Governour

Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), Book 2, Chapter 2
On Thomas Prence (Prince) and education in Plymouth

Education in Plymouth Colony I

3 June 1662: "It is proposed by the Court unto the severall Townshipes of this Jurisdiction as a thinge they ought to take into their serious consideration That some course may be taken that in every Towne there may be a Schoolmaster sett up to traine up children to reading and writing."

—*Records of the Colony of New Plymouth: Laws 1623-1682*, ed. David Pulsifer (Boston, 1861), p. 142

13 December 1670: "Att the said meeting the said John Morton proffered to teach the children and youth of the towne to **Read and write and Cast accounts** on Reasonable considerations."

—*Records of the Town of Plymouth: Vol. I: 1636 to 1705* (Plymouth, 1889), p. 115

"Att a towne Meeting held att the meeting house att Plymouth the **20th day of May 1672**; The Towne did agree and unanimously voate and Conclude that their lands Att Sepecan Agawaam and places adjacent; the proffitts and benefitts thereof shalbe Improved and Employed for and towards the Maintainance of **the free Scoole now begun and erected att Plymouth** ; and that the proffitts and benefitts thereof shall noe way [be] estranged from the said use;..."

—*Records of the Town of Plymouth: Vol. I: 1636 to 1705* (Plymouth, 1889), p. 124

4 July 1672: "It is ordered by the Court that the charge of **the free Scoole**, which is three and thirty pounds a yeare shalbe defrayed by the Treasurer out of the proffitts ariseing by the ffishing att the Cape until such Time as that the minds of the ffreemen be knowne consarning it which wilbe returned to the next Court of election."

—*Records of the Colony of New Plymouth: Laws 1623-1682*, p. 233

4 June 1674: "This Court haveing received by the deputies of the severall townes the signification of the minds of the Major pte of the freemen of this Collonie that all the proffitts of the ffishing att Cape Code graunted by the Court for **the erecting and Maintaining of a Scoole** be still continewed for that end if a **competent Number of Scollars** shall appeer to be devoated therunto, which the Court Judges **not to be lesse then eight or ten....**"

—*Records of the Colony of New Plymouth: Laws 1623-1682*, p. 237

Education in Plymouth Colony II

1 November 1677: "fforasmuch as **the Maintainance of good litterature** doth much tend to the advancement of the weale and flourishing estate of societies and Republicques

This Court does therfore order; That in whatsover Townshipp in this Goverment consisting of **fifty families or upwards**; any meet man shalbe obtained to teach a **Gramer scoole** such townshipp shall allow att least twelve pounds in currant marchantable pay to be raised by rate on all the Inhabitants of such Towne and those that have the more emediate benefitt therof by theire childrens going to scoole with what others may voulentarily give to promote soe good a work and generall good, shall make up the resedue Nessesarie to maintain the same and that the proffitts ariseing of the Cape ffishing; heertofore ordered to maintaine a Gramer scoole in this Collonie, be destributed to such Townes as have such Gramer scooles for the maintainance therof....

—*Records of the Colony of New Plymouth: Laws 1623-1682*, pp. 246-47

Education of Girls in Plymouth Colony? A Tantalizing Record from August, 1664

"Rehoboth, the seaventh of August, 1664. Wee, whose names are subscribed heerto, doe heerby signify to all psons whom it may conserne, that Elizabeth Walker, the daughter of Phillip Walker, of the towne of Rehoboth, was accedentially drowned; **shee, being sent to scoole**, was found alsoe accedentially in the river first by two youthes....From the testimony of the afor specified psons,...we, the subscribers, conceive that the child, which was **two yeares and an half old**, before specified, came accedentially to her end."

—*Records of the Colony of New Plymouth: Court Orders, Vol. IV 1661-1668*, 83-4

Donna A. Watkins, *Weaker Vessels: The Women and Children of Plymouth Colony*, p. 187

Education in 17th-Century Massachusetts Colony

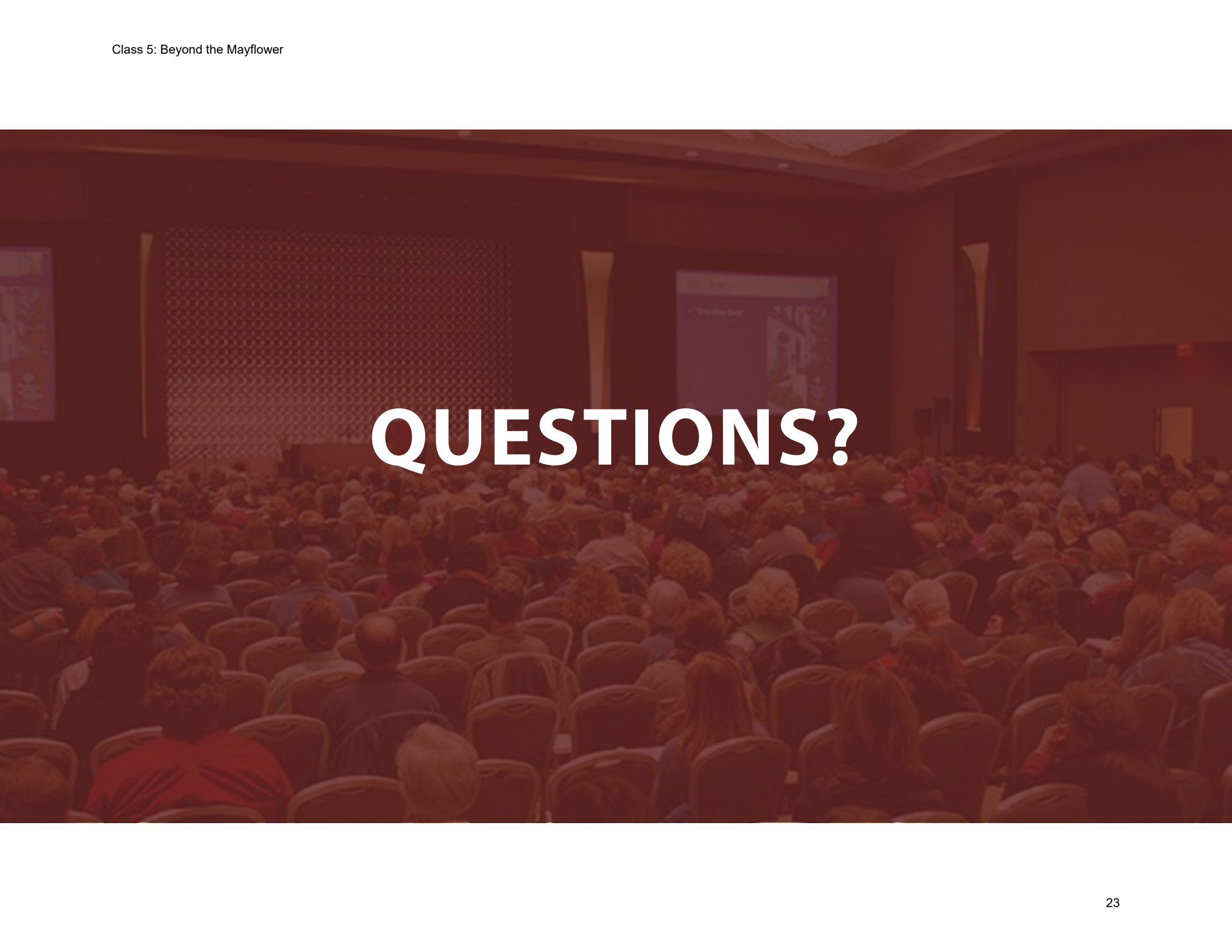
1635: Boston Latin School founded. (It still exists, ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as #1 public high school in Massachusetts.)

1636: Harvard College founded. (At last report, this institution still exists.)

