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Grandfather's Chair: Hawthorne's "Deeper History" of New England

Elizabeth Goodenough

The way in which adults conceived of childhood altered radically during the first half of the nineteenth century. Romantic ideas about the child's divine innocence permeated Transcendentalist thought, educational reform, the Sunday School movement, the growth of pediatrics, and the spawning of a new secular literature for and about children. The Calvinist notion of infant damnation was finally discarded, and gentler discipline was advocated in the child-rearing manuals, now addressed to mothers, which proliferated after 1830. Reflecting on this shift in sentiment occurring in his own generation, Ralph Waldo Emerson quoted "a witty physician" who lamented that "it was a misfortune to have been born when children were nothing and to live until men were nothing" (Cable 101).

Nathaniel Hawthorne's writings for children, published from 1835 to 1853, reflect the contradictions of this ferment. Ranging from history and geography to biography, mythology, and the Sunday School tract, his writing for the young spans the two decades of his evolution into a major literary artist and is representative of every aspect of this growing literature in antebellum America. His first juvenile book, a collaboration with his sister Elizabeth on the *Universal History* (1837) for Samuel Goodrich's Peter Parley series, was undertaken out of need and shows a willingness to accommodate what he perceived as an established market. Hawthorne continued to write for children, however, not only because it promised financial return but also because he took them seriously, saw this writing as a way to advance his career, and intended to make his mark on an expanding body of literature. In his preface to *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1852), still in paperback today, he expressed pleasure in having avoided writing "downward" to children, affirming his belief that they "possess an unestimated sensibility to whatever is deep or high, in imagination or feeling" (7: 4).

Gloria Erlich has noted that Hawthorne's early sense of displacement—he was orphaned at four when his father died at sea and the parental

home was lost—is reflected in his literary concern with origins, childhood, and the past. Always attracted to the minds of children, he places these figures at the center of many of his domestic essays, tales, late romances, and juvenile works. Remembered as a doting parent by his children, he recorded vicissitudes of the nursery in *The American Notebooks*, where he declared that “it is with children as Mr Emerson . . . says it is with nature. . . . The best manifestations of them must take you at unawares” (8: 409). But while Hawthorne shows a romantic understanding of childhood as a visionary or privileged state, he also confounded the sentimental pieties of his day. The wild and prescient Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*, drawn from the problematic, even frightening, experience of watching his first-born Una, conjures up the complexity of his view: “I now and then catch a glimpse of her, in which I cannot believe her to be my own human child, but a spirit strangely mingled with good and evil” (8: 430–31). He never shared his wife’s rhapsodic faith in the perfection of their offspring, but had a haunted regard of this “elfish and angelic child” and, like Wordsworth, saw in children’s imaginative quickness and reflective insight the deepest powers of the literary artist.

No work reveals the complexity of his attitude more fully than *The Whole History of Grandfather’s Chair* (1851), a pioneering example of historical nonfiction for children which was originally published in 1841 by Elizabeth Peabody as three brief volumes: *Grandfather’s Chair*, *Famous Old People*, and *Liberty Tree*.¹ Framed by a narrative in which Grandfather tells four Hawthorne grandchildren the adventures of the old English chair on which he sits, *The Whole History* traces the founding of Massachusetts from the Puritan settlement of Salem and Boston through the Revolutionary era. The “substantial and homely reality” of Grandfather’s fireside chair unifies these “true stories,” since individuals associated with the founding of the republic ranging from Anne Hutchinson to George Washington are somehow made to sit in, own, or act within the hearing of this sturdy oaken artifact, brought from the Old World in 1632. Time itself is concretized by this device, for the children “had seen Grandfather sitting in this chair ever since they could remember anything” (6: 10). They gain direct knowledge of the different span of generational and national histories through their physical contact with Grandfather and his chair: the old man, who bought the chair at auction from the estate of Samuel Adams, is now the age of the young republic, while the Elizabethan chair is at least three times older than the man. Although the central drama of all Hawthorne’s fiction is the relationship which individuals form with the past, *Grandfather’s Chair* is his first attempt, as Nina Baym points out, to dramatize how history impinges on

our lives in an intimate and palpable way (90). Why Hawthorne initially chose to express this sense of the past living in the present through the medium of three juvenile texts can only be understood by the scale of expectation associated with children and their education in this era.

