

Part I
Early America



I

Things Fearful to Name

Introduction

Bestiality and sodomy have long been seen as “unnatural,” following biblical proscriptions, but as John Murrin points out in this article, the way in which these “crimes” have been prosecuted has varied tremendously, even in the North American colonies. Since evidence of penetration was required for prosecution, both bestiality and sodomy have been seen as male crimes; in the American colonies, only two cases involving women and homosexual sex have been discovered, and these were treated as lascivious behavior rather than crimes against nature. Similarly, women appear in only two cases concerning bestiality. Murrin suggests that the crimes of witchcraft and bestiality were closely related in both the dramatic ways that each challenged the social order and community efforts to suppress the crimes. Women, in the eyes of the colonists, manifested their evil inclination by bonding to the devil and becoming witches; men served Satan by blurring the otherwise clear division between humans and beasts.

In the following extended excerpt from his essay examining all of colonial Anglo-America, Murrin treats New England. Neither in colonial America generally, nor in New England specifically, were bestiality or sodomy cases common. Nonetheless, through a meticulous search of the court records and private sources, Murrin is able to analyze court and community attitudes toward both offenses as well as toward the alleged offender. Bestiality seems to have horrified colonists generally, though sources suggest that often the charges were not taken seriously. Sodomy, on the other hand,

seems to have been tolerated, though it remained a criminal act in most colonies, and those accused were subject to prosecution and punishment.

“Things Fearful to Name”: Bestiality in Early America

John Murrin

In the Old Testament, the Lord has no tolerance for either sodomy or bestiality.¹ He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone and later empowered the people of Israel to slaughter the Benjaminites because of the sodomitical activities of the people of Gibeah.² His command was unequivocal:

If a man also lie with mankind as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death. . . . And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death; and ye shall slay the beast. And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman and the beast; they shall surely be put to death; their blood *shall be* upon them. (Leviticus 20: 13, 15–16)

In the New Testament, Paul shared the same revulsion:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the women, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working that which is unseemly. (Romans 1: 26–7)

By the early modern era, virtually all Christian theologians shared Paul’s condemnation of “unnatural” sexual acts, a category that became so widely used that it is still deeply embedded in the criminal codes of American state governments. And yet, despite these shared beliefs, Christian societies differed dramatically in the kinds of unnatural sexual acts that they chose to prosecute. . . .

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Although one woman and her dog were hanged at Tyburn in 1679,³ women were almost never tried for homosexual actions or for bestiality, largely because the requirement of penetration almost defined the offense as a male act. Protestant clergymen sometimes agitated for a broader definition of the crime, something more in keeping with the biblical mandates. But, for reasons that remain unclear, the law courts continued to insist on penetration.⁴

In the American colonies, only two cases have emerged, both in New England, that involved women engaged in sexual play with one another. They were treated as lewd and lascivious behavior, not as potential crimes against nature, even though one of the principal offenders, the servant Elizabeth Johnson, was also punished for the highly provocative offense of “stopping her ears with her hands when the Word of God was read.”⁵ Only two cases of female bestiality have come to light in the colonies. In 1702 the grand jury refused to indict one woman in Boston. But in Monmouth County, New Jersey, Hannah Corkin was indicted for buggery in 1757 but convicted only of attempted buggery. Her offense must have been flagrant, however, for she received an exceptionally severe sentence – four whippings, each of twenty lashes, in four different towns in consecutive weeks.⁶

Trials for deviant sex reversed the patterns that prevailed in trials for witchcraft. According to both the Bible and early modern theology, men and women could commit either crime, but only men were actively suspected of sodomy or bestiality, while women were always the prime targets of witchcraft accusations. Men who fell under suspicion of witchcraft were usually related to a woman who was the chief suspect. But in any sexual relation with an animal, as Scandinavian bestiality trials reveal, a man was seen doing the devil’s work in a way that went beyond conventional sins. God had created an orderly nature with clear boundaries between humans and beasts. Satan, and the buggerers who served him, were challenging those boundaries and threatening to reduce everything to confusion. Swedish sources are rich in this imagery, but it also appears in New England. In New Haven Colony, when one man interrupted another bugging a cow, the accused claimed that he was merely milking her. “Yet it is the Devills Milking and would bring him to the gallows,” his accuser replied.⁷ People still believed, as we shall see in several dramatic North American cases, that sexual unions between humans and animals, and between different species of animals, could produce offspring.⁸ In Sweden, the Swiss Canton of Fribourg, the Republic of Geneva, and New England, the active prosecution of witchcraft and bestiality rose and fell together. For both clergy and magistrates, at least in regimes strongly dedicated to godliness, the two crimes seemed closely related. In the Netherlands, by contrast, the magistrates

rejected clerical advice about both crimes. Bestiality was almost ignored. The last conviction for witchcraft occurred in 1595, and the last trial in 1610.⁹

Bestiality lowered a man to the level of a beast, but it also left something human in the animal. To eat a defiled animal thus involved the danger of cannibalism. The fear of human debasement ran deep enough to prevent men from milking cows. Women performed that chore. Any Swedish man who entered a barn that housed milk cows needed a superb excuse, or he would attract suspicion of bestial motives.¹⁰ So strong was the sense of defilement from any copulation with animals that in Sweden it overrode the double standard of sexual behavior. Men would turn in other men for this offense, even though conviction usually meant death. The lack of sodomy trials in Sweden suggests that, for 150 years after 1630, bestiality seemed uniquely odious among crimes that men were likely to commit. In Sweden, as in New England, the active suppression of bestiality was accompanied by a major witch hunt aimed mostly at women, but in New England the campaign against bestiality lost its energy far sooner than in Sweden. . . .

Sodomy and bestiality in colonial New England have come under considerable scrutiny in the last two decades. Robert F. Oaks argued that homosexual relations must have been far more common than surviving legal records indicate and that, measured against the punishments meted out for buggery, the region was fairly tolerant of sodomy. Roger Thompson has replied that the region was a bastion of homophobic sentiment and that deviant sexual behavior was extremely rare. John Canup has also stressed the distinctive Puritan preoccupation with “the beast within” to account for the region’s extraordinary horror of buggery.¹¹

All of these scholars are making valid and important points. As in any society, many incidents of proscribed behavior never came to the attention of the authorities. But even if we multiply the known sodomy incidents by, shall we say, a factor of fifty, the number of participants would still be a tiny fraction of the total population, though probably not a trivial proportion of teenage boys. The ferocity of the rhetoric denouncing sodomy was indeed distinctive, and as Thompson points out, we have to wonder why the clergy and the magistrates worried so much about things that seldom happened. But then we have very little rhetoric at all from other colonies on this subject. New Englanders published sermons and even a few ponderous tomes of divinity or religious history. Other colonies did not. And yet if we set this rhetoric aside for a moment, the region’s actual treatment of men or boys accused of sodomy was quite similar to what we have seen in other parts of colonial North America. Even the Puritans nearly always found a way to avoid

executing the accused. The only two exceptions occurred in New Haven Colony, which was also the only colony to abolish jury trials.

In 1646 New Haven hanged William Plaine of Guilford, a married man who had committed sodomy with two men in England. In New England, “he had corrupted a great parte of the youth of Gilford by masturbation, which he had committed & provoked others to the like, above 100 tymes,” reported John Winthrop; “& to some who questioned the lawfullnesse of suche a filthy practice, he did insinuate seedes of Atheism, questioning whither there were a God & c.” Theophilus Eaton, the governor of New Haven, wrote to Winthrop on how to proceed in this case. The issue, no doubt was whether masturbation could be a capital crime. Winthrop agreed that this “monster in humaine shape . . . exceedinge all humane Rules, & examples that ever had been heard off” deserved to die but remained vague about the biblical basis for executing him. Winthrop noted only his “frustratinge of the Ordinance of marriage & the hindringe the generation of mankinde.” After the fact, New Haven adopted a law to cover the case. It declared that public masturbation, by “corrupting or tempting others to doe the like, . . . tends to the sin of Sodomy, if it be not one kind of it”; and “if the case considered with the aggravating circumstances, shall according to the mind of God revealed in his word require it, he shall be put to death, as the court of magistrates shall determine.” In short, Plaine’s crime was inciting others to sodomy.¹²

Unfortunately the New Haven Colony records do not survive for this case, or we would have a much fuller account of how many boys were involved with Plaine. But if these encounters happened more than a hundred times, they had been going on for months before any lad notified the authorities or some respectable resident interrupted one of the frolics. In the town of Guilford, many youths had sexual experiences for an extended period of time that godly adults knew nothing about.

