

Frayed Homespun: Colonial clothing and literary revision in Melville, Sedgwick, and  
Hawthorne

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Nelda Clara Katharine Roth (1910-2011), who taught me to always have a project.

## Abstract

This study explores the colonial-based historical fiction of Melville (*Israel Potter*), Sedgwick (*Hope Leslie*), and Hawthorne (*The House of the Seven Gables*), and uses references to American textiles and apparel to analyze what John McWilliams calls “the problem of cultural memory” presented in the literature. The project, therefore, establishes clothing as an authentic repository of cultural history and demonstrates “textile analysis” — the methodology I employ for reading representations of textiles as historical text — as a productive mode of inquiry and a valuable pedagogical approach.

Nineteenth-century American authors sought to fashion a useable past out of the history of British North America but often found the remnants of colonial dependency ill-suited to the independent frame of the United States. Although the nation longed to speed away from “colony” and toward “nation,” the relative infancy of the United States forced authors to search for a myth of origin that would both predict the Revolution and present an established member of the family of nations. Sometimes with reverence but often with contempt, American authors ascended into the not-so dusty attic of colonial history to seek and to re-fashion *truly* American, while not always *true*, American stories. The fictional revisions woven from remnants of colonial dependency and newly-fashioned sovereign ideals altered American history through imaginative historical representation and, in so doing, effectively revolutionized cultural memory to fit a maturing nation. While the design of these fictional revisions depended on *historical* material, the *physical* material of colonial textiles and apparel provided the necessary shuttle between the mythic and the historical, the imaginary and the “real.”

Weaving material relics with archival material effectively transforms fiction into history. References to apparel disguise literary invention as believable fact and establish an authentic conduit to historical memory, albeit mitigated by the nineteenth-century author. In antebellum fiction the entwining of history with *homespun* and other fabrics resurrects a proto-Revolutionary colonial history even as it exposes the complicated inheritance of “tenth-generation” Americans. In this fashion, and in a major variation to David Levin’s terminology, the nineteenth-century *Romantic artist* becomes its *historian*.

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## Preface

In *The Things They Carried*, author Tim O'Brien narrates the wartime experiences of his protagonist of the same name and considers both the authenticity of memory and the weight of the Vietnam Conflict some twenty years after his experience in Southeast Asia. Advertising "truth" but confessing to fiction, the tangled narrative of O'Brien's novel admittedly toys with the reader as "real" people become fictional characters and fictional characters become "real" people. Reader frustration rises as *author* O'Brien comments on the truth of storytelling and the reliability of *character* Tim O'Brien in "How to Tell a True War Story." He writes, "You can tell a true war story by the questions you ask. Somebody tells a story, let's say, and afterward you ask, 'Is it true?' and if the answer matters, you've got your answer" (83).

I used to teach *The Things They Carried* to high school students before beginning my doctoral work at the University of Minnesota. While some students enjoyed the narrative tease of O'Brien, others found him infuriating. The problem was, of course, that my charges loved the character of "Tim" and wanted to believe the stories he told. Minnesotans themselves, my students felt an affinity with Tim O'Brien: they could find Lake of the Woods on a map even if they had never been there; they had relatives in Worthington, O'Brien's hometown; and many had even attended Ramsey Middle School, located across the street from O'Brien's alma mater, Macalester College. For my Saint Paul students, O'Brien earned their trust with his accurate knowledge of Minnesota geography and descriptions of landmarks familiar to them — why shouldn't they trust his rendering of Tim O'Brien and the Vietnam War? Did the story happen? To

my students, *it mattered*.

In many ways, *The Things They Carried* and visceral reactions to the text's "truth telling" led to my research into nineteenth-century historical fiction. O'Brien argues that the "feeling truth" of fiction trumps the "happening truth" of history. The significance of "mak[ing] the stomach believe" (78) through reader empathy holds more importance than do specific details gleaned from the historical record. By maintaining that fiction tells a higher truth than history, O'Brien echoes Hawthorne's 1851 definition of the Romance in his famous preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*. While the novel "is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but the probable and ordinary course of man's experience," the Romance may "present ... truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation" as long as the author does not misrepresent "the truth of the human heart" (vii). *The House of the Seven Gables*, like *The Things They Carried*, uses fiction to "connect a by-gone time with the very present that is flitting away from us" by "mingling the Marvelous" (vii) with the recognizable and the "real."

The nascent United States may have located its genesis in the victory won through the War for Independence, yet, the inheritors of the Revolution sheepishly recognized that their "by-gone time" occurred generations before Lexington and Concord and, furthermore, knew their legacy to be more complicated than the one advertised by the burgeoning republic. Although nineteenth-century Americans identified themselves as scrappy Yankees who threw off the shackles of paternal authority and liberated themselves from British rule, their grandfathers and great-grandfathers had been proud

to call themselves Englishmen. The United States may have severed its political ties to England, but like other postcolonial nations, Americans found it difficult to disentangle themselves from two centuries of colonial rule.

Antebellum authors struggled to fashion a “useable past” out of colonial history, but they found the remnants of colonial occupation ill-suited to the lean, independent frame of the United States. American writers knew that great nations possessed great epics, however, and great epics drew on a long and storied past. Even as the nation longed to speed away from “colony” and toward “nation,” the relative infancy of the United States forced authors to search for a myth of origin that would both predict the Revolution and present a mature and established new member of the family of nations. Sometimes with reverence but often with contempt, American authors ascended into the not-so dusty attic of colonial history to seek and to re-fashion truly *American*, while not always *true*, American stories.

*Homespun*, the fabric extolled by Franklin and worn by humble farmers, ideological patriots, and simple soldiers alike, provided the perfect shuttle between colonial history and its optimistic resurrection in the nineteenth century. In *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of An American Myth*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich persuasively argues that *homespun*, as both a craft and a movement, satisfied the national myth longed for by Americans. “For sentimentalists,” writes Ulrich, “spinning and weaving represented the centrality of home and family, for evolutionists the triumph of civilization over savagery, for craft revivalists the harmony of labor and art, for feminists women’s untapped productive power, and for antimodernists the virtues of a

bygone age” (29). *Homespun* clothed citizen soldiers of Washington’s army; *homespun* materialized as badge of defiance during the non-importation movements; and *homespun* signified the desire for liberty despite obstacles and amid the comfortable security offered by the Crown. *Homespun*, moreover, was *home-made* by American men and women before textile production moved away from the home and into the woolen mills of Lowell and Lynn. Americans may have understood the cost of domestic wool production to Native Americans (38) and recognized the slave labor woven into to their “homemade” fibers; however, *homespun* emerged from the attic of remembrance as a fit marker of American resilience, independence, and tenacity.

To unravel the tangled relationship between the antebellum “present” and its knotty past, I extend homespun and other fabrics of colonial and early-America as a means of literary analysis. I contend that reading representations of textiles *as text* disentangles mythic remembrance from chronicled history within literature, as Ulrich likewise posits in her socio-historical study, but I also argue that references to colonial apparel and accessories, recognizable to antebellum Americans through both the cultural renaissance of homespun and the ubiquity of illustrated biography, promote the authenticity of fiction through familiarity and thus encourage the reader to trust an alternate historical narrative. Consequentially, these familiar fabrics, like the Minnesota landmarks replicated in *The Things They Carried*, encouraged readers to *believe* the histories altered to fit a new republic by nineteenth-century authors. Just as antebellum Americans “invented” or “embellished” colonial-worthy objects when none materialized “in their grandparents’ trunks” (Ulrich 29), antebellum authors

manufactured a useable past by weaving identifiable remnants of history into fictional fabrications, thus creating a fabric befitting the proto-Revolutionaries of colonial America as well as the inheritors of the Revolution in the nineteenth century.

My dissertation explores clothing as both a conduit *to* and creator *of* the past in the historical literature of the emergent United States. Naturally, the convergence of clothing and national history led me to consider American iconography and its ongoing transformation from colonial marker into sovereign icon. The “primitive” North American, later recognized as a “savage” daughter of Britannia, eventually transformed into American *Liberty* and *Columbia* before metamorphosing into Brother Jonathan and Uncle Sam. Costumes and headpieces, not to mention homespun and broadcloth, allowed iconographers to promote a more seamless transition between the threatening “savage,” the Indian Princess, and the classical goddess; and, eventually, to develop a kindred “brother” and “uncle” later in the nineteenth century. Emblems of what would become the United States visually complement the *narrative* illustrations of “America” reproduced in nineteenth-century historical fiction through textiles and apparel.

Chapter one proposes that *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in the Massachusetts* (1827), revises colonial history for an antebellum age as it replicates the familiar icons of the Indian Princess and American *Liberty* through the characters and costumes of its female principals. I argue that the historical fiction advertised by Catharine Maria Sedgwick in fact alters the nineteenth-century understanding of colonial America by applying the contemporary interests personified through *Liberty* onto the Puritan enclaves of early New England, and by promoting the national displacement of both the

Indian Princess and Native Americans.

Chapters two and three submit *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* (1855) as a continuation of the historical revision initiated by Sedgwick's novel. Through the juxtaposition of *homespun* and *broadcloth*, Melville's sole "retouching" of colonial history identifies the American "representative man" as an unfortunate rube rather than a charmed Yankee and uses the motley attire of pirate-cum-patriot John Paul Jones to dispute the suitability of Revolutionary mythology to the maturing United States. Although Melville promotes himself as the "editor" rather than the author of *Israel Potter*, his alteration of Potter's extant biography (1824) reinvents the Revolution as a chapter of indecorous chance rather than the natural consequence of American Exceptionalism.

Chapter four suggests colonial history to be a tangible *presence* rather than a past *remembrance* through its analysis of textiles and apparel within *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). A living history rather than a monument to the past, Hawthorne's quintessential Romance presents the nineteenth-century United States as the embodiment of colonial America rather than a progression *of it*, and suggests modernity to be but a flimsy disguise worn by replicated colonials. I argue that Hawthorne materializes the colonial within the "modern" through the mechanical art of daguerreotypy and through a startling appropriation of the Eucharistic ritual of transubstantiation, thus asserting the Revolution as a vehicle to suspend time rather than to accelerate it.

This project contributes to the study of clothing as a revelatory historical artifact

and establishes “textile analysis” as a productive and historically reliable method of literary interpretation, and, through its exploration of nineteenth-century historical fiction, asserts the ideological fabric of the nineteenth-century United States to be resolutely woven out of the tangled history of colonial North America.



## Chapter One

An Imperfect Union: Clothing and Nation in Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*

Early emblems of New England suggest a connection between colonization and clothing. The seal affixed to official documents and correspondence of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (MBC) in the seventeenth century featured a partially clothed American Indian man poised in surrender and surrounded by trees and leaves (figure 1.1). Pleading “Come over and help us,” the emblem visually encouraged the interests of both conversion and commerce through a cry for assistance and want of clothes, intimating — albeit falsely — that a passive, primitive, needy people awaited the benevolent paternalism of present and soon-to-be New Englanders. The seal, authorized by King Charles I in 1629, underwent many subsequent editions; most versions, however, depicted a naked “savage,” a surrendered weapon, and regional flora. The man’s nakedness, coupled with his plea for assistance, advertised to the inhabitants of the Old World and the colonists of the New that a market both for textiles and Christianity awaited them on the North American continent. Second only to spreading the Gospel and the “Kingdome of Christe,” the merchandising of textiles and apparel — “the masse of our cloths and other commodities” — drove English interest in the Americas as early as the sixteenth century (Hakluyt qtd. in Ulrich 44). Missionary



Figure 1.1: 1629 Seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.  
 Courtesy of Smithsonian Source  
 (web)

efforts complemented English economic endeavors, literally and figuratively, through the day-to-day interactions between colonists and Native Americans and the evangelistic “spin” given to clothing distribution in North America. The famous missionary to the Indians, John Eliot, for one, employed sartorial language to illustrate his mission in *Indian Dialogues* (1671). Eliot, the “apostle of New England,” aligned apparel with Christian conversion, as if to “clothe [a skeleton] with sinews, flesh and skin upon their dried bones, by the power of Jesus Christ” (qtd. in Meyer 95). The depictions of Native Americans, as imagined by Eliot and other non-native Americans, reassured colonists that their theological and economic presence was not only benevolent, but a necessary improvement to the situation in New England. It would seem that Christianity and textile commerce vied for an equal share of the untapped market of early New England.

The MBC seal of 1672 differs from other emblems accompanying early colonial documents in that it features a woman rather than a man. She, too, stands naked amid flora and fauna and assumes a passive rather than a defiant posture, but her breasts clearly mark her as female and her face, more detailed than that of her male counterpart, occupies a greater portion of the seal than does that of the previous warrior. The emblem, while sexualized, does not seem to suggest the naked wantonness typical in New World iconography; however, the cry for help coupled with partial female nakedness projects a physical and emotional invitation to male colonizers. Set against their wives and daughters layered in petticoats and prescribed decorum, the woman native to the New World offers an alternate femaleness unbound by the culture of



Figure 1.2: Pine, Robert. “America.” Pen and Ink. London, 1781. *Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society*

Christian Europe. She becomes the female Caliban to the male Mirandas coming ashore: “O, wonder! /How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, / That has such people in't (5.1)<sup>1</sup>

Images of native Calibans resplendent in nakedness have long “invited” English men to the shores of “exotic” lands in official and decorative representations. Taking their cue from the womanliness suggested by the feminine endings for the names of the world’s continents, sixteenth-century artists clothed *America*, *Africa*, and *Asia* according to European

perceptions of “native” apparel. The imagined nations of *America* and *Africa*, in particular, lounged in various states of undress while *Europa* relied on regal armor to partially cover her nakedness. Images of pre-colonial Africa and America suggest a need for guidance — in fact, “The Discovery of America” (circa 1575) shows Vespucci rousing a sleeping, naked, female “America” who apparently needs not only clothing, but a fruitful occupation as well (Corbeiller 211). In the eighteenth century, the

conflation of sleeping “natives” with regal goddesses generated representations of



Figure 1.3: “The Female Combatants.” 1776. *Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society*

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest. The Riverside Shakespeare*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

America as “Indian Princess,” an invention claiming the indigenous yet regal Native American woman as a “daughter of Britannia” (Fleming 65). The Matoaka-Pocahontas legend introduced by John Smith in the *Generall Historie* (1624) and later embellished by Chastellux and Davis in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, created an origin story for American colonists and their descendants, as well as a beneficent Indian Princess whose support legitimized European presence in North America — at least in the eyes of her chroniclers.

After independence, artists personifying “America” began to favor European characteristics and qualities for the images of the nascent United States. The aforementioned “Princess” now came dressed in Grecian-styled garments and wore a liberty cap rather than a feathered headdress, looking more like Britannia than her daughter (figures 1.2 and 1.3). The transformation continued until the twin goddesses of Liberty and Columbia replaced the “Indian Princess” and were, in time, replaced by the increasingly-paternal images of Brother Jonathan and, eventually, Uncle Sam.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in the Massachusetts* (1827) illustrates the shifting patterns in nineteenth-century iconography even as it chronicles the colonial project in seventeenth-century North America with its dual heroines of Magawisca, a Pequot “princess,” and Hope Leslie, an English transplant to Massachusetts Bay. In the novel, Sedgwick’s female principals, Pequot and English, reject colonial fashion and insist on culturally-appropriate dress; they choose sovereign lives over filial obedience; and they rely on themselves rather than ask anyone to “come over and help us.” Rather than the “princess” or the “goddess” of

decorative art, Magawisca and Hope clothe themselves independent of colonial dictates and refuse to be sold any suit of clothes that would compromise individual sovereignty in the early American colonies.

Indigenous and immigrant, “tawny” and fair-skinned, the two women provide complementary images of independent America, challenging cultural assumptions of both early New England and the early republic. The illustrations of independence projected by Sedgwick in 1827, however, entangle idealized projections of sovereignty with the politics of nineteenth-century America. For although Magawisca bucks colonial mandates and wears what she wants at the expense of her life, she exits New England at the end of the novel; although Hope dresses herself independent of both the fashion and the ideology of the Puritan settlement and invites Magawisca to join her perfect “union,” she fails to recognize individual liberty unless it resembles her own — replete in silk mantles and imported jewels. *Hope Leslie* endorses Native American sovereignty, but not within the white settlement; “removes” Native Americans from the cultural landscape by invoking the myth of the “vanishing Indian” well before the nineteenth century; and instigates an early costume change within American iconography. By displacing the “Indian Princess” from the novel’s central narrative and happy resolution, Sedgwick endorses Indian removal in the 1820s and squares colonial history to agree with her conclusion. Sedgwick fashions America and its ideology in imported clothes, displacing the sovereign, indigenous “America” of history and national mythology with a white girl from Europe who assumes center stage well before her cue.

Sedgwick, like James Fenimore Cooper, inherited a complicated relationship with American Indians which, in turn, influenced her fiction. The family had “lost” Eunice Williams, a distant relative of Catharine’s, to an Indian way of life — and an Indian husband — after her capture in 1704. An Indian boarding school allowed the family to profit, “creating jobs and contracts that the family exploited” (Weierman, *One Nation* 69), and Theodore Sedgwick, Catharine’s father, added to his property by buying land from “Indian patriots — Revolutionary War widows and veterans whose sacrifices helped make the new nation possible,” thus “dispossessing” them from their land (71). For Catharine Sedgwick, this “troubled family history of Indian land dispossession” affected her response toward Indian removal and Indian/white intermarriage in the 1820s (63); additionally, the Indian-white conflicts of Sedgwick’s own Stockbridge impacted her rendering of Pequot history (68-75). Influenced by her own colonial legacy, but dependent on the privilege it afforded her, Sedgwick’s version of colonial history apologizes for colonial crimes against the Pequot even as it justifies national “expansion” and, by extension, the ongoing wrongs perpetuated against American Indians in the nineteenth-century.

Sedgwick, like many of her contemporaries, “explored colonial history to make sense of the Indian removal crisis” in the nineteenth century (75-6).<sup>2</sup> Likewise, I argue that the ubiquitous emblems of “Indian Princess” and “goddess” illustrating American identity — seen on everything from maps to money, sheet music to history books

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<sup>2</sup> Jill Lapore explains that “both advocates and opponents of Indian removal looked to earlier Indian conflicts — especially the much memorialized conflicts of the seventeenth-century colonies — to bolster their arguments (208).

— impacted Sedgwick’s revision of colonial history. Just as she creates a New England Pocahontas while refusing the association (6), Sedgwick ties Magawisca and Hope Leslie to the ongoing transformation in national iconography without openly admitting it. The uncanny resemblance between Pocahontas and Magawisca, as well as the similarities found between American *Liberty* and Hope, forces the reader to pay attention to the role of iconography in *Hope Leslie* and its ongoing importance to American mythology.

## **I: Introduction**

*Hope Leslie* joins the likes of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Child’s *Hobomok* (1824) in resurrecting the American Indian/colonial relationship through the guise of fiction. “Real characters and real events ... illustrate not the history, but the character of the times” (5), argues Sedgwick, thus advertising her narrative as a “stimulus” for historical “investigations” rather than a “substitute for genuine history” (6). Sedgwick’s novel narrates Puritan life in seventeenth-century New England through the vehicle of the fictional Fletcher family, immigrants from England. Although headed by William, the elder Fletcher soon takes a backseat to the drama created through the interaction of his son, Everell Fletcher, his adopted ward, Hope Leslie, and the Pequot maiden Magawisca. Hope’s arrival in the colonies summons William away from his family, thereby opening his home to an Indian attack of revenge led by Magawisca’s father, Mononotto. Captured rather than murdered as are his mother and siblings, Everell’s life is initially spared, but Mononotto sentences him to death as

payment for the death of his son, Samoset; his daughter Magawisca, however, saves Everell's life by her last-minute intervention, sacrificing her arm for the life of her friend and allowing Everell to escape. The plot then jumps ahead seven years and focuses more on the adventures of Hope than on the past tragedies of the Fletcher settlement. Hope's marriage to Everell, although seemingly imminent, becomes thwarted by the involvement of Governor Winthrop, by the rascally Sir Philip, and by misrepresentations and misinterpretations all around. Magawisca reappears, as does Hope's captured sister, Faith, and her Indian husband, Oneco, but Magawisca the Indian maiden never becomes a member of the community, nor does Faith return to the colonial community. The book ends with a string of near-misses, but it eventually makes all things right: Hope Leslie marries Everell Fletcher, the knavish Philip Gardiner pays for his designs, and Magawisca leaves New-England, blessing Hope and Everell as she departs. A real page-turner, *Hope Leslie* delivers an attractive history to nineteenth-century readers through a tale of adventure and romance. The "good guys" win, the "bad" guys lose, the Indian leaves without rancor, but leaves nonetheless.

The resurrection of *Hope Leslie* by contemporary scholars came after years of critical dismissal of Sedgwick's novel as trite sentimentalism. Initially applauded for her "finely drawn" characters, early reviewers enthusiastically posited that "a 'hundred years hence . . . our country will still be as proud of [Sedgwick's] name'" (Kelley x). Praise for the novel ebbed throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, however, and by "a hundred years hence" Sedgwick had become a veritable footnote to a literary history occupied by the giants of Cooper and Irving (xii) — her historical



fiction seen as mere “sentimental romance to genteel females” (qtd. in Kelley xii).

“Rediscovered” by late-twentieth-century scholars, especially feminists, and noted for its seeming revision of colonial history, *Hope Leslie* stands out today as an alternative voice among the collected writings about Native Americans by non-native Americans at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the novel, Magawisca narrates the history of the Pequot war from the Pequot standpoint rather than that of the colonial survivors of the campaign, and her “alternate interpretation” of Puritan history “turned the [Puritan] witnesses against themselves” and “challenges ... official history” in the days of the early republic (Kelley xxix-xxxi, Zagarell 235). The addition of a Pequot voice to a colonial narrative in *Hope Leslie* produces a “dialogue” long “suppressed by Puritan accounts” (Nelson, “Sympathy” 70), and seems to uncover an inclusive open-mindedness not often found in nineteenth-century “Indian” literature.<sup>3</sup>

Sedgwick’s inclusion of Pequot voices among the more familiar Puritan ones does create a multi-textured rendering of colonial history. Yet, the agency given to Magawisca results in a tacit endorsement of the racial beliefs and political bent of nineteenth-century white Americans. Magawisca rejects inclusion into colonial Massachusetts by reminding Hope and Everell of the inescapability of racial difference — “the Indian and the white man can no more mingle, and become one, than day and night” (Sedgwick 330) — and that she is their “enemy” (292). I argue that the representations of Indians as acquiescing to removal within a fictional landscape helps to construct the overall acceptability of the “vanishing Indian” idea among white

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<sup>3</sup> By “Indian” I mean literature written about Native Americans by non-Native Americans.

Americans in the nineteenth-century United States. Native Americans become an “already-relic” of the past when they seamlessly transform into white women and disappear from national iconography in popular literature.<sup>4</sup>

My study of clothing *as text* within *Hope Leslie* extends in a new direction the work already done by Quentin Miller, who establishes clothing as a shuttle for critical analysis in the novel. Miller properly reads clothing within *Hope Leslie* as politically significant: Sedgwick’s “lavish descriptions” of the characters’ apparel “clearly signal that clothing has the potential to be something more than merely narrative ornamentation” (123). Sedgwick, Miller argues, uses Hope’s distinctive fashion to praise individuality over social conformity. Sedgwick’s recurring references to clothing vacillate between praising individuality as an American virtue and criticizing it for the despotism it can create.

*Hope Leslie* does its best to save clothing from easy categorization by imbuing it with meaning even while associating it with the foolish and the vain. Dame Grafton’s continual whining about clothing, fashion, and its limited availability in colonial New England posits apparel a shallow, bothersome interest. Grafton’s frequent harangues, rather than seriously indicting Puritan restrictions, however, provide comic relief to an often-serious plot. Although she is Hope’s paternal aunt, her inherited community in Massachusetts disdains her as an “old woman making [a] fool of [her]self with new topknots” (59); yet, her actions are “innocent peculiarities [as] she spends many a weary

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<sup>4</sup> My use of “already-relic” draws on the research of Jean O’Brien in *Firsting and Lasting* and describes the popular yet false acceptance of Native Americans as long “vanished” from the eastern United States, as well as the interest of many white Americans in preserving Indian history only to legitimize their claims to North America.

hour devising new head-gear” (98); and she misinterprets “feuille morte” as something more romantic than the “dead-leaf” color of its translation, meriting a snicker from the reader. Still, Grafton seems not-altogether laughable when she opines on the necessary, pleasant diversion provided by “dress and ornaments” so absent in “topsy turvy” Puritan New England that would have “cured Alice of moping” (267-8). And Grafton gives public voice to the private disdain felt by Hope — the “unthought of revolting of nature” (227) — when she sees the “foreign” garments enveloping Faith, her estranged white sister, and Oneco, Faith’s Indian husband, giving shape to the sentiment that Hope, once she hears it aloud, rejects.

Hope, my dear, you have no idea what a *non compos mentis* she has got to be. I showed her all my ear-rings, and gave her choice of all but the diamonds that are promised for your wedding gift, dearie, you know, and, do you think, she scarcely looked at them? while she won’t let me touch those horrid blue glass things she wears, that look so like the tawnies, it makes me all of a nerve to see them. And then, just look for yourself, though I have dressed her up in that beautiful Lyon’s silk of yours, with the Dresden tucker, she will — this warm weather, too — keep on her Indian mantle in that blankety fashion (266).

Complete with garbled syntax, her aunt’s impassioned rant forces Hope to act as her sister’s emissary and “indulge” both the “oriental costume” and Mary’s/Faith’s preference for shells instead of jewels (266-7). In the presence of Magawisca and Oneco, Hope “shudders” at her sister’s preferences in clothing, but later indulges them

after Faith returns to the Governor's mansion.<sup>5</sup>

Readers, however, should not discount Grafton's position as mere comic relief, nor Sedgwick's clothing digressions as superfluous, for although the maiden aunt monopolizes the novel's conversations about clothing, other characters make meaning out of apparel. Certainly, Hope's visceral reaction to her sister's clothing gestures to the cultural significance of decorative arts, and other characters claim apparel for self-identification and rhetorical word play. Digby, the Fletcher's faithful servant, suggests a connection between clothing and identity when he recognizes his likeness in art by the "frieze jacket" worn by the "fellow" of the painting, which, he adds, would be recognizable to "any body" (96). Governor Winthrop uses Grafton's words to exonerate the "gentlemanly" actions of Sir Philip Gardiner, elevating him and his clothing from "mere dress and decoration" as the governor encourages Hope to praise Sir Philip rather than disdain him (270). Incidentally, Gardiner's disguise fools many of the principals, Winthrop included, and leads them to see Sir Philip as the Puritan he pretends to be rather than the Roman Catholic he *is*.

While Grafton champions the worth of clothing, by contrast, the intolerant Jennet becomes the harshest critic of decorative apparel and what she calls "vanities of dress" (141). Sedgwick hardly approves of Jennet's harshness, calling her "faithless" (316), "disagreeable" (141), and "our evil genius" (327) among other descriptions, giving her a luckless role in the preservation of Hope Leslie, conveying

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<sup>5</sup> In response to the frustrations of her aunt, Hope suggests that they "indulge [Faith] for the present. I suppose she has the feeling of the natives, who seem to have an almost superstitious attachment to that oriental costume" (Sedgwick 266).

her to an “awful destiny,” eulogizing her unapologetically as “the only one neither missed nor inquired for” (338), and observing that “Death could not have been more lenient in selecting a substitute for the precious life he had menaced” (348). The Puritans of Sedgwick’s “Early Massachusetts” bear little resemblance to the “dismal wretches” that would eventually emerge in Hawthorne’s fiction; Thomas Morton may still be Public Enemy Number One in *Hope Leslie*, but it is Hope who lives and prospers rather than the ever-orthodox, plain-dressed Jennet.

And truthfully, while ministers fitfully raged against “vanities in dress,” London-inspired fashion flourished in the colonies despite civic punishment enacted “from time to time” (Dow 62). Dame Grafton may have had to wait for her London fashions, but they arrived and filled store shelves, even in 1640. Twenty-first century imagination falls short of the record when it imagines the early colonists clad in “nun-like garb”: according to George Dow, the variety of fabrics available to the early-American colonist would rival that of contemporary retailers. The modern reader may imagine black as the color of Puritan clothing, but other hues were “tolerated and even assumed” in Massachusetts Bay (Demos 53).<sup>6</sup> Grafton’s vain preoccupation with clothing seems to dismiss apparel as a silly pursuit rather a serious concern, but it is the very thing that saves her from the attack at Bethel (Sedgwick 59). And, while Grafton’s voice at the novel’s end continues to rail against restrictions in apparel, Jennet’s shrill diatribes meet a watery, eternal silence.

While Dame Grafton and Jennet take opposite sides in the debate over the vanity

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<sup>6</sup> Demos cites brown, russet, and orange as the most popular colors in Puritan New England.

of clothing and fashion, Esther Downing, the niece to Governor Winthrop (created by Sedgwick's fiction rather than by the historical record), complicates the Grafton-Jennet/good-bad dichotomy through her representation as the ideal Puritan woman in dress as well as in spirit. Characterized as "godly" (135), "a reigning belle" (136), and a "fit temple for the spirit within" (151), Esther radiates beauty while maintaining "the severest gospel simplicity" in her dress and ornamentation. While Esther may be the Puritan ideal — and a feminist exemplar — Sedgwick passes over the "godly" Esther and instead locates the center of embryonic America and the potential of a nation not in theocratic ideals or in a saint-like woman (who bears a striking resemblance to Sedgwick herself), but in the self-styled whim of Hope.

## **II: Altered "States": the Anglicization of American Iconography**

My work, while indebted to Quentin Miller, shifts the focus from the theme of individuality to iconography. I examine the characters in *Hope Leslie* against metamorphosing icons of the American nation and narrative progressions of imagined American national identity. Sedgwick's characters interest me for their resemblance to women personifying the nation and for the curious way in which the women of *Hope Leslie* fall out of fashion with their environment of the 1640s as well as with their adoptive reading community of the 1820s.

Sedgwick has company in this enterprise. She joins a cadre of American writers "dressing" their characters as means either to support or confront cultural expectations of the mid-nineteenth century; or, for the authors recreating the colonial past through

historical fiction, costuming their historical reprisals to reinforce or revise the social milieu of the past. For example, as the first American play performed in the United States, Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1790) uses clothing to satirize the values of the Old and New Worlds alike, immediately situating its tension between the perceived "meanness of ... homespun arts" and the "ready made ... splendor and parade" of European fashion



Figure 1.4: Von Meurer, Jacob. "America." *Die Unbekante Neue Welt*. Amsterdam, 1683. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society



Figure 1.5: Von Meurer, Jacob. Cartouche. *Die Unbekante Neue Welt*. Amsterdam, 1683. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society

(Prologue). Tabitha Tenney's *Female Quixotism* (1801) continues the thread of social satire and uses clothing to criticize and illustrate the false romantic ideals encouraged through the reading of novels and the grotesque dangers of their unmitigated consumption. Melville spins the "plain old homespun" of Private Potter in *Israel Potter* (1854/55); and Hawthorne,

of course, imbues textile props with loaded meaning in *The House of the Seven Gables* and in a number of short stories, and he supplies American literature with the powerful scarlet "A", "a certain affair of fine red cloth..." instrumental in resurrecting the story

of one Hester Prynne (30). Like her compatriots, Sedgwick uses her characters' apparel to re-present unique characters and believable events; additionally, because of their resemblance to national emblems, her characters become conduits to America's ideological past.



Figure 1.6: Jeffreys, Thomas. 1777. *Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society*

Variations in the artistic representation of indigenous peoples, as assumed and projected by Europeans, provoked changes in the seventeenth-century seal of the MBC. Costumes for the other personified continents differed among particular representations, but only “America” consistently came in various states of undress.<sup>7</sup> Established in Flemish art of the sixteenth century, “America” materialized as “a rather fierce savage” while “Europe” wore the clothes of nobility and, through her posture, suggested a classical inheritance (Corbeiller 210). Assumptions about the New World changed over time as Europeans became “less-threatened” by America. As a result of the changing perception, the personification became increasingly feminine: facial features softened, hips widened, and breasts grew (Higham 51). As New England and the mid-Atlantic states developed through colonization, the iconography of “America” transformed to reflect the transforming relationship between the New World and the Old: the “savage” was

<sup>7</sup> Viewpoints differ on this point. Although Fleming provides images of a partially-naked Africa, Higham focuses on the Moorish influences attributed to Africa by Europeans and cites America as the sole “primitive.”



replaced by the “Indian Princess” surrounded by the resources of the colonies rather than the instruments of war.

Evidence of the icon’s malleability appears when comparing Von Meur’s *Die Unbekante Neue Welt* (1683) and Jeffreys’s *A New and Correct Map of North America; with the West India Islands* (1777). Published in Amsterdam, *Die Unbekante* suggests that both a formidable people and a treasure of resources inhabit the American continent (figure 1.4). The book’s frontispiece shocks the reader with an armor-clad Amazon figure towering over a darkly-drawn community of laboring warriors. Dropping articles of wealth and authority — coins, an arrow and a scepter, a crown and a liberty cap — the woman rides atop the shoulders of two men. The storm clouds ushered in by this armored company emphasize the awe inspired by the illustration, as well as the fears of the distant European. Additionally, the map within *Die Unbekante* supports early portraits of “America” by accessorizing the personified figure of its cartouche with requisite props (figure 1.5). A topless woman sits upon a cornucopia of commodities guarded by a hissing snake. The wealth within threatens to spill over, but it is retained

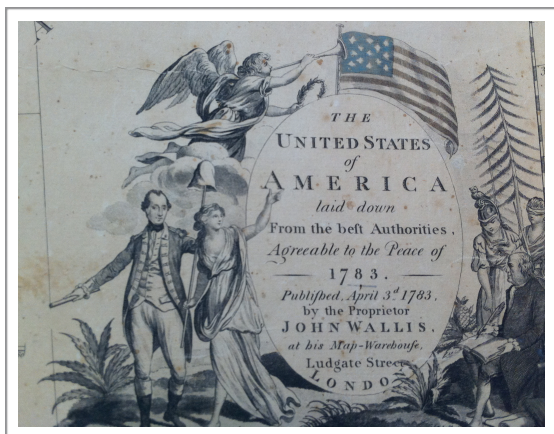


Figure 1.7: Wallis, John. 1783. *Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society*

by a caped European. Beneath “America” work several men who attempt to cover the natural and mineral wealth of the place with baskets and seem to hide gold bars among boxes of pebbles. Their actions appear to be in vain, for the greedy eyes of the well-dressed European at right cannot fail to witness the wealth of the land and its

unmistakable potential.

The figures decorating the cartouche of Jeffreys's 1777 *A New and Correct Map of North America* (figure 1.6) bear little resemblance to warriors of *Die Unbekante*. Although implements of war remain visible to the reader, they fall lazily at the side of the seated figures. The warrior woman and the laboring man of the earlier image transform into Venus and Adonis types, content to play with lions and gaze absentmindedly into the distance. Set pieces and accessories denote the illustration as "America," but now the headdress remains the only thing separating these figures from the goddesses of European iconography. The North American colonists were waging an armed revolution against the English in 1777, yet Jeffreys's *New and Correct Map* ... oddly advertises "America" as a lover's playground. Ironically, the version of "America" sold to the English in Jeffreys's map poses no threat to the English and seems to invite the curious European to join this non-threatening "brave new world."

Things get more complicated once Americans begin to personify their own national image after Independence. John Wallis's *The United States of America: laid down from the best Authorities agreeable to the peace of 1783* veritably erases any signs of indigency and replaces the unclothed headdress-wearing figures with graceful lady Liberty escorted by young George Washington (figure 1.7). Refashioned for an era of independence, America asserts sovereignty by dressing itself more like the power it just overthrew rather than as anything resembling the actual space and place of the nascent United States.

The restless fluctuation between America as "Indian Princess" and "Liberty" in

the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries seems consistent with the changing heroines in *Hope Leslie*. In decorative iconography, the struggle to distance “America” from both the sterile representation of British *Liberty* and the “primitive” America imagined by the developed world produces disparate and often-conflicting emblems. My examination of various nineteenth-century illustrations in books, maps, cartoons, lithographs, sheet music, and on currency suggests that the image of America refused a singular representation between the years of national independence and the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> While *Liberty* and *Columbia* enjoyed a broader popularity than the so-called Indian Princess during the early-national period, at least as a political icon, the malleability of the images throughout early-nineteenth century print culture indicate her to be a fluid rather than a static figure.<sup>9, 10</sup> Vacillating between “America” as *Liberty* with a liberty pole and cap and as *Columbia* sporting fur robes and feathered headdress, the ever-changing personification of America reveals a country unable to settle on a national ideal – or to make up its mind. It would seem that *Liberty* never fully replaces the “Indian Princess”; she merely suggests indigeneity by borrowing some of her accessories. By explaining the interchangeability of national iconography through the sharing of headdresses and trading of caps, I by no means suggest that women serve only as bodies for costuming or that the women of the nineteenth century were akin to

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<sup>8</sup> The collection at the American Antiquarian Society allowed me to track the representation of America from the seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century through numerous media.

<sup>9</sup> If the “Indian Princess” motif persists, it is through Pocahontas, the favorite of the American South.

<sup>10</sup> *Liberty* and *Columbia* may edge out the Indian Princess in national representation, but she assumes a major role in popular culture. Sheet music of the 1820s, 1830s, and beyond advertise Indian women as the decoration and subject matter of the musical compositions. Coincidentally, as the years pass, the women become less “real” and fall more into caricature — complete with fuller headdresses and shorter hemlines.

quarrelsome sisters raiding each other's closets and stealing the attention of each other's beaux. Assumed and rejected accessories gain importance in American iconography because crowns and caps *become* the visual language used to separate one image from another. In an age of print, where distinction in skin tone challenged the tools of lithographers and engravers, accessories of all types became necessary to differentiate one representation from another.

The pairing of complementary yet distinct heroines in *Hope Leslie* illustrates the changing identity of nineteenth-century America or, more accurately, the variable picture the nation painted of itself. Magawisca and Hope, while guided by different authorities, espouse liberal ideology and obey similar principles, in spirit if not in fact. Both women challenge community principles by acting upon their interpretations of right and wrong rather than on those dictated by paternal and civil authority. Hope refuses to see Nelema, the Indian "peddler" living near the Fletchers, as a "witch" — despite her mysterious methods that heal the pedantic Craddock. Rather than submit to the ruling of her authorities, Hope acts upon the injustice she perceives, liberates Nelema from her prison cell, and independently revokes her death sentence. Additionally, Hope's liberal interpretation of religious and civil authority allows her to bemoan the length of sermons (Sedgwick 163), disregard the Sabbath (174), ignore propriety (175), "encourage" the idolatry of a papist (242), manipulate law enforcement (309), and free Magawisca from the imprisonment of colonial Boston (329). Magawisca, in turn, offers herself as a physical sacrifice for the life of Everell and thus heroically — and selflessly — disobeys her community. The action not only prioritizes

individual choice over familial and national obedience, but also prevents the sacrifice of Everell and negates payment of colonial debt for the death of Mononotto's son. Like Hope, Magawisca acts according to a set of principles gleaned from experience and the interpretation of her environment. Hope and Magawisca — young and determined, willful and free — present variations on the same theme and fashion themselves according to an independent will.

### **III. “Wild and Fantastic Grace”: Princess Magawisca**

Sedgwick focuses attention on Magawisca from her first entrance into colonial Massachusetts. Fletcher, after piquing the reader's interest in this “Indian servant” by prioritizing her arrival over the recently-received news of his former lover's death and his imminent adoption of her orphaned children, encourages the reader to see the young Pequot as “one of God's creatures” rather than as a wolf outside the fold (20). Then, he interrupts his own religious proselytizing to introduce the newly obtained “Indian servant” as “... the girl, Magawisca, clothed in her Indian garb, which the governor has permitted her to retain, not caring, as he wisely says, to interfere with their innocent peculiarities; and she, in particular, having shown a loathing of the English dress” (22). More explanation than introduction, Fletcher's hasty narrative of Magawisca before Everell “threw wide the parlor door” (22) solidifies the “Indian servant” as exceptional and signifies clothing as a marker of her particular independence. While early Americans often “translated” Indian names into European appellations (Axtell 55), Magawisca not only gets to keep her name in the Fletcher house (as does her brother),

but Fletcher uses it to introduce her rather than to identify her as “servant,” “girl,” or, as Jennet does, “tawny.”<sup>11</sup> In a novel in which Alice and Mary Leslie, newly-arrived English Anglicans, must be “re-baptized” under different names, the untranslatability of Magawisca and her brother signifies that their personal identity has not been compromised (55). Magawisca’s clothing, denoted by the limited designation as “garb” in *Hope Leslie*, asserts her virtue particularly through its contrast with Gardiner’s self-styled “*garb of hypocrisy*” later in the novel (201). The introduction of Magawisca into the Fletcher household also allows the reader to note the prevailing colonial interpretation of American Indian culture, the latitude given to physical appearance, and the “peculiarities” of an “Indian princess,” at least as interpreted by Catharine Maria Sedgwick.