1642: First Massachusetts School Law: "This Cort, taking into consideration the great neglect of many parents & masters in training up their children in learning & labor...do hereupon order and decree, that in every towne the chosen men appointed for managing the prudentiall affaires of the same shall...have the power to take account from time to time of all parents and masters, and of their children, concerning their calling and implyment of their children, especially of their ability **to read & understand the principles of religion & the capitall laws of this country...**"

1647: Second Massachusetts School Law: "It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times by perswading from **the use of Tongues**, that so at least the true sense and meaning of the Originall might be clowded and corrupted with false glosses of Saint-seeming deceivers....it is therefore ordered that everie Township in this Jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to **fifty Household**ers shall forthwith appoint one within their Town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read...And it is farther ordered that where any Town shall increase to the number of **one hundred Families or Household**ers, they shall set up a **Grammar-School**, the Masters therof being able to instruct youth so far as they may be fitted for the Universitie..."

QUESTIONS?

A large audience of people is seated in a lecture hall, facing a stage. The audience is seen from behind, filling the foreground and middle ground. The stage is at the far end of the room, featuring a large presentation screen displaying a slide with text and images. The room has a high ceiling and decorative wall panels. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent reddish-brown filter.

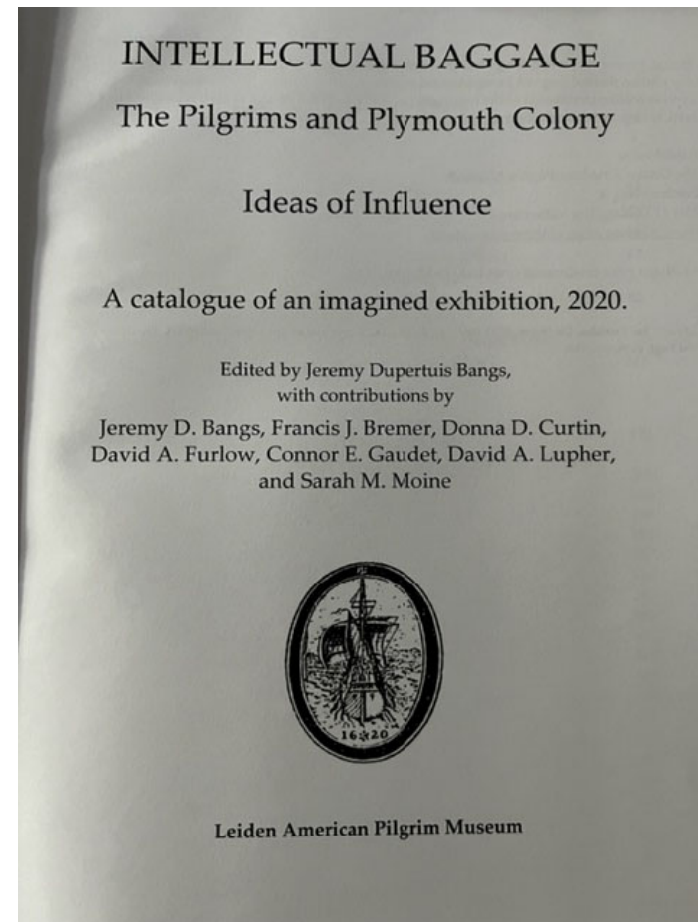
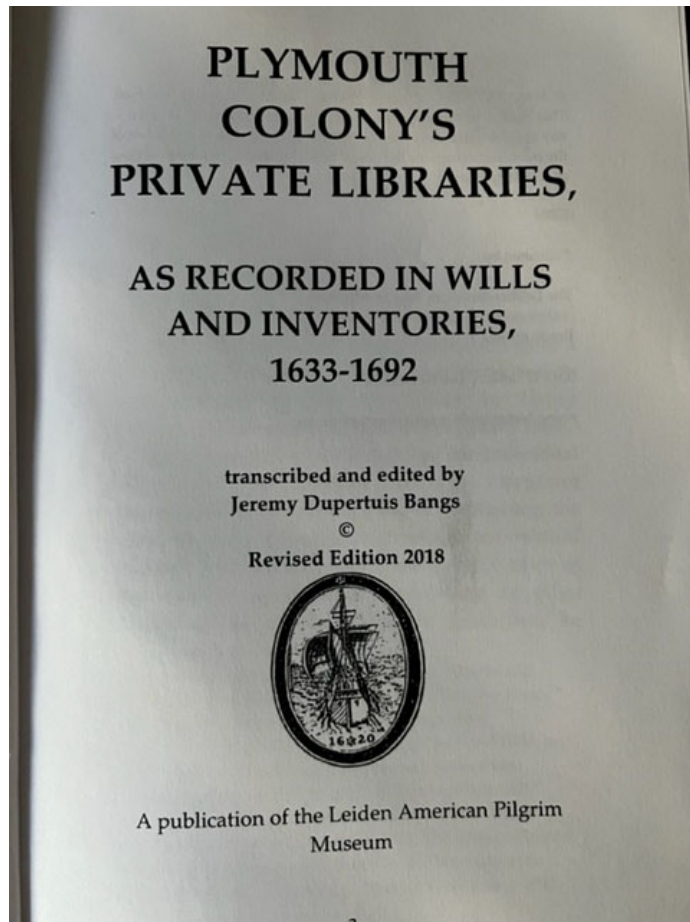
Part 2

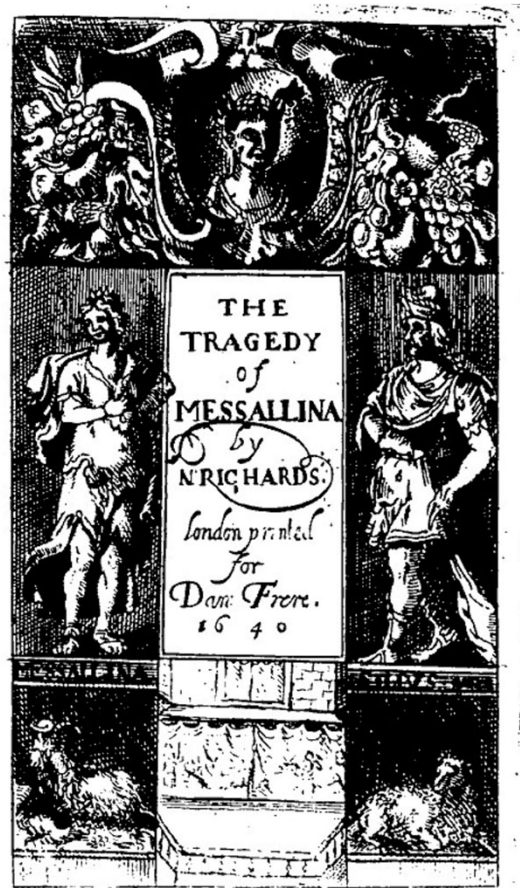
Books in Plymouth Colony:

The Evidence of the Probate
Inventories



Jeremy Dupertuis Bangs (1946–2023)
in Leiden American Pilgrim Museum on Beschuitsteeg, August 2018
- with DL and Sarah Moine





Messallina

On greatest Queenes most servants still attends.

Bawd. Hadst not provocations to enable thee,
Confection of Cantharides, Diafaterion Eringoes,
Snailers, Oysters, Alligant, and could not these
Make thee hold out with five and twenty;
'Twas but a Forenoones worke, a forenoones worke
You paltry pulling.

Cal. I, in your young dayes. (der,

Bawd. In my young dayes, I tell thee small Floun-
Old as I am and fat, I durst yet wager,
To lay twice the number of such shrimps as thee,
That they should ne're rise more.

Cal. Yes with a Pox.

