



# Hawthorne's Magnalia: Retelling Cotton Mather in the Provincial Tales

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Hawthorne's Magnalia: Retelling Cotton Mather in the Provincial Tales

A dissertation presented by

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Hawthorne's *Magnalia*: Retelling Cotton Mather in the Provincial Tales

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of Hawthorne's early development as a historical writer. The introduction attempts to reconstruct Hawthorne's lost "Provincial Tales" sequence using letters and borrowing records. I argue that Hawthorne designed this work as an episodic history of New England, alternating between fact and fiction, perhaps modeled after Mather's *Magnalia*. Chapter one focuses on "Sir William Phips," which I argue is vital to understanding Hawthorne's lifelong engagement with historical nonfiction. Hawthorne revises Cotton Mather's classic biography of Phips by imagining the subject from a private standpoint, while at the same time commenting on contemporary representations of George Washington. Chapter two continues the analysis of "Sir William Phips," now with a focus on how the story amalgamates various oral legends. I demonstrate that for *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne seems to have gone back to the basic formula he had developed for "Sir William Phips," except now as a "romancer." Finally, chapter three examines "The Gray Champion" as an amalgam of Mather, Revolutionary-era propaganda, and nineteenth-century commemorative oratory. In effect, Hawthorne revives Mather across three centuries and points to a legacy of distortion and "romance" where readers would least expect it.

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But all the story of the night told over,  
And all their minds transfigured so together,  
More witnesseth than fancy's images  
And grows to something of great constancy,  
But, howsoever, strange and admirable.

–Hippolyta to Theseus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (5.1.25-30)

## Introduction: Biographical sketches and provincial tales

The title of this dissertation suggests a concept familiar to any student of Hawthorne: twice-told tales. But what do I mean by “Provincial Tales”? In late 1829, Hawthorne was hoping to publish a “series,” and in December he sought Samuel Goodrich’s help, sending him four manuscripts: “**The Gentle Boy**,” “**My Kinsman, Major Molineux**,” “**Alice Doane**,” and “**Roger Malvin’s Burial**.” In the same letter, he mentions “two or three more” yet unfinished.<sup>1</sup> Goodrich responds in January, offering to include “The Gentle Boy” and “My Uncle Molineux [sic]” in *The Token*, a gift annual which he edited.<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne’s reply is missing; all we have is a letter dated May 6, 1830, which begins thus:

I send you the two pieces for The Token. They were ready some days ago, but I kept them in expectation of hearing from you... You can insert them (if you think them worthy a place in your publication) as by The Author of Provincial Tales, such being the title I propose for my volume.<sup>3</sup>

The “two pieces” had to have been “Sights from a Steeple” and “The Haunted Quack,” since they are the only two by Hawthorne to appear in that year’s *Token*, and Goodrich’s deadline for submissions was always May. In his lost response, Hawthorne must have declined Goodrich’s January offer, presumably because he wanted to save “Boy” and “Molineux” for the series; but Goodrich seems not to have replied, and so as the May

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<sup>1</sup> *CE XV*, 199-200.

<sup>2</sup> In Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife* (Boston, 1885), pp. 313-2. On the Provincial Tales as a unit, the first serious study was Elizabeth Lathrop Chandler, “A Study in the Sources of the Tales and Romances Written by Nathaniel Hawthorne Before 1853,” *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* 7 (1925-6), pp. 1-63. See also Nelson Adkins, “The Early Projected Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 39 (1945), pp. 118-55; Richard Adams, “Hawthorne’s Provincial Tales,” *New England Quarterly* 30 (1957), pp. 39-57; and Alfred Weber, *Die Entwicklung der Rahmenerzählungen Nathaniel Hawthornes* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> *CE XV*, 205.



deadline approached, Hawthorne went ahead and sent him two occasional pieces. Perhaps he had promised them in the lost letter; clearly he now wants to use them to advertise his projected “volume.”

Now, from the May letter alone it is impossible to know the current status of *Provincial Tales*. Was it finished? I argue that it was *not*. During the spring of 1830, Hawthorne appears to have reconceived the project to include at least four more stories, namely, “**Sir William Phips**,” “**Mrs. Hutchinson**,” “**Dr. Bullivant**,” and “**Sir William Pepperell**.” Three will appear in the *Salem Gazette* at the end of the year; “Pepperell,” not until the 1834 *Token*. However, Salem Athenaeum borrowing records suggest that Hawthorne was working on all four around the time of the May letter.

Let us begin with “Phips.” In early March, Hawthorne withdrew a volume titled *Sermons and Tracts: 1690*; it would have contained Cotton Mather’s 1690 election sermon, which, as I shall be discussing later in this dissertation, was a foundational source for “Phips.” Hawthorne kept this volume for three weeks, during which time he also withdrew *Edinburgh Review*, vol. 7, presumably for its lengthy article on late-seventeenth-century colonial currency, a theme in Mather’s sermon and one which will be picked up in “Phips.”<sup>4</sup>

“Pepperell,” it seems, was being composed just a little bit later. In the last week of March, Hawthorne withdrew *Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 15 (1745); and in early April, vol. 16 (1746). Both contained accounts of Louisbourg, the principal event depicted in the story. What tells me that he was after such information is the fact that along with vol. 16 he also withdrew Voltaire’s *Precis du siècle de Louis XV*, which is

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Marion Kesselring, *Hawthorne’s Reading, 1828-1850* (New York Public Library, 1949), p. 27.

cited in the story.<sup>5</sup> Then just two days after returning this bundle, he withdraws *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, vol. 1, no. 1, which contains all of Pepperell's letters from Louisbourg. There can be little doubt that "Pepperell" was being written in late March, early April.<sup>6</sup>

The borrowing record for "Bullivant" is somewhat less decisive, but that is only because Bullivant, an apothecary who turns up marginally throughout the histories, is the most obscure of the four subjects. The major sources seem to have been Caleb Snow's *History of Boston*, Thomas Hutchinson's *History of the Province Massachusetts Bay* (vol. I), and Mather's *Magnalia*, but these are of little help with dating because there is no borrowing record; presumably Hawthorne had outside copies. Yet there *are* several clues. Let us begin with the description of Bullivant's shopfront:

Overlooking the bearded Saracens, the Indian Queens, and the wooden Bibles, let us direct our attention to the white posts newly erected at the corner of the street, and surmounted by a gilded countenance which flashes in the early sunbeams like veritable gold. It is a bust of Aesculapius, evidently of the latest London manufacture; and from the door behind it steams forth a mingled smell of musk and assafoetida, and other drugs of potent perfume, as if an appropriate sacrifice were just laid upon the altar of the medical deity.

"Appropriate sacrifice" must be a reference to the death of Socrates, his enigmatic last words to disciple Crito telling him to "go sacrifice a cock to Asclepius." The parallel is appropriate for Hawthorne's Bullivant, a freethinking gadfly imprisoned by the Puritan state. Its significance for us lies in the fact that during March Hawthorne was reading a volume of Montaigne's *Essais* that contained several essays on Socrates; and in April, Fenelon's *Lives of the Philosophers*. Another clue, and a significant one to my mind, is the comparison of the imprisoned Bullivant's soiled cloak to the muddy remnants of

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<sup>5</sup> See Robert C. Grayson, "Sources of Hawthorne's 'Sir William Pepperell,'" *Colby Quarterly* 20 (1984), pp. 100-6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

snow in April, an image peculiar to early spring in New England. Meanwhile there are many similarities between this story and “The Haunted Quack,” one of the pieces sent to Goodrich on May 6 and probably finished in late April as the letter indicates. Both are about apothecaries, and in both esoteric medical references abound and indeed overlap. I think that we can say with some confidence that “Bullivant” was composed in April.<sup>7</sup>

As for “Hutchinson,” it seems to have been written slightly later than the other three, probably during May. Here again, the Mather and Thomas Hutchinson, while important sources, are of no help with dating. However, Hawthorne clearly relies on an article titled “New England Ecclesiastical History,” found in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* 2.1, which he withdrew on May 6, the very day of his letter mentioning the Provincial Tales.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps “my volume” was done, and “Phips,” “Pepperell,” “Bullivant,” and “Hutchinson” represent some new project. But then why do they seem to fit so well chronologically with “Boy,” “Alice Doane,” “Malvin,” and “Molineux”? Here is my tabulation, with important dates listed in the right-hand column:

Mrs. Hutchinson	1634: arrives in Boston 1637: trial and banishment 1643: death in Dutch New Netherland
The Gentle Boy	1656: Quakers arrive in New England 1660: execution of Mary Dyer 1661: Charles II ends New England persecution of Quakers
Dr. Bullivant	1670: Bullivant’s apothecary in Cornhill (first scene) 1689: arrested during uprising and jailed (second scene)
Sir William Phips	1692: Gov. Phips arrives in Boston with the new charter
Alice Doane	1692-3: Salem witch trials

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Roger Malvin's Burial	1725: Battle of Pequawket or "Lovewell's Fight" Early 1740s: Reuben Borne returns to the sight of Malvin's death
Sir William Pepperell	1745: Louisbourg expedition
My Kinsman, Major Molineux	Knowles Impressment Riot 1747; unrest of the 1760s-1770s; Boston rum riots 1730s; temporally indeterminate, amalgam

Scattered throughout all of this are various words and images which do not appear in any source and can only be explained as an attempt to establish continuity within the sequence. For example, "Hutchinson," whose antinomian theme anticipates that of "Boy"—indeed, Ilbrahim's mother Katherine is loosely based on Mary Dyer, the Quaker martyr who had been mentored by Anne Hutchinson—ends thus:

It was a circumstance not to be unnoticed by our stern ancestors, in considering the fate of her who had so troubled their religion, that an infant daughter, the sole survivor amid the terrible destruction of her mother's household, was bred in a barbarous faith, and never learned the way to the Christian's Heaven. Yet we hope, that there the mother and the child have met.

The last line will be echoed in "Boy," when Dorothea, who adopts Ilbrahim, and who is one of the few reasonable Puritans in the story, reassures Katherine as she leaves for exile: "we are Christians [also], looking upward to the same Heaven with you. Doubt not that your boy shall meet you there."

Now let us skip forward "Phips." At one point a rustic figure enters wearing "a trophy which we would not venture to record without good evidence of the fact, a wig made of the long and straight black hair of his slain savage enemies." The "evidence" is a well-documented episode about Captain John Lovewell bringing his "rangers" to Boston to redeem their Indian scalps, with Lovewell himself wearing one of them and

causing a sensation.<sup>9</sup> This happened in March 1725, making it an anachronism for “Phips,” but it serves to anticipate “Malvin,” which is set in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Pequawket, also known as “Lovewell’s Fight.” In April 1725, just a month after their Boston visit, Lovewell and most of his men would be killed in this battle.

Meanwhile in “Pepperell,” which depicts the 1745 expedition to Louisbourg, the New England soldiers enter the captured city to “those harsh old warlike stanzas which tell the story of Lovewell’s Fight.” In “Pepperell” we also find the following excursus on the devastation of war:

Most of the young men who had left their paternal firesides, sound in constitution, and pure in morals, if they returned at all, returned with ruined health, and with minds so broken up by the interval of riot, that they never after could resume the habits of good citizenship. A lust for military glory was also awakened in the country; and France and England gratified it with enough of slaughter; the former seeking to recover what she had lost, the latter to complete the conquest which the colonists had begun. There was a brief season of repose, and then a fiercer contest, raging almost from end to end of North America. Some went forth, and met the red men of the wilderness; and when years had rolled, and the settler came in peace where they had come in war, there he found their unburied bones among the fallen boughs and withered leaves of many autumns.

If “Malvin” was about a man who promises his comrade, too badly wounded to be moved, that he will return to bury him, but waits twenty years to do so, “Pepperell” envisions other Malvins to come.

These are just a few relatively simple examples; others, perhaps more telling, would require more background than is fitting here. One might be tempted to dismiss

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<sup>9</sup> A number of sources mention this anecdote; see for example *Collections, Topographical, Historical and Biographical Relating Principally to New Hampshire*, vol. III (1824), p. 97.

them as the sort of casual repetition one finds even in Shakespeare, but on the aggregate they suggest design. Are they fossils of a lost, epic sequence?<sup>10</sup>

Here is what I think happened. During the spring of 1830 Hawthorne reconceived the whole project. When he wrote to Goodrich on May 6, he was still working on it; is cautiously optimistic that despite Goodrich's pessimism he will be able to find a publisher, perhaps even before October, when *The Token* always came out. But sometime *after* mid-July, when the steady stream of material on New England history abruptly stops, he loses hope<sup>11</sup>; and by late September, when the 1831 *Token* went to press, he has told Goodrich *not* to mention him as "The Author of Provincial Tales" (this we can infer from the fact that in the 1831 *Token*, "Steeple" and "Quack" appear anonymously). Meanwhile, the four biographical pieces, which seemed the least viable on their own, he sends to the *Salem Gazette* starting in November.<sup>12</sup> But "Boy," "Malvin," and "Molineux" he saves for Goodrich, submitting them by the following May for the 1832 *Token*; yet withholding "Alice Doane," which Goodrich had been squeamish about in his January-1830 letter.

Now, what about those unfinished "two or three" mentioned in Hawthorne's December letter? "**The Wives of the Dead**" was almost certainly one of them. In the

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<sup>10</sup> One might object that a collection of "tales" would necessarily exclude "biographical sketches," that is to say, nonfictional pieces. But Hawthorne never uses the term "tale" so strictly, nor does he ever refer to "Phips," "Hutchinson," "Bullivant," or "Pepperell" as "biographical sketches." That term was invented by a posthumous editor in 1876. Bound up with this line of thought is the notion that these are occasional pieces. The *Centenary* editor, for example, groups "Phips," "Hutchinson," "Bullivant," and "Pepperell" with "Thomas Green Fessenden" and "Jonathan Cilley"—*Democratic Review* pieces quite obviously without literary pretensions—on the grounds that all were "designed to fulfill purposes of the moment [and] are not to be placed in the same category with [Hawthorne's] purely literary work" [*CE* XIII, 564-5]. If this dissertation succeeds in proving anything, it is that "Phips" was no bagatelle.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kesselring, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> "Pepperell" did not appear until the 1833 *Token*.

first place, it seems to have been composed during “the last quarter of 1829,” as Luther Luedtke, one of the few scholars to study it in depth, has argued persuasively.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, from a literary standpoint it makes a fine companion to “Malvin.” It tells the story of two women who live in “a principal seaport of the Bay Province.” They are sisters-in-law, each married to a brother, both recently widowed. One brother, a sailor, is rumored lost at sea; the other, a soldier, has just been reported killed in battle with the Indians. While no one battle is named, we are given subtle clues that Pequawket is meant.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the plot as a whole elaborates the antepenultimate stanza of “Lovewell’s Flight,” a ballad which happens to be mentioned at the start of “Malvin” preface:

Ah! many a wife shall rend her hair  
And many a child cry, “Woe is me!”  
When messengers the news shall bear,  
Of Lovewell’s dear bought victory.

Finally, “Wives” appeared in the 1832 *Token* along with “Boy,” “Malvin,” and “Molineux.” It would be peculiar if this story was not one of the “two or three” unfinished as of December 1829.<sup>15</sup>

“**The Gray Champion**,” I argue, was another. Though it was not published until January 1835, it seems to have been conceived much earlier, possibly as early as autumn 1828. That November, Hawthorne accompanied his uncle on a business trip to New

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<sup>13</sup> Luther Luedtke, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Romance of the Orient* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> We are told that the story takes place “one hundred years ago”; plus, there are “thirteen reported dead” in the battle, exactly the number killed at Pequawket.

<sup>15</sup> Especially when we consider that between mid-summer 1830 and mid-autumn 1834, there is very little borrowing of material on New England history. Perhaps it was over summer vacation, 1830, that Hawthorne’s attention turned to what would become his next project (also ill-fated), the “Tales of a Traveler” sequence, q.v. Alfred Weber, *Hawthorne’s American Travel Sketches* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989).

Haven. Friend Horace Connolly, then a freshman at Yale, recalls showing him around campus, but apparently his guest was only interested in the so-called Judge's Cave, said to be where William Goffe, one of the men who had signed the death warrant of Charles I, hid out after the Restoration. When Connolly declined a trip to the site, which was a few miles outside of town, Hawthorne hired a cab there, but returned in a sour mood after discovering it to be tourist sham. Connolly is our only record for this trip, but I have identified a weeklong gap in the Athenaeum borrowing for early November 1828, which would support Connolly's statement that Hawthorne's visit took place a few weeks after the fall term began (middle October back then).<sup>16</sup> Intriguingly, the borrowing resumes with a biography of Ezra Styles. Styles's *History of the Three Judges of Charles I* (1795) coined the "Angel of Hadley" legend, and according to Connolly, the cab drivers would read from it to tourists on their way up East Rock to the site of the cave.<sup>17</sup> Did they read to Hawthorne? Whatever the case, Hawthorne volunteered to accompany his uncle on another trip to New Haven the following summer (1829), and before leaving Salem he appears to have taken out Cotton Mather's *Remarkables of Increase Mather*, a line of which is directly quoted in "Champion." The route back followed the Connecticut River valley up to Deerfield, Massachusetts, then east to Salem.<sup>18</sup> One imagines Hawthorne looking out as they passed through Hadley, Mather's book in his lap. The wheels must have been turning when he returned to work that fall, but by the time of the December letter, "Champion" is among the "two or three" not finished. He continues to work on it in the new year and through the spring; most intensely between mid-April and early July,

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<sup>16</sup> Manning Hawthorne, "Hawthorne and 'The Man of God,'" *Colophon* 2 (1937), pp. 263-8.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Kesselring, pp. 23-4.

<sup>18</sup> For the route, see letters 47 and 48 in *CE XV*, pp. 196-8.



when he withdraws virtually every volume of the *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* (1799-1829), poring over the tracts and pamphlets contained therein. Indeed, it so happens that on May 6, the day of his letter to Goodrich, he took out *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 40 (1770), which contains several Boston Massacre narratives, two of them by Samuel Adams.<sup>19</sup>

“Champion” fits well in our sequence. It depicts the uprising of 1689, which “Bullivant” had glimpsed from a prison window. Bullivant himself makes a brief appearance, riding in Governor Andros’s retinue alongside such public enemies as Joseph Dudley and Edward Randolph. Here, it is intriguing that unlike those two much better-known figures, the obscure “doctor” gets no introduction, only: “on the other side was Bullivant, scattering jests and mockery as he rode along.” Presumably only a very small fraction of Hawthorne’s readers even knew who this man was; but had “Bullivant” preceded the story, the reference would have been clear to all. Was this a small oversight on Hawthorne’s part, one which survived subsequent revisions up to December 1834, when he sent the manuscript, without “Bullivant” of course, to the *New England Magazine*? Be that as it may, “Champion” is an apt predecessor to “Phips,” which depicts another parade down King Street three years later, but with an eerie sense of repetition, for the new governor with his new charter—a man whom Mather called New England’s “*guardian-angel...dropt, as it were from the machin of heaven...for easing the distresses of the land, now so darkened by the wrath of the Lord of Hosts*”—seems rather like a comic reincarnation of the cruel aristocrat Andros.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-9.

<sup>20</sup> *Magnalia*, Thomas Robbins, ed. (Hartford, 1853), vol. I, pp. 204, 7.

Now, was there a “third” unfinished? I think that there was, and it may well have been a version of “**The Maypole of Merry Mount.**” Though this story was not published until the 1836 *Token*—meaning that Hawthorne submitted it to Goodrich by May 1835—some earlier version seems to have existed, possibly as early as spring 1827, when Hawthorne withdrew, in the span of five weeks, no less than eight sources pertaining to the general topic.<sup>21</sup> My theory is that a version of “Maypole” was incomplete as of December 1829, its basic plot similar to the story we know. Perhaps in the new year, when he reconceives the project, Hawthorne decides to make a story about John Endicott; like “Phips,” “Hutchinson,” “Bullivant,” and “Pepperell,” it is built around two main scenes: Endicott’s maypole-chopping at Merry Mount, followed by his red-cross-cutting at Salem. Then several years later, long after the project has been scrapped, perhaps he develops “John Endicott” (let us call it that) into two stories; one of them, “Maypole,” will appear in the 1836 *Token*; the other, “Endicott and the Red Cross,” in the

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<sup>21</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Dictionary History and Critical* (1734), vol. 1 (folio): borrowed March 17-21; Milton *Prose Works* (London, 1806) vol. 1: March 17-24; Joseph Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (London, 1810): March 29, 1827 (no return date given); Daniel Neal, *History of the Puritans* (1816), vol. 1: April 18-21; Aristophanes *Comedies*, ed. T. Mitchell (1820), vol. 1: April 18-21; again June 7-15; Robert Henry, *History of Great Britain* (1788), vol. 1: May 4-5; Daniel Neal *History of New England* (1747), vol. 1: May 7- 8; William Ames, *Fresh Suit against Human Ceremonies* (1633): May 7-8. Cf. Kesselring, pp. 18-19. Strutt’s *Sports and Pastimes* has long been recognized as a key “Maypole” source; Hawthorne cites it in a note to vouch for authenticity regarding “the masques, mummeries, and festive customs.” But the influence of Thomas Mitchell’s introduction to Aristophanes’ *Comedies* has not been noticed. Mitchell discusses the ritual origins of Greek Old Comedy, his comparative standpoint involving maypoles and “gothic” elements; this influences the remark in “Maypole” that the “wild throng about the maypole,” though “Gothic,” has “perhaps” a “Grecian ancestry.” The borrowing sequence above suggests a train of thought. Hawthorne presumably was already familiar with the historical Merry Mount and its maypole. Something prompts him to borrow Strutt, perhaps something in Bayle’s *Dictionary* or Milton prose, both of which mention maypoles and were borrowed shortly before Strutt. His curiosity piqued, on April 18 he takes out the first volume of both Daniel Neal’s *History of the Puritans*, and with Mitchell’s Aristophanes. Shortly thereafter he borrows Robert Henry’s *History of Britain*, which discusses maypoles and with a focus on Baal (this comes up in the story). Next he borrows the first volume of Neal’s *History of New England*, which contains a full account of the Merry Mount incident; and on the same day, Ames’s Puritan polemic against “human ceremonies.”

1838 *Token*. This would explain why the two stories seem so much like twins separated at birth.

It goes without saying that all of this remains very tentative, but let us go ahead and add "**Endicott**" to our sequence, with an asterisk to denote its hypothetical status.<sup>22</sup> I also include, for good measure, "**Young Goodman Brown**," which might have been conceived as a more palatable alternative to the lurid "Alice Doane"; and "**The Minister's Black Veil**," which covers the Great Awakening (there will be references to George Whitefield in "Pepperell"), and which extends the geographical sweep to Long Island Sound and the southern frontier of New England.

* Endicott	June, 1628: Miles Standish, sent to arrest Thomas Morton, attacks Merrymount, destroys maypole. Winter 1629: Endicott raids Merrymount, chops down what is left of the maypole. September 1634: News arrives in Boston of attempt by Samuel Morton, now in London, to have the charter rescinded, in response to which Endicott, in Salem, defaces the flag. Not long before, Roger Williams, unpopular in Boston, has arrived in Salem, welcomed by Endicott.	Plymouth vicinity, Salem	Old Charter, Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1628-84
Mrs. Hutchinson	September 1634: arrives in Boston (on same ship carrying news of Morton's plot to rescind charter) November 1637: trial and banishment; ends up in Roger Williams' Rhode Island August 1643: death in New Netherland	Boston, Rhode Island, Dutch New Netherland	

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<sup>22</sup> After all, Spenser began *The Faerie Queene* with a Red-Cross Knight and a meditation on the virtue of Holiness.

The Gentle Boy	1656: Quakers arrive in New England 1660: execution of Mary Dyer (overseen by Gov. Endicott) September 1661: Charles II orders New England to quit persecuting Quakers	Boston and vicinity	
Dr. Bullivant	1670 (first scene) April-May, 1689 (second scene)	Boston: apothecary in Cornhill, jail	
The Gray Champion	Boston Revolt, April 18, 1689 (technically the evening before)	Boston via Hadley	Dominion of New England, 1684-92 (no charter)
Sir William Phips	May 12, 1692: Phips arrives in Boston with new charter	Boston via Maine frontier	New Charter, Province of Massachusetts Bay, 1692-1776
Alice Doane	Salem witch trials: February 1692 to May 1693; August 19, execution of George Burroughs et al	Salem	
Young Goodman Brown	Salem witch trials	Salem	
Roger Malvin's Burial	May 9, 1725: Pequawket Early 1740s: Reuben Borne returns to the sight of Malvin's death	New Hampshire frontier, vicinity of Lake Osippee	
The Wives of the Dead	News of Pequawket has just arrived	"a principal seaport of the Bay Province"	
The Ministers Black Veil	Hooper gives election sermon for Gov. Belcher; Great Awakening era	Milford, Connecticut; Westford, Long Island	
Sir William Pepperell	March 1745: embarkation from Boston June 1745: Louisbourg surrenders	Boston and Louisbourg via Kittery, Maine (Pepperell's home)	
My Kinsman, Major Molineux	Knowles Impressment Riot 1747; unrest of the 1760s-1770s; Boston rum riots 1730s; temporally indeterminate, amalgam	Boston via a radius of "five days journey." From what interior New England village does Robin come?	

But lest we get ahead of ourselves, let us go back and take stock of what seems certain, which is that the composition of “Phips,” “Hutchinson,” “Bullivant,” and “Pepperell” generally coincides with Hawthorne’s letter of May 6, 1830. Assuming that these do not represent some new project, it is reasonable to hypothesize that during the first quarter of 1830, the Provincial Tales was reinvented as an episodic history of New England, alternating between fact and fiction, biography and tale. Could it be that Hawthorne aimed to retell Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*—that “elephantine miscellany” of biography and history, in the words of Mark van Doren<sup>23</sup>—bringing it forward to his own time? I cannot offer a decisive answer to that question, but in its way, each chapter of this dissertation serves to legitimize the asking. Chapter One focuses on “Sir William Phips,” Hawthorne’s retelling of Mather’s exuberant biography in Book Two of the *Magnalia*. Inspired no doubt by Mather’s genius for types and parallels, Hawthorne evokes some of his own. But his most haunting message has to do not so much with the Phipses of today as with the men who continue to author them, the Mathers of today.

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<sup>23</sup> Mark van Doren, *The Life of Sir William Phips by Cotton Mather* (New York: Jacobs, 1929), p. vii.

## CHAPTER ONE

### “The Business of the Biographer”: Hawthorne’s Sir William Phips



Figure 1. Grant Wood. *Parson Weems' Fable*. 1939. Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas.

Public characters are scanned with a minuteness and a severity unknown to our progenitors. We are not now contented merely to see the senator enveloped in his toga, fulminating his philippics, or pouring forth his eloquence in the forum; nor are we satisfied with the more public exhibition of the judge or the counsellor, surrounded with the insignia of office, and supported with the reverence attached to a court of justice. We delight to follow them into the privacy of domestic life, and see how they act, divested of those appurtenances which claim respect from “vulgar minds.” The divine must be disrobed of his band and cassock; and the soldier, shorn of his plumed helm and mailed front, is required to appear in his private character, to stand the scrutiny of their fellow men. Authors and artists also are not exempt from the general unveiling; but must be content to withdraw from the bright halo of fame and splendor with which they are usually surrounded; and, arrayed in their “dressing-gown and slippers,” are compelled to stand the test of the universal gaze. And is there not an advantage in thus denuding public men of all the pomp and mystery of office and situation? Most assuredly there is; more especially in a republican government, where the ruling men of the time should be known as they really are.

– *New-York Mirror*. “Biographical Mania.” May 15, 1830

I have availed myself of the license of biography to step down occasionally from the elevated walk of history, and relate familiar things in a familiar way; seeking to show the prevalent passions, and feelings, and humors of the day, and even to depict the heroes of Seventy-six as they really were—men in cocked hats, regimental coats, and breeches, and not classical warriors, in shining armour and flowing mantles, with brows bound with laurel, and truncheons in their hands.

– Washington Irving to H.T. Tuckerman on his forthcoming biography of Washington. January 8, 1856

[Hiram] Powers took us into the farthest room...of his very extensive studio...and showed us a statue of Washington that has much dignity and stateliness; he expressed, however, great contempt for the coat and breeches, and Masonic emblems, in which he had been required to drape the figure. What the devil would the man do with Washington, the most decorous and respectable personage that ever went ceremoniously through the realities of life! Did anybody ever see Washington naked! It is inconceivable. He had no nakedness, but, I imagine, was born with his clothes on and his hair powdered, and made a stately bow on his first appearance in the world.

– Hawthorne, *French and Italian Notebooks*. Florence, Italy. June, 18

In November 1830, “Sir William Phips” appeared anonymously in the *Salem Gazette*. It is one of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s first published works. At just over 2,000 words, it is also one of his shortest. Last chapter I argued that Hawthorne originally wrote it, or some version of it, as part of the “Provincial Tales” sequence, for which he never found a publisher. Indeed, it may well go back to another ill-fated sequence, the so-called “Seven Tales of my Native Land,” the bulk of which seems to have been written by the time he returned from Bowdoin in the summer of 1826, and which involved, according to his sister Elizabeth’s recollection, “witchcraft and the sea.”<sup>24</sup> My object in this chapter is to discuss the text that appeared in the *Salem Gazette*. It was left uncollected by Hawthorne, and a posthumous editor would call it, along with three similar pieces written at approximately the same time, a “biographical sketch.” Nebulous as that is, the appellation is somehow appropriate for this brave narrative experiment which falls somewhere between fact and fiction, biography and tale. Hawthorne was only twenty-six at the time, still finding his voice, but there is an uncanny virtuosity here. “Sir William Phips,” I shall explain, is ambitious, formidably allusive, and dense; it brings Cotton Mather’s classic biography of Phips into conversation with a family of recent biographies; and it is not just about Sir William Phips.

## **I: Sir William Phips**

As Mather tells the story, Phips was born at “a despicable plantation” on the Kennebec river, the eastern edge of New England. The death of his father, a gunsmith, left him tending sheep along the rocky coast. But like David the shepherd-king, he “was born to

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. George Edward Woodberry, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: 1902), pp. 30-1.



greater matters.” As a young man he travels to Boston, teaches himself to read, marries a widow with a modest fortune, and founds a shipyard back in Maine. When the village is attacked by Indians, Phips crams everyone aboard a ship for Boston, rescuing them from certain death but losing his shipyard. Devastated but not defeated, he learns of a Spanish galleon sunk in the Bahamas some forty years earlier. He travels to London to court investors, including the King himself, who commissions him a captain. He manages the expedition competently, even heroically: putting down a mutiny among the sailors, locating the wreck, salvaging as much of the treasure as he can, and conducting it safely back to London. Now a rich man with court connections (and a knighthood), he could have lived the high life in England, but chose instead to work with Increase Mather, then in London to protest Governor Andros and the tyrannical Dominion government. With another, higher commission from the King he returns to Boston, is baptized (by the author himself), leads two expeditions against the French—one to Port Royal in modern Nova Scotia, the other to Quebec, where “he lay within pistol-shot of the enemy’s cannon”—bankrolls the colony when money runs short, and finally becomes the first governor under the new charter.

Perhaps the most striking thing about Hawthorne’s “Sir William Phips” is how it virtually ignores all of that, depicting instead what seems just an ordinary day. It is mid-morning in early summer, we are told, and Governor Phips, who has just arrived in Boston with the new charter, is standing on his doorstep, about to take a morning walk, it seems, when he is approached by three ministers. After a round of awkward bows and pleasantries, the ministers offer to accompany him on his walk. As the group strolls down King Street, curious townspeople of all stripes gather along the way, straining for a

glimpse of the new governor. Among them Phips recognizes an old acquaintance and stops to have a few words with him. After handing the man a shilling he moves on. As he approaches the docks, a navy officer appears; there is a heated exchange and Phips draws his cane, strikes the man down, and sends him to jail. Realizing that it is noon, he and the three ministers retire to his house for dinner, where they are joined by a few other dignitaries. Phips gets through the meal commendably, but as soon as after-dinner madeira is served he loosens up and his behavior begins to embarrass the others. Thankfully the symposium is interrupted by the sound of militia training on the common. The story ends with the image of Phips inspecting the ranks and, as evening falls, leading them in prayer.

It seems so very simple until we notice how closely the story engages with Mather, from start to finish. Mather had opened with a sort of prologue explaining how some alchemists (or so they claim) can take a flower, grind it down to a paste, extract its “essential salts,” store them in a “glass hermetically sealed,” then make the original plant appear by applying a “soft fire” to the jar. Like the alchemist with his “glass,” so the biographer with a “book,” preserves the subject’s essence so that readers can, by applying their “warm affections” to the text, “revive” the man’s “true shape.” Now compare Hawthorne’s prologue. When figures come down only in “written history,” he complains, they are like “mere names”; they rarely “stand up in our imaginations like men.” Therefore:

A license must be assumed in brightening the materials which time has rusted, and in tracing out the half-obliterated inscriptions on the columns of antiquity; fancy must throw her reviving light on the faded incidents that indicate character, whence a ray will be reflected, more or less vividly, on the person to be described.

Where Mather's catalyst had been the reader's "warm affections," Hawthorne substitutes the light of "fancy" (his parallel use of a form of "revive" makes this clear). Imagination is necessary if we are to have a tolerably "vivid" idea of the subject.