Nine years later Thomas and Peter Richards interrupted John Knight and Peter Vincon, a servant boy, “Acting filthyness together,” which the two brothers described in lurid detail. Vincon’s testimony suggested that he had sometimes been a willing partner and on other occasions had resisted. On the day in question, Knight had said “shall we play” and Vincon had replied, “no play,” but Knight “came to him” anyway. Partly because Knight had also tried to rape young Mary Clark several times, the court condemned him to death. Nothing in the record indicates that Vincon was punished, although he is described as “the age of fourteene yeares or somewhat more.” This case is the only example of conventional sodomy that led to an execution in colonial New England, although Mingo, a slave in Charlestown, Massachusetts, was hanged for “forcible buggery” (i.e., homosexual rape) in 1712. In 1755 at Lake

George, a Massachusetts soldier named Bickerstaff received the then unprecedented sentence of 100 lashes for “Profane swearing and a Sodomitical attempt.” He was then drummed out of camp with a noose around his neck, a dramatic way of telling him that he deserved to die, and was kept in confinement for the rest of the campaign. But he was not executed.¹³

Puritan New England’s first known encounter with the problem of sodomy occurred aboard the *Talbot* on its way to Salem in 1629. According to Rev. Francis Higginson, “This day we examined 5 beastly Sodomitical boys, which confessed their wickedness not to bee named. The fact was so fowl we reserved them to bee punished by the governor when we came to New England, who afterward sent them backe to the [Massachusetts Bay] company to bee punished in ould England, as the crime deserved.” Those over fourteen could have been hanged, but since five executions would almost have doubled the known total executed for sodomy in seventeenth-century England, we can be reasonably certain that they suffered some lesser punishment.¹⁴

Even New Haven Colony, the world’s most severely Puritan society, learned to cope with youthful sex play among boys without resorting to the halter. At “a meeting of ye court extraordinary” in March 1653, the magistrates examined six “youthes” who “had committed much wickedness in a filthy corrupting way one wth another.” Their confessions “were of such a filthy nature as is not fitt to be made known in a publique way,” but all six were publicly whipped. John Clarke, a servant who was probably older than the “youthes,” was “charged by one of them for some filthy cariag,” which he denied. When one of the other boys “in some measure cleered him” of that accusation, the court left his punishment to his master but warned Clarke “that if ever any such cariag came forth against him hereafter, the Court would call these miscariages upon him to minde againe.” The court feared, no doubt, that it might have another William Plaine on its hands. As this judgment indicates, hardly anyone in New Haven Colony ever received a complete acquittal.¹⁵

The most remarkable New England case was the whole adult life of Nicholas Sension of Wethersfield, Connecticut. He settled there around 1640, married a woman who then became a church member (he did not), and prospered. Quite often, he solicited sexual relations with other men. Once he even tried to seduce an unwilling bedmate while members of the Connecticut General Court were sleeping in the same room. The whole town seems to have known about his inclinations. He was reprimanded once in the 1640s and again in the 1660s, but people also liked him. Even a servant who resented and refused his sexual advances asked to remain in his service. Sension apparently established a long-term relationship with Nathaniel Pond, but after Pond was killed in Meta-

com's (King Philip's) War in 1675, Sension began once more to solicit sex from several young men. He was finally tried for sodomy in 1677, but the jury convicted him only of attempted sodomy. The court, dominated by magistrates from other communities who probably did not know Sension at all well, disfranchised him, ordered him to stand on the gallows with a noose around his neck, had him severely whipped, committed him to prison at the court's pleasure, and bound him to good behavior for a year. Had Sension lived about thirty miles southwest of Wethersfield in New Haven Colony, where there were no juries, he almost certainly would have been hanged, probably in the 1640s. The sentence, even though it could not be capital because of the jury verdict, reflects how one would expect a Puritan magistrate to respond to the foul crime of "going after strange flesh" (Jude: v. 7). Far more remarkable is the community's toleration of Sension's behavior for nearly forty years. Two centuries before the category of "homosexual" was invented, many ordinary residents of Wethersfield were willing, historian Richard Godbeer has argued, "to treat sodomy as a condition rather than as an act; it became in their minds a habitual course of action that characterized some men throughout their lives."¹⁶

Like New Jersey, eighteenth-century New England had its own example of a clergyman, often accused of sodomy, yet accepted by most of his congregation. Stephen Gorton, minister to the Baptist congregation in New London, Connecticut, drew criticism for his homosexual inclinations from the 1720s into the 1750s. Several flagrant infractions prompted some church members to withdraw from the congregation, and in 1757 Gorton was suspended. Yet after he repented publicly for his sin, the congregation voted two to one to restore him to his pulpit. The women favored him by a margin of three to one, while the men split about evenly. But clearly these serious Christians believed that sodomy was a forgivable offense.¹⁷

In New England for most of the seventeenth century, men who committed bestiality received no mercy. Those convicted of the act, as distinct from the attempt, were hanged. The court always allowed a fair amount of time between the trial and the execution so that the condemned man could have an opportunity to repent. God could forgive him. Humans dared not even try. "It is a *Crying* sin," explained Samuel Danforth; "it makes a clamorous noise in the ears of the holy God: it will not suffer God to rest in Heaven. . . . It defiles the Land; the Earth groans under the burthen of such Wickedness."¹⁸

The region experienced something close to a bestiality panic between 1640 and 1643. When the Great Migration finally ceased in 1641, New England probably had a higher percentage of young unmarried men than

at any other point in the century. This group was much smaller than in colonies farther south. In Massachusetts the sex ratio (the number of men per one hundred women) was about 132 in 1641 at a time when it may still have exceeded 400 in Virginia. Yet young unmarried men, usually without known family attachments, provoked most of the cases of bestiality in the 1640s.¹⁹

In July 1640 Aaron Starke of Windsor was accused of bugging a heifer. A year earlier he had been whipped and fined, and the letter R was burned upon his cheek (for attempted rape?), for “the wrong done to Mary Holt . . . and when both are fit for that Condition to marry her.” Instead, a month or two later she was whipped and banished for “vnclene practises” with John Bennett. Starke was still single when accused of bestiality. He “confeseth that he leaned crosse over the heifers Flanke, though at the first he denied that he came neere her, lastly he acknowledgeth that he had twice committed the acte wth the heifer but that shee was to narrowe.” The court ordered a constable to keep him “wth locke and Chaine and hold him to hard labour & course diet” until summoned to trial. Nicholas Sension, the lifelong homosexual, was fined for not appearing to testify at this trial. One has to wonder how intimate the relationship was between these two men. The records of the next several courts have not survived, but Stark was not executed. Connecticut had not yet declared bestiality a capital crime, and the court may also have concluded that his confession amounted to no more than admission of the attempt, not the act. At any rate, Starke survived to be whipped for some other, unstated offense in 1643. He was also condemned to serve Capt. John Mason during the pleasure of the court.²⁰

Massachusetts began to experience similar trouble in the winter 1640–41. “A wicked fellow, given up to bestiality, fearing to be taken by the hand of justice, fled to Long Island, and there was drowned,” noted John Winthrop with equal measure of disgust and satisfaction. “He had confessed to some, that he was so given up to that abomination, that he never saw any beast go before him but he lusted after it.” In December 1641 The General Court (the whole legislature) sentenced William Hatchet, an eighteen or twenty-year-old servant in Salem, to be hanged for bugging a cow on the Lord’s day. He had always been “a very stupid, idle, and ill-disposed boy, and would never regard the means of instruction, either in the church or family,” claimed Winthrop. He was seen by a woman too ill to attend public worship that day who, “looking out at her window, espied him in the very act; but being affrighted at it, and dwelling alone, she durst not call to him, but at night made it known” to a magistrate. Hatchet then “confessed the attempt and some entrance, but denied the completing of the fact.” During the

trial, “much scruple there was with many, because there was but one witness,” whereas the Bible requires two for conviction of a capital crime. A majority voted to convict him on the strength of the woman’s testimony and Hatchet’s admission of some penetration, but when Governor Richard Bellingham could not overcome his own doubts and pronounce the sentence of death, the deputy governor, John Endicott, performed that function. The cow, of course, was condemned “to bee slayne & burnt or buried.”