Sedgwick illustrates in detail Magawisca’s appearance as she enters the Fletcher household. Given the intention of this chapter to read clothing for its cultural significance, I provide Sedgwick’s initial description of Magawisca in its entirety:

She wore a waistcoat of deer-skin, fasted at the throat by a richly wrought collar. Her arms, a model for sculpture, were bare. A mantle of purple cloth hung gracefully from her shoulders, and was confined by a broad band, ornamented with rude hieroglyphics. The mantle and her strait short petticoat or kilt of the same rare and costly material, had been obtained, probably, from the English

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<sup>11</sup> Jennet’s affection for the pejorative “tawny” when speaking of Magawisca suggests the term to be part of the everyday language of 17<sup>th</sup> century colonial North America. However, while the *OED* connects “tawny” to an “Indian Tawney” as early as 1681, *Webster’s* (1828) makes no direct association between Native American and “tawny,” only to “or persons who are sun-burnt; as a tawny Moor or Spaniard; [or] the tawny sons of Numidia.”

traders. Stockings were an unknown luxury; but leggins, similar to those worn by the ladies of Queen Elizabeth's court, were no bad substitute. The moccasin, neatly fitted to a delicate foot and ankle, and tastefully ornamented with bead-work, completed the apparel of this daughter of a chieftain... (23).

Fletcher explains to his wife that Governor Winthrop has allowed Magawisca to keep her "Indian garb" because he deems it an "innocent peculiarity" (22). Based on the narrative designation of certain clothing pieces as "costly" and "obtained from the English traders," one can assume the "peculiar" nature of her apparel was limited to the deer-skin of the waistcoat, the hieroglyphic-adorned band constraining her mantle, and the ornamented moccasin. Dressing Magawisca in a combination of English and "native" fashion mirrors nineteenth-century illustrations of "America" as interchangeably Indian Princess and classically-drawn *Liberty* — *Liberty* in a feathered headdress, *Princess* holding a liberty pole — and concurs with historical descriptions of apparel in rural seventeenth-century New England as a "sartorial hodgepodge" as a result of trade (Axtell 59).

Contrary to protestations made by Sedgwick's patriarch, however, historical accounts of seventeenth-century British North America assert that "Indian garb" was never an "innocent" expression. Early colonists relied on clothing to determine the "friendliness" of Indian nations based on the visible presence of English dress (Welters 17), as demonstrated in *The Captivity of Mary Rowlandson* (1682), among others.<sup>12</sup> For

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<sup>12</sup> "My heart skipped within me, thinking they had been Englishmen at the first sight of them, for they were dressed in English apparel ... but when they came near, there was a vast difference between the lovely faces of Christians, and the foul looks of those heathens..." (254).

the most part, “you could often tell a convert by his cover” (Axtell qtd. in Welters 15), even though inter-cultural trade blurred the boundaries between colonial and “native” apparel (Axtell 59). The “loathing of English dress” that Sedgwick attributes to Magawisca (or at least to Fletcher’s interpretation of Magawisca) coincides with Indian resistance to English apparel in the seventeenth century and to “unfriendly” Indians in colonial Massachusetts. Magawisca’s apparel, while culturally and historically appropriate, punctuates her independence within colonial cultural norms and probably would not have been deemed “innocent” by any citizens of Massachusetts Bay.

Throughout *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick persistently underscores Magawisca’s cultural and personal sovereignty by specifying her distinctive apparel. The “captivity” of Magawisca in the Fletcher home mirrors her captivity by the State through a disdain for colonial apparel, and her assertion of self. After William Fletcher explains her attire as an “innocent peculiarity . . . permitted” by the governor, Magawisca’s actions build on her earlier resolution “rejecting with disdain the Governor’s offer of an English dress” (Sedgwick 282). Just as Mononotto “tore” the “mark of captivity” from Oneco to signal the liberation of his children from the Puritan settlement, insisting on a “badge of thy people” rather than “English dress” (65), Magawisca announces her liberty even while imprisoned by insisting on her “peculiar costume” (282). Describing her heroine in the courtroom, Sedgwick compares Magawisca’s attire to Nelson’s at Trafalgar, and



thus transforms “Indian garb” from a “curiosity” to a mark of “national pride” (282).<sup>13</sup> Noticeably absent here is Magawisca’s mantle, previously described as made of “rare” material “obtained ... from the English traders” (23). By leaving off that “mark of captivity,” Magawisca thereby shrugs off any hints of colonial influence in the Massachusetts courtroom. Her words punctuate her dress as she states, “I am your prisoner, and ye may slay me, but I deny your right to judge me” (286) and later paraphrases Patrick Henry with “I demand of thee death or liberty” (293). Clearly, any connection linking Magawisca to the English community, sartorial or otherwise, has been severed by the time she stands trial before the Boston magistrates.

Sedgwick further accessorizes Magawisca’s “loathing” of colonial dress with a distinct and singular hairstyle. Following the physical description of Magawisca — “slender,” “lofty,” “regular” features, good teeth — and before the catalog of Magawisca’s attire, Sedgwick describes her heroine’s hair as “contrary to the fashion of the Massachusetts Indians ... parted on her forehead, braided, and confined to her head by a band of small feathers, jet black, and interwoven, and attached at equal distances by rings of polished bond” (23). The importance of Magawisca’s singular hairstyle is reemphasized through her disguise while in Boston. To mask her identity, Magawisca hides herself in the “ugly envelop of a blanket” (182) to “conceal the rich dress which it was her father’s pride, (and perhaps her pleasure) ...” (196); she also must forego her

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<sup>13</sup> By comparing Magawisca to Nelson, Sedgwick offers her “Indian Princess” as a heroic martyr rather than a figure of national hope: “Her collar, bracelet, girdle, embroidered moccasins, and purple mantle, with its rich border of bead work, had been laid aside in prison, but were now all resumed, and displayed with a feeling resembling Nelson’s, when he emblazoned himself with stars and orders to appear before his enemies on the fatal day of his last battle” (282).

braids and “comb it thick over her forehead after the fashion of the aborigines in the vicinity of Boston” (196) in order to alter every personal “peculiarity.” The anonymity Magawisca desires can be obtained only by cloaking her “rich” apparel with a mantle of commonness. Distinguished from both her captors and the surrounding indigenous community, Sedgwick establishes Magawisca as an exemplar — connected to her environment, but assimilated to neither: she exemplifies neither “Indian” nor colonial fashion. Magawisca may initially live harmoniously with the Fletchers as more ward than servant, and she may assume her father’s will and assert community with her family and nation; however, she refuses to be baptized fully into either community, resisting both the font of the Puritans and the vengeance of her father. Additionally, as a daughter, Magawisca *submits* but is never *submissive*: defying her father through the attempted sacrifice of her life, risking his future and her own by this selfless act.

The physical ornamentation of Magawisca in *Hope Leslie* works toward the *peculiarity* continually emphasized by Sedgwick when describing Magawisca — and later, Hope Leslie. Fletcher spins Magawisca’s rejection of English attire as an “innocent peculiarity” and Sedgwick marks Magawisca as beautiful “even to a European eye” despite the “peculiarities of her race” (23). Yet, Magawisca’s features culminate in what Sedgwick terms “a noble demeanor and peculiar beauty...” (23).<sup>14</sup> Rather than representative of her nation, Sedgwick makes it a point to separate Magawisca from everyone else. As Bertha Grafton immediately recognizes, she wears a

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<sup>14</sup> Often construed as “strange” or “odd” in modern parlance, “peculiar” to Americans in the early-nineteenth century would have instead signaled singularity or individuality (*Webster’s 1828*). “Peculiar” also indicated an exclusivity within a distinct “nation or system” — a definition speaking to the national icon of Indian Princess exuded by Magawisca.

badge of sovereignty rather than a downcast look as do other Indians. She may complement Everell Fletcher, but Sedgwick makes it clear throughout the novel that Everell as well is physically separated from his community. Asserting sovereignty through her insistence on clothing, however, makes it impossible for Magawisca to exist as either Sedgwick's true heroine or America's icon. Colonial New England reads Magawisca's independence as "national pride," accentuated by what it perceives as her love of "ornament."<sup>15</sup> Magawisca insists upon cultural sovereignty in her dress, but she fails to wear the one "Indian" icon acceptable to nineteenth-century Americans imagining themselves against a menagerie of cultural symbols. Magawisca wears moccasins and displays beadwork, but Sedgwick gives the young princess a feathered headdress only for her entrance into the novel, failing to mention the accessory in any other depiction. After her presence is established, the "band of small feathers" becomes noticeably absent.<sup>16</sup>

The other view of colonial-native American trade in *Hope Leslie* is the adoption of "savage attire" into the white community; namely, the "native" outfitting embraced by Faith/Mary. The garments worn by her sister repulse Hope so much that she "sickens" at the sight and "averts her eyes" until she can compose herself and repress her "rebel

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<sup>15</sup> Disapproval of ornament is supposed to characterize Puritan aesthetics, of course, so there's an anti-Puritan satire intended as well as an anti-colonial one.

<sup>16</sup> Images of "Indians" in nineteenth-century America vary in their representation, as mentioned earlier. The most common adaptation of so-called Indianness, at least in national icons, comes in the form of liberty wearing some sort of feathered headdress. Ornamental ostrich plumes, while still technically "feathered," link the figures to the fashion of Europe rather than any sort of America indiginity (Fleming 46). Paging through collections of lithographers' samples at the AAS revealed Liberty ornamented by eagles feathers to be omnipresent on envelopes and letterhead, advertisements, business logos, and so on. Even though the nation never adopted the eagle-feathered Liberty as its national icon, the pervasiveness of the emblem can be seen in the aforementioned business materials, as well as in the three-dollar coin minted by the U.S. Treasury in 1854 (Higham 78).

feelings” (227). Mary offends her sister with her “mantle of bird’s feathers” and dress of beaded leather. Hope feels that if she could just accessorize Mary’s dress with something recognizably colonial — her own silk mantle, in this case — she might find a resemblance between herself and her sister. Mary’s marriage into the Pequot community may establish her as a hybrid of “Indian” and European cultures sought for in representations of “America” of the nineteenth century,<sup>17</sup>

but through her rejection of “the English dress” (229) Hope Leslie cannot fully recognize her as kin and co-inheritor of the colonial legacy. Like Magawisca, her ornaments speak to pride, vanity, and separateness rather than standing as cultural markers more palatable

to non-Native Americans, such as the interchangeable feathered headdress of either eagles’ feathers or ostrich plumes. It was impossible for the national icon of “Indian

Princess” both to exhibit the indigenuity sought by adoptive Americans and to portray the self-reliance and independence advocated by the young United States without wearing an acceptable sign of her so-called Indianness.

Without the headdress, the only “Indian Princess” acceptable to America in the nineteenth century embraces “English dress,” and by extension, assimilates through religious conversion, marriage, clothing, and physical depiction. Of course I speak of



Figure 1.8: “Matoaka /Rebecca” in *The true travels, adventures and observations of Captaine Iohn Smith, in Europe, Asia, Africke, and America : beginning about the yeere 1593, and continued to this present 1629.* Vol. I-[II]. : From the London edition of 1629. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>17</sup> In her introduction to *Hope Leslie*, historian Mary Kelly associates Faith’s captivity and subsequent marriage with that of Eunice Williams, a distant relative of Sedgwick’s (xxxviii-xxxiv).

Rebecca née Pocahontas-Matoaka, the much misrepresented, ubiquitous exemplar of early-Native Americans. The metamorphosis of “the” Pocahontas in literature and iconography speaks to the impossibility of Magawisca and the transformation of national icon from “Indian Princess” to classical “goddess” without the requisite props. Asserting her novel as an “illustrat[ion]” of “not the history, but the character of the times” (5), Sedgwick advertises Magawisca, a New England “native,” as an original “possibility” rather than a metamorphosis of the Pocahontas, the daughter claimed by Virginia (6).<sup>18</sup> The invocation of Pocahontas, even to refute her as Magawisca’s model, leads the reader to see Sedgwick’s heroine and the daughter of Powhatan as connected (Tilton 81). For Americans in the nineteenth century, Pocahontas exhibited enough of the “English dress” to satisfy any resistant colonial (figure 1.8) and provided a “balance” between the disparate cultures of the United States (50) through her rescue of John Smith, marriage to John Rolfe, Christian conversion, and untimely death in London. Catharine Maria Sedgwick “balanced” the legend further by liberating Pocahontas from Smith’s Virginia and firmly planting her in Winthrop’s Massachusetts.

*Hope Leslie* reflects the popularity of Pocahontas mythology through its “New England spin” on the popular narrative. Sedgwick re-stages the rescue of Smith by Pocahontas but leaves her heroine disfigured by the process. In colonial Massachusetts, Magawisca’s selfless act of compassion furthers colonial advancement while hurting her own cause. Like Nelema, whose “shrivelled arm”

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<sup>18</sup> Michael King addresses the “relative genealogical superiority” assumed by Virginians who could claim Pocahontas as their distant ancestor (para. 2).

cannot enact the “vengeance” due to her English oppressors, Magawisca’s disfigurement leaves her physically unable to displace the English in America — or to marry one of their sons.<sup>19</sup> Sedgwick may flirt with a marriage between Everell and Magawisca, thus continuing the romance plot created and perpetuated in 1805 by the novels of John Davis,<sup>20</sup> but quickly replaces Magawisca with Hope Leslie after the maiden’s selfless sacrifice (Sedgwick 95).<sup>21</sup> Although Martha Fletcher recognizes their connection (33) and Digby thought Everell “as good as mated with Magawisca” (214), Sedgwick entertains, but does not allow, a white-Indian union within the community of seventeenth-century Boston. Hope and Everell may urge Magawisca to “return and dwell with [them],” promising that the differences between the English and the Indians “is but a vapour ... nearly passed away” (330), but Magawisca maintains that they “must part ... forever,” asserting that “the Indian and the white man can no more *mingle*, and become one, than day and night” (330).<sup>22, 23</sup>

Sedgwick’s resolution supports nineteenth-century anxieties surrounding

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<sup>19</sup> Magawisca exits the scene after her sacrifice and returns only after Hope becomes established as the ideal “match” for Everell. Although there is no soap-opera style digression in which Magawisca mourns the future she sacrificed to save her “love,” any possible chance for romance ends with the thwarted execution.

<sup>20</sup> Beginning with *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (1803) and continuing with *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas: An Indian Tale* (1805) Davis fictionalizes the Pocahontas-Smith story and creates the version embraced by generations of Americans (King para. 4).

<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the “ideal male fantasy” created through Davis’s version of Pocahontas; namely, “a passionate girl of the forest totally unrestricted by European moral constraints” (Abrams 57) has no place in the early Massachusetts imagined by Sedgwick. The novel is quick to remind us that girls who give in to seduction meet rather unfortunate ends (Sedgwick 324).

<sup>22</sup> “Mingle,” in its nineteenth-century usage, denotes “to unite in one body” and suggests a “promiscuous” rather than an “orderly” pairing (*Webster’s 1828*).

<sup>23</sup> See Karen Woods Weierman’s study of the taboo of interracial marriage in *One Nation, One Blood: Interracial Marriage in American Fiction, Scandal, and Law, 1820-1870*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005.

miscegenation<sup>24</sup> and encourages removal by unequivocally ending the relationship between Everell and Magawisca by sending Magawisca out to the “solitudes” and “for ever from their sight” (332, 334).

However, Sedgwick distinctively suggests that the rejection of cultural integration stems from Native American refusal rather than from colonial prejudice, for it is Magawisca who rejects Everell, and the novel

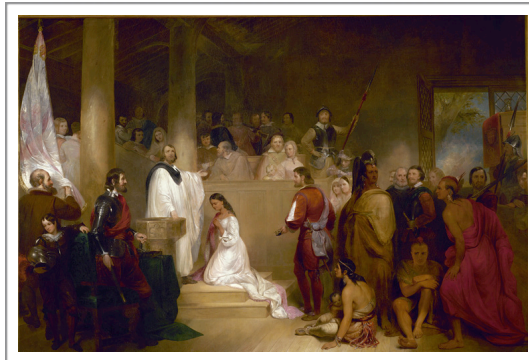


Figure 1.9: Chapman, John Gadsby. 1839. *Courtesy of Architect of the Capital (web).*

explains forced removal as voluntary emigration through Magawisca’s willing exit from the settlements of the East. Sedgwick allows for interracial marriage through the characters of Faith and Oneco, but a marriage such as theirs can exist only outside the settlement of Boston; further, theirs is not a “true marriage of cultures,” as would be the union between Everell and Magawisca, for Faith “has lost her own” (Weierman, “Reading and Writing” 418).

Sedgwick’s choice not to baptize Magawisca further complicates the tacit acceptance of European values perpetuated by the Pocahontas myth. Following the model of her mother, who “would not even consent that the holy word should be interpreted to her” (Sedgwick 22), Magawisca refuses to accept the faith encouraged by the pious Esther, even though doing so might grant her pardon (279). Marriage and

<sup>24</sup> The American people had once embraced assimilation of Indian and white cultures through marriage, according to Robert Tilton. After the Louisiana Purchase increased the space of the nation, however, miscegenation became “repulsive and ‘unnatural’ to most Americans” (63).

baptism dangle before her; however, Magawisca's rejection of both reveals the impossibility of full communion between whites and Indians in Sedgwick's conception of America. But it also advocates a sovereignty previously denied through representations of the "Indian Princess" in the United States. John Gadsby Chapman's painting *The Baptism of Pocahontas* (1839) (figure 1.9) vividly contrasts with Sedgwick's non-baptism of Magawisca in *Hope Leslie*. Chapman's painting — commissioned by the U.S. Congress and now hanging in the Capitol rotunda — "lightens" his Native American icon through the physical depiction and ornamentation of Pocahontas. Rebecca née Matoaka-Pocahontas kneels submissively before an Anglican minister who gazes heavenward with his arm outstretched. Dressed in an off-the-shoulder white silk gown, Pocahontas wears a simple necklace and like Magawisca holds a purple mantle. Her hair, gently pulled back from her face, falls in waves just below her shoulders; her features resemble more of the English characters in the room (especially the young boy flanking Rolfe) than any of the Indians in Chapman's painting. With the purple mantle as the only physical connection between Pocahontas of Virginia and Sedgwick's Indian Princess of New England, *Hope Leslie* interrupts popular interpretations of the Pocahontas legend perpetuated by the likes of Davis and Chapman and advocates for the un-Anglicized depiction of Indian Princess presented in national images of the early Republic, albeit it without the feathered headdress (Fleming 46).

Magawisca may not "dress the part" of an early-American Indian Princess that, even by 1827, had been burned into the cultural consciousness of non-native



Americans; instead, her voice complements her sartorial independence by insisting upon a revision to the narrative told about indigenous peoples in the annals of American history. Magawisca's "recital" of the Battle of Mystic directly engages and squarely indicts her non-Native audience by providing historical witness in present tense. Rather than merely list injustices suffered, Magawisca tells the story of her fiery, violent displacement and eventual captivity, providing a blow-by-blow account for the fascinated Everell Fletcher, and thus refutes colonial history — and Sedgwick's source material — by challenging the accounts of Winthrop, Hubbard, and others (Sedgwick 351).

Everell's interruptions, rather than making the war story more palatable to the inheritors of the colonial victory, manipulate readers into questioning their own trust of published history. When confronted with images of colonial brutality, Everell sounds incredulous and encourages Magawisca to qualify her narrative, asking, "Was it so sudden? Did they so rush on sleeping women and children?" (48). The question does more than shuttle nineteenth-century skepticism to colonial America; Sedgwick's placement of Everell's question and his incorrect interpretation that follows — "Then... as I have heard, our people had all the honour of the fight" — prompts a sarcastic response from Magawisca and highlights the prevailing ignorance of seventeenth-century Englishmen. Through the exchange with Magawisca, however, Everell engages in the practice encouraged by Sedgwick in *Hope Leslie's* preface: "the ambition of the writer would be fully gratified if ... any of our young countrymen should be stimulated to investigate the early history of their native land" (6).

Magawisca's war story is news to Everell (and probably to the nineteenth-century reader)<sup>25</sup> and comes sandwiched between colonial versions of the war offered by Digby. Yet, although Everell becomes caught up in the stories of the former soldier, Digby's tales of Indian violence cannot change Everell's affection for Magawisca. But, Sedgwick's revision of colonial war has little to do with Everell. Instead, the young Fletcher stands in for the reader on the set of *Hope Leslie*: faced with conflicting versions of the same story, he asks the questions we would ask. Sedgwick does provide the nationally-endorsed version of the Battle at Mystic, but she gestures to colonial historians only to understand the perspective of Everell rather than to rebut Magawisca's account. Sedgwick maligns rather than valorizes Puritan New England and her own ancestors by using the chroniclers' words to expose colonial inhumanity rather than to celebrate a "blessed" history of a chosen people.

The study of history, according to Nina Baym, "link[s] individuals to the nation [and] construct[s] them as national subjects" (20). Challenging Everell's understanding of recent history as well as our own, Sedgwick's re-appropriation of historical authority forces her audience to consider a national legacy more complicated than her contemporaries have led us to believe. Our cognitive dissonance echoes Everell's — "as I have heard, our people had all the honour of the fight" (Sedgwick 48) — but we, like Everell, are meant to believe survivor testimony, reading Sedgwick's revision not as "merely changing sculptors to give the advantage to one or the other," but "put[ting] the chisel into the hands of truth ... giving it to whom it belonged" (53). The witness of

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<sup>25</sup> Book art and other illustrations of the Battle of Mystic in the early-nineteenth century downplay any idea of massacre by focusing on the colonial attack rather than the devastating carnage.

Everell reinforces the legitimacy of “recital” performed by Magawisca and the airtime Sedgwick allots to Magawisca shows allegiance to the Pequot survivor. The young Puritan hears three accounts —one authorized by his elders, one given by a soldier, and one offered by Magawisca — but the detail available to the reader (and the narrative most likely to be repeated) comes by way of one of the massacre’s victims, rather than its victors.

The transfer of historical narrative agency from the likes of Winthrop and Hubbard to Magawisca, a female survivor of the Pequot War, subverts hegemonic ideology of the nineteenth century and provides present-day scholars and students with a somewhat shocking historical revision. According to Douglas, *Hope Leslie* “suggests counter history; she is an *ex post facto* protest against the masculine solidities of the past” (185). For readers accustomed to the silent “noble savage” propagated by Cooper and others; for readers familiar with both the selfless forest-dweller who relinquishes love when faced with a marital challenge, as in Child’s *Hobomok*; and for readers anticipating Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* and the warrior who willingly relinquishes sovereignty and fades into the distance, the “Indian Princess” created by Sedgwick seems to unsettle the “comfortable” relationship between whites and Indians wistfully perpetuated by antebellum literature.

Yet, the reader reads Magawisca as a “good” Indian, although she neither dresses nor acts like one.<sup>26</sup> Mononotto’s daughter may retain a clear memory of colonial injustice and keep a catalog of the wrongs committed by the settlers of Massachusetts;

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<sup>26</sup> See Jean O’Brien’s *Firsting and Lasting* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.)

yet, her compassion for Everell and affection for his family cause her to forget — disfiguring her body and crippling her quest for justice. By not producing children in the novel, Magawisca and her brother Oneco contribute to the “last of the tribe” mythology perpetuated by Cooper and later Longfellow, among others, that enjoyed wide appeal in nineteenth-century New England.<sup>27</sup> Magawisca may not repeat the “last of my race” speech offered by Nelema early in the novel (Sedgwick 104), but she knows her future differs from the “bright destiny of [Hope and Everell]” (330). As sole survivors among the community at Mystic, Magawisca and her brother become “good Indians” because they either marry white women, in the case of Oneco, or fail to produce any children, at least by novel’s end; the children of Mononotto become “good” because they open the way for New Englanders to inhabit the space they depart. “Their story ...this little remnant of the Pequot race... lost in the voiceless obscurity of ... the western forests” (339).<sup>28</sup>

#### **IV: Blue Fillet and Ringlets: Hope as *Liberty***<sup>29</sup>

Four chapters depicting the cohabitation of the English and the Pequot in the early Massachusetts end with the slaughter of its most tolerant family, the kidnapping of its first born, and the relegation of Magawisca into the margins of Sedgwick’s novel and

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<sup>27</sup> Jean O’Brien provides numerous examples of “lasting” achieved through the arts of the early nineteenth-century and cites the work of historians Jill Lapore, Brian Dippie, William Simmons and Jane Van Norman Turano (109-110).

<sup>28</sup> This, of course, is the myth that O’Brien debunks throughout her book. “Lasting” Indians and “replacing” them with non-native origin stories became essential for the formerly-English to claim rights to the space of America and position themselves as “native” New Englanders.

<sup>29</sup> *Webster’s (1828)* defines “fillet” as “a little band to tie about the hair of the head.”

colonial history. Magawisca disappears from the central narration shortly after Everell escapes Mononotto, albeit through her sacrifice, and although Magawisca is restored to her family and is no longer a captive of the English, she returns disfigured by her friendship to a white man. Physically imperfect icons may be the stuff of classical art and mythology, but for Sedgwick and American iconography, a mutilated woman cannot be the badge of the united, independent people of North America. Although a severed self may be a more apt illustration of the recovering United States in 1827, *Columbia*, *Liberty* and, for our purposes, Hope Leslie, become the image of the American nation.

Early depictions of classic American *Liberty* in the new United States include the obverse of the *Libertas Americana Medal* created by Augustin Dupré in 1782. *Liberty*, accompanied by a liberty pole and wearing a Phrygian cap, fixes her gaze forward – beyond the circumference of the coin and toward the future (Fleming 56). The artist Dupré, according to Charles Blanc, “represented the new-born Liberty, sprung from the prairies without ancestry and without rulers, as a youthful virgin, with disheveled hair and dauntless aspect...” (56). *Liberty* became interchangeable with *Columbia*, both inspired by classical mythology and simply portrayed rather than fashionably adorned (60). The young beauty with the unruly locks epitomized the American imagination of itself, even after the arrival of Uncle Sam and Brother Jonathan (66).

Co-opting Acadian-born *Liberty* for the symbol of the young United States proved difficult for a nation set on independence from the Old World. Liberty, held by England as “the genius of British institutions and the birthright of all Englishmen” (Higham 57)

looked too much like Britannia and the unbending parent whom Americans fought a war to escape. Likewise, the ubiquitous Indian Princess of the eighteenth-century, minted by the colonizer rather than the colonized, suggested a “primitive” people unequal to the other established nations of the world (50).<sup>30</sup> The aforementioned cartouche progression from Von Meur to Jeffreys to Wallis demonstrates the new nation’s desire to distance itself from foreign expectation and to produce a new image of the nation (figures 1.4-1.7). Wallis’s *Liberty*, unlike the women of previous depictions, strolls across the wild flora of America on the arm of a young George Washington. Animated and smiling, American Liberty appears less militant and more girlish than British *Liberty* but bears no mark of North American indigenuity. Escorted by Washington and framed by an unfurled American flag, an angelic herald, blind Justice, and a scribbling Ben Franklin counseled by Minerva, American *Liberty* holds the requisite pole and cap and directs attention to the inscribed “UNITED STATES of AMERICA.” The collection of images surrounding American *Liberty* grounds her in a specific place (Higham 66): given the trees, the pineapple, and the hemp-like plant, there’s no way viewers could think themselves in orderly old England. The headdress becomes an unnecessary identifier for this youthful image of the United States: her “natively” cluttered surroundings ease the need for feathered accessories.

Naked of any markings of indigenuity and less militant than her British kin,

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<sup>30</sup> Higham documents the English perspective felt by Americans after the Revolution. Ironically, the new nation, while trying to dispel the symbols created by the mother country, allowed itself to be victim to England’s perception – even after independence. Mother England asserted more influence than Americans wished to admit.

American *Liberty* strikes a pose appropriate for the newly-assumed independence of the nascent United States. “Liberty” sheds both the stridency of early versions of “America” as Amazonian warrior and the “chilliness” of her European ancestors (66) by dressing in a light garment that suggests more toga than armor. Wallis’s *Liberty*, while girlish, smiling, and pretty, claims a classic ancestry without owning the oppression of the past. The youthfulness she projects exudes innocence and hope but confesses to neither inexperience nor immaturity. The young but experienced *Liberty* claims George Washington as her escort and coquettishly reveals a slender ankle beneath the flowing skirt of her low-cut gown — thus exuding political savvy, personal awareness, and a social maturity unknown to the naïve and unsophisticated.

Sedgwick ushers in her version of adopted *Liberty* on a litter borne by two unnamed Indians in the service of the Fletcher household (Sedgwick 69). “Tossing back ... bright curls” and “sportively” accosting her escorts (70), Hope emerges onto the scene as a willful child, unconcerned with decorum of position, age, and gender for a chance to glimpse her sister (69). Immediately, Sedgwick surrounds her willful, British-born heroine with the native inhabitants of the New World, and through this device announces an inherited nativity rather than a projection of her European birthright. Given the massacre that has just unfolded in Bethel, the reader is left with a spotty description of the novel’s title character until she reemerges through the letter she sends to Everell. Sedgwick constructs her narrative in such a way that we first learn of the matured Hope Leslie not by what she looks like, but through what she deems important enough to communicate to Everell across the Atlantic. Her newsy letter from early

Massachusetts announces the “goings-on” of the day and the respective foolishness and frustration provided by Dame Grafton and Jennet, but it quickly becomes more narrative than epistle, providing a blow-by-blow account of the drama unfolding in Bethel.<sup>31</sup>

Hope may end, early in her note to Everell, what she calls her “egotism” (97), but Grafton’s enclosed letter adds a sentimental portrait of the heroine to the ideological illustration established by the earlier letter. Guarded revelations of Hope’s affection for Everell should not surprise the reader, nor should Grafton’s exposure of them. The mode of their conveyance, however, further establishes apparel as a marker of significance. Like Magawisca before her, Hope flouts popular and ideological fashion by dressing in accordance with personal taste rather than community customs. Hope may not transgress in her “vanity” of dress, but she certainly allows her apparel to communicate more than theocratic obedience. Writing to Everell, Grafton chides Hope and praises Everell simultaneously, calling the fillet he sent “a real beauty ... [and] the prettiest ... I ever saw,” while complaining that Hope should not wear the gift everyday, for “one does not always want to see the same thing...” (117). Grafton and Hope may be English by birth, but the younger Leslie does not share the Old World preoccupations of the elder Leslie. The blue fillet given by Everell highlights Hope’s attractiveness by encouraging her curls to “fall about it,” rather than downplaying her beauty like “straight-laced” Esther (114); even so, Hope chooses the accessory for its sentimental

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<sup>31</sup> Although Hope continues to write in the past tense (“My testimony was exhorted from me ...”), the dialogue she provides for Everell makes the letter seem more like a scene from the novel than a reflective digression.



connection rather than any allegiance to fashion or obedience to sumptuary laws. Both Hope and Magawisca dress according to their will rather than the laws of their “native” or adoptive communities.

When Sedgwick finally gives the reader a snapshot of Hope, she spares no hyperbole in describing her “favorite” (123), even though such exceptionalism proves difficult to describe. Hope may be generally illustrated as a wavy-haired brunette, “medium” in her height and “delicate” in her build, but descriptions beyond general physical attributes prove impossible for the narrator. Hope’s face can be explained only as a “medium for irradiations of the soul” rather than any tangible, physical place, and Sedgwick allows Hope to determine the color of her own eyes through her “feelings” rather than submit to any genetic predetermination (122). The pastoral freedom of her childhood environment, rather than the confinement of Boston, gives Hope an “elastic step” and a “ductile grace,” and making her more a child of the forest rather than a lady of Massachusetts (122). Comparisons between classical figures and Hope, while initiated by the narrator, continue with Everell, who sees Hope as “trip[ping] it along as if she had Mercury’s wings on her feet” (130). The allusion to Mercury, as well as references to Hebe and Camilla rather than any “republican” woman or colonial exemplar, situates Hope as increasingly out-of-time with her surroundings, even if she lives in the moment. Like Hawthorne’s Mistress Prynne to follow some twenty-three years later, Hope maintains an enlightened distance from the “strictest sect of Puritans” making up her community (122) and “permits her mind to expand beyond the contracted boundaries of sectarian faith” (123). Hope remains *in* the world of Early

Massachusetts, but in many ways, she is not *of* it.

Nor does Hope fully inhabit Sedgwick's world of nineteenth-century New England. She may resemble the Franklin ideal of plucky resourcefulness and hint at the arrival of Emerson's "sturdy lad" to arrive in 1841, but the prototype for Hope Leslie seems foreign to American popular culture in 1827. Novels of the new Republic indicate that the United States offers very few options for a "sensible, capable heroine" (Davidson 220) by sacrificing their women to the pitfalls of male debauchery, exposing the dangers of unchecked romantic love, and proposing the impossibility of an independent woman without an approved-of husband and a child, in that order. Readers today take Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Hannah Foster's *Eliza Wharton* to be "over-the-top" sentimental examples of fallen women; their fates, however, reflect a common occurrence among the young and burgeoning population of the first half-century of the new republic.<sup>32</sup>

While Charlotte allows herself to be carried off to America, and Eliza succumbs to the machinations of a rake, Hope demonstrates her maturity by choosing sense and intuition over romantic fantasies when she rejects the kneeling professions of the unscrupulous Sir Philip Gardiner (Sedgwick 217). Gardiner, oblivious to Hope's "cold" responses to his thinly-veiled flirtation, drops to his knee, "seizes" Hope's hand and professes "Dieu écoute belle priere / Amour ne le met pas en arriere" (217). Seduced neither by Gardiner's courtly posture nor his foreign verse, Hope recovers her hand from her suitor's seizure and commands him to "reserve his gallantries . . . and your

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<sup>32</sup> Susanna Rowson. *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth* (1794); Hannah Foster. *The Coquette; or, the History of Eliza Wharton* (1797).

profane verses for some subject to whom they are better suited; if you have aught of the spirit of a gentlemen in you, you must feel that I have neither invited the one, nor provoked the other” (218). Hope accomplishes what her peers could not: she successfully says “no” when she ought and thus changes the ending for the sentimental heroine of early America.

Hope successfully maneuvers through the rocky terrain of Republican womanhood with the pluck usually reserved for fictional women constructed well after Sedgwick’s publication. The young woman who “trips along as if she had Mercury’s wings on those pretty feet” (130) resembles the “busy tripping” Eva St. Clare in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Stowe 208) and Hawthorne’s “airy sprite” of Pearl Prynne (84). Unlike Eva, who dies from an unexplained illness, and Pearl, who emigrates to England, Hope remains firmly fixed in colonial Massachusetts and lives to realize her emotional, financial, and spiritual inheritance.



Figure 1.10: "See Porcupine, in colours just portrayed ..." Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society

Hope may not be Governor Winthrop’s first choice for Everell’s wife, but the gracious exit of Esther clears the way for their union; Hope’s escape from the seduction plot of Gardiner saves her fortune and her virtue; and her rebirth as Hope through baptism makes her a legitimate heir of the colony and America by extension. Eva dies, unable to rectify the cultural horrors she has inherited; Pearl lives by realizing the paternal bonds that have been long denied to her. Only Hope, orphaned by the vestiges of the old world and claimed by the new, can stand in both the colonial past and the nineteenth-century

present and look toward the future, the very vision of *Liberty* with youthful glow and disheveled hair.<sup>33</sup>

The work done by Sedgwick to “root” Hope Leslie as a true and lasting American figure can also be seen in her rebirth as “Hope” from “Alice” upon reaching Massachusetts. Operating *in loco parentis*, albeit based on the “Christian graces” of Alice Leslie, Mr. Mather and his Puritan community displace paternal authority as well as a recognizable connection to the past by choosing new names for the Leslie girls (Sedgwick 29). “Hope” and “Faith” allegorically depict two of the three key Christian virtues of “Faith, Hope, and Charity” (1 Corinthians 13) rather than evoke the memory of their English mother or of the Madonna. Although *Faith* lives with the Pequot rather than the Puritans, *Hope* remains in New England seventeenth-century Massachusetts.

Just as American *Liberty* becomes surrounded with recognizable images of America to punctuate her non-Englishness, so too does Sedgwick surround her icon with images of British North America. Early designations of America as “Indian Princess” portrayed the New World as distinct from the other three continents by providing flora and fauna unique to the American continent. Later, to separate the

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<sup>33</sup> The character closest to Hope Leslie can be found in popular pamphlets of the eighteen-teens. “Female Marine” stories spawned by Nathaniel Coverly took hold of the public’s imagination and inspired many versions of essentially the same tale. Holding to a formula of good girl, bad choice, honorable service through male disguise, and a happy ending, *The Adventures of Louisa Baker* and others provided a spin-off to the Charlotte Temple story. Rather than end with destitution and shame as in Rowson’s novel, the tainted woman keeps her wits about her and alters her circumstances by changing her clothes. Problems exist with this comparison, of course. Hope never cross-dresses, although she bears the weight of men’s clothing on occasion <sup>33</sup> and disguises Magawisca as Craddock in order to secure her liberty from prison (312). The true cross-dresser in *Hope Leslie* happens to be the unfortunate Rosalin, a pessimistic riff on the disgraced, yet resourceful woman. Rosalin may liberate herself from Sir Philip, but it is only through death that she escapes her virtual imprisonment and shame. Hope’s resourcefulness and optimism in the face of what seem to be unalterable realities reflect the possibility suggested by Coverly’s publications, even if Hope remains decidedly female to all who see her.

United States from the designations that had come before it, and to make it a unique nation distinct from England, *Columbia* née *Liberty* became surrounded with Presidents, flags, and eagles, among other set pieces (figure 1.10). “Fletcher” and “Hope Leslie” may be fictional constructions of Sedgwick’s, but it is no accident that the novel surrounds its first family with Winthrops, flirts with the Pocahontas story, “recites” the Battle of Mystic, includes Sir Philip Gardiner, and makes mention of New England’s most notorious villain, Thomas Morton. An Arcadian beauty originating in Anglican England, Hope Leslie becomes “America” or “Columbia” by remaining connected to her classical origins while embracing uniquely American attributes. *Alice* Leslie may lack a North American birthright, but *Hope* Leslie, newly-named as a Christian virtue and subsequently re-born as a daughter of Puritan New England, encourages her audience to forget that she was first a European – and an adoptive daughter rather than a “native” one.

Hope Leslie and Magawisca, like the national images of American *Liberty* and “Indian Princess,” live “parallel lives” but enjoy different periods of popularity. The arrival of Hope immediately follows the massacre at Bethel and the exit of Magawisca (Sedgwick 69), and Hope becomes the central heroine in the novel only after Magawisca enables Everell to escape Mononotto (93). Her “greatest purpose” completed (94), Magawisca disappears from the narrative until the beginning of Volume II when she reappears with news of Faith Leslie (183). Although Sedgwick continues to depict Magawisca as a strong-willed sovereign rather than as a submissive servant, her presence allows Hope to challenge civil authority — Magawisca’s heroic work is done.

Mononotto's daughter may have saved Everell from sudden death, but Magawisca's freedom depends on the wily deception conjured by Hope and performed by the young Leslie's willing servants. Winthrop refuses Hope's plea for Magawisca's freedom, but the "faithful" Digby forgets his prejudice and provides the means of escape (334) and the bumbling Craddock spends a night in prison to appease Miss Leslie (335). True, Magawisca escapes prison by way of Everell's friendship, but the plan succeeds because of the persuasive powers of Hope. As Magawisca notes, "no one can look at [Hope] and deny [her] aught; that [she] makes[s] old men's hearts soft, and mold them to [her] will ..." (1919). Once arrived, Sedgwick's characterization of American *Liberty* quickly displaces the Indian Princess in the re-narration of the colonial history of North America. Hope Leslie, adorned with an imported blue fillet rather than eagle feathers or even ostrich plumes, asserts her presence by surrounding herself with colonial and indigenous markers of North America. Just like American *Liberty* and *Columbia*, Hope claims the Old World on her terms — the blue fillet rather than her aunt's topknots and baubles — and announces her Americanness by stepping into a world filled with numerous colonial monuments and one heroic Indian Princess without donning any apparel of indigeneity.

Hope Leslie becomes the ideal, although unreal, figure of American identity in the early nineteenth century. As a colonial woman transplanted into antebellum America, Hope appears as a seventeenth-century, first-generation émigré displaced from her aristocratic lineage by the death of her father and dying wish of her mother. As a

construction of the nineteenth century, Hope inherits an idealized American autonomy through her personal independence and singular, yet confident, interpretation of cultural rules and mores. The “hopeful” cultural ideal offered by Sedgwick in the novel frames itself on the title page, however, as “hope-lessly” impossible. While Sedgwick pines for a formidable ancestor of American independence for the nineteenth century, she recognizes the fiction of her literary construction and the impossibility of an actualized “Hope” in either the seventeenth century or the nineteenth.