On its own terms, Hawthorne's plea for poetic license is actually quite conventional, even cliché. Bestselling romancers, Scott and Cooper, engaged imaginatively with their material. There was even a vogue for nonfiction writers to do so. Elizabeth Hamilton, for example, in *Memoirs of Agrippina*, a work known to Hawthorne (he withdrew it from the Salem Athenaeum in 1828), explains how her subject had been a central character in Tacitus, but Tacitus, as a historian, had been constrained by the customary "decorum" of formal history to exclude "quotidian circumstances." These she claims a license to supply according to "probability." "Where my authorities," she writes,

were silent, I have endeavored to fill the chasm in the manner that appeared most consonant to probability. The employment of Agrippina's leisure hours, her domestic avocations, society, etc., were circumstances which it suited not the dignity of history to record. But circumstances too trivial are essentially necessary to the biographer to give such particulars as can alone convey a full and just idea of character.

And later:

If Agrippina may sometimes be found in scenes into which she was not followed by the historian, the scenes themselves, every object with which they are filled, and every ornament by which they are decorated, are faithfully copied from the most authentic describers of ancient manners.<sup>25</sup>

Similar appeals to the scholarly imagination, so to speak, were not uncommon among historians and biographers during the first decades of the nineteenth century. A writer for the *Port-Folio*, an important Philadelphia quarterly, could have pointed to a number of

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<sup>25</sup> *Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina, the Wife of Germanicus* (London, 1804), p. xxxii. For Hawthorne's borrowing, see Marion Kesselring, *Hawthorne's Reading, 1828-1850* (New York Public Library, 1949), p. 19.

recent experiments, from William Godwin's biography of Chaucer to Joseph Berington's *Henry II*, to support his claim that "biography, even fictitious biography, if executed with intelligence, judgment, and a faithful adherence to the manners of the times, becomes an useful supplement to history; it supplies us with those shades of manners, without which historical painting becomes lifeless, undiversified, and uninteresting."<sup>26</sup>

But Hawthorne's plea verges on cliché only until we recognize that Phips was no Agrippina, but a fairly recent figure whose life had been amply reported. Presumably most readers knew at least of the existence of Mather's classic biography, particularly in the aftermath of Thomas Robbins's influential 1820 re-edition.<sup>27</sup> Phips a "mere name"? Yet Hawthorne's statement makes a certain paradoxical sense if we take it to mean that *despite* Mather's extensive reporting Phips remains a cipher. We are to rethink all we think we know about this man. Nor will the story be a mild, scholarly supplementation of the record according to some benign notion of academic "probability," but an imaginative upheaval of the most radical order.

To get a sense of how this works, let us examine three principal scenes, in order, starting with the one where Phips appears to recognize a childhood "playmate":

As the dignitaries of church and state make their way beneath the overhanging houses, the lattices are thrust ajar, and you may discern, just in the boundaries of light and shade, the prim faces of the little puritan damsels, eyeing the magnificent governor, and envious of the bolder curiosity of the men. Another object of almost equal interest now appears in the middle of the way. It is a man clad in a hunting-shirt and Indian stockings, and armed with a long gun. His feet

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<sup>26</sup> *Port-Folio* 9:2 (1820), p. 266. On Hamilton, Godwin and Berington as innovators, see Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain 1740-1820* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 118-22. On Hamilton in particular, see Claire Grogan, *Politics and Genre in the Works of Elizabeth Hamilton, 1756-1816* (Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> On the Robbins re-edition and its significance for Hawthorne and other writers of his generation, see Christopher Felker, *Reinventing Cotton Mather in the American Renaissance* (Northeastern, 1993).

have been wet with the waters of many an inland lake and stream; and the leaves and twigs of the tangled wilderness are intertwined with his garments: on his head he wears a trophy which we would not venture to record without good evidence of the fact, a wig made of the long and straight black hair of his slain savage enemies. This grim old heathen stands bewildered in the midst of King Street. The governor regards him attentively, and, recognizing a playmate of his youth, accosts him with a gracious smile, inquires as to the prosperity of their birthplace, and the life or death of their ancient neighbors, and makes appropriate remarks on the different stations allotted by fortune to two individuals born and bred beside the same wild river. Finally he puts into his hand, at parting, a shilling of the Massachusetts coinage, stamped with the figure of a stubbed pine-tree, mistaken by King Charles for the oak, which saved his royal life. Then all the people praise the humility and bountifulness of the good governor, who struts onward flourishing his gold-headed cane; while the gentleman in the straight black wig is left with a pretty accurate idea of the distance between himself and his old companion.

The bystanders take it for an act of “humility,” but the effect upon the poor man is rather different, and we are left with the sense that Phips may well have intended it that way. While the conversation is “appropriate,” perhaps he chooses to ask after the “prosperity” of his old neighborhood in order to make the man feel ashamed. Meanwhile there are signs of covert aggression: Phips “accosts” with a smile; raises his “gold-headed” cane, perhaps to clinch what he has just said about “the different stations allotted by *fortune* to two individuals born and bred beside the same wild river.”

In the subsequent scene Phips again raises his cane; this time the aggression is there for all to see:

Meantime Sir William steers his course towards the town dock. A gallant figure is seen approaching on the opposite side of the street, in a naval uniform profusely laced, and with a cutlass swinging by his side. This is Captain Short, the commander of a frigate in the service of the English king, now lying in the harbor. Sir William bristles up at sight of him, and crosses the street with a lowering front, unmindful of the hints of Dr. Mather, who is aware of an unsettled dispute between the captain and the governor, relative to the authority of the latter over a king's ship on the provincial station. Into this thorny subject, Sir William plunges headlong. The captain makes answer with less deference than the dignity of the potentate requires: the affair grows hot; and the clergymen endeavor to interfere in the blessed capacity of peacemakers. The governor lifts his cane; and the captain lays his hand upon his sword, but is prevented from drawing by the zealous exertions of Dr. Mather. There is a furious stamping of feet, and a mighty uproar from every mouth, in the midst of which his Excellency

inflicts several very sufficient whacks on the head of the unhappy Short. Having thus avenged himself by manual force, as befits a woodman and a mariner, he vindicates the insulted majesty of the governor by committing his antagonist to prison.

Phips was involved in several physical altercations while governor. Since Mather mentions none of them (only that Phips had a temper which he worked hard to control), Hawthorne must rely on Thomas Hutchinson's account of a "misunderstanding" with one Richard Short. Short captained the ship which transported Phips on his recent crossing. Apparently during the voyage an enemy vessel had been seized and Phips refused Short his rightful share of the booty. To add insult to injury, he soon began impressing Short's sailors, probably to help with the construction of a fort in Maine, and at some point Short put his foot down. "This was ill taken by the Governor," writes Hutchinson, "and meeting Captain Short in the street, warm words passed, and at length the Governor made use of his cane and broke Short's head. Not content with this, he committed him to prison."<sup>28</sup> Besides reintroducing this whole affair ("thorny subject"), Hawthorne appears to adopt some of Mather's own imagery: in another context, Mather recounts how a young Phips would often promise his bride that he would one day be "the captain of a King's ship" with "the command of better men than he was now accounted himself, and that he should be owner of a fair brick-house in the Green-lane of North-Boston"; then on the next page, as if in fulfillment of that prophecy, he describes Phips arriving several years later in Boston harbor dressed in full uniform, now "the captain of a King's ship...a frigot of eighteen guns and ninety-five men."<sup>29</sup> Is Hawthorne trying to evoke some

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<sup>28</sup> Hutchinson, *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, 1:323-4.

<sup>29</sup> *Magnalia* 1: 168-9. Mather refers to the Salem witch trials as "thorny business," *Magnalia* 1:212. Note: for all references and citations of the *Magnalia*, I use the Robbins edition (Hartford: 1853). Unless otherwise noted, I follow Robbins' orthography (including italics).

image of Phips beating down a younger version of himself, at a station he once aspired to?<sup>30</sup>

Something similar happens in the very next scene, the dinner, which presumably takes place at the dream house on Green Lane:

It being now near twelve o'clock, the three ministers are bidden to dinner at the governor's table, where the party is completed by a few Old Charter senators—men reared at the feet of the Pilgrims, and who remember the days when Cromwell was a nursing-father to New England. Sir William presides with commendable decorum till grace is said and the cloth removed. Then, as the grape-juice glides warm into the ventricles of his heart, it produces a change, like that of a running stream upon enchanted shapes; and the rude man of the sea and wilderness appears in the very chair where the stately governor sat down. He overflows with jovial tales of the fore-castle and of his father's hut, and stares to see the gravity of his guests become more and more portentous in exact proportion as his own merriment increases.

Hawthorne seems to be thinking of a passage in Mather comparing Phips to a king who would only dine from “earthen vessels” so as not to forget his humble origins:

It was counted an humility in King Agathocles, the son of a potter, to be served therefore in *earthen vessels*, as Plutarch hath informed us; it was counted an humility in Archbishop Willigis, the son of a Wheelright, therefore to have *wheels* hung about his bed-chamber, with this inscription, *Recole unde Veneris*, i.e. “Remember thy original.” But such was the *humility* and *lowliness* of this *rising man*! Not only did he after his return to his country in his greatness, one day, make a splendid feast for the *ship-carpenters* of Boston, among whom he was willing at his table to commemorate the mercy of God unto him, who had

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<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting: the scene is choreographed very much like a duel: Short cuts a “gallant figure,” dressed to the nines; Phips draws himself up (“bristles”) on sight of him; they approach from “opposite side[s] of the street.” Dueling nomenclature is everywhere: “unsettled dispute.. .affair...dignity... avenged...insulted... vindicated... antagonist.” Things reach comic proportion when we realize that the clergymen are described like seconds, in “capacity” to “interfere,” and as “peacemakers,” a common nickname for dueling pistols. Was it an arranged meeting after all? (Phips “*steers* his course to the town docks.”) If so, Phips has not come to fight on equal terms, for caning, most readers knew, was what you did when you regarded your opponent as a social inferior and refused to engage with him upon equal terms of honor. Phips is wrestling with, indeed *caning*, an earlier version of himself. On Phips’s use of the cane against Short, see Baker and Reid, who argue that this was no backwoods thing but a “gentlemanly” act (“Sir William Phips, Violence, and the Historians: Verbal and Physical Abuse in the Behavior of ‘the Best Conditioned Gentleman in the World’” (1996); and *The New-England Knight* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 211, 215, 311.n.34). See also Hawthorne’s article “Dueling” for the *American Magazine* (August 1836), p. 504.

once been a ship-carpenter himself, he would on all occasions *permit, yea, study* to have his *meannesses* remembered.<sup>31</sup>

But Hawthorne's version the shipbuilders are not invited. An intemperate Phips *involuntarily* permits to have his meannesses remembered, we might say. In calling it a "change," Hawthorne appears to be mocking Mather's claim in the prologue, and iterated in various ways throughout the biography, that Phips was a man who underwent many "wonderful changes." Mather was referring to Phips's rise from rags to riches, his giving up old ways, most importantly his baptism, when he was born again. Hawthorne's use of the word suggests the reverse: here is Phips taking up old ways supposedly given up, regressing into the man he used to be, or perhaps still is, for we are left with the sense that Phips never really changed—the only "change" that has taken place is that he is no longer acting, is no longer under the artificial constraint of "decorum."

But that itself is a version of change, and change, paradoxically, is one of the story's few constants. It is all very much like a kaleidoscope: images collide, alternative narratives form in clusters then disappear. Let us look again at the first scene we discussed. Phips recognizes a childhood playmate, chats with him, gives him a coin; the bystanders praise his "humility and bountifulness." Perhaps Mather *père*, who is standing next to Phips, has made a lesson of it for the people. Whatever the case, Hawthorne's staging quietly contests the public interpretation, as we saw. But notice that he never tells us that the man actually *is* a childhood playmate, only that Phips "recognizes" him as such. Indeed, he seems to want to suggest that some sort of business transaction is going on. Periodically, colonial governors offered money in exchange for Indian scalps. A number of colonists living on the frontier, most famously Captain John

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<sup>31</sup> *Magnalia* 1:221.



Lovewell, made money this way. According to Jeremy Belknap's *History of New Hampshire*, one of Hawthorne's sources, Lovewell and his "rangers" once had the scalps made into wigs, causing a stir when they wore them in the streets of Boston. Hawthorne's reference to this anecdote—"on his head he wears a trophy which we would not venture to record without good evidence of the fact, a wig made of the long an straight black hair of his slain savage enemies"—lends a measure of historical validity to the weird image. But presumably his ulterior motive is to suggest a grisly alternative: the man has come to redeem his scalps and the governor gives him money in return, a "bountiful" gesture indeed.

Meanwhile, the reference to Captain Lovewell opens up another possibility: this man is a veteran of the Quebec campaign, and Phips is transacting some sort of business with him. Some background knowledge is necessary if we are to appreciate this. In the summer of 1690 Phips led an army to Quebec. The plan was to finance it with spoil, as had been done at Port Royal the previous month, but this time the expedition failed spectacularly. The treasury was empty, and with the soldiers on the point of mutiny the government decided to issue them with paper notes. Apparently this had never been done before, in the colonies or even in Europe, and so naturally the merchants would not accept the notes at face value, despite the government's promise to buy them back later in lieu of taxes at a ten-percent advantage. According to Mather, Phips saved the day by buying up "bushels" of notes with his own gold, a public display of trust which also helped replenish the treasury. Furthermore, as a special favor to his veterans, who were struggling to feed their families, he swapped individual notes for coin "at par." Mather recounts all of this in order to counter "idle suspicions" which he does not specify, but

presumably they had to do with the purity of Phips's motives.<sup>32</sup> There may be a clue in Hutchinson, who mentions that the individuals who held on to the notes until tax season ended up with massive returns. Hutchinson also mentions that the notes came in denominations as small as two shillings.<sup>33</sup> Does Hawthorne specify *one* shilling in order to insinuate that Phips is scalping the man, changing coin for paper but not "at par"? In any event, it is intriguing that the man is introduced as an "another object of almost equal *interest*" (that is, after the pretty "damsels").<sup>34</sup>

Every baroque detail seems to have some point once we familiarize ourselves with Hawthorne's sources. There is a nexus of stories here, some of them more evanescent than others. For instance, the image of a man who looks like an Indian being humiliated ("bewildered") in King Street by his old "playmate" serves to recall yet another passage in Mather. Phips's "birth and youth in the East," Mather insists,

had rendered him well known unto the Indians there; he had hunted and fished many a weary day in his childhood with them; and when those rude savages had got the story by the end, that "he had found a ship full of money, and was become all one-a-king!" they were mindfully astonished at it: but when they farther understood that he was become the governour of New-England, it added a further degree of consternation to their astonishment. He likewise was better

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<sup>32</sup> *Magnalia* 1:190-2.

<sup>33</sup> Hutchinson, *History*, 1:403.

<sup>34</sup> It strengthens the argument somewhat that this scene revisits Nehemiah "unfolding his lap" (a ritual gesture for swearing). Nehemiah, angry that poor families have been crippled with debt and cannot spare their young breadwinners to help rebuild the wall, swears against usury and compels the nobles to do the same:

And I shook out my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not his promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise. (Nehemiah 5:15, KJV)

Hawthorne restages this, only to suggest Phips practicing usury against a metaphorical builder of the wall! In this context, the image on the coin may refer to the cedars from the royal forest in Lebanon which Nehemiah, by permission of Cyrus, used to rebuild the wall.

acquainted with the situation of those regions than most other men; and he considered what vast advantages might arise to no less than the whole English nation, from the lumber, and fishery, and naval-stores, which those regions might soon supply the whole nation withal, if once they were well settled with good inhabitants.<sup>35</sup>

Mather's point is that Phips understood the Indians, and the Indians feared him in return, knowing that with such a man at the helm their lands would soon be gone, resettled, civilized; their trees chopped down for ships, those "wooden walls" of the British empire (a theme he develops elsewhere).<sup>36</sup> But how civilized is a bounty on human skin?

The scene is also littered with references to Mather's (magnificent) account of the day Phips discovered the treasure. Arriving in the Bahamas, he writes, Phips chopped down a "stately cotton tree" to make a pirogue, then set out with a handful of trusted men, plus a few "Indian" divers, to look for the wreck. For days they searched to no avail, but just when they were on the point of giving up, one of the men

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<sup>35</sup> *Magnalia* 1:213-4.

<sup>36</sup> Phips aimed "to supply the Crown with all the naval stores at most easie rates, from those eastern parts of the Massachuset province, which, through the conquest that he had made therof, came to be inserted in the Massachuset-charter... And he longed with some impatience to see the King furnished from his own dominions with such floating and stately castles, those 'wooden walls of Great Britain,' for much of which he has hitherto traded with foreign kingdoms." ("Wooden walls" is probably a reference to Themistocles' famous naval defence policy, recorded in Herodotus; indeed, Themistocles, a self-made man like Phips, is just another parallel Mather draws into his orbit of allusions.) At the end Mather prints an "elegy" for Phips which contains the following lines:

'Tis *he*: with *him* interred how great designs!  
Stand fearless now, ye eastern firs and pines,  
With naval stores not to enrich the nation,  
Stand, for the *universal conflagration*.  
Mines, opening unto none but him, now stay  
Close under lock and key, till the last day:  
In this, like to the *grand aurifick stone*,  
By any but *great souls* not to be known.

Phips speculated heavily in timber and mining throughout northern New England; cf. Baker and Reid, *New England Knight* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 175-76; and Viola F. Barnes, "Phippius Magnus," *New England Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (October, 1928), p. 550. Of general interest is Hawthorne's article "Ship Timber" for the *American Magazine* (July 1836), p. 519.

spied a *sea feather*, growing, as he judged, out of a rock; whereupon they bad one of their Indians to dive, and fetch this feather, that they might, however, carry home *something* with them, and make, at least, as fair a triumph as Caligula's. The diver bringing up the feather, brought therewithal a surprising story, that he perceived a number of great guns in the *watery world* where he had found his feather; the *report* of which *great guns* exceedingly astonished the whole company; and at once turned their despondencies for their ill success into *assurances* that they had now lit upon the *true spot* of ground which they had been looking for; and they were further confirmed in these assurances, when, upon further diving, the Indian fetcht up a *sow*, as they stiled it, or a lump of silver worth perhaps two or three hundred pounds.<sup>37</sup>

Soon “Captain Phips” realizes what is happening and cries out: “Thanks be to God! We shall every man of us make our fortunes!”<sup>38</sup> Hawthorne seems to want to reprise this decisive moment: black Indian hair, wet feet, silver coin. The cane, we have been told previously, displays gold from the wreck; it is an “accurate” reminder of the moment fortunes were made. For a second we glimpse the “Indian” diver emerging with the silver. Against visions of bottomless wealth—Mather describes “bushels” of encrusted silver dollars being busted open with hammers and spilling onto the deck—one shilling seems a pittance. But that, so the visual logic goes, is how Phips repays the hands that helped make his fortune.

Meanwhile, with another turn of the kaleidoscope, we see the “heathen” minister George Burroughs, executed for witchcraft along with four others on a particularly grim day in August 1692. Witnesses at his trial spoke of his ability to balance a long gun on his fingertips (evidence of supernatural strength) and associated him with the ubiquitous “black man” because of his long dark hair, swarthy complexion, and also presumably

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<sup>37</sup> *Magnalia* 1:171-3.

<sup>38</sup> Hawthorne gives a lovely retelling of this episode in *Grandfather's Chair* (CE VI: 60-1). It follows Mather closely. Above, I actually use Hawthorne's version of Phips's response, for obvious reasons.

because he had spent several years on the Maine frontier. Hawthorne's presentation seems to have been informed by John Neal's *Rachel Dyer* (1828), in which Burroughs appears as a kind of half-breed, Hawkeye figure who lived for a time among the Indians and even maintained an Indian family.<sup>39</sup> In this gruesome context, the "figure" on the coin becomes a hanging tree, perhaps one of the locust trees on Salem's Gallows Hill; the royal governor will use it to take the life of a subject. This, I argue, is the real reason Hawthorne mentions the anecdote about the Royal Oak (see appendix one): to inform readers that the "figure" has been "mistaken" at least once before. It functions not so much as an authenticator as a kind of imaginative primer (similar to what we saw with the Lovewell anecdote). For the Indian diver, it is a reminder of the worthless "sea feather," or perhaps Mather's "stately cotton tree." For the Indian playmate, it may signify a white pine, the tallest of which were reserved for masts, branded with an arrow, and known as King's Pines. The "figure" is like a weather vane, changing direction according to whichever interpretation prevails.

But clearly a moral argument is being made. In each of the examples we have seen, Hawthorne projects a vision of sin. It is the mirror opposite of what Mather had intended for his readers to do. In the prologue, remember, he envisioned himself as the "chymist," carefully preserving the subject for our "warm affections." This might seem empowering: the reader breathes life into the dry bones of the text. However, in Puritan psychology the affections were emotions felt for objects rationally perceived as good or

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<sup>39</sup> See William J. Schiek, *The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Fiction* (Kentucky, 1979), pp. 60-7; and Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 149-50.

evil.<sup>40</sup> Mather was trusting that our affections, albeit a power, will respond to his text in a determined way: we will see Phips for the good man he *was*. In essence, we are to embody Mather's own vision of Phips's virtue. By contrast, Hawthorne's "fancy" is a more active power; it radically rejects Mather's presentation, assembling a nightmarish montage, a vision of sin. This story, motivated by the sense that something is deeply wrong with Mather's "book," is the embodiment of that vision.

The same intuition, we might say, will motivate Holgrave, who with his pictures seeks to embody a vision of Judge Pyncheon's private sin. In fact, the daguerreotype may owe something to Mather's image of the "chymist" preparing chemicals and heating them in a "glass." Roger Chillingworth's character almost *certainly* owes to Mather's prologue. A doctor, sometimes referred to as an alchemist or "potent necromancer," he manufactures his drugs from plants harvested at unmarked graves. The individual's "only memorial," or so he tells Dimmesdale, is "these ugly weeds, that have taken upon themselves to keep him in remembrance. They grew out of his heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him, and which he had done better to confess during his lifetime." This pointedly reverses an image in Mather's prologue in which Mather describes the Jewish funeral custom of plucking flowers at graveside while reciting from scripture (Isaiah 66:14): "And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb." In this ritual act the Jew embodies his vision of

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<sup>40</sup> William Fenner gave a classic definition: "The affections are the forcible and sensible motions of the heart, or the will, to a thing, or from a thing, according as it is apprehended to be good or to be evil." *A Treatise of the Affections* (London: 1642). See also Perry Miller, *The New England Mind* (Harvard, 1954), pp. 252-5.

the dead man's virtuous heart with a flower.<sup>41</sup> Chillingworth, by contrast, embodies his vision of the dead man's sinful heart with a handful of weeds. He then makes the weeds into drugs for Dimmesdale—at least according to one version, advanced but not endorsed by the narrator—thereby causing the letter A to appear in his flesh. Or perhaps he poisons Dimmesdale with the drugs. In either case, Chillingworth seeks *literally* to embody his vision of Dimmesdale's sinful heart.

The former scenario—to incriminate an eminent contemporary with the imagined sins of a dead man—may seem esoteric, but is worth considering, because a similar thing happens in “Phips.” I have discovered that the story is full of undercover references to George Washington (of all people). The playmate scene, for example, is clearly based on an anecdote in Mason Locke Weems's bestselling *Life of Washington*. In the summer of 1789, shortly after his first inauguration, Washington went on a goodwill tour of New England, and in Newburyport, Massachusetts, ran into a veteran who had served under his command during the French and Indian War:

On his arrival at Newburyport, the following incident occurred, a poor soldier named Cotten, who was with him in the memorable battle on the Ohio, when Braddock was defeated, requested, and was admitted into the room where the President was. On the soldier's asking “how Major Washington did?” the President immediately recollected his person, and rising from his chair, took him by the hand, and tenderly inquired into the scenes of his life, and present circumstances. “I thank God,” answered the soldier, “that I have an opportunity of seeing my old commander once more; I have seen him in adversity, and now seeing him in glory, I can go home and die contented.” The next morning, he came again to take leave of the President, who gave him a guinea, which he accepted, he said, “merely as a token in remembrance of his commander,” and which he wore pendent on his bosom, declaring that nothing earthly should separate it from him.

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<sup>41</sup> For Mather the Jewish ritual “anticipates” the general (Christian) resurrection—when we are given a new body that reflects the judgment pronounced on our soul—as does his memoir of Phips.

As will be clear later on, this is not a case of simple borrowing. The question we must ask: what are Hawthorne's intentions in juxtaposing these two figures? At the very least, it adds another gear to the kaleidoscope. Weems relates several anecdotes about Washington among "playmates"; for example, the story told him (he says) by a former "playmate" about the time Washington skipped a silver dollar across the Potomac. Perhaps even the "figure" on the pine tree is to be mistaken once again; this time, rather than Mather's "stately cotton tree," it is the cherry tree, which Weems probably fabricated to demonstrate his hero's inability to tell a lie.

But behind this is a more unsettling agenda: Hawthorne wants us to make some sort of connection between the two men, a connection predicated on sin. For example, reading the above, we inevitably end up asking ourselves if Washington might have similarly taken advantage of his veterans. My own research is an example: scavenging Washington's spotless record, I came across the following incident. After the French and Indian War, veterans of the Ohio campaign, in which Washington served as commander of militia, were granted "bounties" of land (so they were called) by the Crown. The acreage varied according to status. Apparently Washington, not content with his 200,000 acres of choice bottomland along the Kanawha River in present-day West Virginia, used his connections to buy out the claims of his enlisted men for a song. Speculation like this was common then, particularly among the Virginia gentry, but it walked a fine line between good sense and cynicism. The "Kanawha Tracts," as they came to be known, evidently remained a sensitive subject for Washington. But is he guilty of those sins imputed in the story to Phips? This amounts to two questions really, neither of which is answered decisively. But the story effectively poses another question: Who are the



Mathers of today? And this question is rather easier to answer, for it is predicated on sins of *omission*. This *literary* typology is what I want to spend the rest of the chapter addressing. In essence, Hawthorne makes a revenant of *Mather*, almost by virtue of a simple complaint.<sup>42</sup>

So what is that complaint? As I noted earlier, perhaps the most striking thing about the story is how it chooses to ignore the big events in Mather, opting instead for a quotidian plot. Consider the overall structure. The first paragraph, or prologue as I have chosen to call it, is followed by an overview of Phips's public career. This paragraph, a mere 500 words, has a perfunctory feel, especially because it ends with the following statement, which in turn initiates the narrative: "And now, having arranged these preliminaries, we shall attempt to picture forth a day in Sir William's life, introducing no very remarkable events, for history supplies us with none such, convertible to our purpose." In addition to its general meaning, the word "remarkable" also had a technical meaning, among annalists, who used it to denote those events—wars, elections, decrees, festivals, and so forth—whose public significance made them worth recording. Perhaps for Hawthorne it is also a punning reference to Mather, who uses the word quite often, as when he repeatedly describes Phips as a man of "remarkable" accomplishments, or in the title to the biography he wrote of his father, *The Remarkables of Increase Mather*. Whatever the case, the statement's meaning would upon reflection have been clear to readers: big events, and the record is full of them, do not serve my purpose; they are like dross to me; I am interested in the little things which Mather, for whatever reason, did not think worth mentioning.

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<sup>42</sup> See Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Virginia, 1999), pp. 101-110.

## II: The Business of the Biographer

Such an agenda would have resonated with contemporary readers as a *creative* application of what I shall be calling Johnsonian biography, by which I mean a rhetoric, a set of tropes which emerged during the eighteenth century, and by the nineteenth had become commonplace in Anglo-American discussions of biography.

Since antiquity, history and biography had been separate, complementary fields of historical writing. History dealt with public affairs, exploring political morality; biography was a study of individual character, in circumstances alternately mundane and exalted. But during the eighteenth century, owing to new, sentimental notions of personhood and society—as well as a drastically expanding readership—biography’s classically “private” prerogative becomes a sort of marketing tool; using history as a foil, biographers will often point to its superior depth, universality, and utility.<sup>43</sup> Johnson’s two essays on biography, *Rambler 60* and *Idler 84*, were a locus classicus. His statement in *Rambler 60* about the importance of “domestick privacies” would become iconic. “The business of the biographer,” he writes,

is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue.

For Johnson “domestick privacies” are the marrow of biography not just because they reveal character but also because the common reader, to borrow one of Johnson’s signature concepts, can relate to and apply their lessons. It is here that we spend the great balance of our time; it is here that happiness is ultimately lost or won. Furthermore, since

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<sup>43</sup> On “sentiment” and the evolution of eighteenth-century British historiography, see Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, especially chapters four and five.

private experience remains more or less a constant across the spectrum of humanity, from China to Peru, “domestick privacies” give to biography a stock of “parallel circumstances and kindred images” which “enchain the heart with irresistible interest” and “diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition”; they make biography, writes Johnson evocatively, “leveled with the general surface of life.”

Throughout the essays, Johnson defines biography largely by comparing it with “history.” History, because it deals only with public transactions, is read by most with “indifference,” as if it were a kind of fairy tale. There is the sense that history provides technical knowledge for a few, biography moral knowledge for all. While “the examples and events of history press upon the mind with the weight of truth,” he admits in *Idler* 84,

when they are repositied in the memory, they are oftener employed for show than use, and rather diversify conversation than regulate life. Few are engaged in such scenes as give them opportunities of growing wiser by the downfall of statesmen or the defeat of generals. The stratagems of war and the intrigues of courts are read by far the greater part of mankind with the same indifference as the adventures of fabled heroes, or the revolutions of a fairy region. Between falsehood and useless truth there is little difference. As gold which he cannot spend will make no man rich, so knowledge which he cannot apply will make no man wise.

It is important to recognize that by “history” Johnson is clinging to an older, humanist concept, one which, if not entirely obsolete by midcentury, nevertheless does not exactly reflect current practice (innovators such as Hume and Ferguson were now accommodating unclassical, that is to say “private,” subject matter). Johnson’s use of the term is best understood, I think, as largely rhetorical; “history” is a foil against which to measure the advantages of biography for the common reader, the reader of novels (tellingly, in another *Rambler* essay Johnson uses the same binary to argue the superior “use” of the novel over romance). This *figurative* use of history must be kept in mind when approaching Johnson.

Johnson gave it classic form, but the rhetoric precedes him. The notion of history as a kind of painted spectacle or costume drama can be found as early as Dryden, who wrote in the preface to his landmark translation of Plutarch's *Lives*:

There [in history] you are conducted only into the rooms of state; here [in biography] you are led into the private lodgings of the hero: you see him in his undress, and are made familiar with his most private actions and conversations. You may behold a Scipio and a Laelius gathering cockle-shells on the shore; Augustus playing at bounding-stones with boys; and Agesilaus riding on a hobby-horse among his children. The pageantry of life is taken away; you feel the poor reasonable animal, as naked as ever nature made him; are made acquainted with his passions and his follies, and find the demi-god a man.

There is something inherently unflattering about the “familiar” point of view, a human subject minus “the pageantry of life.” Or, as Hugh Blair will express it, less colorfully than Dryden but with great authority, in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, which was used as a textbook in many American colleges during the first half of the nineteenth century, including Hawthorne's Bowdoin:

Biography affords the opportunity of seeing the characters and tempers, the virtues and failings of eminent men fully displayed; and admits them into a more thorough and intimate acquaintance with such persons, than history generally allows; for a writer of lives may descend, with propriety, to minute circumstances, and familiar incidents. It is expected of him, that he is to give the private, as well as the public life, of the person whose actions he records; nay, it is from private life, from familiar, domestic, and seemingly trivial occurrences, that we often receive most light into real character.

Blair will go on to praise Plutarch as among the “most human” of historical writers in that he is not “dazzled with the exploits of valour and ambition,” preferring instead to “display his great men to us in the more genial lights of retirement from public life.” Blair's notion of the biographer as a kind of unfazed reporter who is not “dazzled by military conquests or political exploits is another common theme. Here is James Mackintosh, the nineteenth-century Scottish whig historian, envisioning the biographer as

a kind of undeceived undeceiver who “follows the hero and the statesman” to the shade of social retirement, where he becomes “a man instead of an actor”:

The historian contemplates only the surface of human nature, adorned and disguised (as when actors perform brilliant parts before a great audience), in the midst of so many dazzling circumstances, that it is hard to estimate their intrinsic worth; and impossible, in a historical relation, to exhibit the secret springs of their conduct. The biographer endeavors to follow the hero and the statesman, from the field, the council, or the senate, to his private dwellings, where, in the midst of domestic ease, or of social pleasure, he throws aside the robe and the mask, becomes again a man instead of an actor, and, in spite of himself, often betrays those frailties and singularities, which are visible in the countenance and voice, the gesture and manner, of every one when he is not playing a part.<sup>44</sup>

One finds similar imagery back in Rousseau’s *Émile*, which Hawthorne was reading at approximately the time he was composing “Phips”:

History shows us actions rather than men, because she only seizes men at certain chosen times in full dress; she only portrays the statesman when he is prepared to be seen; she does not follow him to his home, to his study, among his family and his friends; she only shows him in state; it is his clothes rather than himself that she describes... I would prefer to begin the study of the human heart with reading biography; for then the man hides himself in vain, the biographer follows him everywhere; he never gives him a moment's grace nor any corner where he can escape the piercing eye of the spectator; and when he thinks he is concealing himself, then it is that the biographer shows him up most plainly.<sup>45</sup>

The heart, *la siége de la conscience*, a symbol of natural man unclothed and uncorrupted: one might say that the opposition of history and biography symbolizes for Rousseau the fundamental opposition of nature and society, respectively, *amour propre* and *amour soi-même*. Be that as it may, the heart is another common figure. Arthur Murphy, in the preface to his important edition of Tacitus (1831), calls the biographer an “anatomist of the heart”; William Godwin wrote that in biography “we descend into the most sacred

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<sup>44</sup> Mackintosh, *Life of Thomas More* (1830), in *Miscellaneous Works* (Philadelphia, 1847), pp. 43-4. See also [O.W.B. Peabody], “Sparks’s Life of Gouverneur Morris,” *North American Review* (April 1832), p. 465, which opens with direct reference to the Mackintosh passage cited.