Only then did Hatchet confess “the full completing this foul fact, and attempting the like before.” He became so penitent that his execution was postponed an extra week to let the grace of the Lord complete its work. “There is no doubt to be made but the Lord hath received his soul to his mercy,” Winthrop affirmed. In March 1643 the Court of Assistants sentenced an Irish servant, Teagu Ocrimi, to stand at the place of execution with a halter around his neck and to be severely whipped “for a foule, & divilish attempt to bugger a cow of M^r. Makepeaces.” The moral was sobering. “As people increased, so sin abounded, and especially the sin of uncleanness,” concluded Winthrop, “and still the providence of God found them out.”²¹

In neighboring Plymouth Colony, not long after Hatchet had been hanged in Massachusetts, someone saw Thomas Granger bugging a mare. His parents lived in Scituate, but this sixteen- or seventeen-year-old lad was a servant in a respectable household in Duxbury. During his examination, he confessed to having sex with “a mare, a cow, two goats, five sheep, two calves and a turkey.” A large part of some poor farmer’s flock of sheep had to be paraded before him so that he could identify which ones he had bugged and which could be spared. All of the defiled animals were slaughtered before his face on September 8, 1642, and then he was hanged. The animal carcasses were “cast into a great and large pit that was digged of purpose for them, and no use made of any part of them.” Governor William Bradford wondered why “even sodomy and buggery (things fearful to name) have broke forth in this land oftener than once.” The vigilance of churches and magistrates provided one answer. In populous old countries, such deeds “lie hid, as it were, in a wood or thicket and many horrible evils by that means are never seen nor known; whereas here they are, as it were, brought into the light and set in the plain field, or rather on a hill, made conspicuous to the view of all” – surely a less than inspirational application of John Winthrop’s ideal of a city upon a hill!²²

In New Haven Colony, the exposure of abomination took an even more dramatic form when the Lord intervened directly to reveal the unspeakable wickedness of a lewd and irreverent servant. George Spencer, an ugly balding man with one “pearle” or false eye, had probably

been whipped in Boston for receiving stolen goods, and had also been punished in New Haven for botching an attempt to escape to Virginia. He admitted that he had gained no spiritual benefit from the ministry of the famed John Davenport, that he had not said a single prayer during his five years in New England, and that he read the Bible only when ordered to do so by his master. In February, 1642, Spencer's life took a cruel turn when a sow gave birth to a dead deformed piglet. The "monster" was completely bald and had "butt one eye in the middle of the face, and thatt large and open, like some blemished eye of a man." Out of its forehead "a thing of flesh grew forth and hung downe, itt was hollow, and like a mans instrum^t of gen^tation."

The magistrates arrested Spencer and put him in prison. New Haven had not yet tried a capital crime. Spencer had seen enough of the colony's system of justice to know that the magistrates expected offenders to confess and repent. He had recently seen a man merely whipped for molesting a child, and as Spencer made clear, he thought that child molestation was a more disgusting crime than bestiality. Yet he denied his guilt until one magistrate "remembered him of that place of scripture, he that hideth his sin shall not prosper, butt he y^t confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall finde mercie." Spencer then "answered he was sory and confessed he had done itt," only to learn that his confession would get him hanged and that mercy would come only from the Lord, not the Colony of New Haven. He retracted and repeated his confession several times in a desperate attempt to find a formula that would save his life. But on April 8, 1642, two months after the birth of the monster, the sow was put to the sword in front of the unrepentant Spencer, and he was hanged, "a terrible example of divine justice and wrath."²³

The bestiality panic of 1641–43 passed, but the precedents remained. In late 1645 another New Haven sow gave birth to two deformed piglets that reminded observers of another servant whose name was, incredibly, Thomas Hogg. Although imprisoned for two or three months – longer than anyone else in the colony's history – Hogg refused to confess. The magistrates clearly believed he was guilty. They even brought him to the sow, made him fondle her, and noted that "immedyatly there appeared a working of lust in the sow" but not in another one that they also made him "scratch," and then asked him "what he thought of it, he said he saw a hand of God in it." Hogg wore a steel truss for his hernia, and because it kept cutting open his britches, his private parts had become rather too public. Apparently the deformed eyes of one piglet reminded observers of the hang of his scrotum, which far too many people had seen. But he never confessed, and without a second witness, the court did not hang him. It whipped him instead for general lewdness, which included at least one incident of masturbation.²⁴

In 1647 a Connecticut jury found John Nubery, the seventeen-year-old son of a respectable settler, guilty of bestiality. Out “of horror of Conscience &c: to gloryfie God,” he went before a magistrate and voluntarily confessed to several such attempts, “once to penetration but not to effution of seed.” Connecticut hanged him, but as the elder Winthrop noted, “his Repentance & godly ende” were “very observable.” This case, more clearly than any other, displays the Puritan hope that God would pardon an offence that humans could not forgive.²⁵

By 1647 Massachusetts, Plymouth, New Haven, and Connecticut had each convicted and hanged one young man for bestiality. But then the pace fell off. New Haven hanged two more men. Walter Robinson, a fifteen-year-old boy who was seen by a sailor bugging a bitch in Milford, ran away when the sailor called to him that “he would be hanged,” and finally admitted slight penetration of the animal, which was enough for the court to hang him in 1655.²⁶ Far more spectacular was the case of William Potter, one of the original founders of New Haven Colony, a member of John Davenport’s church (it had the strictest admission procedures in all of New England), and a family man. A “weake infirme man,” he was about sixty years old and had recently been exempted from the military watch because of his poor health. But his ailments did not impede his unusual sex life. In 1662, his teen-aged son saw him bugging one of their sows and went to get his mother, who confirmed what father was doing. In what was clearly a lethal decision that they both understood, mother and son informed a magistrate. Confronted with two witnesses, Potter confessed. He admitted to a lifelong fondness for this activity beginning in England at about age ten. His wife had caught him some years earlier copulating with his bitch. He had persuaded her not to tell the authorities and had even hanged the dog, apparently in a fit of remorse. This time he was, of course, condemned to die. In what remains the most awkward moment in any early American court record that I have read, Potter led his wife through his flocks, pointing out to her every animal that had been a sexual partner. On the day of his execution, a cow, two heifers, three sheep, and two sows all died with him. The case was so scandalous that Cotton Mather was still casting anathemas upon it thirty-seven years later.²⁷

New Haven even detected an abomination when animals of different species grew amorous with one another. In 1655 Nicholas Bayley’s dog tried to copulate with a sow. When a neighbor admonished Bayley to execute the dog, Bayley’s wife retorted, “what would you have the poore creature doe, if he had not a bitch, he must have some thing.” The court found this remark so shocking that it banished the depraved couple. It

may be no coincidence that the Bayleys had also fallen under suspicion of witchcraft.²⁸

Bestiality seemed so loathsome that even jokes about it were punishable. Young Jeremiah Johnson, the only person whose sense of humor emerges from the voluminous court records of New Haven colony and town, once overheard Edmund Dorman praying loudly in a swamp for a wife: "Lord thou knowest my necessity & canst supply it, Lord bend & bow her will & make her sensible of my condition." When someone later asked him for whom Dorman was praying, Johnson replied, "it may be his mare that God would make her seruisseable." Dorman, who married Hannah Hull three months later, sued Johnson for slander in September 1662. After several witnesses recounted other irreverent remarks that Johnson had made, the court warned him "that it was a fearefull thing to come to that height of sinning as to sit in y^e seat of y^e scorner," put off its decision for several months, and then imposed a good-behavior bond of £10 on him, the only one I can recall seeing that had no time limit.²⁹

Puritan missionaries even tried to impose their standards on the Indians. In January 1647 the first group of "praying Indians" agreed to abide by a set of laws that punished both adultery and bestiality with death. New England's priorities emerged quite clearly here. The code said nothing about sodomy, an offense that did occur among Indians, but instead prohibited bestiality among a people who had no large domesticated animals before the Europeans arrived and who had never shared the Christian prohibition of premarital sexual relations between men and women. The offense may have been unknown among the Indians.³⁰

They did not remain ignorant for long. In 1656 two Indians informed Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island and at that time the president of the colony's Court of Trials, that they had seen Richard Chasmore of Pawtuxet, known locally as "Long Dick," bugging a heifer. One had seen him in the winter, the other in the spring. Williams tried to arrest Chasmore, but some men of Pawtuxet were able to protect him until he could flee to New Netherland. Pawtuxet was then on territory disputed between Rhode Island and Massachusetts. One measure of Williams's outrage at this abomination is that he wrote to Governor Bellingham of Massachusetts and urged him to arrest Chasmore when he returned to Pawtuxet and bring him to trial in Boston. Chasmore's friends seemed willing to subject him to trial in Rhode Island. "I guesse y^e bottome of y^e Councell js," Williams explained, that the Chasmore faction expected "an easier doome with us where Indian Testimonie will not easily passe," although Williams had also heard that some men of Pawtuxet were beginning to believe the allegations against Chasmore "from his owne expressions."