## Chapter Two

Homespun and *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile***I: Introduction**

The Reverend Horace Bushnell spoke on the second day of the centennial celebration in Litchfield, Connecticut. An eminent theologian and distinguished civic leader, he had been assigned the task of extolling the men who were, by history's account, instrumental in the defense and creation of the United States in general and Litchfield in particular. Bushnell's remarks on the fourteenth of August in 1851, however, differed from those made by other speakers prior to his appearance. Rather than contribute to the litany in praise of American icons, Bushnell commemorated the unsung heroes of Litchfield. The reverend emphasized that those "monumentalized by history" (111) were not the instruments of history as remembered during these celebrations, but instead were created *by* the instrument of history — their individual worth being less important than the time and place in which they found themselves (127). His de-emphasis of known and previously memorialized individuals precedes Bushnell's argument for what he sees as the true monuments of Litchfield: "the simply worthy men" who, through their lives and their work, established the community and made it what it had become at this time of centennial commemoration. To convey the importance of the unhistoric, Bushnell employs the motif of textile labor to illustrate and define the formative years of the community, dubbing the hundred years of the town's history "the Homespun Age" (110).



Bushnell's sermon that August day was significant in mid-nineteenth century America for a number of reasons. The celebration of the extraordinary within the so-called ordinary echoed the industriousness valued by Emerson through the "sturdy lad from New Hampshire or Vermont" who lives life in the active tense of common pursuits ("farms it, peddles, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township ...") rather than in the passive mode of studious removal ("Self-Reliance" 43) and foreshadows Whitman's 1855 "Song of Myself" with its lists of laborers of all kinds to celebrate the "commonest and cheapest and nearest and easiest ..." in himself and in all (21). The re-inscription of household labor as historically noteworthy rather than domestically banal recognized the worth of those who maintained the hearth during the Revolutionary campaign; it also reinforced a mythic imagining of household production. This mythology, as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has demonstrated, was equitably rich in an era moving away from an agrarian economy: "for sentimentalists, spinning and weaving represented the centrality of home and family; for evolutionists the triumph of civilization ... for craft revivalists the harmony of labor and art, for feminists, women's untapped productive power, and for antimodernists the virtues of a bygone age" (29). This study, through its emphasis on textiles as a mode of reading nineteenth-century American historical fiction, finds Bushnell's declaration both mythically and literally valuable, especially if positioned among authors writing during this time of centennials in American communities.

Bushnell used fabrics to remember and communicate his understanding of the past; he was not the only writer to imbue fabrics with metaphoric and historic value in

mid-nineteenth century America. While Hawthorne's early fiction (*Twice-Told Tales* 1837) calls his readers' attention to monuments and monumental figures of the American experience — Simon Bradstreet, John Endicott, Thomas Morton, Miles Standish, and colonial governors of the Province House, among others — his *Scarlet Letter* of 1850 is born out of the “gold embroidery ... the wonderful skill of needlework ... now [a] forgotten art ...” found in the dusty remnants of the colonial past housed in the Salem Custom House (30). Herman Melville, following the popular failure of *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Pierre* (1852), turned to the historically unsung in his fictionalization of the life of Israel R. Potter: Revolutionary War veteran, forgotten exile, and uncompensated soldier. The novel's subject materializes through Melville's procurement of a book entitled *The Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter* (1824), an autobiographical<sup>34</sup> account of the author's service to country, originally written on what Melville calls “sleazy gray paper” (1). The material work of Melville's *Israel Potter* (1854)<sup>35</sup> occurs with the raveling of “the Homespun Age” through the weaving of homespun into Melville's historical novel. Bushnell's Litchfield remarks in 1851 commemorated the “simply worthy men” of the town's past — his words providing a reinterpretation of the unsung, adding public laurels to the private memorials of collective memory. But the dead were still dead and the past was still the

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<sup>34</sup> I use the term *autobiography* loosely. It is widely assumed that Henry Trumbull, publisher of *Life and Remarkable Adventures* ... and other similar books, determined the material for the narrative from Potter's accounts, acting more as author than editor — or at best, a collaborator of Potter. Trumbull owns the copyright of the book — “the right whereof he claims as author,” according to the American Antiquarian Society, and refers to Israel as the subject of the novel rather than the author. The AAS notes that “The extent of Potter's contribution is not clear.”

<sup>35</sup> *Putnam's* began publishing a serialized version of *Israel Potter* in 1854. Although the book was not packaged as a novel until 1855, the character of Israel Potter reappeared in public consciousness a year earlier.

past. The tombstones were figuratively retouched to reflect the honor due to these citizens, but the web of their influence and the record of their deeds remained unaltered. Homespun, to Bushnell, provided a memento of the formative years of the nation and evoked nostalgia. Homespun and its tools reappearing as household decor later in the nineteenth century reinforced the nostalgia evoked by Bushnell's speech, providing markers of America's simpler, agrarian past in an increasingly industrial age. The homespun of Melville's novel, like Bushnell's speech, conveys the importance of the "unhistoric" citizens of the American past, but it does not share in the nostalgia of Bushnell's manifesto. *Israel Potter* pulls the lives and objects of the past out of the historical memory and re-presents the colonial and revolutionary eras through the fiction of mid-nineteenth century America.

Instrumental in this resurrection is the trope of *homespun* in Melville's novel. My study of *Israel Potter* unpacks the textiles evoked and employed in the narrative and reads them as text. Specifically, I track Melville's engagement with homespun as his way to make use of the colonial and Revolutionary past for readers continually moving away from these formative moments in American history. Bushnell uses homespun to organize his remarks and to provide a sentimental touchstone for his audience; Melville eschews the disguise of sentimentality and allows the past to be translated into the present, putting it to work rather than letting it sit in the corner of cultural memory. The fodder for my work is found throughout the text of *Israel Potter*, but the foundation for my argument lies in a narrative aside found toward the end of Melville's novel: "For a time back, across the otherwise blue-jean career of Israel, Paul Jones flits and re-flits

like a crimson thread. One more brief intermingling of it, and to the plain old homespun we return” (149). “Plain old homespun” appears an apt way to depict the novel and its title character. Both in biography and Melville’s subsequent fiction, Israel Potter appears the simple rustic implied by the metaphor: the warp of his character and woof of his philosophy are visible despite the disguises he attempts; he is a “Jonathan” out-of-place in an increasingly urban age; his name — *Potter*— is household, if not homespun. The details of his life and exile surpass his communicative ability; he must rely on others — first Trumbull and then posthumously, Melville — to speak for him. The resultant novel at the hand of Melville seems to connote the simplicity of homespun as well. The 1855 *New York Daily Times* review of Melville’s newly-bound novel promises *Israel Potter* to be “a book to begin reading at night, when work is done, and to finish the next night.” The *London Times* is more cutting in its indictment of *Israel*’s narrative simplicity: “A pleasant book, nervously written, with which the reader never grows tired, although, artistically viewed, he finds in it much to condemn.” Yet, the work of Melville’s fiction lies beneath the structure of plot — deceiving, like Hawthorne’s prose, the “superficial skimmer of pages.” Homespun, like *Israel Potter*, materializes through more craft than is immediately visible. Homespun evokes images of Americans at spinning wheels, united in rebellion against British imperialism during non-importation movements of the 1760s . It materializes figuratively in the exodus of Israel R. Potter, motivated by adolescent rebellion, spinning away from home only to return to the ruins of his paternal homestead some fifty years later. The novel makes it clear that Potter is “plain old homespun,” unequivocally spun from the cloth of America

rather than the fabric of foreign climes. He may wear the “tatters” of an English peasant, but is always out-of-place when away from home. This unfortunate reality for Potter is also a complication in the reading of Potter as emblematic of American idealism *à la* Emerson and Whitman. If Potter is the un-disguisable American, then his failings illustrate that the American ideal postulated by Emerson is as flimsy as Israel’s masquerade while on the lam. Potter may be the cat who “falls on his feet,” but his “hundred chances” are imbued with futility rather than the opportunity implied by Emerson. Melville reinforces the industry of homespun beyond characterizations of Israel Potter through the way he spins his novel: combining original narrative with threads “already-spun” in 1824. The narrative homespun of *Israel Potter* unravels the trope of homespun and its allusions to the American past, providing a complement to the revolutionary history re-scripted by Melville in 1854.

*Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* seems an unlikely place for discussions of the weight of textile production as a motif in nineteenth-century American fiction. The novel appears, at first glance, to be a bad-luck story of an American boy always caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Forbidden to marry the girl he loves, young Israel leaves his father’s home in search of financial and personal independence. He gains employment in various locales and eventually tries his hand at a sea-faring life. The War for Independence draws his interest and employs his service, including heroic duty at Bunker Hill. But Israel’s presence in noteworthy battles would be brief: his assigned ship is quickly captured by the British, binding him to a frigate bound for England. What follows is an adventure, not quite so tragic as the biographical fodder for the

novel which narrates Israel as “stranger in a strange land” — longing for home, but always found retreating when he wishes to be advancing across the Atlantic. Like his Biblical namesake, Israel liberates himself from imprisonment, but his freedom is tenuous and short-lived. Recruited as a courier, Israel traffics state secrets to Benjamin Franklin in Paris, where he endures the wisdom of the envoy and makes the acquaintance of John Paul Jones. Franklin’s sermonizing and Jones’s seaborne adventure provide passage out of England and a divergence from the narrative pathos of Israel’s exile, for both reader and protagonist. Neither Franklin nor Jones, unfortunately, returns Israel to the homeland he seeks. Israel’s quiet homecoming fifty years after his capture ironically collides — quite literally — with jubilant processions honoring the “heroes that fought” in the Battle of Bunker Hill. After this, Melville quickly cuts to the end, allowing a chance reunion with the remnants of his father’s home before Israel dies, “fading ... out of being — his name out of memory” (192).

The fiction that unfolds serially in the pages of *Putnam’s* (1854) and later as a novel (1855) carries less emotional weight than does the biography upon which it is based; for *The Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter* was written in order to obtain a pension for Potter, and it ends with emphasis and capitalized cries of injustice, “*I was absent from the country when the pension law passed — my petition was REJECTED!!!*” (105). Melville’s construction, in contrast, exclaims less and ends with Potter’s return to his childhood haunts, content to watch a stranger plow under the ruins of his father’s home. Melville’s tale of the exiled revolutionary does not actively pursue legislative justice for the uncompensated soldier; it treads lightly on Potter’s

misfortune, providing instead an almost mirthful rendering of Israel's wanderings. This was his intent. Originally, Potter's story was intended for *Harper's Monthly Magazine*; after its rejection, Melville restructured it for the "more intellectual, politically liberal" *Putnam's Magazine* (Post-Lauria 118), promising "very little reflective writing in it; nothing weighty. It is adventure" (121). Melville's claims of "nothing weighty" should be taken as advertising rather than gospel, however. Weighing the pages of *Israel Potter* disproves Melville's promise to his publishers. Melville claims his work as a "reprint," but actually delivers a revision; thus, he only poses as the editor he claims to be. He promises merely to "retouch" the "tombstone" of Potter's tale, but instead he recreates his narrative by co-mingling Potter with celebrities of the Revolution. Nothing is what it seems in Melville.

My work pushes scholarship about the nineteenth-century in a new direction by adding to the work done by Melville scholars exploring the nexus of past and present, history and fiction. Hennig Cohen situates Melville's constructed Potter as consistent with the Emersonian view of the "common man" American hero. Brian Rosenberg and Peter Bellis, in their respective work, find agency in Melville's detached third-person account of Revolutionary biography, considering *Israel Potter* as more than just "recollection" (Bellis) — a "rebellion" (Rosenberg) and re-imagine the "link" between the past and present (Bellis). Bellis, in fact, asks many of the same questions I do as he interrogates the role of history interjected into fiction and the guise of the narrator who tells it all (608). Additionally, Bellis sizes up *Israel Potter* against its source, considering Melville's "artless" borrowing of the biography to critique the degree of

fidelity in historical memory. “Melville’s aim,” Bellis writes, “is to discredit the notion of historical narrative as simple ‘recollection’ ... absorption of autobiography into the large narrative of history is ... a fictionalization ... (610). My interest in *Israel Potter*, like Bellis’s presumably, derives from a preoccupation with the presentation of colonial and revolutionary history through a nineteenth-century lens. Bellis’s engagement with narrative gaze, the distinction between first- and third-person perspective, and the influence of the present upon the past reinforces and contributes to my argument. The distinction between my approach and his, however, concerns the textile archive as yet another repository of the past integrated by Melville into his revolutionary fiction. Bellis writes that the “facts” from Potter’s experience reprinted in the fiction stand as “evidence of their truth” (609). Insertion of archival textile material and its representation in American portraiture, like the insertion of historical “celebrities,” complicates the posture of authenticity supported by the duplication of the original into the reprint. I argue that the engagement of the textile archive not only conflates temporality by injecting the mid-nineteenth century into Revolutionary history, it provides tangible, recognizable vehicles by which to traverse the past and reconstitute it in the present. These pieces are the *shuttle* for the readers of Melville’s fiction, allowing them passage amongst the threads of time and history. Textiles allude to historical events; yet, textile artifacts are history in themselves — made up of dated material and woven in lives long past.

## **II: Rescue from the Ragpickers and Weaving/Writing Homespun**



Herman Melville spent less than thirty-two cents in his acquisition of *Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter*,<sup>36</sup> and chances are slim that he realized the complications in the volume he possessed. Little is known about Melville's relationship with Potter's biography beyond his possession of the "pamphlet" and the supposed fervor with which he eventually undertook the narration that would result in *Israel Potter: Forty Years of Exile* (Chacko 366). In the journal of his travels in England, he mentions his interest in Potter's biography, what he calls "the Revolutionary narrative of the beggar" (66), but only briefly. Melville presents himself merely as the editor of a reprint of *Life and Remarkable Adventures*, and he controls the reading of the document with a preface oddly dedicated "to His Highness the Bunker-Hill Monument." Yet, Melville's pose as mere editor sounds remarkably akin to that of custom house official-turned author in his friend Hawthorne's preface to the *Scarlet Letter*. Both men come upon the remnants of history fortuitously, glean it from the dark attic of history, and bring it into the light of the nineteenth century. Unlike the biographically-based civil servant of "The Custom House" who confesses his creative license with the archive while affirming the authenticity of the "outline" only (32), Melville's narrative persona disguises his authorial role, promising to maintain the substance of Potter's story and deviate from it only with "a change in grammatical person ... some expansions ... additions of historic and personal details ... one or two shiftings of scene ...," resisting modifications "though sorely tempted" to rescript Potter's life in a brighter light (2). At the onset, Melville's rendering seems to keep that promise. Like Potter's original

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<sup>36</sup> David Chacko and Alexander Kulcsar give the price of the Potter's biography to be between twenty-eight and thirty-one cents.

biography, it begins with the birth and early life of young Israel; as advertised, *Israel Potter* varies only in point of view (“grammatical person”) and some geographic alterations (“shifting of scene” from Rhode Island to Massachusetts.) For example, after one chapter of musings of geographical import and romantic regional imagery, Melville describes the onset of Potter’s wanderings in this fashion:

It was on Sunday, while the family were gone to a farmhouse church near by, that he packed up as much of his clothing as might be contained in a handkerchief, which, with a small quantity of provision, he hid in a piece of woods in the rear of the house. He then returned, and continued in the house till about nine in the evening, when, pretending to go to bed, he passed out of a back door, and hastened to the woods for his bundle (8-9).

And here is the same moment as told by the subject himself in *Life and Remarkable Adventures*:

It was on Sunday while the family were at meeting that I packed up as many articles of my clothing as could be contained in a pocket handkerchief, which, with a small quantity of provision, I conveyed to and secreted in a piece of woods in the rear of my father's house; I then returned and continued in the house until about 9 in the evening, when with the pretence [*sic*] of retiring to bed, I passed into a back room and from thence out of a back door and hastened to the spot where I had deposited my clothes, &c. ... (6).

For the first six chapters, Melville’s *Israel Potter* continues to “reprint” *Life and Remarkable Adventures*, abiding by the promise of near-authenticity and, as a result,

narratively lulling the reader into trusting the “truth” of the project insisted upon in the book’s preface. Additionally, the shift from the first person assumed by Potter into the third-person persona in Melville encourages the reader of the opening half-dozen characters to believe Melville as merely the removed, benevolent “Editor” of his claim, simply “selecting, revising, and arranging the material” (*OED*), rather than the author he is. This correlation between Potter’s biography and Melville’s fiction, coupled with Melville’s detached persona, leads the reader to believe that *Israel Potter* speaks of history, not *for* history. As such, Melville’s persona asserts that the re-edited document of his creation should be viewed as “a tombstone retouched.” To “retouch” a tombstone is not to add to the engraving on the monument; rather, it suggests making the monument to the past clearer and more readable to the present.

“Re-touching” seems a fairly innocuous way to maintain historical authenticity: to retouch implies not change, but a type of cleaning-up. Melville, however, has chosen a loaded phrase. To “retouch a tombstone” would require altering the patina acquired by the monument over its years of existence. Wiping off the residue formed in the time between *Life and Remarkable Adventures* and *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* contradicts Melville’s introductory assertions to the reader. As the narrative progresses, in fact, he does more than reprint historical and cultural material; Melville spins historical remnants with new material, thus fabricating the past in every sense of the word: in 1854, *fabricate* suggested skillful crafting of new material, but also indicated an invention or forgery (*Webster’s, OED*). Melville’s inventive history surrounding the likes of Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Ethan Allen prompts the reader to

recall Revolutionary history but misleads us to remember it wrong. Melville does more than clean up the graveyard; he goes back in time and repositions characters to fit his liking. And his ventriloquism is so polished that no one notices the agency of the master in the voice of the puppet. Threading Potter throughout key historic events and amongst key historic personages gives the reader a “hook” into the events of the past: we travel vicariously with Potter into the past and see formally unavailable, roped-off, aesthetically preserved and static events as dynamic, real, and present moments.

Melville’s “retouching,” therefore, disrupts communal memory: *Israel Potter* alters that which has passed, craftily spinning the biographical record with newly shorn fiction representing it — in both senses of the term — to the mid-nineteenth-century reader.

To take *Israel Potter* as a “reprint,” one needs to trust the sincerity of the author or be familiar enough with the source to hear the vocal similarity between the two, while *not* so familiar as to recognize the alterations when they occur. According to David Chacko and Alexander Kulcsar, *Life and Remarkable Adventures* enjoyed three printings in 1824 and was sold throughout New England (365). Familiarity with Potter’s story was possible in 1854; recognition of the title more than the content is perhaps more probable for both Melville and his mid-century audience. Chacko and Kulcsar suggest that Melville may have known the author/publisher Henry Trumbull and his writing (367); readers, however, may have recognized the text more for its genre association than for its author, given the proliferation of pamphlets styled similarly to Potter’s biography, such as *Life and adventures of Joseph Mountain, a Negro highwayman* (1791), *Life and adventures of a fly. / Supposed to have been written by*

himself (1794), *Life and adventures of Peter Williamson : who was carried off from Aberdeen, and sold for a slave* (1812), and most famously, *The Life and adventures of Robinson Crusoe / Written by himself* (Baltimore 1794, London 1719.) *Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter* ... was one of two such books published by Trumbull and in circulation in the 1820s, the other being *Life and adventures of Robert, the hermit of Massachusetts* ... (1829).<sup>37</sup> While the two biographies bear a resemblance, Trumbull claims an authorial position in *Robert* ("the right whereof he claims as author") that he does not in *Israel*.<sup>38</sup> Further, the entirety of *Life and Remarkable Adventures* is written from a first-person perspective; *Robert* is a combination of "pure" personal account (10-26) with Trumbull's third-person narration.<sup>39</sup>

Dividing the narrative in such a way assumes a degree of unmitigated authenticity in the first part of the book while confessing the instrument of the translator in the second. Since *Israel* has no such clear-cut division, one might assume that the text in its entirety is pure unmediated Potter. Melville's introductory remarks to *Israel Potter*, however, suggest that Trumbull's influence on Potter's story was known and that *Life and Remarkable Adventures* was just as mitigated as were his other works: "... a little narrative of his adventures ... written, probably, not by himself, but taken down from his lips by another" (1). Despite any collaboration/translation/mitigation that may

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<sup>37</sup> Full title reads as *Life and adventures of Robert [Voorhis], the hermit of Massachusetts, : who has lived 14 years in a cave, secluded from human society. Comprising, an account of his birth, parentage, sufferings, and providential escape from unjust and cruel bondage in early life--and his reasons for becoming a recluse. / Taken from his own mouth, and published for his benefit.*

<sup>38</sup> This information courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society's (AAS) online catalogs.

<sup>39</sup> AAS

have occurred, presenting the story of Israel Potter through a first-person perspective bears the onus of authenticity assumed by the personal authority of such narrations; a responsibility Melville dodges, of course, by naming himself “Editor” and writing in the third-person perspective. Entitling a personal narrative “Life and Adventures . . .” — biographical or otherwise — gestures to the fiction-*cum*-biography of Defoe and confesses the presence of fiction in the guise of telling the truth. Chacko and Kulcsarr document numerous biographical fabrications occurring in *Life and Remarkable Adventures*. Potter was born in 1754 rather than the 1744 of his claim; his birth was illegitimate rather than “born of reputable parents”; and his surname was Ralph at birth — it became Potter after he was removed from the custody of the unfit William Wescott and apprenticed to John Potter in 1757 (368). And these corrections arise upon examination of only the first paragraph of Potter’s biography.

Further alterations of truth occur through Trumbull’s version of Potter’s narrative of his early years, but given the intent of the publication, perhaps the most notorious liberty taken with Potter’s story is his supposed engagement at the Battle of Bunker Hill as a soldier of Rhode Island. According to the papers of Revolutionary War General Nathanael Greene, Potter’s account is impossible: not a single regiment from Rhode Island participated at the Battle of Bunker Hill (374). Positioning Potter as veteran of the first major battle of the Revolution adds to the evocative pathos of the story and makes his case for remuneration as a veteran of the war. The juxtaposition of the monument at Bunker Hill, commemorated in 1823, with the 1824 narrative coupling Israel’s claim of service there with his current penury creates rich tragedy — a tragedy

certainly not lost on the readership of the pamphlet. Melville may set out to spin the tale of “plain old homespun” Israel Potter, but he realizes that the material he receives through *Life and Remarkable Adventures* is already spun. Potter’s first-hand account has already been mediated and corrupted. The Israel Potter of *Life and Remarkable Adventures* is a construction, an echo of reality rather than a reprint of it. It stands to reason, however, that despite the assumption of Editor rather than author, and a third-person voice rather than a first, nineteenth-century audiences may still have taken Melville’s Potter, as they did Trumbull’s, for the plain truth edited into fiction.<sup>40, 41</sup>

While Melville eschews the responsibility of author by naming himself “Editor” of *Israel Potter*, he also extols himself as the savior of the story of Israel Potter by rescuing the “tattered copy ... by the merest chance from the rag-pickers ... ” (1). A ragpicker in 1854 was the English equivalent of the French *chiffoniers* — street urchins of urban areas who found sustenance and made their living picking through the discards of better society. According to *The New York Journal of Medicine and the Collateral Sciences* of 1853, this social sub-set comprised only the destitute and poverty-stricken of Europe — no Americans were believed to be “found among them” (94). Elizabeth Oakes Prince Smith depicts the rag-picker wearing “brown gowns with a bag tied to the back and a long narrow basket in hand stirring up the ground with their iron rods in

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<sup>40</sup> According to Chacko and Kulcsar, Melville’s character of *Israel Potter* was used for the entry on Israel Potter in *Appleton’s Cyclopedia of American Biography*, published in 1888. *McGuffey’s Reader* (1888) offered Franklin’s remarks to Israel in Paris as an endorsement of temperance (Douglas 314).

<sup>41</sup> Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791) is perhaps the best-known precedent for this phenomenon. Subtitled “A tale of truth,” Rowson unequivocally verifies the “veil of fiction” created in her document. Regardless, mourners of the fictional Temple visited her gravesite — and continue to, according to a 2009 *New York Times* article (“Buried in the Churchyard: A Good Story, at Least”).

pursuit of their filthy trade” (146). To save the “tattered copy” of Potter’s biography from the likes of these affirms the rescue of Melville’s claim. But to “pick through the rags” seems to be precisely what Melville has done through the transformation of *Life and Remarkable Adventures* into *Israel Potter*. A rag-picker gleans through refuse for individual gain and survival: Melville, metaphorically at least, does the same with Potter. Even though Melville claims *Israel Potter* as a “tribute — [to] a private of Bunker Hill ...” (1), most of the novel forgets the man of history and instead pays honor to one who exists only in the annals of personal imagination.

Like the rag-pickers he claims to have rescued the document from, Melville makes use of historical left-overs for personal gain; the difference is in station and appearance. Incidentally, the rag-pickers threatening Melville’s rescue of Potter’s biography could be the likes of Israel R. Potter himself. Potter occupied the lower stratum of society but supported himself though what he could glean in the margins, reduced to the “sewers” but never “to actual beggary” (Melville 188). Melville liberates the narrative from the dustbin and places it in middle-class homes through serialization in *Putnam’s*, saving Potter’s biography from Potter himself. Yet instead of “rescuing” the biography, he erases it by translating the voice of history into one more palatable and interesting to his audience. Melville creates an alternate, parallel reality for the reader to visit and, perhaps, remember as truth by inserting Potter into a history he had no part in.

Judging from the biographical inaccuracy of Potter and Trumbull’s *Life and Remarkable Adventures*, the “real” Israel R. Potter may not be “the simply worthy man”



Horace Bushnell signified in his commemorative remarks, but Melville's creation of Potter is perhaps more evocative of "The Age of Homespun" than even the individuals Bushnell originally lauded. *Homespun* suggests a material constructed out of local resources "unsophisticated," "homely," and "rude" (*OED, Webster's*). Melville weaves his homespun hero in a method true to textile production, complementing and reinforcing metaphors to homespun entwined through his content. Spinning threads into yarn — the fodder for all textiles — requires raw material to be "drawn out" (*OED, Webster's*); incorporating new material with "already spun wool" eases its production: that which is newly gathered is wound into that which is already established, producing a seamless connection between that which *was* and that which *is* (or will be). Melville's book, therefore, is *homespun* by the author: material from the past is materialized through the integration of known American history with new materials. *Israel Potter* as homespun, though, is a bit of a ruse: homespun connotes rustic authenticity; the *Israel* scripted by Potter and Trumbull materializes through crafty fabrication. Melville's editorial assertions, however, do more than allow the readers of *Israel Potter* to question the reliability of the narrator and the (in)fallibility of historical memory. The concealment of intent beneath the veil of narrative suggests *disguise* as a meaningful trope in the critical study of *Israel Potter*. Potter and Trumbull disguise their attempts at grift through false sentimental posturing; Melville disguises his created fiction through the appearance of a benevolent, removed Editor; and the constructed Potter disguises himself, often poorly, as someone he is not. These disguises provide additional

complements to the primary narrative of “the beggar” Melville hoped to deliver through the pages of his novel.

### **III. *Homespun* and Revolution: “Let us not forget what we owe to linsey-woolsey.”**

The story of Israel Potter is homespun in its construction, weaving the already-spun with the newly (imaginatively) shorn; it is homespun in contrast to the stories flitting through it, providing the juxtaposition of the common soldier with Revolutionary heroes. As such, it is fitting that Israel should embark on his odyssey clad in homespun. Although both Potter’s biography and Melville’s are unclear about the fiber of the clothes young Israel packs in his handkerchief as he leaves his father’s home (8), these garments can certainly be read as simple and useable — only what was necessary so as not to complicate the journey with weight. Further, Chacko and Kulcsar align young Potter religiously with the Quakers of Rhode Island; they posit that references to “friends” in the biography allude to the Society of Friends (369), which gestures to the simplicity of clothing packed by Potter. Melville’s interpretation of Potter’s “friends” is unknown; however, later textual references reinforce the interpretation of Israel as plain-dressed and, certainly, plain-spoken.<sup>42</sup> The next mention of apparel, specifically simple apparel, comes as an authorial/editorial aside by Melville as Potter leaves the “field of the farmer” for “that of the soldier.” Melville breaks away

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<sup>42</sup> In fact, his “plain-spoken” quality simultaneously endangers and endears him to his English supervisors while in exile. He cannot call his employer, Sir John Millet, by his title, stammering “Mister” instead of “Sir” (Melville 29). His inability to lie to George III reinforces both Potter’s Americanness as well as a his lack of prowess in communication. Potter’s simplicity of speech continues to be a descriptor of him throughout the book.

from plot to remind the reader that “while we revel in broadcloth, let us not forget what we owe to linsey-woolsey” (14). Potter seems to be the human incarnation of that which we should not forget: the coarsely-fashioned working patriot who left his plow to take up arms against the British.

The *OED* defines “linsey-woolsey” as a “mixture of wool and flax” and as “coarse inferior wool;” *Webster’s Dictionary* (1828) defines it as “made from linen and wool; hence vile; mean; of different and unsuitable parts.” Denotation of the word illustrates simplicity, but usage in the United States during Melville’s time lauds the material as honorable rather than “inferior.” An 1854 trade magazine links linsey-woolsey to self-sufficiency as a way to avoid costly British imports by engaging in domestic production (174). Washington Irving writes the material as a marker of past simplicity in *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, where “[The women’s] hair untortured by the abominations of art was scrupulously pomatumed back from their foreheads with a candle and covered with a little cap of quilted calico which fitted exactly to their heads. Their petticoats of linsey woolsey were striped with a variety of gorgeous dyes ... ” (164); Irving also tags the material as a badge of pride, stating that “even the goede vrouw of Van Twiller himself thought it no disparagement to cut out her husband's linsey-woolsey galligaskins” (167). Irving’s latter remarks, while indicating that homemade fabrics were something to be proud of, reveals that the perception of the fabric at the time of authorship as something less than that: the “goede vrouw” may have been proud to do her own work, but wives of present-day notables seem embarrassed to do so. Irving suggests that while a well-

made man in the days preceding the Revolution was home-made, his nineteenth-century counterpart was not.

Within *Israel Potter*, Melville gives readers their first view of Benjamin Franklin — the one celebrity addition incorporated by Melville who actually intersected with the “real-life” Potter — through his apparel. Franklin is “all over is of a piece. He dressed his person as his periods; neat, trim, nothing superfluous, nothing deficient. . . . practical magian[s] in linsey-woolsey (51).<sup>43</sup> Franklin, the self-made, innovating, patriot-diplomat, writer of the “plain style,” dresses perfectly here: he chooses not the ruffs and rings of the Paris salon; he masks nothing of his “true” (read: American) self with foreign accoutrements. He, as is Israel, is nothing more, nothing less than he needs to be. He is authentically American. Broadcloth, in contrast, is “fine, plain-wove, dressed, double width, black cloth . . . ” (*OED*) and also attributed in *An Impartial history of the war in America, between Great*

*Britain and the United States*

(1781) as among the chief

imports of Great Britain to the

colonies before the War for

Independence (33) and worn by

the better-off of society (*Israel*

*Potter*: notes 227). Definitions

for *broadcloth* are strangely absent from *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary of the*



Figure 2.1: Doolittle, Amos. 1813. *Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society*

<sup>43</sup> For the record, Melville presents Franklin as part of a trio of “practical magians in linsey woolsey”: the patriarch Jacob, Hobbes, and Franklin.

*American Language* (1828), even though the term can be found in American sources as early as 1800.<sup>44</sup> Prioritizing homespun over broadcloth not only brings class distinctions to the forefront, but it emphasizes the value of rebellion through self-reliance among the early patriots. Like George Washington, who dressed all in homespun for his first inaugural, choosing locally-made apparel rather than imported European fashion is an act of patriotism and economic rebellion.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that national iconography of the early nineteenth-century embraced the roughly-clad “Brother Jonathan” as its symbol. A male addition to a female-figured “America,” personified as both Indian Princess and Arcadian goddess, Brother Jonathan challenged European ideology through his stark contrast with the dress and person of John Bull, his English counterpart. The American “Jonathan” takes a key role in national perception, especially as illustrated in Royall Tyler’s drama *The Contrast* (1787). Playing the rustic bumpkin out-of-place in fashionable New York City, Jonathan plays the foil to the well-read and sophisticated Jessamy, who studies Chesterfield, charms women, and knows all the “rules” governing laughter at the theater. The Yankee — “chock full of fight” — wins in the end, and the silver-tongued anglophiles are exposed as debt-tied charlatans. Brother Jonathan offers an alternate image of the nation and reveals the ongoing preoccupation with image-control in antebellum America. The Indian Princess, while suggestive of nobility, grew from a European perception of the former colonies and was deemed too “savage” to portray the nascent United States; Liberty and Columbia, although fitted with American

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<sup>44</sup> The Evans Bibliography cites an advertisement by Benjamin Thurber offering a “large assortment of Broad-cloths,” among other materials.

rather than European accessories, felt too much like Britannia to fit the new nation; only Brother Jonathan grew out of contrast rather than a distant kin of European perception.<sup>45</sup>

An Amos Doolittle pen-and-ink caricature entitled “Brother Jonathan Administering a Salutary Cordial to JOHN BULL” (1813) depicts the homespun-clad Jonathan besting the garishly-

fashioned Bull (figure 2.1). Forced to drink “yankee perry,” Bull succumbs to the force once reserved in previous engravings for colonial subjects. “The Able

Doctor, or America Swallowing

the Bitter Draught” (London, 1774) suggests the figurative rape of the colonies by the leaders of Europe. Here, the former colonies master the former colonizer, administering the “cure” to “mend”

English morals and manners. Although the image of Bull appears to be in stark contrast to the figure of Jonathan, other caricature exaggerates the difference by painting Bull’s face and exaggerating his gestures.<sup>46</sup>

*Homespun* further depicts the self-reliance of early-American nationals through the shared uniforms of both the Continental soldier and the New-England farmer. Early

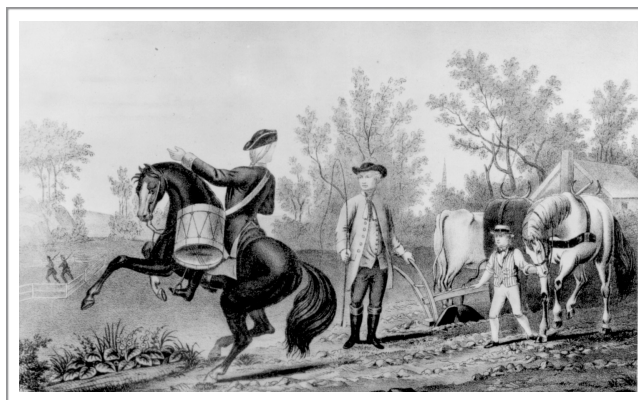


Figure 2.2: “General Putnam Leaving His Plow...” n.d.  
Courtesy of the National Archives

<sup>45</sup> My chapter on *Hope Leslie* addresses this development in detail. Further information can be found in John Higham’s *Indian Princess and Roman Goddess: The First Female Symbols of America*. (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1990.)

<sup>46</sup> See Charles Williams’s “A Boxing Match, of Another Bloody Nose for John Bull” (1813), example.

dictates for military dress during the Revolution stressed durability and thrift. The earliest pronouncement comes in May of 1775 in the form of an unsigned, open letter to the associators of the city of Philadelphia. Unequivocally, men willing to serve were encouraged to don hunting shirts for their service “as it will level all distinctions, answers the end of coat and jacket, and is within the compass of almost *every* person’s ability . . . .” The hunting shirt of the officers’ request fulfills the requirement of a continental uniform which they deem “absolutely necessary” and makes good common sense: the hunting shirt “will answer all seasons of the year” in terms of its suitability for various temperatures (“To the Associators. . .”). Other sources indicate that hunting shirts were made of either homespun, linen, or leather — varying by region and local raw materials — and were easily and quickly constructed by the soldier himself.<sup>47</sup>

Charles Mackubin Lefferts asserts that “during the period 1775-1776, the men wore no uniform except what they could get . . . ” (38). Portraiture of early military campaigns suggest that homespun was the fabric of necessity for most soldiers. In *Military Uniforms in America, the era of the American Revolution*, Charles McBarron captions the painting entitled *Bunker Hill, 17 June 1775* as “the homespun-clad Americans contested every inch” (8) against the British regulars in uniform red coats. Heroic portraiture of the farmer-to-soldier mythology, interestingly enough, contrasts this image by featuring yeomen of the fields dressed in finer apparel than linsey woolsey. The 1775 lithograph “General Putnam Leaving his Plow for the Defence [*sic*] of his Country,” echoes the Cincinnatus motif but shows Israel Putnam at the plow dressed as

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<sup>47</sup> Keith C. Wilbur. *The Revolutionary Soldier, 1775-1783: An Illustrated Sourcebook of Authentic Details About Everyday Life for Revolutionary War Soldiers*. NY: Globe Pequot, 1993.

more nobleman than farmer, clad in waistcoat, well-shone boots, and what seems to be a modified tricorne — definitely more broadcloth than homespun (figure 2.2).<sup>48</sup> Putnam enjoys a mention in *Life and Remarkable Adventures* as Potter describes his own exodus from civilian life. He writes that while General Putnam left immediately for battle, Potter remains with his day's labor: "the nature of the summons did not render it necessary for me, like him, to quit my plough in the field ..." (13). He finishes so as to not "leave his work half done ..." (14). Potter brings up the Putnam reference to link not only his service to that of a decorated general (one he supposedly served under at Bunker Hill) but to explain his delay in joining the troops: "I felt no less willing to obey the call of my country at a minute's notice and to face her foes ... than did the gallant Putnam ..." (13). Since we can assume that Israel Potter was not present at the call to service of Israel Putnam, the image of Putnam rising to service and leaving his plow must be based on Potter's understanding of popular representations of the general — his interpreted historical memory.

Available to Potter at the time of *Life and Remarkable Adventures* would have been many publications chronicling the life of General Putnam; most descriptions of the field and plow incident employ the language used by David Humphreys in *An Essay on the life of the Honourable Major-General Israel Putnam* (1790): "Putnam, who was plowing when he heard the news, left his plough in the middle of the field, unyoked his

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<sup>48</sup> Although the 1775 lithograph is the dominant image of Putnam leaving his plow, it is not the only one. The capital building of Connecticut in Hartford boasts both a statue of formally-dressed Putnam and a stone engraving on the building itself of Putnam leaving his plow to join the revolution. The detail in the stone etching suggests that Putnam is dressed as in the lithograph. *The Story of the American Revolution* (1842) by Lambert Lilly contains a slight alteration from the standard depiction. Here, Putnam looks more forlorn than zealous and wears the toga of the Cincinnatus legend.



team and without waiting to change his clothes, set off for the theatre of action” (289). Humphreys mentions clothing to illustrate his aforementioned statement that “the country, in motion, exhibited but one scene of hurry, preparation and revenge (289). *Life and Remarkable Adventures* leaves out the information about changing clothes; it only states that Israel leaves for war after finishing his field “swinging my knapsack and shouldering my musket” (14). The presence of the knapsack, while not specifically indicating the clothing within, alludes to homespun.<sup>49</sup> Melville reiterates Potter’s comparison to Putnam but adds the linsey-woolsey aside, thus endorsing the image of the simple farmer-soldier rather than the decorated general. The further misadventures of the fictional Potter indicate that he is an extension of the man introduced in the biography and not the same nobleman-farmer presented in the Putnam lithograph.<sup>50</sup> Melville’s re-prioritization of locally-made homespun — worn by the “meanest” of people — recognizes the “simply worthy man” instrumental to the war for Independence and evoked by Horace Bushnell in his Litchfield remarks.

Melville’s advertisement of Putnam as broadcloth rather than the “lest we forget” linsey-woolsey does more than manipulate the storied biography of Putnam; it evokes the general’s fictional counterpart found in children’s literature of the nineteenth century. Yankee Doodle, the cartoonish man-of-action, conjures the wily Putnam more than the more staid-looking figures from the Revolution, General Washington included.

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<sup>49</sup> William Alcott’s *Young Man’s Guide* (1833) illustrates the young man — the “rustic hero” — entering the city as that of “knapsack in hand, clothing coarse and homespun ... ” (qtd in Halttunen 2).

<sup>50</sup> Putnam appears in well-shined boots. Israel shows he has no knowledge of proper boot care through the suspicion he demonstrates under Pont-Neuf (Melville 41).

Putnum consistently appears in nineteenth-century American textbooks and biographies as a “doer” and a self-made man (Wasowicz). Melville’s re-appropriation of the Putnam mythology through his attention to clothing and the reassignment of American hero to the “linsey woolsey” of Israel Potter complicates the figure of Yankee Doodle as a comfortable, yet appropriate American icon. It is Potter not Putnum who is made to dance and “jig” to British taunts (Melville 17), just as Revolutionary soldiers were taunted with “Yankee Doodle” by the redcoats only to make the British dance upon their return to Boston (Lemay 446); and it is Potter not Putnam who dons high boots in service to his country, playing the “macaroni” rather than the New England sailor (Melville 39).<sup>51</sup> Just as the “New Hampshire lad” conjured by Melville’s Potter questions the cat-like ability of the self-reliant American, so too does the realignment of Yankee Doodle with Melville’s unlikely hero challenge the power of the scrappy American icon.