The energetic career of his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, who was converted to her faith in childhood by William Ellery Channing's reading of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807), exemplifies the romantic spirit of reform which fostered a work like *Grandfather's Chair*. Believing that mothers and children could draw spiritual lessons from the past and regenerate the future, she authored juvenile histories and promoted the education of women. With her sister Mary, who married Horace Mann in 1843, she opened schools, wrote texts for the nursery and guides for teachers, and pioneered the kindergarten movement in this country. In 1837, when Hawthorne was trying to define authorship as a socially useful occupation, she drew him out of his isolation in Salem into a wider human community and readership and the intellectual atmosphere of Transcendentalism.²

Elizabeth Peabody shared with Hawthorne a sense of the importance of understanding how the past shapes the present. Discovering Hawthorne also believed that "society in this country is only to be controlled in its *fountain of youth*," she encouraged him not to abandon a "great moral enterprise"—his ambition to create "a new literature for the young." Recommending him as "a man of first rate genius" to Mann, the new Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, she described Hawthorne's mission: "He says that were he embarked in this undertaking he should feel as if he had a right to live—he desired no higher vocation—he considered it the highest" (Peabody 199–200). Although Mann found *Twice Told Tales*, "beautifully written," he favored, like other writers and educators of the period, "something nearer home to duty & business" (Peabody 198). Hawthorne never contributed to the district school libraries which Mann was planning to endow in the early 1840s. But late in December 1840, just five months after opening the West Street Book Shop, a Transcendentalist meetingplace in Boston soon to publish *The Dial*, Elizabeth Peabody published *Grandfather's Chair*, thereby launching Hawthorne's career as an independent writer for children.

The unusual methodology of this non-schoolbook differentiates it from contemporary educational texts and from the more conspicuously imaginative works—"The Gentle Boy" and "Little Annie's Ramble"—in which Hawthorne had already addressed the mind of the young. Since he professed "a deep dislike to the character of the shoals of books poured

out from the press" (Peabody 200), he experimented in *Grandfather's Chair* with a frame narrative which nevertheless manifests his astute recognition of the complex audience of juvenile literature: parents and educators who would buy the work and children who would listen to or read the book themselves. Since many conservative parents in 1840 still favored the Bible and primer over the new didactic fiction for the young, Hawthorne is at pains to distinguish truth from fantasy throughout the work: "setting aside Grandfather and his auditors, and excepting the adventures of the chair . . . nothing in the ensuing pages can be termed fictitious" (6: 6). He explicitly defends his "imaginative authority" in the preface—"filling up the outline of history with details"—on the grounds that these "do not violate nor give a false coloring to the truth." Pacifying parents concerned with corrupting influences, he claims his narrative "will not be found to convey ideas and impressions of which the reader may hereafter find it necessary to purge the mind" (6: 6). But it is precisely the imaginative aspects of the narrative, when "the authentic thread of history" is tied to the "familiar and private existence" of historic personages (6: 5), which reveal the moral and psychological implications of his subject. The work's invention—the machinery of the chair, Grandfather, and his young auditors—authenticates the work, lending verisimilitude and trustworthiness to these New England tales.

Refusing to patronize youngsters or palliate his subject, Hawthorne reveals the value of historical consciousness and its origin in the moral imagination of the child. His aims are clear and consistent throughout: to paint a portrait of the national character so that a generation in the process of becoming will read its own lineaments in the description of a country being born. Unlike the simpler narration of facts for the Peter Parley series, Hawthorne relies here on biographies and histories to replace the lifeless facts of schoolbooks and their "cold array of outward action" (6: 5). Converting multiple primary sources into tales of "striking incidents," he dramatizes pivotal episodes in the lives of "eminent characters" to exemplify the formation of the republic and the inheritance of "the sombre, stern, and rigid characteristics of the Puritans" by their descendants (6: 6). Pictorial vignettes in the lives of Roger Williams, Rev. John Eliot, Sir William Phips, Ezekiel Cheever, and Cotton Mather are thus elaborated to personify evolutionary landmarks in New England history—the growing self-reliance of the colonists and their rough attempts to forge religious, economic, educational, military, and political independence.