I have not the Court art to kill my lovers,
Nor draw them on with witchcraft, *Circean* charmes,
Nor is it lust, but want makes me a trader,
And those I clip with, I must like at least.
Let *Romes* brave Emperesse do her liking.

Stitch. I she's a brave Roman dame indeed.

Hem. And those Mad-dames are the best doers

Stitch.

Cal. *Calphurnia* loathes varietie of men,
Times big bone Animalls so apt to please,
Th'Emperesse will whets not my appetite,
Besides you know I'me not for durance,
Wanting the daily visits of best Doctors,
To make me broths of dissolv'd Pearle and Amber,
Which well considered will not quit the cost,
She won the wager, I am glad I lost.

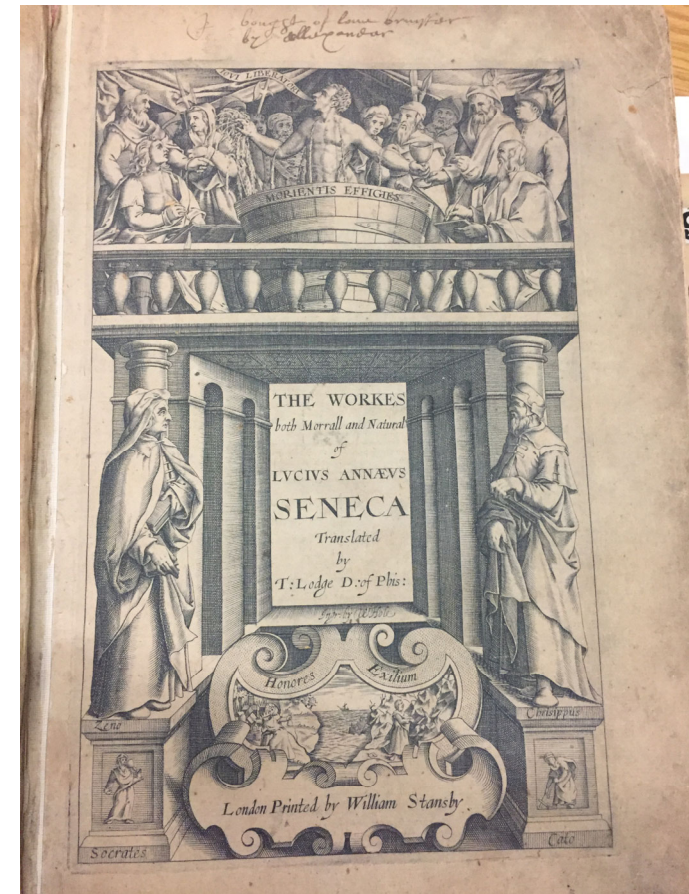
Nathanael Richards, *Messallina* (1640)

Inventory of the Brewster

# Willst on Demand	00	04	00
# Corusant vorket	00	10	00
# Redend Comon vorket	00	08	00
# Willst on Demand	00	04	00
# Willst on Demand	00	03	00
# Willst on Demand	00	06	00
# Willst on Demand	00	06	00
# Willst on Demand	00	12	00
# Willst on Demand	00	04	00
# Willst on Demand	00	05	00
# Willst on Demand	00	06	00
# Willst on Demand	00	02	00
# Willst on Demand	00	02	06
# Willst on Demand	00	06	00
# Willst on Demand	00	02	00
# Willst on Demand	00	03	01
# Willst on Demand	00	04	00
# Willst on Demand	00	02	06
# Willst on Demand	00	02	00
# Willst on Demand	00	02	00

A page from the Brewster inventory Seneca is on line 7.

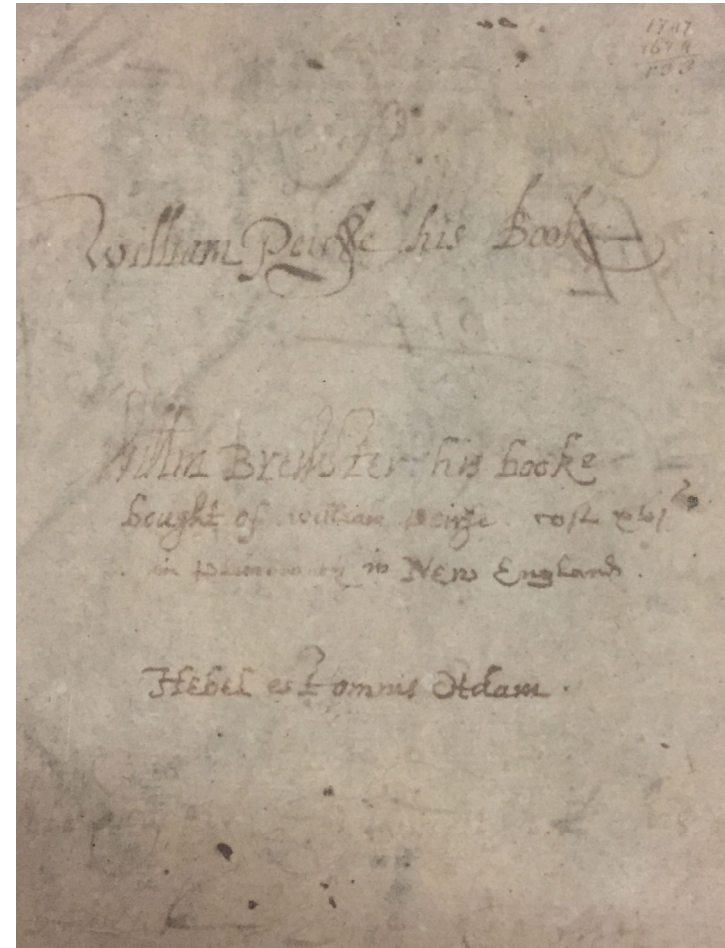
“Seneca Workes”

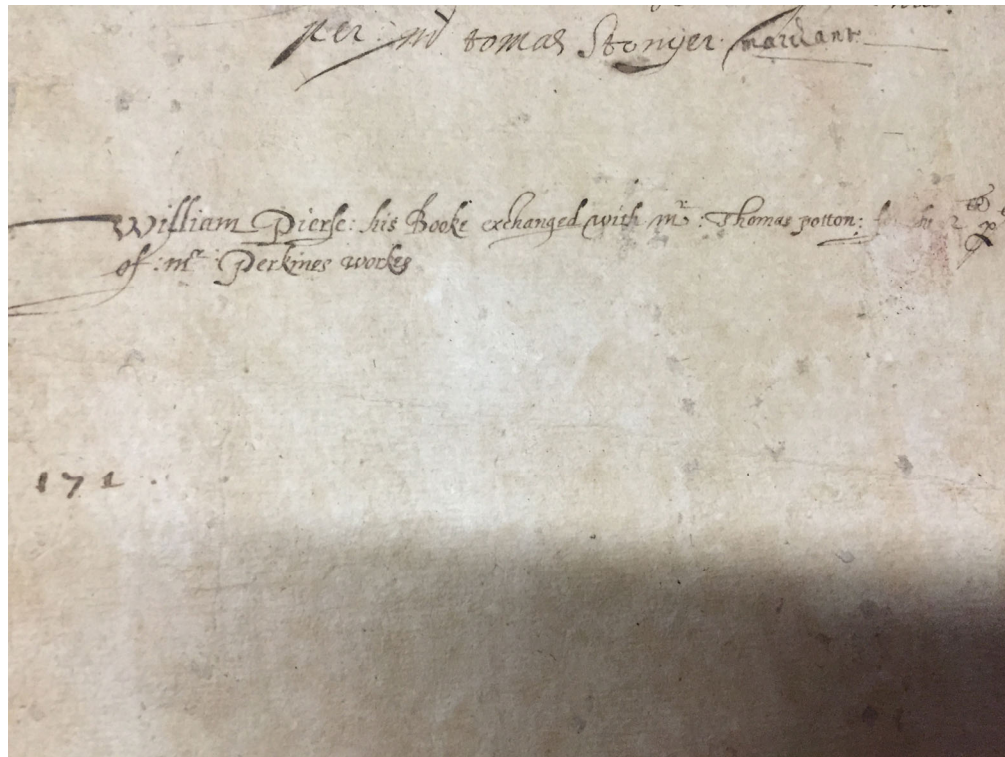


Title page, Thomas Lodge's translation of Seneca's prose works, 1st edition, 1614