<sup>45</sup> For Hawthorne’s borrowing of *Emile*, see Kesselring, p. 17.

recesses of private life, and trace the heart through all its mazes.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, in an American quarterly we find history compared to “masquerade”:

History gives us only the great outline of mortality; it shews men, as it were, in a masquerade, armed at all points for the combat of death; or decked and varnished for the senate or the court. She rarely shews to us the throbbings of the human heart, or levels individual character to common apprehension, or brings home the sentiments of the statesman or the warrior to the business and the bosoms of ordinary men.

But biography, he continues,

unfolds the human character, and lays open to view the inmost recesses of the human heart; because it follows the subject of its contemplation into the chamber and the closet, attends him in the bosom of his family, and sees him in all the undress of life, fulfilling the domestic charities and the dear relations of father, husband, son and brother. Biography introduces us to an intimacy of acquaintance with our fellow-men, and presents us with that strange medley of contradictions, that bundle of inconsistencies, which constitute the human animal.<sup>47</sup>

The above comes from a magazine published in 1806, but I could as easily have chosen something from the twenties or thirties.<sup>48</sup> And so it is fair to presume that the authorial persona projected by Hawthorne in our story—the biographer as anti-chemist, reporting from inside the “ventricles” of the heart—would have been appreciated by attentive readers as a *creative* application of the Johnsonian rhetoric. So perhaps would the *figurative* implication that Mather has depicted Phips in the manner of a “historian.” In a passage echoed in countless quarterly articles, Johnson laments how many a biographer “dwells most upon conspicuous events, lessens the familiarity of his tale to

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<sup>46</sup> Godwin, *Sketches of History* (1784), p. 25; Murphy, *Tacitus* (1831), p. xvi.

<sup>47</sup> *The Monthly Register, Magazine, and Review of the United States* 1 (Dec, 1806): 33.

<sup>48</sup> The following three examples come from within a year of “Phips”: “Loose Thoughts on Biography,” *American Monthly Magazine* (July 1829), probably written by Nathaniel Parker Willis, who edited the magazine; “The Life and Character of Henry Brougham,” *North American Review* (July 1831), p. 227 (authorship uncertain); and Theodore S. Fay, “The Life of Jacob Hays,” *New-York Mirror* (February 27, 1830), an excerpt from which I use as one of my epigraphs.

increase its dignity, shows his favourite at a distance, decorated and magnified like the ancient actors in their tragic dress, and endeavours to hide the man that he may produce a hero.” Besides characteristically mixing metaphors—notice how Johnson opposes terms conventionally associated with biography (“familiarity”) and history (“dignity”); comedy and tragedy; novelistic realism (“the man”) and romance (“hero” and “tale”)—he is suggesting a parallel between bad biography and history. In another influential passage, Johnson seems to be counting on the military overtones of “rank” and “uniform:

There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults or failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer from their detection; we therefore see the whole ranks of characters adorned with uniform panegyric, and not to be known from one another, but by extrinsic and casual circumstances.

Hawthorne echoes this when at the start of the second paragraph he dismisses Phips’s extraordinary achievements as the product of mere “casual circumstances.” Is this a simple coincidence, or does it indicate the direct influence of Johnson on this story. Either way, Johnson’s statement could serve as a motto for what Hawthorne, and many others in his day, seem to have thought of Mather as a biographer.

This brings us to the next point: for Hawthorne to impute such things to Mather would have been like preaching to the choir. During the 1820s Mather was a polarizing figure; for many he embodied some of the worst aspects of Puritanism; none would have considered him a model biographer.<sup>49</sup> Among the filiopietistic biographies that constitute

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<sup>49</sup> O.W.B. Peabody, in his biography of Cotton Mather for Jared Sparks’ *Library of American Biography* (1837), has the following to say of the *Pietas in Patriam*: “It is chiefly remarkable for its resolute silence in regard to all those peculiarities of habit, character, feeling, and domestic life, which his relation to the subject of the memoir gave him the best opportunity to know.” He calls the *Magnalia* “a chaotic collection...deformed by some enormous faults, and not to be trusted as a guide in matters of importance”; so full of “partialities and aversions” as to afford “little more than a view of [Mather’s] own prejudices.” Francis Bowen, who wrote the biography of Phips for Jared Sparks’ *Library of American Biography* (1837), gives the following prefatory assessment of his sources: “Cotton Mather wrote a life of Sir William Phips, which was first published in London in a separate form, and was afterwards included in the *Magnalia*. He was

the *Magnalia*, that of Phips, subtitled “Pietas in Patriam,” is perhaps the most tendentious. (This is not to detract from its literary merits or to suggest it was not written out of genuine admiration and friendship.) Mather’s political agenda is salient from start to finish. Particularly egregious is how he seeks to clarify his own involvement in the Salem witch trials. Also, the Mather family had recruited Phips as a kind of point man in their campaign to have the controversial new charter accepted; here was Mather straining to introduce this

most magnificent of misfits into his pantheon of Puritan founders.<sup>50</sup> While Hawthorne was no great proponent of Mather’s integrity as a historian, neither was it his purpose merely to beat a dead horse. His ultimate purpose, I suspect, is to remind readers that the present is little better, as if to say to the biographers of his day.

### III: The Mathers of today

That, in so many words—and minus the reference to Mather of course—had been the message of Samuel Stanhope Smith. In a series of reviews for the *Analectic Magazine*, an important quarterly out of Philadelphia which had been edited for a time by Washington Irving, Smith attacked *Delaplaine’s Repository of the Lives and Portraits of*

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intimately acquainted with the subject of his memoir; and the account would be entitled to full credit, did not his well-known credulity, and the partiality which he everywhere shows, throw some doubt on the more remarkable statements.” Bowen goes on to say that he will rely on the scraps provided by Hutchinson, since Mather’s “account of [Phips’s] public career is wholly unsatisfactory.” The *North American Review* characterizes the *PP* as “full of learning, quaintness, and credulity unlimited,” *NAR* 9 (Sept 1816): 306. See also *NAR* 17 (Jan 1818): 255-72; and Middleton, *John Eliot (LAB, 1837, vol. V, p. 5)*. On Mather as a divisive figure in early nineteenth-century New England historiography, see Buell, *New England Literary Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 226.

<sup>50</sup> In bookending part two of the *Magnalia* with biographies of Winthrop and Phips, Mather seems to be projecting the latter as a second “Nehemiah Americanus.” This would have been evident, I argue, to Mather’s contemporaries, who would have remembered his 1692 election sermon, “The Serviceable Man,” which makes thinly-veiled comparison of Phips to Nehemiah.



*Distinguished Americans*, the latest portrait-biography “pantheon” to appear in the United States, and with it the dismal state of American biography as he saw it.<sup>51</sup> The essays are worth our attention, not only because of distinct verbal overtones in our story, but also because the young Hawthorne read the *Analectic* during this time (we know this from one of the rare surviving letters from his teenage years).<sup>52</sup>

Smith, a professor of moral philosophy at Princeton, begins by reminding his readers of the difference between biography and history:

It is the common office of history and biography to detail the transactions of a person’s public life: it is the peculiar function of the latter to tell how a person comports himself with his friends in the private circle, and with his family by the fire-side. The same observation extends also to professional life. An account of one man’s success in the practice of physic, and of another in pleading at the bar, will by no means answer the chief end of biographical narrative.

“In biography” he continues,

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<sup>51</sup> For background on the *Repository*, see Gordon Marshall, “The Golden Age of Illustrated Biographies: Three Case Studies,” in *American Portrait Prints: Proceedings of the Tenth Annual American Print Conference* (University of Virginia Press, 1984.), pp. 29-82. On the concept of portrait pantheons, see Brandon Braeme Fortune, *Portraits of Virtue and Genius: Pantheons of Worthies and Public Portraiture in the Early American Republic, 1780-1820* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1987); and Christopher Lukasik, *Discerning Characters* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 41-5, discusses the tumultuous reception of the *Repository* within the context of what he calls the “paradox of early-republican biography.”

<sup>52</sup> Smith explains how figures who never received biographical treatment survive as “mere names,” while those who had appear “fresh in our imaginations”:

Servius Tullius, and Leonidas, are known to us as mere names, marking eras in history, but with the men, the personages, we are not at all acquainted. Numa and Lycurgus, on the contrary, really immortalized by Plutarch, appear to be among our familiar acquaintances; we seem to know their very persons, and the example of their lives is fresh in our imaginations.<sup>52</sup>

Later on he asks rhetorically: “Who would not rather survive to posterity in the ample detail and vivid colouring of biography, than in the cold outline and faint shading which history can but afford to give?” (*Analectic* 13 (1819), p. 153.) Compare with the “Phips” prologue. On Hawthorne’s reading of the *Analectic*, see “Hawthorne to Robert Manning” (August 15, 1820), *CE XV*: 128.

we look for something more, we look, in short, for the character of the man as it is exhibited under his own hand and seal, in his private conversation, in his familiar epistolary correspondence, in his wise and witty sayings, in his accidental rencontres with rather inconvenient trifles, a kind of mishaps to which we have given the name of anecdotes. It is in these insignificant affairs that a man drops the artificial gravity of a public character; and forgets the impropriety of showing himself in the nakedness of natural disposition. It is in these therefore that the biographer finds his appropriate occupation.<sup>53</sup>

The biographer reveals “in little and domestic things, what are the workings and conduct of a mind which has always been conversant with great and public transactions”; a famous doctor “amputating a leg,” then “stabbing a fly,” a great orator “speaking before the senate,” then “picking up a pebble” on the beach. He studiously observes “the same individual at one time compared with the same individual at another,” taking note of little inconsistencies, “and can tell you whether he is always identical, or is not occasionally *impar sibi*, unequal to himself.” Such a diverse moral landscape is biography’s great strength: its “office,” a noun Smith uses several times. The Latin *officium* was sometimes translated “business,” and so when Smith insists that it is the biographer’s “office” to “pursue the same individual from the public office to the private station,” he means, in effect, that the biographer does not keep store hours—his job begins when the subject’s day ends. Unfortunately, Delaplaine “is yet to learn what is the true and legitimate end of biographical literature”; does not discern “the true boundary between history and biography”; is “too much a historian for a biographer.” There is an abundance of public scenery, sufficient for “all the purposes of mere history,” but that is all:

In vain will you scan its pages for anecdotes or sayings, or familiar letters. You will see the general architectural outlines of character delineated with sufficient exactitude; but you will seek in vain for those little loop-holes through which you might view the furniture and organization of the inner man... the little circumstances which home and home only can afford... we are only permitted to

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<sup>53</sup> For Smith and his milieu, see Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton, 1989).

see Columbus in his ship of discovery, intrepidly encountering the dangers of the boisterous ocean, and of his no less boisterous comrades – so we seldom have a view of Dr. [Benjamin] Rush, except in the hospital of the sick, assiduously administering physic to his patients, sometimes with little mercy, and sometimes with little necessity: and hardly in a single instance are [Fisher] Ames, Hamilton, and Washington suffered to be seen, except in their public official capacities.

At times Smith seems mystified that the fundamentals of biography should need to be pointed out given how often they are repeated in the magazines. And yet in practice, Americans seem to have an endemic “prejudice” to view the founding fathers as if they had

no private character at all, possessing a godlike port of mind (*altitudo animi*) which never stoops to the level of vulgar humanity. It is almost inconceivable that Washington, for instance, should ever have relaxed the tension of his muscles into anything like a common laugh: indeed we have often heard it asserted that he never *smiled* but once in his life; and that even the beholders thought the event quite as prodigious as the superstitious Romans considered the celebrated laughter of the Etrurian ox.

“If ever anything idolatrous enters into our conceptions,” he continues:

it is when we contemplate the character of Washington: yet we are irreverent enough to believe that even Washington was a man like ourselves; and that had any pains been taken to watch or to remark on his conduct on Mount Vernon, we could now be told that he did little things just as little men do. The same remark is equally applicable to Ames and Hamilton; and of all the three we know that there is now extant a sufficient number of characteristic anecdotes and familiar letters to give us a pretty thorough investigation of their private characters.

Here, Smith is blaming not only the crop of “pantheons” like *Delaplaine’s*, but also John Marshall, the sitting Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, whose *Life of Washington* (1805-8) had been billed as Washington’s official biography.<sup>54</sup> Over the course of five volumes, Marshall chronicles Washington’s public career magisterially, but virtually ignores his private life, allotting it a few perfunctory remarks toward the end. There is nothing about Washington’s childhood; in fact, Washington does not even appear until

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<sup>54</sup> On the title page was the endorsement of Washington’s nephew Bushrod Washington, the current resident of Mount Vernon, a Justice on Marshall’s Court, and a successful slave trader.

volume two. While the work was admired for its veracity and reasoning, it was also heavily criticized, becoming something of a byword for “history” masquerading as biography.<sup>55</sup>

On the other extreme was Mason Locke Weems, who advertised his book as an alternative to Marshall. In the preface he uses the Johnsonian rhetoric to great effect. Why do we need another biography of Washington, he asks rhetorically, when so much has already been written about him?

Is not his history *already* known? Have not a thousand orators spread his fame abroad, bright as his own Potomac, when he reflects the morning sun, and flames like a sea of liquid gold, the wonder and delight of all the neighbouring shores? Yes, they have indeed spread his fame abroad – his fame as Generalissimo of the armies, and first President of the councils of his nation.

But “public character is no evidence of *true greatness*,” he continues,

for a public character is often an artificial one. At the head of an army or nation, where gold and glory are at stake, and where a man feels himself the *burning focus* of unnumbered eyes; he must be a paltry fellow indeed, who does not play his part pretty handsomely. Even the common passions of pride, avarice, or ambition, will put him up to his metal, and call forth his best and bravest doings. But let all this heat and blaze of public situation and incitement be withdrawn; let him be thrust back into the shade of private life, and you shall see how soon, like a forced plant robbed of its hot-bed, he will drop his false foliage and fruit, and stand forth confessed in native stickweed sterility and worthlessness.

As a matter of fact, a perfect scoundrel can master the forms of public life and pass as a good man:

There was Benedict Arnold, while strutting a brigadier general on the public stage, he could play you the great man, on a handsome scale; he out-marched Hannibal, and out-fought Burgoyne; he chaced the British like curlews, or cooped them up like chickens! and yet in the *private walks of life*, in

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<sup>55</sup> Washington Irving, breezily mixing metaphors, speaks of “learned commentators who have pinned themselves on the sleeve of Shakespeare’s immortality, and made the old bard, like General Washington, in General Washington’s life, a most diminutive figure in his own book” (from *Salmagundi*). John Adams privately dismissed it as “impious idolatry...a Mausoleum 100 feet square at the base and 200 feet high...as durable as the monuments of the Washington benevolent societies” (from “Adams to Thomas Jefferson” (July 3-5, 1813), quoted in Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford, 2009), p. 513).

Philadelphia, he could swindle rum from the commissary's stores, and, with the aid of loose women, retail it by the gill. And there was the great duke of Marlborough too – his public character, a thunderbolt in war. Britain's boast, and terror of the French. But his private character, what? Why a *swindler* to whom not *Arnold's self* could hold a candle; a perfect nondescript of baseness; a shaver of farthings from the poor sixpenny pay of his own brave soldiers.

But “behind the curtain” there is only “honest nature”:

It is not then in the glare of *public*, but in the shade of *private life*, that we are to look for the man. Private life is always *real* life. Behind the curtain, where the eyes of the million are not upon him, and where a man can have no motive but *inclination*, no excitement but *honest nature*, there he will always be sure to act *himself*; consequently, if he act greatly, he must be great indeed. Hence it has been justly said, that, “our “*private deeds*, if *noble*, are noblest of our lives.”

Weems's mission, essentially, was to take readers behind that curtain: to reveal the other “half” of Washington's greatness: Washington “the affectionate brother, the cheerful schoolboy, the diligent surveyor, the neat draftsman, the laborious farmer, the widow's husband, the orphan's father, the poor man's friend.”

There was a great hunger for what Weems had to offer. In twenty-five years, the *Life of Washington* went through twenty-nine editions. A generation of Americans, including Hawthorne, was weaned on it. It was one of those books Lincoln claimed to have read by firelight as a boy. Furthermore, until Jared Sparks published his monumental *Life and Writings of Washington* in 1834-8 after gaining access to Washington's papers, Weems was the only “private” alternative to Marshall. As Edward O'Neill noted in his pioneering study of American biography, plenty of Washington biographies were produced during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, but all of them derive from either Marshall or Weems.<sup>56</sup> Thus it is fair to say that when Hawthorne sat down to compose “Phips,” Marshall and Weems were like two master

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<sup>56</sup> Edward H. O'Neill, *History of American Biography, 1800-1935* (Pennsylvania, 1935), pp. 155-73.

narratives. It would be hard to imagine a starker contrast between two biographies of the same man: the stately, “public” Marshall and the homespun, “private” Weems—the Judge and the Parson. Meanwhile, issue of fact and fiction was also at stake, for it soon became common knowledge that Weems, although he *claimed* to have interviewed people who had known Washington in a private capacity, had simply made the bulk of it up, in some case applying to Washington stories he had heard about other local figures. Nor had he ever been rector at Mount Vernon, as he professed, since such a “parish” did not exist. But presumably Weems would have raised eyebrows even if he had not been openly discredited, for the simple reason that there was, except for scattered bits of anecdotal hearsay, a dearth of information about Washington’s private life. Indeed we can go so far as to say that for early nineteenth-century readers, Washington’s private life would have been virtually synonymous with the unknown. Readers would have grasped the irony behind John Neal’s remark, in his review of *Delaplaine’s Repository* for the *Analectic*, that Weems’s biography, though a “plain, unambitious duodecimo...to be found in almost every school-room...will be regarded by every lover of *true biography* with ten times more veneration than the pompous quarto pages which bear that title in the *Repository*.” Much of the irony centers on Neal’s use of the word “true,” since he was also on record denouncing Weems as “full of ridiculous exaggeration...not one word of which we believe.”<sup>57</sup> Perhaps Neal was thinking of Johnson’s remark, cited earlier, that “between falsehood and useless truth there is little difference.”

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<sup>57</sup> [Neal,] “Delaplaine’s Repository,” *Portico, a Repository of Science and Literature* 2:6 (Oct. 1816), pp. 285-6; Neal, “American Writers: No. V,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 27 (Feb. 1825), p. 203.

But let us return to our story. We should begin by noting that Hawthorne's agenda is eerily similar to that of Weems. Like Weems, he points to a deficit of private reporting amid a surplus of public reporting. (Indeed, Hawthorne's complaint against Mather is virtually identical to Weems's complaint against Marshall, thus engineering an unlikely analogy between Mather and Marshall.) Also like Weems, he remedies that deficit imaginatively, though to be sure he is more forthright than Weems about his own use of "fancy."<sup>58</sup>

We can venture such a schematic interpretation because it is from Weems that Hawthorne got the Newburyport anecdote, and others as we shall see. For example, there is an episode in Weems (and only in Weems) which bears striking resemblance to Hawthorne's rendition of the brawl with Captain Short. Weems relates how at a political gathering in Alexandria, Virginia, Washington, then a young militia colonel, and a certain Mr. Payne were canvassing for opponents in an upcoming election. Payne, thinking that he had been insulted by Washington, drew his cane and knocked his "antagonist" to the ground. Immediately two of Washington's lieutenants "whipped out their cold irons" to exact "dreadful vengeance," but the colonel—to everyone's great surprise, especially Payne's—prevented them from drawing, then declined to challenge Payne to a formal duel. Instead, he invited him to dinner, and the two went on to become lifelong friends. "In what history, ancient or modern, sacred or profane," writes Weems, "can you find...such an instance of that true heroic valor which combats malignant passions?"

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<sup>58</sup> Read the article by Hawthorne for the *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* (March, 1835), and you will see how well he knew Weems and his complaint against Marshall.

Washington had it in his power to have taken ample revenge; and cowards, who have no command over their passions, would have done it.”

There can be little doubt that Hawthorne was thinking of this episode when he depicts Phips “avenging” himself with his cane. Notice the close-up of his face as he “removes his periwig, wipes away the sweat of the encounter, and gradually composes himself, giving vent to a few oaths, like the subsiding ebullitions of a pot that has boiled over.” In “A Book of Autographs,” a sketch published in the 1844 *Democratic Review*, Hawthorne will give a tellingly mirror-opposite description of Washington: “his majestic face neither darkens nor gleams with any momentary ebullition of feeling.” Perhaps Hawthorne chose to render the incident involving Short because of all the fights mentioned by Hutchinson it is the only one involving a cane. This detail made it “convertible to” his “purpose”; that is to say, *transportable* to Washington’s context.

Indeed, it may be that by “convertible to our purpose” he also meant *reversible*, for that is what he does, not only with the Payne anecdote, but with others evidently taken from Weems. Compare the rather peculiar description of dinner, in which “grape-juice” is liberally consumed “after the cloth is removed,” with Weems’s remark that Washington routinely drank “two glasses of old Madeira after the cloth was removed...never to excess.” Weems also reports that at Mount Vernon Washington took pleasure in the fact that his meals were never cut short by military “alarms”—evidence that he was only reluctantly a soldier—while Hawthorne’s Phips, by contrast, seems positively to relish “the noise of drum and fife,” abruptly adjourning dinner to go supervise the militia. Finally, there is Hawthorne’s description of Phips accompanied by “two footmen, one an African slave of shining ebony, the other an English bond-servant,



the property of the governor for a number of years.” This detail, a deliberate anachronism on Hawthorne’s part (no sources mention Phips owning slaves<sup>59</sup>), puzzled me until I read Weems, who relates that Washington was rarely seen in public without two trusty manservants, one a dotting enslaved valet, the other a white indenture. (Weems describes Washington being waited on by “sons and daughters of Africa...in gay liveries and shining faces.”) While to us the mere reference to slavery seems incriminating, this detail would have disturbed even those contemporary readers who had complicated opinions on the subject, for it is one of many images Hawthorne uses throughout the story to present Phips as an enslaver (rather than the liberator Mather had portrayed). In fact, the pervasive kingly imagery, such as the comparison to Louis XIV, would have resonated with the old Jeffersonian rhetoric about how Washington fancied himself a monarch.<sup>60</sup>

Is Hawthorne suggesting that George Washington was a monster? I do not read it that way. What he seems to want, rather, is to remind readers that the only thing standing in the way of that *possibility* are Weems’s made-up stories, which can be inverted with the stroke of a pen (“convertible”). The anecdote of the madeira, for instance, could as easily have gone the other way. Hawthorne poses as Weems only to deliver a kind of *reductio ad absurdam*, a series of shocking reminders that behind the curtain—a persistent curtain, once we accept the analogy between Mather and Marshall—there is

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<sup>59</sup> Edward J. Gallagher makes this point; cf. “Hawthorne’s Sir William Phips,” *ESQ* 19 (1973): 213-19.

<sup>60</sup> In a letter dated February 18, 1830, Hawthorne wrote to a friend: “There is to be a great ball in town, the evening of Washington’s Birth-Day. You know my habits too well to suppose that I shall be there” (CE XV: 201). As I explain in another chapter, he probably composed much of “Phips” in March, 1830.

“none but imaginative authority,” to borrow a phrase from the preface to *Grandfather’s Chair*, Hawthorne’s history of New England for children, and, as I explain in another chapter, a work with a similar, if milder, burden to that of “Phips.”

Furthermore, Hawthorne seems to call into question Weems’s “private” perspective—and with it a key premise of the Johnsonian rhetoric— suggesting, in effect, that there is ultimately little difference between it and Marshall’s public perspective. For while the story begs to be read as an account of an ordinary “day in the life,” a kind of *cinema vérité*, it may also be read, I shall now explain, as a description of Election Day, the most ceremonious event in the Puritan calendar.

On Election Day, which happened every May, a new governor was elected by the council and formally installed, and a sermon, always on a public topic, was delivered by a chosen minister. It was an ornate spectacle with much fanfare, pomp and circumstance—a public holiday attended by every stratum of provincial society, including peripheral members such as sailors, frontiersmen, and Indians. The format did not change all that much between 1630 and 1775; here it is described in the *Massachusetts and Boston Weekly* for May 27, 1773:

At ten o’clock, the honorable his Majesty’s Council and a number of the principal gentlemen of the town waited upon his Excellency the Governor at the Province-House, to congratulate him on this anniversary, and having partook of a collation, they went with his Excellency in procession to the Town-House, preceded by the commission-Officers of the Troop of Guards, and of the Boston regiment of militia, of the Company of Artillery, and of the Grenadiers, all dressed in their uniforms, escorted by his Excellency’s Company of Cadets, who were under arms, commanded by the honorable Colonel Hancock, having an excellent band of music playing on their march... After divine service, the guns at Castle William and at the batteries in this town were fired; and the procession was to Concert hall, where an elegant entertainment was provided and a great number of gentlemen of rank dined with his Excellency. After dinner their Majesties’ healths, the Royal Family, and other loyal toasts were drank.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in A.W. Plumstead, *The Wall and the Garden* (Minnesota, 1968), p. 27.

The above itinerary, you will have noticed, maps onto our story like clockwork, investing the plot with a pervasive ambiguity. How fitting, then, that it should open with Phips standing on his doorstep. Is he about to take a morning walk, or is he preparing for the election procession? Have the ministers come on a casual “ramble” to discuss “business,” or to formally petition the new governor and escort him, as per Election-Day custom? Do the “many bows” and “angular politeness” come from natural awkwardness, or are they ceremonial gestures? Why are the ministers precisely three in number, thus forming a neat “junction” two-men wide and three deep? Why the parade language? And why of all streets King Street?

...the courteous dispute is concluded by a junction of the two parties, Sir William and Dr. Mather setting forth side by side, the two other clergymen bringing up the rear... As the dignitaries of church and state make their way beneath the overhanging houses, the lattices are thrust ajar, and you may discern, just in the boundaries of light and shade, the prim faces of the little puritan damsels, eyeing the magnificent governor, and envious of the bolder curiosity of the men... The governor struts onward flourishing his gold-headed cane.

Do the people gather spontaneously, out of natural curiosity, or to attend an organized spectacle? Perhaps there is a military escort or a band playing—we are not told. When Phips gives the man a coin, is it a random act or a “collation”? When the bystanders praise the act, are they speaking casually or liturgically? For there are echoes here of Mather’s 1692 election sermon, at precisely the time of day it would have been given.<sup>62</sup> All then retire at the stroke of noon for dinner.

What are we to make of this? Does Hawthorne mean to present the “private” as essentially a public construct? At the very least, another interpretative dimension is introduced. Determining whether this is an ordinary day or Election day is like reading

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<sup>62</sup> See note 26 above.

the image on the coin; this time, Hawthorne is toying with other synthetic categories. But I venture to read it also as a criticism of Weems, who promised to give us the other, private, unknown half, but used that only to reinforce the public consensus. He posed as Washington's true biographer, but really he is just another alchemist, like Mather, and perhaps more insidious. Hawthorne mimics Weems's ceremony of innocence, as it were. He sets us up for the discovery that what we are really witnessing is a public spectacle of power with layers of stylization. To have the *experience* of this discovery is to witness the private receding into public life. Thus, on one level the story may be read as a kind of parable on the elusiveness of the "private," as if to remind us that public and private, sunlight and shadow, onstage and off, seen and unseen, the realms of fact and imagination, are at best metaphors, names we give to the uncertain terrain on either side of a shifting horizon. Together they testify to the presence of a veil, and yet both are dimensions that complete the real. What is behind the veil, we imagine what we choose. Was George Washington really a pirate like Phips? Probably not, but it is possible. Indeed, with so many Mathers in our day, can a Phips be far behind? Ultimately something positive emerges from Hawthorne's skepticism, unsettling and encouraging, "strange and admirable."

## CHAPTER TWO

The Biographer and the Devil's Advocate:  
from "Sir William Phips" to *The House of the Seven Gables*

Patrick Henry, in the public mind of Virginia, was a *beau ideal* of all that was marvellous and grand in an orator and a patriot. His fame rested upon a tradition which represented only a great outline of an intellectual giant, touched with but a few misty shadowings of its proportions. There was really nothing tangible to the historian, by which he might draw an accurate picture of the man... The rich fruit, as it ripened, fell to earth ungarnered, and gave back its subtle essence to the atmosphere in which it had been engendered—posterity nothing the gainer from its prodigal affluence. An undefined remembrance of great power, only, survived.

—John Pendleton Kennedy, *Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt* (1849)

But it were folly to lay any stress on stories of this kind, which are sure to spring up around such an event as that now related, and which, as in the present case, sometimes prolong themselves for ages afterwards, like the toadstools that indicate where the fallen and buried trunk of a tree has long since mouldered into the earth.

—*The House of the Seven Gables*

## **I: The prologue and the law of chiaroscuro**

In one of the short biographies that make up *Delaplaine's Repository*, there is a prologue defending “the necessity of drawing largely upon the imagination to compensate the deficiencies of fact.”<sup>63</sup> The anonymous author compares the concept to painting: “fact and imagination” for the biographer are analogous to “light and shade” for the portrait painter; both, to make the representation “vigorous and lively,” must apply a modicum of “obscure tints.” Presumably he means modest brushstrokes, little details informed by an educated sense of probability. If so, the license is not dissimilar to that claimed by Elizabeth Hamilton in *Memoirs of Agrippina*. In the previous chapter I argued that Hawthorne’s request to “remedy” Mather’s “defects” follows the Hamiltonian convention. However, after comparing the story with Mather’s portrayal of Phips in the biography and election sermon, we noticed bold imaginative revisions, in some cases nightmare inversions. Apart from a few minor, and ultimately trivial, details—for example, the image of the governor leading the militia in prayer, for which John Dunton’s antiquarian “authority” is cited—imagination hardly seems to have been tethered to a criterion of scholarly probability. Thus, I am inclined to regard the appeal to Hamiltonian convention as something of a sop, Hawthorne’s ulterior purpose being to present a radical alternative to Mather’s portrait of Phips, a kind of shadowy counterpart. Quite literally in some cases. For example, the “African slave of shining ebony”: no source mentions Phips owning a slave; Hawthorne supplies it, I suspect, in order to counteract Mather’s portrayal of Phips as a great liberator. The detail may not be true, but neither is it demonstrably false; while not probable, it remains possible. Indeed if

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<sup>63</sup> [Anonymous,] “Francis Hopkinson,” *Delaplaine's Repository of the Lives and Portraits of Distinguished Americans* (Philadelphia, 1818), vol. II, pp. 125-6.

reality is predicated on a measure of shadow as well as light, it may ultimately point in the direction of the real.

That, in so many words, is the argument the story makes for its own reality. It is premised on what we might call the law of chiaroscuro, which stipulates that since light *and* shadow complete the real, no reasonable representation lacks a measure of both. Unsurprisingly, chiaroscuro was a common figure in biography to denote the proper balance of virtue and vice, public and private. There is no shortage of examples. Last chapter we saw how Parson Weems, reacting to Marshall's exclusively *public* portrayal of Washington, prefaced his own biography by declaring: "It is not in the glare of public, but in the shade of private life, that we are to look for the man. Private life is always real life." Another example may be found near the beginning of the *Life of Johnson*, where Boswell, to preempt charges of hagiography from readers who viewed him as Johnson's acolyte, announces: "I profess to write, not his panegyric, which must be all praise, but his Life; which, great and good as he was, must not be supposed to be entirely perfect...[for] in every picture there must be shade as well as light." This story seems to run on a similar kind of rationale. Hawthorne is counting on our sense that Mather's portrait of Phips is unreal by virtue of its shadowless, and that by supplying shadows he is lending it some reality.

To appreciate all of this we must first recognize that Hawthorne seems to have meant the story to be read in conjunction with Mather for a kind of net chiaroscuro effect. Such a design would explain a number of his additions and departures, from the detail of the slave to the quotidian retelling of Mather's election sermon (shade being an ancient figure for the nonpublic, e.g. obscurity). Both are exercises in what we might call

shadowy counterpoint. Another example occurs in the scene where Phips, dressed in a powdered white periwig, recognizes a former childhood playmate who is wearing “a wig made of the long and straight black hair of his slain savage enemies.” The black wig symbolizes frontier obscurity (besides a number of other dark things). The stranger wearing it embodies what Phips used to be, was on track to become were it not for a few “casual” interventions, perhaps still *is* under the powdered white wig that he is presently wearing. Thus, the vivid contrast between the two wigs hints at a more abstract chiaroscuro: the interpenetration of past and present. Indeed the black wig is an apt metaphor for the story as a whole: through it Hawthorne challenges Mather’s literary campaign to dress Phips in a white wig, so to speak. The two wigs in effect are like the two narratives squaring off, the black one representing Hawthorne’s attempt to supply the elements Mather seems to have omitted—a private life, a criminal life, a past life—elements which convention has chosen to call “shadowy” because they are invisible (or have been made so) and consequently must be imagined.