The darker side of the nation's coming of age is not ignored. Giving flesh and blood outline to the painful and shameful facts of human existence—accidents at sea, smallpox epidemics, Quaker persecutions,

witch trials, the Acadian exile, Indian wars—Hawthorne places tremendous confidence in the power of children to reflect on difficult truths, synthesize contradictory impressions, respond to psychological nuance, and assess moral responsibility. He asks them to mediate the moral ambiguities of the Puritan temperament, linking the rugged qualities necessary to “struggle with wild beasts and wild men” (6: 17) in the New World to militancy, intolerance, and fanaticism. Finally he trusts them to entertain the subtle recognition that history is not merely a sequence of dates to be learned—treaties, laws, battles, charters—but the consequences of a family drama in which they take part and from which lessons must be drawn.

The author's primary concern, as expressed in the preface, is that the young will find the book “readable” and approach it “of their own accord” (6: 5). So Hawthorne scripts his own success with an unnamed narrator who omits the “tedious” parts of Grandfather's tale as well as “prattle” from his listeners “not essential to the story” (6: 13). This external narrator also constructs the frame, a literary enclosure in which Grandfather's storytelling occurs. Demonstrating the new home-centered learning advocated by contemporary domestic manuals (Brodhead 90–91), this educational environment partakes of informal family pastimes, bathing the fictional children in genial warmth. “The white-haired old sire” sits in the summer parlor or chimney corner, attracting a “flowery wreath of young people around him” (6: 51). Storytelling occurs during the different seasons of one year but only in the children's “unoccupied moments”—that is, after physical play is exhausted and outdoor games are ruled out by weather or twilight. Grandfather, who promises to teach something never found in schoolbooks, has resolved that “the instructive history of a chair” should be a pleasure and not a task: he always waits until the mood is right and the children beg for more. And what these fictional young want is more of what Hawthorne does best—the creation of romance. They amuse themselves imagining that the chair might come alive and tell its own picaresque adventures; Grandfather suggests entitling this work *Memoirs of My Own Times, by Grandfather's Chair*. But while the presence of Alice, Charley, Clara, and Laurence (aged 5, 9, 10 and 12) function in the work as current movie ratings do, reassuring parents that this material is appropriate for a preteen audience, their disparate personalities and responses to the narrative are also ominous reminders. Humanity's “deeper history” (6: 65), of which this family is a microcosm or type, is not as progressive as patriotic contemporary historians like Bancroft might suggest.³

The young auditors in their different ages, genders, and temperamental

types represent contrasting ideologies of the nineteenth-century child. By the way he distinguishes these four almost allegorical figures and the contexts he associates with them, Hawthorne complicates abstractions about child nurture which had mounted in the debate of the 1830s. Puritan and romantic modes of child-rearing are held in remarkable tension by Grandfather, who appreciates the virtues of all his grandchildren and seems to justify opposing pedagogical approaches for different species of children.

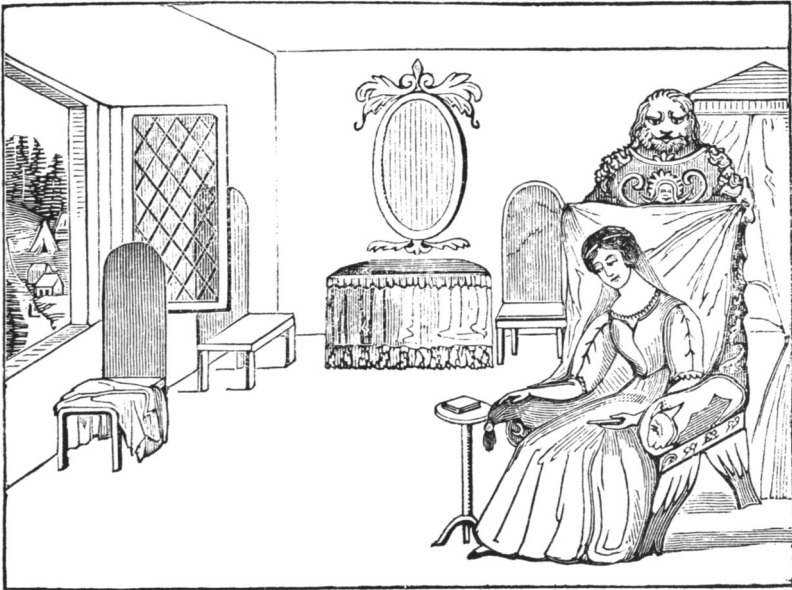
Both girls are associated with the gentle sensibility of the Lady Arbella, who originally brought the chair from England in 1632 as a dowry. Grandfather's first story, which recounts the demise of this young bride within a month of arriving in the New World, suggests the difficulty of transplanting her refined values to a land fit only for "rough and hardy people" who "can toil in the heat or cold, and can keep their hearts firm against all difficulties and dangers" (6: 17). Learning about "the gentle lady who had come so far to die so soon" prompts Alice and Cousin Clara, twice her age, to respond in entirely different ways: little Alice exclaims, "Oh, the lady must have been so glad to get to heaven!" while the older girl inquires what became of Lady Arbella's husband (6: 18). Through their opposing attachments—to spiritual and family realms—Hawthorne develops the "deeper history" of Grandfather's chair.