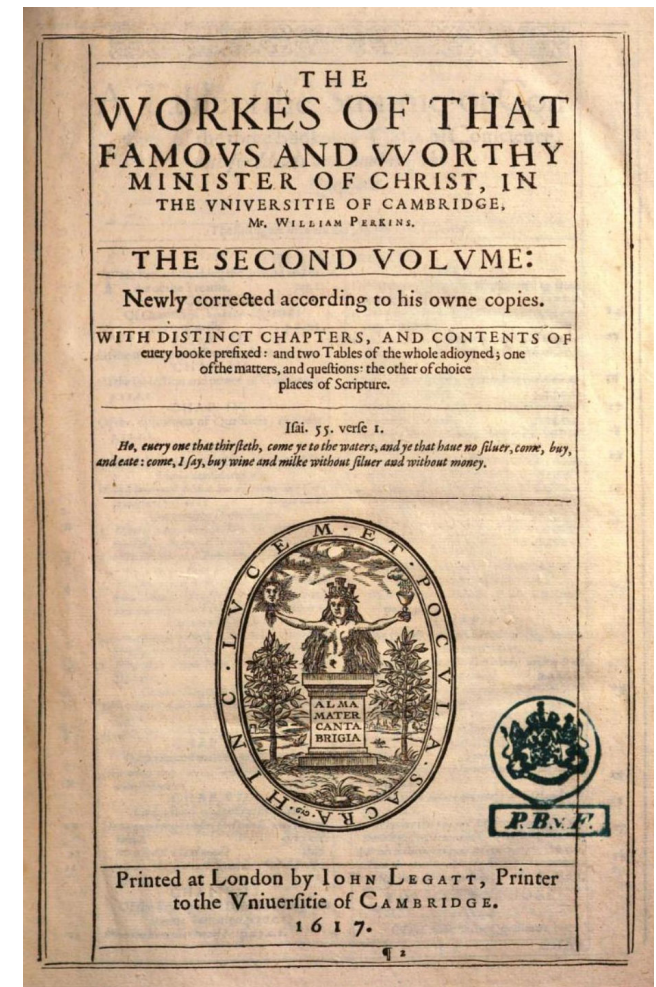
Inscriptions of William Peirce and William Brewster in Lodge's Seneca.

- "William Peirse his Booke"
- "Willm Brewster his booke bought of William Pierse cost xvi S in Plimmouth in New England.
Hebel est omnis Adam"
- Brewster's motto nests Latin within Hebrew: "A breath is every man" (based on Psalm 39:5, where the word for "breath" is rendered "vanity" in both the Geneva and KJV).



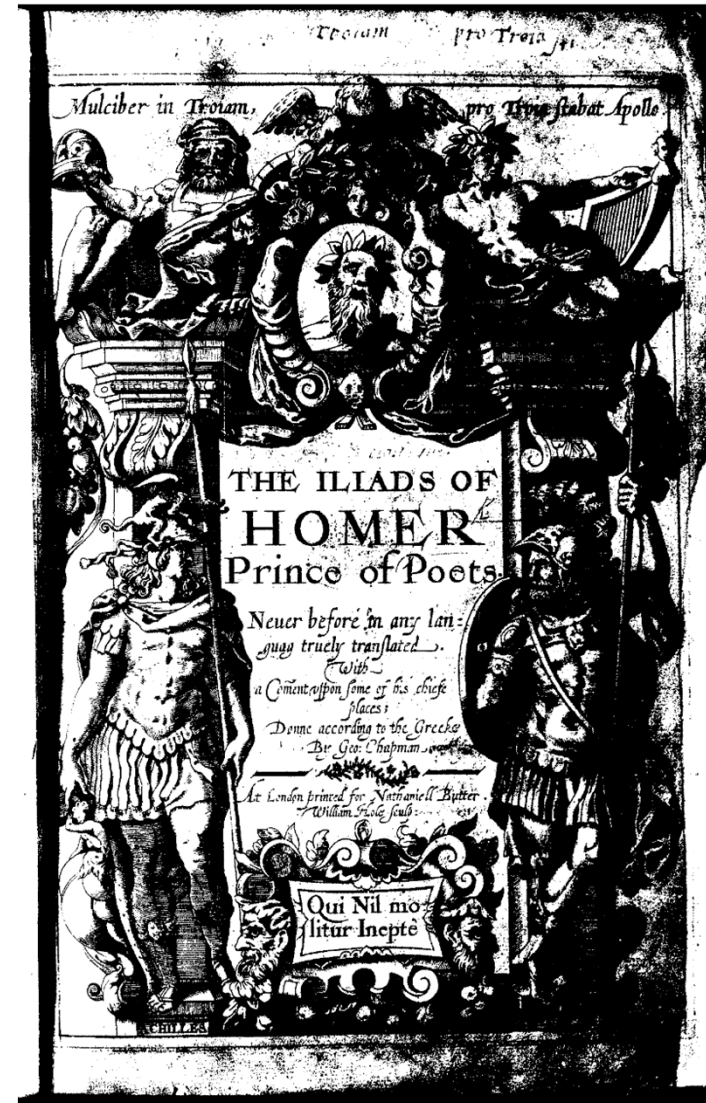


Inscription on back pastedown of Brewster's Seneca:
"William Peirse: his Booke exchanged with
Mr Thomas Potton: for the 2th pt of Mr Perkins workes"



"Homers Iliads"
entry in probate inventory of
Myles Standish

The Iliads of Homer
Donne according to the Greeke By Geo: Chapman
London: Nathaniel Butter, 1611



"Cecers comentaryes"

Entry in probate inventory of
Myles Standish
(2 December 1656)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
The Courtship of Miles Standish (1858),

Fixed to the opposite wall was a shelf of books, and among them
Prominent three, distinguished alike for bulk and for binding;
Bariffe's Artillery Guide, and the Commentaries of Caesar,
Out of the Latin translated by Arthur Golding of London,
And, as if guarded by these, between them was standing the Bible....

Nothing was heard in the room but the hurrying pen of the stripling
[John Alden],
Or an occasional sigh from the laboring heart of the Captain,
Reading the marvellous words and achievements of Julius Caesar.
After a while he exclaimed, as he smote with his hand, palm
downwards,
Heavily on the page: "A wonderful man was this Caesar..."

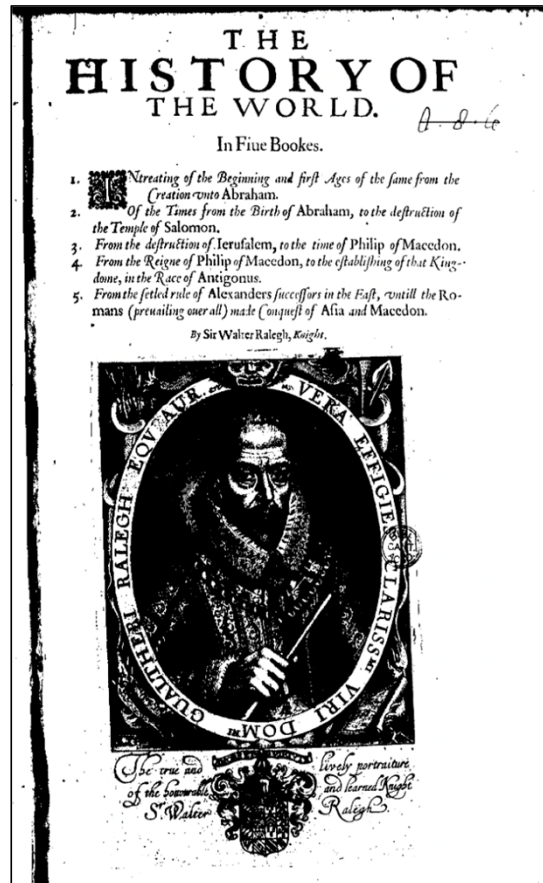
Longfellow's inspiration for this scene:
Justin Winsor, "Abstracts of the Earliest Wills in the Probate Office,
Plymouth," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 5 (1851),
pp. 335-38.