Melville’s presentation of Israel as simple, unadorned laborer (“let us not forget what we owe to linsey-woolsey”), rather than finely appareled in imported broadcloth as in the Putnam iconography, keenly links apparel to revolution. Farmers and other labors rising to battle in field apparel and shirtsleeves assert an ideological and economical independence from the English and exude defiance. Melville’s prioritization of homespun textually models the colonial boycott of British goods in the 1760s in response to the Sugar Act of 1764. Residents of New England were encouraged to craft

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<sup>51</sup> Benjamin Franklin points out the impracticality of Israel’s shoes, insisting that “it’s both wasting leather and endangering your limbs, to wear such high heels” (44). Low-heeled or Hessian boots were worn by most men in Paris and London during the late-eighteenth century. Heels suggested the “macaroni” fashion of Italy.

their own fabrics rather than succumbing to the duty on textiles imposed by the British. Spinning and weaving, in this time, was given “new significance” and became an act of revolution in addition to domestic industry and self-sufficiency (Ulrich 176). This “new significance” echoes through the text of *Israel Potter*, circumventing a nostalgic reading of “homespun” sparked by Bushnell. References to homespun do not long for a bygone age; rather, they take the past, revise it through the eye of the present, and re-present it to the reader. The trope of *homespun* used by Melville undresses patriots from imported broadcloth and into locally fashioned homespun. The costume change imposed by Melville changes our reading of American heroes and signals the importance of textiles in our history. The cultural debt of the country is not owed to those decorated in the cemeteries and in the annals of history; rather, homage should be paid to the unsung — those who labored without accolade but did their work purposefully and well.<sup>52</sup>

#### **IV: *Homespun* and Disguise**

*Homespun*, as a marker of authenticity, becomes more distinct in its fibers when positioned against what it is not. Likewise, the “plain old homespun” protagonist of *Israel Potter* becomes more readable through his attempts at disguise. Melville echoes the historical and addresses his own time by emphasizing disguise in his narrative. The Boston Tea Party (1773) provides historical precedent for the power of disguise in acts

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<sup>52</sup> The State Building of Connecticut, site of many Israel Putnam memorials, is located on Bushnell Park. Coincidentally, it is named for the Horace Bushnell who coined the term “Age of Homespun” to describe the pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary eras.

of rebellion, and disguise remains on the forefront of American culture during Melville's time. Karen Halttunen provides the example of fears surrounding the movement of young people, predominantly men, from family-centered, agrarian communities moving to the industry and anonymity of American cities in the mid-nineteenth century. What surrounded these naive urbanites was the "fear of those around you as 'passing' for something other than they were — fear in a society wondering who they [the young men] were — and who *really* were all those people around them" (xv). Conduct manuals written to guide these naifs stressed "demonstrat[ing] ... perfect sincerity or 'transparency' of character" (xvi). Although those new to the city may strive to maintain their identity despite the change in surroundings, those looking to take advantage of the situation were dangerously slick and changeable.

Melville presents this threat indirectly in *Israel Potter*, yet it preoccupies the plot of his forthcoming *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (1857). Textually, Melville creatively *passes* his fabricated biography of Private Israel Potter as a "hands-off" experience: he attempts to disguise the strings of authorship he holds as a disengaged editor, compiling information rather than creating it. In this sense, Melville disguises his fiction as edited biography just as the constructed Potter disguises his identity in his attempts to escape. In fact, the disguises attempted by both the author and the character seem to serve the same purpose. Melville washes his hands clean of creation, claiming no voice in the re-publication of Revolutionary history and, therefore, attests to the authenticity maintained by his re-edited edition of Potter's biography. Thus, Melville disguises control of the historical record; his claims to be controlled by

the record, “retouching” the tombstone rather than resurrecting the dead are a masquerade. Israel Potter, as Anne Baker remarks, lacks such an option. He suffers at the hand of history, powerless to control his life and legacy. For Baker, Potter’s disguises fail, and his misadventures throughout Melville’s fiction show that the individual is “drowned out” by the propulsion of history and “forces beyond his or her control” (Baker 22).

The interjection of Israel into historical engagements and in relations with esteemed historical personalities, however, illustrates not an individual lost on the sea of history but one instrumental in its direction and outcome. In Melville’s version of history, Potter sparks the fires at Whitehaven, obtaining a flame from a sleepy resident through his own cunning. By contrast, John Paul Jones’s first-hand account of the incident, however, neither mentions nor alludes to any accessory; the flame that kindled the fires of Whitehaven came from the deception and work of Jones himself (*Life and Correspondence* 82). Potter’s witness of Jones’s celebrated battle against the *Serapis* gives voice to a version of Jones reinforced by his infamous battle cry, “I have not yet begun to fight” (Melville 145). Jones’s own account of the incident in *Life and Correspondence*, however, makes no mention of the patriotic utterance; instead, the record is provided through the account of one of the sailors aboard the *Serapis* (191). Under the hand of Melville, the supposed “hands-off” editor, Potter appears to ride the course of the story’s plot, commenting on its direction but neither holding the reins nor maneuvering the sails. In both cases, however, the presence of both men — the author and his construction — alters the remembrance of history through its altering of the

action within. The action is subtle: a changed description here, a re-allocated credit there; yet, alterations created produce a different way to remember the heroes of the revolution. The accolades of Jones and the wisdom of Franklin appear humbled before a simply-clad Jonathan, reeking of “indian corn” (Melville 44) and doing his work honestly and well. The contrast brings us back to Bushnell's description of the “simply worthy men” of Litchfield, Connecticut — men whose realm of influence was small but whose work made American hamlets like Litchfield possible. Bringing this sort of American into the foreground of American memory alters the reading of history, making the forgotten Potters of the world more honorable and memorable than the Franklins and Joneses, further admonishing the reader to “not forget what we owe to linsey-woolsey” (14).

Melville may disguise himself as editor and his protagonist as a mere cog in the revolutionary war machine, but the fictional construction of Israel Potter read in the pages of *Putnam's* fails to disguise his difference against a backdrop of foreign surroundings and customs. Try as he might, Israel can never hide his identity while in exile. Only when he stops running and embeds himself in the urban anonymity of London does he become invisible to his persecutors; London's crowds disguise all individuality and overshadow recognizable individuality with teeming masses. “Once in that [London's] crowd detection would be impossible” (Melville 16).<sup>53</sup> Prior to his

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<sup>53</sup> In both biography and fiction, Israel Potter lives for years without persecution in the poverty of the London streets. London as antithesis to individuality — and thus, Americanness — comes through via authors contemporary to Melville. Most notably is Hawthorne's “Wakefield”: “Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe.”

London-induced invisibility, however, Potter fails at all attempts to pass unnoticed, owing to his failure to mask his identity adequately, both in dress and in speech.

Israel takes the first possible opportunity to escape from captivity, only to be discovered by a naval officer on the watch for deserters (Melville 17, Potter 21). He exchanges his naval dress for the tatters of an “old ditcher,” but he cannot part with the bargeman’s shirt, whose collar is poorly hidden by the rags he wears. The discrepancy between the impressive blue collar exposed beneath the poor-man’s “Sunday suit” gives him away to soldiers on the watch for military deserters (Melville 24, Potter 32). In these situations, Potter is exposed to the British not because he looks like an American but because he looks like one of *them*. Earlier, Potter’s first escape is interrupted by those who assume him to be part of the British navy, hailing our hero with “Ahoy, what ship?” (Melville 17). Potter’s American allegiance allows for the raucous party and disturbing performance of Potter as a jiggling Yankee (17), yet Potter’s detainment as an American prisoner-of-war occurs not through appearance, but through his own confession at the moment of capture. Later, Potter is again recognized as the enemy he seeks to evade when he is stopped by British soldiers. Israel tries to make himself invisible against the poverty of the peasant-class of England; instead, his failure to discard the fine bargeman’s shirt focuses the attention of his British counterparts. Not once is he stopped during these early enterprises because of his Americanness; he is stopped because he presents himself — by station, by apparel, by manner — as one still connected to the country of his ancestors.

Once he is found out for the “yankee” he is, Potter — in both biography and fiction — relies for escape on disguise created through British presumptions about their former colonial brethren. His captors soon determine that a “true-blooded Yankee” must have something to drink; a crowd gathers and the liquor flows. In a strange episode, Israel is made to dance a jig for the crowd since, according to their assumptions, “Yankees were extraordinary dancers” (17). Melville borrows this action from the biography but shapes it differently. Although both Israels use the dance to sweat out any inebriation and plot their escape, the biographical Israel reacts to the incident on a national level while Melville’s Israel interprets the moment personally rather than politically. Potter writes in *Life and Remarkable Adventures* that the group of spectators assembled to see the Yankee believed to have “... less refinement than the ancient Britons, and possessing little more humanity than the Buccaniers [*sic*].” Despite the perception of his audience, Israel dances with faith of country, assured that “if John Bull was to be thus diverted at the expense of an unfortunate prisoner of war, uncle Jonathan should come in for his part of the sport before morning, by showing them a few *Yankee steps* which they then little dreamed of” (23).

Melville substitutes the British interpretation of the yankee as “a sort of wild creature, a species of ‘possum or kangaroo’ for the pirate and pre-civilized man of Potter’s biography. Potter’s own evocation of national caricatures in *Life and Remarkable Adventures* shows that he reads the situation as prisoner-of-war rather than as a wronged civilian: a representative of his nation in the hands of her enemy — a nation that would not tolerate this sort of amusement and would act accordingly. He



may be a renegade, but he is still human. Melville's use of animal imagery, however, changes the dynamic of the situation. In widening the gap between English and American by diverging their species, Melville uses the shift in taxonomy to identify the perceived differentiation growing between the English and the not-so-formerly English. Here, Melville juxtaposes the perception of Potter as British seaman — he is captured initially because he looks like them — with the cultural interpretation of American as something wholly different and outside of the British experience.

The staging of a “possum or kangaroo” performing for his captors seems to conflate the portrayal of the Revolution with imagery evocative of the mid-nineteenth century and the issue of slavery within the union. It echoes representations of enslaved African-Americans and their forced performances for their white masters, performances that presented the slave as a caricature of himself as imagined by white perception.<sup>54, 55</sup> Melville presents Israel as being “a little cut” by the treatment, lamenting while jiggling that “these people should so unfeelingly seek to be diverted at the expense of an unfortunate prisoner” (18). Here, as in the case of Africans in the captivity of white Americans, Israel delivers the representation expected by his captors, all the while recognizing the “expense” of his actions and plotting his escape. Carolyn Karcher argues that Melville's presentation of Israel Potter “stands for American slaves, both

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<sup>54</sup> One such depiction begins Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the white master “whistles” at young Harry to come to him, rewarding the “scampering” child with treats, a “pat[ting]” him on the head and “chuck[ing] him under the chin” (44). Harry is made to dance for the gentlemen, and “The boy commenced one of those wild, grotesque songs common among the negroes” (44).

<sup>55</sup> Melville provides a depiction of white perception of African-Americans in his other fabricated history “Benito Cereno,” following *Israel* in 1856. In this novel, historically-based Amasa Delano describes his relationship with Africans as an affection, “[taking] to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs” (201).

black and white” (107) and although I agree that this incident demonstrates Potter’s powerlessness over his situation, I don’t reference it to argue that Melville’s Israel — as a character constructed through the pages of his fabricated biography — demonstrates the futility of the individual over the forces of history as Anne Baker does in her assessment. I contend that Melville uses *Israel Potter* to make present the Revolutionary past for his reader and, in doing so, revises the historical record to reflect his nineteenth-century perceptions of the demeaning nature of captivity and the dehumanization that occurs when captors and masters see themselves as genetically different from those they snare and shackle. Although the jiggling Yankee incident in *Life and Remarkable Adventures* may show that the flesh-and-blood Israel Potter lacks the agency to control his own brand, the infiltration of Melville’s interpretation and subsequent plot variation show that the historical record is subject to and influenced by the perception of its readers and the lens of time.

Shortly after these episodes, Potter no longer struggles with his appearance as a seaman with the British Navy: he has since “torn off the collar” of the shirt that muddled his escape (Melville 25). He is no longer read as “one of us” and struggles to mask his Americanness as he attempts to return home. I say “struggles,” for although Potter intends to play the part of the English peasant, the revolutionary spirit within him resists such pretensions. This tension is more true of Melville’s fiction than of Potter’s biography, although he is read as foreign by both his employer, Sir John Millet, and the King of England himself (Potter 41, 44). Melville plays more with the trope of disguise in terms of the physical and metaphorical masks Potter wears throughout the book.

Melville's Potter gives himself away through language, calling his pennies "English pennies" ("What other sort would you have?" replies his English audience) and defaulting to the title "Mister Millet" rather than "Sir John" as a term of respect for his employer, Sir John Millet (Melville 26). He cannot verbally reinforce the hierarchical system of the country he rebels against. The surprising result of such insubordination — in both the fiction and the biography — is not imprisonment. When prompted to say "Sir John" in addressing his employer, Potter stammers "... pardon me — but somehow, I can't. I've tried; but I can't ..." Millet's improbable response exonerates Potter as he asks, "... are all your countrymen like you? If so it's no use fighting them," and then excuses Potter from the expectation of "Sir Johnning" him (28). Although Potter's biography refers to Millet as "Mr. Millet" (41), conversation between the two men in that text does not seem influenced by politics.

Israel may effectively hide his Americanness as he is "metamorphosed in all outward things," but his national sentiment and democratic ideology give him away to none other than King George III. The recognition that occurs and the conversation to follow is briefly conveyed in Potter and Trumbull's edition (44-45), while Melville's narration continues past the initial meeting and presents a dialogue between the king and Israel. The key difference between the incident of the biography and the fiction, other than length, is that Melville allows us to believe that the transparency of Potter's disguise results from manner rather than from apparel. When Israel and the King brush up against each other in Kew Gardens, Potter touches his hat without removing it and bows — "something in his air arrested the King's attention" (33). Potter does nothing

“American,” yet he is recognized as “other” by the king: Potter comes across the king; the king recognizes him as perhaps foreign; and only then does Potter announce himself as “American born,” taking off his hat and bowing to the sovereign (Potter 44). In fiction, Melville takes liberty with the presentation of Potter’s difference and makes it recognizable through a physical gesture instigated by ideology. Only after Israel fails to remove his hat does the King begin his questioning of Potter. Melville’s account of the incident encourages a reading of Israel — and by extension, the average American — as unwavering in his ideology when positioned against a stammering, pessimistic king. Not only does Melville’s Israel “get away with” his insubordination, he is rewarded for it. Israel denies the King’s allegations of espionage and confesses himself to be an escaped prisoner of war. Upon hearing this admission, the king promises him safety while in the Kew Gardens, even after Israel refuses the King’s request to join his army (34).

The disguises Potter assumes for the remainder of Melville’s fiction are less about hiding his Americanness and more about making himself *less visible*: for a time, he no longer needs to escape imposed captivity, but to blend in — both to his surroundings and to the historical record. He no longer hides from British soldiers on the lookout for deserters; he no longer seems to fear the imprisonment he has since twice escaped. The plot’s trajectory propels Potter past the boundary of England and into France without incident or recognition while Melville’s hand seamlessly writes Potter into close association with Franklin and Jones, concealing the art of authorship, of course, under the guise of disengaged editor. At this point in the novel, *Israel Potter*

becomes less about Israel Potter and more about providing a portal into the “real life” history and personages of the Revolution. The reader, particularly the mid-nineteenth-century audience reading Melville’s serialized tale in *Putnam’s*, gains transport through the adventures of Israel into the chronicles of America. Here, the Revolutionary past overshadowed by the winds of yet another war are made present for the audience — through the recollection of famous faces and places yes, but more so for the increased accessibility of these characters through the human portraits painted by Melville and the vehicle of Israel Potter. Like Potter, the reader of *Israel Potter* observes history but is rarely instrumental to its construction. The reader’s existence may span the dates of storied events, but the name of the “simply worthy man” is rarely noted in the annals of the nation. Providing a vehicle into the past through a type of character recognizable — and perhaps intimately familiar — to the reader brings the past closer to the present. One now can see the flawed man behind the monument of Franklin; one can sail with the John Paul Jones of legend and of reputation.

#### **V: Fabrication: Historical immersion and the prophetic history of Israel**

The complicated web of Israel’s construction becomes more visible as one studies its inter-relationship through the threads of the Franklin/Jones divergences. Episodes focusing on these historical celebrities coincide with moments of liberty for Israel. In his journey to Franklin, he manages to go freely from Charing Cross to Dover to Calais to Paris — no incident is recorded in Melville’s prose (40) — and sails freely with Jones. Israel does lament his Franklin-imposed “house arrest” in Paris, noting that

“somehow I’m bound to be a prisoner, one way or another” (58); Jones’s ship, one could argue, further limits Israel’s freedom and secures him to a vessel rather than to the wilds of the sea. Jones’s repeated epithet for Israel, “my lion,” furthers the case for an unshackled imprisonment in the appearance of liberty. *Lion* here conjures neither the British crown as alluded to in the Kew Gardens, “the very den of the British lion” (32), nor does it denote the ferocity of one shackled in captivity, as it does with Ethan Allen in Pendennis Castle, “roar[ing] [as] some tormented lion” (163). If Israel roars, the reader does not hear him. Melville uses the captivity of Israel as a space to entertain textual and historical liberties, improvising on both the historical record and Potter’s biography, rather than challenging the subjectivity of Israel. These episodes provide the reader glimpses into Melville’s interpretation of Revolutionary moments through the conflict and conversation he creates for Israel.

Of the historical celebrities playing significant roles in the trajectory of *Israel Potter*, Ben Franklin seems most closely related to Israel Potter and is the only “celebrity” present in Potter’s actual biography.<sup>56</sup> Embracing the *coup* of finding a biography written by someone named “Israel,” Melville continually alludes to the Old Testament to frame the chapters and add dimension to the characters. The allusion to the lion, of course, recalls the miraculous escape of the prophet Daniel and appropriately frames Israel’s fortuitous safety granted him in the “the very den of the British lion” (Melville 32). By heading a chapter “Israel in the Lion’s Den,” Melville advertises the connection. Ethan Allen’s captivity is the subject of the chapter “Samson Among the

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<sup>56</sup> A meeting between Potter and Franklin, according to the papers of Franklin, occurred in February of 1777 (Chacko and Kulcsarr 381).

Philistines” wherein the desire for liberty is temporarily quelled by an “adorable Delilah” (166) and other women who promise “a bottle of good wine everyday, and clean linen once every week” (167), but the relationship there does not follow the impassioned climax of the biblical story. The most textured Old Testament allusion of the novel, however, comes about through the association of Benjamin Franklin to Jacob, son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham. In Melville, Franklin stands as the “patriarch Jacob” three times in chapter eight and Israel is *Israel née* Jacob, the spiritual transcendence of a birth-name to a God-given name. Materially, the men are the same — the difference merely nominal. Israel is what Jacob becomes when directly blessed by God; continuing this analogy, Israel Potter must be what Benjamin Franklin becomes when — blessed by God? It seems an unlikely association: Franklin the diplomat and *über*-American of mythological proportions linked to Israel Potter, the often-bumbling, forgotten, homespun, uncompensated peon of the Revolution. Yet, the two men share similar life experiences. Potter left home with only a knapsack and profited through his civilian enterprise of self-reliance; he “teamed it” and “farmed it,” improving on his property and his condition before leaving for war and falling prisoner to the British. Franklin leaves the servitude of his brother, enters Philadelphia “dirty” with pockets “stuff’d out with shirts and stockings” and still rises from “poverty and obscurity ... to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world” (Franklin 26, 5). Like the Franklin rags-to-riches story, Israel comes ashore with limited resources and is poorly equipped to navigate the cultural mores of his surroundings. But unlike the runaway Franklin, who is pleasantly bewildered by the price of bread and the modes of worship

of his adopted Philadelphia, Israel stumbles through cultural and geographic challenges despite his best efforts. Israel reads as the inversion of Franklin: poised to succeed through diligence and perseverance, yet somehow channeling misfortune and metaphorically maimed by his failures, rather than landing cat-like on his feet (Emerson 43).

Melville plays with Israel as the inverse of Franklin throughout their interactions, particularly through what they wear and how they wear it. They are, in fact, cut from the same cloth. Melville associates Israel with homespun, differentiating his particular story from the fictional plot divergences as “plain old homespun.” The textile association ascribed to Franklin is also homespun.<sup>57</sup> Initiating the biblical allusion, Melville dresses Franklin in “plain coat and hose” like the “homespun raiment” of Jacob. Franklin, according to Melville, robed himself appropriately as he “dressed his person as his periods; neat, trim, nothing superfluous, nothing deficient” (Melville 51). The textile thread continues with links of clothing to political association, calling Franklin “a plain spoken Broadbrim”<sup>58</sup> lauding the work and character of Franklin, Jacob and the more-contemporary Hobbes by describing them as “politicians and philosophers; keen observers of the main chance; prudent courtiers; practical magians in linsey woolsey” (51).

Linsey-woolsey, as a form of homespun, provides an historically apt way to conjure Franklin. In *Benjamin Franklin in Portraiture*, Charles Sellers describes

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<sup>57</sup> Of course, Franklin used “Homespun” as his *nom de plume* in a number of political essays.

<sup>58</sup> Or Quaker



Franklin as a problematic subject: he was “a figure impressive in his lack of impressiveness” (1). In an era of portraiture where “dress and physical bearing were elements of dominion and success ... never before ... had they encountered a figure of such monumental importance with so little monumentality and so total disregard for ‘presence’” (2). Clad in linsey-woolsey, Franklin provides the antidote to the gentleman-patriot remembered through Revolutionary memorial. He figuratively stands next to the Israel of biography and fiction at the plow: called to service, but remembering responsibility and finishing one job before beginning another — the linsey-woolsey of service rather than the broadcloth of revelry (Melville 14). Yet, while Melville categorizes Israel’s homespun as “plain old” (149), Franklin’s apparel reveals his exceptionalism and places him in esteemed company. The “worsted hose” worn by the American envoy may set him apart from French high society, but it makes him at home in the Latin Quarter surrounded by likewise disheveled scholars. Franklin’s wardrobe adds to his impressive reputation and mystique as his “sublime thoughts and tattered wardrobe were famous across Europe” (52). Inversely, Israel’s tatters poorly disguise him to the British who seek him (24), setting him apart from the peasant-class into which he hopes to disappear and foreshadow his fate: “these wretched rags he now wore, were but suitable to that long career of destitution before him” (21-22). Franklin, according to Melville, had “carefully weighed the world” and “could act any part in it” (53). Israel has not yet determined the accurate measure of the world; as a result, it weighs on him and is readable through his apparel.

To reckon the difference between Franklin and Potter, at least as sustained by Melville's novel, one must measure the birthright granted to Franklin/Jacob through national mythology and iconography against the patriotic inheritance denied to the Israels of America, as criticized by Melville. Ben Franklin is the "Jack of all trades, master of each and mastered by none" (53). Israel may try his hand at many occupations, but his varied employments speak of his penury rather than his proficiency. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson promises that through the dismissal of chance and the acceptance of work, one has "chained the wheel of Chance, and shalt sit hereafter out of fear from her rotations" (50). Melville's characterization of Emerson's "sturdy lad" through the guise of Potter in 1854 seems a pessimistic manifestation of American idealism and aptly fitted to a country on the brink of dissolving. Israel Potter and Benjamin Franklin both wear homespun and illustrate the national debt we owe to "linsey-woolsey"; they both share in the covenant of inheritance pledged to Abraham, willed to Isaac, and stolen by Jacob. However, Melville argues that rather than blessed for our efforts, the New Israel of America is cursed by bad luck. Critically reading *Israel Potter* revises the historical memory of the Revolution as it recasts the American Adam as Potter-esque rather than Franklin-esque. And, if we read Israel Potter as the American rebirth of Jacob, we unravel the adopted mythology of America as the chosen people of "New Israel" and its justification in conquering a continent. As Joseph Ellis and others have observed, Franklin's construction of "Poor Richard" creates in American mythology the original "self-taught, homespun American with an uncanny knack for showing up where history was headed and striking a folksy pose that then

dramatized the moment forever ...” (109). Israel may mimic the illustration of Poor Richard, but he lacks the wisdom gained as result of his adventures. Melville’s Israel Potter is the even poorer facsimile of Franklin’s literary spawn.

#### **VI: “False heels ... full of meaning”**

Israel reaches Franklin in Paris by maneuvering London’s Charing Cross, securing a “post-coach” to Dover and taking a “packet” to Calais (Melville 40). Constructed disguises, until now, have failed Potter; however, clothes fitted by the American sympathizers Woodcock, Tooke, and Bridges gain him unfettered access to systems of transportation and propel him out of the “lion’s den.” The only moment of potential recognition comes under the bridge at Pont Neuf, but then Israel’s ignorance, rather than a rent in his disguise, nearly gives him away. In fact, the bootblack stops Israel because he “deeply regret[ed] that a gentleman of Israel’s otherwise imposing appearance, should be seen abroad with unpolished boots ... ” (41). All are duped by the costume of courier fitted in Brentford and assumed by Potter, all except the envoy Franklin.<sup>59</sup> To Franklin, Israel’s words immediately reveal his nationality. Without even facing the exile, he identifies Israel as American, exclaiming, “Ah! I smell Indian corn” (44).

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<sup>59</sup> Israel’s successful escape from England adds a wrinkle to Peter Bellis’s assertion that Israel “is always recognizable as an American in spite of his numerous disguise and false identities” (613). His Americanness is apparent only to his countryman in this episode.

Necessary beyond disguise are Israel's boots. Fitted with a false heel, the specially-made footwear secures the confidential documents and protects them from detection in case of capture: the boots "it need hardly be said — had been particularly made for the occasion" (40). Boots reinforce his assumed identity to the bootblack of Paris, but they immediately stand out to Franklin as ill-fitted to Israel. Franklin comments on the boots, chastising Israel by stating, "Don't you know that it's both wasting leather and endangering your limbs, to wear such high heels?" "How foolish," Franklin continues, "for a rational creature to wear tight boots ... " (44). Ironically, the boots are the only part of Israel's disguise especially fitted to his person: two scenes of measuring and fitting are provided for the reader (38-40). As Israel models the fit of the boots, Tooke remarks that "he'll surely be discovered. Hark, how he creaks" (40). The manner in which Tooke makes the comment (smiling) and the response of Woodcock ("Come, come, it's too serious a matter for joking") indicate that integration of the boots into the disguise is flawless (40). So, for Franklin to question them immediately seems uncanny and reinforces the mythology of Franklin's shrewdness extolled in American literature.

Given the fashion of footwear during the Revolution, however, Franklin should not have been the only one observing a problem with Israel's boots. Low-heeled boots rather than high-heeled ones characterized London men in the late 1800s; American portraiture suggests shoes, not boots, as the footwear for American soldiers;<sup>60</sup> and

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<sup>60</sup> See *Shoes* by Lucy Pratt and Linda Wooley (London: V&A Publications, 1999), 53. Also, according to Florence Ledger's *Treatise on the History of Shoes*, Paul Revere "wore cowhide or buckskin shoes with large buckles; in fact, American soldiers proudly asserted that "not a pair of boots graced the company" (110).

Melville describes footwear “of that age” as “shoes with silver buckles” (37). What can be made of Potter’s seeming so “in place” to his observers while so out-of place with the fashion of the era? In the Potter and Trumbull biography, nothing is made of the boot: Potter is outfitted by Squire Woodcock, and secret documents are secured in the false heel of a “pair of boots” made “expressly for [Potter] ... ” by the American sympathizers (50). The route of Potter from Brentwood via Charing Cross, Dover, and Calais is mentioned with the same banality as in Melville. Franklin receives the confidence without further mention of the boots, and the bootblack under Pont Neuf in Melville plays no role in the biography.

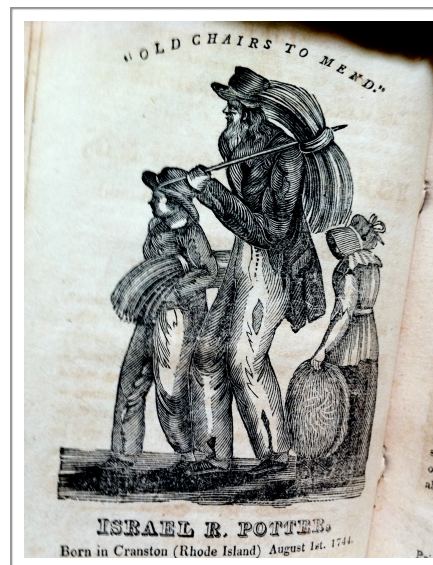


Figure 2.3 “Old Chairs to Mend.”  
1855. *Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society*

The false-heeled boots that are figured as a plot device in *Israel Potter* operate as both metaphorical and material markers within the text. After ascertaining the true purpose of Israel’s heels, Franklin recants his criticism and puns, “your false heels, instead of being idle vanities, seem to be full of meaning” (Melville 45). The conceit introduced by way of the boot extends throughout the content and form of Melville’s fiction. Meaning is disguised in the linsey-woolsey of Potter at the plow and in the sage visage of Franklin. What seem to be mere authorial asides, set pieces, and plot devices reveal themselves as Melville’s revision of national mythology. The broadcloth of

General Putnam may be the remembered image of Bunker Hill, but the true patriots were coarsely-clad; Admiral Jones may be regally memorialized by the navy, but Melville suggests his life contradicts his remembrance; and statesman Franklin is shown more for his humble origins than for his eventual reputation. Textual “vanities” imposed by Melville adorn the story of Israel R. Potter, but rather than being “idle,” these additions allow the reader to analyze the stealthy interpretation of Revolutionary history that Melville offers.

Materially, the invisibility of the boots during Israel’s exodus and their jarring visibility to Dr. Franklin reinforce the fabric constructing Potter and Franklin. One may be “plain old homespun” and the other a “practical magian in linsey woolsey,” but their characters are constructed from the same material. Franklin spots the aberration in Potter’s costume even as he immediately recognizes Israel as a countryman. Franklin’s understanding of Israel is unique among other moments of recognition in the book: few accost Israel for his Americanness; most detain him for his presentation as English. Consequentially, the boot-wearing of Israel is short-lived: if the picture flanking the title page of the 1824 biography and gracing the cover of the 2008 Penguin Edition of *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* is any indication, Potter soon traded his boots for the more comfortable, non-heeled shoes more fashioned to his era (Figure 2.3). “Old Chairs to Mend” depicts Israel accompanied by his young son advertising his craft on the streets of London — the one place Israel’s identity is visible to none. Anonymity may be found amidst the crowds of urban centers, but becoming one of the crowd apparently requires the right shoes.

In 1898, Eliza Philbrick of Salem examined dresses inherited from her mother, hoping to find an appropriate piece to wear to the upcoming Daughters of the American Revolution party in Boston. Finding nothing that would elevate her status among the more elite women of her community, Philbrick instead fabricated a gown by piecing together remnants and found-material from other sources. The dress that materialized for the party was constructed out of uncut “rough brown wool spun and woven on her grandparents’ New Hampshire farm almost a century before ... ” but embellished with “a brightly colored panel purchased from an antiques dealer ... believed [to be] hand-wrought” (Ulrich 30). By 1911, Philbrick had further altered the dress by “replacing the antique embroidery” and making additional adjustments “to the neck and sleeves” (30). Fewer than fifteen years had passed between Philbrick’s original alteration of a colonial artifact and its final manifestation in the early twentieth century. Yet in that time, the only authentic contribution to the dress was the “rough” material discovered without fashion or form. Ulrich remarks that the “colonial dress” created by Philbrick was unlike any dress worn during the colonial period (32). But recreating an authentic rendering of the past was not Eliza Philbrick’s intention. The dress was merely a vehicle by which Eliza could assert her “independence” (32) and claim a constructed version of the past to stand in for an original. Although the dress became less recognizable as time passed, its representation remained fixed in time; although offset by quotation marks in Ulrich’s text, the garment still bears the title “colonial gown” (32). Likewise, Melville’s integration of borrowed threads with new material allows Melville’s narrative “rough”

material to pass as a “reprint” of biographical history. Dynamic recollections of the past, like altered “colonial gowns” and fabricated biography, call to mind the fallibility of historical memory. Yet, such representations, although altered by the hand of the present, allow the past to remain part of cultural consciousness. As Walter Benjamin writes, “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (255). Through the material presence of homespun and the rebellion inherent to its historical fabric, *Israel Potter* saves the past from disappearance by claiming the remnants of the Revolution useable and applicable to the concerns of the American citizenry in 1854.



## Chapter Three

“Intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals but a savage at heart”: John Paul Jones and Nineteenth-Century American Identity

### I: Pirate or Patriot?

In September of 1776, the Continental Navy became the first American military branch to designate an official uniform; in March of 1777 it became the first to alter it. The change originated from John Paul Jones and a small group of officers dissatisfied with the mandated ensemble consisting of a red-lapelled blue coat, a gold-laced waistcoat, and blue breeches (Morison 96). An unofficial agreement allowed American

naval men to substitute a white-lined, red-lapelled blue coat and white waistcoat for the official model, and to forego blue breeches for white (71). The alterations, ornamented with an epaulet inscribed with a rattlesnake and “Don’t Tread on me,” Samuel Eliot Morison observes, resulted in “a much smarter uniform than the blue and red” (72). Perhaps the “smartest” quality of the new uniform, however, derived from the confusion it caused during engagements with the enemy. From a distance, ships populated by officers dressed in the new uniform resembled captains of the British fleet, leading John

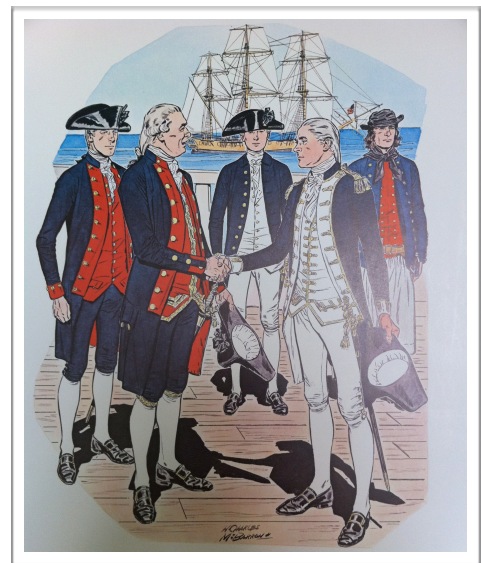


Figure 3.1: Uniforms of the United States Navy, 1776-1777. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society

Adams to denote the uniform as “English” (370). Lowering the ensign, at least temporarily, added to the deception. This masquerade, embraced by Captain Jones, created a tactical advantage while at sea: the enemy saw the unmarked ship as familiar and relaxed its defenses, only to find itself unexpectedly engaged, and quite often over-matched, by a smaller, scrappier opponent.

Melville could expect the reader of *Israel Potter* to approach the novel familiar with the legends of John Paul Jones. Lauded as the first to raise the American flag aboard the *Alfred* (1775), the victor of ferocious sea battles against the *Serapis* and the *Drake*, and the originator of the oft-quoted American mantra “I have not yet begun to fight,” John Paul Jones enjoyed popular acclaim throughout the nineteenth century. No fewer than twenty-three biographies featured Jones as the subject; three editions of his writings and letters became available to the public; and fiction writers, poets, and dramatists on both sides of the Atlantic claimed Jones as their title character. In iconography Jones cut his most dashing figure — a figure he personally constructed and adorned with that costume he himself had carefully designed in 1776. After Charles Willson Peale painted his portrait four years later, in 1780 (figure 3.2), and Jean-Antoine Houdon sculpted his bust in 1780-1 (figure 3.3), these depictions set the pattern



Figure 3.2: John Paul Jones (1741-1792)  
Charles Willson Peale, from life, c. 1781-1784  
Courtesy of Independence NHP

for pictures of Jones for at least seventy years thereafter — with precisely the kind of commanding appearance he favored for himself.<sup>61</sup> But the duplicity he had stitched into the navy’s uniform — what you saw was not what you actually got — became a motif working its way into an entire series of representations of Jones after his death in 1792.

Of course, Jones stood in patriotic histories of the Revolution for the courageous patriot, the tireless warrior in the battle for Independence. Still, Jones had lived a highly

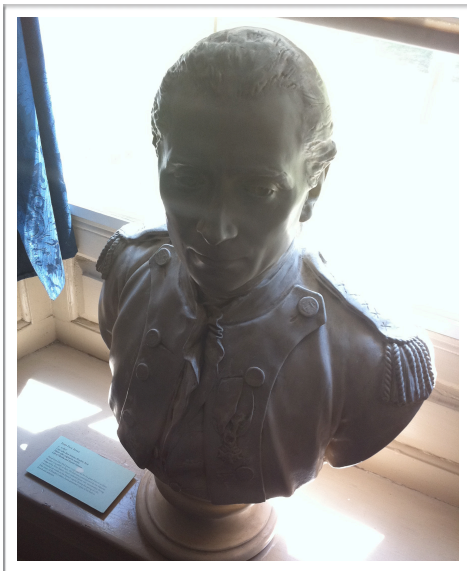


Figure 3.3: “John Paul Jones”  
copy after Jean-Antoine, Paris. 1781.  
John Paul Jones House, Portsmouth, NH.  
Author’s photo.

eventful life before (and after) joining the American cause, and his nineteenth-century commentators seized upon those adventures to depict the unsavory aspects of the hero’s character. As early as 1807, George Sinclair had published a biography of Jones modeled after the 1803 London-based original with the omnibus title: *The Interesting Life, Travels, Voyages, and Daring Engagements of the Celebrated and Justly Notorious Pirate, Paul Jones: Containing*

*Numerous Anecdotes of Undaunted Courage, in the Prosecution of his Nefarious*

<sup>61</sup> In his diary, John Adams identifies the captain as “the most ambitious and intriguing Officer in the American Navy.” Adams would concur with Melville’s paradoxical identification of Jones in *Israel Potter* — the President-to-be writes “Jones has Art, and Secrecy, and aspires very high. You see the Character of the Man in his uniform, and that of his officers and Marines, variant from the Uniforms established by Congress . . . Eccentricities, and Irregularities are to be expected from him — they are in his Character, they are visible in his Eyes. His Voice is soft and still and small, his Eye has keenness, and Wildness and Softness in it” (13 May 1779).

*Undertakings*. Had the hero not been a bloodthirsty pirate? A rake and seducer of ladies? Indeed, a robber, a murderer, a political opportunist?

Indeed he had been, but in some quarters those nefarious undertakings were not marks against the American hero; they simply added to the romance. Jones shared a kinship with the piratical marauders of fiction, if not of history.

Sinclair's biography of Jones may have eliminated the frontispiece of the 1803 edition, *Paul Jones shooting a sailor who had attempted to strike his colours in an engagement* (1779) (figure 3.4), but it

resurrected the original's indictment of "notorious pirate" in the book's title. Subsequent editions often opted to dispense with both illustration and epithet, but

the salacious and dishonorable content within remained unchanged. Although marketed as "a book for young men," the titillating content of Jones's biography appealed to a wide audience of nineteenth-century readers. "Pirates, robbers, and murderers," as Henry Brooke noted in 1841, "... have been heroes in the imaginations of the old and young, rich and poor, the learned and the illiterate ... we all admire that which is active and enterprising, however destructive, to that which is passive..." (x). For the inheritors of the Revolution, at least to the book-buying public, the static portrait of the American patriot was often shelved for the dynamism of the rogue.



Figure 3.4: *Paul Jones shooting a sailor who had attempted to strike his colours in an engagement* (1779) Courtesy of the British Museum.

If the tale of John Paul Jones revealed his ruthless piracy, so much the better (figure 3.5). In much of popular literature, the pirate was the “romantic outlier” rather than the feared terrorist roving the Barbary Coast.<sup>62</sup> Versions of pirates attractive to



Figure 3.5: Paul Jones, the Pirate (A. Park, London: (n.d ~1840s?). Courtesy of the National Archives (U.S.)

popular audiences emerged through such works as Byron’s *Corsair* (Philadelphia, 1814); the numerous oft-printed ballads about Captain Kidd, notably, “The Dying Words of Captain Robert Kidd”;<sup>63</sup> Exquemelin’s popular history *The History of the Bucaniers of America*;<sup>64</sup> and the several versions of the popular song *The Pirate’s Serenade*. From a political standpoint, in some quarters piracy even became

synonymous not with greedy banditry but with

independence and the struggle against injustice. And Melville himself, in “Benito Cereno,” joined with the author of the slave narrative *The Florida Pirate* (1823) to suggest piracy as the only escape from the horrors of American slavery when he cast its protagonists not as greedy bandits but as political refugees with limited options for

<sup>62</sup> Pirates, Privateers, and other treasure hunters met accusations of witchcraft in addition to those resulting from treason and violence. Popular folk belief identified successful treasure hunters with the occult. How does one find what has never been found before? It was believed that conjuring and subsequent diabolical intervention must be the answer for the recovery of lost riches. Folk belief led England to outlaw “the use of occult measure to locate treasure” and, in some cases, punish offenders with death (Baker and Reid, 149).

<sup>63</sup> Willard Hallam Bonner, “The Ballad of Captain Kidd,” in *American Literature* 15.4 (1944)

<sup>64</sup> Published in London during the late-seventeenth century, *Bucaniers* wasn’t printed in the United States until 1826.

sovereignty.<sup>65</sup> American pirate-types often flew the skull and crossbones after being “denied the general consent of nations” (Brooke 28).<sup>66</sup> Moreover, in early nineteenth-century British and American novels, John Paul Jones (or men based upon the late captain) frequently dropped in on tales of mismatched love, maritime adventure, and epic romance. Among the best known examples are, Cooper’s *The Pilot*, Scott’s *The Pirate*, and Dumas’s *Captain Paul*.