From the beginning this mute antique is identified not simply with the male patriarchs and mavericks of American history but with an artistic delicacy and domestic female sensibility associated with the Lady Arbella living on in the present:

At this time, however, it happened to be the fashion for ladies to adorn their drawing-room with the oldest and oddest chairs that could be found. It seemed to cousin Clara, that if these ladies could have seen Grandfather's old chair, they would have thought it worth all the rest together. (6: 11)

Citing "such arbiters of taste as the editors of *Godey's Lady's Book*" who "encouraged women to claim these old armchairs as their own, by altering and upholstering them so that they would be suitable for the parlor," David Watters argues that "the fashionable new furniture for the cottage" was connected with "a female genealogy" in its ornateness, one which Hawthorne and Sophia favored in their "romantic home furnishings" at the Old Manse (29, 41–42). Clara shares Hawthorne's fascination with the romance of a seventeenth-century chair.⁴

Always verifying who actually sat in the chair and inquiring about *its* welfare after each episode, Clara is the quietest but most socially and aesthetically attentive of the children. Her antiquarian curiosity about



The Lady Arbella, from the rare 1842 edition of *Grandfather's Chair*. The illustration is probably the work of Sophia Peabody. Reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

“fashions and manners . . . introduced from England into the Provinces” initiates a description of eighteenth-century balls and festivals reminiscent of the chair’s aristocratic origins. She appreciates domestic harmony more than politics: to her the threepence tax of the Stamp Act seems “not worth quarreling about!” (6: 150) and her response to war fastens on its dismal separation of spouses and children from their fathers (6: 190).

Clara’s solicitude for the chair appreciates Grandfather’s assertion that “the imagination can hardly grasp so wide a subject as is embraced in the experience of a family chair.” To Laurence’s remark that “a family chair must have a deeper history than a chair of state,” Clara exclaims that “the history of a country is not nearly so interesting as that of a single family would be” (6: 65). Grandfather’s first story is a disquieting beginning: the stage is set for a family history in which an heirloom passes on within a private domestic sphere. But after the Lady Arbella dies, subsequent hostility to her artistic and personal values is personified by leaders like John Endicott, whose heart is “as bold and resolute as iron” (6: 17).

Alice, an “unworldly infant” who instigates the narrative by curling

up in Grandfather's lap, requests a story that will put her to sleep. Like Wordsworth's visionary child trailing clouds of glory, she is never far from the shadows of the departed whom the storyteller invokes. Since she appears to be asleep more often than she really is, Grandfather sometimes neglects "to soften down" his narrative for the youngest listener. Real bloodshed is too much for her; Clara, twice her age but sharing the same tender female sensibility, must comfort and take the horrified little girl to bed. Grandfather hopes Heaven will grant that Alice "may dream away the recollection of the Boston massacre" (6: 170).

Through this innocent, Hawthorne addresses the realities of aging, mortality, and the overwhelming sadness of human history. Gazing at "little Alice" and the other "fair, unworldly countenances," Grandfather finds "a mist of tears bedimmed his spectacles":

He almost regretted that it was necessary for them to know anything of the past or to provide aught for the future. He could have wished that they might be always the happy, youthful creatures who had hitherto sported around his chair, without inquiring whether it had a history. It grieved him to think that his little Alice, who was a flower bud fresh from paradise, must open her leaves to the rough breezes of the world, or ever open them in any clime. So sweet a child she was, that it seemed fit her infancy should be immortal! (6: 51)