Sir Clement Edmond
Observations upon Caesars Commentaries
London: Matthew Lownes, 1609



Illustration for Book 5.33 of Caesar's
Gallic Wars. Ambushed by the Gauls,
Sabinus and Cotta form their legionaries
into a circle.

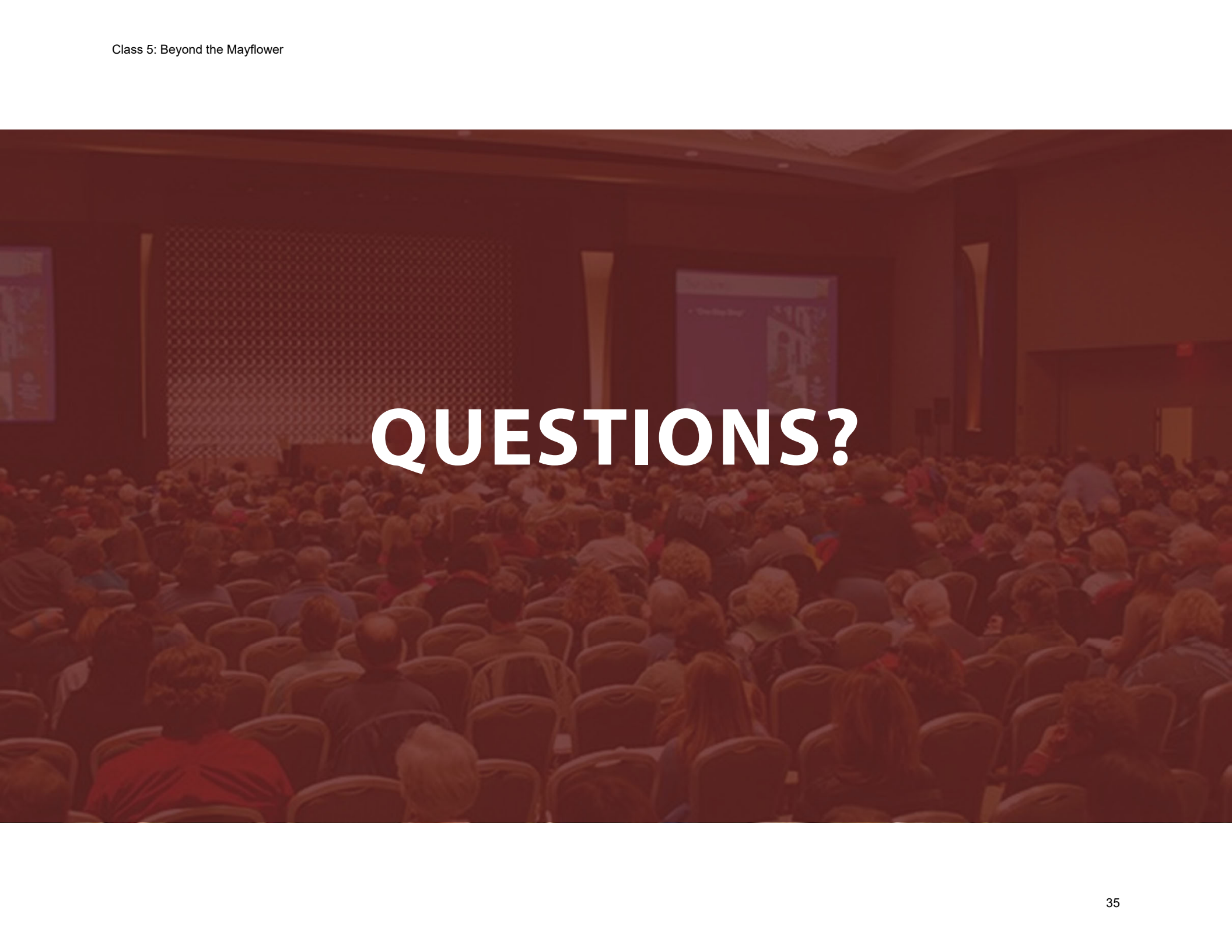


Raleigh, *History of the World* (1611)



Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*
trans. Philemon Holland (1601)

QUESTIONS?

A large audience is seated in a lecture hall, facing a stage. The audience is seen from behind, filling the foreground and middle ground. The stage is at the far end of the room, featuring a large presentation screen displaying a slide with a building image. The room has a high ceiling and decorative wall panels. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent reddish-brown filter.

Part 3

Governor Bradford's Use of Secular Books

and y^e losses they have suffered there.
Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees
+ & blessed y^e God of heaven, who had brought them over y^e vast, & furious ocean, and de-
livered them from all y^e periles, & miseries therof; againe to set their feete on y^e firme
and stable earth, their proper element. And no marvell if they were thus joyefull,
seeing wise Seneca was so affected with sailing a few miles on y^e coast of his owne
Epist.
53. Italy; as he affirmed, that he had rather remaine twentie years on his way by
Land, then pass by sea to any place in a short time; so tedious, & dreadfull was y^e
same unto him.

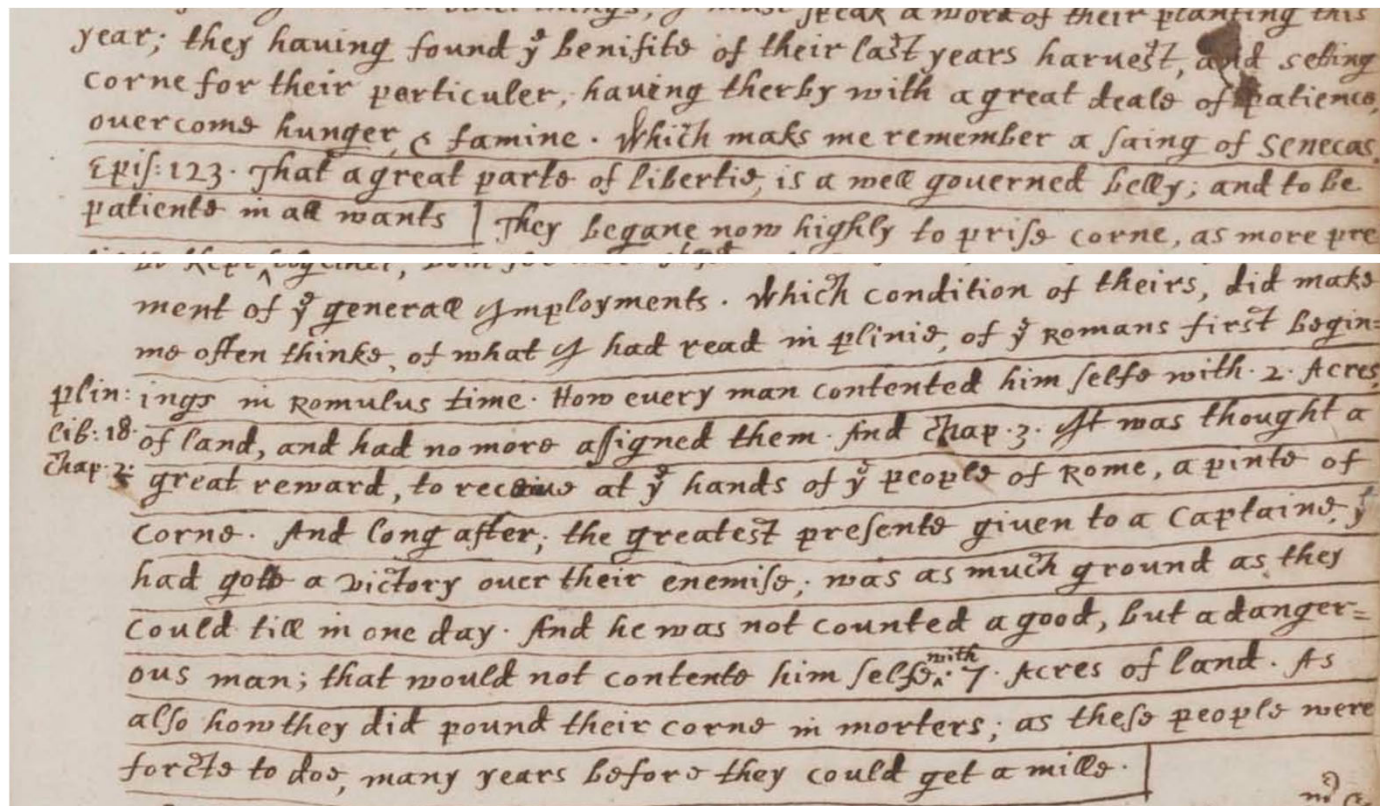
William Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, Book 1, Ch. 9 (MS p. 46)
The *Mayflower* arrives at Cape Cod (Provincetown Harbor).
Composed around 1630