Another way in which Hawthorne challenges Mather is by inflecting, sometimes with a single word or ambiguous turn of phrase, various counter-narratives. Some of these counter-narratives survive in writing, others do not and may have been legends Hawthorne knew personally. It is worth our time to get some sense of how this works. The analysis is challenging because it requires, in addition to textual and historical sensitivity, an ear for what has been lost to history. But the reward is to appreciate a subtle polyphony that becomes more pronounced with successive readings.

Probably the best place to begin is the passage dealing with the Salem witch trials. They happened under Phips’s watch as governor, but how invested was he? The precise



nature of his role has been debated ever since. Mather portrayed it as an extension of his newfound piety; while Robert Calef, Mather's bitter critic, insinuated that Phips was a hypocrite who had consulted with fortune-tellers but then oversaw the execution of those convicted of similar crimes. For Thomas Hutchinson, writing in the mid-eighteenth century, Phips was well intentioned but incompetent.<sup>64</sup> In Hawthorne's time the general consensus seems to have been that the Mathers took advantage of Phips, who was naïve or distracted, and who at any rate owed his position to them.<sup>65</sup> Recent historians are divided as to the question of how present Phips actually was at the trials.<sup>66</sup> It is certain that during the fateful summer of 1692 he was absent for extended periods in Maine, where he was supervising the construction of a fort at Pemaquid meant to protect the northeastern frontier against the Indians and French, and perhaps also his own vast holdings there.

A basic timeline is necessary if we are to appreciate Hawthorne's nuanced treatment of this topic. When Phips arrived with the charter in the middle of May 1692, the local jails were overflowing with people awaiting trial for witchcraft. After first meeting with his council he decided to appoint an emergency Court of Oyer and Terminer ("hear and determine"), which met for the first time in early June, and a week later oversaw its first execution. At this point it adjourned for twenty days, presumably to allow time for an ad hoc committee of local ministers to gather and to present an opinion on spectral evidence, the court's heavy use of which seems to have become a

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<sup>64</sup> Hutchinson, *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, vol. II, p. 75.

<sup>65</sup> See Francis Bowen, *Library of American Biography*, first series, vol. VII (Boston, 1837), p. 81.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (Knopf, 2002), pp. 237-8, 390-1n.

source of growing public concern. In the middle of June this committee released a written statement which was composed by Cotton Mather. In the first two articles Mather commends the judges for their “sedulous and assiduous endeavors” in “detecting the abominable witchcrafts which have been committed in this country,” and expresses hope that the “discovery of those mysterious and mischievous wickednesses may be perfected.” However the next ten articles counsel “a very critical and exquisite caution” in the use of spectral evidence; citing a number of distinguished authorities on the subject, Mather warns that “by too much credulity for things received only upon the Devil’s authority, a door [may be] opened for a long train of miserable consequences,” because “Satan may, with God’s permission, appear in the shape of an innocent, yea, and a virtuous man.” But the final article effectively nullifies all of that: “Nevertheless,” Mather closes with breathtaking resoluteness, “we cannot but humbly recommend unto the government, the speedy and vigorous prosecution of such as have rendered themselves obnoxious, according to the direction given in the laws of God, and the wholesome statutes of the English nation, for the detections of witchcrafts.”<sup>67</sup> Mather, knowing full well that English legal precedent as well as scripture could pretty easily be interpreted in such a way as to sanction the use of spectral evidence, was giving the court a green light to proceed. And so it did. By the end of September nineteen people had been executed, and many more convicted, on the basis of spectral evidence. Phips finally dissolved the court in early October when, returning from his latest sojourn in Maine, he discovered that his own wife was now among the accused.

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<sup>67</sup> In the Phips biography Mather cites the entire document *except for* the three controversial articles! *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford: 1853), vol. I, p. 221.

Hawthorne chooses to imagine the moment at which the Mather report is delivered to Phips:

As Sir William comes down the steps, he is met by three elderly gentlemen in black, grave and solemn as three tombstones on a ramble from the burying ground. These are ministers of the town, among whom we recognize Dr. Increase Mather, the late provincial agent at the English court, the author of the present governor's appointment, and the right arm of his administration. Here follow many bows and a deal of angular politeness on both sides. Sir William professes his anxiety to re-enter the house and give audience to the reverend gentlemen; they, on the other hand, cannot think of interrupting his walk; and the courteous dispute is concluded by a junction of the parties, Sir William and Dr. Mather setting forth side by side, the two other clergymen forming the center of the column, and the black and white footmen bringing up the rear. The business in hand relates to the dealings of Satan in the town of Salem. Upon this subject, the principal ministers of the province have been consulted; and these three eminent persons are their deputies, commissioned to express a doubtful opinion, implying, upon the whole, an exhortation to speedy and vigorous measures against the accused. To such counsels Sir William, bred in the forest and on the ocean, and tinctured with the superstition of both, is well inclined to listen.

In referring to Increase Mather as the “author” of Phips’s appointment and the “right arm of his administration,” Hawthorne seems to be nodding to the contemporary consensus that Phips was the Mathers’ pawn; while in capturing the duplicitous tenor of the report, he is apparently channeling Calef, who derided the report as “perfectly ambidexter,” and who called out Mather for omitting the controversial final clause from his otherwise complete and verbatim citation of the report in the Phips biography (notice that Hawthorne works in a paraphrase of the final clause).<sup>68</sup> As for the depiction of Phips’s response to the report, one imagines a primitive gleam in the governor’s eye as he catches its drift. Here we detect variation on a familiar theme: Phips, superstitious and prone to violence, has not transcended his background, has not really changed, despite Mather’s claims to the contrary.

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (London: 1700), pp. 302-3.

At the same time, and more intriguingly, Hawthorne may be hinting at rather specific allegations about Phips and the occult. Treasure hunting was associated with witchcraft in the early-modern folk imagination, and there seems to have been a rumor going around that Phips met with a fortune-teller before finding the wreck, judging by the following passage in Mather's biography:

I cannot but relate a wonderful experience of Sir William Phips, by the relation whereof something of an *antidote* may be given against a *poison* which the diabolical *figure-flingers* and *fortune-tellers* that swarm all the world over may insinuate into the minds of men. Long before Mr. Phips came to be Sir William, while he sojourned in London, there came into his lodging an old *astrologer*, living in the neighbourhood; who, making some *observation* of him, though he had small or no *conversation* with him, did (howbeit by him wholly undesired) one day send him a paper, wherein he had, with the pretences of a rule in astrology for each article, distinctly noted the most material passages that were to befall this our Phips in the remaining part of his life...<sup>69</sup>

On this slip of paper was noted, Mather continues, that at the age of thirty-seven Phips would “find a mighty treasure”; that at forty-one he would be sent by “his King” on a great “trust beyond the sea,” i.e., as governor; and that subsequently he would “hit upon a vastly richer matter.” Phips, characteristically, treated this document “with a most pious neglect,” consigning it to the bottom of a trunk, where it sat for many years until one day his wife discovered it:

Mr. Phips received this undesired paper with trouble and with contempt, and threw it by among certain loose papers in the bottom of a trunk, where his lady some years after accidentally lit upon it. His lady with admiration saw, step after step, very much of it accomplished; but when she heard from England that Sir William was coming over with a commission to be governour of New-England, in that very year of his life which the paper specified, she was afraid of letting it lye any longer in the house, but cast it in the *fire*.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Magnalia*, II, p. 222.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

Mather seems to have carefully prepared this story, presumably in order to put old rumors to bed. The rumors themselves are beyond our reach, but reading between the lines of Calef can perhaps give us some idea of their tenor. Calef wryly observes that the slip of paper must have meant something to Phips, since he kept it around for so long; that Phips paid the man 200 pounds sterling (a considerable sum of money then) after he found the treasure. He notes the inordinate “confidence” with which Phips predicted his future success to his wife. He also compares Phips to King Saul, in this case seeing a witch *before* he put witches to death:

King Saul in destroying the witches out of Israel is thought by many to have slain the Gibeonites wrongfully under that notion; yet went after this to a witch to know his fortune. For his wrongfully destroying the Gibeonites (besides the judgments of God upon the land) his sons were hanged; and for his going to the witch, himself was cut off. Our Sir William Phips did not do this; but, as appears by this book, had first his fortune told him, (by such as the author counts no better) and though he put it off (to his pastor, who he knew approved not thereof) as if it were brought to him in writing, without his seeking, etc., yet by his bringing it so far, and safe keeping it so many years, it appears he made some account of it; for which he gave the writer, after he had found the wreck, as a reward, more than two hundred pounds. His telling his wife that he should be a commander, should have a brick house in Green-lane, etc., might be in confidence of some such prediction; and that he could foretel to him that he should be governor of New-England, was probably such an one, the scriptures not having revealed it. Such predictions would have been counted, at Salem, pregnant proofs of witchcraft, and much better than what were against several that suffered there.<sup>71</sup>

Who knows what really happened; or, more to the point, what stories were going around.

The best that we can do is read between the lines of primary sources, relying here and

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<sup>71</sup> Calef, *More Wonders*, pp. 300-1. Here Calef is mocking Mather, who in the Phips biography, and several years after the fact, voices his concern that spectral evidence wrongly applied might

cause the *righteous to perish with the wicked*, and procure the blood-shed of persons like the Gibeonites, whom some learned men suppose to be under a false pretence of witchcraft, by Saul exterminated. (*Magnalia* II: 210)

On the Gibeonites, see appendix three.

there on the work of more recent historians who have devoted their careers to studying the larger body of material, extra-literary as well as literary. Sometimes these paths converge. For example, Mather does not say that Mrs. Phips burned the paper because she feared being accused of witchcraft, but presumably that is what happened, for the eve of Phips's arrival was just when the witch hysteria was moving into high gear. Indeed the paper, or some floating story about the Phipses consulting with fortune-tellers, may have been why she herself would eventually be accused. Whatever the case, several recent historians have speculated that one reason Phips took such a hard line during the Salem witch trials was because he feared incrimination if he did not.<sup>72</sup> Was Hawthorne familiar with some such legend? His phrasing is peculiar and seems to have been designed to allow: sensing himself "tinctured," that is to say, *stigmatized* in the public eye, Phips is "well-inclined to listen" to Mather's counsel. If so it is an example of Hawthorne's ability to marshal alternative worlds and have them turn on a single word. Of course "tinctured" can also mean simply "having a certain mental or moral quality or character," a usage which seems to have derived from alchemy and would have appealed to Hawthorne given Mather's whole alchemist-as-biographer conceit.<sup>73</sup>

In support of that notion, there seems to be a similar kind of semantic layering to the phrase "casual circumstances." Near the beginning of the story we are told, in effect, that Phips's wealth was predicated on "casual circumstances":

The contrast between the commencement and close of his life was the effect of casual circumstances. During a considerable time, he was a mariner, at a period when there was much license on the high-seas. After attaining to some rank in the English navy, he heard of an ancient Spanish wreck off the coast of

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. Norton, pp. 279-80.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. OED tincture (v) 2b; for Mather on alchemy see my discussion in the previous chapter.

Hispaniola, of such mighty value, that, according to the stories of the day, the sunken gold might be seen to glisten, and the diamonds to flash, as the triumphant billows tossed about their spoil. These treasures of the deep (by the aid of certain noblemen who claimed the lion's share) Sir William Phips sought for, and recovered, and was sufficiently enriched, even after an honest settlement with the partners of his adventure. That the land might give him honor, as the sea had given him wealth, he received knighthood from King James. Returning to New England, he professed repentance of his sins (of which, from the nature both of his early and more recent life, there could scarce fail to be some slight accumulation), was baptized, and, on the accession of the Prince of Orange to the throne, became the first governor under the second charter.

For “casual,” a notoriously nebulous adjective and a perennial favorite of bureaucrats, *OED* lists a number of basic usages, three of which may apply here. The first—“relating to or denoting properties which are not essential to something’s nature...external, superficial”—would seem to reflect what we said last chapter about Hawthorne’s pointed, Johnsonian lack of interest in Mather’s purple scenery, and in fact his diction may well have been informed by a passage in *Rambler* 60:

There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults or failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their detection; we therefore see whole ranks of characters adorned with uniform panegyric, and not to be known from one another, but by extrinsic and casual circumstances [emphasis added].

Another meaning of casual is: “subject to, depending on, or produced by chance; accidental, fortuitous.” If Hawthorne meant to suggest essentially that Phips got lucky, he would have been entering an ongoing historiographical conversation. Phips’s success in finding a treasure that had eluded whole governments beggared belief and compelled historians to take a position on the matter. Mather attributed his success to the confluence of personal merit and divine purpose.<sup>74</sup> Calef, as we have seen, hinted at sorcery. Thomas Hutchinson, writing in the mid-eighteenth century, was skeptical of

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<sup>74</sup> See Jennifer J. Baker’s analysis of Mather’s portrayal of Phips as a “projector,” in *Securing the Commonwealth: Debt, Speculation, and Writing in the Making of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 205), pp. 33-42.

both Calef and Mather and assigned it to mere luck. Hutchinson's judgment would be echoed in the nineteenth century by Francis Bowen, one of Hawthorne's contemporaries who wrote a new biography of Phips for Jared Sparks's *Library of American Biography*, as well as other numerous compilers who, like Bowen himself, cribbed from Hutchinson. In sum, if we take "casual circumstances" to mean luck, then it appears that Hawthorne, too, is echoing Hutchinson's judgment.<sup>75</sup>

But there is yet another meaning of "casual" that Hawthorne may have intended to evoke: "untoward; causing injury or death." None of the historians attribute Phips's success to untoward circumstances. Yet there may be a clue in James Sullivan's *History of Maine* (1793), a work which Hawthorne knew quite well.<sup>76</sup> Sullivan, openly disagreeing with Hutchinson's judgment, insists that Phips's success was the result of personal merit. However, he notes that it was not uncommon in those "barbarous" times for captors to extort information about hidden treasure from pirates who were facing execution and were under "the deluded hope of gaining pardon."<sup>77</sup> Sullivan vigorously denies that Phips learned the location of the shipwreck in such a way, but in doing so he may be disclosing something, for he seems to be countering some narrative, which must have been a *legendary* narrative, since no narrative of like tenor survives in writing as far

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<sup>75</sup> Hutchinson, *History*, vol. I, pp. 396-7. Compare William Allen, *An American Biographical and Historical Dictionary, Containing an Account of the Lives, Characters, and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons in North America from its First Discovery to the Present Time* (Cambridge, 1809). Allen was one of Hawthorne's professors at Bowdoin, and Hawthorne the *Dictionary* in the fall of 1830 (see Kesselring).

<sup>76</sup> Hawthorne mentions Sullivan's *History* in a note to "The Great Carbuncle," a story published in 1837. In "Phips" there are clear echoes of Sullivan's assessment of the "feeble" Maine governments (p. 77) and "want" of a regular clergy (p. 79).

<sup>77</sup> Sullivan, *History of Maine*, pp. 76-7.



as I have been able to trace. Hawthorne grew up summering at his uncle's country home on the shores of Lake Sebago, Maine, and would later attend Bowdoin College, just up the Kennebec River from Phips's birthplace, where one pictures him scavenging material for his first collection of tales about "witchcraft and the sea." This was only twenty-odd years after Sullivan wrote his history. Thus, if there *was* some kind of legend known to Sullivan, there is a good chance that Hawthorne also knew it. Adding to my suspicion is the language of the above passage. On the way to a cryptic remark about "accumulation" of sins, as if that were bags of gold, Hawthorne is provocatively vague about the precise "nature" of Phips's "recent life." He must have known that the word "mariner" can signify any number of occupations. More importantly, what rank did Phips actually hold when he "heard" about the wreck? The phrase "some rank in the English navy" is of little help—it is unclear whether we are to take "some" as meaning "considerable" or simply as an indefinite pronoun—and I suspect deliberately so. This was the golden age of Atlantic piracy, as Hawthorne seems to want to remind us ("a period of much license on the high seas"), when a royal commission was often the only thing that distinguished a buccaneer from a pirate.

Now, did Hawthorne know the legend that Sullivan seems to be addressing, and if so does he mean to insinuate it here? Or did he, reading Sullivan, merely sense the ghost of one? Whatever the case, clearly he has worked to create an aura of ambiguity, provoking us to revisit the history for signs of equivocation. It is a reading process he seems to train us in, one which walks a fine line between a hermeneutics of suspicion and of paranoia, and yet *may* light up an alternative, shadowy world otherwise lost to us. At the end we never get hard facts, only a trail of smoke, fossilized conjecture, ways in

which the human imagination has worked to address the “casual” omissions of courtly scribes by telling dark stories, for what is legend but the communal embodiment of imagination?

Hawthorne seems to have understood this, for he begins the prologue by asserting that “fireside legends” are critical for the picture to reach human proportion, and thus making it clear that they are a vital part of the imaginative “methods” he will use to improve on Mather:

Few of the personages of past times (except such as have gained renown in fireside legends as well as in written history) are anything more than mere names to their successors. They seldom stand up in our imaginations like men. The knowledge communicated by the historian and biographer is analogous to that which we acquire of a country by the map – minute, perhaps, and accurate, and available for all necessary purposes, but cold and naked, and wholly destitute of the mimic charm produced by landscape-painting. These defects are partly remediable, and even without an absolute violation of literal truth, although by methods rightfully interdicted to professors of biographical exactness. A license must be assumed in brightening the materials which time has rusted, and in tracing out half-obliterated inscriptions on the columns of antiquity: Fancy must throw her reviving light on the faded incidents that indicate character, whence a ray will be reflected, *more or less vividly*, on the person to be described [emphasis added].

In other words, the poet’s imaginative grappling with his material evokes the subject “more or less vividly.” And what better way to characterize this revisionary process?<sup>78</sup> Depending on context, the adjective “vivid” can denote a representation that is lifelike (Latin *vividus*), but it can also denote fantasy (a vivid imagination), or sometimes simply

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<sup>78</sup> Recall that Mather in his own prologue had used a form of this word to denote the work of his “warm affections” as biographer:

...when we do in a *book*, as in a *glass*, reserve the history of our departed friends; and by bringing our *warm affections* unto such an history, we revive, as it were, out of their *ashes*, the true *shape* of those friends, and bring to a fresh view what was memorable and imitable in them [emphasis added].

Refer to the previous chapter for my argument that Hawthorne designed his prologue as an imitation of Mather’s.

an enhanced contrast of dark and light (as anyone who has adjusted the settings on a modern television knows, greater vividness can make the picture seem distorted). All of this lends itself to Hawthorne's purpose, which is to describe the flickering byproduct of his "fancy" as it works to enshadow the material. By itself the story is like pure shadow, a reel of grotesque images, probably no more viable than Mather's. But as a kind of dark filter through which Mather is to be read—not unlike a photographic negative—a plenary image is generated whose unsettling claim to veracity rests on the instinctive realization that Hawthorne's dystopian pictures, though drawn from the fringes of possibility, must be an improvement on Mather's grotesquely shadowless original.

That is why Hawthorne can stand to compare the dark work of his imagination to light. While the conceit makes a certain amount of literal sense—imagination is like ambient lighting, to "brighten" the material is to allow shadows of various shapes to form—on the figurative level he wants to suggest the paradox that imagination can be a means to enlightenment, its shadows bringing us closer to the truth. The analogy with landscape painting—the story is to Mather what a landscape painting is to a map—is there to help us understand this. A landscape painting is not necessarily any truer than a map—indeed as Hawthorne certainly knew, landscapes in the Claudian tradition were often heterocosms of fantasy and allegory—but at least there are shadows in the picture. And that I think is how he wants us to appreciate the story: not reality itself but a vehicle for the real. Consider the black wig: like the white wig it is only a copy, a piece of artifice, a fiction in the radical sense of the word, even a disguise. The man under the wig, the *original* Sir William, is beyond our power of recovery. A "more or less vivid"

representation, however, is not, but only if we are bold enough to adopt “methods rightfully interdicted to professors of biographical exactness.”

## **II: Sparks against Wirt**

Now, there is good reason to believe that Hawthorne had a specific person in mind here: Jared Sparks, a contemporary historian who given his philosophy and reputation could aptly be called the apostle of “biographical exactness.” Indeed Hawthorne may well have conceived the story as a sort of response to a particular article by Sparks, in the 1819 *North American Review*, attacking William Wirt’s *Sketches of the Life of Patrick Henry*. Hawthorne was not quite fifteen when the article appeared (although already a reader of at least one leading American quarterly), but judging by echoes of it in subsequent writings, he seems to have known it quite well. Before getting to all of that, however, it is necessary to say something about the article and its milieu, which was, after all, very much the young Hawthorne’s milieu as well.

How can a “successor,” to borrow a word from the first sentence of Hawthorne’s prologue, write biography that is both interesting *and* true? It was a problem that beset second-generation American biographers, that is to say, those who had little memory of the Revolutionary era and had to take their information second-hand. Here again our trail goes back to Samuel Johnson, because it seems to have been in Johnson’s terms that both Wirt and Sparks, if not Hawthorne as well, understood the problem. Our discussion will limit itself to *Rambler* 60, Johnson’s famous essay on biography, in particular those passages cited by Boswell in the preface to his *Life of Johnson*, which is where the majority of Johnson’s nineteenth-century readers would have encountered them. Recall

from the previous chapter how Johnson regarded quotidian circumstances as the heart and soul of biography. It was “the business of the biographer,” he wrote,

often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue.

Not only did these situations reveal character, but the common reader could relate to them and apply their lessons. Johnson continues:

There are many invisible circumstances, which, whether we read as inquirers after natural or moral knowledge, whether we intend to enlarge our science or increase our virtue, are more important than public occurrences.

Such “invisible circumstances” endowed biography with a “use” that formal history, which dealt only with public transactions, generally lacked, but they also made biography a difficult and even fraught genre, for they required a condition of intimacy that naturally challenged objectivity. “If the biographer writes from personal knowledge,” Johnson explains,

and makes haste to gratify the public curiosity, there is danger lest his interest, his fear, his gratitude, or his tenderness overpower his fidelity, and tempt him to conceal, if not to invent. There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults or failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their detection; we therefore see whole ranks of characters adorned with uniform panegyrick, and not to be known from one another, but by extrinsic and casual circumstances.

As for the biographer who lacked “personal knowledge,” he had, or could at least “hope for,” objectivity, but his problem was veracity, a problem which compounded over time, for the knowledge he sought normally survived by word of mouth only, or rather did *not* survive: each time the story was told it lost a portion of its truth or became something else entirely. Johnson describes a process akin to what takes place in the children’s game of telephone except without the benefit of being able to recover and compare the “original” message. “The incidents which give excellence to biography,” he writes,

are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition. We know how few can portray a living acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable particularities, and the grosser features of his mind; and it may be easily imagined how much of this little knowledge may be lost in imparting it, and how soon a succession of copies will lose all resemblance to the original.<sup>79</sup>

“Volatile,” from the Latin root meaning “fly” (as in Virgil’s classic *fama volat*), suggests a kind of explosive, rarified mutability. “Evanescent” material is fragile, elusive, time-sensitive. Johnson’s characteristically nuanced diction evokes the various barriers and entanglements that for him made biography a thorny and, for the non-contemporary at least, virtually promethean task.

William Wirt, a young Virginia lawyer who already enjoyed a measure of fame for *Letters of the British Spy*, a series of deeply erudite essays on oratory, seems to have been well aware of Johnson’s strictures when in 1805 he sat down to write his biography

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<sup>79</sup> Twice-told tales. Hawthorne appears to open “Howe’s Masquerade” with an iteration of the Johnson passage:

Being of a sociable aspect, I ventured to address him with a remark, calculated to draw forth his historical reminiscences, if any such were in his mind; and it gratified me to discover, that, between memory and tradition, the old gentleman was really possessed of some very pleasant gossip about the Province-House. The portion of his talk which chiefly interested me, was the outline of the following legend. He professed to have received it, at one or two removes, from an eye-witness; but this derivation, together with the lapse of time, must have afforded opportunities for many variations of the narrative; so that, despairing of literal or absolute truth, I have not scrupled to make such further changes as seemed conducive to the reader’s profit or delight.

This story is part of a sequence entitled *Legends of the Province-House*, in which a first-person narrator visits the titular building, once the center of colonial government but now a shabby boarding house, and curates for us some of the stories told him by the old men who live there. In terms of organization *Legends* is not unlike *The House of the Seven Gables*. There we find a more nuanced iteration of the Johnson passage:

...ancient superstitions, after being steeped in human hearts, and embodied in human breath, and passing from lip to ear in manifold repetition, through a series of generations, become imbued with an effect of homely truth [emphasis added]. The smoke of the domestic hearth has scented them, through and through. By long transmission among household facts, they grow to look like them, and have such a familiar way of making themselves at home, that their influence is usually greater than we suspect.

of Patrick Henry. In an early draft he acknowledged that without Boswell's "fireside confidence" it would be difficult "to charge the narrative with those private and domestic incidents...which unfold the whole character...and constitute the principal charm of biography."<sup>80</sup> Hoping to compensate, he decided to send letters to "every corner" of Virginia asking "respectable gentleman" who *had* known Henry personally to "sketch, as minutely as possible...even to the color of his eyes, a portrait of his person, attitudes, gestures, manners." He reminded them all, in good Johnsonian fashion, that "the most interesting part of biography [cannot] be learnt from any archives or records."<sup>81</sup> It took him a long time, twelve years, to complete the biography, in part because he had to juggle "office duties," but principally because the information he wanted was so hard to come by, and because he often had to square conflicting testimony. When the book finally did come out in 1817, Wirt's frustration is evident in the preface. There is a tone of humility throughout. He admits that he lacked "personal knowledge" of Henry (notice Johnson's exact phrase). "Much of what was known," he laments, "had perished before the author commenced his researches"; while whatever survives "lies in unsuspected sources, or with persons unwilling, for some reason or other, to communicate their information." He begs readers to consider the biography "only as so many detached *sketches*."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Cited in Casper, *Constructing American Lives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 52-3.

<sup>81</sup> Wirt to Judge Tucker (Jan. 31, 1805), in John Pendleton Kennedy, *Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt, Attorney-General of the United States* (Philadelphia 1849), I: 122-3; Wirt to Thomas Jefferson (Jan. 18, 1810), in Kennedy, I: 251-2.

<sup>82</sup> Wirt, "Preface," *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* (Richmond, 1817), pp. v-xvi.

To put it that way was something of an understatement, for many of the key passages, including Henry's famous "liberty or death" speech, Wirt had composed largely on the strength of scattered testimony, a few archival scraps, and his own imagination.<sup>83</sup> This was not lost on first readers. William Tudor described it to John Adams as an excellent read but essentially a fiction. Adams wrote back in agreement, adding: "I have read it with more delight than Scott's Romances in verse and prose, or Miss Porter's Scottish Chiefs and other novels."<sup>84</sup> Hence we would probably be right to suspect a bit of irony in the following excerpt from Adams' letter to Wirt thanking him for a copy:

Your Sketches of the Life of Mr. Henry have given me a rich entertainment. I will not compare them to the Sibyl conducting Eneas to the regions below, to see the ghosts of departed sages and heroes; but to an angel conveying me to the abodes of the blessed on high, to converse with the spirits of just men made perfect.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile back in Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, who had been one of Wirt's consultants, gave what may only be interpreted as qualified praise:

You have certainly practiced vigorously the precept of "de mortuis nil nisi bonum" [of the dead nothing but the good will do]. This presents a very difficult question—whether one only or both sides of the medal should be presented. It constitutes, perhaps, the distinction between panegyric and history [i.e., biography]. On this, opinions are much divided—and, perhaps, may be so on this feature of your work.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> It was Wirt who composed the speech, and it was not until the 1970s that scholars really began to question its authenticity. See Judy Hample, "The Textual and Cultural Authenticity of Patrick Henry's 'Liberty or Death' Speech," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (vol. 63 no. 4: 1977), pp. 299-310; David A. McCants, "The Authenticity of William Wirt's Version of Patrick Henry's 'Liberty or Death' Speech," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (vol. 87 no. 4: 1979), pp. 387-402; and Charles L. Cohen, "The 'Liberty or Death' Speech: A Note on Religion and Revolutionary Rhetoric" (vol. 38 no. 4: 1981), pp. 702-17.

<sup>84</sup> Kennedy, II: 51.

<sup>85</sup> Adams to Wirt (January 5, 1818), in Kennedy, II: 43.

<sup>86</sup> Jefferson to Wirt (November 12, 1816), in Kennedy, I: 365-6.



Presumably Jefferson was alluding to the debate over *Delaplaine's Repository* which was then raging in the quarterlies. In fact a letter survives from Wirt to Delaplaine himself, who was planning another pantheon, this one to commemorate eminent contemporaries. Wirt tries to dissuade him. After reminding him of all the criticism that the *Repository* had recently suffered (“your biographies are censured as being too flattering representations...all angelic purity...such characters as never did and never will live...”), he warns him to expect more of the same, and inevitably so, now that he will be dealing with “living characters,” for, he reasons,

inasmuch as no man has ever been faultless throughout his life, such a biography must either inflict unauthorized pain, or offend against historical veracity by suppressing the truth... You may show the bright side of the character, truly; but you cannot show the *sombre* strokes that shade it, without giving more pain than a kind spirit is disposed to inflict. And if you hold up a *perfect* model to your readers, you will lose that confidence in your representations, without which an historian cannot live.<sup>87</sup>

In other words, the contemporary biographer must choose between “offending against” his subject, or against “historical veracity” and readerly intelligence to boot. Though *Sketches* did not qualify as contemporary biography—Henry had been dead for six years when Wirt began it—Wirt mentions some of the criticism it had gotten as an example of what was in store for Delaplaine:

You see what has been said of my *Sketches* of Henry. Some of the reviewers treat it as a romance—and yet I have introduced into it every charge, both against his public and private character, I have ever heard. Still it is censured, as attributing to him a perfection of character which is utterly incompatible with human frailty.

Wirt is probably thinking in particular of Jared Sparks’s review for the *North American*, in which the term “romance” is a kind of pejorative motif. As Wirt recognizes above,

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<sup>87</sup> Wirt to Joseph Delaplaine (November 5, 1818), in Kennedy, II: 77-8.

Sparks used it to disparage the *Sketches* as an improbably eulogistic portrayal of Henry, but he also meant it as a criticism of Wirt's methods: legend and imaginative amplification. "After twelve years' search," Sparks declares, "the author has added little to our stock" of knowledge "except what he has obtained from the verbal accounts of old people who were acquainted with Mr. Henry, and from certain traditions relating to the earlier years of his life." He accuses Wirt of "listening with a rather too willing credulity to the voice of tradition" and of "sporting with the airy forms of his own fancy."<sup>88</sup>

Sparks, who was not quite thirty when he wrote the review, would over the next decade emerge as New England's foremost biographer. Born in Connecticut and educated at Harvard, where he seems to have been something of a prodigy in mathematics as well as in history, he spent time in Baltimore as a Unitarian minister but in 1823 stepped down from the pulpit, moved back to Boston, and purchased the fledgling *North American Review*, which under his editorship between 1823 and 1830 became one of America's most distinguished quarterlies. During this time Sparks was

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<sup>88</sup> [Sparks,] "Mr. Wirt's Life of Patrick Henry," *North American Review* (18: March 1818), pp. 293-324. In 1844 Sparks would commission his friend Alexander Hill Everett to write a new biography of Henry for the *Library of American Biography*. Everett's preface is full of irony. For example, his claim that any "eminent" person would want "so fond and faithful a chronicler" as Wirt must be a left-handed compliment, since "fond" can mean foolish as well as adoring, and "faithful" can mean puppy-dog loyal as well as accurate. Henry has been "eminently fortunate," Everett continues,

in the manner in which the history of his life has been written. While the recollection of his eloquence and the admiration of his character were still fresh in the minds of numerous surviving contemporaries, the task of collecting and recording the expressions of them, which were circulating in conversation, or merely ephemeral notes, was undertaken by one whose kindred eloquence and virtues rendered him on every account the fittest person to do justice to the subject. (*Library of American Biography*, second series, vol. I, p. 211)

"Kindred eloquence" is hardly a complement for a historian, especially because Henry was a canonically rhapsodic orator. Furthermore, Everett subsequently characterizes Wirt as someone whose "enthusiasm" sometimes carried him "to the verge of fiction." With evident sarcasm he suggests titling the *Sketches*, after Goethe's autobiography, "Poetry and Truth" (emphasis added), because it reads so well that it almost carries the "illusion" of veracity.

the toast of Boston literary society, and his passion was for American history. In the spring of 1826 he traveled from Maine to Georgia consulting archives and private collections, touring battlefields, and taking advantage of the briskly growing number of state and local historical societies. The aim, he told James Madison in 1827, was to compose “a history of the American Revolution on a broad and extended scale, comprehending its causes and origin, its military, civil, and diplomatic features, drawing the facts chiefly from original documents.”<sup>89</sup> That history never came, but the grunt work he did in preparation for it would bear rich fruit in a number of important works published during the 1830s, most notably his multivolume biographies of Washington (1834-7) and Franklin (1836-40). These works coincided with another ambitious project, the *Library of American Biography* (1834-8, 1844-8), in which Sparks aimed to provide “a connected history of the country...from the first settlement down to the present time.” To accomplish this with reasonable narrative economy, he chose subjects whose lives did not overlap too much chronologically, though ultimately “all persons” who had been important players in American history would appear somewhere, if not as titular subjects. The first series, which came out between 1834 and 1838, comprised twenty-six biographies spread over ten volumes of approximately 350 pages each. Sparks wrote three of the biographies himself and commissioned “the most competent hands” he could find to do the rest. When he conceived the project back in 1832, he predicted that the series would be “well suited to the present reading taste,” and he was right: *American Biography* was an overwhelming success and cemented Sparks’s reputation as “the

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<sup>89</sup> Sparks to James Madison (May 12, 1827), in Herbert B. Adams, ed., *The Life and Writings of Jared Sparks* (Boston, 1893), II: 209.

