The ideas of Barnaby and Schnell are often outliers in the continuum of opinion, and a stronger, more explicit review of the scholarly literature on the poems, plays, and novels they discuss would be welcome. The authors need to engage ideas of those outside the charmed circle of their own “discursive community.” The book closes with several pages of scholastic abstraction that Bacon described as one of the distempers of learning—sometimes it seems that the demonstration of mastery of the fashionable idiom matters more than what is being said. The book concludes with a brief and orphic epilogue refers to the so-called “experiment [?] we call America,” and suggests we might benefit from relearning the lessons of history, but what those lessons are, remains unsaid. Although this study has the weaknesses of an early selection, both scholars are young and audacious, and their insights will deepen over time. When the authors resonate with a particular writer, their readings are more persuasive: the resourceful, idiosyncratic Aphra Behn fits their theory better than the others; chapter five was their best.


From the outset Douglas Anderson puts his readers on notice that his study offers “a wandering viewpoint … rang[ing] backward and forward through the bulk of Bradford’s book” (22). Expect neither a fully enunciated thesis nor a sequential development of argument, and (it might be added) do not look for any help from the 100-word, extraordinarily general book-jacket description. If the reviewer’s task includes summarizing the contents of a book, then in this instance such an undertaking is harder than usual.

The title announces Anderson’s subject: the books that Bradford read or could have read, and also the impact of his keen awareness of these works in particular, print media in general, and his own
book-defined work-in-progress. All of these perspectives intermingle, especially in relation to Bradford's personal understanding of history. They effectively form a network of crisscrossing associations that shape the narrative manner of his record of Plymouth colony. Even the opening pages of Bradford's manuscript, Anderson observes, not only allude to specific authors (Socrates Scholasticus, Eusebius, John Fox) but also in their hand-ruled appearance mimic the very look of printed books. Similarly, the initial storm-at-sea episode is rendered textually complex by its allusion to Paul's voyage in The Acts of the Apostles. These and other such deliberate maneuvers in the historian's manuscript insist on the reader's identification of narrative frames. Such features, Anderson contends, announce Bradford's intention to imitate the artifice of literary design.

There is another interest woven into this emphasis on books: namely, how in Bradford's history, reflecting his view of narratives generally, a sense of design-like coherence surprisingly emerges out of sundry resistant and conflicting fragments. Relevant here is the colonial historian's unusual accommodation of experiences seemingly at variance with Pilgrim ideals. Possibly influenced by Jean Bodin and William Perkins, among others, Bradford embraces contingent responses to apparent aberrations within the Pilgrim community and hence resists any closure in his own textual record. Instead, as an “example of the resilience and flexibility of the ‘textor’s’ narrative art” (68), he permits his narrative to imitate history's subtle interweaving of variety and unity, dissolution and preservation, hopelessness and hope—that is, history's containment of both unnerving circumstances and human differences. Recognizing the artificial or representational nature of human performance—its tangle of emotions and intentions replete with either deceit or potentiality—Bradford pertinently endorses the spirit of compromise apparently implied in John Robinson's writings.

A third concern, intertwined with these two subjects, includes the correspondence between the textual interdependence of Bradford's account and the geographic codependence of Plymouth colony and Europe. In the art of Bradford's book, which mirrors
the unifying narrative strategies of other self-reflective Pilgrim documents, what might appear to some European observers as an eccentric marginal outpost becomes an important participant within the focal design of the Reformation. It is in this context, Anderson concludes, that the colony’s diminishment in size and importance should be understood at the end of Bradford’s account. Anderson here refutes the long-standing reading of this historian’s document as an elegiac story of declension. Instead, Bradford celebrates the absorption of Plymouth into the divine scheme of history; the colony’s once eccentric difference is now incorporated in the grand design.

Anderson’s book teems with insights, some of which become more plausible if we now and then adjust the critic’s underlying assumption about Bradford’s degree of narrative management. It is interesting to observe that Anderson stresses Bradford’s appreciation of humanity’s unpredictable and ambiguous tangle of emotion and will, but in turn accords this historian little of this same human complexity. When such issues crops up, it is explained away as “rare exceptions” (108). Anderson’s portrait inclines toward pure unadulterated authorial intention, which he somehow knows. A mere handful of instances will make the point: “Bradford chose to emphasize,” “carefully interweaves,” “is acutely aware that all constructions of character are dependent upon artifice,” “carefully selected letters and documents for a similar purpose,” “surely realized [apropos “a meaningful narrative design”] that the effect of doing so would inevitably jar readers” (101,125, 217, 218). The words chose, carefully, acutely, surely, among other instances in the study, insist on Bradford’s thorough self-conscious control at nearly every turn of his narrative. This view of the man counters the historian’s own understanding of the impact of circumstance and feelings on human behavior; is counter-intuitive to our everyday experience, and obscures one of the most productive tensions in Of Plymouth Plantation.

More probable is a Bradford whose ambivalent emotional responses to the vexing welter of historical process register beneath and through his conscious intentions. Then, for example, it might
be more reliable to indicate that his text does finally suggest the upbeat absorption of Plymouth colony into the grand divine scheme but that the text does so only because of narrative accretions—accidental progressive implication—that resist Bradford’s manifest elegiac and nostalgic state of mind at the end of his account. Anderson’s attribution of iron-fisted authorial control to Bradford sometimes results in both over-reading and under-reading.

