

The Puritan attitude toward death in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century New England was ambivalent and contained both terror at the possibility of eternal damnation and hope for deliverance. The joyful theme of the *migratio ad Dominum* resonated with the Saints only at times when they were convinced divine grace was actively working in their lives, but when they saw they were backsliding, the horror of death prevailed. Puritan anxiety about death was caused by tensions inherent in the doctrine of predestination, which implied man's dependence on God's inscrutability, and in the doctrine of assurance, which implied that self-doubt was more desirable than full assurance of salvation. What complicated any verification of the presence of grace was man's endless potential for self-deception. *Memento mori* gave urgency to the Puritan work ethic and the effective use of time. The anxiety about one's destiny began in early childhood when death and its ensuing horrors for the depraved were used as a means of religious instruction to provoke spiritual precocity and conversion. This early immersion into the discourse about death has been erroneously interpreted as a proof of the non-existence of childhood in Puritan New England. Deathbed scenes depicted in Puritan spiritual biographies were designed as examples of *ars moriendi* and demonstrate that dying with fear and trembling was expected of the elect, but it was equally significant to hope for salvation. The pompous funerary style and the outward splendor of tombs implied a social crisis and a newly-acquired importance of individual's death in the Puritan culture. In opposition to some other researchers in the field, this thesis contends that the ambivalent attitude toward death does not contradict the Puritan doctrine but reflects its inherent contradictions. Both reassurance and anxiety were inseparable from the Puritan religious experience and mutually reinforced each other.