American Plutarch.”<sup>90</sup> Harvard seems to have recognized this when in 1839 it appointed him to its first ever chair in American history (he would become president in 1849).

Throughout his career Sparks emphasized documentary evidence, written sources, positive facts. He had no time for legend or imaginative embellishments, or the private, for that matter, if it could be harvested only through those channels. In effect he dispensed with what Johnson considered the marrow of biography. In doing so he could have cited in his defense Johnson’s own warning about the vagaries of tradition. Be that as it may, it is hard to imagine him agreeing with Johnson that “publick documents,” and biographies that rely principally on them, are “barren and useless.” Furthermore, Sparks knew what he was saying when he wrote in the advertisement to *American Biography* that “biography is only another form of history; truth is the first requisite, simplicity of style the next.” He says nothing about the biographer’s responsibility to the private. At a time when, as I explained in the last chapter, it was so common to belabor the distinction between biography and history by emphasizing the former’s private prerogative, it was a pointed omission. By it Sparks knew that he was essentially collapsing that distinction.

His philosophy seems to have been formed more or less by the time he wrote the Wirt review, his first significant piece of criticism. It opens with the following pronouncement:

The prominent incidents of some men’s lives are so intimately connected with the destinies of nations, and the important political events of their times, that, in recording them, it is not always easy to draw the line of separation between biography and history.

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<sup>90</sup> Adams, II: 189. For “the American Plutarch” see Adams, II: 361; also Thomas Powell, *The Living Authors of America* (First Series, New York, 1850).

Since the consequences of their actions extend well beyond an “immediate sphere,” Sparks continues, the biographer must take a *national* rather than a local, a political rather than a social, perspective. He must not be afraid to

enter into historical details and political discussions, which, although they have not the attractions of amusing narrative, have, nevertheless, the strong interest of important facts, and the practical results of theoretical politics.

In essence, Sparks is suggesting that the biographer of a man like Henry should not be afraid to tell the story from a “historical,” rather than a classically “biographical,” standpoint. It may not seem like much to us, but these were polemical words. In the first place, to predicate the “interest” of biography on its political content reverses the conventional, Johnsonian wisdom; indeed, the phrase “practical results of theoretical politics” might as well come from a neoclassical treatise on the function of formal history. Secondly, although Sparks does not openly challenge biography’s private prerogative, he says nothing about it, even as he emphasizes the need to report the public. This was a contrarian gesture, coming as it was only a year or so after the publication of *Delaplaine’s Repository* had provoked a heated exchange between those like Samuel Stanhope Smith who insisted that it was the biographer’s “office” to report the “insignificant affairs” in which “a man drops the artificial gravity of a public character and forgets the impropriety of showing himself in the nakedness of natural disposition”; and those like Charles Caldwell who defended Delaplaine by denouncing such reporting as invasive, trivializing, and detrimental to readerly morals. While Sparks effectively sides with the Caldwellian camp—in the course of the essay, he reiterates most of their arguments against the Boswellian vogue for biographical “sketches and anecdotes”—his major complaint had to do with veracity, an issue which virtually none of the Caldwellians raised. To report the private—to “surround his hero with every variety of

circumstance,” as he phrases it—the biographer is forced to rely on “combustible materials” such as tradition; or worse, he is “obliged to resort to his invention for incidents, and to his fancy for embellishments.” Such an approach is best left to poets, which, he derisively implies, may have been Wirt’s true calling.

Even were it not for its influence on Hawthorne, which I shall be getting to very shortly, this essay would be a fascinating document. The passing of the revolutionary generation, America’s first “greatest generation” so to speak, must have brought a certain humility to biography, particularly for those who understood it largely in Johnson’s terms. Indeed Johnson’s terms allow us to appreciate Sparks as something of a realist with a very sensible mistrust of the collective imagination’s devious habits. Protecting veracity, after all, is a way of honoring memory. But it can also be a convenient way of forgetting if it leads us to deprive ourselves of an alternative and we become puppets for the eulogists and half-truths of yesterday. Of course it is all too tempting to speculate about Sparks’s motives. What survives of his interaction with Gouverneur Morris’s widow may offer something in the way of a clue, while at the very least reminding us that whatever his personal feelings were, he faced certain practical challenges. Mrs. Morris refused to grant Sparks access to Mr. Morris’s papers unless he agreed to write a biography. Sparks, who coveted the diary Morris kept while minister in Paris during the French Revolution, reluctantly complied. In a letter he assures Mrs. Morris that he will print only those letters in which Mr. Morris “expresses in the clearest terms his happiness in his domestic relations,” and he questions the “expediency” of revisiting obsolete “slanders” and other such “evanescent” matters:

It must be remembered that Mr. Morris was a public man, and that his life is to be written for the nation and for posterity. His public acts and distinguished services are to be engraved on the tablets of history, and held in perpetual

remembrance. The slanders against him are already unknown to the present generation, and nearly if not quite forgotten by those who remain of the last. Is it worthwhile to revive, for the sake of confronting them? I think not. The prominent traits of his character I would neither conceal nor obscure, but slanders that are forgotten may be allowed to sleep. The early dissensions of his family, the evanescent feuds of party politics, and the enmities of the malicious or the harsh judgments of the misinformed, which embittered his declining years, are subjects of so personal and private a nature, and with which the public has so little concern, that I am induced to believe that they should be touched upon lightly and briefly.<sup>91</sup>

Clearly Sparks was content to let sleeping dogs lie. Furthermore, comparing the above with what he would later write in the preface to the Morris biography may offer a glimpse of how Sparks operated—

It has not been my aim to write a panegyric, to conceal defects, or emblazon good qualities, but rather to present traits of character, acts, and opinions, in their genuine light and just bearings, and leave them to make their proper impressions. Such is doubtless the legitimate purpose of biography. Indiscriminate eulogy is seldom sincere, never true, contributing little to accurate history, or to the stock of valuable knowledge either of men or things.<sup>92</sup>

—that is to say, one recognizes that Sparks, like Wirt, knew how to practice “nil nisi bonum,” only under the guise of a different method. But then perhaps he was bound by his word to Mrs. Morris, who was probably apprehensive because Mr. Morris, a fabulous philanderer, had recorded many of his affairs in the Paris journal.

George Washington was no Gouverneur Morris, but Sparks had to jump similar hurdles before he could access his trove of unpublished papers. For several years he lobbied Bushrod Washington, the current occupant of Mount Vernon and a member of the Supreme Court. He finally succeeded after getting the blessing of Chief Justice John Marshall, the author of Washington’s first official biography. To court subscribers,

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<sup>91</sup> Sparks to Mrs. Morris (August 27, 1831), in Adams, II: 167-9.

<sup>92</sup> Sparks, “Preface,” *Life of Gouverneur Morris* (Boston, 1832) vol. 3, pp. v-vi. It should be noted that Hawthorne, between December 1834 and May 1835, withdrew all three volumes from the Salem Athenaeum (cf. Kesselring, p. 61).

Sparks published a prospectus in the form of two open letters to his friend Joseph Story, himself a justice on Marshall's court. In it he gives an overview of the contents of the collection and outlines his methods. He expresses his hope to gratify the American public's desire "to have preserved, in a durable form," documents that "illustrate" Washington's "great deeds and character, and reflect honor on the country." As for the private letters, Sparks quickly preempts any notion that they will furnish some kind of "secret history"; the only thing "secret" about them, he declares, is that they have never before been published. For Washington, "in whatever he did," always "obeyed no other guide than the rectitude of his own heart," and this "unmingled purity of motive" naturally left him "nothing to conceal." At the same time, it "stamps the records he has left behind" with "indelible marks of truth," giving Washington's "historical character a reality peculiar to him alone." At times Sparks echoes Weems before him—whether he was aware of that or not—as when he declares that some of the letters will exhibit Washington's "character as a private man in an engaging light, and one which will not be eclipsed by his public virtues"; will show him "on his farm" amid "the humbler concerns of life"; will prove that "in acts of charity he was open-handed to an extreme...and never failed to reply in a condescending and friendly manner" to all petitioners, "however humble a rank in life the writer."<sup>93</sup>

There is good reason to believe that Hawthorne knew the prospectus. It first appeared in the *National Gazette*, a Washington newspaper which Hawthorne borrowed from the Salem Athenaeum on at least one occasion, and was then reprinted in more than fifty newspapers nationwide, including the *Salem Gazette*, the very newspaper in which

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<sup>93</sup> For Sparks's opinion on Weems, see his exchange with Edward Everett, in Adams II: 517-9.



Hawthorne would publish “Phips.” Besides, this was a heavily anticipated project, and presumably the buzz would have been greater in Salem, which was Judge Story’s native town. All things considered, it would appear strange if Hawthorne had *not* encountered the prospectus at some point prior to writing “Phips.” Now, was “Phips” some sort of response? It is tempting to speculate, given what we know of the story’s subterranean concern with Washington, but difficult to know for sure. I *will* venture to argue, however, that “Phips” was probably written in response to Sparks’s attack on Wirt, for we know that this was the case for subsequent works that follow a starkly similar pattern.

### **III: Hawthorne against Sparks**

Clearly Hawthorne knew the article by the time he began editing the *American Library of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, a middlebrow monthly out of Boston organized by his publisher Samuel Goodrich. During his brief tenure from January to August 1836, Hawthorne composed virtually every article, and in one of them, a short biographical profile of John C. Calhoun, he neatly paraphrases the opening of the Wirt review (cited earlier):

The life of a leading statesman is so mixed up with the annals of his country, that, in regard to him, there is scarcely any distinction between biography and history. Great national events compose the incidents of such a life. The narrative should not flow on in the narrow line, which suffices to represent the course of private men, but, if it aim to give any tolerable idea of its subject, must be allowed a latitude as wide as the land itself.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> “John C. Calhoun,” *The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* (vol. 2, no. 9: May 1, 1836), p. 359. For reference, here is the full passage in Sparks that Hawthorne is paraphrasing:

The prominent incidents of some men’s lives are so intimately connected with the destinies of nations, and the important political events of their times, that, in recording them, it is no always easy to draw the line of separation between biography and history. The machinery of society and government is kept in motion by the agency of a few powerful minds—to delineate these in their true characters, to exhibit them in the greatness of their strength, and the extent of their energies, it is necessary to trace their

In another he praises Sparks's work as editor of the *American Biography* series. Sparks's "conscious fidelity to truth," Hawthorne declares,

enables us to read them all with undoubting confidence, and with the conviction that they are written not for effect, not for gain, but with the veritable purpose of instructing the public on some of the most interesting points of our history. This praise, indeed, belongs to whatever is attested by the authority of Mr. Sparks—himself eminently trust-worthy as well as discerning; uniting more excellencies than any other biographical writer in our language—

‘Comprehensive, clear,  
Exact and elegant’ —

in some essential qualifications unrivalled, and even unique.<sup>95</sup>

He seems to have chosen this quotation with care; the four adjectives correlate nicely with cardinal attributes of the *American Biography* series as envisioned by Sparks in the advertisement. First, its "comprehensive" scope: "the plan of the series," Sparks wrote, "embraces the lives of all persons who have been distinguished in America, from the date of its first discovery to the present times," and constitutes "a perfect history of the country." Second, its factual "exactness" (which recalls "professors of biographical exactness," it is worth noting). Third, its "clearness" and "elegance" of style:

The two principal objects to be attained in biographical compositions are accuracy as to facts and finish in the literary execution. The former demands research, the latter labor and skill. Biography is only another form of history; truth is the first requisite, simplicity of style the next. It admits of no embellishment that would give it the air of fiction; and yet its office is but half done, unless it mingles entertainment with instruction.<sup>96</sup>

As for the quotation itself, it comes from James Thomson's *Seasons*, a passage celebrating Sir Francis Bacon:

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influence, not only in producing the operations and charges, which took place in their immediate sphere of action, but such as proceeded more remotely from the same causes.

<sup>95</sup> "Life of Eliot," *American Magazine* (vol. 2, no. 12: August 1, 1836), p. 495. This article was a digest of Conyers Francis' biography of John Eliot for the *Library of American Biography*.

<sup>96</sup> Sparks, "Advertisement," *The Library of American Biography*, vol. 1 (Boston: 1834), pp. iii-iv.

Him from the studious shade  
Kind Nature form'd, deep, comprehensive, clear,  
Exact, and elegant; in one rich soul,  
Plato, the Stagyrte [Aristotle], and Tully [Cicero] join'd.  
The great deliverer he! who from the gloom  
Of cloister'd monks, and jargon-teaching schools,  
Led forth the true philosophy, there long  
Held in the magic chain of words and forms,  
And definitions void: he led her forth,  
Daughter of heaven! that slow-ascending still,  
Investigating sure the chain of things,  
With radiant finger points to heaven again.

High praise indeed, and probably tongue in cheek, for notice that Hawthorne omits Thomson's "deep." Indeed we might tease out more sarcasm: Sparks, like Bacon, has liberated mankind from its monkish mysticism and yet ratified its belief in God.

It is a little glimpse of how Hawthorne must have sweetened the drudgery of magazine editing.<sup>97</sup> Nor are we to regard it as a trivial disclosure, for the essential complaint, namely, Spark's lack of depth or profundity, will be subtly voiced throughout *Grandfather's Chair*, Hawthorne's history of New England for children. In 1839, when Hawthorne sat down to write it, not only was Sparks's stock at a high, but the *Library of American Biography*, which had just completed its first series, inspired the publication of a children's version, the *Children's Library of American Biography*. *Grandfather's Chair*, I argue, was Hawthorne's answer. In it a mild-mannered old man relates to his four grandchildren the "adventures" of a chair which, he claims, belonged to a line of famous people, from the first settlement of Salem in 1630 until the death of Samuel Adams in 1803 (also the year before Hawthorne's birth incidentally). The chair is personified throughout. To tell its story—to write its biography, for that is how Grandfather repeatedly describes himself—is to tell the history of New England by

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<sup>97</sup> Hawthorne seems to have especially hated writing the biographies; cf. Letters 60-2, 68-71 in *CE XV*; also Arlin Turner, *Hawthorne as Editor* (Louisiana State University Press, 1941), p. 29.

providing biographical miniatures of each famous occupant in turn. In other words, the chair is the device whereby Hawthorne achieves the scope and format of Sparks's *Library*. However, the chair offers him a crucially different angle on all of that because it is a *fireside* chair.

Hawthorne's use of the chair as a narrative device harkens back to the so-called object narrative, or novel of circulation, a genre with roots in eighteenth-century Britain. These were often satirical in nature: as the object is passed around, it suffers abuse at the hands of humans, witnesses the spectrum of graft, or rampant materialism in the case of Charles Johnstone's classic golden guinea. By the early nineteenth century the genre had lost its satirical edge and become a rather tired, sentimental convention in children's literature.<sup>98</sup> Hawthorne seems to want to revive some of that satirical valence, for there is a tenor of protest throughout *Grandfather's Chair*, one which begins in the preface. In the very first sentence, Hawthorne sets himself a Sparksian scope, while at the same time introducing a distinction: his chosen "form and style" will make learning fun for children by providing "vivid and familiar ideas" of the principal characters and events of New England history:

In writing this ponderous tome, the author's desire has been to describe the eminent characters and remarkable events of our annals, in such a form and style, that the young might make acquaintance with them of their own accord. For this purpose, while ostensibly relating the adventures of a chair, he has endeavored to keep a distinct and unbroken thread of authentic history. The chair is made to pass from one to another of those personages, of whom he thought it most desirable for the young reader to have vivid and familiar ideas, and whose lives and actions would best enable him to give picturesque sketches of the times. On

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<sup>98</sup> *Chrysal; or, The Adventures of a Golden Guinea*; other classic titles include: Smollett's *History and Adventures of an Atom*, Thomas Briggs's *Adventures of a Bank Note*, the anonymous *Secret History of an Old Shoe*. On the evolution from satire to children's literature, see Lynn Festa, "The Moral Ends of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Object Narratives," in *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Mark Blackwell (Lewisburg, Pa: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 309-28.

its sturdy oaken legs, it trudges diligently from one scene to another, and seems always to thrust itself in the way, with most benign complacency, whenever a historical personage happens to be looking round for a seat.

Why so “vivid and familiar”? The subsequent paragraph will specify. “There is certainly no method,” Hawthorne writes,

by which the shadowy outlines of departed men and women can be made to assume the hues of life more effectually, than by connecting their images with the substantial and homely reality of a fireside chair.

Such a “method,” he continues,

causes us to feel at once, that these characters of history had a private and familiar existence, and were not wholly contained within that cold array of outward action, which we are compelled to receive as the adequate representation of their lives. If this impression can be given, much is accomplished.

In other words, the fact that this is a *fireside* chair grounds perspective in the private or “familiar” realm of experience, thus completing the characters, bringing them to life. Notice the complaint about historical representation, so similar to that of the “Phips” prologue: “cold array” echoes “cold and naked.”<sup>99</sup> This time it is rather spelled out for us what is missing, and must by the same token be imaginatively supplied: a fireside perspective. In the third, subsequent paragraph, Hawthorne addresses his use of imagination; he explains that besides inventing the conversation and the chair—and with that, implicitly, the whole fireside perspective—he has sometimes supplemented the record “with details for which he has none but imaginative authority”:

Setting aside Grandfather and his auditors, and excepting the adventures of the chair, which form the machinery of the work, nothing in the ensuing pages can be termed fictitious. The author, it is true, has sometimes assumed the license of filling up the outline of history with details, for which he has none but imaginative authority, but which, he hopes, do not violate nor give a false coloring to the truth.

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<sup>99</sup> “Array” can mean armor, also battle formation. Such a pun would be in the spirit of Johnson’s “uniform panegyric,” from the *Rambler 60* passage cited on pages 9 and 15 of this chapter. For the narrator’s aversion to military history, see my remarks on page 32.

This time we can be pretty sure that Hawthorne is addressing Sparks. He seems to be remembering what he himself had written in the *American Magazine* about “the authority of Mr. Sparks.” Now the author of his own, rival children’s history, he offers up his “imaginative authority,” as if to declare, in the parlance of Sparks’s *Library* advertisement: my “embellishments” may “have the air of fiction,” but that of itself does not make them untrue, for they operate in a dark terrain where your “authority,” or any authority predicated on positive facts, does not extend. Indeed my “imaginative authority” may help to imbue the “shadowy outlines of departed men and women” with a “substantial and homely reality” (wickedly punning on the second adjective). Throughout the preface Hawthorne emphasizes that he will be providing no more than “impressions,” yet we wonder if behind the humility topos with which he concludes there is not a question embedded: How *substantial* are his own “delicate playthings” compared with “the granite rocks on which New England is founded”?

The author’s great doubt is, whether he has succeeded in writing a book which will be readable by the class for whom he intends it. To make a lively and entertaining narrative for children, with such sombre, stern, and rigid characteristics of the Puritans and their descendants, is quite as difficult an attempt, as to manufacture delicate playthings out of the granite rocks on which New England is founded.<sup>100</sup>

*Grandfather’s Chair* can be a kind of rubric or key for understanding the much more subtle, and radical, agenda of “Phips.” A similar complaint is made; a similar “remedy” is proposed; a similar defense of that remedy is advanced. Imagination supplements the historical record “even without an absolute violation of literal truth,”

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<sup>100</sup> Hawthorne may intend to evoke the “granite” memorials being erected throughout New England during the 1820s, 30s, and 40s. If so, he anticipates Melville’s much more explicit reference, at the opening of *Israel Potter*, to Jared Sparks and the Bunker Hill Monument, for which see Jill Lepore, “His Highness,” *The New Yorker* (September 27, 2010).

except this time it does not wreak havoc in those vacant spaces. This is a children's history, after all. We are given scenes inside John Endicott's mansion; Ezekiel Cheever's turn-of-the-eighteenth-century schoolroom; a coffee house on King Street; a barber shop frequented by Samuel Adams and other Revolutionary-War luminaries. Imagination brings the past to life, gently humanizes the characters, who are on the whole charitably portrayed. This is more Rockwell than Hitchcock, so to speak. When Grandfather promises to teach the children "something about the history and distinguished people of the country [that] they have never read in any of their school books," he does not mean to suggest that he will be challenging the foundations of historical knowledge.

The much sunnier portrayal of Sir William Phips is illustrative of the difference.

At one point Grandfather tells the children that Phips

had many popular characteristics, being a kind, warm-hearted man, not ashamed of his low origin, nor haughty in his present elevation... Soon after his arrival, he proved that he did not blush to recognize his former associates... He made a grand festival at his new brick house...and invited all the ship-carpenters of Boston to be his guests. At the head of the table, in our great chair, sat Sir William Phips himself, treating these hard-handed men as his brethren, cracking jokes with them, and talking familiarly about old times. I know not whether he wore his embroidered his dress, but rather I choose to imagine that he had on a suit of rough clothes, such as he used to labor in, while he was Phips the ship-carpenter.

How differently does Hawthorne "choose to imagine" Phips this time around! And yet these songs of innocence are interspersed with subtle misgivings. For instance, a "bony hand" clings to a gold chalice as it is fished from the sea, prompting Grandfather to wonder if perhaps the treasure ought to have been "left with the skeletons of the ancient Spaniards who had been drowned when the ship was wrecked, and whose bones were now scattered among the gold and silver." But Phips and his men, Grandfather assures the children, "were troubled by no such thoughts as these," not even after one of the

lieutenants becomes insane at “the sight of so much treasure.” Usually the dark innuendo depends on some background knowledge on the part of the reader, as when Grandfather denies that Phips had met with a fortune-teller:

Do not suppose, children, that [Phips] had been to a fortune-teller to inquire his destiny. It was his own energy and spirit of enterprise, and his resolution to lead an industrious life, that made him look forward with so much confidence to better days.

Likewise, adult readers who knew about the caning of Short would have sensed irony in Grandfather’s remark, ostensibly in reference to Phips’s carpentry skills, that he was a man who “well knew how to use his hands.” Similarly, those familiar with the theory that Phips’s personal demons compelled him to adopt a fatally un-nuanced policy during the Salem witch trials would have been tempted interpret *literally* Grandfather’s comment that the “frightful business...might have perplexed a wiser and more cultivated head than his.”

But such moments are like passing shadows, benign little clouds on a summer afternoon. When it comes time for Washington to appear, Grandfather wonders if it “might be irreverent to introduce his hallowed shade into a history where an ancient elbow chair occupies the most prominent place.” Pressed by one of the children for domestic scenery, he discreetly steers the conversation: “turning from the personal and domestic life of the illustrious leader, he spoke of the methods which Washington adopted to win back the metropolis of New England from the British.” Washington enters the story when he finds the chair abandoned in the Cambridge mansion in which he headquartered early in the war. The very same “handsome apartment,” Grandfather remarks, would later be rented by “Mr. Sparks, whose invaluable labors have connected his name with the immortality of Washington.” Hawthorne’s phrasing echoes what



seems to have been a cliché used by contemporary reviewers to praise Sparks,<sup>101</sup> but I am inclined to read irony here, much as I read irony in Grandfather's frequent references to "authentic documents," or his declared uninterest in military history. Instead of offering an account of the battle, he encourages one of the children, Charley, to visit the Bunker Hill diorama and report back.

This brings me to the subject of dialogue, which is another important distinction between *Grandfather's Chair* and the *Children's Library*. As Grandfather spins his yarns, the children interject with questions or comments that reflect their different personalities. The chair, which Grandfather claims to have bought at auction following the death of Samuel Adams, the last of its famous occupants, is physically present the whole time. The conversation, which takes place over the span of a few months, has been curated for us by an omniscient narrator. Hawthorne's use of dialogue was probably informed by the experimental pedagogy of Bronson Alcott, who encouraged

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<sup>101</sup> See for example George Bancroft: "[Sparks] has published an edition of Washington's works as is never likely to be excelled; thus winning a claim to regard by his zealous care for the remains of our greatest benefactor, and permanently connecting him with a name that will never perish." ("The Documentary History of the American Revolution," *North American Review*, April 1838). Later that year Edward Everett will echo Bancroft, writing that Sparks's "ten years of unrelaxing and conscientious labor...has contributed to give a wider diffusion and a more abiding permanence to the fame of Washington; [such] that whenever the authority of the greatest and best of chieftains and patriots is appealed to in all coming time, it will be in some association with his own name and labors." ("Life and Writings of Washington," *North American Review*, October 1838).

Hawthorne's personal relationship with Sparks is an intriguing but elusive topic. In May of 1839—around the time Hawthorne began work on *Grandfather's Chair*—Sparks married the beautiful, rich and aristocratic Mary Crowningshield Silsbee of Salem, whom Hawthorne had courted in 1836-7. That courtship was rocky, almost bringing Hawthorne to a duel. According to Elizabeth Peabody, herself an admirer of Sparks, Mary broke Hawthorne's heart, but compare Hawthorne's own version of things (letter 88). Whatever the case, Sparks and Silsbee had a history that predated Hawthorne; apparently back in 1830 Sparks ended a two-year courtship when he left to do archival work in England. For a useful survey see James R. Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), pp. 119-22, 128-9, 275.

children to discuss the life of Christ as depicted in the Gospels.<sup>102</sup> Hawthorne's idea is similar, but this time the *subject*, as it were, is New England history. Indeed in Hawthorne's hands dialogue becomes a device for exploring typical responses to history, for each child's personality reflects a discrete adult readership. Charley, who always seems to be bumping his toy truck into the legs of the chair, is perennially restless indoors; he becomes bored with the stories unless they happen to be about soldiers and statesmen. In fact he is a kind of embryo Phips, with whom he is fascinated; at one point the narrator mentions, darkly, that Charley is "addicted to a similar method of settling disputes." It is not to imply Charley will grow up to be another Phips, but certainly he is to be seen as the archetypal man of action, a doer not a dreamer. Or is he really the quintessential dreamer, addicted to stories of conquest and adventure? In any event, Charley, whose name derives from "soldier," represents one kind of male reader; we might call him the typical Sparksian reader. Meanwhile, Clara, whose name comes from the Latin for light (Greek equivalent Phoebe), is the typical female reader; it is she who presses Grandfather for more domestic scenery when they are discussing Washington, not presumably out of frivolousness or prurience, but because that is her world. Then there is Laurence, as in poet's laurel; sensitive, thoughtful, and with a vivid imagination. For Christmas he is given a "handsome" portrait-biography collection, which he and Grandfather peruse together. Laurence, who is said to love *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, seems to be a version of Hawthorne himself as a child.

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. John Matteson, *Eden's Outcasts* (New York: Norton, 2007), p. 58. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Hawthorne's sister-in-law, taught at Alcott's Temple School. She had also taught school for a time under Jared Sparks, it is worth mentioning.

Another benefit of dialogue is that it allows Hawthorne to subject Sparksian biography to a kind of rolling criticism. Now that we have come to see the chair as a metaphorical *human* subject, we can appreciate how this works. A good example comes near the end of Part One. Grandfather has just finished his account of Phips, and with it the “Puritan” era of New England history. Charley, who naturally wants to learn more about his beau ideal, begs Grandfather to continue, and his enthusiasm carries over to the impressionable Laurence:

“Really, Grandfather,” observed Laurence, “this seems to be the most remarkable chair in the world. Its history cannot be told without intertwining it with the lives of the distinguished men, and the great events that have befallen the country.”

Notice that Laurence’s comment echoes Hawthorne’s paraphrase, in the Calhoun article cited earlier, of the opening lines of the Wirt review. Here is that paraphrase again:

The life of a leading statesman is so mixed up with the annals of his country that, in regard to him, there is scarcely any distinction between biography and history. Great national events compose the incidents of such a life. The narrative should not flow on in the narrow line, which suffices to represent the course of private men, but, if it aim to give any tolerable idea of the subject, must be allowed a latitude as wide as the land itself.

So, this chair is an important public figure like Calhoun; its biographer must adopt an overwhelmingly public, or “historical,” perspective. The magnitude of such a perspective impresses Laurence. But then Grandfather, after humorously acknowledging that such a biography (“memoir”) would sell—

“True, Laurence,” replied Grandfather, smiling. “We must write a book with some such title as this—‘Memoirs of My Own Times, by Grandfather’s Chair.’”  
“That would be beautiful!” exclaimed Laurence, clapping his hands.

—gently observes that “any other old chair” could report “stranger” experiences, and that in fact private experience—what Hawthorne, in his paraphrase of Sparks, had referred to as the “narrow line”—is a “subject” infinitely “wide”:

“But, after all,” continued Grandfather, “any other old chair, if it possessed memory, and a hand to write its recollections, could record stranger stories than any that I have told you. From generation to generation, a chair sits familiarly in the midst of human interests, and is witness to the most secret and confidential intercourse, that mortal man can hold with his fellow. The human heart may best be read in the fireside chair. And as to external events, Grief and Joy keep a continual vicissitude around it and within it. Now we see the glad face and glowing form of Joy, sitting merrily on the old chair, and throwing a warm, firelight radiance over all the household. Now, while we thought not of it, the dark clad mourner, Grief, has stole into the place of Joy, but not to retain it long. The imagination can hardly grasp so wide a subject, as is embraced in the experience of a family chair.”

As Grandfather’s wisdom sinks in, Laurence realizes that a “family chair” requires a “*deeper* history than a chair of state”:

“It makes my breath flutter—my heart thrill—to think of it,” said Laurence.  
“Yes; a family chair must have a deeper history than a Chair of State.”

Clara, speaking for female readers, finds such a history more “interesting”:

“Oh, yes!” cried Clara, expressing a woman’s feeling on the point in question.  
“The history of a country is not near so interesting as that of a single family would be.”

In so many words: due to its neglect of private experience, the Sparksian perspective lacks both depth and interest. Furthermore, it is less challenging, for such is the import of Grandfather’s subsequent remark:

“But the history of a country is more easily told,” said Grandfather. “So, if we proceed with our narrative of the chair, I shall still confine myself to its connection with public events.”

It is an enigmatic remark. Why is private experience harder to tell? Is it because of the requisite width and depth? The added burden of interesting readers of various walks? Is it because there are no abstractions to fall back on, only concrete, moral, “homely” realities? Or is it because of the protean materials one must consult? Hawthorne may have wanted to invite each of these questions and more, but he was probably thinking

most immediately in terms of materials, for he seems to have been responding to an adjacent passage in the Wirt review in which Sparks writes:

The present unfortunate propensity of filling tomes of quartos and octavos with marvellous accounts of the lives of men and women, who, during their existence, produced no immediate impression on the publick mind, and who were not known beyond the circle of their immediate friends, or the mountains, which bounded the horizon of their native villages, is both preposterous and absurd. Such people may have been good in their sphere—the recollections of their virtues should be cherished in the breasts of those to whom their influence extended—but why should the world be called off from its busy occupations to listen to an ill-told story of their little concerns?

Clearly these narratives lacked both interest and stylistic appeal for Sparks, but the main, ostensible reason he objects to them—and why he uses the word “marvellous” above to describe them—has to do with the lack of reliable, written material, which obliges the biographer to turn to tradition or his own imagination to fill in the gaps. Perhaps then Hawthorne was thinking: the Sparksian perspective is easier because here the biographer does not have to cross over into the domain of fiction.

#### **IV: Hawthorne’s biography of a house**

It is intriguing that *The House of the Seven Gables*, technically a “romance,” should begin with echoes of the above passage from *Grandfather’s Chair*. The narrator introduces himself as a kind of peripatetic reporter whose imagination has long been haunted by this prominent thing that “stands” etched on the civic consciousness:

Half-way down a by-street of one of our New England towns, stands a rusty wooden house, with seven acutely peaked gables facing towards various points of the compass, and a huge, clustered chimney in the midst. The street is Pyncheon-street; the house is the old Pyncheon-house; and an elm-tree of wide circumference, rooted before the door, is familiar to every town-born child by the title of Pyncheon-elm. On my occasional visits to the town aforesaid, I seldom fail to turn down Pyncheon-street, for the sake of passing through the shadow of these two antiquities; the great elm-tree, and the weather-beaten edifice.

“The aspect of the venerable mansion,” he continues,

has always affected me like a human countenance, bearing the traces not merely of outward storm and sunshine, but expressive also of the long lapse of mortal life, and accompanying vicissitudes, that have passed within. Were *these* to be worthily recounted, they would form a narrative of no small interest and instruction, and possessing, moreover, a certain remarkable unity, which might almost seem the result of artistic arrangement [emphasis added]. But the story would include a chain of events, extending over the better part of two centuries, and, written out with reasonable amplitude, would fill a bigger folio volume, or a longer series of duodecimos, than could prudently be appropriated to the annals of all New England, during a similar period. It consequently becomes imperative to make short work with most of the traditionary lore of which the Pyncheon-house, otherwise known as the House of the Seven Gables, has been the theme.