Drawing on the Platonic doctrine of pre-existence which Wordsworth had used metaphorically in the *Intimations Ode*, this conception of childhood is completely antithetical to the Calvinist notion of original sin. But the sight of golden-haired Alice also prompts Grandfather to defend learning history as an inevitable aspect of maturation, a process he sets in the familiar context of the Wordsworthian consolation. Like the poet at the conclusion of the *Ode*, Grandfather finds compensations for age in the attainment of the philosophic mind:

But such repinings were merely flitting shadows across the old man's heart. He had faith enough to believe, and wisdom enough to know, that the bloom of the flower would be ever holier and happier than the bud. Even within himself, though Grandfather was now at that period of life when the veil of mortality is apt to hang heavily over the soul, still, in his inmost being he was conscious of something that he would not have exchanged for the best happiness of childhood. It was a bliss to which every sort of earthly experience—all that he had enjoyed, or suffered, or seen, or heard, or acted, with the broodings of his soul upon the whole—had contributed somewhat. (6: 51–2)

This justification would not seem especially persuasive coming at the end of *Grandfather's Chair* were it not an extension of the creative consciousness which originally characterizes the storyteller. Part I opens with the old man sitting alone in his armchair one spring afternoon, apparently asleep but actually listening to the distinctive sounds of children playing outside. His identification with these childish activities in a dream-like state is the prelude to his invention of the "real or fabulous" history (6: 210). His capacity to delight Alice, barely five, grows out of his pleasure in knowing that "different as they were, the hearts of both could be gladdened with the same joys" (6: 10). Grandfather thus embodies Wordsworth's famous epigraph—"The Child is Father of the Man"—as well as the lines which precede it.

My heart leaps up when I behold
 A rainbow in the sky:
 So was it when my life began;
 So is it now I am a man;
 So be it when I shall grow old,
 Or let me die! . . . ("My Heart Leaps Up")

And though Grandfather was old and gray-haired, yet his heart leaped with joy whenever little Alice came fluttering, like a butterfly, into the room. (6: 9)

At the beginning and end of Hawthorne's career, the innocent wonder of girls like little Annie and Pansie dispel the gloom of their aged male companions. But in this work the child's fancy, a power often associated by Hawthorne with the butterfly, is met by a reciprocal élan. Here the elderly consciousness is idealized in its capacity to create stories which both celebrate and collaborate with the child's imagination.

While the bond of Grandfather and Alice seems calculated to encourage children to grow up and accept the loss of their prelapsarian world, Laurence and Charley suggest the darker aspects of Hawthorne's view of childhood and his ambivalence about the artist's Puritan heritage and self-definition. Charley, a rambunctious, upbeat fellow who rams his wheelbarrow into Grandfather's chair, is a sporadic listener. Direct, adventuresome, and literal-minded, he loves to hear about battles but seems to learn nothing from history. Laurence, on the other hand, is sensitive, idealistic, and reflective, sharing Alice's affinity for conjuring shadows and Grandfather's capacity to see both sides of a conflict. Rereading *Midsummer Night's Dream*, he is attuned to environments which release the transforming power of the imagination, declaring that early evening

“before the candles are lighted” provides the best setting to talk about “old times.”

“The shapes of the famous persons who once sat in the chair will be more apt to come back, and be seen among us, in this glimmer and pleasant gloom, than they would in the vulgar daylight. And, besides, we can make pictures of all that you tell us among the glowing embers and white ashes.” (6: 74)

Forecasting Hawthorne’s famous description of the ideal setting in which to write romance in the Custom House preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, Laurence embodies both the strengths and limitations of the literary sensibility.

Each boy’s temperament is associated with different pedagogical traditions and challenges described within Grandfather’s tales: Charley with Master Cheever’s Old-Fashioned School and Laurence with the forest scholarship of the Rev. John Eliot, translator of the Indian Bible (1663) and the only Puritan, according to Grandfather, “who realized that an Indian possesses a mind, a heart, and an immortal soul” (6: 43). Through Eliot, Hawthorne dramatizes a humanitarian educational ideal espoused by Elizabeth Peabody and other Transcendentalists in their quest for a natural language at the root of all tongues, or what Bronson Alcott called a “Universal Grammar.” Peabody was attracted to this philological theory because “if all language was derived from a common source—the interaction of the Reason with Nature—it declared a brotherhood of man far more inclusive than any defined by the arbitrary claimers of American *political* democracy” (Gura 155–56). Like Peabody, Eliot is portrayed as an educator who seeks unity beneath the surface of cultural and linguistic difference. He thus sees the red men as “descendants of those lost tribes of Israel of whom history has been able to tell us nothing for thousands of years” (6: 45–46). Redefining the Puritan mission as one of delivering these children of God from the “cruel bondage of ignorance and idolatry” (6: 47–48), his success is graphically demonstrated to visiting Englishmen. “Bred in the cloisters of a university,” these learned men are astonished when Eliot hands a young Indian scholar a manuscript of the Bible:

“Read this, my child,” would he say, “these are some brethren of mine, who would fain hear the sound of thy native tongue.”