Massachusetts did arrest Chasmore. But while the party was passing through Providence on its way to Boston, a group of local men, supported by an emergency Providence town meeting, liberated Chasmore who, however, agreed to stand trial in Newport in March 1657. Williams not only stepped down from the bench to prosecute Chasmore, but he also accused Chasmore's liberators and even threatened to send them to England for punishment by Oliver Cromwell's government. When no one was willing to testify for the prosecution in any of these cases, everyone went free. The Puritan horror of bestiality had finally encountered a stronger force in New England, the determination not to let the testimony of Indians condemn a white man to death. Williams understood those odds, which is no doubt why he tried Chasmore "upon a Comon fame of Buggarie" and not for the act itself, but the jury acquitted him anyway. No Indians testified in the case, but for the first time in New England records there is more than a hint that in at least one town, bestiality did not destroy a man's standing in his community.³¹

In the same year, 1657, the Massachusetts Court of Assistants not only dismissed the charge of bestiality that Ruben Cuppie made against Richard Pitfold but also whipped Cuppie for an irresponsible allegation that could have threatened the life of another. But in 1674 Massachusetts hanged Benjamin Goad of Roxbury, the seventeen-year-old son of godly parents, who was caught bugging a mare in an open field in the early afternoon of a sunny day. Goad did not fit the profile of an irresponsible and unattached servant, and the jury hesitated before convicting him, asking the bench to decide whether an initial admission and only one witness provided sufficient evidence to hang him. Others must also have thought that the penalty was too severe. "You pity his Youth and tender years," replied Samuel Danforth in the only published New England sermon that focused specifically on bestiality, "but I pray pity the holy Law of God, which is shamefully violated; pity the glorious name of God, which is horribly profaned; pity the Land, which is fearfully polluted and defiled." Goad, he added, "was extremely addicted to Sloth and Idleness" and "lived in Disobedience to his Parents; in Lying, Stealing, Sabbath breaking, and was wont to flee away from Catechism." Yet the critics made their point in a quieter way. Goad became the last New England colonist to hang for bestiality.³²

Between 1642 and 1662 New England executed six men for bestiality. During nearly the same years, these colonies hanged thirteen women and two men for witchcraft. The bestiality trials began when the population of single servants was at its peak, but the witchcraft trials started a few years later, only when the region finally had enough

post-menopausal women, who were always the prime suspects in New England, to attract a significant number of accusations. Nine of the executions (seven women and two of their husbands) were in Connecticut, four in Massachusetts, and two in New Haven. Hartford had a severe witch panic in 1662–63 when eleven people were tried, of whom four were executed and two escaped. The willingness of the courts to execute witches faltered when some people were convicted who simply did not match the stereotype of what a witch should be. In Massachusetts the deputies outvoted the magistrates to insist on the execution of Ann Hibben, a magistrate's widow, in 1656. The Hartford trials placed Judith Varlet, the niece of Peter Stuyvesant, in peril of her life, although she did survive. Between 1663 and the Salem outbreak in 1692, only one person was executed for witchcraft in New England – Goody Glover in Boston in 1688. During the same three decades, Benjamin Goad was the only man executed for bestiality.

On the eve of the Salem trials, the totals stood at about two to one: sixteen executions for witchcraft (fourteen women and two men), and seven men for bestiality. The Salem outbreak was truly bizarre. There the testimony of lowly orphan girls acquired more credibility than that of respected churchmembers, such as Rebecca Nurse and Mary Easty. No one who confessed was ever hanged, but all of those who were hanged insisted they were innocent. Had the Salem frenzy not occurred, the parallels between the earlier witch and bestiality prosecutions probably would have emerged long ago. Salem has diminished the significance of all of the early witch trials. But after Salem, no one else was executed for witchcraft in New England.

After Benjamin Goad, no one else was executed for bestiality in colonial New England. Plymouth convicted Thomas Saddeler in 1681 but only had him whipped. In Maine, Benjamin Preble “utterly disownes” what the court called “a scandalous report arising from some publique fame of Buggery.” But “severall evidences have been taken, although the treuth lyes darke & undiscovered, relating either to the Accusers or accused.” The court let the matter drop. In Massachusetts, when John Barrett of Chelmsford was accused in 1674, the Middlesex County Court merely admonished him and never sent him to Boston for trial. Petty juries refused to convict Jack, a black “servant” in 1676, or John Lawrence of Sudbury a year later. Grand juries refused to indict Samuel Bayley of Weymouth in 1683 and Jonathan Gardiner of Roxbury in 1685. As Judge Samuel Sewall noted, there was only one witness against Gardiner. Thirty years later when a cow “brought forth a calf, which had so much of a human visage as to make the attentive spectators apprehensive that the poor animal had been impregnated by a beastly Negro,” Cotton Mather did not launch a grim hunt for the human

perpetrator. Instead he wrote up a description of the “monster” for the enlightenment of the Royal Society in London.³³

In Connecticut a petty jury tried Simon Drake for sodomizing a cow in 1674 but found the accusation not “legally proved” although there was “great Ground of Suspition.” The court released him. A year later a grand jury refused to indict John Sherwood of “some sodimetical practices.” Three later cases show that things had changed decisively. In 1697 John Arnoll (or Arnold) of Fairfield was caught in the act of bugging a mare by Phillip Lewis. Lewis reprimanded him and then returned with a friend, to whom Arnoll confessed that he was “very sorrowfull” for what he had done. Thirty years earlier this testimony would have satisfied the two-witness rule, and Arnoll would have hanged. But he was not even brought to trial.³⁴

In 1713 two interlocking Connecticut trials showed some of the ways that settlers linked bestiality and witchcraft in their own minds. While walking into the woods in Colchester, Connecticut one July day, Bethiah Taylor came upon Joseph Chapman copulating with a cow, “but she being afraid for her own Life dare not call to him but went immediatly . . . to Deacon Samuel Loomis” and asked his advice. He had little to offer, and when Chapman also showed up, she went home. Two or three weeks later Chapman came to her house, told her that he had been expecting a court summons upon her complaint, and threatened to sue her to protect his name if he was not brought to trial. One suspects that Taylor, having got nowhere talking with the deacon, had consulted her own friends. The story was spreading, probably among local women, and Chapman hoped he could intimidate her into silence. But instead the authorities came to arrest him, and he fled and had to be pursued and captured.

Then, in a pretrial deposition, eighteen-year-old John Brown testified that two years earlier he had heard Goodwife Taylor call the wife of Thomas Brown (probably a relative of John) a witch who had turned herself into a cat to torment the Taylor children. Brown, no doubt, hoped to discredit Taylor’s testimony. Someone who cried “Witch” might also accuse a man of buggery. But Jonathan Lisburn, a fifty-year-old man, testified that three years earlier, in 1710, he had come upon Brown, then fifteen years old, bugging a mare. The “Sight being So amazing i did not Know what do doe wharfore i whent unto naibor pumry for advise,” he reported. Pomeroy hesitated and then advised him to consult with a clergyman and “to discors with John to See if he colde no waiy Be made Senciabile of his Sin.” Bestiality was becoming forgivable. Lisburn took this advice and talked with the local minister and with Brown. When he asked Brown why he did such a thing, Brown replied “that he did not Know what was the mater he thought that he

was Beweched. . . .” In other words Chapman’s defender was himself a buggerer willing to accuse others of witchcraft. Brown also escaped for a time, but the court clamped both men in irons, convicted them, and had them shamed on the gallows and whipped, but not hanged. Goody Taylor’s testimony held up. In a Puritan society that offered no legal protection for personal confessions to a clergymen, even the minister was forced to testify in court about what Lisburn and Brown had told him.

In 1710 Brown had been detected in the act by a man, who kept the matter private among the two of them, a trusted neighbor, and a minister. Nobody alerted the legal authorities. In 1713 Chapman was interrupted by a woman, who also went first to a prominent member of the local church, but then the news got out, probably through the female gossip network, as in Virginia a year earlier. At a distance of nearly three centuries, we have to wonder how much Chapman and Brown knew about each other’s buggery. Had it become, as in parts of England a century before, something that older boys showed to younger ones?

By 1713 the double standard of sexual behavior had reasserted itself throughout the region. It had been in some jeopardy in the Puritan era, when courts had sometimes punished men more severely than women for the same act of fornication, and when quite a few men had pleaded guilty to sexual offenses and accepted their punishment. After 1700, almost without exception, men would not plead guilty to any sexual offense except making love to their own wives before their wedding day. Some husbands, just to avoid a small fine, pleaded not guilty to that charge as well, even though that plea left their pregnant wives open to acute embarrassment. Juries nearly always sided with the men, not the women. As the 1713 bestiality convictions indicate, the double standard now extended to that crime as well. Brown and Chapman tried to protect each other.

Benjamin Goad was hanged in 1674. Metacom’s (King Philip’s) War broke out in 1675, and New England spent most of the next four decades at war with neighboring Indians and New France. The massive mobilization of men for these wars created an ethic of male bonding powerful enough to overcome the disgust and loathing that the previous generation had felt for bestiality. When men live together for a long time without women, some of them will turn to one another for sexual gratification.

No doubt some will also turn to the animal population. After 1713 occasional accusations of bestiality turn up in the court records of the New England colonies, but they simply reinforce the pattern already in place by 1713. When James Warren saw Gershom Thomas having sex with a heifer on a Sunday morning in 1746, Thomas’s friends urged Warren to keep the matter private and even offered to pay him. When Mary Corey awoke one morning in 1743 and heard her husband Seth

copulating with his bitch, she fled to a neighbor's house, while Seth sought out his brother as a mediator and, perhaps in contrition, executed the dog. Confronted by Joseph Hebard, who was probably Mary's father, Seth confessed that "I am a Deavl." Hebard "advised him to go Into some hole or Corner and Cast himself on y^c Earth Before God and Beg of God that he would Brake his hart and humble him." The case went before a magistrate but never came to trial. Between 1713 and the Revolution, only one case that I know of was actually tried. It ended in acquittal when three jurors outlasted the nine who favored conviction. In this area, as in so many others, New England looked a lot more like old England in the eighteenth century than it still resembled the city upon a hill once envisioned by John Winthrop.