ther. Then began I to require the Master to set me on some shoare. But he told me, that the shoars of the sea were dangerous, and vnfit to land at, and that he feared nothing more in a tempest then to beare vp for land; yet was I so tormented that I remembred not my selfe of any danger: for a certaine languishing desire to vomit, that prouoked but preuailed me nothing in emptying my stomacke: it pained me infinitely, which stirred but voyded not choller. I therefore importuned the Master so, that will he nill he, I compelled him to beare for the shoare; whereto when we somewhat neered, I expect not to do any thing that *Virgil* commandeth, that the Prow of the Ship should be turned towards the Sea, or that the Anchor should be let slip into the Sea; but remembring my selfe of that I was accustomed to doe, I cast my selfe into the water, couered in a Velvet mantle, as they are wont who wash themselves in colde water. What thinkst thou I suffered, whilst I strue to escape these perrils, whilst I seek, whilst I make a way thorow these dangers? I know well, not without cause, that Mariners feared the land. They are incredible things that I suffered, considering that I could not support my selfe. Learne this of me, that the Sea was not so incensed at the birth of *Vlysses*, that it should cause ship-wracks in all places. He vomited easily. For mine owne part I had rather remaine twenty yeares vpon my way, then passe by Sea to any place. As soone as I had recouered my stomacke

Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 53.4-5;
Lodge translation (1614), p. 247

prevent a *Consumption* in his *Virtue*. But after he had relided in *Holland* about half a Score Years, he was one of those who bore a part in that Hazardous and Generous Enterprize of removing into *New-England*, with part of the *English Church* at *Leyden*, where at their first Landing, his dearest Consort accidentally falling Overboard, was drowned in the *Harbour*; and the rest of his Days were spent in the Services, and the Temptations, of that *American Wilderness*.

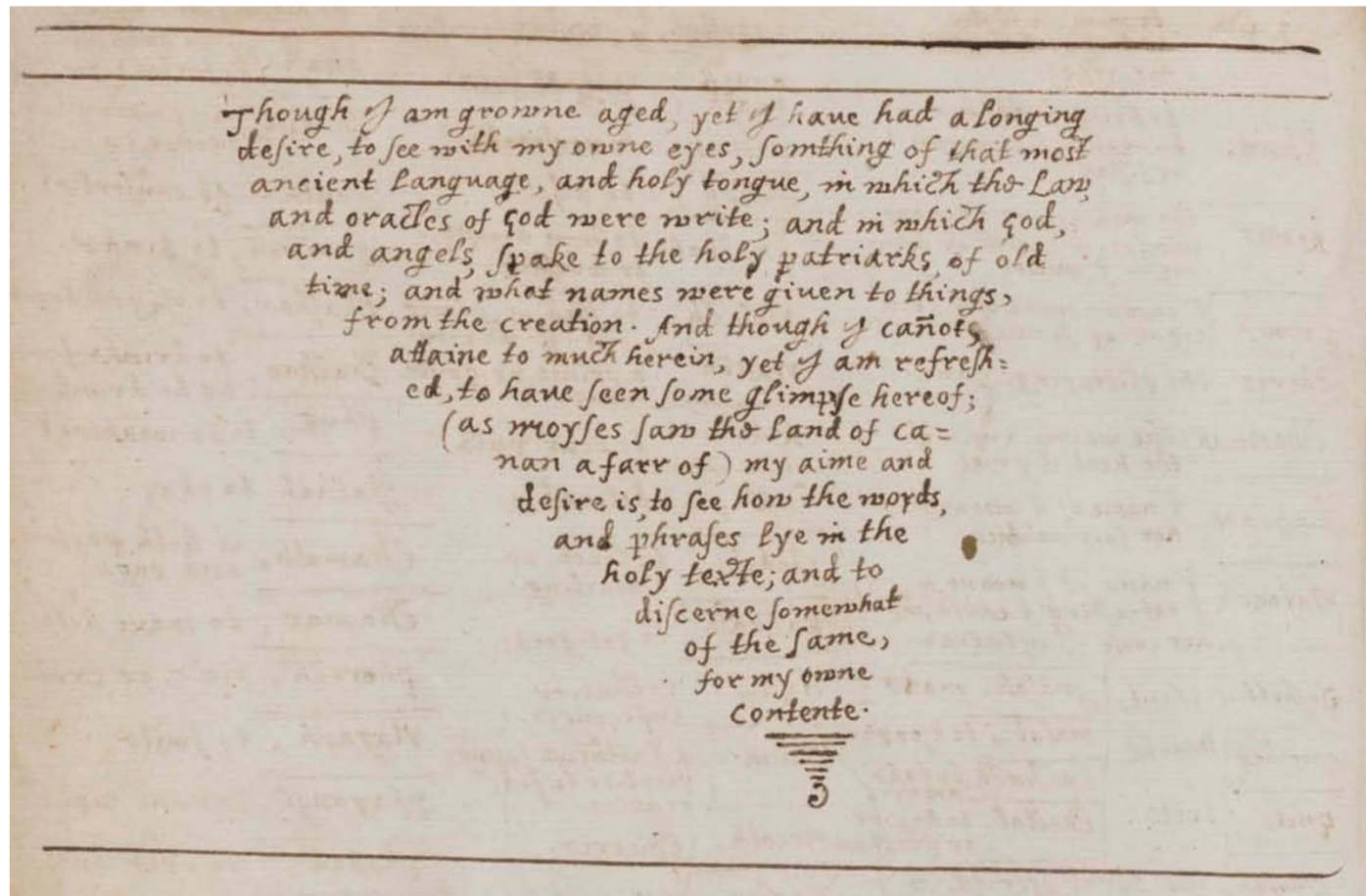
Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), Bk. 2, Ch. 1
Life of Bradford