You will have noticed the similarities. Much as he did there, Hawthorne is apparently responding to Sparks's denunciation of biographical narratives of mere private experience as uninteresting, "ill-told," and spurious, by affirming the value, and difficulty, of them, as if to say: a narrative that did justice to such an immensely "wide" subject—one "written out with reasonable *amplitude*"—could indeed possess "interest and instruction," and perhaps even formal "unity," but it would be long—longer, in fact, than the history of a country—and furthermore, it would involve a good deal of "traditionary lore." All of this seems to indicate, at the very least, that *House* opens with Sparks as an imagined reader.

Now, the narrator's pledge to "make short work with most of the traditionary lore" at his disposal is of course a rather ironic one, for as anyone who has read this book knows, he will go on to make a vineyard of "traditionary lore," never declaring its veracity but letting it accumulate nevertheless, often in the very act of voicing his distrust. Such praeteritio is the modus operandi throughout the remainder of the first chapter, as the early history of the house takes shape like a tenuous mosaic. Entitled "The Old Pyncheon Family," the chapter is organized very much like a biographical sketch of the sort one finds scattered throughout contemporary magazines. Hawthorne

had written his fair share of these, first as a journeyman editor—his profile of John C. Calhoun is an excellent example—later as a contributor to the *Democratic Review*, and so he knew the basic formula: a survey of the subject’s background, beginning with parentage and gradually, incisively leading up to the present, followed by a brief physical description. Such will be the format of this chapter, as we are all but told in the very next line:

With a brief sketch, therefore, of the circumstances amid which the foundation of the house was laid, and a rapid glimpse of its quaint exterior, as it grew black in the prevalent east-wind—pointing, too, here and there, at some spot of more verdant mossiness on its roof and walls—we shall commence the real action of our tale at an epoch not very far from the present day.

We might aptly call them *casual* circumstances, for they concern the dispute between Pyncheon and Maule, which according to legend—and it is only in legend, we are told, that there is any mention of a dispute—ended with Maule’s execution.<sup>103</sup> Indeed they are presented like *parental* circumstances, for they precede what appears to be a moment of conception—the “impenetrable Colonel dug his cellar and laid the foundations of his first mansion”—which could be Shandean-comic if it did not seem so much like rape. Next, the narrator tries to imagine “the bright novelty with which the house first caught the sunshine”—no easy thing to do, he admits, since he has only know it in its “venerable” old age. His description of the “ceremony of consecration” aims to evoke a baptism—

the morning when the Puritan magnate bade all the town to be his guests [for] a ceremony of consecration, festive as well as religious, [the street was] thronged...as with a congregation on its way to church. All, as they approached, looked upward at the imposing edifice, with was henceforth to assume its rank among the habitations of mankind.

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<sup>103</sup> “No record of this dispute is known to be in existence. Our acquaintance with the whole subject is derived chiefly from tradition.” It may be no coincidence that Hawthorne’s phrasing echoes that of Sparks, commenting in the Wirt review on the lack of written material pertaining to Henry’s early life: “We have scarcely anything but tradition to tell us, that such a [youth] existed.”

—while the house now brings to mind the “strangeness and novelty” of a newborn baby:

...all around were scattered shavings, chips, shingles, and broken halves of bricks...the lately turned earth, on which the grass had not begun to grow, contributed to the impression of strangeness and novelty, proper to a house that had yet to make its place among men’s daily interests.

Over the ensuing pages the house grows into adulthood; as years become decades and centuries, its story becomes synonymous with that of a family and to a certain degree a town. The chapter closes, as promised, with “a descriptive paragraph or two treating of the seven-gabled mansion in its more recent aspect.” The seven gables symbolize different aspects of one self, individual or corporate. Windows are like eyes; flowerboxes, eyebrows; rooftop weeds evoke tufts of remaining hair; while the elm tree out front—planted, we are told, by an eighteenth-century Pyncheon, and which “gave beauty to the old edifice, and seemed to make it a part of nature”—is like clothing, perhaps a wig, designed to make the house not merely old but also aristocratic. Finally there is a shop door, another eighteenth-century addition, this time a shameful one, an uncouth gateway to the street. By now the house has soaked up so much human experience that “the very timbers were oozy, as with the moisture of a heart. It was itself like a great human heart, with a life of its own, and full of rich and sombre reminiscences.” The house is imagined, much as grandfather’s chair had been, as a kind of human subject with a story to tell: “the deep projection of the second story gave the house such a meditative look, that you could not pass it without the idea that it had secrets to keep, and an eventful history to moralize upon.” The object of course is speechless, that is where the narrator comes in.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See appendix four.



Clearly this book, though called a romance, was conceived and executed largely as a kind of biography. In fact even the term “romance” seems to have had something to do with biography. Recall that Sparks used it as a pejorative figure throughout the *North American* article, which seems never to have been far from Hawthorne’s mind. Still I would remain hesitant to make a connection were it not for the fact that just before he began *House*, Hawthorne withdrew John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Memoirs of William Wirt*, and evidently read it closely, for the book left its mark all over *House*, starting with the preface, which appears to echo Kennedy’s assessment of Sparks’s criticism. According to Kennedy, who has a whole chapter dealing with the subject, the *Sketches* was attacked by Sparks as a “romance” in that it did not keep “within the bounds of probability”; in particular, Wirt did not “winnow the improbabilities, not to say the impossibilities, of the story that reached him through the excited popular imagination.”<sup>105</sup> This seems to have rubbed off on Hawthorne’s distinction between novel and romance, judging by the verbal overlap—

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man’s experience. The former—while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart—has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer’s own choosing or creation.

—and also by the fact that Hawthorne will go on to use legendary narrative, “the excited popular imagination,” just as Wirt did essentially: to exceed “the bounds of probability.”

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<sup>105</sup> Kennedy, II: 35-8. According to Kesselring (p. 42), Hawthorne withdrew both volumes from the Salem Athenaeum on Dec. 21, 1849, returning them Jan. 14, 1850. Roughly two weeks later he sent Fields the final draft of *The Scarlett Letter*.

My tentative theory is that Hawthorne's reading of Kennedy during the final stages of *The Scarlet Letter* played a significant role in the genesis of *House*, his next big project. Perhaps it was then that he decided to renew his old quarrel with Sparks, this time as the biographer of a house. He would return to the basic paradigm he had developed for "Phips," except now instead of offering only one perspective—with a kind of implicit mandate to juxtapose that with Mather's—he will develop *both* perspectives as he chronicles the experience of a house, which symbolizes so much more than a house, over two centuries. In his own mind he conceived of *House* essentially as a biography, but of course he could not call it that, if only for the simple reason that it depicts people and places that technically do not exist; and so he chooses to call it a romance, remembering Sparks's use of that term to mock the very methods he himself had written "Phips" to vindicate, and will now vindicate again, only in a fictional context. This theory remains tentative and will have to be developed, but hopefully what I have uncovered in this chapter will pave the way for a better understanding of *House*, not only its historiographical dimensions but also its apparently epic design. I will close this chapter by discussing certain parts of *House* that are similar to "Phips" and tend to support my tentative theory that Hawthorne was essentially finishing what he had had started in 1830, now in a fictional context, not only because fiction was his trade, but because only fiction was big enough to contain such immense, composite entities.

Let us begin with the two prologues. A stylistic comparison suggests that in distinguishing between Novel and Romance, Hawthorne was thinking back to his old distinction between Sparksian Biography and Poetic Biography (these are my terms for

the fundamental, unnamed binary in the “Phips” preface). The following table attempts to make this clear.

<p>SWP:</p> <p>The Sparksian Biographer is “minute, perhaps, and accurate...exact”</p> <p>The Poetic Biographer uses “methods rightfully interdicted to professors of biographical exactness...”</p> <p>“a license must be assumed in brightening the materials....fancy must throw her reviving light on the faded incidents that indicate character”</p>	<p>HSG:</p> <p>The Novelist “is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity”</p> <p>The Romancer “claims a certain latitude...which he would not be entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a novel...”</p> <p>“has fairly a right to present [the truth of the human heart] under circumstances...of his own choosing or creation”</p>
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Indeed minus the terminology he essentially repeats the old preface, with one crucial difference: “Phips” holds itself accountable to particular truth, *House* to universal truth.

This becomes evident if we schematize each preface thus:

<p>SWP:</p> <p>The Sparksian Biographer must be faithful to his written material,</p> <p>whereas the Poetic Biographer is free to probe beyond it.</p> <p>Neither may violate “literal truth.”</p>	<p>HSG:</p> <p>The Novelist must be faithful to the “probable and ordinary,”</p> <p>whereas the Romancer is free to probe beyond it.</p> <p>Neither may violate “the truth of the human heart.”</p>
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Such a difference is only logical considering that one depicts an actual person, the other does not (although it frequently challenges us to believe that it does).

Let us now consider the peculiar way in which the narrator exposes the inadequacies of his written material—in particular the work of a certain Puritan historian—while at the same time remaining *genuinely* skeptical about the alternative, all of which is very reminiscent of “Phips.” A good place to begin is the investigation of Colonel Pyncheon’s death, the question at hand being, Did Pyncheon die naturally or was

he murdered? The talk of the town—some of which we are told has survived in the form of legend—intimated foul play. The medical inquest, however, was inconclusive, prompting a similar verdict from the grand jury. Nor is there any inkling of unnatural death “on record.” What we have is a classic case of one party’s word against another’s, with a hung jury: on one side of the balance is History, according to which nothing untoward happened, on the other Legend, which is “responsible for all contrary averments.” But while the narrator duly warns us that individual legends normally mislead, their cumulative tenor at least is compelling, in large part because Higginson’s impossibly eulogistic sermon is listed as an example of History:

In Colonel Pyncheon’s funeral sermon, which was printed and is still extant, the Reverend Mr. Higginson enumerates, among the many felicities of his distinguished parishioner’s earthly career, the happy seasonableness of his death. His duties all performed,—the highest prosperity attained,—his race and future generations fixed on a stable basis, and with a stately roof to shelter them, for centuries to come,—what other upward step remained for this good man to take, save the final step from earth to the golden gate of Heaven! The pious clergyman surely would not have uttered words like these, had he in the least suspected that the Colonel had been thrust in to the other world with the clutch of violence upon his throat.

Furthermore, the drift of the narrative soon exposes Higginson’s thesis as flawed. In the subsequent paragraph we are told that when he died Pyncheon was trying to get an Indian deed recognized by the government; it was to a vast tract of land in present-day Waldo County, Maine, and would have secured the family fortune for generations to come. Had he “survived only a few weeks longer,” he probably would have “consummated” the thing, but he did not, and thus, the narrator observes with a wry matter-of-factness, it was hardly a “seasonable” death.

By itself of course this amounts to little more than a semantic quibble. However it allows Hawthorne space to develop a very salient analogy between Higginson and

Cotton Mather, and it is here, I argue, that the real damage is done. To begin, notice that Hawthorne's outline of Higginson's sermon is a veritable synopsis of the Phips biography. Over the course of this chapter and the last I have explored in some detail Mather's presentation of "the many felicities of his distinguished parishioner's earthly career." Now let us briefly consider his presentation of Phips's death in conjunction with how it is registered above. Though Mather himself never uses the adjective "seasonable," it is the perfect word for Hawthorne to evoke two separate arguments made by Mather in regard to Phips's death, both of them highly tendentious and probably meant to combat lingering rumors. Let us begin with Mather's claim that Phips's died in *Christian* fulfillment of the astrologer's prophecy. According to that prophecy, remember, Phips would find the treasure, become governor, and finally "hit upon a vastly richer matter." Mather interpreted this to mean that Phips had entered God's heavenly kingdom—and Hawthorne was clearly thinking of that when he wrote "final step from the golden gate of Heaven"—even though when he died Phips was evidently busy raising an expedition to another, purportedly more lucrative wreck. Also, Phips had recently signed an agreement with two sachems for a large tract of land in Maine but was never able to get it recognized by the government, for apparently the same land had been granted to John Leverett back in 1646; the issue would not be settled until the 1760s, when Phips's grandson finally agreed to accept cash from the Leverett family and relinquished the family claim to what became known as the great Waldo Patent.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. Emerson W. Baker and John G. Reid, *The New England Knight: Sir William Phips, 1651-95* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p. 174.

By “seasonable” Hawthorne must also have wanted to evoke Mather’s argument that Phips’s death was *natural*. “The circumstances of his death,” Mather acknowledges near the very end of the biography,

seem to intimate the *anger* of God, in that he was “in the midst of his days” removed; and I know (though *few* did) that he had *great purposes* in his heart, which probably would have taken effect, if he had lived a few months longer, to the great advantage of this province. (*Magnalia* I: 230)

Mather seems to be addressing some narrative that Phips’s death was punishment for ill-gotten gold, for in the above statement he makes a reference to Jeremiah 17:9-11:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool. (KJV)

Phips died in London because he had been recalled there to answer charges, no doubt inflated by his enemies, that he had misused public funds for private gain; in particular, that he had constructed the fort at Pemaquid in order to develop his own adjacent properties (which would have included Waldo land). Presumably Mather is addressing these charges, not only because he mentions the good of the “province,” but also because throughout the biography he makes a concerted effort to present Phips’s economic ventures in Maine as public-spirited rather than selfish; for example, the conceit that Phips, like a modern Nehemiah, was using Maine timber to furnish material for British warships, those “wooden walls” of the commonwealth. But why would such infractions, even if true, merit “the anger of God”? While not the picture of virtue, it was nevertheless standard, and to some degree expected, practice among imperial governors during that time to use the office to augment a private fortune. It would not be enough to merit *divine* punishment. There must have been talk of something else, something

positively nefarious, and worse than treasure-hunting. Earlier we discussed how the treasure-hunting stigma might have influenced his witch policy, but what about his projects in Maine? Could there have been some link, at least in the popular imagination, between Phips's economic speculation and his decision-making during the trials?<sup>107</sup>

The point is, Higginson's sermon is a thinly-veiled reference to Mather's biography of Phips, which for nineteenth century readers was a towering example of spin (and a real one). Evoking Mather and his problems lends a kind of automatic exigency to the alternative. At the same time, it effectively explodes the Sparksian veneration of written history, which may be why the narrator makes a point of telling us that Higginson's sermon "was printed and is still extant." Whatever the case, the whole strategy is reminiscent of "Phips," which could be construed as one big argument for imaginative engagement on the grounds that history is sometimes written by men like Cotton Mather.

Such is largely how Higginson's sermon will function throughout the book. The next time it turns up is in chapter eight, entitled "The Pyncheon of Today." Now the question being investigated is whether Judge Pyncheon is the reincarnation of his ancestor Colonel Pyncheon. The narrator handles it methodically, first assessing the written sources:

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<sup>107</sup> It is indeed suspicious that during the trials Phips should have been flitting back and forth between Boston and Pemaquid, or that John Alden, whose extensive holdings in Maine made him one of Phips's chief rivals there, was suddenly accused—and by girls who had never known him and seem to have been coached—shortly after Phips first arrived in Boston in May. These are my own half-paranoid speculations, inspired largely by my reading of Hawthorne. However, see the article by Emerson W. Baker and James Kences, "Maine, Indian Land Speculation, and the Essex County Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692," *Maine History* 40:3 (Fall 2001), pp. 159-189; also Louise A. Breen, *Transgressing the Bounds: Subversive Enterprises among the Puritan Elite in Massachusetts, 1630-1692* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 197-220.

In old Colonel Pyncheon's funeral discourse, the clergyman absolutely canonized his deceased parishioner, and opening, as it were, a vista through the roof of the church, and thence through the firmament above, showed him seated, harp in hand, among the crowned choristers of the spiritual world. On his tombstone, too, the record is highly eulogistic; nor does history, so far as he holds a place upon its page, assail the consistency and uprightness of his character. So also, as regards the Judge Pyncheon of to-day, neither clergyman, nor legal critic, nor inscriber of tombstones, nor historian of general or local politics, would venture a word against this eminent person's sincerity as a christian, or respectability as a man, or integrity as a judge, or courage and faithfulness as the often-tried representative of his political party.

Again Higginson's sermon is put front and center, this time with the effect of tainting Higginson's peers who do not gainsay or "assail" his impossibly eulogistic, and we know flawed, representation of the Colonel. Of course such an implication does not extend to the scribes of today. However, notice that the narrator uses a set of phrases typically found in contemporary campaign biography ("sincerity...party"), as if to invite us to come up with modern parallels to Higginson, and thus effectively embedding a second question within the first—Who are the *Higginsons* of today?—to which the answer must be yes, for presumably such analogues were not hard to find. Thus History has been weakened, and the narrator seems to echo our misgivings when he declares in the very next line:

But besides these cold, formal, and empty words of the chisel that inscribes, the voice that speaks, and the pen that writes for the public eye and for distant time—and which inevitably lose much of their truth and freedom by the fatal consciousness of so doing—there were traditions about the ancestor, and private diurnal gossip about the Judge, remarkably accordant in their testimony.

Adding that:

It is often instructive to take the woman's, the private and domestic view, of a public man; nor can anything be more curious than the vast discrepancy between portraits intended for engraving, and the pencil-sketches that pass from hand to hand, behind the original's back.

He then proceeds to list a number of these stories, but his attitude remains hardly uncritical, for each time he alludes to one, he reiterates his scepticism in the process. For



example, “marvellous fidelity” is hardly an expression of confidence when one considers the range of meaning to the adjective “marvellous”:

...the Puritan—so, at least, says chimney-corner tradition, which often preserves traits of character with marvellous fidelity—was bold, imperious, relentless, crafty; laying his purposes deep, and following them out with an inveteracy of pursuit that knew neither rest nor conscience; trampling on the weak, and when essential to his ends, doing his utmost to beat down the strong. Whether the Judge in any degree resembled him, the farther progress of our narrative may show.

But does it? We are never given enough information to know for sure whether these stories were not indeed slanderous, or that when Phoebe thinks she hears a “gurgling” sound in Judge Pyncheon’s voice, it is not an unjust “fantasy” produced by the legend of Maule’s curse working upon her imagination. The narrator’s accompanying remarks are hardly enough to dispel such misgivings!

...ancient superstitions, after being steeped in human hearts, and embodied in human breath, and passing from lip to ear in manifold repetition, through a series of generations, become imbued with an effect of homely truth. The smoke of the domestic hearth has scented them, through and through. By long transmission among household facts, they grow to look like them, and have such a familiar way of making themselves at home, that their influence is usually greater than we suspect.

Ultimately the investigation yields no decisive knowledge about *either* man’s character, much less what they share in common. The closest we come to knowledge has to do with how both have been represented: a similarly stark “discrepancy,” according to which History has created and upheld a positive public image that Legend disputes. But History has its problems, and so while we may not be able to trust individual legends, we *can* trust our intuition that there is more to the story than History allows, something homelier, assuming that “life is made up of marble and mud.”

“The Pyncheon of Today” approaches Phips in typological complexity. Both entertain the notion that an eminent contemporary may be the reincarnation of an

historical figure now commonly regarded as unseemly, a notion which is predicated on two questions essentially: What was the dead man like, and to what extent does the living one resemble him? Hawthorne effectively leaves the first question unanswered, and yet manages to leave us with the sense that we have been “instructed”—not by providing positive knowledge, but rather by pointing to a legacy of withholding, a persistent veil, a *literary* typology predicated on the omission of something dark (private lives, sinful lives, past lives, etc.). These are Hawthorne’s favorite typologies, I would argue; certainly they are his most durable, for they use skepticism to adumbrate a world of possibility on the other side.

Now for my final point of comparison. In the world of *House*, Judge Pyncheon is the archetypal public man, much as Phips seems to have been for Hawthorne personally, and so it makes sense that the chapter devoted to him, “*Governor Pyncheon*,” should resemble “*Sir William Phips*.” The comparison is instructive, as we shall see. To begin, you will recall how “Phips” follows a day’s itinerary almost to the hour, and seems to hold us in the present, even as the rhetoric draws us into the past, causing a kind of shadowy-background effect. Secondly, the story sometimes makes use of free-indirect discourse. Consider the following passage, which introduces the scene of encounter between Phips and the man in the black wig:

As the dignitaries of church and state make their way beneath the overhanging houses, the lattices are thrust ajar, and you may discern, just in the boundaries of light and shade, the prim faces of the little puritan damsels, eyeing the magnificent governor, and envious of the bolder curiosity of the men. Another object of almost equal interest, now appears in the middle of the way. It is a man clad in a hunting shirt and Indian stockings, and armed with a long gun...

The phrase “another object of almost equal interest” can be read two ways. One, the narrator is simply doing his job as biographer to provide “interesting” details. But it begs

also to be read as a form of free-indirect discourse, a first-person window into Phips's unclean thoughts as his attention shifts from "the little Puritan damsels" to "another object of almost equal interest," perhaps a veteran who owes him "interest" on a loan.

"Governor Pyncheon" adheres to a similar formula. As the would-be governor sits motionless in the chair, presumably dead, the narrator mockingly takes us through his would-be agenda, and to do this he makes extensive use of free-indirect discourse: an "interview" with Clifford, a meeting with a stock broker, an auction to "re-annex" an adjoining lot, a wife's gravestone to be replaced, a rich widow with an attractive daughter, a political gala, perhaps a seat next to Daniel Webster, the best old madeira, a nomination, a governorship. Other feverish musings follow until the jingling shop-bell finally intervenes. Has this reel of images yielded any insight? Virtually nothing is declared. The narrator insulates himself with the claim that all of it "may by no means be considered as forming an actual portion of our story." Indeed the chapter ends with an evident sense of relief at being back in the stable world of consensus and market values, and pointing us back to its owlish opening:

Judge Pyncheon, while his two relatives have fled away with such ill-considered haste, still sits in the old parlor, keeping house, as the familiar phrase is, in the absence of its ordinary occupants. To him, to the venerable House of the Seven Gables, does our story now betake itself, like an owl, bewildered in the daylight, and hastening back to its hollow tree.

While the owl is a symbol of wisdom, "Governor Pyncheon" seems more like a dream, as if the narrator has fallen asleep and revisits, this time with relaxed inhibitions, some of the stories about the Judge that he had been so quick to disavow earlier. Fittingly, this chapter is also the most purely "romantic" segment of the book, that is, according to the definition of romance implied in the preface (free to probe beyond the probable). This point can be illustrated by a comparison of two passages. Earlier, in "The Pyncheon of

Today,” the narrator had mentioned a rumor, denounced it as a “fable,” yet paused to acknowledge that it was “not impossibly typical” of the Judge’s character. In other words, this rumor may be tantamount to slander, but its *tenor* remains possible.

The Judge had wedded but a single wife, and lost her in the third or fourth year of their marriage. There was a fable, however—for such we choose to consider it, though, not impossibly, typical of Judge Pyncheon’s marital deportment—that the lady got her death-blow in the honey-moon, and never smiled again, because her husband compelled her to serve him with coffee, every morning, at his bedside, in token of fealty to her liege-lord and master.<sup>108</sup>

In “Governor Pyncheon” he revisits the topic of “marital deportment,” now entertaining that not-impossible tenor by insinuating that the Judge is glad that his first wife is dead. Notice also the ominous recurrence of the word “seasonable,” Higginson’s *mot juste*, now a kind of toxic item:

And if he have time, amid the press of more urgent matters, he must take measures for the renewal of Mrs. Pyncheon’s tombstone, which, the sexton tells him, has fallen on its marble face, and is cracked quite in twain. She was a praiseworthy woman enough, thinks the Judge, in spite of her nervousness, and the tears that she was so oozy with, and her foolish behavior about the coffee; and as she took her departure so seasonably, he will not grudge the second tombstone. It is better, at least, than if she had never needed any.

In the context of the epic that is *House*, “Governor Pyncheon” is a trip to the underworld. It can be no coincidence that the subsequent chapter begins with the Pyncheon elm being likened to “the golden bough that gained Aeneas and the Sibyl admittance into Hades.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Apparently this story was based, at least in part, on an episode in Wirt’s own life. Kennedy relates how Wirt’s first wife, the daughter of a prominent Virginia doctor, died a little over four years into their marriage, and that Wirt composed a poem for her marble headstone (I: 75-6). There seems to have been suspicion about Wirt’s motives and treatment of her. There was certainly a lot of talk about his dissolute lifestyle before as well as after her death. Kennedy acknowledges that Wirt was not “the most sedate of all who rode the circuits,” and that there were “occasional irregularities of conduct,” but maintains that these have been blown out of proportion by his enemies who “repeat and aggravate the most improbable of these falsehoods” with “wanton and malicious exaggeration” (I: 64-8). See note 35 for more evidence that Judge Pyncheon is a version of Wirt.

<sup>109</sup> This detail was probably inspired by John Adams’s letter to Wirt, cited on p. 17 of this chapter. Hawthorne would have encountered it in Kennedy.

Hawthorne probably knew that for Virgil the elm could symbolize, in addition to a host of prized things, *false* dreams. He certainly knew that George Burroughs had been convicted of witchcraft largely on the basis of rumors that he beat his wife. Hawthorne indulges similar rumors here for the sake of a “belief,” no more and no less, “that whatever show of honor may have been piled upon it, there was heavy sin at the base of this man’s being.”

The above statement comes at a climactic moment, near the end of the chapter, and it has the ring of a closing argument. It is followed, a few lines down, by the phrase, “Yonder leaden Judge *sits* immoveable upon our soul,” which pointedly evokes a phrase used back in chapter one to describe the “coroner’s jury” as it “sat upon the corpse” of Colonel Pyncheon. Hawthorne appears to have designed this chapter, at least in part, as a kind of forensic oration. Lending support to this theory, there are echoes of William Wirt’s speech against Aaron Burr, a famous speech and one presumably fresh in Hawthorne’s mind from his reading of Kennedy, who quotes sizeable portions of it. Wirt had been chief prosecutor at the treason trial of Aaron Burr, who stood accused of conspiring to raise an army and sever the western territories from the union. Burr’s lawyers argued that he had broken no law, emphasizing the lack of documentary evidence. The prosecution’s case rested largely on hearsay evidence, and Wirt’s brilliant imagination. In his speech Wirt insisted that in order to appreciate Burr’s obvious guilt the “whole project” must be reconstructed in vivid detail. Reminding his more “sensitive” auditors that this was not a “drawing room” but a “court of justice,” that it was not his job as prosecutor to “pronounce a panegyric on the prisoner,” he proceeds to deliver a spirited *narratio* on a scale worthy of Cicero’s *Catilinarians*. The most famous

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part of the speech is probably that recounting Burr's visit to Herman Blennerhasset's mansion. Blennerhasset, who lived in a mansion he had built for himself on a private island in the Ohio River, had entertained Burr on his way to New Orleans allegedly to link up with co-conspirators. Wirt's rendition reads like a cross between Milton and Cicero, as he imagines Burr landing on the "enchanted island" to tempt Blennerhasset and his wife:

In the midst of all this peace, this innocent simplicity and this tranquility, this feast of the mind, this pure banquet of the heart, the destroyer comes; he comes to change this paradise into a hell. Yet the flowers do not wither at his approach. No monitory shuddering through the bosom of their unfortunate possessor warns him of the ruin that is coming to him. A stranger presents himself. Introduced to their civilities by the high rank which he had lately held in his country, he soon finds his way to their hearts by the dignity and elegance of his demeanour, the light and beauty of his conversation, and the seductive and fascinating power of his address. The conquest was not difficult.<sup>110</sup>

Surely this was not lost on Hawthorne's characterization of Judge Pyncheon as a charming but depraved aristocrat, who, "cherishing his schemes," enters the house to disturb its veritable Eden. Meanwhile the narrator assumes Wirt's role as prosecutor, rehashing "all the deep-laid schemes of yesterday," moralizing grandly ("ambition is a talisman more powerful than witchcraft"), persistently mocking the defendant, ironically a Judge, with a "rise up" refrain—which appears to have been inspired by Wirt's analysis of the French *lever* in connection with the charge that Burr had illegally levied, or "raised," an army—and crowning it all with the soaring pronouncement:

Will he bear about with him—no odious grin of feigned benignity, insolent in its pretence, and loathsome in its falsehood—but the tender sadness of a contrite heart, broken, at last, beneath its own weight of sin? For it is our belief that, whatever show of honor he may have piled upon it, there was heavy sin at the base of this man's being.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Kennedy, I: 171.

<sup>111</sup> The irony increases somewhat when we realize that, for Hawthorne at least, Judge Pyncheon was a version of Wirt himself! See appendix four.

I will leave you with the following theory. Wirt's *Sketches* had been Hawthorne's model for "Phips." In the Burr speech he recognized a simpler model. Here was a tour de force of imagination in service to "the deficiencies of fact," but this time to probe for putative sin. Apparently at both ends of his career Hawthorne sensed that America, its past divided between the Mathers of yesterday and today, needed a kind of devil's advocate.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> See appendix five.

## CHAPTER THREE

Sound and fury: Mather on the commemorative stage in “The Gray Champion”

...to deny all which, would be as reasonable as to turn the chronicles of all nations into romances of *Don Quixote* and the *Seven Champions*...

—Cotton Mather, *Pietas in Patriam; The Life of His Excellency Sir William Phips*



## **I: New England's glorious revolution**

At dawn on April 18, 1689, colonists from Boston and vicinity, many of them deserted militia, gathered in the North End and neighboring Charlestown. By mid-morning they had seized military stores, arrested the captain of H.M.S. *Rose*, and imprisoned a handful of government ministers and supporters (among them Dr. Bullivant). By early afternoon they were laying siege to Castle William, the town citadel where Governor Andros and the remnant of his administration had taken refuge. It had begun as something of a popular movement, without visible support from above, but as the day wore on various members of the Puritan elite came forward, forming a Committee of Public Safety, calling for conscription, and reading from the balcony of the Town Hall a statement which had been prepared in advance by Cotton Mather. Titled "Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston," it catalogued Andros's misdeeds and identified the movement with "the noble undertaking of the Prince of Orange." Attached was a memo signed by members of the Committee calling on the governor to surrender, largely for his own security against an angry mob. Andros grasped the futility of the situation and duly capitulated. Meanwhile the "old" charter of 1630, which had been vacated five years before on orders from Charles II, was reinstated pending word from England.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. Ian K. Steele, "The Origins of Boston's Revolutionary Declaration of 18 April 1689," *New England Quarterly* 62: 1 (March, 1989), pp. 75-81; Steven Saunders Webb, *Lord Churchill's Coup* (New York: Knopf, 1995), pp. 182-95; David S. Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 239-45; Richard R. Johnson, *Adjustment to Empire: The New England Colonies 1675-1715* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971), pp. 881-91; Viola F. Barnes, *The Dominion of New England: A Study in British Colonial Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923) pp. 238-45. I have relied on each of these studies in order to present as impartial an account as possible of the events of April 18, 1689.

Over the next few months the fate of New England hung in the balance. Fortunately for the colonists there was now a new king to treat with. In the fall of the previous year William of Orange, in response to an invitation from Parliament, had landed in England. No shots were fired in anger, and as William's army approached London, James II fled to France, clearing the way for William to be declared king in early 1689. William was a Calvinist, and on news of the Boston revolt he immediately recalled Andros and suspended the Dominion. But it soon became clear that the new king was also a pragmatist for whom only a new charter—one which made the colony answerable directly to him rather than a board of company directors, and which mandated religious toleration—would do. Increase Mather, who had been in London for several years lobbying for the old charter, saw the writing on the wall. The old charter was out of the question. Now he must sell the new charter to a faction back home who viewed it as a betrayal of the original errand, and not lose face in the process. To do this he argued that the new charter was the king's way of guaranteeing New Englanders full rights as citizens of the mother country, thus protecting them from another arbitrary governor like Andros. In exchange they would have to accept toleration, but that, far from a betrayal, was what the "errand into the wilderness" had been all about. But had it?

In the *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Cotton Mather carried on his father's work redefining the errand, and he managed to do so in a way that kept New England exceptional.<sup>114</sup> As he told it, New England had been founded as a refuge from Stuart tyranny. Fifty years on, with the charter vacated and a Stuart viceroy sent to rule over them, they found themselves under that tyranny once again. For several years they

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<sup>114</sup> My argument follows that of Bruce Tucker, "The Reinvention of New England, 1671-1770," *New England Quarterly* 59:3 (Sept., 1986), pp. 315-21.

“suffered patiently” as those civil and religious liberties for which their fathers had fled were taken from them. But then on news that England was finally moving against James II, they rose up in solidarity. To make New England a full participant in the Glorious Revolution was to demonstrate not only loyalty but entitlement to full constitutional rights. And yet at the same time, Mather made the Glorious Revolution itself seem like an event New England had envisioned, indeed virtually acted out, back in 1630. It was as if Old England, in 1688, finally woke up to what New England had stood for all along.