The latter limitation mainly occurs when a passage threatens Anderson's insistence on Bradford's firm authorial hand. Such is the case with the historian’s entry for 1624, the year when Bradford felt forced by circumstance and human behavior to depart from the communal ideal and so assigned parcels of land to individual families. Anderson reads this decisive occasion as an instance when the historian, who “clearly presents change itself as constructive,” “is prepared to accommodate the lessons of experience” (107, 109; emphasis added). To maintain this position Anderson unfortunately abandons close reading, the very manner that he employs so productively throughout most of his study. Close attention to the text in this instance, however, suggests a deep emotional undercurrent that veers far away from Anderson’s thesis-facilitating claim.

Note, first of all, the syntactic performance of Bradford’s introductory comment concerning his reluctant decision to allow private possession of land: “At length, after much debate of things, the Governor [Bradford] (with the advice of the chiefest amongst them) gave way.” Consider the three responsibility-defusing qualifications, the strategy of verbal distancing, before Bradford pens, in a telling phrase, that he “gave way” from the communal ideal. Such phalanxed defensiveness finds reinforcement in an eccentric reference to Plato: this experience, “amongst godly and sober men, may well evince the vanity of that conceit of Plato’s … that the taking away of property and bringing in community into a commonwealth would make them happy and flourishing.” Plato would never have been the authority behind the Pilgrim social ideal, and his convenient appearance at this sensitive point—which is only noted in passing by Anderson—is very curious indeed. At one level,
Bradford might be self-protectively justifying his violation of Plymouth's charter concerning land, a violation he mitigates by expressly indicating that the distribution was “for present use” only, not “for inheritance.” At another level, the reference to Plato displaces an undeclared departure from the Pauline communal ideal of the first generation of Christians, the actual nostalgic model for the Pilgrims. As Anderson astutely points out elsewhere, Paul’s epistles are intertextually interwoven in Bradford’s history. In this overlooked instance, Paul’s unseen ghost is present in an unusual displacement of authority similar, perhaps, to the underground textual work performed by Bradford’s equally peculiar pre-dating of William Brewster’s death by a year at a later point in the history.

Bradford, moreover, particularly pointed to the importance of this 1624 passage when in later years he appended a sad note on its opposite blank page. This added passage bothers Anderson enough to move him to dismiss it as “melodramatic” (113), but its disconsolate sentiment unequivocally remains nonetheless. Although Anderson rightly connects this appended commentary with a passage by John Robinson, in this instance he misses its key intertextual link to Bradford’s own writing. The image in the addendum most invested with emotion here is an elaborate conceit: “But (alas) that subtle serpent hath slyly wound in himself under fair pretences of necessity and the like, to untwist these sacred bonds and ties.” This theme—the uncertain meaning of necessity—runs throughout Bradford’s history. Time and again he struggles to decide whether this or that necessity encodes a communication from the divine taskmaster or from corrupt postlapsarian human desires. The entry for 1624 records Bradford’s nervous, syntactically qualified hope that the necessity leading to his temporary departure from the Pauline ideal is a sign from God, who “seeing all men have this corruption … in His wisdom saw another course fitter for them.” In the entry for 1632, however, Bradford rereads this moment. Between 1624 and 1632, more and more land had been demanded by church members who “broke away under one pretense or another, thinking their own conceived necessity” suffi-
cient justification. In the appended passage there is no melodrama, only a sad finish to this reversal in Bradford’s understanding of the “necessity” of 1624. Bradford now believes that, like Adam in response to the “fair pretenses” of Eve, he “gave way” to human corruption, the pretense of a divinely-ordained necessity, and as a result the Pilgrims lost (uncoiled) their Eden-like Pauline communal ideal.

A more progressive reading of events is also recorded in *Of Plymouth Plantation*, but often unwittingly and against the grain of Bradford’s feelings. Bradford’s manifest awareness and imitation of print media, which Anderson cogently highlights, certainly comprise part of the story that needed to be told. Yet there is another story, as well, concerning the productive narrative tension between an author’s intention and execution, conscious design and unconscious product, that also underlies much of this colonial history. Read with this other story in mind, Anderson’s rich book has much to offer. Concerning its number of highly speculative interpretations, each reader will personally decide what to attribute to Bradford’s resourcefulness and what to Anderson’s creativity. Either way, *William Bradford’s Books* is engaging. Anderson comes well prepared to conduct his exploration *Of Plymouth Plantation*, and on the whole he succeeds wonderfully in imparting new insights concerning its surprising intertextual resonance.


Edward Taylor (1642?–1729), the Cambridge-educated Restoration émigré, still remains a mystery. At the top of the list of puzzles is the seeming inconsistency between his conservative Calvinistic ministry and his Renaissance-faceted verse meditations, especially the poems written between 1682 and 1692. The often peculiar manner and matter of Taylor’s metaphysical poetry have long resisted close scrutiny. Few critics have ventured detailed