When William Borradaile reissued Sinclair’s edition of *Life and Remarkable Adventures ... of John Paul Jones*

twenty years after its first publication, he used an illustration of Jones shooting one of his officers point-blank (figure 3.6).

The chaos behind the captain in the illustrations obscures the style of uniform and, therefore, individual



Figure 3.6: “Paul Jones shooting Lieutenant Grubb.” 1823. *Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society*

allegiances: nearly-faceless individuals battle against unidentifiable opponents,<sup>67</sup> yet

<sup>65</sup> Although readers’ sympathies often fell to the tortured Cereno in the nineteenth century, the language used by Melville in the fictional adaptation, especially when taken in concert with its source, indicates the author’s abhorrence of the slave trade and his recognition of its social malignancy. For Melville to suggest that Jones *looks* like a pirate reminds the reader of the charge leveled against him by the British for patriotic service to America and the duality of both a rogue bandit and a maligned, ostracized, freedom-fighter embedded in the term.

<sup>66</sup> Jones was no stranger to injustice, according to his accounts. After punishing a disobedient sailor, one Mungo Maxwell, and then having been exonerated of any wrong doing by the Admiralty Court, Jones returned to Scotland to find himself charged with murder. Maxwell, as luck would have it, “never recovered” from the flogging and his family saw fit to pin the crime on Jones (Thomas 23-25).

<sup>67</sup> The combatants of the print are faceless in the way that Trumbull’s *Declaration of Independence* fills the chamber with repeated or obscured images.

Jones and his combatants announce their shared cause through their similar uniforms.

While the illustrator dresses Jones in national legitimacy, he exposes the captain's barbarism in his actions. The print not only indicts Jones of slaying one of his crew, but the range of the shot and the bodies below it suggest the action to be both malicious and habitual. Jones may be remembered for raising the colors aboard the *Alfred* and refusing quarter with "I have not yet begun to fight"; however, the Grubb illustration portrays a challenge to the legitimacy of Jones's fiery will and the bloodshed that sometimes ensued.

*Paul Jones Shooting Lieutenant Grubb*, while reinforcing the relationship between Jones and the other unlikely protagonists popular in the 1820s, also revealed the malleability of cultural memory and encouraged some writers to recoup Jones's unsavory reputation by publishing official accounts of his life authorized by the Jones estate. For, although *The Life and Remarkable Adventures ...* was sold as and surrounded by pulp fiction, the image of Jones as piratical murderer grew from fictional illustration to printed fact, according to newspaper articles and biographic accounts. Historian Robert Sands, armed with Jones's papers and determined to "circulate an unvarnished and full account of the rear admiral's life," credits the ubiquity of both the Grubb print and the false testimony<sup>68</sup> incited by it as the motivation for publishing his corrective account, *Life and Correspondence of John Paul Jones* (1830) "...in regions

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<sup>68</sup> Sands mentions an obituary in "a Southern Paper" as evidence as false testimony against Jones. The deceased claimed to have witnessed the point-blank shooting of Lieutenant Grubb. Coupled with the bookstore sighting, an alarmed Sands feared the heroic memory of Jones to be at risk.

where such fabulous and monstrous legends obtain, in this age of light, admission into public prints” (3).

A younger Melville would have been the consumer of these cheap tracts published with a mind toward the urban middle-class, like the ones carried by Borradaile. An older Melville, inspired by his early infatuation for these adventure stories, developed into a vociferous collector of graphic prints and nineteenth-century book art and, as a result, expanded the diverse collection of painting and prints he inherited from his father.<sup>69</sup> Although a self-professed “*naïf*” in his approach to art, Melville’s enthusiasm for and proficiency with visual art emerges in references to art and artists in many of his narratives (Sten 1, 3). For example, whaling scenes “praised” in *Moby-Dick* (chapter 56) derived from Melville’s engravings “after the whaling scenes by Garneray” (Wallace 62); the first chapter of *Redburn* describes the Melville family collection that surrounded him as a child (60); and “Fragments from a Writing Desk” catalogs a number of classical paintings, sculptures, and architectural forms (Sten 4). Melville’s lifelong interest in maritime adventure and the influence of the visual arts in his writing become most apparent, however, through the nine engravings in Melville’s collection taken from the fifteen illustrations included in Marryat’s *The Pirate* (1836). Robert K. Wallace and others assert that these engravings indicate the impact of visual arts during Melville’s formative years, the influence of “adventure stories” the author read as a boy, and the interconnectivity of narrative and art in his writing (64).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Melville amassed more than three hundred graphic prints during his lifetime.

<sup>70</sup> See also Bernard Rosenthal’s “Melville, Marryat, and the Evil-Eyed Villain.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25.2 (Sept 1970): 221-24.



The protagonists emerging through the pages of Melville's fiction resemble the misunderstood beggars, thieves, and pirates romanticized in the literature of his youth and, like the many characters of early nineteenth-century fiction, muddle the distinction between hero and villain. *Israel Potter*, Melville's sole novel of historical fiction, further complicates the distinction by casting his rogue exemplar as John Paul Jones, the

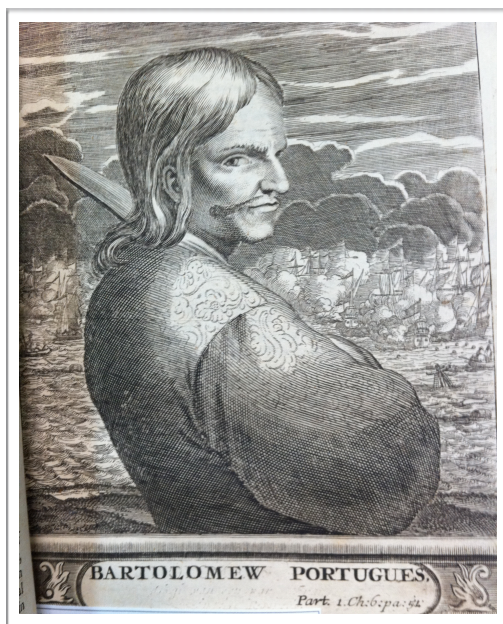


Figure 3.7: Pirate Bartholomew Portages. *The History of the Bucaniers of America*. 1826. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

lone “crimson thread” flitting through the “blue-jean” travails of Israel R. Potter. Melville inserts the captain into Potter’s dismal tale of exile and invents the relationship between Israel and Jones, creating adventure within the pathos spun by Potter and reprinted by Melville. Yet, in his motley characterization Melville does more than liberate Potter’s story from biography to fiction. Melville’s Jones, while never dubbed “pirate” by the narrator of *Israel Potter* or by

Israel, looks like the pirates of Exquemelin (figure 3.7), dresses like the pirate suggested by inflammatory frontispieces, and acts like the pirates/revolutionaries of nineteenth-century American fiction. Like the confusion Jones fashions at sea, the narrative portrait offered by Melville unsettles the mid-century veneration of established American heroes and challenges the mythology constructed by the Jones estate and such biographers as Sands and embraced by a young Republic.

Of course, Melville allows neither his narrator nor Israel to call Jones a pirate.

Israel may identify Jones's "jaunty barbarism" and "savage" markings under his European finery, but he never truly defines what he observes. Assumptions and hearsay, however, provoke incidental characters to associate Jones with piracy. An oddly placed maritime "quack-doctress" calls Jones a "reprobate pirate" (Melville 134); English sailors assume the *Ranger* to be "some bloodthirsty pirate" when they fail to recognize her nationality (99); and a British ship unknowingly solicits information from Jones about "that bloody pirate, Paul Jones" (133). In the last instance, Melville shows Jones, when confronted by his reputation, as a light-hearted Robin Hood rather than a despotic Captain Kidd; he encourages his enemies to arm themselves with money rather than ammunition. "So, away with ye; ye don't want any powder and ball to give him. He wants contributions of silver, not lead. Prepare yourselves with silver, I say" — and offers a keg of pickles rather than one of powder solicited by his enemies (133).<sup>71</sup>

"Pirate" as a charge leveled *only* by his enemies does replicate the cultural mythology of Jones at mid-century as most subtitles suggesting "pirate" had been dropped from American publications and most accounts had foregone incendiary frontispieces. Yet, not all Americans succumbed to the intoxicating memory of Paul Jones. The 1846 edition of *Life and Adventures of John Paul Jones* may begin without a frontispiece, but its preface decries the character of Jones and other revolutionary leaders: "The whole race of magnificent barbarians, gorgeous tyrants, unparalleled cutthroats, and gigantic

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<sup>71</sup> Melville's phrasing of Jones's entire retort is worth noting: "Aye, indeed, but he won't hurt you. He's only going round among the nations, with his old hat, taking up contributions. So, away with ye; ye don't want any powder and ball to give him. He wants contributions of silver, not lead. Prepare yourselves with silver, I say" (133).

robbers ... have never been able to fix our devotion" (4). The editors propose "the humblest artizan" [*sic*] as more worthy of national laurels than the men who led them, suggesting the same "homespun" hero as Bushnell does in his Centenary address in 1851 and as Melville does in *Israel Potter*.

Melville continues to hedge his opinion of Jones in *Israel Potter* by casting him as an "outlaw" in the eyes of Israel (63). Usage of the term in antebellum American applied to individuals "excluded" from the law or "deprived" of its protection (*Webster's 1828*) rather than limited to the designation of "felon" it would later absorb (*OED*). Read as more maverick than marauder, appearing as the outlaw seems to fit with the renegade patriot description often accompanying Jones. Yet, although Jones technically assumes the designation of "outlaw" during the Revolution as he sails without a country,<sup>72</sup> he disguises himself in the fashion of his enemy — looking more like Cornwallis than Washington.<sup>73</sup> In a novel where one's clothing and appearance play such a significant role (the authenticity of homespun, the privilege of linsey-woolsey, the dress of Potter, Franklin, Allen and, of course, Jones) it is curious that Melville modeled Jones not after how he dressed in the eighteenth-century but how he *appeared* to those who saw him. Never does the reader see the Jones of Peale's 1781 portrait, nor do we witness the proud dignity illustrated by the many Jones prints and publications of the nineteenth century. Instead, we are given "pagan" tattoos covered by a "laced coat

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<sup>72</sup> Jones adopted America when he enlisted in its cause; however, since the United States was not recognized as a sovereign power until after Independence, Jones's contribution to the war was unprotected by the acts of war, as noted earlier.

<sup>73</sup> According to Thomas, "captains would often try to deceive each other by posing as friend not foe. Unless used to lure an enemy's ship onto the rocks, ruses were not considered unsporting" (61).

sleeve” (Melville 70); hands covered in rings and “muffled in ruffles” (70); a “... prophetic ghost, glimmering in anticipation ... of the French Revolution which levelled [*sic*] the exquisite refinement of Paris with the bloodthirsty ferocity of Borneo; showing that broaches and finger-rings, not less than nose-rings and tattooing, are tokens of the primeval savageness which ever slumbers in human kind, civilized or uncivilized” (70). The Jones presented to the readers of *Israel Potter* challenges the staid notion of American heroics and the nature of revolutionary ideology a generation after Independence.

Melville’s insertion of Jones into the resurrected Potter biography (1824) rescues the reader from the reprint of Israel’s unlucky misadventures. True to his promise, Melville “preserves” the story of Potter and lures the reader to accept his word as truth, as far-fetched as it may seem.<sup>74,75</sup> So, when the ill-fated Israel happens upon John Paul Jones in the Paris apartment of Benjamin Franklin, the reader accepts the encounter and delights in the “shifting of scene” occasioned by the maritime hero (Melville 1). Melville may be well within his promised bounds of biographic authenticity — Jones is a “historical addition,” after all (1) — but the unfaltering duplication of Potter’s clumsy narrative leads the reader to trust the intimacy between Jones and Potter as accurate and authentic. The relationship between the captain and the sailor relies on the backdrop of

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<sup>74</sup> Melville assures his reader that he will act as the editor rather than the author of Potter’s story. Since I will refer to his promise throughout the chapter, I provide it here: “...with a change in the grammatical person, it preserves, almost as in a reprint, Israel Potter’s autobiographical story ... with the exception of some expansions, and additions of historic and personal details, and one or two shiftings of scene, may, perhaps, be not unfitly regarded something in the light of a dilapidated old tombstone retouched” (1).

<sup>75</sup> *Israel Potter* may have enjoyed decent critical acclaim in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but contemporary readers balk at its content. Most readers tell me that they’ve either never heard of it or have stopped reading it before its conclusion.

historical events as Potter fights with Jones against the British aboard the *Serapis* (Chapter 19) and lights the fires at Whitehaven (116), thus painting a portrait of both Jones and Potter that nineteenth-century readers were probably willing to accept. The Jones constructed by Melville, however familiar, nonetheless offers an alternative reading of the captain while still remaining based on the historical chronicles. Just as the disguise affected by Jones in the Atlantic fooled the British, the readers of *Israel Potter* see the figure of Jones, trust their assumptions, and allow the familiar presence to distract them from the textual maneuvers of Melville, not noticing the disguise until it is too late.

All of Melville's character collages in *Israel Potter*, but especially that of Jones, parallel the revision attempted by much of the popular historical fiction of the nineteenth century. Gesturing to familiar illustrations and engravings through his portrayal of Captain Jones added to the false trust encouraged by Melville's "reprint" of Potter's biography and created an "already-known" feeling among nineteenth-century readers. Under the guise of truth and with the allure of maritime adventure, the inclusion of "the crimson thread" shuttles the reader between mythology and historical revision, spinning the story of one of America's most celebrated and sordid heroes in order to offer a truly home-spun portrait of the United States at mid-century. Melville's tongue-in-cheek dedication to "His Highness the Bunker Hill Monument" (1) mocks the reverence shown to shrines of the past by suggesting a relationship between monuments and monarchs; his liberal interpretation of Jones's biography challenges the collective infallibility of historical memory by offering a flawed, but definitely more useful,

monument to the fledgling nation. “Intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals but a savage at heart, America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations” (138).

John Paul Jones, as both a historic figure and a fictional construction, provides a useful fulcrum for my project. Not only does Melville blur the boundary between “reprint” and revision, he also establishes Jones as a man of fashion. Just as references to textiles and apparel speak to the importance of “homespun” in *Israel Potter*, the clothing disguising the body of Jones addresses Melville’s criticism of national mythology and increases the critical importance of *Israel Potter* in American literature. Melville associates Jones with the complicated interests of the United States at midcentury: my project analyzes Jones’s varied apparel and motley appearance within the novel to illuminate Melville’s interpretation of Revolutionary history and its usefulness to a country on the brink of dissolution.

## II. Fiction disguised as Fact: John Paul Jones and Israel R. Potter

My earlier chapter on *Israel Potter* summarizes the novel, but owing to the scope of the analysis, it addresses Melville’s insertion of Jones only briefly. In this chapter, I focus on Jones exclusively. Jones enters *Israel Potter* in the novel’s tenth chapter and plays a major role in the plot for the next ten. The captain’s relationship with Israel provides the “shuttle”<sup>76</sup> between Potter’s invisible exile in England and his front-row seat to history aboard the *Ranger* and the *Bon Homme Richard*; it also shuttles

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<sup>76</sup> See Melville’s title for Chapter 20 of *Israel Potter* – “The Shuttle.”

the reader between the mythology and reality of “homespun” heroes being resurrected at midcentury.<sup>77</sup> Melville’s Jones, both in character and clothing, complements the homespun analyzed in chapter two and provides the contrast — the “crimson thread” — necessary to identify and assert the mythological applications of textiles and apparel in the nineteenth century.

Jones plays two roles in the novel, as far as my analysis is concerned. First, he serves as a compatriot to Israel, lessening the confusion of exile for the wayward Potter. Benjamin Franklin may be the first American met by Israel while abroad (Melville 42), but John Paul Jones is the first who puts him at ease.<sup>78</sup> Jones may not share the bed offered him by Israel, but he develops as Israel’s intimate throughout the course of the novel. The men share the moniker of *lion*, Jones’s designation assigned by Franklin and Potter’s assigned by Jones; Potter provides the lens through which the reader meets Jones (63)<sup>79</sup> and he alone sees the disguised tattoos of the captain; Potter gains access to Jones’s quarters at sea and is offered the captain’s bed (104); and young Israel plays a type of first-mate in Jones’s daring adventures at sea, often occupying the role previously attributed to Jones or played by other unnamed sailors as documented in the

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<sup>77</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>78</sup> In *Israel Potter*, Franklin treats Israel as a rather daft student rather than a fellow American. In fact, Dr. Franklin takes advantage of Israel’s cultural ignorance to increase his own store of both brandy and French chambermaids – as well as the comic relief of the reader (55-61).

<sup>79</sup> “In a few moments, a swift coquettish step was heard, followed, as if in chase, by a sharp and manly one. The door opened. Israel was sitting so that, accidentally, his eye pierced the crevice made by the opening of the door, which, like a theatrical screen, stood for a moment between Doctor Franklin and the just entering visitor. And behind that screen, through the crack, Israel caught one momentary glimpse of a little bit of by-play between the pretty chambermaid and the stranger ... The next instant both disappeared from the range of the crevice; the girl departing whence she had come; the stranger—transiently invisible as he advanced behind the door—entering the room. When Israel now perceived him again, he seemed, while momentarily hidden, to have undergone a complete transformation (63).

biographies of the captain. Under the wing of Jones, Israel becomes more able and less pitiful than he is in earlier chapters. In the 1824 *Israel Potter*, although Israel always possessed the skills to outwit his pursuers, he ultimately ended up imprisoned by the British despite his mental quickness. In Melville's retelling, Jones's friendship alters Potter's reality, at least for the moment.

With Jones, Israel becomes emblematic of "Brother Jonathan" and Emerson's self-reliant ideal.<sup>80</sup> Once the "Jonathan" bumpkin overwhelmed by the unfamiliar, Potter now offers and acts upon creative solutions to complicated problems.<sup>81</sup> Formerly tripped up by the counterfeit of others, Potter now "falls on his feet" (Emerson 43) and keeps stride with the heroic actions of his laurelled compatriots. Significantly, the eventual departure of Jones from the novel reveals his importance to Israel. When separated from his ship and his captain, Israel's trickery no longer protects him from the enemy: his disguises become transparent again and he resigns himself to wandering in exile and, eventually, to a life of penury.

Jones's relationship with Israel, in contrast to the characterization of Israel alone, provides a more optimistic image of the common American as the self-reliant ideal. Jones's usefulness to the analysis of national mythology, however, extends beyond his connection to the novel's title character. Melville introduces Jones through a

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<sup>80</sup> The figure of Brother Jonathan in American iconography, introduced in Royall Tyler's *The Contrast*, serves as both a foil to the British John Bull and a precursor to Uncle Sam.

<sup>81</sup> When Jones's crew lacks the flame to burn Whitehaven, Israel procures a pipe from a compatriot, leaps ashore, and tricks a resident into lighting first his pipe and, subsequently, the town (116-17). Fires may have raged in Whitehaven, but Jones is given credit for the action – and the incident is less dramatic than Melville's version.



disparate collection of civilian and military attributes, even while exposing the “savage” burned into his person:

He was a rather small, elastic, swarthy man, with an aspect as of a disinherited Indian Chief in European clothes. An unvanquishable enthusiasm, intensified to perfect sobriety, couched in his savage, self-possessed eye. He was elegantly and somewhat extravagantly dressed as a civilian; he carried himself with a rustic, barbaric jauntiness, strangely dashed with a superinduced touch of the Parisian *salon*. His tawny cheek, like a date, spoke of the tropic. A wonderful atmosphere of proud friendlessness and scornful isolation invested him. Yet there was a bit of the poet as well as the outlaw in him, too. A cool solemnity of intrepidity sat on his lip. He looked like one who of purpose sought out harm's way. He looked like one who never had been, and never would be, a subordinate (63).

The captain enjoys European fashion, Parisian rings, and expensive watches, but Jones's apparel fails to disguise his “untamed” self. As silently exclaimed by Israel after cataloging Jones for the reader, “Though dressed à-la-mode, he did not seem to be altogether civilized” (63). The multiple personalities of Jones, as exhibited in the novel through clothing and ornamentation, mesh with the motley portrait of him created by the popular and scholarly press of the nineteenth century. Jones, often portrayed as the daring warrior, was also described as a rakish pirate, romantic corsair, and tireless matchmaker, as well as an unwavering patriot. As the designated emblem of America within the novel — the Paul Jones of nations — Jones's diverse wardrobe illuminates

the version of the United States that Melville wishes to offer up to his reader: “civilized in externals but a savage at heart” (136).

### III. “A Disinherited Indian Chief”

Biographers of Jones, from the nineteenth-century to the present, emphasize Jones’s familial and cultural inheritance as a way to explain the emotional swings and the resolute tenacity of the captain. Many early writers raised the question of Jones’s legitimacy, suggesting that he may have been of noble blood as the bastard child of his parents’ employer, William Craik, thus explaining his military savvy and gentlemanly poise. Others, Morison and Thomas included, argue that Jones quite legitimately inherited his defensiveness and suspicion of authority from his father, John Paul, Sr. (Thomas 13). Letters written by Jones himself praise the possibilities for class mobility formerly impossible for the son of a Scottish gardener, demonstrating Jones’s relief that in the burgeoning republic the cultural bounds of his childhood no longer restrained him.<sup>82</sup> John Paul, Jr., therefore, presents himself to the fledgling American Navy as *John Paul Jones* and, thus, avoids the limits of paternity.

While the aforementioned ancestry makes Jones a tempting subject for American authors, neither the “bootstraps” tale nor the “pauper as prince” story explains Melville’s description of Jones as “natively” American. Within the first three pages of

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<sup>82</sup> The British Navy did offer the opportunity for some class mobility, but letters of recommendation from appropriate sources were required for officers-in-training. Although Jones held rank in the Continental Navy, he was often passed over for assignments in favor of other more “connected” individuals.

the captain's entrance in the pages of *Israel Potter*, Melville describes Jones as "a disinherited Indian Chief" (63) and compares him both to an Iroquois and a Sioux (64-65). The following chapter, "Paul Jones in a Reverie," describes the insomniac pacing of Jones as "Indian meditations" (69) before proceeding with an account of the captain's irregular tattoos (69-70). While Melville's vacillation between two Native American nations — Jones as Iroquois first and as Sioux later — might pique the curiosity of a twenty-first century reader, references to Indian Nations encompassing areas both east and west of the Mississippi River would not have seemed out of place in the nineteenth-century, especially during the forced movement of indigenous nations across the country.<sup>83</sup>

The American Indian figure preoccupied the romantic plot lines of American fiction, as I cite in chapter one. By mid-century, however, literary representations of American Indians grew less sympathetic and ceased to encourage compassion from white readers. "Columbia," an Americanized version of "Britannia" and "Liberty," replaced the "Indian Princess" in national iconography just as enslaved Africans displaced American Indians as *le cause célèbre* of antebellum fiction. Although authors and artists had largely manipulated and thus misrepresented the American Indian figure in literature and art in the early nineteenth century, the ubiquity of the image kept Indian issues at the forefront of the nation's collective consciousness. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, while championed by the Jackson administration, must have relied on the

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<sup>83</sup> Referencing nations beyond the all-encompassing "Indian," at first glance, seemed politically motivated. While treaties with the Sioux and the Iroquois would have dominated the antebellum media, the reader — more than likely — took the references as geographically representative of Native Americans from the east coast to the western states.

support of a distracted public who now found little to read about Native Americans other than the violence and dissension advertised by incendiary headlines. By the time Melville published *Israel Potter*, the political issues of American Indians had virtually disappeared from the pages of antebellum fiction even while Native American resettlement and treaty issues remained ever-present in the 1850s.<sup>84,85</sup>

Creating a narrative portrait of a Native American, or in the case of *Israel Potter*, a figure with mannerisms specific to identifiable American Indian nations, Melville drew from both historical and contemporary sources. Known to Melville would have been the accounts of John Heckewelder and others, but nineteenth-century readers would have recognized the “Indian” qualities assigned to Jones from Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales. First editions of *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and *The Prairie* (1827) may not have not been illustrated, but Cooper’s technicolor descriptions of “thieving,” “knaveish,” and “devilish” Sioux and Iroquois would have left a lasting impression on its audience.<sup>86</sup> The exception to negatively portrayed Native Americans, of course, is Chingachgook, the “good” Indian of Cooper’s fiction. Chingachgook, by adopting Natty Bumppo, lends his birthright to the English scout and by doing so endorses a white/“native” American legitimacy. Cooper’s noble sachem laments the destruction of his nation, but his death figuratively ends the Mohican claim to upstate

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<sup>84</sup> See Flandrau, Charles. *The History of Minnesota*, 1900. *North American Indian Thought and Culture*. Alexander Street Press, 2007; Kappler, Charles. Ed. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, II*; Sturtevant, William C. *Handbook of North American Indians*, XV; Weierman, Karen Woods. *One Nation, One Blood*, 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Jean O’Brien’s *Firsting and Lasting* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) addresses the the creation “landed rights” of white Americans achieved through the fabrication of the “vanishing Indian” myth in the nineteenth century.

<sup>86</sup> Cooper, *The Prairie* (41, 252); *Last of the Mohicans* (48, 61)

New York. Yet, the American Indian of nineteenth-century fiction, even when described “nobly” as Chingachgook, would not have been emblematic of the United States.

Melville’s conflation of “Sioux,” “Iroquois,” and “Indian” with Jones and, by extension, the United States (“America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations”) promotes a curious and contentious national identity in mid-nineteenth century America.

Figured as “Indian” but unequivocally white, John Paul Jones, at least in the pages of Melville’s narrative, reads much like Natty Bumppo — the pathfinder and frontiersman extraordinaire. Both Melville’s Jones and Cooper’s Bumppo/Hawkeye prefer wild spaces to so-called civilization<sup>87</sup> and assume “Indian” attributes; however, the frontiersman is always white — and often seeks to displace Native peoples from the “wild” frontier. This displacement of — or contrast with — the ethnic or racial *other*, according to Toni Morrison, allows the white protagonist to project what we would call “American” qualities. In her words, the purpose of such racially-constructed binaries allows “...the American self [to] know itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (52).<sup>88</sup> Suggesting Jones as the emblem of America while aligning him with specific Indian Nations seems to run counter to the dominant mythology and the basis of national construction *à la* Morrison. Melville gestures to Jones as the American *par*

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<sup>87</sup> Although Jones enjoyed “the ladies of Portsmouth,” he longed for the sea and for battle (Thomas 92-93).

<sup>88</sup> Morrison writes specifically of the relationship of white America to what she calls the “Africanist presence.”

*excellence* by aligning his actions with specific Indian nations; he does not establish Jones as the representative American by *contrasting* Jones's "Americanness" to his "Indianness." As both "Indian" and white, Melville's Jones demonstrates a self truly at odds with himself — an appropriate embodiment of the United States in 1854.

Jones as the emblem of America as imagined through Melville's paradoxical layering ("à-la-mode [but not] altogether civilized...") criticizes American mythogenesis even as it creates a maritime frontiersman as its "Representative man," to use Emerson's term. Melville's engagement with national mythology in *Israel Potter* can be better understood by jumping forward to *The Confidence Man* and "The Metaphysics of Indian Hating" (124-131). Here, Melville's characters wax philosophically about Colonel John Moredock of Illinois, an avowed "Indian killer," thus motivated by the violent murder of his family. Melville's narrator outlines the colonel's violent mission by explaining his location-specific identity: "The backwoodsman is a lonely man. He is a thoughtful man. He is a man strong and unsophisticated. Impulsive, he is what some might call unprincipled ... If in straits, there are few to help; he must depend upon himself ... Hence, self-reliance, to the degree of standing by his own judgment, though it stand alone" (125). The backwoodsman, in "Indian Hating" and throughout Melville's oeuvre, may be "held in a sort a barbarian," yet — or perhaps because of this — "the backwoodsman would seem to America what Alexander was to Asia — captain in the vanguard of conquering civilization" (126).

Even as Melville urges his reader to see Jones as indigenous through his Sioux and Iroquois mannerisms, and as a frontiersman through his kinship to other pathfinders, the text continues to remind the reader of Jones's birthplace across the Atlantic. Jones's penchant for European clothing, his particular concern for his distinctive Scottish headgear, and his remarks about his birthplace complement Melville's ongoing references to Jones's as "barbaric" or as "a barbarian,"<sup>89</sup> a designation of one's foreignness as well as one's manners in the nineteenth century (*Webster's 1828*). Although the reader of *Israel Potter* may recognize Jones as a colonial immigrant, the reader hears no such foreignness in dialogue between Jones and other characters in the novel. Manipulation of phonetic sounds in nineteenth-century literature to create "authentic" accents rendered Dutchmen, Germans, Italians, Frenchmen, and African-Americans, among others, laughable, bumbling, and outside of the "American" characters of the novel. Accustomed to "hearing" foreign accents within the text to signify difference, Melville's reader may *see* Jones's difference, but hears nothing in his voice to suggest ethnic "otherness." The voice belies Jones's complicated identity in the novel. He may comport himself like a Native American, dress like a Frenchman, and bear the mark and bonnet of a Scotsman, but the Jones heard in Melville's novel speaks in the same unaffected accent as does Benjamin Franklin.

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<sup>89</sup> Jones's "scotch bonnet," in particular, draws the attention of the reader – not only by its mention in the text, but the attention paid to it in an early exchange with Israel aboard the *Ranger*: "What do you think of my Scotch bonnet? ... A Scotch bonnet ... ought to look well on a Scotchman. I'm such by birth. Is the gold band too much" (Melville 104)?

So, for his emblem of the young United States, Melville embraces a multi-ethnic, multi-faceted maritime rascal who sounds like an “American,” but comports himself as an Iroquois and a Sioux. Although Melville’s Jones fits with “the rogues, adventurers, and land boomers ... who killed and were killed until they had mastered the wilderness...” that Richard Slotkin (4) famously calls essential to the creation of an American mythology, the Jones of *Israel Potter* appears *as Indian* rather than as an “Indian-fighter” like other frontiersmen. Of course, Melville’s “essential American,” to use D.H. Lawrence’s term, figuratively displaces indigenous Americans even as he assumes so-called “Indian” characteristics. By comparing Jones’s manner to “...a look as of a parading Sioux demanding homage to his gewgaws” and determining the captain’s seated posture to be “like an Iroquois,” Melville prompts the reader to rely on stereotypical “stock” poses for Native Americans created by literature and then directs the reader to assign these characteristics to Paul Jones. The rhetorical turn co-opts indigeneity, albeit constructed from stereotype rather than fact, and confers national legitimacy to a Scot who piloted American vessels while dressed as the very English enemy he sought to destroy.

Jones may not be the frontiersman who, like Melville’s Mordock in *The Confidence Man*, maintains his hatred of Indians even as violence between whites and Native Americans decreases, but his purpose in *Israel Potter* depends on the ironies suggested by the appropriation of the frontiersman as an “Indian hater” within the 1857 novel. Mordock professes to be a Christian even as he makes the murder of Indians his life’s mission, prompting the cosmopolitan to ask, “If the man of hate, how could John



Moredock be also the man of love?” (136). Melville uses this discrepancy between ideology and practice to criticize “the failure of Christians to be Christian,” according to Elizabeth Foster and others (Parker 326), just as he identifies a similar paradox in American mythogenesis through *Israel Potter*.

Melville’s appropriation of the Indian motif perpetuated by Cooper nearly thirty years earlier may have been out-of-fashion in antebellum American literature, but its resurrection contributes to the ongoing discussion of American identity in the nineteenth-century.<sup>90</sup> Like Cooper, Melville “manipulates ... images to question the validity of defining ethnicity by the dichotomy of savagery and civilization” (Krauthammer xi). The construction of John Paul Jones in *Israel Potter*, based on a composite of chapbook sensationalism and biographical memory, defines the character of the American nation through his acknowledged foreignness, his assigned indigency, and his scrappy manner — all the while posturing in his European accoutrements.

#### **IV. “Another Adventurer”**

Charles Wilson Peale immortalized Jones on canvas after the captain returned from France in 1780. The portrait, at present held by Independence National Park in Philadelphia, decorates Jones with military awards and depicts him in the red-lapelled

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<sup>90</sup> I do not argue that Melville should be regarded as a champion of Indian rights; however, I do think it noteworthy that Melville compares specific Indian nations to his national emblem while other authors relegate American Indian figures and “types” to the margins of American interest.

blue jacket he chose as his unofficial uniform with the Navy. Peale's likeness of Jones, along with the bust sculpted by Houdon, serves as the Jones "standard" among other portraits of the late captain. Most biographical and biographically-based narratives of the captain comply with the images offered by Peale and Houdon, in accompanying illustration if not in print. While writers may paint Jones as a villainous tyrant and social miscreant, the frontispieces preceding these narratives fall in line with the nationally-embraced image of Jones as unflappable patriot. In fact, a feature article on Jones published in *Harper's* of July 1855 depicts the captain very much in the likeness created by Peale and supplies a narrative of similar praise.<sup>91</sup>

The narrative portrait offered by Melville first in 1854 and then again in 1855, however, paints a contrasting alternative to the Peale/Houdon-type representation of Jones. Melville creates his Jones from plentiful chapbook fodder and nationally endorsed images. What results is a motley collage, a "rag-picked" quilt of representations, not necessarily synchronous with each other. Melville introduces the seemingly disharmonious qualities of Captain Jones to the reader through the eye of Israel, who describes Paul Jones as undergoing a "complete transformation" between hallway and chamber. Adjectives describing Jones come at the reader in contradictory bursts. The captain may first be seen as "elastic," but quickly becomes "swarthy" and "savage" in the words to follow (63). The tangled descriptions of Jones speak to the complications inherent to his character, at least as remembered in the popular press. Melville designs his initial description of Jones to assail the reader with lightning

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<sup>91</sup> Lossing, B.J. "John Paul Jones." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 11.62 (July 1855): 145.

contradictions; unraveling the narrative skein allows us to assess the representation of Jones offered through *Israel Potter*.

### **A. An American Ideal**

Descriptions of “elastic,” “unvanquishable enthusiasm, intensified to perfect sobriety,” and “never been . . . never would be a subordinate” (63) fit with the nationally-endorsed images of Jones created by Peale and others. The Peale portrait, although less like Melville’s description of Jones than those offered by his contemporaries, does seem to fuse honor to tenacity in much the same way as Melville does in his narrative. Melville’s words also square with most narratives of the late captain, biographical or otherwise. Even in texts where Jones appears more nefarious than honorable in print, the accompanying illustrations mimic the Peale portrait or carry stock patriotic images from the Revolution to accompany Jones’s story.<sup>92</sup> For as biographers repeatedly point out to the reader, even though Jones may have sullied his reputation with unnecessary violence and unscrupulous behavior, the theater of war and the cause of American independence challenged the captain’s tendencies and saved him from a life otherwise filled with villainy and disrepute.

The heroic picture endorsed by Melville’s narrative carries with it other associations appropriate to the post-revolutionary spirit of nineteenth-century America. The “elastic” of Melville’s description echoes Franklin’s “can-do” spirit in *The Autobiography*, explains the continual success of the adaptable Hawkeye, and evokes

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<sup>92</sup> *Life and Adventures of Paul Jones*. (NY: William H. Graham, n.d.), for example, begins with a frontispiece depicting the death of Lafayette. Others include cannons, anchors, flags, and other such images.

Emerson's "New Hampshire lad" of "Self-Reliance." Jones, while more praised for his unwavering resolve in battle than for his pliant adaptability, demonstrates *elasticity* in the novel through his relationships with Potter and Franklin. The captain initially converses with Franklin in a "fiery rage" and accuses the American forces of "timidity" masquerading as "prudence" (Melville 64). Melville describes Jones as "a bitter stranger" (63), an "aggravated king of beasts" (64), and as a man of "volcanic spirit" (65). Jones spews hostility in the face of what he deems injustice, but it immediately dissipates when he recognizes the presence of Israel. After only a few exchanges, it is Israel who is "fired" by the "contagious spirit" of Jones, and Jones becomes patient and thoughtful with the "true blue" Americanism of Israel Potter. Jones changes again under his own "Indian meditations" and, in this, Israel's perceptive eye sights the "mysterious tattooings" under Jones's fashionable sleeve (Melville 69).<sup>93</sup> Jones's *elasticity* depends upon his audience rather than on the situation: he remains ever stalwart, but melds his edges accordingly.<sup>94</sup>

But Melville writes in the era of revolutionary nostalgia. Authors pay tribute to monumental figures from history, but just as prominent are the hitherto overlooked "homespun" heroes of the revolutionary era. Horace Bushnell praises the unnoticed men and women of the "homespun era" for their invisible service to country; Melville

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<sup>93</sup> For Melville, Jones echoes Queequeg of *Moby-Dick*, at least in appearance, as "jaunty barbarian in broadcloth; a sort of prophetic ghost, glimmering in anticipation upon the advent of those tragic scenes of the French Revolution which levelled the exquisite refinement of Paris with the bloodthirsty ferocity of Borneo; showing that broaches and finger-rings, not less than nose-rings and tattooing, are tokens of the primeval savageness which ever slumbers in human kind, civilized or uncivilized" (70).

<sup>94</sup> Biographers of Jones's suggest the captain's changeable temperament varied by situation rather than companion (Thomas 63).

memorializes Israel R. Potter, as well as his beggar's narrative, through *Israel Potter*; and biographers confess their notable subjects to be less deserving of tribute than are ordinary Americans. If the *elastic* quality in Jones speaks to the resilience of Franklin and the philosophy of Emerson, "rustic, barbaric jauntiness" offers the reader another image of an antebellum ideal not apparent in national portraiture but circulating as the American ideal. The term *rustic* suggests country coarseness in manners and attire throughout the novel, not necessarily a negative attribute in the 1850s, and reinforces the association with Brother Jonathan. The determination carried in the emblem of Jonathan comes through in Potter's original biography and in Melville's adaptation of it. But Melville's contradictions nonetheless work to construct the legitimacy of Jones as a national hero — "America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations" (Melville 136). The captain's clothing may have projected allegiance to European style; however, his carriage confessed humble origins and reflected his adopted Yankee resolve.

### **B. An officer and a gentleman**

Jones's character may embody the necessary underpinnings of the American ideal (elastic, enthusiastic, rustic, intrepid, never-subordinate), but he dresses in a costume shunned by American artists and authors. In Tyler's *The Contrast*, for instance, Charlotte's obedience to French fashion rather than to domestic interests illuminates the rent in her Republican virtue (*The Contrast*, 1787); Doolittle's engraving "Brother Jonathan administering a salutary cordial to John Bull" (1813) endorses the understated brown suit of Jonathan over the garish clothes and complexion of John Bull; and *Walden* insists that clothing be purchased and worn in accordance to its usefulness

rather than its style. Even Franklin disguises himself under the *nom de plume* of “Homespun” when publishing many of his political pieces and dresses in sensible habiliments— “nothing superfluous” within the pages of *Israel Potter*.<sup>95</sup> Coupled with the resurrection of homespun in the 1850s, it would seem that the lasting image of Jones in the novel would emphasize his humbler attributes rather than his interest in fashionable apparel. Yet, Melville repeatedly delineates Jones’s accoutrements rather than focusing on the humble origins shared by the Captain and Israel. Clothing, and Jones’s interest in it, becomes a noticeable topic of conversation within the novel. Upon their reunion aboard the *Ranger*, Potter and Jones almost immediately digress into discussions of clothing (102-5). Paul Jones even solicits Israel’s opinion of his hat — “What do you think of my Scotch bonnet?” (104) — overtly calling attention to Jones’s national origin, but also signaling the captain’s concern for his appearance and his alteration of the navel uniform. The sartorial packaging of Jones in *Israel Potter* indiscriminately merges Jones’s gentlemanly aspirations with his humble pedigree and scrappy behavior, and it begs the question of authorial intent. Namely, why did Melville clothe his self-professed national emblem — “the Paul Jones of nations” — in European fashion while repeatedly idealizing the homespun and “linsey-woolsey” of the heroes that fought?<sup>96</sup> Yes, Jones is to be the “crimson thread” to the “plain old homespun” of Potter (Melville 149), but how can foppery square with a nineteenth-century American ideal, even one as enduring as John Paul Jones?

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<sup>95</sup> My analysis of Franklin and Israel in Chapter 2 provides a more complete delineation of Franklin’s wardrobe.

<sup>96</sup> See Melville’s comparison of Israel Potter to Israel Putnam (14) and my earlier analysis in chapter 2.