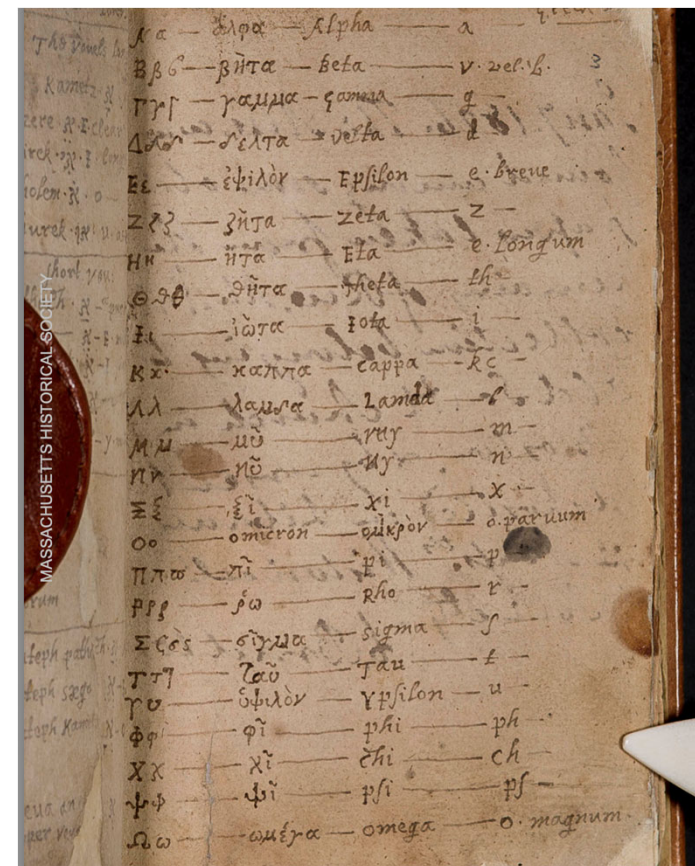
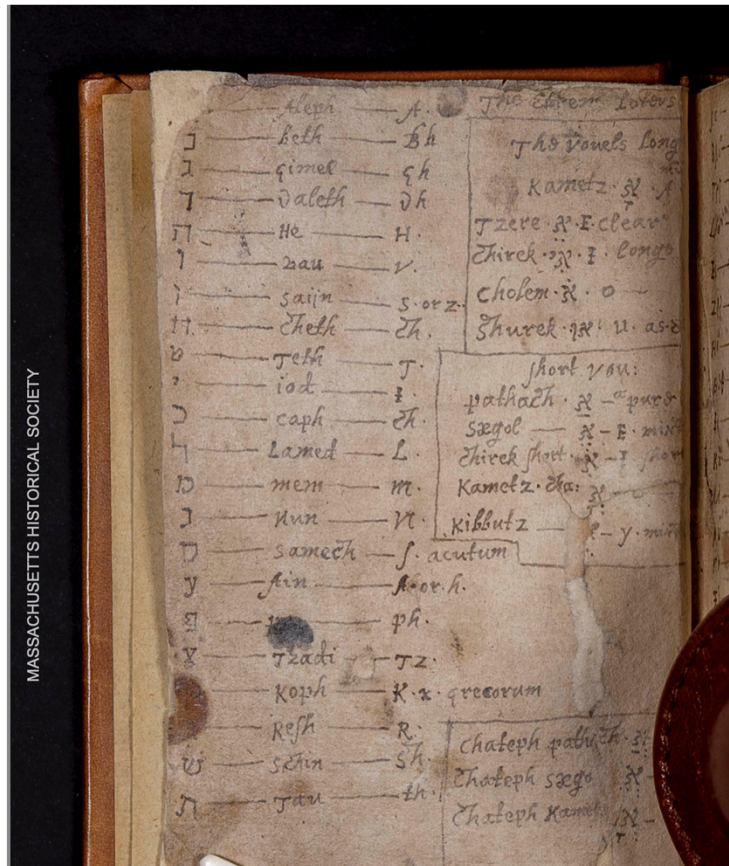
The image shows two pages of a handwritten manuscript in cursive script. The top page contains text about the benefits of their harvest and a quote from Seneca. The bottom page continues the narrative, mentioning Pliny and the distribution of land in Rome. The ink is dark, and the paper appears aged.

year; they having found y^e benifits of their last years harvest, and seeing
corne for their particuler, having thereby with a great deal of patience,
overcome hunger & famine. Which makes me remember a saying of Senecas
epi: 123. That a great parte of libertie, is a well governed belly; and to be
patients in all wants. They began now highly to prize corne, as more pre
ment of y^e general employments. Which condition of theirs, did make
me often think, of what I had read in plinio, of y^e romans first begin
plinio in romulus time. How every man contented him selfe with 2. Acres
lib: 18 of land, and had no more assigned them. And Chap: 3. It was thought a
Chap: 3 great reward, to receive at y^e hands of y^e people of Rome, a pinto of
corne. And long after, the greatest presents given to a Captaine, y^e
had got a victory over their enemies, was as much ground as they
could till in one day. And he was not counted a good, but a danger
ous man; that would not content him selfe ^{with} 7. Acres of land. As
also how they did pound their corne in morters; as these people were
forced to do, many years before they could get a mill.

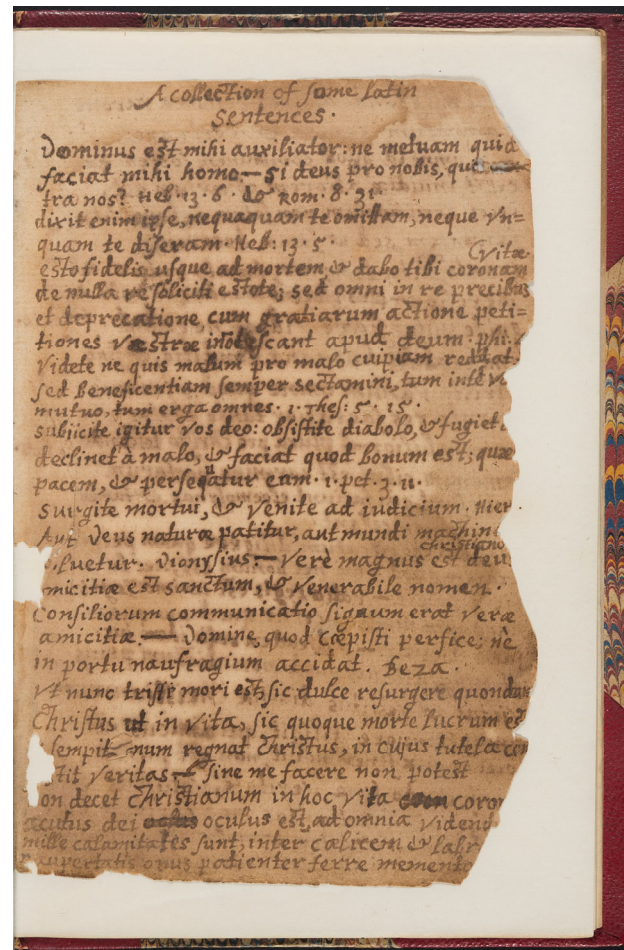
Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, Bk. 2, Anno 1624, MS pp. 115-116
Seneca, Pliny, and the harvest of 1624



The elderly Bradford on studying Hebrew: notation in MS on endpaper of
Of Plimoth Plantation