Bestiality discredited men in the way that witchcraft discredited women. At least in New England, both began as unforgivable crimes that were becoming forgivable by the end of the seventeenth century. No one was executed for bestiality after Benjamin Goad in 1674. During the Salem witch trials, no one who confessed was executed. All nineteen of those hanged insisted they were innocent. In the eyes of the court, they remained unrepentant. But when Mary Lacey, Jr., confessed in court in July 1692 that she had actually worshipped Satan, a magistrate reassured her that "you may yet be delivered if god give you repentance." "I hope he will," she replied. She survived.³⁵ In all likelihood, acts of sodomy and bestiality were much rarer in New England than in other mainland colonies. Yet New England prosecuted both offenses, and witchcraft, far more vigorously than the other colonies except New Netherland with its singular horror for male sodomy.

Within New England, bestiality stigmatized young men, mostly teenagers, with the spectacular exception of sixty-year-old William Potter in New Haven. The panic of the early 1640s involved mostly male servants who had no relatives in New England. (The exception was Thomas Granger in Plymouth Colony, and even he was living in someone else's household.) After the mid-1640s, the accused were much more likely to come from respectable households, and the passion for executing them began to diminish. The offense usually involved an actual transgression against a real animal, except in the New Haven pig cases when deformed piglets provided the only tangible evidence.

Witchcraft, by contrast, stigmatized mostly older women, often grandmothers. When men were the accusers, the typical offender was a woman past menopause who had acquired title to property and had no male heirs. When women were the primary accusers, as at Hartford in 1662-63 and Salem in 1692, elderly women remained the primary suspects, but more of them were churchmembers with no lack of male

heirs. And more men were accused, some of whom, such as Rev. George Burroughs, had acquired a reputation for abusing their wives and children. An accusation of witchcraft, unlike one for bestiality, usually did not involve a specific act. The crime was more in the imagination of the victim than in the deeds of the accused. Once spectral evidence became sufficient for conviction, the accused were left with no effective defense. Nobody could prove that her spectre had *not* tormented somebody.

In the early American bestiality cases, women – who seldom spent time in the fields or forests – appear quite disproportionately as accusers. This pattern suggests that the double standard of sexual propriety probably protected most men from accusations by other men most of the time. Men must have witnessed this offense far more often than women, but they hardly ever pursued the matter into a court of law. Harrie Negro's accusers in West Jersey were all women. At least one woman was involved in the Virginia cases of 1644 and 1712. A South Carolina woman testified against John Dixon. Even though Francis Oldfield finally brought Dixon before a magistrate, he agonized for months before taking that step. In New England the record does not indicate who denounced Thomas Granger in Plymouth, Benjamin Goad in Massachusetts, or Aaron Starke in Connecticut. God, or the piglets, denounced George Spencer and put Thomas Hogg's life in peril, while John Nubery denounced himself. But in the cases that have left adequate information about the accusers, women played an outsized role in New England as well. Only Walter Robinson of New Haven, denounced by a sailor, and John Arnoll of Connecticut were prosecuted by men. William Hatchet of Massachusetts, William Potter of New Haven, and Joseph Chapman of Connecticut were all turned in by women. The Chapman case, by exposing John Brown's earlier act of buggery, gives us a clear glimpse of men shielding other men from the law while also trying to reform the malefactor. Quite possibly, even in New England, the double standard operated effectively most of the time for most men when the offense involved sodomy or bestiality. Rather more slowly, men began to apply it once again to fornication as well.

The legal system offers indirect evidence for this hypothesis. Magistrates belonged to the social and cultural elite. Jurors were often ordinary farmers. All six men sentenced to death for sodomy in the seventeenth century – one in Virginia in 1624, three in New Netherland, and two in New Haven – were condemned without a jury trial. The only colonial jury known to have condemned anyone to die for this offense gave its verdicts in Pennsylvania in 1748. By contrast, New England juries were willing to convict young men of bestiality at least until 1674. After 1674 no one was executed for bestiality in New England before the Revolution and only two men in New Jersey. If male sodomy was indeed more

common than bestiality, this pattern suggests that ordinary men in New England found buggery a much more loathsome offense – until the accused turned out to be the son of a friend or acquaintance.

Another striking pattern was the inability of contemporaries to see animals as victims in bestiality cases. In insisting on penetration as a defining element of the crime, the courts allowed legal custom to override Scripture. But in destroying the animals involved in this offense, they allowed Scripture to override their own better sensibilities. In 1641 the Massachusetts Body of Liberties explicitly prohibited “any Tirranny or Crueltie towards any brute Creature which are usuallie kept for mans use,” and Quaker West New Jersey exempted animals from judicial forfeiture after a crime unless they were inherently dangerous. Yet courts in both colonies condemned animals to death after someone had buggered them. No one in the colonies took the initiative to intercede on behalf of such a victim the way a French convent and parish priest did in 1750 to prevent a court at Vanvres from condemning a she-ass to death. They bore “witness that she is in word and deed and in all her habits of life a most honest creature” who must have been an unwilling participant in the crime. The court agreed and set the animal free.³⁶

In August 1799, a century and a quarter after the execution of Benjamin Goad, the Connecticut Superior Court condemned Gideon Washburn of Litchfield to hang for acts of bestiality committed over a five-year period with two cows, two mares, and a heifer. In October Washburn petitioned the legislature for a pardon or a postponement of the execution, which was scheduled to take place on his eighty-third birthday. He protested his innocence but also complained that the jury had violated the Puritan two-witness rule. Of the four witnesses against him, “*three* of them [had testified] each to *one* fact, and the other to *three* several facts, that no *two* witnesses testified of any *one* fact.” Washburn’s memory, but not his morals, harkened back to the Puritan era when the biblical two-witness rule had been enforced. But under English common law, which was already beginning to prevail at the time of his birth, one witness became sufficient to convict even a capital offender if the jury found the testimony credible. Washburn’s petition provoked what must have been a furious debate. The original manuscript has orders and counter-orders written all over the reverse side. The lower house voted to comply with his request for a pardon, but the upper house would agree to no more than a postponement. The legislature finally ordered him hanged on the third Friday in January 1800.³⁷ [In all likelihood, he was the last person formally executed for this offense in what is now the United States.] . . .

Occasional bestiality trials have occurred in the United States since then. In Reconstruction Virginia a black teenager, Austin Robertson, was

sentenced to a year in the penitentiary for bugging a heifer, but that conviction was overturned on the grounds that penetration had not been proved and was probably impossible because Robertson was too short. As late as the 1950s, an Indiana man was convicted of bestiality with a chicken. He appealed on the grounds that a chicken was not a beast under Indiana law. The court agreed with him but upheld his conviction for sodomy. Bestiality has never again become the abomination and obsession that it was, briefly, for seventeenth-century New Englanders.³⁸

Notes

- 1 This paper was prepared for a joint meeting of the Shelby Cullom Davis Center and the Philadelphia (now McNeil) Center for Early American Studies, held at Princeton University, January 16, 1998. The author wishes to thank William Chester Jordan for his persistent encouragement of the project, Mary Fissell for her thoughtful formal commentary, and the numerous participants for their many helpful suggestions.
- 2 All biblical citations are to the “Authorized” or King James version. In this paper I use sodomy to indicate sexual relations between men, and buggery to mean relations between men and animals, even though actual usage, then and now, was and is much looser.
- 3 Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World. Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983).
- 4 See, for example, the opinion of Rev. Charles Chauncy, 1642, in William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 410.
- 5 George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County* [Massachusetts], vol. 1: 1636–1656 (Salem, Mass.: The Essex Institute, 1911), 44 (the quotation is from Dow’s summary of the case); Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, 12 vols. (Boston: William White, 1855–61), II, 137 (hereafter, *Plym. Recs.*).
- 6 Henry Clay Reed, “Chapters in a History of Crime and Punishment in New Jersey” (PhD dissertation: Princeton University, 1939), 462.
- 7 Jonas Liliequist, “Peasants against Nature: Crossing the Boundaries between Man and Animal in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sweden,” *Focaal*, No. 13 (1990), esp. pp. 33–39; Trial of John Ferris, June 30, 1657, Records of New Haven Colony: General Court, May 1653 to Dec. 1664, pp. 145–46 (Connecticut State Library, Hartford).
- 8 See Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 28–32.
- 9 J. H. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 59–60.
- 10 Liliequist, “Peasants against Nature,” esp. pp. 39–40, 45–46.