Whether he intended it or not, Mather also gave New England a typology of resistance, one which would be exploited eighty years later by publicists such as Samuel Adams, who argued that once again, as in 1630 and 1689, New Englanders were standing up for quintessential English liberties against a corrupt English government, but this time they might not be able to wait for their English brethren to wake up.<sup>115</sup> Their rationale, in turn, would serve nineteenth-century New England historians, who used it to show that the libertarian ideals of the Revolution, now enshrined in the Declaration and Constitution, had been cradled in New England from the start. The country was expanding, but states like Massachusetts would continue to define the spirit of America.<sup>116</sup> Jared Sparks, for example, in his review of William Wirt’s *Sketches of the Life of Patrick Henry*, took issue with Wirt’s claim that Henry had been the “first voice of

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<sup>115</sup> The classic discussion of American “radical Whig” ideology remains Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-87* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), pp. 1-124.

<sup>116</sup> On Webster’s “sectional nationalist” agenda, see Harlow Shiedley, *Sectional Nationalism: Massachusetts Conservative Leaders and the Transformation of America, 1815-1836* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998). For a compelling discussion of his agenda in the Plymouth oration, see Paul D. Erikson, “Daniel Webster’s Myth of the Pilgrims,” *New England Quarterly* 57:1 (March 1984), pp. 44-64.

resistance” in the colonies. In a lengthy digression, Sparks surveys New England’s rich revolutionary pedigree, which began with the Pilgrims, whom the “high-born sentiments of freedom” drove to seek an “asylum in the wilderness.” This “same spirit” would continue to animate their descendants on all occasions when they “fancied their liberties were encroached on or their rights invaded.” 1689—the “energetic proceedings of the people of Massachusetts Bay during the tyrannical administration of Sir Edmund Andros”—was a case in point. Sparks refers his readers to a number of pamphlets published in the aftermath of the uprising, pointing out that the same arguments would be made on the eve of the Boston Massacre against Governor Barnard’s quartering of troops. In fact, new editions of Mather’s Declaration were then being printed in Boston, “so exactly did it suit the spirit of those times.” In sum, the “fathers of New England,” if they were alive today, would “scarcely thank Mr. Wirt for telling them that [the American Revolution] originated in Virginia so late as the year 1765, but would point him to the history of their descendants, and show him that the spirit of their ancestors never slumbered in their bosoms.”<sup>117</sup>

## **II: Pseudo-Webster**

“The Gray Champion” is full of similar rhetoric, and we know that Hawthorne was deeply familiar with this article, making it fair to suppose that the story was written in response to it. But I shall not go too deeply into that, for it is equally obvious that the story mimics commemorative oratory, which carried the same message, and which reached a much larger audience. In particular, I think that Hawthorne had in mind Daniel

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<sup>117</sup> Jared Sparks, “Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry,” *North American Review* 18 (March, 1818), pp. 302-11.

Webster's speech for the 1820 Plymouth bicentennial. This was a very famous speech. In it, Webster essentially rehashes Mather's grand narrative. "Love of religious liberty" drove the Pilgrims to "voluntary exile." Soon others followed their lead, settling harbors up and down the coast of what they called New England. There they and their children would endure numerous hardships: a howling wilderness, Indians, and finally a governor who came to take away their charter, and with it their hard-won liberties. Under the Dominion everything good ground to a halt, until word of the Orange Revolution arrived, and the colonists rose up, even before it was safe to do so. The lower orders were brimming with passion; their leaders responsibly shepherded that, risking their "lives and fortunes" to sign Mather's Declaration. Mather himself, who dared to resist "kingly encroachment in religion," was a "champion of liberty" in a "fateful and perilous conflict."<sup>118</sup>

"The Gray Champion" is a tale that begs to be read as a commemorative oration. The "bigoted" James II, we are told, has sent Andros, every inch a tyrant, to take away the colonist's civil and religious liberties. The colonists, in turn, have patiently coped, but when they get vague news of William's landing, heady but "subdued" anticipation grips the land. Governor Andros intends to discourage rebellion. He musters his ministers and soldiers for a parade, which winds through town and onto King Street. The colonists, who have gathered there, fear the worst, and while their ministers appear to calm them, still the redcoat legion marches on. Suddenly an old man comes forward. He has a long white beard and is dressed "in the fashion of at least fifty years before." Ordering the troops to halt, he warns Andros that his days are numbered. Andros,

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<sup>118</sup> Daniel Webster, *Discourse Delivered at Plymouth, December 22, 1820, in Commemoration of the First Settlement of New England* (Boston, 1821).

sensing danger, signals a retreat. As the people celebrate, the mysterious old man disappears into the crowd, but he will return, the speaker then assures us in a rousing peroration:

...whenever the descendants of the Puritans are to show the spirit of their sires, the old man appears again. When eighty years had passed, he walked once more in King Street. Five years later, in the twilight of an April morning, he stood on the green, beside the meeting-house, at Lexington, where now the obelisk of granite, with a slab of slate inlaid, commemorates the first fallen of the Revolution. And when our fathers were toiling in the breastwork on Bunker's Hill, all through that night the old warrior walked his rounds. Long, long may it be, ere he comes again! His hour is one of darkness, and adversity, and peril. But should domestic tyranny oppress us, or the invader's step pollute our soil, still may the Gray Champion come, for he is the type of New England's hereditary spirit; and his shadowy march, on the eve of danger, must ever be the pledge, that New England's sons will vindicate their ancestry.<sup>119</sup>

This speaker, I argue, is meant to be a version of Webster; I will be calling him pseudo-Webster in order to distinguish between Hawthorne, his persona, and Webster himself. On cursory reading, pseudo-Webster appears to deliver just the message we would expect: the colonists, who have had their civil and religious liberties trampled on, stand their ground admirably, thanks in large part to the leadership of the clergy, until they are rescued by a figure who embodies the spirit of the first settlers. On closer inspection, however, we see pseudo-Webster's rhetoric effectively tearing against that message. Let us begin by comparing two passages. The first is from Webster's Plymouth speech and depicts the Pilgrim landing:

...we are on the spot, where the first scene of our history was laid; where the hearths and altars of New-England were first placed; where Christianity, and civilization, and letters made their first lodgment, in a vast extent of country, covered with a wilderness, and peopled by roving barbarians... The imagination irresistibly and rapidly draws around us the principal features, and the leading characters in the original scene. We cast our eyes abroad on the ocean, and we see where the little barque, with the interesting group upon its deck, made its

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<sup>119</sup> Compare Sparks: "...this [spirit] will animate and encourage them to resist to the last breath a cruel and invading enemy," *op. cit.*, p. 305.

slow progress to the shore. We look around us, and behold the hills and promontories, where the anxious eyes of our fathers first saw the places of habitation and of rest. We feel the cold which benumbed, and listen to the winds which pierced them. Beneath us is the Rock, on which New-England received the feet of the Pilgrims. We seem even to behold them, as they struggle with the elements, and with toilsome efforts gain the shore. We listen to the chiefs in council; we see the unexampled exhibition of female fortitude and resignation; we hear the whisperings of youthful impatience, and we see, what a painter of our own has also represented by his pencil, chilled and shivering childhood, houseless, but for a mother's arms, couchless, but for a mother's breast, till our own blood almost freezes. The mild dignity of Carver and of Bradford; the decisive and soldier-like air and manner of Standish; the devout Brewster; the enterprising Allerton; the general firmness and thoughtfulness of the whole band; their conscious joy for dangers escaped; their deep solicitude about dangers to come; their trust in heaven; their high religious faith, full of confidence and anticipation...

Now here is pseudo-Webster, depicting the colonists gathered against their impending doom:

A multitude, by various avenues, assembled in King Street, which was destined to be the scene, nearly a century afterwards, of another encounter between the troops of Britain, and a people struggling against her tyranny. Though more than sixty years had elapsed since the Pilgrims came, this crowd of their descendants still showed the strong and sombre features of their character... There was the sober garb, the general severity of mien, the gloomy but undismayed expression, the scriptural forms of speech, and the confidence in Heaven's blessing on a righteous cause, which would have marked a band of the original Puritans, when threatened by some peril of the wilderness. Indeed, it was not yet time for that old spirit to be extinct; since there were men in the street, that day, who had worshipped there beneath the trees, before a house was reared to the God, for whom they had become exiles. Old soldiers of the Parliament were here too, smiling grimly at the thought, that their aged arms might strike another blow against the house of Stuart. Here also, were the veterans of King Philip's war, who had burnt villages and slaughtered young and old, with pious fierceness, while the godly souls throughout the land were helping them with prayer. Several ministers were scattered among the crowd, which, unlike all other mobs, regarded them with such reverence, as if there were sanctity in their garments.

Here we have a kind of sequel to Webster's *tableau vivant*: seventy years on, the colonists face new perils, but the same "old spirit" continues to animate them. And yet pseudo-Webster, in the course of his argument, ends up revealing some of the evils and hypocrisies which that spirit, whatever it was, has enabled. It is as if he means to validate Webster's prophecy, but allows himself to become progressively more infatuated with

admiration for the colonists' piety. Their "reverence" for their ministers is for him a mark of distinction (this "crowd" is not your ordinary "mob"), but there is more than a whiff of hypocrisy here, particularly in light of his subsequent remarks about how the Anglican clergyman's "priestly vestments" symbolize "all those abominations which had driven the Puritans to the wilderness." Evidently the colonists have come to practice a version of the same. All of this forces us to wonder what the errand *really* was about, or at least what it has come to mean since.

So much for an easy divide between freedom-loving colonists and their oppressors. As for the idea of principled leadership from above, that message breaks down too. While pseudo-Webster seems to toe the conventional line, his language is *just unclear enough* for a whole other story to materialize in the shadow. As we shall see, his language literally conspires against him.

Hawthorne, without a doubt, was deeply familiar with Mather's account of the uprising. But he seems also to have known at least one counter-narrative, a pamphlet attributed to Edward Randolph, Andros's chief lieutenant and Mather's great nemesis. In it, Randolph, who had since returned to England after spending several months in the Boston jail alongside other Dominion officials, insists that the Puritan elite resented Andros because he undid the monopoly they once enjoyed under the old charter, but, rather than risk their necks openly, they had the people do their bidding for them. For several months the clergy worked to "prepare their minds" by propagating "foolish and nonsensicall stories" that Andros was a militant papist plotting to bring New England under world-Catholic dominion in the form of an alliance between James II and Louis XIV; was conspiring with Jesuit priests on the frontier to incite the Indians; had ordered



his doctor to serve the militia poisoned rum, before leading them on a hopeless expedition to the Maine wilderness during the depths of winter, all because he wanted to decimate their ranks and massacre the defenseless population; that he stacked the officer-corps with Roman-Catholics; that H.M.S. *Rose*, a frigate stationed in Boston Harbor, had been given orders to fire upon the city, which was to be incinerated and replanted with Irish papists. “With these and the like false stories,” writes Randolph,

the country was miserably distracted, and when any came to town, some secretly told them the same things and others shook their heads and made ugly faces, whereby they concluded all to be true, which was reported amongst them. So that it was but the sounding a trumpet or beating a drum, and the majority of the people was ready to rise against the governor, who, as they were made to believe, was the great enemy of the country.<sup>120</sup>

Randolph portrays the Puritan clergy, Cotton Mather chief among them, as sanctimonious vipers who perfected the art of managed mobocracy—“professors of the greatest sanctity” who “preached prayer and passivity” but secretly contrived to “raise the devil”—setting up an elaborate system of “alarms” to “make trial” of the people’s readiness “when called to action.” And so when the people finally did rise up, the clergy casually stepped in under pretense of restoring order, and to coat with a veneer of orange their plot to revive the old theocracy.

Mather gave his own version several years later, in the Phips biography, which he in turn put at the heart of the *Magnalia*. By now the battle for English public opinion had

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<sup>120</sup> [Anonymous], *A Particular Account of the Late Revolution, 1689* (London, 1690), in Charles M. Andrews, ed., *Narratives of the Insurrections, 1675-1690* (New York: Scribner’s, 1915), pp. 196-210. In Hawthorne’s day, the pamphlet was attributed to Randolph; cf. Alonzo Lewis, *History of Lynn* (1827). However, it was probably composed by Rev. Robert Ratcliffe, the first vicar of King’s Chapel, who had been one of those rounded up and jailed during the uprising, and the very “high churchman” fictionalized by Hawthorne in the story. There are far too many references to church matters—for example, the pun on Puritan homiletics in the phrase “prepare their minds,” cited in p. 7 of this chapter—for a layman like Randolph to have written this; cf. Andrews, op. cit., p. 196.

run its course. Moreover, a canonical “Glorious Revolution” narrative had crystallized. According to it, a whiggish elite had shepherded a populace frazzled by rumors of a popish plot. Mather shapes his account to mirror that. He acknowledges that the uprising had two dimensions, popular and elite. He admits that among “the suspicious people” were circulating “like wild-fire” certain rumors “more extreme” than a “strong charity would have countenanced.” But the clergy, far from propagating them, worked hard to discredit them. It was only when the militia, bewildered by the rumors, began to desert their posts that “the more considerate persons” grew concerned:

And one thing that plunged the more considerate persons in the territory into uneasie thoughts, was the *faulty action* of some soldiers, who upon the common suspicions, deserted their stations in the army, and caused their friends to gather here and there in little bodies, to protect from the demands of the governour their poor children and brethren, whom they thought bound for a *bloody sacrifice*; and there were also belonging to the Rose-frigot some that buzzed surprising stories about Boston, of many mischiefs to be thence expected.

And so “the principal gentlemen in Boston” devised a plan (continuing):

Wherefore, some of the principal gentlemen in Boston, consulting what was to be done in this extraordinary juncture, they all agreed they would, if it were possible, extinguish all essays in the people toward an *insurrection*, in daily hopes of orders from England for their safety: but that if the country people, by any violent motions, pushed the matter on so far as to make a *revolution* unavoidable, then, to prevent the shedding of blood by an ungoverned *mobile*, some of the gentlemen present should appear at the head of the *action* with a *declaration* accordingly prepared.

All of this paid off when the levee finally broke (continuing):

By the eighteenth of April, 1689, things were pushed on so far by the people, that certain persons seized the captain of a frigot, and the rumor thereof running like lightning throughout Boston, the whole town was immediately in arms, with the most *unanimous resolution* perhaps that ever was known to have inspired any people. They then seized those wretched men, who by their innumerable *extortions* and *abuses* had made themselves the objects of universal hatred; not giving over till the governour himself was become their prisoner; the whole action being managed without the least bloodshed or plunder, and without and with as much *order* as ever attended any *tumult*, it may be, in the world. Thus did the New-Englanders assert their title to the common rights of Englishmen; and except the plantations are willing to degenerate from the temper of true

Englishmen, or except the revolution of the whole English nation be condemned, their *action* must so far be justified.<sup>121</sup>

Thus did Mather manage to have the last word, and that word would live on through Adams, Webster, and numerous other mouths.<sup>122</sup>

“Champion” effectively reopens the case. We hear echoes of Randolph almost right away. According to Randolph, remember, the clergy’s propaganda made the country

miserably distracted, and when any came to town, some secretly told them the same things and others shook their heads and made ugly faces, whereby they concluded all to be true, which was reported amongst them. So that it was but the sounding a trumpet or beating a drum, and the majority of the people was ready to rise against the governor, who, as they were made to believe, was the great enemy of the country.

Now compare this with the following, from the second paragraph of the story:

At length a rumor reached our shores that the Prince of Orange had ventured on an enterprise, the success of which would be the triumph of civil and religious rights and the salvation of New England. It was but a doubtful whisper: it might be false, or the attempt might fail; and, in either case, the man that stirred against King James would lose his head. Still the intelligence produced a marked effect. The people smiled mysteriously in the streets, and threw bold glances at their oppressors; while far and wide there was a subdued and silent agitation, as if the slightest signal would rouse the whole land from its sluggish despondency.

We also hear echoes of Randolph in Hawthorne’s description of the colonists assembling in King Street: the “roll of the drum” is like their “muster-call.” There is something uncanny about how they come together “by various avenues” and form, as if on cue, around their ministers, who “quiet” them but (tellingly) do not “disperse” them:

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<sup>121</sup> *Magnalia Christi Americana*, ed. Rev. Thomas Robbins (Hartford: 1853), vol. I, pp. 179-80. Throughout this dissertation, my punctuation—including all italics and capitalization—follows Robbins, which was presumably how Hawthorne encountered the *Magnalia*.

<sup>122</sup> Examples may be found throughout the oratorical literature of the early nineteenth century, but it seems worth noting Joseph Story’s speech at the Salem bicentennial in 1828, for perhaps Hawthorne was in the audience. Justice Story, close friend of Webster’s, includes an account of 1689, declaring that “resistance to the arbitrary measures of Sir Edmund Andros was but a prelude to the principles and practice of the Revolution.”

The roll of the drum at that unquiet crisis seemed to go through the streets, less as the martial music of the soldiers, than as a muster-call to the inhabitants themselves. A multitude, by various avenues, assembled in King Street, which was destined to be the scene, nearly a century afterwards, of another encounter between the troops of Britain and a people struggling against her tyranny... Several ministers were scattered among the crowd, which, unlike all other mobs, regarded them with such reverence, as if there were sanctity in their very garments. These holy men exerted their influence to quiet the people, but not to disperse them.

This is followed by a volley of feverish “interpretations”:

Meantime, the purpose of the Governor, in disturbing the peace of the town, at a period when the slightest commotion might throw the country into a ferment, was almost the universal subject of inquiry, and variously explained.

"Satan will strike his master-stroke presently," cried some, "because he knoweth that his time is short. All our godly pastors are to be dragged to prison! We shall see them at a Smithfield fire in King Street!"...

"The Pope of Rome has given orders for a new St. Bartholomew!" cried others. "We are to be massacred, man and male child!"

Neither was this rumor wholly discredited, although the wiser class believed the Governor's object somewhat less atrocious.

Presumably, pseudo-Webster means that the menacing *sight* of Andros and his redcoats does not discredit the rumor. But the agent of “discredited” is ambiguous. Is it that “the wiser class” (clearly a nod to Mather’s “more considerate persons”) refrain from disabusing the people of a notion which they themselves know to be false—perhaps because they have put it there in the first place and now ventriloquize it from anonymous places in the crowd? That may be for us to decide. What *is* certain is that there is panic in the air, and that the elite is on the ground trying to manage public opinion. The same ambiguous dynamic continues:

His predecessor under the old charter, Bradstreet, a venerable companion of the first settlers, was known to be in town. There were grounds for conjecturing, that Sir Edmund Andros intended, at once, to strike terror, by a parade of military force, and to confound the opposite faction, by possessing himself of their chief.

“Stand firm for the old charter Governor!” shouted the crowd, seizing upon the idea. “The good old Governor Bradstreet!”

While this cry was at the loudest, the people were surprised by the well-known figure of Governor Bradstreet himself, a patriarch of nearly ninety, who appeared on the elevated steps of a door, and, with characteristic mildness, besought

them to submit to the constituted authorities.

“My children,” concluded this venerable person, “do nothing rashly. Cry not aloud, but pray for the welfare of New-England, and expect patiently what the Lord will do in this matter!”

According to Mather, intelligence that Andros was planning to arrest opposition leaders (principally himself) had been one of the *casus belli*; Randolph, on the other hand, claimed that this was just another false story spread by the clergy. Pseudo-Webster shows the “idea” being leaked, and presumably by “the wiser class,” for notice how the people immediately “seize upon” it. But it remains unclear whether the elite mean to steer the people on a more rational course, or merely manipulate them with another fable now that they have them where they want them. Indeed there is something rather staged about how Bradstreet happens to appear exactly when chants for the “old charter governor” are the loudest. The same could be said of the eponymous hero’s appearance, which takes place a little later, just as the redcoats are closing in:

“Oh! Lord of Hosts,” cried a voice among the crowd, “provide a champion for thy people!”

This ejaculation was loudly uttered, and served as a herald’s cry, to introduce a remarkable personage. The crowd had rolled back, and were now huddled together nearly at the extremity of the street, while the soldiers had advanced no more than a third of its length. The intervening space was empty—a paved solitude, between lofty edifices, which threw almost a twilight shadow over it. Suddenly, there was seen the figure of an ancient man, who seemed to have emerged from the people, and was walking by himself along the centre of the street, to confront the armed band. He wore the old Puritan dress, a dark cloak and a steeple-crowned hat, in the fashion of at least fifty years before, with a heavy sword upon his thigh, but a staff in his hand, to assist the tremulous gait of age.

When at some distance from the multitude, the old man turned slowly round, displaying a face of antique majesty, rendered doubly venerable by the hoary beard that descended on his breast. He made a gesture at once of encouragement and warning, then turned again, and resumed his way.

The “doubly venerable” champion is a hawkish iteration of the “venerable” Bradstreet. Later, as the crowd celebrate the victory, we are told that the two men were seen “embracing.” Here Randolph would have recognized support for his argument about a

clergy who preached “prayer and passivity” in public, but privately “raised the devil.” Hawthorne leaves the question open-ended. For him, I suspect, the champion, angel or devil, symbolized the bundle of fictions—twice-told tales, as it were—which mobilized the people and delivered them from bondage, and which, paradoxically, rings true to the historical reality of 1689.

To be sure, very little of Hawthorne’s plot can be deemed historical, at least in the literal sense of the word. There had been no eleventh-hour show of force; while Andros *had* imported a handful of soldiers to act as a bodyguard, it was hardly the battalion of regulars depicted here. And as for the “old warrior” coming forward to save the people in their hour of need, it would have been quite obvious to readers that Hawthorne was trying his hand at a topic then very much in vogue among romancers, namely, the so-called Angel of Hadley legend, about the regicide judge who during King Philip’s War emerges from hiding to rescue the people of Hadley when the frontier village is suddenly attacked by Indians.<sup>123</sup> But even these things, I shall now argue, serve a historical purpose—not, again, in the literal sense, but then Webster himself had not been very literal when he made 1689 the second “act” of a “great Revolutionary Drama” that began at Plymouth Rock.

Let us begin with the image of Andros’s men, music blaring and banners flying, snaking their way through town and onto King Street in “double rank.” This seems to have been designed to evoke Paul Revere’s engraving of British regulars arriving in

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<sup>123</sup> Cf. G. Harrison Orians, “The Angel of Hadley in Fiction: A Study of the Sources of Hawthorne’s ‘Gray Champion,’” *American Literature* 4 (1932), pp. 256-69. Orians was the first in a long line to address this topic. For useful background on the legend itself as it came into the nineteenth-century, see Mark L. Sargent, “Thomas Hutchinson, Ezra Stiles, and the Legend of the Regicides,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 49:3 (July 1992), pp. 431-8.

Boston in 1768. The men are shown disembarking along the waterfront and moving up King Street in double file. The caption reads:

...three ships of war, armed schooners, transports, came up the harbour, and anchored round the town; their cannon loaded and springs on their cables, as for a regular siege. [The next day] the 14<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> regiments, a detachment from the 59<sup>th</sup>, and train of artillery with two pieces of cannon, landed on the Long-wharf, then formed and marched with insolent parade, drums beating, fifes playing, and colours flying, up King-street: each soldier having received sixteen round of shot.

Revere's object was to present heavily armed mercenaries arriving with a "siege" mentality, thus setting the stage for his complementary engraving of the Boston Massacre, an event which took place a little over a year later, when some of the same troops fired on civilians gathered in front of the Custom House. Revere did both engravings at the same time and meant them as companion pieces (Figures X and X). It was propaganda and it succeeded; Governor Barnard's decision to quarter troops in Boston, done in response to chronic unrest, would go down in history as the thing that led inevitably to the so-called "massacre" (a title Revere helped to invent; loyalists made a point of calling it the Boston Riot). Hawthorne seems to want to evoke both engravings. He is careful to specify that Andros meets the colonists near the intersection of Cornwall and King Street, exactly where the Custom House later stood; while the image of the "row of fires in the dusk" seems calculated to evoke Revere's depiction of the British musket-fire:

A double rank of soldiers made their appearance, occupying the whole breadth of the passage, with shouldered matchlocks, and matches burning, so as to present a row of fires in the dusk. Their steady march was like the progress of a machine, that would roll irresistibly over everything in its way.







**Figure 3.** Paul Revere, *The Boston Massacre*, 1770  
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

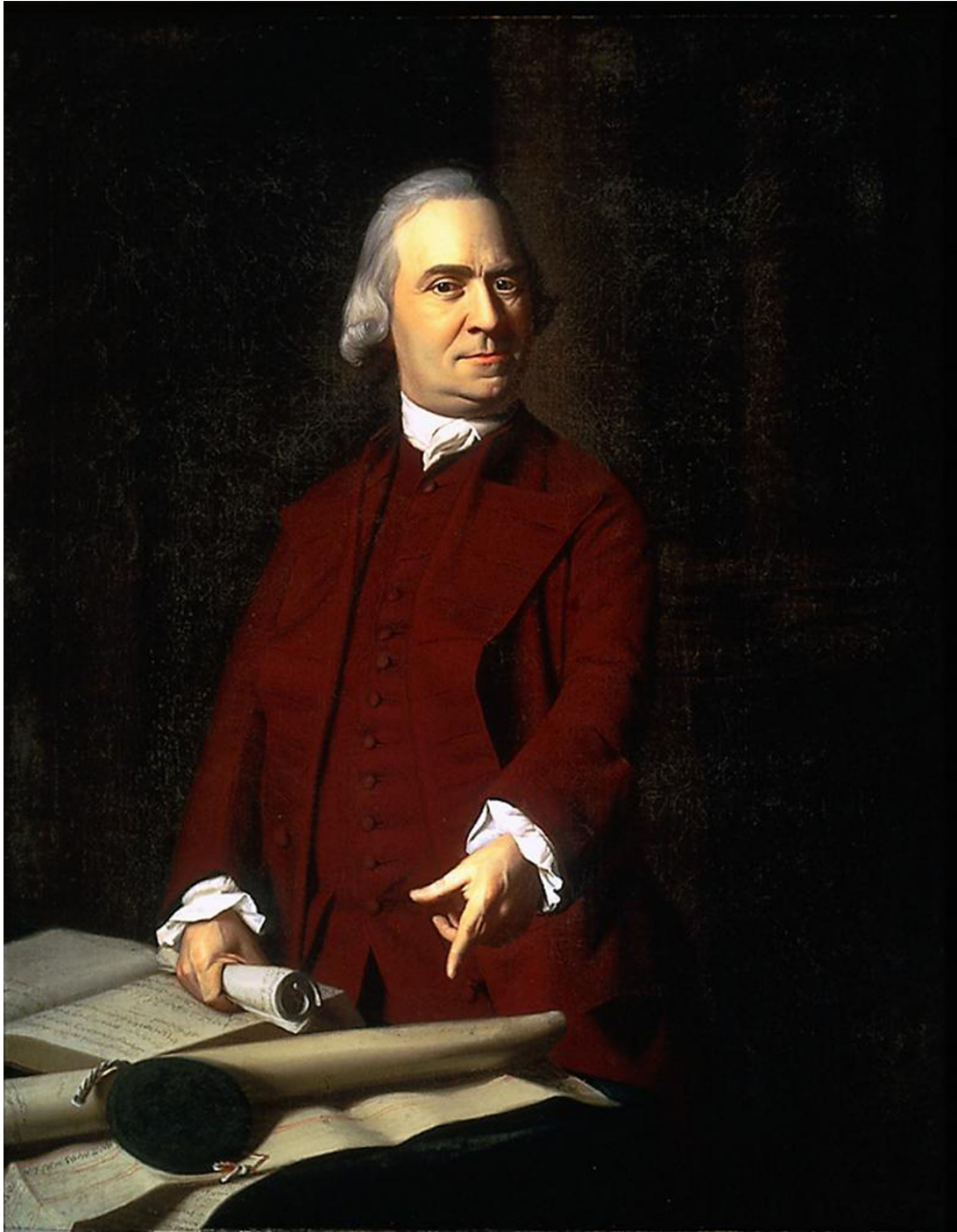
Meanwhile, the climax of the story can only be a reference to the confrontation between Samuel Adams and Governor Thomas Hutchinson that took place the following day. Legend has it that Adams, who chaired the Committee of Public safety, which had been hastily formed in the chaotic aftermath, *personally* intimidated Hutchinson, Barnard's successor, into withdrawing both regiments to Castle William outside town. Samuel's cousin John Adams, who was present, vividly remembered the scene. Into a room of "large white wigs, English scarlet cloth coats" and "gold-laced hats" walked the plainly dressed Samuel Adams:

With a self-recollection, a self-possession, a self-command, a presence of mind that was admired by every man present, Samuel Adams arose with an air of dignity and majesty, of which he was sometimes capable, stretched forth his arm, though even then quivering with palsy, and with an harmonious voice and decisive tone said that "nothing short of the total evacuation of the town by all the regular troops, will satisfy the public mind or preserve the peace of the province." These words thrilled through the veins of every man in the audience, and produced the great result. After a little awkward hesitation, it was agreed that the town should be evacuated, and both regiments sent to the castle. The painter should seize upon the critical moment, when Samuel Adams stretched out his arm, and made his last speech.<sup>124</sup>

Adams ranked this event up there with the surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga. He wrote the above later in life, hoping that a "national" painter might someday take it on. Perhaps Hawthorne took his cue directly from Adams. Or perhaps his inspiration came from John Singleton Copley, whose portrait of Adams aimed to evoke the terrific stare with which Adams supposedly browbeat Hutchinson (Figure X). Whatever the case, it was an iconic moment and fascinated well into the nineteenth century. For the historian George Bancroft it had a certain representative quality, an image of "patriot and courtier standing

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<sup>124</sup> John Adams to William Tudor (April 15, 1817), in *Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, 1856), vol. x, pp. 249-53.



**Figure 4.** John Singleton Copley, *Samuel Adams*, about 1772  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

One art historian has called this portrait “a stirring history painting in the guise of a portrait... The sitter is commandingly real, almost terrifyingly present. Copley linked the portrait to a specific historic moment that was urgently familiar to all who saw it. Yet at the same time he created an image with a larger-than-life message. Adams’s defiant gesture and gaze arrest the viewer, who is cast in the role of Governor Hutchinson himself.” Carol Troyen, *John Singleton Copley in America* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), p. 227.

face to face. When statues are erected to the men of our country, this incident might be well selected for the chisel of an American artist.” It was Adams’s finest hour, and presumably not a few readers could have appreciated Hawthorne’s allusion.

Indeed, for many nineteenth-century readers, Adams was a talismanic figure who embodied, for better or worse, that antique, characteristically Puritan combination of warrior and saint. Younger contemporaries remembered him as a sort of walking anachronism, a man who made a point of wearing the old tricorne hat long after it went out of fashion, whose “conversation was always in praise of old times, his manners austere, [and] his remarks never favourable to the rising generation.” For John Quincy Adams he was a “prophet superannuated and anti-federal.” Others fancied they saw the face of Oliver Cromwell.<sup>125</sup> Edward Everett, speaking at the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Lexington, called him simply

the last of the Puritans. At a time when the new order of things was inducing laxity of manners and a departure from the ancient strictness, Samuel Adams clung with greater tenacity to the wholesome discipline of the fathers... resistance of oppression was his vocation... instead of quailing, his spirit mounted and mantled with the approach of the crisis. He rose to a religious tranquility, as the decisive hour drew nigh. He was a living spring of animation to others. He looked forward to the impending struggle as the consummation of a great design, of which not man, but God, had laid the foundation stone on the rock of Plymouth.<sup>126</sup>

These were common sentiments, a version of which would be articulated by Hawthorne himself, writing in *Grandfather’s Chair* that with Adams

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<sup>125</sup> For the John Quincy Adams quote, and for Samuel Adams as Cromwell, see John P. Kaminski, *The Founders on the Founders: Word Portraits from the Revolutionary Era* (University of Virginia Press, 2008), pp. 152 and 161, respectively. For Adams as an “anachronism,” see Pauline Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries* (New York: Knopf, 1979), pp. 293-4.

<sup>126</sup> Everett, *Address at Lexington* (April 18, 1835).

it seemed as if one of the ancient Puritans had been sent to earth, to animate the people's hearts with the same abhorrence of tyranny, that had distinguished the earliest settlers. He was as religious as they, as stern and inflexible, and as deeply imbued with democratic principles. He, better than anyone else, may be taken as representative of the people of New England, and of the spirit with which they engaged in the revolutionary struggle.

The rhetoric here resembles that of "Champion," but of course "Champion" is a very different kind of story. Hawthorne knew that Adams was a problematic leader, nowhere more so than during the Boston Massacre. For every heroic story, it seems, we can find at least one darker counterpart. For example, there was a rumor that Adams, dressed in a red cloak and white wig, rallied a group of civilians *just before* the shots were fired. Hiller Zobel, in his meticulously researched book on the Boston Massacre, summarizes numerous eye-witness accounts thus:

In the middle of Dock Square, a tall man wearing a white wig and a red cloak stood. Quieting down, the crowd gathered around him. The men at [William] Hunter's [house] could not hear his words, although he was obviously haranguing the mob. They did not know him. After a few minutes, having finished his speech, he went off. The people in Dock Square raised their hats, and gave a cheer for the Main Guard, with a promise to "do for the soldiers." Whistling through their fingers, shrieking, some of them striking their clubs on a store front as they passed, they headed for King Street. Some went over Cornhill, some by a narrow little alley; and the rest roared up Royal Exchange Lane to the Custom House.<sup>127</sup>

Hutchinson's attorney-general accused Adams of being this man, a charge Adams himself vehemently denied, but the rumor persisted long into the nineteenth century.<sup>128</sup>

Suspicion that Adams in some way orchestrated the Boston Massacre were never (have never been) put to rest. There was even a rumor that Adams arranged for a shot to be

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<sup>127</sup> Hiller B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 190.