For one, the insertion of Jones as the national ideal challenges the representation of American character established by Benjamin Franklin and reinforced by the accepted mythology of the late Doctor. Franklin, whom D.H. Lawrence would later identify as the “pattern American” as well as the “dummy American,” offers up a model of American identity that Lawrence attacks as both inadequate and misleading (20). Rather than the neat and tidy model for the “ideal [American] self” proposed by Franklin in *The Autobiography*, Lawrence presents the quintessential American as the “strange and fugitive self shut out and howling like a wolf or a coyote under the ideal windows ... the self who is coming into his own” (20). Melville’s endorsement of the swarthy, daring, and imperfect Jones as the national ideal — “America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations” — challenges the “barbed wire fence” encouraging “cultivation” designed and enforced by the model of Doctor Franklin that Lawrence argues against nearly seventy years later. Melville criticizes nineteenth-century national mythology through the “homespun” of Israel and the “linsey-woolsey” of Franklin, but punctuates the argument through the fashionable “savagery” of John Paul Jones.

Not only does the apparel worn by Jones in *Israel Potter* challenge the thoroughgoing representation of national character in the nineteenth century, it demonstrates the reach of historic source material into Melville’s fiction. Paul Jones, at least as constructed by Melville, may not openly lament his social position or aspire to a high status; however, his interest in clothing belies his desire for gentrification.<sup>97</sup> Paul Jones saw his naval commission as the means for social mobility and, through his

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<sup>97</sup> The only “promotion” sought by Jones in *Israel Potter* is to captain the *Indien* (Melville 63).

urging, transformed the community of officers (largely merchantmen and privateers) by encouraging an image of respect. Biographers credit Jones as the originator of the phrase “officer and a gentleman” (Thomas 310) as he repeatedly encouraged the fusion of military might and good manners in seaman.<sup>98</sup> Jones also emphasized the importance of writing as a desirable quality. He states, “. . . nor is any man fit to command a ship of war, who is not capable of communicating his ideas on paper in language that becomes his rank” (“John Paul Jones to Robert Morris”). Not one to dictate guidelines without following them, Jones used the pen to communicate his character to others. Thomas and others consider Jones’s writing superior to that of most men of his station, most likely a credit to his Scottish education (Thomas 21).

One of the most widely published letters from Paul Jones in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century is his letter to the Countess of Selkirk (see figure 3.8 below).

RANGER, BREST, 8th MAY, 1778

MADAM : - -

It cannot be too much lamented that in the profession of Arms, the Officer of fine feelings, and of real sensibility, should be under the necessity of winking at any action of Persons under his command, which his heart cannot approve : - - - but the reflection is doubly severe when he finds himself Obliged, in appearance, to countenance such Action by his Authority.

This hard case was mine when on the 23d of April last I landed on St. Mary's Isle. Knowing Lord Selkirk's interest with his King, esteeming as I do his private Character ; I wished to make him the happy Instrument of alleviating the horrors of hopeless captivity, when the brave are overpowered and made Prisoners of War.

It was perhaps fortunate for you Madam that he was from home; for it was my intention to have taken him on board the Ranger, and to have detained him till thro' his means, a general and fair exchange of Prisoners, as well in Europe as in America had been effected.

<sup>98</sup> According to Jones, the early navy should rise beyond the rough privateers of its ranks for “want of learning and rude ungentle manners are by no means characteristic of an officer” (“John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes”).



When I was informed by some men whom I met at landing, that his Lordship was absent; I walked back to the Boat determining to leave the Island: by the way, however, some Officers who were with me could not forbear expressing their discontent; observing that in America no delicacy was shown by the English; who took away all sorts of moveable Property, setting Fire not only to Towns and to Houses of the rich without distinction; but not even sparing the wretched hamlets and Milch Cows of the poor and helpless at the approach of an inclement Winter. That party had been with me, as Volunteers, the same morning at White Haven; some complaisance therefore was their due. I had but a moment to think how to gratify them, and at the same time do your Ladyship the least Injury. I charged the Two Officers to permit none of the Seamen to enter the House, or to hurt anything about it -- To treat you, Madam, with the utmost Respect to accept of the plate which was offered -- and to come away without making a search or demanding anything else.

I am induced to believe that I was punctually Obeyed; since I am informed that the plate which they brought away is far short of the Inventory which accompanied it. I have gratified my Men; and when the plate is sold, I shall become the Purchaser, and I will gratify me own feelings by restoring it to you, by such conveyance as you shall be pleased to direct.

Had the Earl been on board the Ranger the following Evening he would seen the awful Pomp and dreadful Carnage of a Sea Engagement both affording ample subject for the Pencil, as well as melancholy reflection for the contemplative mind. Humanity starts back from such scenes of horror, and cannot but execrate the Vile promoters of this detested War.

*For they, t'was they unsheath'd the ruthless blade,  
And Heav'n shall ask the Havock it has made.*

The British Ship of War, DRAKE, mounting 20 guns, with more than her full complement of Officers and Men, besides a number of volunteers, came out from Carrickfergus, in order to attack and take the American Continental Ship of War RANGER, of 18 guns and short of her complement of Officers and t1en. The Ships met, and the advantage was disputed with great fortitude on each side for an Hour and Five minutes, when the gallant Commander of the DRAKE fell, and Victory declared in favor of the RANGER, his amiable Lieutenant lay Mortally wounded. A melancholy demonstration of the uncertainty of human prospects, and of the sad reverse of fortune which an hour can produce. I buryed them in a spacious grave, with the Honors due to the memory of the brave.

Tho' I have drawn my Sword in the present generous Struggle for the rights of Men; yet I am not in Arms as an American, nor am I in pursuit of Riches. My Fortune is liberal enough, having no Wife nor Family, and having lived long enough to know that Riches cannot ensure Happiness. I profess myself a Citizen of the World, totally unfettered by the little mean distinctions of Climate or of Country, which diminish the benevolence of the hearts and set bounds to Philanthropy. Before this War began I had at an early time of life, withdrawn from the Sea service, in favor of 'calm contemplation

and Poetic ease.' I have sacrificed not only my favorite scheme of life, but the softer Affections of the Heart and my prospects of Domestic Happiness: -- And I am ready to sacrifice Life also with cheerfulness if that forfeiture could restore Peace and Goodwill among mankind.

As the feelings of your gentle Bosom cannot be congenial with mine let me entreat you Madam to use your soft persuasive Arts with your Husband to endeavour to stop this Cruel and destructive War, in which Britain can never succeed. Heaven can never countenance the barbarous and unmanly Practices of the Britons in America, which savages would Blush at; and which if not discontinued will be soon retaliated in Britain by a justly enraged People. -- Should you fail in this, (for I am persuaded you will attempt it; and who can resist the power of such an Advocate?) Your endeavours to effect a general exchange of Prisoners, will be an Act of Humanity, which will afford you Golden feelings on a Death bed. I hope this cruel contest will soon be closed ; but should it continue I wage no War with the Fair. I

acknowledge their Power, and bend before it with profound Submission; let not therefore the Amiable Countess of Selkirk regard me as an Enemy. I am ambitious of her esteem and Friendship, and would do anything consistent with my duty to merit it.

The honor of a Line from your hand in Answer to this will lay me under a very singular Obligation; and if I can render you any acceptable service in France or elsewhere, I hope you see into my character so far as to command me without the least gain of reserve.

I wish to know exactly the behavior of my People, as I determine to punish them if they have exceeded their Liberty.

I have the Honor to be with much Esteem and with profound Respect,

Madam,

Your most Obedient and most humble Servant

Jn. P. Jones

Figure 3.8

The letter, in which the captain explains the questionable actions of his crew and, subsequently, seeks the Countess's forgiveness, was reprinted in both England and America and "contributed to Jones's public image as a dashing and courteous captain" (Ennis 90). The Selkirk incident began with Jones's visit to the Selkirk home in the hope of kidnapping the Earl of Selkirk. After determining the Lord's absence,

Jones reluctantly agreed to pillage the Selkirk mansion, as documented by Jones's letter to Selkirk and Melville's gloss of the incident, citing the need to compensate his crew for their "general good conduct and bravery on former occasions" (Melville 125). When Jones's men secured the Selkirk plate, however, Jones vowed to purchase the heirloom and restore it to the family when possible. All evidence suggests that the captain made good on his promise.

In Melville's fictional adaptation of the Selkirk letter, he maintains Jones's chivalric intention in his fictional adaptation of the letter but takes a number of liberties with its content. The Selkirk letter that materializes in *Israel Potter* pokes fun at Jones by over-emphasizing his efforts toward gentility. Consider the letter's closing, as constructed by Melville: "But unconquerable as Mars should I be, could but dare to dream, that in some green retreat of her charming domain, the Countess of Selkirk offers up a charitable prayer for, my dear lady countess, one, who coming to take a captive, himself has been captivated. 'Your ladyship's adoring enemy, JOHN PAUL JONES'" (125). Melville's saccharine creation makes Jones almost adolescent in his literary love-making, especially when considering the closing of the fiction against the original:

Let not, therefore, the amiable Countess of Selkirk regard me as an enemy. I am ambitious of her esteem and friendship and would do any thing consistent with my duty to merit it ... I wish to know exactly the behaviour of my people as I am determined to punish them if they have exceeded their liberty. I have the

honour to be with much esteem and with profound respect Madam &c &c JOHN  
PAUL JONES (Morison 185).

Melville opts to rewrite his Jones as a lovelorn gentleman interested in romantic remembrances rather than as an able captain interested in both the demeanor of his crew and the reach of his service to the Countess and her husband. Where the fictional example speaks to the interest of the individual, the actual letter written by Jones conveys the interest of the nation and its desire to maintain a positive reputation with its potential allies.

The presence of the fictional “reprint” in place of the original document demonstrates Melville’s irreverence for storied monuments to the past and the men for whom they were built. Melville confesses his intent to “retouch” a “dilapidated old tombstone” through his fictional resurrection of Potter’s biography; yet, his project encourages reverence toward the “Bunker Hill private” and his “faithful service” (1) rather than re-remembrance of those already memorialized. Squaring history to fiction, at least in this case, draws attention to such overlooked contributors to the Revolution as Potter while exposing the flaws of sacrosanct legends from the past. *Israel Potter*, however, refuses to be a serious book. Everything Melville says can be read sardonically: he may “rescue” Israel Potter’s story, but he does not offer Potter as a ruddy specimen of American self-reliance nor does he champion his cause. Melville’s alteration of Jones’s letter to the Countess reveals his irreverence for both revolutionary

icons and the historic record. He rewrites Jones's letter because he *can* — and doing so prioritizes the interpretation of the present over the record of the past.

In *Israel Potter*, the flirtatious letter to Lady Selkirk complements the fickle image of the captain as constructed by Melville rather than the stalwart picture fixed in national memory. Melville manipulates the memory of Jones in *Israel Potter* by raiding and rearranging the captain's closet; we recognize the discrepancy between the expectation of Jones and the arrival of Jones because Israel fixates on it with his first "read" of the captain. Jones enters Franklin's chamber "extravagantly dressed as a civilian ... dashed with a touch of the Parisian *salon* ... à-la-mode [but not] altogether civilized (Melville 63); wears a coat ornamented in lace and ruffles (70) and ornaments his finger with "several Parisian rings" (70) in contrast to the "neat, trim, nothing superfluous, nothing deficient" style of Doctor Franklin (51). Yet, literary and sartorial styling — the ruffs and rings — do little to cover the "thoroughbred savage" within Jones (69). Finally, although Jones avidly supported the literary arts in life, Melville's captain fails to recognize *Poor Richard's Almanac* — one of the mostly widely published and read pieces in eighteenth-century America — as Franklin's creation while reading it in *Israel Potter* (68).<sup>99</sup>

Melville's version of the Selkirk letter portrays Jones as an unrequited lover; the associations between Jones and women in the novel, however, provide a more salacious image of the captain. Although Franklin quickly spins Jones's impolite behavior toward the French chambermaid as "an energetic compliment" (62), Jones's biographers offer a

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<sup>99</sup> Jones's ignorance of the Poor Richard/Franklin association is brief, for he eventually renames his ship *Le Bon Homme Richard*.

less-than positive remembrance of the captain's romantic interludes. Indictments of "libertine" and "rapist" fill the pages of nineteenth-century books, most of which were intended for young men. Jones, at best, seduced and impregnated women and then set them up with reputable, wealthy boyfriends who would mistake the child as their own and marry the woman; at worst, the captain violently raped, or attempted to rape women on numerous occasions (*Interesting Life, Travels, and Voyages ...* 1817). Fanning describes Jones as "a great lover of the ladies" and recounts his diverting and retaining a businessman on board his ship so that Jones could "entertain" his wife uninterrupted" (109). Jones also was known to "carry" off women and return them with compensation to "console" the cuckolded husband for his wife's absence (100). Modern-day biographers may skirt the soap opera-quality of Jones's affairs, explaining Jones's exploits as the recourse of a lonely man committed to the Revolution (Thomas 232), but they indicate his resistance to a single, committed relationship (85).

Certainly the captain's behavior was not wholly out-of-character for seafaring men; however, the biographical descriptions of Jones and the hints dropped by Melville bring the captain more in line with the privateers and merchantmen he encouraged the navy to rise above. The "Jones" chronicled by nineteenth-century biography and fiction locates him with the sea captains of popular balladry. In "The Sea Captain, or Tit for Tat" for example, a licentious captain distracts one of his sailors so that he can bed his lovely wife. Although the song draws its humor from the sailor's revenge with the captain's spouse, controlling subordinates to satisfy one's sexual appetite reads very much like the Jones portrayed in nineteenth-century chapbooks. Melville's revision of

Jones's Selkirk letter, his attention to fashionable dress, and his interest in the ladies encourage a reading of Jones as rascalion. According to Melville, "All barbarians are rakes" (70).

This raw portrait of Jones, however, becomes an ideal rather than an embarrassment for Melville's America. Melville praises rather than maligns Jones for his transparency and his inability to disguise himself. In *Israel Potter* Jones can no sooner hide his "savage" tattoos than camouflage the absence of rings from his hand. Melville co-opts Jones's interest in self-invention by reinventing Jones through his own guise of fiction and further criticizes American nationalism at midcentury. According to *Israel Potter*, Jones can never transcend his identity with the accoutrements of gentility, but in spite of this — or rather, because of this — Jones becomes the icon of America. Rather than reject the indecorous story of Jones, Melville embraces the captain, complete with his shortcomings, as the future of America, which, like Jones, must admit the failings of its character despite the putative infallibility advertised in national mythology. America may fashion itself out of the Yankee ideal popularized by Franklin and identify itself as the pathfinder characterized by Natty Bumppo; from Melville's more jaundiced perspective, however, such posturing at midcentury is a ruse — an ornate disguise. Melville's national vision for 1854 beats Lawrence to the theoretical "punch" Lawrence delivers to the twentieth century: "You have got to pull the democratic and idealistic clothes off American utterance, and see what you can of the dusty body of IT [the American whole soul] underneath" (19).

America in *Israel Potter* is no different from the gardener's son who surreptitiously finds himself leading a navy. Jones bellows, "Why was I not made a czar?" "Probably a nor-easter," replies Franklin (Melville 65). The doctor's sardonic explanation for Jones's present situation applies to the United States as well. Rather than American Exceptionalism and the "city upon the hill" motif begun aboard the *Arbella*, Melville emphasizes the reliance upon chance for the success of the United States, and he refashions the accepted standard of the "pattern American" through his endorsement of the "unprincipled" and "reckless" John Paul Jones.

Melville's analysis of individual prejudices and cultural expectation, while addressed by way of the perceptions of Jones and Israel (17), is a mere footnote compared to his narrative of Delano's blindness in "Benito Cereno." The line between legitimate and illegitimate, and the influence of print culture in its determination, run through the narrative of *Israel Potter*. Based on an autobiographical narrative that may or may not be true,<sup>100</sup> populated with familiar heroes, and delivering the "lightness" promised by Melville rather than the pathos of Potter's original (Post-Lauria 121), *Israel Potter* picks from the rag-pile what most nineteenth-century biographers relegate as pulp. By forming his Jones as a composite of many renderings, both flattering and otherwise, Melville attempts to jar American consciousness from the monument of its memory and offer an image worthy of a mature nation. An infant America may have believed in infallible heroes and dismissed the crimes of its past and present through a nostalgia for its "homespun," simpler times. Melville's "reprint" of the Potter story and

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<sup>100</sup> See David Chacko and Alexander Kulcsar. "Israel Potter: Genesis of a Legend." *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*. 41.3 (July 1984): 365-389.



his reshaping of Jones along multi-national lines encourages the United States to act its age and accept *his* Jones as an honest emblem for America. In 1854, the United States must be led to recognize the concert of pirate and patriot in its history; Melville attempts this against the grain of his contemporaries and garners support only among cheap editions of unsolicited biography.

Paul Jones duped the British by disguising his identity in enemy colors.

Melville's counterfeit deceives the "skimmer of pages" who, in trusting the authenticity of the historical reprint, believes the character of Jones created in *Israel Potter* to be a "true blue" copy of the man lionized by American memory. It is not. The alternate "crimson thread" spun by Melville challenges the portrait of Captain Jones and, by extension, American identity reflected at midcentury. If "America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations," and Paul Jones projects a schizophrenic appearance in the very text that emblemizes him, then the popular image of the American patriot and the unsullied virtue of the United States must be called into question. Melville's challenge to popular memory probably went unnoticed by the early readers of *Israel Potter* who, even when being complimentary, saw little in the text beyond a pleasurable diversion. Yet Melville's single book-length offering of historical fiction, dedicated "TO HIS HIGHNESS THE Bunker-Hill Monument" topples gilded monuments to the past and American nostalgia with his collage of the pirate-patriot-indigenous-foppish John Paul Jones. In lieu of monuments Melville leaves a democratic marker more fitting to the ideology and cultural fabric of the United States at mid-century; a marker which

prophetically foreshadows a civil war that would tear the fabric of the nation to shreds.

Homespun may have fueled the Revolution, but the nation inherited by its descendants must also claim the “crimson thread” in order honestly to weave the veritable motley of the nascent United States.

## Chapter 4:

Redressing the Past: Clothing and Representation in *The House of the Seven Gables***I: Introduction**

I am not sure what I expected from the House of the Seven Gables when I toured it with my family in July 2010. After winding through the steep sidewalks of Salem to the infamous house and being led into an ultra-modern Visitors' Center, the dark waiting room within the seventeenth-century mansion felt much more in line with the dusty shadows of Hawthorne's novel than anything we had experienced in the seaside town thus far. The tour, once it began, led us through narrow passages in order to take stock of the art and architecture of colonial America as well as to imagine the décor of the house when Nathaniel Hawthorne visited his cousin Susanna Ingersoll here in the nineteenth century. Our tour guide rattled off details pertaining to the paintings, china, and weaponry displayed throughout the mansion but provided only a sketchy connection between the stuff of the house and its relationship to Hawthorne's novel.<sup>101</sup>

My boys, aged four and eight, seemed a bit surprised that the story I told them in the waiting room found little purchase in the tour narrative. Quite frankly, so did I.



Figure 4.1: The author and her son in front of the House of Seven Gables, Salem, Massachusetts (July 2010)

<sup>101</sup> See Tami Christopher's "The House of the Seven Gables: A House Museum's Adaptation to Changing Societal Expectations since 1910" for the many alterations to the tour script. (in *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America's Changing Communities*. Ed. Amy K. Levin. New York: Altamira Press, 2007: 63-76).

Where was the haunting picture of Colonel Pyncheon? Where might the cent-shop have been? Where did Hepzibah roast the mackerel and where was the room that would be transformed by the arrival of young Phoebe? Hawthorne, like the curators of the Derby Street Seven Gables, fills the pages of his novel with material from the past, yet unlike the Salem museum, every artifact of Hawthorne's Romance *connects* colonial history to the antebellum United States rather than provides specimens of a distant, largely decorative past. The museum of Seven Gables, unlike Hawthorne's "Romance," while serving up cultural edification, fails to consider the relationship between the inheritors of the Revolution and their colonial past and does little to resurrect the fictional inheritors of the many-gabled house on Pyncheon street. But the relationship of the inheritors of the Revolution to their colonial past is a central concern of Hawthorne's tale about that house and its curious assemblage of inhabitants.

In his authorial comments on *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), of course, Hawthorne never claims to have invented anything more than a made-up story written about a fictional family and the fantastic curses that haunt their present existence in the 1850s. The Seven Gables house on Derby Street does not (and should not) have anything to do with the 1851 Romance. Hawthorne writes in his preface that "the personages of the tale — though they give themselves out to be of ancient stability and considerable prominence — are really of the author's own making, or ... of his own mixing" (iv). Defining the narrative as a "Romance" rather than a "Novel," he ostensibly relieves himself of any responsibility to historical "truth" by asserting that *The House of the Seven Gables* has "a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead

than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex” (ix).<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless, while *Seven Gables* dwells in possibility rather than fact, its relationship to a “real” place in Salem, Massachusetts encourages the reader to “assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of this narrative” even as Hawthorne calls such an assignment the reader’s choice rather than Hawthorne’s authorial purpose (viii). There may be an essential “historical connection” in the novel, he admits, but like the films of today, his preface slyly argues that “All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.”<sup>103</sup>

*The House of the Seven Gables*, despite its claims of fiction shrouded in the guise of truth, insists that its reader consider the relationship between the colonial past and the post-Revolutionary present or, as Hawthorne writes, “to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us” (viii). Like the faded “A” found in the attic of the Salem Custom House, the “stuff” of the nearby Seven Gables generates a narrative of New England history, but this time, rather than spiring the reader away from 1850 back to 1649 in order to spin a tale of the colonial past in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne’s 1851 Romance roots itself in the present as it *resurrects* rather than

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<sup>102</sup> Hawthorne’s preface to *Seven Gables* may be the most famous preface in American literary criticism, for it sets forth a distinction that has seemed to generations of commentators to define the crucial difference between the American and British traditions.

<sup>103</sup> Hawthorne’s protestations to the contrary did little to save his Romance from historical scrutiny. Some readers of the novel saw much they recognized in the characterization of Judge Pyncheon and demanded that Hawthorne erase the libelous stain created out of his unfortunate appropriation of a historic name (Madsen 510). Further, the fictional characters marked by historical names wore historically-appropriate clothing and engaged in culturally-specific activities and occupations. Hawthorne fashions Holgrave’s modernity out of a suit bought at Oak Hall and employs him as an itinerant daguerreotypist and sometimes-author of popular fiction. Indeed, my own pilgrimage to 115 Derby Street — and that of the thousands of readers who visit each year — suggests that Hawthorne’s claim of fiction does little to separate the “real” from the pretend in the pages of the historical Romance.

*reprints* stories of British North America. Even as the house itself succumbs to time and inevitable decay, *Seven Gables* suggests that absolutely nothing has changed within the life of the Maule/Pyncheon homestead. The colonial artifacts housed within *Seven Gables* and the transformative textiles outfitting the characters show that the past “is never dead. It's not even past,” as Faulkner would later write.<sup>104</sup> New generations may replace those that have gone before, but the inheritors of *Seven Gables* never evolve from their historical forebears into modern men and women.<sup>105</sup> In Hawthorne’s ironic narrative, revolution generates nothing new. As in “Rip Van Winkle,” the present looks a lot like the past; but here, unlike Irving’s narrative, the present doesn’t *resemble* the past; it appears to channel the past through the bodies of Maules and Pyncheons alike.

Hawthorne fuses “bygone time” with the “present” by manipulating his environment — “mellow[ing] the lights and deepen[ing] and enrich[ing] the shadows of the picture” — as well as by indulging in liberties afforded him by his own definition of the Romance but not to the writer of “the Novel” — a resolutely realistic genre. According to Hawthorne “[The Novel] 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 Romance] — 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” (vii). The “latitude” taken by the Romancer, by his own

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<sup>104</sup> William Faulkner. *Requiem for a Nun*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.

<sup>105</sup> As I will later argue, Phoebe matures from “country girl” to a woman of feeling; however, while Phoebe *inhabits* the house, she is not poised to *inherit* anything.

admission, surfaces in his “fashion[ing] of the “material” with the text. While both “fashion” and “material” denote narrative style and literary substance, I argue that *Seven Gables* stretches the diction to include a sartorial usage as well.<sup>106</sup> By employing nineteenth-century fashion and textile materials to convey meaning in his Romance, Hawthorne not only uses terms to indicate the text’s style and substance, but he also savvily manipulates apparel and fashion, what Gayle Fischer calls the often “uncontrollable medium” (5-6), in order to *produce* the past through the bodies of the present. As a result, Hawthorne’s Romance produces a knotty literary patchwork available only to those who are willing to seek out his “subtile process” rather than submit to an “ostensible one” (viii). Like his friend Melville, Hawthorne dupes the reader with the “humble weave” of his prose (viii), but rewards those enticed into committing themselves to more than a “skimming” of his pages.

References to clothing and textiles inundate the reader through the pages of Hawthorne’s fiction. In fact, in *Seven Gables* “clothing, metaphors based on the wearing of clothing, and a few emblematic decorations ... are used a total of 429 times [in the text], [or] an average of 1.35 times per page in the 319 pages of the Centenary edition” (Caldwell 36). The number seems even larger when the clothing references are distributed among the relatively small cast of six principal characters in *Seven Gables* (36). All characters — save Phoebe and Hepzibah— present themselves through their physical appearance before they acquaint readers with the content of their characters.

Holgrave materializes through both form and fashion as “a slender young man, not

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<sup>106</sup> See *Webster’s 1828 Revised Unabridged Dictionary* for definitions of “material” and “fashion” circulating in 1851.

more than one or two and twenty years old, with rather a grave and thoughtful expression for his years, but likewise a springy alacrity and vigor” (Hawthorne 35). His dress, even as the “simplest kind,” marked him as a gentleman as it was “white” and “nicely kept” (35). Here, physical qualities do more than give description to the reader; they make “themselves felt almost immediately in his character” (35). We may learn of Holgrave’s philosophy through his conversations with others, but before he utters a word the bent of his character materializes through the cut of his coat. Clifford reveals himself to Phoebe through the “old-fashioned dressing gown of faded damask” seen earlier in the Malbone miniature (87); Hepzibah continually reminds the reader of her decrepitude and, by comparison, the ruin of the house through the wearing of “rusty silks” (40);<sup>107, 108</sup> and the Judge never enters the text without the apparel and accessories representative of his character. Like epithets in Greek epics based on description, clothes for the inhabitants of the Pyncheon mansion announce each character’s presence to the reader and remind us of each character’s role before any dialogue has taken place.

My analysis of *Seven Gables* hinges on two characterizations of Judge Pyncheon made by young Phoebe in the early going of the narrative. Through the eyes of this youngest of the Pyncheons, Jaffrey Pyncheon’s features become both a “prophecy”

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<sup>107</sup> The first sentence of the Romance advertises the Pyncheon mansion as “a rusty wooden house, with seven acutely peaked gables, facing towards various points of the compass...” (1).

<sup>108</sup> Hepzibah suffers “rustiness” in all her attributes: we see her “rigid and rusty frame” (29), and as a “gaunt, sallow, rusty-jointed maiden” (33) throughout the text.



rooted in the “settled temper of his life” as inherited from the “bearded ancestor,” and the form even now possessed by “the original Puritan” (Hawthorne 100).

Then, all at once, it struck Phoebe that this very Judge Pyncheon was the original of the miniature which the daguerreotypist had shown her in the garden, and that the hard, stern, relentless look, now on his face, was the same that the sun had so inflexibly persisted in bringing out. Was it, therefore, no momentary mood, but, however skillfully concealed, the settled temper of his life? And not merely so, but was it hereditary in him, and transmitted down, as a precious heirloom, from that bearded ancestor, in whose picture both the expression, and, to a singular degree, the features, of the modern judge were shown as by a kind of prophecy? A deeper philosopher than Phoebe might have found something very terrible in this idea. It implied that the weaknesses and defects, the bad passions, the mean tendencies, and the moral diseases, which lead to crime, are handed down from one generation to another, by a far surer process of transmission than human law has been able to establish, in respect to the riches and honors which it seeks to entail upon posterity (100).

The fantasy would not quit her, that the original Puritan, of whom she had heard so many sombre traditions, -- the progenitor of the whole race of New England Pyncheons, the founder of the House of the Seven Gables, and who had died so strangely in it, -- had now stepped into the shop. In these days of off-hand equipment, the matter was easily enough arranged. On his arrival from the other

world, he had merely found it necessary to spend a quarter of an hour at a barber's, who had trimmed down the Puritan's full beard into a pair of grizzled whiskers; then, patronizing a ready-made clothing establishment, he had exchanged his velvet doublet and sable cloak, with the richly-worked band under his chin, for a white collar and cravat, coat, vest, and pantaloons; and lastly, putting aside his steel-hilted broadsword to take up a gold-headed cane, the Colonel Pyncheon, of two centuries ago, steps forward as the judge, of the passing moment (101).

Within the space of two pages, Hawthorne offers the judge as proof of historical continuity regardless of time (100) and evidence of historical *presence* and its ability to dissolve space and time (101). Hawthorne admits that any ideas of ancestral transmutation are that of the narrator's — or a “deeper philosopher” (100) — and immediately refutes any possibility of spectral presence for both Phoebe and the reader by reminding us that “of course, Phoebe was far too sensible a girl to entertain this idea in any other way than as matter for a smile” (102) and goes on to delineate the physical differences between the Judge and the Colonel. Yet, the presence of the Colonel within the form of the Judge, however un-sensible, had seemed real enough to the pragmatic Phoebe — and “easily arranged” through the changing of clothes.

While scholars have occasionally asserted the significance of clothing in the development of Jaffrey Pyncheon and Holgrave Maule, the sartorial characterizations of Hawthorne's other principals receive little attention. Caldwell writes that “Hawthorne

partially succeeds in transcending the emblematic with Colonel Pyncheon's 'ruff' and Holgrave's 'mantle,' but not with the rest of the clothing imagery [in the Romance]" (41), and asserts that Phoebe's clothing "is a minor concern to Hawthorne" (40). Caldwell's study catalogs costume pieces and links them to the emblematic tradition. Rather than collecting textiles and considering their emblematic properties as in Caldwell's work, however, I consider the function of the characters' clothing within Hawthorne's plan to "connect the bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us" (vii).

Through explicit and implicit references to clothing, Hawthorne eliminates any temporal boundaries between past and present in antebellum America by manifesting the former inhabitants of Seven Gables within the bodies of its current residents. In the Romance, the house may appear to occupy center stage, but it is clothing that bridges the temporal gulf between colonial North America and the antebellum United States by erasing the space between past and present. Rather than "resurrecting" the characters through the forms of their offspring, which implies a break in continuity through the transformation from death to life, or "reproducing" the Puritan original, which suggests a physical separation between original and copy, Hawthorne's narrative demonstrates what Stuart Burrows calls a *continuance* between past and present; or rather, a fluid continuance between that which *was* and that which *is*. To create this fluidity, Hawthorne joins historical materials with mediums of re-production from both the scientific and spiritual worlds: the practice of daguerreotypy and the Eucharistic ritual of transubstantiation.

## II: A Crowded House

*The House of the Seven Gables*, begun in 1851 about six months after the publication of the now canonical *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), demonstrates Hawthorne's persistent preoccupation with the reach of colonial crimes into the nineteenth century.

The novel begins in the age of locomotion and mechanical reproduction, but it uses details from the past both to establish and explain the conflicts of its characters.

Haunted by an ancient curse, the inhabitants of Seven Gables seem determined not by their own actions, but by the sins of their fathers. Hepzibah Pyncheon, the aged spinster and unfortunate inheritor of the decaying mansion, "rusts" as she draws on a nearly-spent inheritance; Clifford Pyncheon emerges from a false imprisonment a free man, but he seems a delicate child trapped in an aging man's frame; and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, the only socially successful member of the family, must mask his secret guilt under a smile of benevolence and the accouterments of wealth. American elasticity comes in the form of Holgrave, the young daguerreotypist, but he too is damaged by the history of the old "wizard" Maule, the very leveler of the curse against the Pyncheons and the original owner of the land now owned by the Pyncheons.

Despite all impediments, however, the Romance ends well. Jaffrey Pyncheon dies, the family inheritance is discovered, Clifford's innocence is revealed, and the surviving Pyncheons and Maules retire to the country seat left them by the deceased judge. Young Phoebe Pyncheon, uninformed of any substantial knowledge of her family history, psychologically frees her relatives from the weight of history with her sunny

optimism, disregard for the past, and “can-do” spirit — and ushers in an era of hope through her marriage to Holgrave Maule. Hawthorne’s text rewards those who suffer unjustly, punishes those who act selfishly, but ends without clearly settling on the relative importance of the past in the dawning of a new age.

*The House of the Seven Gables*, as both a literary text and physical structure, clutters its rooms with material and metaphor. Every person, every object, and every setting seems representative of something else. My students often meet the descriptive tangle with varying degrees of enthusiasm. While one student heralded the Romance as “English Major Land” for its abundant fodder ripe for analysis, others were exhausted by its sheer volume of representation, saying, “Enough! We get it already!”<sup>109</sup> Both camps have a point — the book heaps image upon image, meaning upon meaning: Hepzibah’s refusal to accept the democratic stratification of the nineteenth century manifests in her near-sightedness; portraits document the inescapability of one’s heritage; the new science of daguerreotypy flirts with the cultural implications of representation; and a family of ancient chickens models the Pyncheon family in their “rustiness” and destructive inbreeding.

The many references to textiles and apparel in the Romance help Hawthorne layer the historical past upon the present. Decorative textiles, specifically the “faded and moth-eaten” crimson curtain (93), insulate the fragile present — specifically, the jangled nerves of Clifford — from the gaze of the indomitable past. Or, at least that’s what Clifford believes they can do. Although Phoebe is never identified through a

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<sup>109</sup> Comments attributed to Anastasia Kornilova and other individuals from the University of Minnesota enrolled in EngL 3221: The American Novel to 1900 (Spring 2010).

particular costume, rusty silks, worn damask, new tow-cloth,<sup>110</sup> motley patchwork, fine broadcloth, decorative ruffs, and green woolen breeches denote the rest of the Romance's characters and signal their indebtedness to either the past or the present. In other words, clothing becomes a marker through which the reader can quickly ascertain the role each character will play as the Romance channels a pre-Revolutionary past into the new nation of the mid-nineteenth century. Hepzibah's rusty silks remind us of the slow ruin of the ancestral wealth of the Pyncheons as well as the reputation of their family. Holgrave's tow-cloth suit and checked pantaloons identify him as one unencumbered by the past and unlimited by occupation, unlike his ancestor Matthew Maule, who is distinguished even in death by his "leather jerkin ... breeches ... [and] his carpentry rule" (238). Minor characters carry clothing "cues" as well, such as the "square and sturdy little urchin" (40) who devours Hepzibah's gingerbread and the "ancient woman in a white short gown and a green petticoat" who brings in yarn to barter (65).<sup>111</sup>

Although physical descriptors create a believable backdrop for the text, In *Seven Gables* Hawthorne's textiles reach beyond the creation of reality. The now famous definition of the Romance delineated by Hawthorne in his preface predisposes the

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<sup>110</sup> A coarser and less-expensive make of linen. During the Revolution, tow-cloth was one form of *homespun* outfitting the Continental Army. See Erna Risch. "Clothing the Troops." *Supplying Washington's Army*. Washington DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1981. Web.

<sup>111</sup> *The House of the Seven Gables* is not Hawthorne's only foray into metaphoric textiles. Parson Hooper dons a black veil to give a physical presence to his sin, but alienates his audience as a result in "The Minister's Black Veil"; Faith's pink ribbons seal the despair and faithlessness of Young Goodman Brown when he happens upon them fortuitously in the forest; Wakefield's motley allows him to disappear from familiar society; Edith and Edgar embody the purity suggested by their garments in "The May-Pole of Merry Mount," and in *The Scarlet Letter*, Pearl's finery and Hester's scarlet "A" challenge the interpretation of sin in colonial North America.

reader to read the text outside of normal, physical bounds. While *Seven Gables* takes place in a real location, surrounded by actual things, and populated by historical families of colonial and nineteenth-century New England, we are told to discount any connection between the book and the community in which it is set. If the book is to be read as a Romance, and a “Romance,” by his definition, “mingl[es] the marvelous” rather than conveys the “probable and ordinary course of man’s experience” (vii), then we must reconsider the traditional role of costuming in the text. Hawthorne quite characteristically tempts his reader to disregard any revelation of the real through the imaginary; I argue, however, that the reader can gauge the author’s purpose by reading tangible objects beyond their physical presence; or, rather, by reading beyond the appearance of clothing and textiles and into their cultural relevance and mode of production. Seeing the act of creation in the mode of dress reveals the “clouds” Hawthorne wishes to build rather than the physical and temporal structures of Salem, Massachusetts.

*The House of the Seven Gables*, despite its coy refusal to be read as a historical text, rounds out my project in both its profusion of references to clothing and its interest in representation. This study investigates the presence created by fiction — in other words, the way in which the fiction of the nineteenth century transports the past into the present, but supplants its meaning with the perception of the author at the time of telling. *Seven Gables*, in both its refusal to claim a specific historic text and its preoccupation with walking portraits and changeable daguerreotypes, instructs the

reader in the art of reading history rather than in the changeability of historical content across time.<sup>112</sup>

### III. “The Revolution will not be Historicized”<sup>113</sup>

#### A. Breathing Monuments

In his Bunker Hill Oration (1825) Daniel Webster explained the significance of the newly erected structure at Charlestown to the inheritors of the Revolution forty years after the battle. While the monument “may contribute ... to produce, in all minds, a pious feeling of dependence and gratitude” (par. 5), he said, he also reminded the assembled crowd that they are “among the sepulchers of our fathers” (par. 2) and that “monuments and eulogy belong to the dead” (par. 17). Fiction writers in the nineteenth century, however, interpreted the past for use in the present rather than erecting static shrines to the past, and they initiated a “cultural dialogue on how history should be ... written” (Mizruchi 11). The American novel, in its mission to reconstruct the past through the eyes of the present, offers “portraits” of history that provoke reader engagement and thus encourage a particular relationship between the historical and the *now* (13).

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<sup>112</sup> Excusing himself by way of his preface from historical accuracy, Hawthorne never cites a specific historical source for his narrative. In fact, he discourages his reader from seeking any similarities to “real” people and places, arguing that his book has “a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex” (ix). However, the curse leveled by Maule upon Pyncheon — “God will give him blood to drink” — echoes the statement made by Sarah Good upon her execution in 1692. Incidentally, her judge met with a fate similar to Colonel Pyncheon’s: Noyes died of an internal hemorrhage, “bleeding profusely at the mouth” (Linder).

<sup>113</sup> Taken from Chris Castiglia. “Secret Histories? Early American Dispositions as Alternatives to Historiography,” *Society of Early Americanists’ Seventh Biennial Conference*, 3-5 March 2011, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



A survey of antebellum literature reveals the pervasiveness of history — documented or otherwise<sup>114</sup> — in the conflicts, settings, and social associations of its characters. Henry James, writing the first biography of Hawthorne, asserts that the need to look backward while progressing forward is a distinctly American trait. “It is only an imaginative American who would feel urged to keep reverting to this [coming back to his ancestors] circumstance, to keep analyzing and cunningly considering it” (14). Incorporating history as the subject of fiction creates an “always-already-read” quality for the reader, to use Jameson’s term (9). In this sense of “already-read,” readers meet the text familiar with its content — the plot (or parts of it) already happened, after all — and as a result feel an uncanny recognition toward something they have never read. This all gets tricky in fiction, of course: the liberties taken with history and historical subjects often form an alternative account that sometimes gets mistaken for the “truth.”<sup>115</sup> In fact, literature of the nineteenth century, particularly in the United States, often *meant* to blur the line between truth and fiction, thus privileging the gaze of the present over the chronicles of the past. In antebellum literature, and especially in *Seven Gables*, “...characters strive to control others’ perceptions, and to rewrite their own and the culture’s memories” (Mizruchi x).

The ever-presence of history in the literature of the nineteenth century suggests that the American past refuses to belong to the dead; rather than fixed remembrances,

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<sup>114</sup> Many of the novels and short fiction written at this time depend on events claimed to have been witnessed, heard from a reliable source, or read in an area newspaper. *Charlotte Temple*, “Wakefield,” and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for example.

