

Puritan Poets

(Part-1)

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The Puritan age in English Literature lasted from 1649 to 1660. Puritanism was a radical Protestant movement to reform the Church of England. Rose to popularity during 17th century in the New England, US, Puritanism, as a religious movement, believed in cleansing the church of all of its remaining Roman Catholic ties. Its followers lived by a moral and religious code that not only influenced their own lives, but sought to impact the lives of everyone around them. Authors of Puritan literature were deeply religious and wrote in such a way to make God became easier for everyone to understand and more relevant in their day-to-day lives.

Characteristics of Puritan Literature:

Puritan literature relied on a first-person narrative. Puritan authors approached writing from a personal point of view, with many of their writings coming in the form of journals, diaries, and day-to-day experiences. By writing from a first-person perspective, thoughts are conveyed from the author speaking about himself or herself.

Puritan literature relied on a religious, rather than an entertainment, theme. Puritans didn't believe in writing for entertainment; rather, they thought of writing as a tool to reach people with the story of God. Works focused on realistic messages illustrating the idea that everyone was born a sinner and that his or her salvation had been pre-determined, a concept known as predestination.

Puritan literature also relied on specific genres. Taking into account the first-person narrative and religious focus, most Puritan literature took the form of a sermon, poem, letter, or historical narrative. There was often an underlying purpose to these types of communications, illustrating their values and the importance of the Bible and God in their daily lives.

Puritan literature relied on a simple style of writing. Puritans lived simple lives, so it stands to reason that their style of writing would mimic the same pattern. Puritan authors used direct and simple language and sentence structure to convey their point, shunning the more elaborate style of writing that was popular in many circles at the time.

Puritan literature relied on Biblical allusions. Biblical allusions, or references to Biblical events or characters, were used heavily in Puritan writing. Many authors would compare themselves or current struggles to hardships endured by characters illustrated in the Bible.

Puritan literature relied on fear. In many works, authors relied on their readers' sense of fear about God and hell to effect change in the readers' minds and souls. By using fear to reach the readers, the author thought there was better potential for change. After all, sinners who did not conform to their religious beliefs were believed to be headed for an eternity of torment in hell.

Notable Poets/ Examples:

John Milton (1608 to 1674), most famous for his epic poem Paradise Lost in 1667, was an English poet with religious beliefs emphasizing central Puritanical views. While the work acted as an expression of his despair over the failure of the Puritan Revolution against the English Catholic Church, it also indicated his optimism in human potential. A sequel

entitled Paradise Regained was published in 1671. Other notable published works by Milton include, On Shakespeare, Comus, Lycidas and the tragedy Samson Agonistes

Some others poets in this category include Richard Baxter, Anne Bradstreet, Samuel Danforth, Morgan Llwyd, Andrew Marvell, John Milton, John Bunyan, Robert Overton, Richard Crashaw, Edward Taylor, Michael Wigglesworth and other poets.