Then would the Indian boy cast his eyes over the mysterious page, and read it so skilfully that it sounded like wild music. It seemed as if the forest leaves were singing in the ears of his auditors, and as if the roar of distant streams were poured through the young Indian’s voice. Such were

the sounds amid which the language of the red man had been formed; and these were still heard to echo in it. (6: 46)

Eliot's ceaseless toil to translate the Bible into a vocabulary closer to the vitality of nature makes the slaughter of the Indians by the dominant Puritan community all the more poignant. Having seen the apostle's historic volume in the Boston Atheneum, Laurence is moved to tears at the cruel irony of there being no Indians left to read it. His younger brother, however, shows the bellicose spirit and obtuse understanding of his Puritan forebears surviving into the nineteenth century when he exclaims of the Indians, " 'I would have conquered them first, and then converted them' " (6: 44).

This coercive mode of acculturation favored by Charley and perhaps necessary for his own training is exemplified by Ezekiel Cheever, the venerable Boston teacher who dominated a one-room school for seventy years (1637–1707). In keeping with the Calvinist view of children as miniature adults, his lads wear small square-skirted coats, looking "like so many grandfathers in their second childhood" (6: 83). "Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! In these good old times, a schoolmaster's blows were well laid on." Cheever whips the "urchins" as he teaches arithmetic to the merchants, shopkeepers, mechanics and "bold, rough sea-captains" of the future:

This class of boys, in short, must supply the world with those active, skilful hands, and clear, sagacious heads, without which the affairs of life would be thrown into confusion by the theories of studious and visionary men. Wherefore, teach them their multiplication-table, good Master Cheever, and whip them well when they deserve it; for much of the country's welfare depends on these boys. (6: 84)

Richard Brodhead's contention that in the 1840s and early 1850s "the picturing of scenes of physical correction emerges as a major form of imaginative activity in America" (67) is verified by *Grandfather's* elaborate "sketch" of the Old-Fashioned School. This detailed scene at the center of the three volumes, which Hawthorne later asked his fiancée Sophia Peabody to illustrate,⁵ lies in direct contrast to the instructional space created by the outer "modern" frame. That Horace Mann focused the debate on school reform around the issue of corporal correction indicates, Brodhead points out, his view of the "insufficiency . . . of the older patriarchal New England culture of the Boston schoolmasters" (75–76). *Grandfather's* approval of the older ways, however, is not senile nostalgia but an aspect of Hawthorne's own ambivalent view of the child and attachment to Calvinist perspectives of the past. *Grandfather* has

observed that “even you, Charley, my boy, would have felt some respect for the chair if you had seen it occupied by this famous schoolmaster” (6: 81). But at the conclusion of the chapter, Charley, whose wheelbarrow seriously injures the legs of the chair, asks Grandfather if Cheever’s boys did not tip the chair over when the schoolmaster was out of the room.

“There is a tradition,” replied Grandfather, “that one of its arms was dislocated in some such manner. But I cannot believe that any school-boy would behave so naughtily.” (6: 85)

Laurence and Charley recall Ilbrahim and the savage children who stone him in “The Gentle Boy,” but the dichotomy they represent is more subtle and complex. Restless or partisan activity, physical toughness, shrewd entrepreneurship, and unreflecting pragmatism are strands of the Puritan and Yankee character which Grandfather has shown necessary to build the country. While Grandfather appreciates the truth and profundity of what Laurence says, the boy’s faith in words is also identified by Hawthorne with the ineffectual efforts of “studious and visionary men.” Charley’s and Laurence’s disparate responses to the first blood of the Revolution shed seventy-one years earlier suggest that a voice of mediation born of historical understanding is rarely heard.