- 11 Robert F. Oaks, "‘Things Fearful to Name’: Sodomy and Buggery in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Journal of Social History*, 12 (1978–79), 268–81; Roger Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex: Popular Mores in a Massachusetts County, 1649–1699* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), esp. 71–82; Thompson, "Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in the Seventeenth-Century New England Colonies," *Journal of American Studies*, 23 (1989), 27–40; John Canup, "‘The Cry of Sodom Enquired Into’: Bestiality and the Wilderness of Human Nature in Seventeenth-Century New England," *American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings*, 98 (1988), 113–34.
- 12 Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle, eds., *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 629; J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The True-Blue Laws of Connecticut and New-Haven* (Hartford: American Publishing Co., 1879), 201.
- 13 Records of New Haven Colony: General Court, May 1653 to Dec. 1664, pp. 89–91; M. Halsey Thomas, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), II, 677, 678; Louis Effingham de Forest, ed., *The Journals and Papers of Seth Pomeroy, Sometime General in the Colonial Service* (New York: Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New York, 1926), 106.
- 14 "Francis Higgeson's Journal," in Stewart Mitchell, ed., *The Founding of Massachusetts* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1930), 71.
- 15 Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *New Haven Town Records, 1649–1662* (New Haven: New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1917), 178–79.
- 16 Richard Godbeer, "‘The Cry of Sodom’: Discourse, Intercourse, and Desire in Colonial New England," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 52 (1995), 259–86, esp. p. 283 (quotation).
- 17 Godbeer, "‘The Cry of Sodom,’” 277–79.
- 18 Samuel Danforth, *The Cry of Sodom Enquired into; Upon Occasion of the Arraignment and Condemnation of Benjamin Goad, for his Prodigious Villany. Together with a Solemn Exhortation to Tremble at Gods Judgements, and to Abandon Youthful Lusts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Marmaduke Johnson, 1674), 8.
- 19 Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *New England's Generation: The Great Migration and the Formation of Society and Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 223.
- 20 *Records of the Particular Court of Connecticut, 1639–1663* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1928), 3, 4, 13, 20; J. Hammond Trumbull, *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15 vols. (Hartford: Brown & Parsons, 1850–90), I, 77.
- 21 Winthrop, *Journal*, ed. Dunn, 342–43, 374–76; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1628–1686* 5 vols. in 6 (Boston: William White, 1853–54), I, 344 (hereafter cited as *Recs. Mass. Bay Co.*); John Noble and John F. Cronin, eds., *Records of the Court of Assistants of the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay, 1630–1692* (Boston: Suffolk County, 1901–28), II, 121 (hereafter cited as *Recs. Mass. Ct. Assts.*).

- 22 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, ed. Morison, 320–22, 316–17.
- 23 Charles J. Hoadly, ed., *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven, from 1638 to 1649* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany, and Company, 1857), 62–73.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 295–96. Hogg was successfully reabsorbed into the community. He was standing watch for the colony by 1648, took the standard oath of submission to the colony in 1654, and died insolvent, a ward of the town, sometime before the March 12, 1686 session of the New Haven County Court. *Ibid.*, 378, 140; New Haven County Court Records, 1666–1698, p. 159 (Connecticut State Library, Hartford). In 1655 when a third monster piglet was born, the whole town of New Haven filed past to see if it resembled anyone in particular. It did not, and no one was accused. Dexter, ed., *New Haven Town Records, 1649–1662*, 245–46.
- 25 *Recs. Partic. Ct.*, 48, 49; Winthrop, *Journal*, ed. Dunn, 771.
- 26 Records of New Haven Colony: General Court, May 1653 to Dec. 1654, pp. 85–87 (Connecticut State Library, Hartford).
- 27 Charles J. Hoadly, ed., *Records of the Colony or Jurisdiction of New Haven, from May 1653 to the Union. Together with the New Haven Code of 1656* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany, and Company, 1858), 180, 440–43; Cotton Mather, *Pillars of Salt. An History of Some Criminals Executed in this Land; for Capital Crimes. With some of their Dying Speeches; Collected and Published, For the Warning of such as Live in Destructive Courses of Ungodliness. . .* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1699), reprinted in Daniel E. Williams, ed., *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives* (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1993), 65–93, at pp. 67–69.
- 28 Dexter, ed. *New Haven Town Recs., 1649–1662*, 245–46; John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 403.
- 29 Franklin B. Dexter, ed., *New Haven Town Records, 1662–1684* (New Haven: New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1919), 7–8, 22–23.
- 30 Thomas Shepard, *The Clear Sun-shine of the Gospel Breaking Forth upon the Indians in New England. . .* (London: R. Cotes for John Bellamy, 1648), in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d ser., 4 (1834), 40. See Virginia DeJohn Anderson, “King Philip’s Herds: Indians, Colonists, and the Problem of Livestock in Early New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 51 (1994), 601–24.
- 31 All of the documents in this case are assembled in Bradford Fuller Swan, *The Case of Richard Chasmore alias Long Dick* (Providence: Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 1944).
- 32 Noble, ed., *Recs. Mass. Ct. Assts.*, III, 66–67; I, 10, 14; Thomas, ed., *Diary of Samuel Sewall*, I, 4; Danforth, *Cry of Sodom*, esp. p. 8.
- 33 Pulsifer, ed., *Phym. Recs.*, VI, 74; Robert E. Moody, ed., *Province and Court Records of Maine, Vol. III: Province of Maine Records, 1680–1692* (Portland: Maine Historical Society, 1947), 199; Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex*, 73; Noble, ed., *Recs. Mass. Ct. Assts.*, I, 74, 87–88, 251, 273, 281; Thomas, ed. *Diary of Samuel Sewall*, I, 64; Cotton Mather to the Royal Society, July

- 3, 1716, in Kenneth Silverman, ed., *Selected Letters of Cotton Mather* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 209–10.
- 34 Lacy, ed., *Recs. Conn. Ct. Assts.*, I, 52–53, 60; Connecticut State Archives, *Crimes and Misdemeanors, 1662–1789*, 1st ser., I, 216 (Connecticut State Library, Hartford).
- 35 Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1977), II, 520.
- 36 Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558–1794* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), 197; Aaron Leaming and Jacob Spicer, eds, *The Grants, Concessions, and Original Constitutions of New Jersey (1752)*, 2nd edn (Somerville, NJ: Honeyman & Co., 1881), 404; E. P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1906), 150–51.
- 37 Connecticut State Archives, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, 2nd ser., II, 87a, 87b, 87c, 88a (Connecticut State Library, Hartford – emphasis in original); Albert E. Van Dusen, ed., *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, IX (Hartford: Connecticut State Library, 1953), 437–38.
- 38 Secretary of the Commonwealth, Executive Papers, Box 16, Dec. 16–31, 1870, Dec. 29 packet (Library of Virginia, Richmond).

Documents

In the first document William Bradford describes the early years of Plymouth colony. The excerpt includes an account of Thomas Granger’s alleged crime of buggery committed in 1642 with several farm animals, including a turkey. Surprisingly, as John Murrin explains, the animal “victims” as well as the defendants required punishment in the eyes of authorities. Why?

Of Plymouth Plantation: the Pilgrims in America

William Bradford

Besides the occasion before mentioned in these writings concerning the abuse of those 2. children, they had about the same time a case of

Excerpted from William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation: the Pilgrims in America*, ed. Harvey Wish (New York: Capricorn Books, 1952), pp. 202–4.

buggerie fell out amongst them, which occasioned these questions, to which these answers have been made.

And after the time of the writing of these things befell a very sadd accidente of the like foule nature in this govermente, this very year, which I shall now relate. Ther was a youth whose name was Thomas Granger; he was servant to an honest man of Duxbery, being aboute 16. or 17. years of age. (His father & mother lived at the same time at Sityate.) He was this year detected of buggery (and indicted for the same) with a mare, a cowe, tow goats, five sheep, 2. calves, and a turkey. Horrible it is to mention, but the truth of the historie requires it. He was first discovered by one that accidentally saw his lewd practise towards the mare. (I forbear perticulers.) Being upon it examined and committed, in the end he not only confest the fact with that beast at that time, but sundrie times before, and at severall times with all the rest of the forenamed in his indictmente; and this his free-confession was not only in private to the magistrats, (though at first he strived to deny it,) but to sundrie, both ministers & others, and afterwards, upon his indictmente, to the whole court & jury; and confirmed it at his execution. And wheras some of the sheep could not so well be knowne by his description of them, others with them were brought before him, and he declared which were they, and which were not. And accordingly he was cast by the jury, and condemned, and after executed about the 8. of September, 1642. A very sade spectacle it was; for first the mare, and then the cowe, and the rest of the lesser catle, were kild before his face, according to the law, Levit: 20. 15. and then he him selfe was executed. The catle were all cast into a great & large pitte that was digged of purposse for them, and no use made of any part of them.

Upon the examenation of this person, and also of a former that had made some sodomiticall attempts upon another, it being demanded of them how they came first to the knowledge and practice of such wickednes, the one confessed he had long used it in old England; and this youth last spoaken of said he was taught it by an other that had heard of such things from some in England when he was ther, and they kept catle together. By which it appears how one wicked person may infecte many; and what care all ought to have what servants they bring into their families.