<sup>115</sup> See information on Israel Potter (chapter 2) and John Paul Jones (chapter 3).

historical literature strives to be useful to the newly-formed United States. In other words, “the Revolution will not be historicized,” to use Chris Castiglia’s phrase. It would seem that the very nature of “revolution” resists stasis and invites change, regardless of its denotation as a “return” to an earlier point or its association with a new beginning. Either way, “revolution” implies a particular relationship to the past, albeit split between an unavoidable return, in a Ciceronian sense, or a destruction of historical time (Koselleck 48). In fact, the phenomenon of the American Revolution, according to Simon Gilhooley, “altered not just history, but time itself.” While the first generation of independent Americans took an uncomplicated approach to the war fought by their fathers by either embracing or rejecting its cultural significance, subsequent generations — the generations of Hawthorne and Melville — struggled to form a productive vision of their collective history. Do we perpetually “relive” the history (through the War of 1812, for example); do we “preserve” the past through monuments and shrines; or do we claim the past within the space of the present? While the third option, what Daniel Levin calls “heritage,” created a “false immediacy,” it also established a symbolic unity between past and present (Gilhooley). Antebellum literature appears to reflect the view of history settled on by second-generation Americans, prioritizing both the preservation of the past and urging its immediacy within the nineteenth century.<sup>116</sup>

*The House of the Seven Gables* certainly preserves history, but does so grudgingly rather than in celebratory fashion. If *Seven Gables* is a monument to the

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<sup>116</sup> Additionally, antebellum authors questioned the worth of colonial history to winners of the Revolution. Should colonial ancestors be read as *proto*-Revolutionaries, or as the evil, monarchical, repressive enemy?

dead, it is to a cursed inheritance rather than to an attractive legacy — for the Pyncheons of Seven Gables struggle under the sins of the past rather than embrace an unfettered present. Of course, Hawthorne preserves the colonial rather than the Revolutionary; yet, he does so under the revolutionary interpretation of time by seeming to present that which is “authentic” and “original” (read: *present*) rather than suggesting the present to be a duplication of the past. According to Michael Colacurcio, Hawthorne, “... rather than ‘borrowing’ from his historical sources ... or taking here and there a ‘prod’ to his imagination ... may have wished fully to ‘re-cognize’ [my emphasis] the sense of his sources as significant expressions of intellectual culture, and thence to speculate about the influence of Puritan literature on American life” (3). *Seven Gables* creates a “series of reflexive images” out of the “paradox” of past and present, living and dead; through this, “Hawthorne’s novel ... depicts antebellum America not as a place where the subject is being replaced by a representational double, but as a place where the subject is entirely constituted by representation...” (Burrows 30).

Consider the transmutation of portraits throughout Hawthorne’s text. The relationship between the inhabitants of the mansion and the portrait of the ancestor underscores that it is the *representation* of the past and its presence among the living that so troubles the present. Clifford asks for the portrait to be covered, Holgrave seeks to re-present figures through daguerreotypy, and Phoebe claims to be “followed” by the “Puritan ancestor” (77), only later to recognize the Puritan within the form of Jaffrey Pyncheon. The portrait, for Phoebe, becomes “not [a] fixed likeness but [a] living identity that projects their subjects into the future” (Williams 224). Hepzibah, at least

initially, reveres the portrait more than the other characters do as “only a far-descended and time-stricken virgin could be susceptible” (Hawthorne 26), but later, although reverence prevents Hepzibah from forming a judgment of the ancestor, she is able to recognize the Colonel’s transmutation within the body of the Judge and can “read more accurately, and to a greater depth, the face which she had just seen in the street” (48). Here, the portrait reveals a “story or reality invisible in the original” (Williams 224) and shows that representations of history, at least as materialized through portraiture, exist “through time” rather than as a specific, finite moment in time (229-30).

The narrative of *Seven Gables*, what Hawthorne calls “a succession of Rembrandt pictures, done in words instead of oils” (221), seems to create a *redundancy* even as it erases the line between past and present, living and dead. As Burrows tells us, “there is something remarkably superfluous about the events depicted in the text, where nothing seems to happen that has not already happened: Pyncheons act like Pyncheons, Maules act like Maules...” (31). The Judge uncannily “becomes” the Puritan ancestor and Holgrave nearly repeats the hypnotic manipulation done to Alice through the story he tells to Phoebe (Hawthorne 180). Even Phoebe, remarkably immune to the maladies of Pyncheon history, flirts with repeating the fate of her cousins, both past and present, simply by residing in the ruinous mansion (187). The imminent marriage of Phoebe and Holgrave may resolve the historic Pyncheon/Maule conflict through the union of its progeny and, in doing so, may create a new reality for the future; however, by marrying Phoebe to the descendent of Matthew Maule, Hawthorne refuses to free anyone from the legacy of *Seven Gables*. And here, as Burrows observes, lies the “point” of

Hawthorne's Romance, namely "neither to renew the past nor to break with it ... instead [the point is] to domesticate the social dislocation of the 1840s and 1850s in a literary form that imagines the past and present as utterly continuous, even identical, and in so doing, attempts to repress the possibility of any change at all" (34-5).<sup>117</sup> But still, even as Hawthorne re-presents the past in the lives of the present, the reader must be ever-mindful of the author's other admission with regard to portraiture. "There is no such thing," says the author, "as a true portrait. They are all delusions" (Williams 238).

### **B. Living Dead**

The Pyncheon mansion may be teeming with living, breathing productions of the past within the bodies of the present, but the decaying structure injects its toxins within the characters of Hepzibah and Clifford. Constructed by Hawthorne as "rusty," both Hepzibah and the ancestral home she inhabits bear the mark of time in and on their structures.<sup>118</sup> While the latter is described as "a rusty wooden house, with seven acutely peaked gables, facing towards various points of the compass..." (Hawthorne 1), the former suffers "rustiness" in all her attributes and is seen by the reader through her "rigid and rusty frame" (29), and as a "gaunt, sallow, rusty-jointed maiden" (33).<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Interestingly enough, the only place where the past seems to separate from present is within Hepzibah's cent shop. Susan Mizruchi points that the difference between past and present comes through in the no-nonsense descriptions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century items (85). Here, confusion is created for Hepzibah when "the spirit thus flits away into the past, or into the more awful future, or ... steps across the spaceless boundary betwixt its own region and the actual world" (Hawthorne 55).

<sup>118</sup> John R. Byers, Jr. argues persuasively that Mary and Catherine Byles, daughters of loyalist Reverend Mather Byles and staunch adherents to the English Crown, inspired Hawthorne's creation of Hepzibah Pyncheon. See "*The House of the Seven Gables* and 'The Daughters of Dr. Byles': A Probable Source." *PMLA* 89.1 (Jan 1974): 174-177. For recent work on the curious sisters, see Edward M. Griffin's "Stubborn Loyalists: Calling on the daughters of Dr. Byles." *Common-Place* 7.4 (July 2007). Web.

<sup>119</sup> While "rust" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century denoted the oxidation of metals, it also meant to "To degenerate in idleness; to become dull by inaction; and to impair by time and inactivity" (*Webster's 1828 Revised Unabridged Dictionary*).

Holgrave coaxes vegetation out of the estate's garden, and Phoebe's presence seems to heal the "blight" once affecting the garden rosebush (93), but Hepzibah, truly paralyzed by the house, produces nothing. Even when forced to live by her labor rather than her inheritance, Hepzibah is limited by her myopia and must trade the productions of others rather than those of her own making.<sup>120</sup> Ironically, Hepzibah's foray into trade also fails to produce even as it undoes Hepzibah's identity as a "lady." As it turns out, Hepzibah doesn't know the needs of her customer and doesn't sell the right things; she is more concerned with the unfortunate past she recreates through the reopening of her ancestor's cent shop and the ancient aristocracy she undoes by entering trade than she is with making money.<sup>121</sup>

Hepzibah's brother, while not "rusting," fails to thrive within the Seven Gables. The character of Clifford offers an antithesis to the Wordsworthian child as "father of the man"<sup>122</sup> through his failure to mature cognitively even as his body succumbs to age. Recognized by Phoebe through his likeness as depicted in the Malbone miniature and, more specifically, through the garments he wore as a youth, the "old-fashioned dressing gown of faded damask..." embodies Clifford (87-88). Further, Clifford's unchanged, antique clothing "translates" his silent "misfortune" to those around him, "mak[ing] it

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<sup>120</sup> Hawthorne emphasizes the tragedy of both Hepzibah's failure to produce and the negative effects of time by sharing Hepzibah's former prowess with the reader: in her youth Hepzibah "exhibited some of the most recondite specimens of ornamental needlework" (30).

<sup>121</sup> Customers enter the cent shop but "satisfied" neither themselves nor Hepzibah (43). Rotten thread was inadvertently sold and crossly returned (43); yeast was wanted but unavailable (44); and "no less than five persons ... inquired for ginger beer, or root beer, or any drink of a similar brewage, and, obtaining nothing of the kind, went off in an exceedingly bad humor" (44).

<sup>122</sup> William Wordsworth. "My Heart Leaps up When I Behold" (1802). *The Complete Poetical Works*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1888. *Bartleby.com*. 6 August 2011. Web.

perceptible to the beholder's eye" (89). The clothing of Hepzibah and Clifford not only embodies their persons, but seems fixed and unchangeable. While the rest of the community was "transformed" through their Sabbath clothing — giving ordinary Sunday apparel the "quality of ascension robes" (142) — Hepzibah and Clifford quickly recognize that they cannot change: the "dampness and moldy smell of the past" remains embedded in their antique finery (143). The nexus of failed productivity and unchanged clothing seen in the characters of both Clifford and Hepzibah seems to inform Thoreau's suggestion, published three years later in *Walden*: "Perhaps we should never procure a new suit, however ragged or dirty the old, until we have so conducted, so enterprised or sailed in some way, that we feel like new men in the old..." (21).

The inheritors of Seven Gables may be portrayed as the unfortunate repositories of colonial sin and guilt; however, Hawthorne refuses to embed such abject pessimism in the imaginary inhabitants of Essex County.<sup>123</sup> Hepzibah may continuously be linked to, and limited by, her "rusty silks," evocative of both environmental decrepitude and the decaying structure of Seven Gables itself; however, the "silk" portion of the epithet releases Hepzibah from decay and ties her instead to the strength and longevity of the material.<sup>124</sup> Hepzibah may be unproductive in many ways but she, like the silk she

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<sup>123</sup> The reader of Hawthorne must anticipate his historic, tacit refusal of overt didacticism in his literature. As we are reminded in the preface to *Seven Gables*, "The author has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral, as with an iron rod, -- or, rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly, -- thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude" (viii).

<sup>124</sup> Silk, in the nineteenth century, was "expensive and scarce... almost as strong as cotton and almost as elastic and resilient as wool" (Robinson 37).

wears, survives and, unlike the Judge, escapes the curse of Seven Gables. The line between aristocrat and plebeian may have been blurred through her foray into trade, but Hepzibah's clothes maintain the status of both wealth and originality. Hawthorne certainly argues against the suffocating constraints created by classist communities, but he seems reluctant to relinquish the marks of wealth and title granted by the Old World. While Hepzibah's silks succumb to rust, a seemingly impossible state for a non-metal, *silk* enjoys a unique irreproducibility.<sup>125</sup>

Given the worth of the material in the nineteenth century, the silks worn by Hepzibah could have — and probably would have — been altered to fit the present. Expensive fabric was often “remade” into new garments, as dictated by fashion and need, through either “minor alterations” or “extensive” repurposing” (Wass 4). Women's garments, in particular, underwent numerous changes as pregnancy and age changed women's bodies. Women also inherited fabrics from their mothers as, according to John Demos, a woman's wardrobe served as the only asset she retained in marriage (86). Unmarried and without children, Hepzibah does not need to change her apparel to serve a newer present, nor must she alter her trousseau to fit her children. While Hawthorne may describe Hepzibah as “unseemly” (217), the description can be seen as an ironic Hawthornian play on words, since no alterations can be seen in the *seams* or the folds of her garments for no alteration has occurred in Hepzibah's life.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Artificial silk may have seemed easy to create, but the process eluded experimenters and delayed production of the material until the late 1880s (Robinson 37). For better or for worse, the fabric of aristocracy is almost impossible to replicate.

<sup>126</sup> According to Wass, “stitching marks, fold lines, or piecing” are what clothing historians examine for evidence of “reworking” (4).



Clothing may constantly remind the reader of Pyncheon stagnation and decay; however, the apparel worn by the aging inhabitants of Seven Gables refuses an easy designation. Clothing, even while seeming to limit Hepzibah and Clifford, protects them from harm within Hawthorne's Romance. Entranced by the progression outside his window, Clifford "feel[s] himself man again" and mounts the windowsill, but survives the crisis of emotion when Phoebe and Hepzibah "seize [his] garment and [hold] him back" (Hawthorne 141). The role of apparel in protecting the Pyncheon siblings, however, is not usually so dramatic. Repeatedly assuming the capacity of *protection* rather than salvation, clothing acts as the buffer between Hepzibah, Clifford, and the elements. The "flight of the two owls," as Hawthorne calls it, transpires through the protection of sufficient outerwear (213). The call to don warm clothing before heading out in the storm may appear insignificant and to be attributed more to the creation of reality than that of any cultural significance; interestingly enough, however, the garments worn by both Hepzibah and Clifford serve to protect them from storms from the east. Clifford's garment "muffles" him "during these days of easterly storm" (213), but Hepzibah's cloak provides "defensive armor in a forty-years' warfare against the east wind" (192). Easily undone by the innocuous ringing of the shop bell whose "sound always smote upon her nervous system rudely and suddenly" (65), Hepzibah appears the very model of fragility, hardly capable to do "warfare" with anyone or anything. Her cloak, while aged and probably thinning, testifies to the resiliency of Hepzibah Pyncheon from the cultural and familial storms ripping through Salem.

Hepzibah and Clifford don't *present* the past as does the Judge, but they certainly suffer under its weight. For the inheritors of Seven Gables, the past is ever present — and the transformation tried by the Judge through his mask of benevolence isn't possible for them. Hepzibah seems bound by the house in both a literal and figurative sense until the death of Jaffrey; Clifford, most pathetically, suffers from “a mysterious and terrible Past ...” but sees only a “black Future before him.” As a result, the child-man Clifford is trapped in the “impalpable Now, which, if you look closely at it, is nothing” (126). Clifford, as figurative antidote to any hopefulness felt by the antebellum United States, shows the time of American progress and possibility — the “Now” — generative of only a “substantial emptiness, a material ghost” (88). Yet, Hawthorne complicates the pessimism he creates by liberating Clifford from his ghostliness through the eyes of Phoebe: “There is no frightful guest in the house, but only a poor, gentle, child-like man, ... I am afraid ... that he is not quite in his sound senses; but so mild and quiet he seems to be, that a mother might trust her baby with him; and I think he would play with the baby as if he were only a few years older than itself. He startle me! -- oh, no, indeed” (106).

The garments worn by Hepzibah and Clifford demonstrate the difficulties in preserving the past, especially in the century following the Revolution. As Webster reminds his audience in 1825, monuments may arise in the present, but structures and “eulogies” designed to memorialize the past “belong to the dead” (para. 17). Clothing ties the inhabitants of Seven Gables to their cursed inheritance while still protecting them from harm. Hepzibah and Clifford may be living *as if they were dead*, but their

clothing saves them from actual death — allowing them to leave the house despite the storm, to stop a death leap, and to provide armor against all that is seen and unseen. Through this, Hawthorne urges the reader toward “poetic insight” — what he calls “the gift of discerning, in the sphere of strangely mingled elements, the beauty and majesty which are compelled to assume a garb so sordid” (33). So, it is not just to look at Clifford and Hepzibah and lament the passage of time and the failure to adapt, but it is the challenge to see past the decrepitude and into the vision for the future it suggests. Hepzibah, as Nina Baym suggests, may be difficult to valorize in her rusty silks and unfortunate turban, but she “ruptures” the expected link between heroism and beauty: “Her plain-ness allows [Hawthorne] to strip morality of its wrappings to reveal the true essence of woman: the tender and courageous heart. ‘For the gaunt, bony frame and limbs of Hepzibah, as compared with the tiny light-someness of Phoebe's figure, were perhaps in some fit proportion with the moral weight and substance, respectively, of the woman and the girl’” (615).

### **C. A Walking Shadow**

Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, like most of the other characters in Hawthorne's *Romance*, initially presents himself through his clothing. Before we can identify the man definitively, the reader is given an account of his apparel. “The gentleman,” writes Hawthorne, who “would have [possessed] a stately figure . . .” had he been taller, appeared to be “considerably in the decline of his life, [and was] dressed in a black suit of some thin stuff, resembling broadcloth as closely as possible. A gold-headed cane, of rare Oriental wood, added materially to the high respectability of his aspect, as did also

a white neckcloth of the utmost snowy purity, and the conscientious polish of his boots” (98). Broadcloth, while decidedly manufactured rather than homemade, had lost its negative connotation in the nineteenth century. While broadcloth was once an exclusively British and seemingly un- American product, the advent of textile manufacturing in the United States after the Revolution allowed individuals to support the national economy while still dressing well.<sup>127</sup> Broadcloth may have “given him away” to loyalist sentiments or authorial historical revision in fiction chronicling the Revolution, but the reader of *Seven Gables*, familiar with the garments of the other Pyncheons, should pay more attention to the condition of the Judge’s apparel than to its make. For, of course, the Judge only *appears* to wear broadcloth — what he does wear merely “resembles” the material, Hawthorne writes. The suit of clothes, in addition to being falsely advertised as “broadcloth,” reveals its age through its wear. The “thin” pseudo-broadcloth worn by the Judge, as well as the “conscientious polish” of his footwear, alerts the reader to the contrived presentation of Jaffrey Pyncheon that would seem to overshadow the content of his character. Rather than focus on the man behind the cloth, one should recognize the character formed by the masquerade attempted by the Judge’s apparel.

Hawthorne emphasizes the sartorial “mask” assumed by Jaffrey Pyncheon in his differentiation of the Judge’s apparel from other similarly-dressed figures. For even

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<sup>127</sup> Local production of broadcloth allows for the convergence of “broadcloth” and “homespun” in some texts. Popular accounts of George Washington’s inauguration dress him in homespun, yet Washington purchased his suit from the Hartford Woolen in Connecticut (Wass 132). The general may have chosen the fabric himself; however, one could very well have assumed “homespun” to imply ‘meanly’ made at home. Here, “homespun” seems to mean only “Made in the U.S.A.”

though “his clothes looked like others’ clothes ... there was yet a wide and rich gravity about them that must have been a characteristic of the wearer” (46). The Judge’s appearance reinforces his public manner, just as his public manner reinforces his fashion: [the] Judge’s “very high order of respectability ... not merely expressed itself in his looks and gestures, but even governed the fashion of his garments, and rendered them all proper and essential to the man” (46). While the reader may recognize the Judge’s flawed character through his attempts at disguise (103),<sup>128</sup> the citizen of Salem cannot help but question Hepzibah’s attitude toward her cousin, for how can someone so “put-together” be so bad? Clifford, recently released from prison and now a candidate for institutionalization, appears more degenerate, given his faded damask and childlike tendencies.

The clothing of Jaffrey Pyncheon may allow him to transcend the reputation of Pyncheon Street and the seven-gabled mansion, but unlike his cousins who suffer public disdain, the Judge cannot untangle himself from the Pyncheon curse.<sup>129</sup> Young Phoebe quickly recognizes the shadow of the past worn by the Judge when she confuses the subject of Holgrave’s daguerreotype with the portrait of the Puritan Colonel. “I know the face,” Phoebe states, “... it is my Puritan ancestor, who hangs yonder in the parlor. To be sure, you have found some way of copying the portrait without its black velvet cap and gray beard, and have given him a modern coat and satin cravat, instead of his

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<sup>128</sup> Hawthorne reveals that “The ancestor had clothed himself in a grim assumption of kindness ... which most people took to be the genuine warmth of nature...” (103).

<sup>129</sup> One “curious customer” of the cent shop described his interaction with Hepzibah as follows: “I never was so frightened in my life ... She’s a real old vixen, take my word of it! She says little, to be sure; but if you could only see the mischief in her eye” (Hawthorne 45). A vixen, of course, is a female fox.

cloak and band” (77). Later, when confronted with the “real” Judge, she again sees Colonel Pyncheon through the form of Jaffrey Pyncheon. The fantasy, though quickly dismissed by the “sensible” Phoebe, materializes through the modernization of the Colonel’s garments rather than through the transformation of his person (100-1). The Judge *is* the Colonel — only thinly disguised through an updated wardrobe and a closer shave and, as Phoebe contends, “[un]improved by [the] alterations” (77).

**“Blood ... given for you”**

The curse placed on the Colonel at the execution of the “wizard” Maule must be considered in order to reckon the transmutation of the Judge and the Colonel. At the death of Maule, “while Colonel Pyncheon sat on horseback ... Maule addressed him from the scaffold, and uttered a prophecy, of which history, as well as fireside tradition, has preserved the very words. ‘God,’ said the dying man, pointing his finger, with a ghastly look, at the undismayed countenance of his enemy, ‘God will give him blood to drink!’” (4). The realization of the curse through the unviolated, blood-stained “Sudden Death” (11) of Colonel Pyncheon, the nearly asymptomatic death of Jaffrey Pyncheon, and the repeated “gurgling” heard by generations of Pyncheons, signal the prophecy of Maule to be continually revealed to the unscrupulous inheritors of Seven Gables.

The perpetual materialization Maule’s ancient prophecy revealed through various Pyncheons within *Seven Gables*, especially Jaffrey Pyncheon, suggests a connection among remembrance, blood, and presence, and it gestures to the theology of

the Eucharist as defined by various traditions of the Christian church.<sup>130</sup> What does Eucharistic theology have to do with the transmutation of Colonel Pyncheon through the form of the Judge, and how is it connected to discussions of historical *presence* or even *heritage* within *The House of the Seven Gables*? First, Hawthorne clearly establishes that “the very words” of Maule’s prophecy have been “preserved” through the written and oral forms of “history” and “fireside tradition” (4). Next, the prophecy, in both language and purpose, echoes, with shocking irony, the words uttered by Christ on Holy Thursday: “... This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me (*KJV*, Luke 22:19).<sup>131</sup> While Christ suggests to the disciples that his body and blood are “given” and the repetition of the act create a “remembrance,” Maule threatens that the blood “given” by God will cause Pyncheon death and subsequently force a remembrance of Maule. The prophecy appears to be all too real when guests identify the blood on the ruff and in the beard of the Colonel and a voice, in “tones of which were like those of old Matthew Maule,” remembers Maule and his curse: “God *has* given him blood to drink!” [my emphasis] (Hawthorne 10). Even though *Gables* identifies the cause of death as apoplexy, Hawthorne reminds the reader that “tradition — which sometimes brings down truth that history has let slip but is oftener the wild babble of the time ... tradition is responsible for all contrary averments” (11).

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<sup>130</sup> Hawthorne, a descendant of New England Puritans, would have recognized “The Lord’s Supper” as the unification of the communicant and Christ through the physical form of bread and wine (Moore-Keish 30). Calvin writes “it is therefore with good reason that the bread is called body, since not only does it represent it to us, but also *presents* it to us” [my emphasis]” (*Calvin* 147).

<sup>131</sup> Or, as phrased in Matthew 26:28, “This is my blood in the new testament, which is shed for many of the remission of sins” (*KJV*).

The “tradition” of the curse as passed down by generations of Pyncheons, Maules, and the inhabitants of Salem makes the long-dead Colonel very *present* within the form of his progeny; or, as Hawthorne explains it, “a sort of intermittent immortality on earth” (14). When times were difficult for the Pyncheon family, the Colonel — “this representative of hereditary qualities” — materialized, and “caused the traditionary gossips of the town to whisper among themselves, ‘Here is the old Pyncheon come again’” (14).<sup>132, 133</sup> The appearance of the Colonel throughout generations of Pyncheons *re-presents* the past in the present through the act of remembrance or commemoration, but also *presents* the past within the space of the present through a dissolution of temporality. While the former suggests that the physical form *resembles* the past but is *not the past*, as seen in the vacillation between Phoebe believing her “fantasy” and recognizing “sense” (100-101); the latter argues for the transubstantiation of the past within the physical body of the present, as recognized by Hepzibah’s recognition of the Colonel within the living form of the Judge (48-9).

Calvinist theology maintains that bread and wine received during Holy Communion remained bread and wine and “represents the true spiritual communion

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<sup>132</sup> “Gossip,” at least in *Seven Gables*, should be regarded as a legitimate account. In his illustration of the private and public persona of Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne admits “that there were traditions about the ancestor, and private diurnal gossip about the judge, remarkably accordant in their testimony” and that “the pencil-sketches that pass from hand to hand behind the original’s back” are often more accurate than “portraits intended for engraving” (103). Hepzibah legitimizes the “gossip” as she recognizes “the very man” through the form her cousin: “Put on him a skull-cap, and a band, and a black cloak, and a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other, — then let Jaffrey smile as he might, — nobody would doubt that it was the old Pyncheon come again! ... [And] perhaps, too, to draw down a new curse” (48-9). And Phoebe, a sensible New England “girl,” twice confuses representations of the Judge for her ancient ancestor, Colonel Pyncheon (77, 100).

<sup>133</sup> This reappearance of the past when needed by the present echoes Hawthorne’s “The Gray Champion” (1837).



which we have in his body and blood” (*Calvin* 30). The physical elements satisfy a spiritual hunger through a tangible human act, yet *unify* the communicant with the body of Christ. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht explains the Catholic theology of the Eucharist as “a ritual through which the ‘real’ Last Supper and, above all, Christ’s body and Christ’s blood could ‘really’ be made present again” (28). Here, rather than “commemorative,” the relationship created between bread/body and wine/blood “brings together a substance (i.e., That which is present because it demands a space) and a form (i.e., That through which a substance becomes perceptible)...” (29). Hawthorne illuminates the Colonel within the form of the judge, thus both unifying the past with the present *and* dissolving the temporal space between Reformed Protestantism of colonial North America and the Transcendentalism of antebellum America.<sup>134</sup>

Hawthorne’s novel promises to “mingle the Marvelous” (Hawthorne vii) and “present the clouds overhead” (ix) rather than offer a grounded account of nineteenth-century Salem and its connection to colonial history while still “connect[ing] a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us” (vii). For Americans of the antebellum United States, the “bygone time,” consisted of a tangle of revolutionary fervor and a messy colonial history that many would rather forget or, at least, remember differently. “God will give him blood to drink” transports the ancient prophecy of Maule into lives of modern-day Salem and forces a keen remembrance of the sordid

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<sup>134</sup> Hawthorne’s attitudes towards Roman Catholicism were quite conflicted. Heavily influenced against Catholic belief and practice by his upbringing and by the Protestantism of his religion, he gained considerable sympathy towards Catholic believers later in his life after his tenure as American consul in Liverpool, when he traveled to Italy and lived there from 1857-1859. See Gilbert P. Voight, “Hawthorne and the Roman Catholic Church.” *The New England Quarterly* 19.3 (September 1946): 394-97, and Jenny Franchot’s *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.

history of colonial North America. While the ritual enacted through the language of the Eucharist joins the communicant in the blessed inheritance they receive as members of the church, the “ritual” enacted through the repetition of Maule’s curse painfully affirms to the characters of *Seven Gables* that theirs is an inheritance cursed by the sins of their fathers. That rather than transcend the past through time, the inheritors of Seven Gables are doomed to live out the past in the materialized presence of the original sinner.

#### **IV: Patchwork: A Solution?**

Hepzibah and Clifford wear the faded, rusty clothes of yesterday while Jaffrey Pyncheon wears modern fabrics and displays antebellum style, yet he fails to disguise the Colonel he embodies through his person. Of the older inheritors on Pyncheon Street, no one seems dressed to meet the present or to adapt to the future. Oddly enough, the character that provides the sartorial exemplar for nineteenth-century America is Uncle Venner — ever-known to the Salem community and related to no one in particular. Hawthorne uses *patchwork*, the standard apparel of Venner, to illustrate the true relationship between past and present. Rather than “destined to see the tattered garments of Antiquity exchanged for a new suit,” the tattered garments “gradually renew themselves by patchwork” (153). “Patchwork” — and the practice of recycling discarded remnants — provides an accurate way to describe the relationship of antebellum Americans to their colonial past. Yet Venner looks more like a vagrant from the old world than a model for the new:

...clad in an old blue coat, which had a fashionable air, and must have accrued to him from the cast-off wardrobe of some dashing clerk. As for his trousers, they were of tow-cloth, very short in the legs, and bagging down strangely in the rear, but yet having a suitableness to his figure which his other garment entirely lacked. His hat had relation to no other part of his dress, and but very little to the head that wore it. Thus Uncle Venner was a miscellaneous old gentleman, partly himself, but, in good measure, somebody else; patched together, too, of different epochs; an epitome of times and fashions (51).

Every article of clothing — from his trousers to his hat — emphasizes the collective as a democratic ideal while emphasizing the ill-fitting nature of the items to Venner himself. The trousers, the most “suitable to his figure,” provide the worst fit, and his hat neither fits his head nor his style. He is mismatched, saggy-bottomed, and in all ways unfit.

Yet, Venner’s patchwork models for the relationship between the past and present in Hawthorne’s Romance. *Patchwork* suggests that the present materializes out of remnants from the past rather than as newly made garments for the present moment. *Patchwork* gives usefulness to that which was once discarded and presupposes that labor is required to find the remnants and piece them into a single garment. The resultant material, in both its substance and its production, illustrates a fairly healthy relationship between past and present, especially given the strained connection between the colonial past and post-colonial present. In *patchwork*, we take from the past that

which is useful and refashion it for the present; yet, the garment can never be of one “piece,” for the patches testify to their former state even as they form a new garment.

How can the reader square Venner’s emblematic patchwork with his dilapidated appearance in the novel? For Salem, Venner is a timeless fixture (49) complete with a timeless knowledge of the past: he remembers Hepzibah’s girlhood and knew Clifford before his incarceration (51). The *timelessness* suggests an association between Venner and Irving’s Rip Van Winkle, while the *patchwork* of Venner connects him to Melville’s vagabond exile, Israel Potter. Both Venner and Rip lack the ambition of a profession, but they make themselves useful (and fed) by completing various jobs within the community (50).<sup>135</sup> And both characters form a bridge between the colonial past and post-revolutionary present — Venner through his knowledge of Hepzibah’s grandfather and his “grand airs” (51-2), and Rip through his presence both before and after the Revolution. Like Venner, Israel pieces together his apparel, but unlike Venner, Israel rarely wears the finery described by Hawthorne as Venner’s “Sunday suit” (131). Potter acquires a fine shirt from the English navy, but the item gives him away to the British rather than associates him with a “dashing clerk” as with Venner (51). Hawthorne uses Venner’s apparel to materialize the bridge between past and present; however, Venner remains a poor wanderer dependent on the benevolence of others. He may not wear the rags of Potter nor embody the laziness of Rip, but he is an ideal American in neither

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<sup>135</sup> Rip may “never refuse to assist a neighbor even in the roughest toil,” but he, unlike Uncle Venner, spent most of his energy in *avoiding* work rather than completing it (Irving 9).

form nor substance. Venner's clothes set him apart rather than connect him to the body politic.<sup>136</sup>

The various occupations of Venner align him with the industry of Holgrave, but the eternal uncle of Salem is too old to be Emerson's "New Hampshire lad." Venner's potential, as well as his estate, is quite possibly bankrupt, and while the "man of patches" maintains a rosy optimism, his attitude forms out of the "charm" created by "the moss or wallflower of his mind in its small dilapidation" (50). Venner's future would have led him to the "workhouse" without the serendipitous inheritance obtained by Hepzibah and Clifford, and the community of individuals retiring to their newly-obtained country seat looks more like a benevolent commune of shared labor and wealth rather than a nation of striving individuals. Hawthorne presents the ideal of Venner even as he indicates his hopelessness as an independent American. He can *survive* only through the benevolence and support of community — one in which nothing is earned and everything is shared. Yet, Hawthorne idealizes his patchwork as the appropriate mode for incorporating the past within the present. Perhaps Venner's disconnectedness — to the society through the singularity of his dress, and to Salem history through the absence of familial connections — allows him to project a usefulness stitched together out of the messy American past. He wears remnants of the past, but the remnants fail to *wear on him*.

## V: (Re)Production

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<sup>136</sup> Lorraine Carroll's recent work on hermits suggests clothing as a *system* of belonging rather than a metaphor because it concretizes in bodies.

Production appears stalled within the Pyncheon estate in *Seven Gables*. Neither Hepzibah nor Clifford produces any children, Clifford suffers a perpetual childhood, and Jaffrey Pyncheon, as he seems to reproduce the long-dead Colonel Pyncheon, fails to make any sort of progress.<sup>137</sup> Even the chickens living in the Pyncheon garden seldom produce, and when Phoebe discovers the sole offering from this ancient family — “a diminutive egg” — Hepzibah “sacrifices” what Hawthorne calls “the continuance, perhaps, of an ancient feathered race” in order to provide a delicacy for her brother (130). By all accounts, the Pyncheons of antebellum Salem figuratively refute the progress and positive maturation desired by the adolescent nation.

Holgrave Maule, heir to the Maule legacy, emerges on the scene physically unmarked by his troubled history. Although Holgrave knows his history and flirts with its repetition (180), he bears no resemblance to Maules of the past — so much so that he can disguise his identity until the end of the narrative (270). Yet Holgrave, like the Judge, actively reminds the reader of the messy history inherited by both Pyncheon and Maule and admits to “representing” the “original” in the present: “in this long drama of wrong and retribution, I represent the old wizard, and am probably as much of a wizard as ever he was” (270). Holgrave even attempts to publish a version of the ancient Pyncheon/Maule conflict within the likes of *Graham’s* and *Godey’s* — making his personal history available for public consumption (158). No doubt Hawthorne uses Holgrave’s ambition to poke fun at his own career when Phoebe recognizes neither his name nor his published tales (158) and falls asleep during the story’s narration (181).

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<sup>137</sup> Judge Pyncheon fathers children, but he loses his only surviving heir by the end of Hawthorne’s *Romance* (239).

Yet, perhaps the disinterest and subsequent inattention expressed by Phoebe for her own family history explains the ability of the youngest Pyncheon and the youngest Maule to escape the rust of family legacy. The transmission of history from past to present requires a receptive audience. Holgrave may maintain an active engagement with his past, but his narrative reproduces family history within the mode of fiction. He cannot make Phoebe hear the past, and now, through the eventual publication of “Alice’s Posies” in the popular press as a “story,” he will not be able to make anyone believe it.

Holgrave admits to “representing” the past but fails replicate it fully during the course of the Romance. In fact, Hawthorne suggests Holgrave as the model of modern Emersonian self-reliance and Yankee resilience. Though not quite twenty-two, Holgrave had already been “a country schoolmaster,” “a salesman in a country store,” “the political editor of a country newspaper,” a New England “peddler.” He “studied and practiced dentistry” (150) and is now the practitioner of the new art of daguerreotypy. Although acting outside of Emerson’s mandate in “Self-Reliance” by traveling to Europe — “carry[ing] ruins to ruins” — he seems unaffected by Old World allure as he lives solidly and practically in the New England present. Like other versions of the Yankee ideal, Holgrave works many jobs and entertains many ideas, but as Hawthorne writes “the true value of [his] character lay in that deep consciousness of inward strength, which made all his past vicissitudes seem merely like a change of garments” (153).

Within the scope of *Seven Gables*, however, Holgrave rarely changes his apparel. The youngest Maule wears “a summer sack of cheap and ordinary material,

thin checkered pantaloons, and a straw hat, by no means of the finest braid” (35).

Holgrave’s attire marks him as a gentleman within the community, not because of its style or its worth, but because of its cleanliness (35). Cleanliness of one’s linen had long been a marker of wealth in American and European society: only the rich could afford to change into a clean shirt each day or pay for it to be laundered daily. The advent of detachable shirt collars “democratized men’s fashions”; now, middle-class men could advertise themselves as gentlemen without the wealth required to fully dress the part.<sup>138</sup>

Hawthorne dresses Holgrave as a gentleman but, perhaps more importantly, he resists dressing him in the same fashion as his ancient ancestor: that is, in accordance with his labor. Holgrave’s contemporary clothing projects him as a gentleman rather than as the descendant of Matthew Maule; unlike that of his ancestor, nothing in his clothing suggests the work that he does. Throughout the text, Hawthorne announces the elder Maule — the artisan responsible for building Seven Gables — by his carpenter’s clothes: “a green woollen jacket, a pair of loose breeches, and . . . a long pocket for his rule” (171). Holgrave neither wears nor endorses the clothing of his ancestors, thinking it foolish to wear the clothes of his great-grandfather and “cut precisely the same figure in the world,” just as long-standing houses suggest the same foolishness (156).

Holgrave may change his mind about building houses for posterity (268-9), but he remarkably avoids repeating the “figure” of Matthew Maule through his purchase of

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<sup>138</sup> Ann Buerman Wass affirms Hawthorne’s association between Holgrave’s gentlemanly appearance and his cleanliness to be an accurate determinant of status in the mid-nineteenth century (339).



new, ready-made fabrics from a well-known establishment in Boston.<sup>139</sup> In contrast, the Judge fails to break with the Colonel even through his clearly-modern dress. Although his near-broadcloth and white neck scarf displays antebellum New England rather than colonial America, to the citizens of Salem, the Judge's apparel still *suggests* the Puritan ancestor despite the notable difference projected through his clothes.<sup>140</sup>

Holgrave avoids representing Matthew Maule by fashioning himself independent of history, both public and personal. We read the daguerreotypist as an individual: self-reliant, truly modern, and unmarked by ancestral guilt. However, the desired result of dressing like gentlemen in antebellum America was to “disappear among the crowd” (Wass 338). Even though Hepzibah “hardly knows what to make of Holgrave” (Hawthorne 70), her resistance to his character comes from the company Holgrave keeps rather than from the clothes he wears. The “well-meaning and orderly young man” stands out against his oddly-fashioned associates: “men with long beards, and dressed in linen blouses, and other such new-fangled and ill-fitting garments” (70). Hepzibah trusts Holgrave because, among other reasons, he maintains the mark of gentility even while associating with political dissidents. In fact, Holgrave may stand out among his friends, but on Pyncheon Street his disguise as a clean and neatly-dressed gentlemen renders him invisible.<sup>141</sup> The man surrounds himself with the descendants of

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<sup>139</sup> Hawthorne's narrator suggests that Holgrave purchased his apparel at Oak Hill (35), a retailer known throughout the nation for its “fashionable clothing and high-powered sales techniques” (Allaback 546).

<sup>140</sup> Scholars note the similarities between the Judge's white neckcloth and the Colonel's ruff, as well as the correspondence of the walking stick to the Colonel's sword (Caldwell 36).

<sup>141</sup> Caldwell calls Holgrave's clothing “a contrived disguise, designed to fit the role he is playing” (40). His invisibility among people who *should* be able to recognize him sounds very much like Oliver Edwards of Cooper's *The Pioneers*.

his ancestral enemy, and he stands on the site of the historic wrong perpetrated against his family; yet, Holgrave's comportment renders him historically opaque to the other inhabitants of Seven Gables.

Rather than an unfortunate loss of independence, the absorption of individuality within the space of the crowd registers a positive connotation within *Seven Gables*. A procession differs from a group. It is the aggregate created by a procession rather than the individuals forming the group that conveys importance in the Romance. Hawthorne writes that individual characteristics, specifically those associated with one's clothing, create a "tedium" even in the most impressive group: "the spectator feels it to be fool's play, when he can distinguish the ... common-place of each man's visage, with the perspiration and weary self-importance on it, and the very cut of his pantaloons, and the stiffness or laxity of his shirt-collar, and the dust on the back of his black coat" (141). By changing one's perspective, one can see the group before the man, rendering the crowd, "by its remoteness" as "one broad mass of existence, — one great life, — one collected body of mankind, with a vast, homogeneous spirit animating it" (141). Clothing identifies the individuality in the man, but individuality here appears not as impressive but limited to the style and keeping of the man. Holgrave's gentlemanly ensemble of clean and neat linen renders him invisible within the crowd and thus part of the "mighty river of life" (141). Notably, however, the "majesty" of the crowd becomes visible in the present rather than in visions of the past. The parade of deceased Pyncheons appears to the reader through the particulars of their clothing. The Puritan maintains the "stiff[ness]" of his "garb and mien," the shopkeeper wears his ruffles

“turned back from his wrists,” and a “red-coated officer” and a “periwigged and brocaded gentleman” all pass by the portrait of the Colonel (238). For the Pyncheons of both the near and distant past, the family collective never exudes the power of the crowd. And as distinct individuals, their presence becomes readily detectable — and apparently easily transferrable — to the next generation of Pyncheons.

### **The man behind the curtain**

Hawthorne channels a Whitmanesque philosophy by delighting in the energy formed by the democratic collective; yet, Holgrave, even as he disappears into the crowd of well-dressed men, maintains his agency as an individual through his labors, if not through his physical form. As a daguerreotypist and an author, Holgrave controls the reproduction of individuals and their stories but maintains an invisibility in the products he creates. He remains “the man behind the curtain” manipulating the form of another.<sup>142</sup> And it would seem that the invisibility Holgrave projects as an individual allows him to control the representation and reproduction of the past on Pyncheon Street. For even as the Judge channels the Puritan, Phoebe’s initial confusion between the two comes from viewing Holgrave’s daguerreotype. The relationship between Holgrave and history, as well as the perspective offered to the reader, is influenced by the art of daguerreotypy. In its representation of life and its ability “to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us” (vii) in its materialization of the past for observation in the “present,” Holgrave’s newest business venture seems aptly suited to the historical under-workings of *Seven Gables*.

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<sup>142</sup> In fact, Holgrave uses Uncle Venner as the “face” of his studio instead of providing potential customers with an image of himself.

While advertised with numerous slogans, Daguerre and his assistant agreed that the photography emerging in the nineteenth century allowed for “nature” to recreate itself rather than be *recreated* by the likes of Holgrave and his ilk.<sup>143</sup> Holgrave defines daguerreotypy in similar terms; however, he emphasizes the unexpected phenomenon created through the process of reproduction itself. Photography, although “given credit only for depicting the merest surface . . . actually brings out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon” (77).<sup>144</sup> For Holgrave, “secret character” emerges not by artistic agency, but through the process of photography. The gentlemanly appearance of Holgrave allows him to disappear into the crowd, and his role as a producer rather than as a subject renders him invisible to history. Yet, Holgrave shapes history through his narrative and photographic reproductions as well as through his very presence at the Pyncheon estate, alerting the reader to pay attention to the man as well as to the material he produces.