That night Charley had a dream about the Boston massacre, and thought that he himself was in the crowd and struck down Captain Preston with a great club. Laurence dreamed that he was sitting in our great chair, at the window of the British Coffee House, and beheld the whole scene which Grandfather described. It seemed to him, in his dream, that, if the townspeople and the soldiers would have heard him speak a single word, all the slaughter might have been averted. But there was such an uproar that it drowned his voice. (6: 171–72)

The final words of *The Whole History*, which can only be heard in a dream of Grandfather’s, belong to the chair. Coming alive to speak in a brief conclusion, this sturdy oaken object, now enchanted for the children by its historic associations, emerges as the true hero of the work. The conversational scene entitled “Grandfather’s Dream” is only reported to the children after warnings that “they must not mistake this story for a true one” (6: 205). But the inspiration for Grandfather’s dialogue with a piece of furniture comes from Charley’s “what next?” and Laurence’s desire that lessons of the chair’s “long intercourse with mankind” be uttered (6: 205). The children’s dissatisfaction at the end of the stories suggests Grandfather’s failure to impose simple order on history. Being fair to both sides and showing the good and the bad of individuals, Grandfather has made the narrative balanced like a sturdy chair but filled with contradictions. Some of these incongruities—Cotton Mather’s en-

lightened campaign for smallpox inoculation joined with his role as “chief agent” of the witchcraft delusion—have been as hard to reconcile as the parts of Grandfather’s chair—the ornate English wood carvings of the back buttressed by the Yankee iron ingeniously mending its joint. The oracular armchair’s declaration that “JUSTICE, TRUTH, and LOVE are the chief ingredients of every happy life” (6: 209) resonates ironically with Grandfather’s history, which has shown these qualities to be in very short supply. The final repartee of Grandfather and the chair solidifies a characteristic opposition throughout the work. The old man advances his faith that “these words are no secret. Every human being is born with the instinctive knowledge of it.” The chair’s rejoinder challenges the next generation:

“And, with this eternal lesson written in your soul, do you ask me to sift new wisdom for you out of my petty existence of two or three centuries? . . . here I close my lips for the next hundred years. At the end of that period, if I have discovered any new precepts of happiness better than what Heaven has already taught you, they shall assuredly be given to the world.” (6: 209)

Whether or not Laurence, Clara, Charley and Alice come to recognize that they are “what’s next,” Hawthorne’s frame creates space for children to see themselves in the realm of history and to test their responses against his fictive auditors. Laurence’s questioning of how Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson, a Tory and Puritan historian, could have failed to assess what the temper of the people was suggests the value of Hawthorne’s work as a portrait of American character rather than a mere chronology of events. More than any single person, *The Whole History* valorizes an understanding of the past based on the oral transmission of culture from old to young. As a symbol of historical consciousness, Grandfather’s chair gains mythological status. Like Grandfather’s lap, where children apprehend their sense of life, this seat of learning dramatizes the essential knowledge that cannot be discovered in books but must be drawn from human interaction.

From generation to generation, a chair sits familiarly in the midst of human interests, and is witness to the most secret and confidential intercourse that mortal man can hold with his fellow. The human heart can best be read in the fireside chair. (6: 65)

At the time he was writing *The Whole History*, Hawthorne did not feel his tales had captured the attention of the American public. Posing as an obscure man of letters, he did not enjoy the same rapport with his audience as Grandfather found in the chimney corner, surrounded by children. Working in the Boston Custom House, trying to earn money so that he could marry, and writing the second and third volumes of the series, he

joked to Longfellow that “by occupying Grandfather’s chair, for a month past, I really believe I have grown an old man prematurely” (quoted in Centenary Edition, Pearce, Introduction to *True Stories* 6: 293). Another decade had to pass before he earned the domestic stability, personal confidence, and professional success to complete the “book of fairy tales” he had originally planned as a collaboration with Longfellow in 1838 and which he hoped might “revolutionize the whole system of juvenile literature” (quoted in Pearce 6: 291). With the publication of *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys* (1852) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), Hawthorne “modernized” classical myths, his own children serving as the first audience for these adaptations. The fictive storyteller of this framed narrative, a vibrant college student named Eustace Bright, suggests the rejuvenating pleasure the writer took in this project: not only did he fulfill his early conception of literature for the young aimed at entertainment and imaginative delight rather than simply at moral training, but also won immediate fame as “one of the best of all possible writers for children.”⁶ Hawthorne confessed to Washington Irving in 1852 that “. . . I sent you *The Wonder Book*, because, being meant for children, it seemed to reach a higher point, in its own way, than anything I had written for grown people” (quoted in Pearce 6: 311).

