

Grade: C+

Sample Paper 4

English 320

Sonya Lancaster

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Reaction to Infant Mortality in a Puritanical Society

The startling rampancy of infant mortality was an epidemic that plagued families of 17th century New England. The reality of death unceasingly tormented Puritan families, thus demanding an unequivocal amount of faith in their religion. Consequently, they became consumed by their committed belief in an afterlife. This conviction granted them the peace to appreciate life's blessings and trials. They trusted God's plan and lived for the promise of expected treasures. After reading Mary Rowlandson and John Williams' texts in class, I began to question their seemingly calm acceptance of the death of their children. I was unable to comprehend the notion of embodying this spirit of tranquility following the death of my child. Their calm disposition in response to the death of their children led me to inquire further into the Puritan reaction to death. I chose to explore the emotional reactions to the phenomenon of infant mortality in early New England. In doing so, I found it imperative to recognize the cultural compliance regarding gender roles, religious intransigence, and suppression of worldly emotion.

Infant death was almost expected, either as a result of captivity or disease. Consequently, we may assume fear would be an overriding theme in Puritanical societies. Logically, it is possible to deduce that living with the persistent threat of death would translate to a fearful existence. In the *Representation of Childhood Death*, the authors discuss this by saying: "The Puritans in...New England...sought to cause fear and used very considerable eloquence to depict the appalling prospects in store for children who were not savingly converted" (Avery 88-89). Accordingly, instilling trepidation in children would be an effective method for teaching their truth that salvation is a more sanguine alternative after death. However, this inference is inaccurate. As a