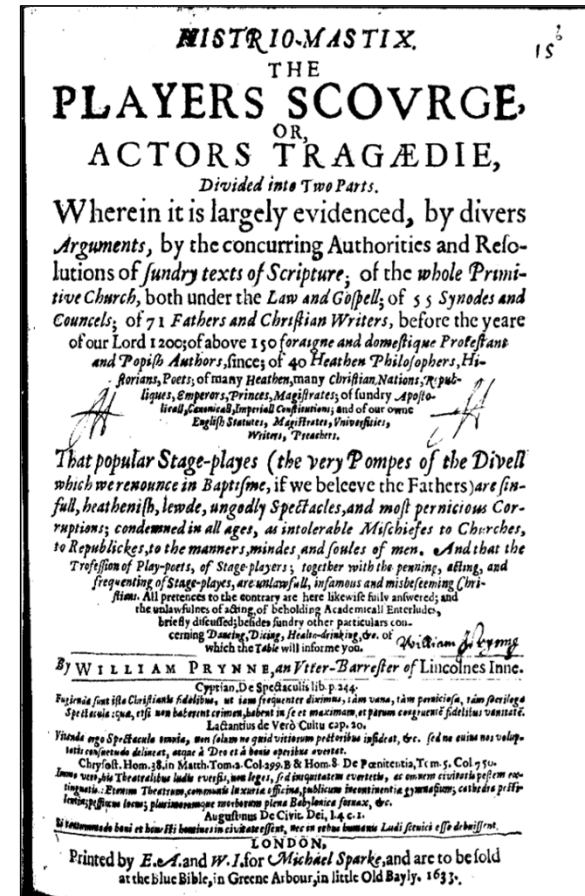
Bradford: Hebrew and Greek alphabets
from the notebook containing *The Third Dialogue*



The first of four pages of Latin extracts compiled by Bradford around 1655.



William Prynne (1600-1669), Parliamentary politician and Presbyterian propagandist
Portrait by Wenceslaus Hollar



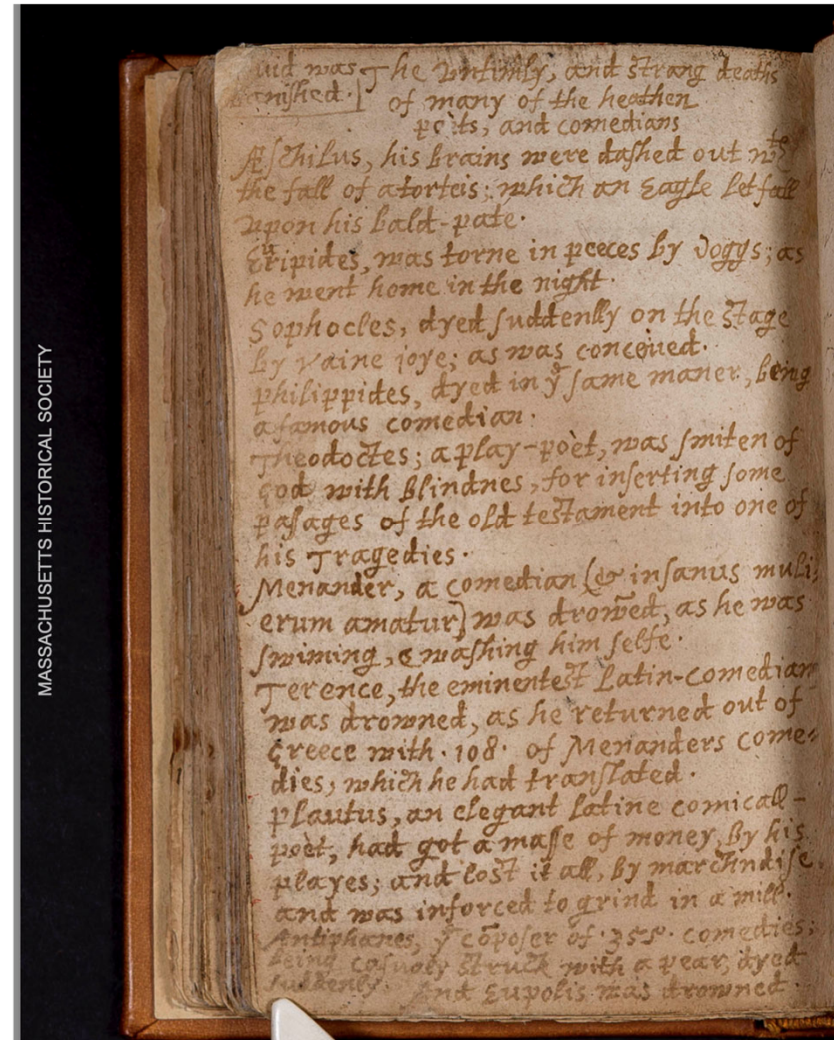
Title-page of *Histrio-Mastix* (1633)

“The untimly and strang deaths of many of the heathen poets, and comedians”

—a catalogue Bradford copied (with abridgements) from Prynne’s *Histrion-Mastix*

—“comedians” = playwrights (both tragic and comic)

—Bradford’s addition to Prynne’s list is in the upper left-hand corner:
“Ovid was banished”

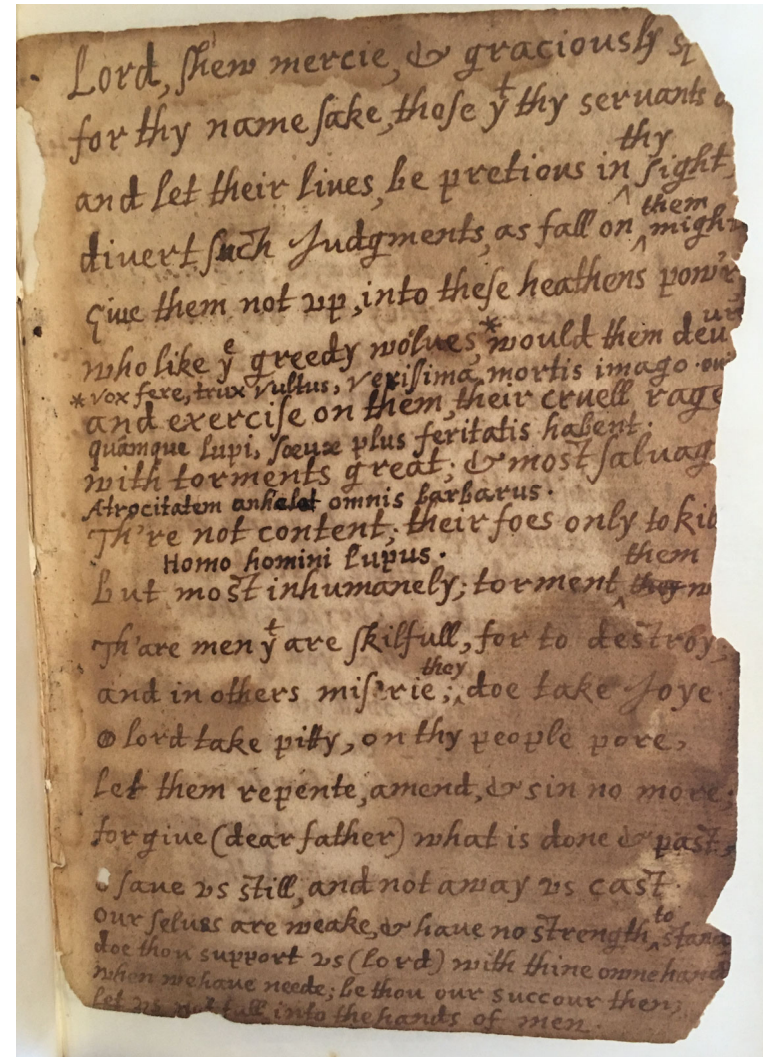


Selection from Bradford's poem
"Some Observations" (1655)

—Four interpolated Latin lines, the first
two from Ovid's poetry of exile, *Tristia* 5.7:

"savage tongue, grim faces, most
accurate image of death"

"like wolves, but they have even more cruel
savagery"



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A large audience of people is seated in a lecture hall, facing a stage. The audience is seen from behind, filling the foreground and middle ground. The stage is at the far end of the room, featuring a large presentation screen displaying a slide with text and images. The room has a high ceiling and decorative wall panels. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent reddish-brown filter.

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