Although *The Whole History of Grandfather’s Chair* was successful in Hawthorne’s era, it has subsequently been neglected as a children’s book and has only recently received the attention it deserves from Hawthorne scholars. Calling it “Hawthorne’s most extended historical statement” (88), Nina Baym argues that the author “had never been in firmer control of matter and manner than in this series” (96). In its exploration of human psychology by means of a Puritan relic which takes on mythological meanings, the history taps the strengths of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne’s greatest work. The sophisticated response he asks from children presupposes a capacity for the highest moral growth, a humane flexibility, and an insight into truth which progressive educators since Elizabeth Peabody have found in the young. By lending concrete reality to social history, *The Whole History of Grandfather’s Chair* seems more modern than the famed *Wonder-Books* because of its effective blend of fantasy and fact. Now that Hawthorne’s fiction has become the material of operas and television scripts, this work could provide a rich resource for the wider curricula of contemporary education; Hawthorne’s framed scenes, theatrical pacing, and pictorial detail could inspire the kind of dramatic productions currently staged at schools, theme parks, and children’s museums in an effort to make history come alive. As a written text, *The Whole History* is unusual for its refusal to let go of the child’s

imagination as the essential key to learning. While our era tends to separate the textbooks of American History from the historical fictions of *Johnny Tremain* and the juvenile biographies which crowd bookstores and libraries, Hawthorne was well ahead of his time in combining all three modes in this story of a legendary chair.

Notes

Portions of pages 1 and 2 were originally published in "*The Magnetized Observer*": *Hawthorne's Romantic Vision*, an exhibition catalogue (Salem, MA: Essex Institute; Cambridge, MA: Houghton Library, Harvard University, 1988).

¹For a history of the project and publication details, see Roy Harvey Pearce's Historical Introduction in the Centenary Edition of *True Stories*, 6: 292–97.

²For an outline of Peabody's career, see Bruce Ronda's introduction to E. P. Peabody's *Letters* (3–40). "Peabody's references to the now lost correspondence between Hawthorne and herself, during 1837–1838 and perhaps longer, make us regret the light that might have been thrown on this important period of his life" (Pearson 259).

³Grandfather praises the "brilliancy and philosophy" of Bancroft's history to Laurence (6: 137–38). For a discussion of *The Whole History* in relation to the patriotic typology of George Bancroft's *History of The United States*, a best-seller during Hawthorne's time, see Frederick Newberry (111–33). Bancroft was Hawthorne's superior at the Boston Custom House during the time he wrote *The Whole History*. E. P. Peabody "gave the final help to get him his position at the Boston Custom House by interceding with her old friend, George Bancroft" (Pearson 257).

⁴In endowing Cousin Clara with the imagination of an antiquarian, Hawthorne may be crediting a female cousin who apparently gave him the idea for *Grandfather's Chair*. Roy Harvey Pearce's Historical Introduction in the Centenary Edition of *True Stories* quotes a letter Hawthorne wrote to Horace Connolly "sometime after May, 1840" about his first visit to the actual House of the Seven Gables:

On my return, after the exploration I had made of the old structure, the "Duchess" [his second cousin Susan Ingersoll] said to me, "why don't you write something?" "I have no subject to write about." "Oh, there are subjects enough; write about that old chair," pointing to a high backed old chair in the room, "it is an old Puritan relic, and you can make a biographical sketch of each old Puritan who became in succession the owner of the chair." It was a good suggestion and I have made use of it under the name of "Grandfather's Chair." It will be a child's book. . . . (6: 292)

⁵Roy Harvey Pearce indicates in the Historical Introduction to the Centenary Edition of *True Stories* that the illustrations in the Tappan and Dennet reissues may be Sophia Peabody's (6: 294).

⁶Wary of promoting imaginative art for children, this reviewer praises Hawthorne's knowledge of "the passion of the marvellous in the young and how it may be gratified, submitting exaggeration to the gentler uses of pity and good conduct." A disciplinary aid to mothers, *The Wonder Book* "absorbs in a corner all noise and confusion as its secret influences penetrate the youthful reader" (*Literary World* 424).

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