### **“Dead and alive at once”**

Phoebe’s personification of Holgrave’s inanimate pictures — “They . . . hate to be seen” (76) — and her confusion between the living judge and the deceased colonel was hardly a unique response to nineteenth-century photographs. Daguerreotypy was thought to virtually resurrect its subject by materializing individual form beyond the

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<sup>143</sup> Until the end of the 1850s (Burrows 35), daguerreotypy was defined as “Painting by nature herself”; “Copy by nature herself”; “Portrait by nature herself”; “To show nature herself”; “Real nature”; and a “True copy of nature” (29).

<sup>144</sup> Nina Baym complicates this definition in her analysis of *Gables*, positing “The Romance assumes that behind or beneath the actual world is an unseen world of motive and meaning, which actually controls the shape of the visible” (qtd in Burrows 34). And Hawthorne believed photography to “print off our deepest and subtlest, and delicatest thoughts and feelings...” (Burrows 34).

initial moment of production. The physical image represented by a photograph could seem “not only alive but dead and alive at once” as one “flips from its negative to positive” (Trachtenberg 176). The act of viewing the photograph outside the moment of production virtually “revives” and “restores [the subject] to the present” (174). Integral to the process of material resurrection is the viewer or *reader* of the photograph. For what Holgrave calls “making pictures out of sunshine,” Phoebe sees as the confinement of the subject in an uncomfortable space: “they are ... always dodging away from the eye, and trying to escape altogether” (Hawthorne 76).

The nineteenth-century understanding that the daguerreotype brought its subject to life required what Trachtenberg calls the “specific triangulation of viewer, image, and light” (180-1). Phoebe immediately reads Holgrave’s daguerreotype as alive by describing the subject (and all subjects of photography) in the active sense: “dodging,” “trying to escape,” “[they] *hate to be seen* [my emphasis].” What Holgrave describes as pictures made from manipulated light, Phoebe — a most “sensible New England girl” — reads as long-departed people seemingly *present* through their materialization in the photographic image. Yet, dependent on the relationship of light to the created image, daguerreotypy can restore the subject to death just as quickly as it was brought to life: “Held toward the light, all substance seems to vanish from the picture: the highlights grow darker than the shadows, and the image ... appears like a ghostlike vision. Yet as soon as it is moved away from the light and contemplated from a certain angle, the image reappears, the mere shadow of a countenance come to life again” (Hartman qtd. in Trachtenberg 174).

The fluctuation between death and life materializes in the character of Judge Pyncheon and in the images created by Holgrave. Louis Martin explains that the presence of the Judge “makes the dead man come back as if he were present and living and... redouble[s] the present and intensif[ies] presence in the institution of a subject of representation” (Williams 226). What Phoebe calls the desire to “escape” the daguerreotype creates the uncanny repetition created between the likeness of Judge and Colonel. “The power of Colonel Pyncheon’s portrait derives not so much from its haunting presence in the frame as it does from the fact that a ‘copy’ of it has escaped the frame and is actively walking the streets... .” (Williams 229). Of course, Phoebe confuses the daguerreotype as representative of the “stern eye” of her “Puritan ancestor” rather than the “modern face” of Jaffrey Pyncheon (Hawthorne 77). For Phoebe, the act of representation has rendered the long-dead alive once more rather than materializing the present.<sup>145</sup>

### **Of Masks and Men**

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<sup>145</sup> Daguerreotypy gave more Americans access to portraiture and was once believed to be a “true Republican style of painting,” according to Emerson (Burrows 44). Given the relative affordability of having one’s photograph taken compared to having one’s portrait painted, reproducing one’s likeness on paper became much more common. But as the medium developed, doubts began to rise concerning the individuality expressed by daguerreotype portraits, as Melville posited in *Pierre*, “...For if you are published along with Tom, Dick, and Harry, and wear a coat of their cut, how then are you distinct from Tom, Dick, and Harry” (qtd. In Burrows 40). “True distinction,” according to Melville, could be achieved by not being “published” at all (40). Dickinson, whose only fully verified portrait is a daguerreotype, reinforces Melville’s claim by famously dubbing publication “the Auction/Of the Mind of Man—.” The cultural rub between individuality and reproducibility, as well as appearance and commonality, materializes in Melville’s remark in *Pierre*. Further, given that the gentleman of the mid-nineteenth century was to “disappear among the crowd” (Wass 338), the ubiquity of daguerreotype portraits and the “sameness” created through the medium may have eliminated a portion of individuality but positively subsumed the man into the crowd to an even greater degree. It would seem that clothing both provides the vehicle to assert individuality in the age of mechanical reproduction and the means to distinguish oneself among the crowd by, in fact, disappearing into it.

The problem with daguerreotype representations, of course, lies in the relationship of light to one's viewing of a particular image. As Phoebe notices, the image looks to be "dodging away from the eye" (76) and although Holgrave claims that the images often look "unamiable" because "the originals are so" (76), daguerreotypes often portrayed an inanimate "mask" rather than rendering a living being. Owing to the nature of early photography, the subject posed without movement for several minutes and, according to Emerson, "...the total expression escaped from the face and you held the portrait of a *mask* instead of a man" (Burrows 46).<sup>146</sup> Hawthorne makes use of the "mask" through both his narrative rendering of Judge Pyncheon and Holgrave's reproduction of the Judge in daguerreotypy. The clothes worn by the judge — "some thin stuff, resembling broadcloth as closely as possible" — and the fixed smile on his face come as unnatural masks created by the judge for the sake of public appearances. For, "if the observer chanced to be ... acute and susceptible, he would probably suspect that the smile on the gentleman's face was a good deal akin to the shine on his boots, and that each must have cost him and his bootblack ... a good deal of hard labor to bring out and preserve them" (Hawthorne 98). Holgrave, through his photographic reproduction, reveals the *mask* rather than what most of Salem know to be the judge; but in doing so, according to Burrows, "display[s] the Judge as he truly is not by

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<sup>146</sup> Gilman and Parsons, *Journals of RWE* (114-17).

showing the man behind the mask, but by showing the mask to be the man” (Burrows 47).<sup>147</sup>

Photography in *Seven Gables* identifies the true character of the judge by revealing the true character beneath his public persona. The daguerreotype should also, according to Roland Barthes, bring an end of the myth of the past by materializing it within the present. In photography the past ceases to be ethereal and, through a tangible, touchable image, gives testimony to “*what has been*” (Barthes 85) and making “what we see on paper ... as certain as what we touch” (87-8). As he reflects on his recently-deceased mother in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes “reads” history through clothes worn in old photographs, recognizing the past (here, for him, time that existed before his birth) through the “clothes my mother had worn before I can remember her” (65). The recognizable difference represented through clothing, for Barthes, creates a “kind of stupefaction in seeing a familiar being dressed *differently...*” (65). But the clothes in *Seven Gables* fail to distinguish the past from the present; rather, clothing reveals the fluidity of past and present. Unlike what is *supposed* to happen in the advent of photography — the concretization of the past within the physical and temporal space of the present — portraits and photographs confuse the space between the historical and the “now.” Judge Pyncheon lives as both himself and as his ancient ancestor; his clothing does little to disguise the Puritan within. The portrait of the long-dead Colonel

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<sup>147</sup> Another “problem” of daguerreotypy lies in the lateral reversal of its represented subjects. Rather than giving a “true” image of the subject, the subject appears as in a mirror, with the right side seen as being on the left side. This reversal becomes a key point in the competing analyses of the only certainly-known image of Emily Dickinson — a daguerreotype taken when she was seventeen. See “How I Met and Dated Miss Emily Dickinson” by Philip Gura in *Common-Place* 4.2 (Jan 2004) and “A Response to ‘Eyes be Blind, Heart be Still’” by Mary Elizabeth Kroner Bernhardt in *New England Quarterly* LV.1 (March 1982).



rattles Clifford, and the ghosts of Seven Gables threaten to haunt Hepzibah with the “rustle of their garments” (Hawthorne 204).

The fluidity between past and present, as well as the inability of photography to finalize the past in Hawthorne’s Romance, proposes that the Revolution may be less *reinvention* and more of a *return*. Daguerreotypes and portraits may distinguish *what once was*, to use Barthes’s phrase, but the “copy” and the original coexist within the same form. Holgrave and the Judge may sartorially distinguish themselves from their ancestors, but Holgrave still acts like a Maule and the Judge still acts like a Pyncheon. In fact, the Judge can’t even escape the presence of the Colonel within his very form. Try as he might, his disguises penetrate only so far, leaving Hepzibah and Phoebe to quickly recognize the long-dead within the living. In *Seven Gables*, the Revolution not only refuses historicization, it fails to bury the ghosts of colonial North American under the burgeoning republic of the United States. Only the marriage of Phoebe and Holgrave releases Hepzibah and Clifford from the dusty frame of Seven Gables; but that too is repetition: despite modernity, Maules and Pyncheons continue to coexist within a shared estate.

## **VI. Optimistic Growth: “One Little Offshoot”**

Hawthorne introduces Phoebe Pynchon to the reader shortly after Hepzibah has “begun trade,” as Uncle Venner puts it but, unlike the other characters of the Romance, Phoebe enters the text naked of any reference to her apparel. In fact, Hawthorne distinguishes Phoebe from the others by dressing the “country cousin” in general shades

and colors rather than in the specific styles he attributes to Hepzibah, Clifford, Holgrave, Uncle Venner, and the various visitors to the cent-shop. It is the “young, blooming, and very cheerful face” of Phoebe, rather than her wardrobe, that introduces her both to the reader and her cousin Hepzibah (Hawthorne 56). Phoebe arrives on Pyncheon Street as “a young girl, so fresh, so unconventional,” but perhaps, more importantly, “widely in contrast, at that moment, with everything about her” (57). As the narrator explains later in the text,

Her figure, to be sure, -- so small as to be almost childlike, and so elastic that motion seemed as easy or easier to it than rest, -- would hardly have suited one's idea of a countess. Neither did her face -- with the brown ringlets on either side, and the slightly piquant nose, and the wholesome bloom, and the clear shade of tan, and the half a dozen freckles, friendly remembrancers of the April sun and breeze -- precisely give us a right to call her beautiful. But there was both lustre and depth in her eyes. She was very pretty; as graceful as a bird, and graceful much in the same way; as pleasant about the house as a gleam of sunshine falling on the floor through a shadow of twinkling leaves, or as a ray of firelight that dances on the wall, while evening is drawing nigh. Instead of discussing her claim to rank among ladies, it would be preferable to regard Phoebe as the example of feminine grace and availability combined, in a state of society, if there were any such, where ladies did not exist. There it should be woman's office to move in the midst of practical affairs, and to gild them all, the very

homeliest, -- were it even the scouring of pots and kettles, -- with an atmosphere of loveliness and joy (67).

It is the contrast of Phoebe's youth to the rustiness of Seven Gables and its inhabitants that propels Hawthorne's narrative and, eventually, allows it to end happily, rather than any particular aspect of her clothing. Sartorial references, or the lack thereof, reveal the impossibility of Phoebe's association with clothing, for she embodies the "wonder of youth" but wears none of its "false brilliancy" associated with "certain chintzes calicos and gingham" (154). Phoebe, unlike the other characters of the Romance, cannot be translated through apparel.

The emphasis on Phoebe's demeanor rather than on her dress emerges in the actions associated with her character. She appears "elastic," resembles the "gleam" created by a ray of sunshine or "dancing" firelight, and continually resonates the best qualities of early Spring. Her beauty and grace form through her actions rather than any style or manner she may assume. As a result, Phoebe can appear "lovely" even when completing the most banal and unbecoming tasks. The emphasis of manner amidst the noticeable absence created through Phoebe's unremarked wardrobe distinguishes the young girl from the Romance's other principals, and it would seem to denote Phoebe, at least sartorially, as a "minor concern to Hawthorne" (Caldwell 40). While Phoebe's character may stretch the metaphoric limits of apparel, the *absence* of sartorial specificity creates a palpable presence in the Romance. Hawthorne appears purposefully vague as he singles out Phoebe and dresses her generally rather than specifically; yet,

although the reader remains unaware of what Phoebe wears, we certainly understand *how she wears it*.

Consider the spiritual transformation created by the “well brushed” and newly-sewn Sabbath clothing upon Salem’s “unspiritual” populace, in contrast to the singular ability of Phoebe to *transform* her clothing spiritually. Hawthorne mentions specific articles of clothing to illustrate the universality of the transformation. Whether it be “an old man's decent coat ... or a little boy's first sack and trousers,” the church clothes worn by Hepzibah’s neighbors “had somewhat the quality of ascension robes” and “transfigured” the citizenry out of their sinful state (142). Phoebe, on the other hand, “fresh ... airy and sweet in her apparel,” imbues her clothing with a comparable newness, “as if nothing she wore — neither her gown, nor her small straw bonnet, nor her little kerchief, any more than her snowy stockings — had ever been put on before; or, if worn, were all the fresher for it ...” (143). Hawthorne allows Phoebe’s character to *convey* her appearance rather than permit her apparel to *determine* her essence. Phoebe is “a religion in herself,” resembles “a prayer” and emits “a holiness that you could play with” — she has no need for the power of sartorial transfiguration.

Phoebe may not need to rely on clothing for spiritual transfiguration; yet, *shopping* for clothing, among other pursuits natural to “New England girls,” keeps Phoebe from assuming a “bleached, unwholesome aspect” (148). Phoebe approaches the city’s shops with a healthy appetite for fashion, “ransacking entire depots of splendid merchandise,” but prefers (or can only afford) perusal to acquisition as she returns home with only “a ribbon” to show for her efforts (148). Hawthorne describes

the “country cousin” as having a “feminine eye for costume” (88), and allows clothing to influence her perception of the Judge, thus blurring her distinction of time and place (101). Clothing may save Phoebe from a sterile future and allow her to see the *real* character of Judge Pyncheon despite his modern embellishment; however, the specificity absent in Phoebe’s apparel amongst a cast of characters distinguished by their dress separates Phoebe from the antebellum community of *Seven Gables*. If clothing creates belonging, as argued by Lorraine Carroll, then Phoebe is historically and culturally orphaned within the burgeoning United States.<sup>148</sup>

But figuratively orphaned within the antebellum United States may be a good thing. Phoebe’s sartorial singularity among the community of Salem marks her as one unstained by cultural history and, therefore, poised to survive the present and move into the future. A blissful ignorance of the past, at least in the Romance of *Seven Gables*, appears to be a necessary quality for American progress. Phoebe may recognize various threads of Pyncheon history, but her knowledge of the family’s travails remains sketchy at best. Even when “taught” the story of Alice’s ruin by Holgrave, family history cannot hold her attention and Phoebe falls asleep (180). Phoebe admits to having “an impression of a vast deal of trouble and calamity...” after Holgrave finishes his narrative, but “[doesn’t] remember the incidents quite distinctly” (180). Historical significance and cultural myth fail to influence Phoebe’s perception of reality: where

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<sup>148</sup> The disconnection Hawthorne creates between Phoebe and her community through her dress resembles the difference expressed by other nineteenth-century female characters through dress and other means. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Pearl resonates difference in her fine apparel, as well as through her spirited demeanor; In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Eva appears other-worldly through her white garments and what her mother calls her “singularity.” And Faith, whom Young Goodman Brown leaves behind “just this once,” and Edith of “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” stand out through the pink ribbons and “gay decoration” adorning their respective characters.

Clifford sees the “constantly shifting phantasmagoria of figures” in the waters of Maule’s well, Phoebe saw “neither the beauty nor the ugliness — but only the colored pebbles” and recognizes the natural, logical creation of what to Clifford appears to be a “dark face”(131). The youngest Pyncheon knows not the story; therefore, she escapes haunting by the specter of family history.

Hawthorne further illustrates Phoebe’s disconnection from the Pyncheon/Maule community and the sordid details comprising its history by refusing to replicate her likeness anywhere within the Romance of *Seven Gables*. Unlike the Judge — or even Holgrave, Phoebe is never “doubled” in images from the past. Hawthorne refuses any “representation or likeness of her past self; [further], we never see her gazing in a mirror or doubled in a portrait.”<sup>149</sup> Phoebe is, as Susan Williams remarks, “a domestic literary heroine ... above all” (233). Phoebe creates a *home* out of Seven Gables by “bring[ing] out the hidden capabilities of things around them ... through a kind of “natural magic” (Hawthorne 59); welcomes Clifford *home* through a well-provisioned breakfast table and satisfies his seemingly insatiable desire for coffee (90); and re-establishes the Maule/Pyncheon foundation by creating a *home* outside the rusty history of Seven Gables through her impending marriage to Holgrave. Uncle Venner calls Phoebe “One

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<sup>149</sup> The youngest Pyncheon becomes Hawthorne’s antithesis to the mirror-gazing Giovanni Guasconti and his destructive self-presentation in “Rappaccini’s Daughter.”

of God's Angels," and although not ethereal, Hawthorne's Phoebe transcends the bounds that restrain the rest of her antebellum community (68-9).<sup>150</sup>

Through Phoebe's interruption of a revolving colonial past — created by her lack of "doubling" in the Romance — and her disconnection from culturally-specific modes of dress, Hawthorne constructs a optimistic synthesis of colonial past to antebellum present. Phoebe, tied to the past through her lineage but not bound to its ugliness, can unify the Pyncheon/Maule community without privileging one ancient family over the other. She will become a Maule, but she remains grounded on Pyncheon's soil; and, if Phoebe's character is any indication, her children may very well "take everything from their mother" (66) rather than from their father. Through her selfless nature and her willingness to sacrifice, Phoebe models what Valerie Joyce calls "the mythic representation of unity in the New Republic. She is the "New Republican Other," both self-reliant and untempted by fashion.<sup>151</sup> Additionally, Phoebe initiates "New Plebeianism" through her joyful embrace of domestic labor and commercial endeavors, and, without rejecting her rusty kin, models "feminine grace ... in a state of society ... where ladies did not exist" (67). Although Uncle Venner repeatedly calls her an angel, Phoebe rejects the moniker even as she embraces its attributes: "I am no angel, Uncle Venner," said Phoebe, smiling, 'But, I suppose, people never feel so much

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<sup>150</sup> Hawthorne refuses a "double" for Phoebe, but flirts with a Phoebe/Alice connection through her association with Alice's mildewed rose bush and her relationship with Holgrave Maule. Yet, Phoebe heals the blight (92-3) and avoids mesmerization through the benevolent nature of Holgrave (180). Also, as Keiko Arai reminds us, where Alice is an "exotic," "a lady born," and possessing a "foreign education," Phoebe is "an American girl, and Hawthorne, using a contemporary idea of girlhood, submits her as the future model of 'this republican country' replacing the old-world pre-Revolutionary model" (54).

<sup>151</sup> LuElla Putnam uses this term to illustrate the model for women emerging through the "sequels" like *Lucy Temple* ("Lucy Temple: Mother of the American Sequel." American Literature Association 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention. 26-29 May 2011. Boston, Massachusetts. Conference Presentation.)

like angels as when they are doing what little good they may” (189). Still, Phoebe’s refusal of Venner’s compliment, however logical, fails to win the argument. Even as Phoebe’s words continue to float before the reader, our heroine exits the scene by “flitting almost as rapidly away as if endowed with the aerial locomotion of the angels to whom Uncle Venner had so graciously compared her” (189).

Hawthorne’s representation of Phoebe embodies the cultural shift away from the idealized “Republican mother” and back to the “Republican daughters” modeled in the ideology of the early Republic. By focusing on the young woman rather than on the matron — in the antebellum United States as well as within the Romance of *Seven Gables* — identity grows out of inheritance and interconnectivity. As Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley contend, narratives of U.S. national identity are persistently configured in the language of family: national identity is implicated in shifting notions of childhood” (Arai 54). Phoebe’s “capable body” of late-childhood coexists with the perpetual childhood suffered by Clifford through the interconnectivity of the “newly constituted family” at novel’s end which “abandons patriarchal aristocracy, capitalism, and radical reformism, all linked with Europe, thus suggesting an alternate social vision for America” (Arai 55). In fact, Clifford links the union of Holgrave to Phoebe the “flower of Eden” (Hawthorne 263). Hawthorne’s representation of Phoebe in *Seven Gables* — connected yet disconnected, revolutionary, yet grown from the past — creates a new vision for the United States “By giving considerable power to ‘a little girl from New England’” (Arai 53) rather than any dusty icons from the past. She is the grown-up Pearl destined to remain in New England rather than flee



to England, and a more optimistic version of Edith, unfettered by Puritan ideology.

Rather than “disguising” herself with the accouterments used to create what was known as a “true woman” (Fischer 24), Phoebe represents a female exemplar for the new nation created out of internal vim rather than outward presentation.

And so, unlike Goodman Brown, who loses his Faith among the spirits of the forest, and Parson Hooper, who remains ever separated from his earthly love, the descendants of Seven Gables avoid the tragic end often prescribed to Hawthorne’s protagonists. Even Edgar and Edith, while maintaining their marriage and their lives, must live out their days within the strict confines of Endicott’s Puritan enclave without their rainbow garments and “long glossy curls” (33).<sup>152</sup> The other unlucky couples of Hawthorne’s fiction cannot cast off the garments separating them from a happier destiny and, as a result, resolve themselves to conflicts beyond their control. Phoebe, however, embarks on a future with Holgrave unencumbered by any ties to apparel and, as such, may enjoy a present liberated from the hang-ups of the past. She is, after all, the “flower of Eden bloom[ing]” amid the dust of Seven Gables and, as a result, restores New England to the hopes of the early Puritans and to the covenant made in the first Eden. A full communion, linked to hope rather than tainted by blood, becomes possible for the dubious inheritors of colonial North America.

Hawthorne aficionados journey to the Derby Street House every year, but rather than finding remnants of the Hepzibah’s silks or Clifford’s damask, we discover that

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<sup>152</sup> Hawthorne. “The May-pole of Merry Mount.”

Hawthorne may have been telling the truth after all: the Romance draws on the “clouds overhead” instead of the “real” structures of Salem, Massachusetts. The House of the Seven Gables, rather than exhibiting colonial portraits or advertising an ancient well, has nothing to do with curses or child-like brothers or harpsichords that play in the wind. It is nothing more than a house. Yet, rather than believe the author known to “dupe” his reader, we should consider *The House of the Seven Gables* as a medium, much like the daguerreotypes found throughout the text, dependent on the interaction of the reader with the material within. Hallways and portraits, not to mention tow-cloth and woolen breeches, materialize into animate forms when met with the gaze of the reader. Just as Holgrave’s photos shift between death and life in the hands of Phoebe, the images within the novel alternately create both breathing presence and a memorialized past.

## Conclusion

*Homespun*, emblematic of Yankee resourcefulness and a fiercely-wrought independence, provided a fit material for colonial remembrances as it confirmed the rustic, self-reliant identity espoused by nineteenth-century Americans. My study demonstrates, however, that the fabrics uncovered within antebellum historical fiction challenge rather than affirm the legacy of self-reliance imagined by Americans of the nineteenth century. “Homespun” may evoke the mythic resourcefulness of Franklin, the “pattern American,” but literary references to textiles and apparel unravel rather than assert the rustic mythology espoused by the nascent United States. American authors sought a myth of origin fit for the inheritors of the Revolution; however, the material remnants found in nineteenth-century historical fiction suggest the national story embraced by the citizenry to be but a cheap fabrication.

### Post-Colonial Cultural Memory and the Colonial Past

My study has investigated examples of American historical fiction that illustrate the complicated relationship between the inheritors of the Revolution and their colonial past, a problem characterized by John McWilliams as “cultural memory.” In the years preceding the Civil War, American authors, especially the descendants of Puritans, struggled “to make sense of their heritage” (4) and the role of New England (and their forefathers) in the creation of the United States. “It was at this time,” writes McWilliams, “the crosscurrents in attitudes toward the Puritan heritage became more

acute and arguably most important” (4).

The problem of “cultural memory” identified by McWilliams expands upon a line of inquiry begun by David Levin in his now-classic study *History as Romantic Art* (1959). Levin drew attention to the problem of cultural memory as it concerned America’s colonial past and to the “large community of men of letters” in the early-nineteenth century who shared attitudes and techniques in dramatizing what they called “the value and meaning of the Past” (7). As historians, these “men of letters” modeled their work after historical fiction, especially the novels of Sir Walter Scott, in order to present history, or, “the ruin,” to the reader in its “former wholeness” by bringing “the Past to life upon the printed page” (7-8). History, the men agreed, should consist of “living men [and not] protocols,” and must allow the reader to “experience” the Past (8).

Levin focused on the most prominent historians: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman, but he also included many other intellectual leaders, both “conservatives and radicals”: Joseph Buckminster, William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker, Jared Sparks, Andrews Norton, George Ripley, Charles W. Upham, John Gorham Palfrey, and Edward Everett” (4). This rather extensive list demonstrates the problem of cultural memory to be a significant preoccupation of nineteenth-century historians and philosophers. Levin writes that the historical moment that most intensely concerned Bancroft and his contemporaries was the fairly *recent* Past, namely the colonial era that officially ended in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris. These “men of letters” recognized that the United States needed its history to assert a brawny

sovereignty emblematic of a Revolutionary spirit, especially as the gap widened between the antebellum “present” and the battles of the Revolution.

Both Levin and McWilliams agree that, for a high percentage of these writers, the colonial past included their own ancestors. For them, a group McWilliams calls “the tenth generation,” cultural memory was personal. To fit the colonial past to the United States these “tenth generation [New Englanders] . . . needed to find the providential connections between the three eras of greatest significance to the presumed advance of protestant virtue: the plantations of 1620-1700, New England’s Time of Troubles from 1675 to 1700, and New England’s early leadership of the revolution that would form the American Republic” (4). The process of both establishing a history suited to the inheritors of a Revolution and maintaining fidelity to colonial life, according to McWilliams, created “complementary definitional problems that elicited both pride and anxiety” for those of the tenth generation representing colonial North America in the nineteenth century (4). Did one proudly read the historical record so as to define one’s ancestors as the progenitors of liberty, those who planted the seeds of revolution — the “germ of a new freedom” — that grew into the self-reliant new nation in the late-eighteenth century? Or did cultural memory require anxious tenth-generation descendants to acknowledge that the colonists were not truly proto-Revolutionaries but had been loyal subjects to the King and had been proud to call themselves Englishmen?

If the “complementary definitional problems” elicited both “pride and anxiety,” Levin shows that the historians of the first forty years, especially the New Englanders, came down on the side of pride, or, as he writes, the “unusual moral purity of his

country” (25). Seventeenth-century Puritans, for example, were lauded for their character, namely, “a sturdy conscientiousness, an undespairing courage, patriotism, public spirit, sagacity, and a strong good sense,” rather than dismissed for their intolerance (35). Further, Levin demonstrates that each historian chronicled the colonial past by telling the story of some “great man,” a leader who guided “the People” (49). For them, Winthrop’s idea of a shining city upon a hill prefigured the democratic nineteenth century and continued to dominate the antebellum historians’ narratives. The historical “portraits” of “breathing men,” therefore, drew (or re-drew) one’s ancestors in light of what the new America claimed to embody in the nineteenth century: independence, ingenuity, and self-reliance.

The novelists I have discussed in my project were less sunny in their outlook. To Melville, Sedgwick, and Hawthorne, the cultural memory of the colonial past was problematic, worrisome, anxious, and double-sided. There were great men among their forebears, but those tenth-generation descendants and younger colleagues who wrote the first American novels could not deny that some of their predecessors were less than noble. These writers fashioned an American style in prose fiction that often located the true moral purity of the country’s early history not in the great men, even their great-grandfathers, celebrated by the historians, but in what the fraternity of historians termed “the People.” Rather than the colonial admirals and generals, diplomats and judges, preachers and philosophers praised by historians, nineteenth century authors suggested the true American ideal to be one of “The People”: *homespun* men and woman who, without accolade, created the country by doing their work honestly and well.

My study identified that the artistic methods used by antebellum authors to convey these values were often subtle, sly, ironical, and embedded in their texts through visual and linguistic references to fashion, costume, and disguise. While the historian may work by assertion, the novelist works by suggestion. In the literature of my study, consequently, antebellum authors *suggest* homespun as a multi-faceted political argument, *offer* feathered headdresses as challenges to sovereignty, and *recommend* Puritan garments as proof of the continuity between past and present. In this fashion, clothing becomes both a conduit to and creator of the past in the historical literature of the emergent United States.

*a. The Romantic Artist as Historian*

The problem of cultural memory in the nineteenth century addressed by both Levin and McWilliams preoccupied antebellum historians and, therefore, determined the shape of colonial histories published before the Civil War. By reading the Past through a Revolutionary lens and insisting on “well-written histories” that “come alive” for the reader, the “Romantic men of letters” proposed an American history composed of proto-Revolutionary heroes and present-day ideologies. My project continues the work of Levin and McWilliams but considers the *historicity* of nineteenth-century historical fiction rather than the literary qualities of historiography. Rather than the “historian as romantic artist,” my project proposes a major variation of the Levin terminology, namely, the *romantic artist as historian*, and explores the problem of cultural memory, its influence, and its subsequent impact upon tenth generation American authors.

The coterie of nineteenth century writers, largely consisting of New Englanders with long and often messy family histories, emerged through the cultural preoccupations of nineteenth-century literature rather than any physical fraternity or publicly shared theoretic aims. The *romantic artist as historian* sought to fashion colonial history as a lineage fit for the Revolution's inheritors, yet, just as the men of Levin's study recognized the disconnection between independent ideals and colonial dependency, the fiction of these tenth-generation New Englanders acknowledged, to varying degrees, the stained remnants of colonial history.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, distinguished by an extensive bibliography and an infamous ancestry, vacillates between adoration and disdain in his literary representations of colonial America. Haunted by a colonial judge who condemned witches, Hawthorne may not deify the men and women of British North America, but neither can he fully disentangle his characters from the proto-Revolutionary spin embraced by nineteenth-century historians. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, descended from a Revolutionary officer and a distinguished family tree, joins Hawthorne, albeit inadvertently, in casting shadows on idealized remembrances of colonial history. Sedgwick may create revolutionaries out of Massachusetts Puritans and Pequot Indians, but can neither claim New England as the undisputed birthright of white Americans nor endorse Native Americans as equally entitled to both colonial America and the nineteenth-century United States. Herman Melville, a non-New Englander by birth but an adopted Yankee with a Dutch Calvinist upbringing, stretches both the geography of this theoretic coterie and the intent of its fiction. Neither haunted by the past nor



wishing to extol existing monuments from colonial and Revolutionary history, Melville blurs the line between fictional history and political satire and, in so doing, subtly criticizes the “great men” remembered in historical accounts.

The texts I selected for my study, all widely-read and well-received when they were published in the mid-nineteenth century, represent canonized and non-canonized works of antebellum historical fiction. *Israel Potter*, Melville’s full-length fictionalization of American history, weaves Potter’s Revolutionary exodus out of biographic and imaginative threads and allows the contemporary critic to consider both the *romantic artist as historian* and the rhetorical dispute between history and mythology in the nineteenth-century United States. Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* garnered public acclaim throughout much of the nineteenth century, disappeared from critical study in the early twentieth century and, only recently, has begun to regain its place in the American canon. *Hope Leslie*, like *Israel Potter*, blends well-known historical figures with fictional characters and events; however, Sedgwick balances the satiric stance of Melville with her more optimistic revision of both colonial history and the political climate of the burgeoning United States. *The House of the Seven Gables*, like the other novels of my project, blurs the line between history and fiction, but does so within the bodies of its characters rather than in its representation of historical accounts. As *Israel Potter* re-focuses Revolutionary history through an antebellum lens and *Hope Leslie*’s characters strike Revolutionary poses, Hawthorne’s *Seven Gables* suggests the present to be an uninterrupted continuation of the past: Puritan ancestors assume the form of antebellum judges and although the morés of the mid-nineteenth

century differ from those of the seventeenth, time has no sway upon the Americans represented in the novel. In this way Hawthorne both reinforces and extends the *re-presentation* of the past offered by Melville and Sedgwick.

#### Textile Analysis and the “Custom House” model

My approach of “textile analysis” can best be explained through what I call the “Custom House” model. In Hawthorne’s preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, the narrator wades through the dusty artifacts of the Salem Custom House and, in so doing, discovers Hester’s Prynne’s fading badge of infamy — “a certain affair of fine red cloth” — and the “treasure” of her corresponding history (29). The synthesis of the “Actual” and the “Imaginary” (34-5) occurs through the artifacts themselves, helped along only by the “unusual light” of the Salem attic rather than the imaginative powers of Hawthorne’s curious narrator. In fact, Hawthorne’s resident archivist denies any creative intervention with the story to follow, calling himself the “editor” rather than the “author” of the tale. If the “Actual” swerves into the “Imaginary,” it is through natural elements rather than human agency. Objects rather than individuals communicate “the truth of the human heart” — a “truth” more authentic than the historical record.

Modeling the “Custom House,” my approach sifted through remnants of colonial America in nineteenth-century historical literature and, like Hawthorne’s custom house official, explored the relationship between past and present, history and fiction as mediated by references to textiles and apparel. I found that clothing, when read as a *material* construction, illustrates the impact of production and commerce on both political culture and colonial economy. *Homespun* and *linsey-woolsey*, as a result,

become artifacts of transatlantic trade and embargo in addition to symbolic badges of rustic authenticity. When read as a *social construction*, references to clothing illuminate the cultural expectations and stereotypes of the past, but also reveal the inaccurate mythologies that shaped portrayals of colonial history in the nineteenth century. The clothing worn by the characters of historical fiction, such as Sedgwick's "princess" and Melville's "pirate-patriot," like the "portraits" of "great men" created by Levin's "men of letters," reveals the Past to be more nineteenth-century *translation* than faithful transcription. Each sartorial reference, when read as a composite of culture rather than a marker of realism, directs the reader to explore the "threads" of its production and, therefore, untangle the past from its conception in the present. "Reading" representations of textiles as cultural and historical remnants allows the reader to newly and authentically translate the relationship between the antebellum present and the colonial past.

In *Israel Potter*, the approach of "textile analysis" uncovered Melville's challenge of Revolutionary mythology popularized by mid-nineteenth-century Americans through his analysis of *homespun*. By distinguishing the broadcloth of Putnam from the linsey-woolsey of Potter, Melville trumpets the simply-clad continental soldier, historically forgotten and traditionally unsung, over the well-dressed general monumentalized by the nation. The wanderings of Israel Potter, tinged with pathos and characterized as "plain old homespun," challenge the *homespun* distinguished by Benjamin Franklin and idealized by nineteenth-century philosophies of self-reliance championed by Emerson and Thoreau. Rather than embracing obstacles as opportunities and "always like a cat

fall[ing] on his feet,” Melville’s “homespun” character offers a pessimistic, if not impossible, rendering of the American ideal.

Examining the “crimson thread” alongside the “homespun” of Melville’s novel led me to a productive analysis of John Paul Jones and his position in nineteenth-century history and culture. Dressed in the disparate costumes of pirate and patriot, the characterization of Jones in *Israel Potter* mimics the indecent depictions of Jones in early-nineteenth-century chapbooks and, therefore, challenges the captain’s stalwart image popularized by national biography. Melville, however, promotes the seemingly incompatible motley of Jones rather than the homespun of the renowned Franklin or the “rustic” Israel as a fit emblem for the maturing United States.

While Melville uses textiles and apparel to *produce* a culturally accurate, if not technically correct, version of colonial history, Sedgwick depends on clothing and apparel to *produce* the character of colonial America rather than to *illustrate* it as she insists in the novel’s preface. My project asserted that Sedgwick’s characters depict sovereignty and Revolutionary fervor rather than the “character of [colonial] times” through the costume and character of Magawisca, a New England version of Pocahontas, and through the dress and civil disobedience adopted by Hope Leslie, a recent immigrant to the Puritan settlement. Magawisca asserts independence through both her “rejection” of English dress and insistence on a “singular” hairstyle, while Hope follows the dictates of her will rather than that of her community and dresses according to sentiment rather than fashion.

Reading *Hope Leslie* through the lens of “textile analysis” connected colonial

representations to their emblematic counterparts, namely the “Indian Princess” and the “American *Liberty*,” and complicated the colonial “character” espoused by Sedgwick and promoted by contemporary critics. While the novel appears to endorse a non-traditional version of colonial history and to promote Native American sovereignty, reading the characters as composites of their clothing suggests otherwise. Sedgwick’s substitution of Hope for Magawisca prematurely erases the presence of Indians in New England and replaces the emblem of “Indian Princess” with the English-born *Liberty*, thus justifying Indian re-settlement well before the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and arguing for the impossibility of a colonial/Indian community within the nineteenth-century United States.

*Israel Potter* uses textiles and apparel to *produce* history and *Hope Leslie* manipulates clothing to *produce* national character; however, representations of clothing and textiles in *The House of the Seven Gables* conflate the present and the past and, as a result, render imaginative *production* indistinguishable from historical *re-production*. The clothing worn and referenced by Hawthorne’s characters identifies “the past” as ongoing rather than finite and creates a historical “presence” in line with the contemporary theories of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Daniel Levin. Read with the curse, “God will give him blood to drink” and its pessimistic rendering of Eucharistic theology, references to textiles and apparel throughout *The House of the Seven Gables* offer a different relationship to history than the one idealized by the tenth-generation Americans living in the nineteenth century.

“Passionate Attention” in Reading and Teaching

Teasing out the particularities of textile references recognizes the often muddy distinction between an original, authorial *production* of history and an edited *re-production* of the historical record. Students respond enthusiastically to my approach of “textile analysis” as it provides an avenue into critical analysis and offers an alternative to plot summary. More than traditional “close reading,” my approach spurs the reader beyond quick interpretations and encourages an attention to literary and historical nuances within literature that, ideally, leads to critical inquiry, research, and thoughtful analysis.

*Focused attention*, similar to the “passionate attention” discussed by Richard L. McGuire in his pedagogical study, encouraged my Fictional History classes to read *Hope Leslie* for its historical representations as well as its plot. “Unraveling” the factual from the imaginative led students to Sedgwick’s characterization of Puritans rather than her replication of national emblems explored by my study. The Puritan community of Massachusetts Bay in *Hope Leslie* differed from the sect described as “dismal wretches” by Hawthorne, as well as the one indicted by Miller’s dramatization of seventeenth-century Salem in *The Crucible*. Even so, my students were drawn to the thread of witchcraft and spectral evidence interwoven through the literature and were surprised to meet a very different version of Thomas Morton than the one costumed by Hawthorne in “The May-pole of Merry Mount.” For my students, reading representations of history and apparel took literature beyond plot, uncovered historical repetitions, and encouraged critical analysis.

Although my approach of “textile analysis” originally developed as a means to

analyze the colonial history woven throughout nineteenth-century literature, its application to twentieth-century texts yielded productive results from my students. *Ragtime*, written by E.L. Doctorow in the mid-1970s but set in the early years of the twentieth-century, weaves familial archetypes with turn-of-the-century icons like Henry Ford, Harry Houdini, and Evelyn Nesbit. Doctorow's incorporation of textiles is more figurative than literal, however, as the novel depends on musical "rags" for the construction of its characters and the progression of its plot. Following the directive given at the novel's onset to "not play Ragtime fast" and applying my method of analysis, students researched historical references within *Ragtime* as they studied the novel. Reading *Ragtime* while "reading" the rags of history within the novel led my students to interpret Doctorow's work as a pessimistic refusal of American Exceptionalism. Student analyses varied in their content, yet uncannily shared the thesis of *failure*: failed escapes, failed capitalism, and failed American ideology. The "passionate attention" demonstrated by my classes while reading *Ragtime* reinforced the observation made by McGuire: "Once a student asks himself the smallest question about a work and seeks to answer it, he has begun a critical inquiry which only stops when he chooses to stop it" (67). Modeling my approach of textile analysis but engaging in their own historical "unraveling," my students approached *Ragtime* as a site of discovery rather than an object of consumption and, as a result, found literary analysis to be both a rewarding and a scholastically productive enterprise.

Material remnants woven throughout historical fiction may challenge the accepted

mythology of nineteenth-century America and reveal the rent in the fabric of self-reliance; yet, literary textiles render a more honest, and therefore more useable, inheritance than the legacy promised by American mythology. Homespun *relied* on the slave labor of the West Indies as well as the independent interests of colonial Americans; Revolutionary success *depended* on the foreign motley of John Paul Jones; *Liberty* illegitimately *claimed* a national birthright for white Americans; and *revolution*, despite its promise of rebirth, only thinly disguised a resurrected past in modern apparel. Admitting that American identity depends on dubious rather than exceptional origins allows the inheritors of the Revolution to build on a legitimate foundation rather than contenting themselves to construct “castles in the air.” Antebellum authors exhibit resourcefulness and model authentic self-reliance by fashioning a solvent and truly American inheritance out of the remnants — the “rags” — of colonial history.



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