<sup>128</sup> On speculation among Hawthorne's contemporaries about the identity of this man, see Dirk Hoerder, *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts, 1765-1780* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), p. 228; also Wells, *The Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams* (Boston, 1865), vol. II, pp. 312-3. Suspects include James Otis and William Molineux. See also George Caleb Snow, *History of Boston* (Boston, 1823) pp. 279-80; Snow was one of Hawthorne's staples throughout his career.

fired from within the Custom House to provoke the British guard, who were already jittery as the boys in the street pelted them with snowballs. Such conspiracy theories were rife in Hawthorne's day. For example, during the 1820s and 30s a number of English veterans published memoirs in which they swore to have seen Adams firing a pistol from behind a stone wall adjacent to Lexington Green, thus facilitating the first deadly exchange of the American Revolution. Adams *was* in fact present that morning; he and John Hancock had spent the night in Lexington, met with the militia at dawn, and barely eluded Gage's army on its way to Concord, said to be stopping in Lexington to arrest them. When, near the end of the story, pseudo-Webster reminds us that the "old man...in the twilight of an April morning, stood on the green, beside the meeting-house, at Lexington," he presumably means it as praise, but the effect for some readers might have been somewhat grayer.<sup>129</sup>

But all of this, we have come to learn, is quite in keeping with the story, which, whatever the narrator's intent, points to a two-faced legacy. Indeed, it is like hearing the ghost of Edward Randolph when one reads the words of Adams' enemies. Governor Hutchinson, whose home had been ransacked by a mob believed to have been organized by Adams, called him "the greatest incendiary in the King's dominion," a man who possessed

a talent of artfully and fallaciously insinuating into the minds of his readers a prejudice against the characters of all whom he attacked, beyond any other man I ever knew. This talent he employed in the messages, remonstrances, and resolves of the house of representatives, most of which were of his composition,

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<sup>129</sup> On the Lexington incident, see William M. Fowler, Jr., *Samuel Adams Radical Puritan* (New York: Longman, 1997), p. 137. Adams was a problematic figure in early nineteenth-century New England literature, and variously dealt with, argues John McWilliams, *New England Crisis and Cultural Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Pauline Maier, "Coming to Terms with Samuel Adams," *American Historical Review* 18:1 (1976), pp. 12-37.

and he made more converts to his cause by calumniating governors, and other servants of the crown, than by strength of reasoning.<sup>130</sup>

Peter Oliver, another loyalist official whose home had been vandalized, was more colorful in his criticism. Adams, he writes, could “fabricate the structure of rebellion from a single straw,” and was the ringleader of a vicious circle of propagandists who customarily

interlarded their addresses, as cooks do some species of fowls, with dissertations upon popery; representing the views of Parliament to make the realm and its dominions to be a Smithfield of fire and faggots; and warning England of its approaching martyrdom. Every base and false art was used to incite a rebellion throughout the realm.<sup>131</sup>

Oliver goes on to liken Adams to a cuttlefish “discharging his muddy liquid, and darkening the water to such a hue, that the other was lost to his way, and by his tergiversation in the cloudy vortex would again be seized, and at last secured.” His devotees were “psalm-singing myrmidons” who prayed by day and rioted by night. Adams himself was a devil masquerading as a saint:

He had always a religious mask ready for his occasions; he could transform himself into an angel of light with the weak religionist; and with the abandoned he would disrobe himself and appear with his cloven foot and in his native blackness of darkness.

Oliver claims that “a celebrated portrait painter” once told him “that if he wished to draw the picture of the devil, he would get Sam Adams to sit for him.” Was he referring to

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<sup>130</sup> According to Barnard Bailyn, the crowd “smashed in the doors with axes, splintered through the rooms, ripped off wainscoting and hangings, splintered the furniture, beat down the inner walls, tore up the garden, and carried off into the night, besides 900 sterling in cash, all the plate, decorations, and clothes that had survived, and destroyed or scattered in the mud all of Hutchinson’s books and papers.” Among these papers was a draft of the third volume of Hutchinson’s *History of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay*, from which my excerpt is taken. Cf. Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 35-69.

<sup>131</sup> Peter Oliver, *The Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion* (London, 1781), p. 135.

Copley? If so, Copley appears to have succeeded rather well, though with characteristic nuance.

Now, as scholars we can, without questioning the integrity of his faith, or even the dignity of his motives, venture to say that Adams was a man who knew how to use religion to mobilize people. Whenever passion and solidarity seemed to be ebbing, such as during the four years between the Stamp Act and the Boston Massacre, Adams would often turn to religion. For example, when he got wind that the Church of England was thinking about creating a bishopric for the colonies, he portrayed it as yet another effort to stamp out religious freedom (Figure X). Later, when Parliament granted toleration to francophone Catholics living in Quebec, which had recently been ceded to Britain after the French and Indian War, Adams stoked ancient fears by making it look like the British government intended to weaken New England by giving French papists another base from which to operate (Figure X). Here is how one twentieth-century scholar, Claude H. Van Tyne, put it:

Not only were the dissenting clergy making every effort to fan the flames of rebellion, but some of the more astute Whig leaders were using religious and sectarian forces in a more or less conscious way to the same end. No one can study closely the work of Samuel Adams, 'the man of the Revolution' [according to John Adams], without realizing how far he himself was actuated by religious prejudices, and the extent to which he worked upon the religious passions of others. A stern Calvinist, observant of religious ceremonies, he had all the Puritan hatred of Anglican episcopacy and Roman papacy. His natural affiliations were with the Puritan clergy, and he used them to the utmost for political purposes. It was worthy of St. Ignatius, as Brooks Adams says, "the way Samuel Adams used the toleration, granted the Canadian Catholics by the Quebec Bill, as a goad whereby to inflame the dying Puritan fanaticism." Holy water and papal bulls were special objects of Puritan hatred, and Adams made his fellow-citizens fear that they were in danger of both.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> C.H. Van Tyne, "The Clergy and the American Revolution," *American Historical Review* 19:1 (Oct., 1913), pp. 44-64.





*An Attempt to Land a Bishop in America.*

**Figure 5.** *An Attempt to Land a Bishop in America*, Gentleman's Magazine, September 1769. The issue as imagined in a British journal.



*The Mitred Minuet.*

**Figure 6.** Paul Revere, *The Mitred Minuet*, 1774  
The British Museum, London

In an era persuaded by Charles Beard's *Economic Interpretation*, Van Tyne wanted to remind scholars that religious and sectarian forces had also been at work. One might say that "Champion" has a similar point to make, although in its world, religion is just another manifestation of fantasy at work in history, particularly New England revolutionary history from 1689 to 1776. Remember, for example, those shrieks about how Andros was planning a "Smithfield fire in King Street" and a "new St. Bartholomew." Their tenor, as we have seen, reflects all the various rumors circulating in 1689, but it is worth noting that specifically they echo the caption on the frontispiece of a pamphlet published by Samuel Adams in 1775 (Figure X).<sup>133</sup>

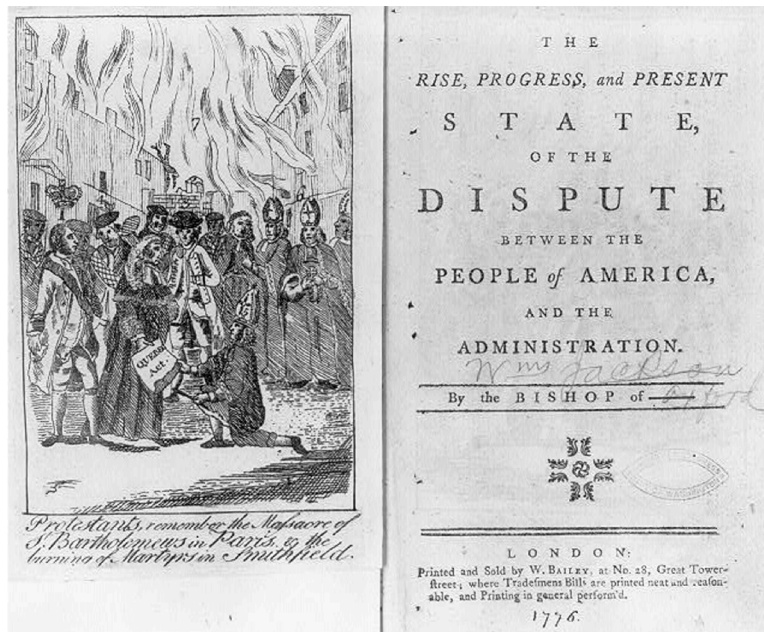


Figure 7. Unknown, *Protestants, remember the Massacre of St. Bartholemews in Paris, & the burning of Martyrs in Smithfield, 1775*  
Library of Congress

<sup>133</sup> Very little has been written about this pamphlet; cf. A.R. Riggs, "Arthur Lee, A Radical Virginian in London, 1768-1776," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 78:3 (July 1970), pp. 268-80.

Here and throughout the story, Hawthorne is reminding us that such stories of the night played their part; whoever put them there, they moved the people; and they return, not just “on the eve of danger,” but whenever we fancy ourselves a country; for Mather, and Adams, are still talking through Webster.

### **III: Mathers of today**

The story enforces that message by amalgamating the voices of Mather and Adams with that of Webster. This can be detected virtually anywhere in the text, but to keep things simple I will look at just one passage. It comes right after the tableau of the colonists which we discussed earlier, but this time it is Mather and Adams who take over as narrator:

A double rank of soldiers made their appearance, occupying the whole breadth of the passage, with shouldered matchlocks, and matches burning, so as to present a row of fires in the dusk. Their steady march was like the progress of a machine, that would roll irresistibly over everything in its way. Next, moving slowly, with a confused clatter of hoofs on the pavement, rode a party of mounted gentlemen, the central figure being Sir Edmund Andros, elderly, but erect and soldier-like. Those around him were his favorite councillors, and the bitterest foes of New England. At his right hand rode Edward Randolph, our arch-enemy, that "blasted wretch," as Cotton Mather calls him, who achieved the downfall of our ancient government, and was followed with a sensible curse, through life and to his grave. On the other side was Bullivant, scattering jests and mockery as he rode along. Dudley came behind, with a downcast look, dreading, as well he might, to meet the indignant gaze of the people, who beheld him, their only countryman by birth, among the oppressors of his native land. The captain of a frigate in the harbor, and two or three civil officers under the Crown, were also there. But the figure which most attracted the public eye, and stirred up the deepest feeling, was the Episcopal clergyman of King's Chapel, riding haughtily among the magistrates in his priestly vestments, the fitting representatives of prelacy and persecution, the union of church and state, and all those abominations which had driven the Puritans to the wilderness. Another guard of soldiers, in double rank, brought up the rear.

The whole scene was a picture of the condition of New England, and its moral, the deformity of any government that does not grow out of the nature of things and the character of the people. On one side the religious multitude, with their sad visages and dark attire, and on the other, the group of despotic rulers, with the high churchman in the midst, and here and there a crucifix at their bosoms, all magnificently clad, flushed with wine, proud of unjust authority, and

scoffing at the universal groan. And the mercenary soldiers, waiting but the word to deluge the street with blood, showed the only means by which obedience could be secured.

Let us begin with this last sentence, which echoes a (notoriously hysterical) passage in John Hancock's Boston Massacre oration, delivered in 1774 and widely believed to have been ghost-written by Adams:

I come reluctantly to the transactions of that dismal night, when in such quick succession we felt the extremes of grief, astonishment and rage; when Heaven in anger, for a dreadful moment, suffered hell to take the reins; when Satan, with his chosen band, opened the sluices of New England's blood, and sacrilegiously polluted our land with the dead bodies of his guiltless sons.<sup>134</sup>

Before that there is an echo of Mather, the *Magnalia*, in which Mather quotes, then answers, a question from one of his own previous election sermons:

“What went ye out into the wilderness to see?” And the answer to it is not only too *excellent*, but also to *notorious*, to be dissembled. Let all mankind know, that we came into the wilderness, because we would worship God without that *Episcopacy*, that *common-prayer*, and those unwarranted *ceremonies* with which the ‘land of our forefathers sepulchures’ had been defiled; we came hither because we would have our posterity settled under the pure and full *dispensations* of the gospel; defended by rulers that should be our selves.<sup>135</sup>

Meanwhile, interspersed are echoes of two *Boston Gazette* pieces written by Adams within a week of each other, part of his series on the proposed bishopric:

...some, it is said, have lately set up *the Image*, and have been seen in *public* company with *crucifixes* at their breasts...<sup>136</sup>

And:

The establishment of a protestant episcopate in America...is very alarming to a people, whose fathers, from the hardships they suffered, under such an establishment, were obliged to fly their native country into a wilderness, in order

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<sup>134</sup> John Hancock, *An Oration; Delivered March 5, 1774* (Boston, 1774). On Adams's reputed authorship, see Ira Stoll, *Samuel Adams: A Life* (New York: Free Press, 2008), pp. 117-8.

<sup>135</sup> *Magnalia* I: 240-1.

<sup>136</sup> *Boston Gazette*, April 11, 1768.

peaceably to enjoy their privileges, civil and religious.<sup>137</sup>

As you will have noticed, Adams himself appears to be channeling Mather. That is something he did quite often, as when on multiple occasions he compared Hutchinson to Andros.<sup>138</sup> In a sense, he made Hawthorne's work easy for him by signing the *Gazette* piece from which the second excerpt is taken "Cotton Mather." Other pseudonyms include "A Puritan," "Vindex" (Latin for avenger or champion), and "Candidus" (Latin for white, or of course, honest).

Was Hawthorne's title yet another reference to Adams and the role he played? If so, "gray" is a telling modification, for even as Hawthorne evokes these voices—let us call them pseudo-Mather and pseudo-Adams—he subtly alerts us to the fact that they may be less than "honest." These are less careful versions of their originals, one might say. Let us begin with pseudo-Mather. Notice that the formation of the enemy embodies what he, and his colonists, detest: union of church and state. However, the colonists adopt a similar formation, huddling closer and closer around their ministers (we saw this, remember, in the preceding tableau). *Both* sides, evidently, practice unity of church and state, but only one of them is called out for it.<sup>139</sup> Meanwhile, pseudo-Mather tells us that it was the clergyman who "most attracted the public eye." He seems to mean this as praise. But is it not peculiar that the clergyman should "excite" more fear and loathing than the sight of Andros and his phalanx of redcoats? The clergyman is the centerpiece;

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, April 4, 1768.

<sup>138</sup> See for example his speech before the colonial assembly, Jan. 15, 1768, in *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, ed. Henry Alonzo Cushing (New York, 1906), vol. I, pp 152-62.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Frederick Newberry, "The Gray Champion: Hawthorne's Ironic Criticism of Puritan Rebellion," *Studies in Short Fiction* 13 (1979), pp. 363-70.

they syntax crests menacingly as if to reflect the threat he is perceived to embody. But are such perceptions warranted? Even modestly informed readers would have known that King's Chapel, despite the forbidding name, was hardly a monolithic entity.<sup>140</sup> The effect of this is to open up a discrepancy, giving the picture a hallucinatory quality. Ostensibly there to describe the enemy, it may actually say more about attitudes among the colonists—or the narrator himself. Indeed, it is as if instead of getting a picture of *actual* fears, we are taken behind the scenes to where fear is produced (see appendix six). Consider, for example, that image of the crucifix. Is this pseudo-Mather's attempt to present the clergyman as if he *were* a Roman-Catholic priest?<sup>141</sup> If so, the self-evident absurdity of the image serves to discredit him as a narrator, assuming that no lowly vicar would have dared to wear a crucifix—or pectoral cross, as it was technically called—something worn only by Roman-Catholic priests, or sometimes by bishops in the Church of England. Or is this pseudo-Adams talking, (mis)representing the “*episcopal* clergyman” as a bishop? It would be another instance of Hawthorne's ability to condense a century of propaganda. Elsewhere in the story, we hear Mather's colonists speaking lines written by Adams; now we hear Mather and Adams talking in counterpoint as they mine the same ancient fears, their voices full of sound and fury.

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. F.W.P. Greenwood, *A History of King's Chapel, in Boston; the First Episcopal Church in New England* (Boston, 1833), pp. 15-32. See also *Lost Notebook*, CE XIII, p. 130-1. One of the pro-Dominion pamphlets, titled *New England's Faction Discovered; or, A Brief and True Account of their Persecution of the Church of England...1690*, talks about constant harassment, even vandalism, all of which the author claims was egged on by the Puritan clergy, despite the fact that the church lacked a building, and was a mere “speck in a Congregationalist sea” stretching from Maine to New York (Andrews, *Narratives*, pp. 253-9).

<sup>141</sup> The image of the *multiple* crucifixes, worn presumably by Andros's officers and ministers, serves to convey Mather's claim, in the Declaration, that the Dominion government was full of papists: “the Army of our poor Friends and Brethren [is] now under a Popish Commander, for in the Army as well as in the Council, Papists are in Commission” (Declaration, Article X).

In “The Gray Champion,” Hawthorne creates another *literary* typology. Mather and Adams spring back to life, talking through Webster on the commemorative stage. At the very least, the message seems to be that Mather created a romance, one which Americans keep up whenever they try to explain their country to themselves by dreaming up their own innocence, whether in scurrilous pamphlets about Smithfield fires, or the sublime mountaintops of Exodus—yes, the story rehearses that too, consider that Bradstreet’s speech echoes Exodus 14:13—or through fables like the Angel of Hadley.<sup>142</sup> Hawthorne puts this “romance” at the heart of the Revolution, daring us to call it fiction. But if Americans wanted to call it that, they would have to stop believing in it.

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<sup>142</sup> According to Hancock, the British soldiers

endeavored to deprive us of the enjoyment of our religious privileges, to vitiate our morals, and thereby render us deserving of destruction. Hence the rude din of arms which broke in upon your solemn devotions in your temples, on that day hallowed by Heaven, and set apart by God himself for this peculiar worship.

Now we can appreciate why Hawthorne would have viewed Hancock’s speech as another iteration of the Angel of Hadley story, about colonists attacked by Indians while worshipping on the Sabbath. See also “A Bell’s Biography,” in which Hawthorne seems to pointedly reverse the Angel of Hadley plot: this time it is the Indians who are attacked during worship—and are actually slaughtered, along with their French missionaries, some even at the altar, by a “war party” of colonial rangers.

## Appendix One: Pine Tree Shillings

In 1652, during the Interregnum, Parliament authorized the establishment of a mint in Boston, the first in the North American colonies. The first series of silver shillings featured a willow tree (1653-60); the second, an oak (1660-7); the third, a pine (1667-83). However, all continued to read 1652 on the reverse, probably in order to disguise the fact that the mint continued to run until as late as 1683.

The story mentioned by Hawthorne went as follows. Sir William Temple, the colonial agent at the time of the Restoration, attempted to shield the Boston minters from punishment (death) by convincing Charles II that all the shillings depicted the so-called Royal Oak, in which Charles, then prince of Wales, hid after his forces were defeated by Cromwell at the Battle of Winchester, and which saved him from sharing the fate of his father. Temple supposedly reached into his pocket and produced one of the shillings, whereupon Charles laughed and called the New Englanders “a parcel of honest dogs.” This is recounted in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1<sup>st</sup> Series, vol. 7, p. 228. (When did Hawthorne withdraw)

Pictured below, clockwise from upper left: pine obverse, pine reverse, willow obverse, oak reverse. I give only one example of the reverse because it remained unchanged. All images courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston.





## Appendix Two: Saul, David, and the Gibeonites

The Gibeonites, inhabitants of Gibeon with its famous Pool, were a Canaanite tribe spared by Joshua but condemned to serve as water-carriers at the tabernacle. The next time we see them is in 2 Samuel 21:1-9. With Israel in the midst of a three-year famine, King David learns that God is angry “for Saul and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.” David goes to seek “atonement” with the Gibeonites, who tell him that they desire “nor silver nor gold from Saul, nor of his house.” When David subsequently promises them anything, they demand seven male descendants of Saul—“the man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel”—to be turned over for punishment. David complies—though sparing Jonathan’s son, whom he had sworn to protect—and the Gibeonites hang the seven on a “hill before the Lord” at the beginning of the barley harvest. We never learn exactly *why* Saul persecuted the Gibeonites (2 Samuel states only that he “sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah”). Mather is obviously referring to some extra-biblical theory about “false pretence of witchcraft.” Calef must have found this irresistible. He could repeat Mather’s own words in order to evoke a type who, in addition to being a famous hypocrite (when Saul consulted with the witch of Endor she had to remind him that he had made witchcraft a capital offense), was the very opposite of a savior-king. He could also pander to rumors about Phips and the fortune-teller, and perhaps stories that Phips’s death had been the result of divine punishment (see pp. 43-5 of this chapter). Tucked away in all of that would be the suggestion that Salem was enough to bring the land under a curse.

This subtext is of interest to us because it appears to have shaped *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne’s biography of house, an object which, as I shall explain later in this chapter, is a metonym for the American experience. If that is the case, how fitting that Hawthorne should have organized his “ongoing drama of wrong and retribution” around a narrative that only survives as a scrap in Calef.

### Appendix Three: “The Old Pyncheon Family” and “A Bell’s Biography”

It is worthwhile to compare Chapter One with “A Bell’s Biography,” a sketch, clearly experimental, which Hawthorne had written in 1837 for the *Knickerbocker* magazine. They are remarkably similar in terms of structure and imagery. There is a first-person narrator who in the opening lines projects himself as the biographer of a publically significant object, in this case an actual signifier, for the bell is envisioned as a kind of human orator:

Hearken to our neighbor with the iron tongue! While I sit musing over my sheet of foolscap, he emphatically tells the hour, in tones loud enough for all the town to hear, though doubtless intended only as gentle hint to myself, that may begin his biography before the evening shall be farther wasted. Unquestionably, a personage in such an elevated position, and making so great a noise in the world, has a fair claim to the services of a biographer. He is the representative and most illustrious member of that innumerable class, whose characteristic feature is the tongue, and whose sole business, to clamor for the public good. If any of his noisy brethren, in our tongue-governed democracy, be envious of the superiority which I have assigned him, they have my free consent to hang themselves as high as he.

Subsequently, he imagines the bell telling him its story:

And for his history, let not the reader apprehend an empty repetition of ding-dong bell. He has been the passive hero of wonderful vicissitudes, with which I have chanced to become acquainted, possibly from his own mouth; while the careless multitude supposed him to be talking merely of the time of day, or calling them to dinner or to church, or bidding drowsy people go bedward, or the dead to their graves. Many a revolution has it been his fate to go through, and invariably with a prodigious uproar. And whether or no he have told me his reminiscences, this at least is true, that the more I study his deep-toned language, the more sense, and sentiment, and soul, do I discover in it.

He then attempts to reconstruct its early life (including a baptism) by relating several “traditions”:

The old people hereabout have a tradition, that a considerable part of the metal was supplied by a brass cannon, captured in one of the victories of Louis the Fourteenth over the Spaniards, and that a Bourbon princess threw her golden crucifix into the molten mass. It is said, likewise, that a bishop baptized and blessed the bell, and prayed that a heavenly influence might mingle with its tones. When all due ceremonies had been performed, the Grand Monarque bestowed the gift—than which none could resound his beneficence more loudly—on the Jesuits, who were then converting the American Indians to the spiritual dominion of the Pope. So the bell—our self-same bell, whose familiar voice we may hear at all hours, in the streets—this very bell sent forth its first-born accents from the tower of a log-built chapel, westward of Lake Champlain, and near the mighty stream of the Saint Lawrence.

But the priests are soon massacred by a party of colonial rangers, who after setting fire to the chapel decide to carry the bell back to Boston, only themselves to be intercepted and wiped out in an Indian counterattack. The bell remains “entombed” in the forest until it is discovered, several decades later, by another English “war party” on their way to Fort Ticonderoga during the next French war. They transport the bell to Boston, sell it to a wealthy old man, who in turn donates it to his church. “Ever since that period,” the narrator declares, “our hero has occupied the same elevated station, and has put in his

word on all matters of public importance, civil, military, or religious.” Oh, the irony: the self-same bell once used to summon monks to mass and convert savages to “the spiritual dominion of the Pope,” is now a pillar of Boston public life. From the tower of a prominent church it will announce the fall of Quebec, Revolution and Independence, the visits of Washington and Lafayette, and countless other public anniversaries up to the present day. That is where the story ends, in the present, as the bell tolls midnight, now speaking a communally recognized language and thus awakening the narrator from his “lonely fantasy.” It is worth noting that Chapter Eighteen, “Governor Pyncheon” ends in similar fashion, as the shop bell rings us back to the stable world of market values (see pp. 105-108 of this chapter).

## Appendix Four: “Governor Pyncheon”

A number of details in “Governor Pyncheon” appear to have been informed by passages in Kennedy. For example, when the narrator mocks Pyncheon thus—

Why do you sit so lumpishly in your great-great-grandfather’s oaken chair, as if preferring it to the gubernatorial one? We have all heard of King Log; but, in these jostling times, one of that royal kindred will hardly win the race for an elective chief-magistracy! ... Rise up... Art thou too sluggish?... The Avenger is upon thee! Rise up, before it be too late!

—he is reusing Wirt’s own language, a verse bagatelle from a letter cited by Kennedy as an example of the “pleasantry, wit, and humor” that Wirt “drew from the treasure of his friendships”;

Whence this heaviness that hangs upon you,  
This lethargy that creeps through all your senses?  
Why does your blood thus stagnate in your veins,  
And whence this torpor that invades your brains?  
Why does your pen no more your fingers please?  
Why does paralysis those fingers freeze?  
Have you become a numb-fish or a frog,  
Oyster enamoured, or good old king Log? (K 2:204)

Similarly, Pyncheon’s “ordinary bed-dime” of “ten o’clock” reflects one of Wirt’s letters ending: “Good night—it is ten o’clock, which is now my bed hour—till the Supreme Court comes to break my rest” (Kennedy II: 195). Also, both men are fond of ghost-stories and regard them as a form of genteel entertainment (cf. Kennedy II: 378). Elsewhere in the book we discover echoes of Kennedy. For example, the way Hawthorne imagines the public reaction to Judge Pyncheon’s death—

...of all the events which constitute a person’s biography, there is scarcely one...to which the world so easily reconciles itself, as to his death... At his decease, there is only a vacancy, and a momentary eddy—very small, as compared with the apparent magnitude of the ingurgitated object—and a bubble or two, ascending out of the black depth and bursting at the surface.

—appears to have been inspired by a letter in which Wirt explains his motives for writing the Henry biography:

The project pleases me more and more, and I hope to be enabled to immortalize the memory of Henry and to do no discredit to my own fame. The idea has been always very dismal to me, of dropping into the grave like a stone into the water, and letting the waves of Time close over me, so as to leave no trace of the spot on which I fall. For this reason...I resolved to...write something worthy of being always read...(I: 133)

As a matter of fact, in the same letter Wirt mentions that he has been loaned a miniature of Henry which he keeps on his bureau for inspiration. The identity of this miniature remains uncertain, but apparently in 1815 Wirt commissioned Thomas Sully to paint a portrait from it to adorn the frontispiece of the *Sketches* (see Virginius Cornick Hill, Jr., “Notes on the Patrick Henry Portraiture,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (vol. 71, no. 2: April 1963), pp. 168-84.) Was this detail in Kennedy the basis for Clifford’s miniature and Hepzibah’s “air drawn pictures”? This brings me to another

point of overlap between Pyncheon and Wirt: Holgrave, presenting the daguerreotype to Phoebe, tells her that

the original wears, to the world's eye—and, for aught I know, to his most intimate friends—an exceedingly pleasant countenance, indicative of benevolence, openness of heart, sunny good-humor, and other praiseworthy qualities of that cast.

His remarks echo Kennedy's characterization of Wirt as a public man who had "an habitual reserve even in the intercourse of intimate friendship, and thus his most private correspondence seldom exhibits the exact portraiture of his heart" (II: 14).

## Appendix Five: The Swinney Trial

Another of Wirt's forensic roles appears to have influenced Hawthorne, namely, Wirt's defence of George Swinney, whose trial for murder had been something of a national sensation during the Jefferson administration. The seventeen-year-old Swinney stood accused of poisoning his great-uncle George Wythe, a signer of the Declaration. In his old age Wythe, a noted jurist, became preoccupied with the morality of slavery; after freeing his slaves he adopted and personally educated a young mulatto, Michael Brown, alongside his own nephew, Swinney, in order "to test the theory," writes Kennedy, "that there was no natural inferiority of intellect in the negro compared with the white man." Wythe intended to leave half of his estate to Brown, the other half to Swinney, though he soon reduced Swinney's portion when he discovered that Swinney had stolen some of his books to pay off gambling debts. But this would not have been known to Swinney when on a June morning in 1806 he allegedly spiked Wythe's coffee with arsenic. Almost immediately Wythe, Brown, and Lydia Broadnax, a former slave whom Wythe kept on as a paid cook, became violently ill. Wythe, who lingered for several days in agony, insisted to doctors that he had been murdered and revised his will to disinherit Swinney. When Wythe finally died and Swinney came to trial, virtually everyone was convinced of his guilt, including Wirt, who demurred when first approached by Swinney's mother, but subsequently agreed to defend him when, as he explained to his wife, he learned that there had been a

difference in the opinion of the [medical] faculty in Richmond as to the cause of Mr. Wythe's death, and that the eminent McClurg, amongst others, had pronounced that his death was caused simply by bile and not by poison. I had concluded that his innocence was *possible*, and, therefore, that it would not be so horrible a thing to defend him as, at first, I had thought [emphasis added]. (Kennedy, I: 143)

Swinney was ultimately acquitted, not so much because of Wirt's brilliant defence, but rather because, as Wirt alludes to above, the doctors were divided: Wythe's symptoms were identical to those of apoplexy; and although arsenic had indeed been found in the coffee grinds ("the fowls that ate of them," Kennedy writes, "were said to have died immediately"), the autopsy, ordered by Wythe himself before he died, revealed no traces of poison. Moreover, Lydia Broadnax, who had narrowly survived and was prepared to testify that she had seen Swinney sprinkle white powder in the coffee that morning, was disqualified as a witness by a Virginia statute prohibiting persons of "negro blood" from testifying in capital cases. In the end Swinney could only be convicted of check forgery.

The parallels with *House* are fairly obvious. The divided medical opinion in regard to Colonel Pyncheon's death—Hawthorne has "the eminent Dr. Swinnerton" for Wirt's "the eminent McClurg"—which in turn "obviated the idea that any murder was committed," as Wirt puts it. Then of course there is the old Pyncheon bachelor, who happens to be of Wythe's generation, haunted by a sense of ancestral wrong and pondering some sort of reparation, only to be (allegedly) murdered by a dissolute nephew poised to lose his inheritance. Hawthorne has been accused of ignoring slavery, but not presumably by those contemporary readers (if any) who remembered the Swinney trial and recognized it to be a facet of the book's "weighty lesson" that "together with the seed of the merely temporary crop, which mortals term expediency, they inevitably sow the acorns of a more enduring growth, which may darkly overshadow their posterity."

## Appendix Six: The opening lines of “The Gray Champion,” and Mather

Notice that the first line of the story paraphrases the following line from the Magnalia (in the right-hand column). This is significant, I think, and not merely because it indicates that by “the Revolution” Hawthorne was nominally referring to England’s Glorious Revolution—even though he must have welcomed the ambiguity:

<p>There was once a time when New England groaned under the actual pressure of heavier wrongs than those threatened ones which brought on the Revolution.</p>	<p>When the people were under these frights, they had got by the edges a little intimation of the then Prince of Orange’s glorious undertaking to deliver England from the <i>feared</i> evils, which were already <i>felt</i> by New-England. (I, 119)</p>
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It seems worth mentioning also that the next two sentences of the story closely follow Mather’s Declaration:

<p>James II, the bigoted successor of Charles the Voluptuous, had annulled the charters of all the colonies, and sent a harsh and unprincipled soldier to take away our liberties and endanger our religion.</p>	<p>...Jacobean “bigotry inspired by the great Scarlet Whore”...  Declaration, Article I</p>
<p>The administration of Sir Edmund Andros lacked scarcely a single characteristic of tyranny: a Governor and Council, holding office from the King, and wholly independent of the country; laws made and taxes levied without concurrence of the people immediate or by their representatives; the rights of private citizens violated, and the titles of all landed property declared void; the voice of complaint stifled by restrictions on the press; and, finally, disaffection overawed by the first band of mercenary troops that ever marched on our free soil.</p>	<p>In little more than half a Year we saw this Commission superseded by another yet more absolute and Arbitrary, with which Sir Edmond Andross arrives as our Governour: who besides his Power, with the Advice and Consent of his Council, to make Laws and raise Taxes as he pleased, without an Assembly, makes void Titles to our Lands... [and] for the first time several Companies of Souldiers were now brought from Europe, to support what was to be imposed upon us.  Declaration, Article IV.</p>

Hawthorne probably would have known the Declaration from Daniel Neal’s *History of New England* (London, 1720) which he borrowed from the Salem Athenaeum, q.v. Marion Kesselring, *Hawthorne’s Reading 1828-1850: A Transcription and Identification of Titles Recorded in the Charge-Books of the Salem Athenaeum* (New York: New York Public Library, 1949).