But it may be demanded how came it to pass that so many wicked persons and profane people should so quickly come over into this land, & mixe them selves amongst them? seeing it was religious men that begane the work, and they came for religions sake. I confess this may be marvelled at, at least in time to come, when the reasons therof should not be knowne; and the more because here was so many hardships and wants mett withall. I shall therefore indeavor to give some answer hereunto. And first, according to that in the gospell, it is ever to be remembred that where the Lord begins to sow good seed, ther the

envious man will endeavore to sow tares. 2. Men being to come over into a wildernes, in which much labour & servise was to be done aboute building & planting, &c., such as wanted help in that respecte, when they could not have such as they would, were glad to take such as they could; and so, many untoward servants, sundry of them proved, that were thus brought over, both men & women kind; who, when their times were expired, became families of them selves, which gave increase hereunto. 3. An other and a maine reason hearof was, that men, finding so many godly disposed persons willing to come into these parts, some begane to make a trade of it, to transeport passengers & their goods, and hired ships for that end; and then, to make up their freight and advance their profite, cared not who the persons were, so they had money to pay them. And by this means the cuntrie became pestered with many unworthy persons, who, being come over, crept into one place or other. 4. Again, the Lords blesing usually following his people, as well in outward as spirituall things, (though afflictions be mixed withall,) doe make many to adhear to the people of God, as many followed Christ, for the loaves sake, Iohn 6. 26. and a mixed multitud came into the willdernes with the people of God out of Eagipte of old, Exod. 12. 38; so also ther were sente by their freinds some under hope that they would be made better; others that they might be eased of such burthens, and they kept from shame at home that would necessarily follow their dissolute courses. And thus, by one means or other, in 20. years time, it is a question whether the greater part be not growne the worsen. . . .

Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven, from 1638 to 1649

Charles J. Hoadly

The next set of documents concerns two cases of bestiality in New Haven. The first involved George Spencer, a one-eyed man, who in 1641 first denied then later admitted the crime, before he ultimately recanted his confession. Authorities scoffed at his retraction, assuming he “acted by a lying speritt in his denyalls” because other compelling evidence indicted him: a sow, presumably

Excerpted from Charles J. Hoadly (ed.), *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven, from 1638 to 1649* (Hartford, CT: Case, Tiffany, and Company, 1857), pp. 62–73, 295–6.

one of his prey, gave birth to a deformed piglet that looked just like Spencer. The “monster” also had “butt one eye in the midle of the face.” Read carefully for the way in which the sin of bestiality was linked to other sins of which Spencer was also found guilty: lying, stubbornness, and ridiculing the Lord’s Day. Why do you think Spencer’s confession was so important to obtain?

This section’s final document from 1646 focuses on another New Haven man, Thomas Hogg, who would not confess to bestiality, though the court punished him for other sins, including public masturbation, lying, and stealing. What evidence did the court attempt to procure in this case?

A Gen^{rl} Court Held at Newhaven the 2^d of the 1^t Moneth, 1641, about Geor: Spencer

Francis Browne admitted member of the Court and received the charge.

The 14th of February, 1641, John Wakeman a planter and member of this church acquainted the magistrates that a sow of his w^{ch} he had lately bought of Hen: Browning, then w^h pigge, had now brought among divers liveing and rightly shaped pigs, one pdigious monster, w^{ch} he then brought w^h him to be veiwed and considered. The monster was come to the full growth as the other piggs for ought could be discerned, butt brought forth dead. Itt had no haire on the whole body, the skin was very tender, and of a reddish white collour like a childs; the head most straining, itt had butt one eye in the midle of the face, and thatt large and open, like some blemished eye of a man; over the eye, in the bottome of the foreheade w^{ch} was like a childes, a thing of flesh grew forth and hung downe, itt was hollow, and like a mans instrum^t of gen^ration. A nose, mouth and chinne deformed, butt nott much vnlike a childs, the neck and eares had allso such resemblance. This monster being after opened and compared w^h a pig of the same farrow, there was an aparant difference in all the inwards. Some hand of God appeared in an imp^fssion upon Goodwife Wakemans speritt, sadly expecting, though she knew nott why, some strange accedent in thatt sows pigging, and a strange imp^fssion was allso upon many thatt saw the monster, (therein guided by the neare resemblance of the eye,) that one George Spencer, late servant to the said Henry Browning, had beene actor in unnatureall and abominable filthynes w^h the sow, thus divers upon the first sight, expressed their apprehensions w^hout any knowledge whatt conjecture others had made. The foremenconed George Spencer so suspected hath butt one eye for vse, the other hath (as itt is called) a pearle in itt, is whitish & deformed, and his deformed eye being beheld and compard together w^h the eye of the monster, seamed to be as like as the eye in the glass to the eye in the face; the man had beene form^rly notorious in the plantatiō for a prophane, lying, scoffing and

lewd speritt, as was testfyed to his face, butt being examined concerning this abominatiō, att first he said he had nott done itt thatt he knew off, then denyed itt, butt being comitted to prison, partly on strong probabilities of this fact, and ptly for other miscarriages, the same evening, being the 24th of February as above, Mr. Goodyeare, one of the magistrates, went to the prison, found Sam: Martin and another yong man talking w^h the said Georg Spencer, he asked him if he had nott comitted thatt abominable filthynes w^h the sow, the prison^r att first denyed itt. Mr. Goodyeare asked him whatt he thought of the monster w^{ch} had beene shewed him, whether he did not take notice of something in itt like him, the prison^r after a little pause asked the magistrate whose sow itt was, who replyed, he knew best himselfe, att w^{ch} the prison^r was againe silent, the magistrate apprehending in the prisoner some relenting, as a preparatiō to confession, remembred him of thatt place of scripture, he thatt hideth his sin shall not prosper, butt he y^t confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall finde mercie, and asked him if he were nott sory he had denyed the fact w^{ch} seemed to be witnessed frō heaven agst him. The p^rson^r answered he was sory and confessed he had done itt, butt as Mr. Goodyeare was going away, the p^rson^r tolde Sam: Martin what he had confessed to Mr. Goodyeare was for fauo^r, thereupon Sam: Martin called Mr. Goodyeare back. Mr. Goodyeare retourning, asked the prison^r if he said soe, who said no, affirīng y^t Sam: Martin mistook him, Mr. Goodyeare demaunded of him whether had comitted the fact yea or no, he answered he had done itt, and so Mr. Goodyeare departed.

The 25th of Febr. 1641, both the magistrates w^h divers others went to the prison to speake w^h the prisoner, wished him to give glory to God, in a free confessiō of his sin, he againe confest the bestiality before meñconed, said he had comitted itt while he was in Mr. Brownings service, and in a hogstie of his; yett Mr. Goodyeare after going to him, he att first denyed the fact, but Rob^t Seely the marshall thereupon minding him of w^t he had confest to him, he againe freely confessed the fact, butt said he had nott done itt in the stye w^{ch} Mr. Goodyeare spake off, butt in a stye w^hin a stable belonging to Mr. Browning. And thatt he, the said Geo: Spencer being there att worke, the sow came into the stable, and then the temptatiō and his corruptiō did worke, and he drove the sow into the stye, and then comitted thatt filthynes.

The 26th of Feb: Mr. Eaton and Mr. Davenport going to speake w^h the prisoner, Mr. Goodyeare came to them and in the presence of Goodman Mansfield, With Newmā, Tho: Yale, Theophilus Higginson, Joh: Brocktt and others, questioned him more perticularly concerīng the bestiality, namely how long the temptatiō had beene upon his speritt before he comitted itt; he answered itt had beene upon his speritt 2 or 3 dayes before; being asked w^t workings he had w^hin him att thatt time, he

said he found some workings against itt, both frō the haynousnes of the sin and the loathsomenes of the creature; being asked whether he did nott in thatt time seeke help frō God against the temptatiō, he said no, if he had he thought God would have helped him; being asked whether he did nott vse to pray to God, he answered he had not since he came to New England w^{ch} was betweene 4 or 5 yeares agoe, in Engl[and] he did vse to pray, butt itt was onely in his bed; being asked in w^t manner, he answered [he] said (Our Father &c); being asked whether he did nott read the scriptures he answe[r]d] his ma^r putt him upon itt else nott, being asked whether he found nott some workinge [*upon him*] in the publique ministry, he answered sometimes he had some workings, butt they did nott abide w^h him, being asked how long he was in the sty^e w^h the sow, he said about 2 howers; being asked about w^t time, he said about 6 a clock in the evening, when the sun was sett, and the day light almost shutt in; being asked w^t itt was in the monster thatt did affect him, he answered the whitnes in the eye; being charged frō the testimony w^{ch} had beene given by sundry person who had conversed w^h him, w^h a prophai^{ne}, atheisticall carryag, in unfaithfullnes and stubbornes to his ma^r, a course of notorious lying, filthnes, scoffing att the ordinances, wayes and people of God, he confest miscarryages to his ma^r, and lying, and thatt he had scoffed att the Lords day, calling itt the Ladyes day, butt denyed other scoffing, wicked and bitter speches witnessed against him, and other form^r acts of filthynes, either with Indians or English, w^{ch} out of his owne mouth were charged upon him. On the Lords day, being the 27th of Feb: he caused a bill to be putt up, intreating the prayers of the church to God on his behalfe, for the pardon of the sinns he had committed, and confessed, professing he was sory he had greived the magistrates in denying itt, acknowledging thatt Satan had hardened his hart both comitt and denye it.

Att a Gen^{rl} Court held att Newhaven the 2^d of March 1641

George Spencer being brought to the Barr and charged as w^h other crimes so w^h the foremenconed beastiality, and the monster shewed, upon w^{ch} God from heaven seamed both to stamp out the sin, and as w^h his finger to single out the actor; being wisht therefore, as he had done before many wittnesses formerly, so againe, by confessiō to give glory to God; butt he impudently and w^h desperate imprecatiō^s against himselfe denied all thatt he had formerly confessed, whereupon the form^r particulars were fully testified in open Court to the prison^{rs} face by the persons before menconed respectively, and other testimonyes was added, namely, Rob^t Seely the Marshall affirmed thatt the prison^r did dictate to him the foremenconed bill by w^{ch} he desired the prayers of the church for the

pardon of thatt beastiality, professing therein thatt Satan had sometimes hardened his hart to deny itt, and y^t on the Lords day att night after he had heard himselfe prayed for in the congregatiō, he againe confessed the fact to him, and seamed to be greived for the sinne, and some teares fell from the prison^{rs} eyes greiving as he said thatt he had denied itt. . . .

The Court, weighing the premises did finde and conclude the prisoner to be guilty of this unnatureall and abominable fact of beastiality, and thatt he was acted by a lying speritt in his denyalls. And according to the fundamentall agreem^t, made and published by full and gen^{rl} consent, when the plantatiō began and government was settled, that the judicial law of God given by Moses and expounded in other parts of scripture, so far as itt is a hedg and a fence to the morrall law, and neither ceremoniall nor tipicall, nor had any referrence to Canaan, hath an everlasting equity in itt, and should be the rule of their proceedings. They judged the crime cappitall, and thatt the prisoner and the sow, according to Levit. 20 and 15, should be put to death, butt the time of executiō, and the kinde of death were respited till the next Gen^{rl} Court. . . .

Being hereupon demaunded in Court whether he would yett give glory to God in a free acknowledgm^t of his sinfull and abominable filthynes in the beastiality before named, he answered he would leave itt to God, adding thatt he had condemned himselfe by his former confessions.

The Court seriously considering the clearnes of the testimonyes together w^h his answers, were abundantly satisfied and confirmed, both concerning his guilt, and their form^t sentence against him, and now proceeded to determine whatt time, and what kinde of death he should dye. Itt was therefore by gen^{rl} consent concluded and adjudged, thatt on the 6th day next, being the 8 of Aprill, he the said Georg Spencer shall be hanged upon a gallows till he be dead, the place to be the farthest part of the feild called the Oyster-shell field, by the sea side, butt thatt first, the foremençoned sow att the said place of executiō shall be slaine in his sight, being run through w^h a sworde.

The 8th of Aprill, 1642

The day of executiō being come, Georg Spencer the prisoner was brought to the place apoynted by the Court for executiō, in a cart; upon sight of the gallowes he seemed to be much amazed and trembled, after some pause he began to speake to the youths about him, exorting them all to take warning by his example how they neglect and dispise the meanes of Grace, and their soules good as he had done, in the educatiō he had from his parents, the govern^t of his religious ma^r, and the publique ministry he had lived vnder, by all w^{ch} he might have gott much spirituall good, butt thatt his hart was hardened. In perticular he directed and pressed his exhort.

upon Anthony Stevens, servant to Mr. Malbon, then present, who being discontented wth his condicō, as the prisoner had heard, purposed to be gone from this place. He tolde him if he went from the ordinances he went from Christ, as he had heard itt delivered in publique, and many other wordes he vsed to the same purpose; w^{ch} being finished, he was advised to improve the small remainder of his time in the acknowledgm^t of his owne form^t sinfull miscarriages, together wth the abominable lewdnes he had committed wth the sow there present, and his desperate obstinacie in such fearefull denyalls after such cleare and full confession as he had oft made before sundry witnesses. Att first wth the acknowledgment of sundry evils, both in his yonger yeares, and in his late service, he joynd a denyall of his fact, butt the halter being fastened to the gallowes, and fitted to his neck, and being tolde it was an ill time now to pvoke God when he was falling into his hands, as a righteous and seveere judge who had vengeanc att hand for all his other sins, so for his impudency and atheisme, he justified the sentence as righteous, and fully confessed the bestiality in all the scircumstances, according to the evidence in Court, and called for one With Harding, a sawyer there present, who coming neare, the prisoner charged upon him the murder of his soule, affirming thatt the said William Harding coming into the prison to him, had given him counsell to deny the fact, and had tolde him thatt the Court could nott proceed against him, butt by his owne confession, w^{ch} pernicious counsell had stopped his eare against all wholsome counsell and advice thatt had, from time to time, beene given him, both by Mr. Davenport and others, for his sperituall good, and had hardened his hart to such a peremtory denyall in Court, though he had so often confessed the fact more privately, and though executiō had beene respited betwixt 5 and 6 weeks after the first sentence, and his life so long spared, yett the counsell of the said Harding had beene a meanes to hinder his repentance, and now he was ready to dye, and knew no other butt he must goe presently to hell.

Thomas Hogg

Thomas Hogg haveing bin imprisoned vpon suspition of bestyality wth a sow of his mistresses, for about 2 or 3 monthes agoe, there was a discovery of that w^{ch} is conceived bestyalitye, a sow of Mrs. Lambertons pigging two monsters, one of them had a faire & white skinne & head, as Thomas Hoggs is. It being considred of, Mr. Pell was sent for, and afterward was fownd another wth a head lik a childs & one eye lik his, the bigger on the right side, as if God would discrib the party, wth the discription of the instrument of bestyalytie. This examinant being sent for & examjned about it, he fetched a deepe sight, fell in his countenance, but denied it; but information was made of sundry loathsome

passadges concerning him, as discovereing his nakednesse in more places then one, seemeing therby to indeauo^r the corrupting others, and being told of it, he said his breeches were rent, when indeed his sperit was rent.

Thomas Hogg said his belly was broake, & his breeches were streight, & he wore a steele trusse, & soe it might happen his members might be seene.

Goodie Camp informed the court, that for all she could say to him, yet he did goe so as his filthy nakednesse did appeare; she has given him a needle & thridd to mend his breeches, but soone it was out againe, & he would tell her his breeches were tore & burnt.

The faults for w^{ch} he was imprisoned were two. For that of bestyalytie, guilt did appeare in his carryadge, although he denyed he was at farme when the sow took bore, & would not have gon to fetch home the swyne about their pigging time, & being sent once & agayne, he went, but brought them not home, but one of bro. Thompsons famyly fownd them in lesse then halfe a day.

Afterward the governo^r & deputy, intending to examyne him, caused him to be hadd downe vnto his M^{rs} yard, where the swyne were, & they bid him scratt the sow that had the monsters, & immedyatly there appeared a working of lust in the sow, insomuch that she powred out seede before them, & then, being asked what he thought of it, he said he saw a hand of God in it. Afterwards hee was bid to scratt another sow as he did the former, but that was not moved at all, which Thomas Hogg acknowledged to be true, but said he never had to doe wth the other sow. The court was informed that he seeing his m^{rs} swyne, & this sow that had the monsters, yet he would not bring them home.

Nicholas Elsie said he knoweth that Thomas Hogg did question whether that sow was his mistrises or noe, & shewed an vnwillingnesse to have them home.

Mary, servant vnto Mrs. Lamberton, informed the court that the neagar was the first in the famyly that observed his discovereing his nakednesse, & told him she would flying fier in his breeches if he continued thus; and divers times herself saw it, & told him of it, but he would deny it.

He had discovered himselfe to be an impudent lyar, and forward in stealing. Lucretia, the governo^r's neagar weoman, informed the court that while she was in the famyly wth h^m, she saw him act filthjnesse wth his hands by the fier side, & the next day the child & Hannah told her of it, & she asked whether hee was not ashamed. And she hath seene him take his hand out of the pott & a dumpling with it. Mary, aforementioned, added she saw him take cheese out of the buttrey, & speaking to him about it he denyed it presently.

The centence of the court was, (leaveing that about beastyalytye to be further considred on,) that for his filthynesse, lyeing & pilfering, he should be severaly whipped, & for the future time during his imprisonment, that he be kept wth a meane dyet & hard labour, that his lusts may not bee fedd.

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