

# Drawn and Published:

## The Craft of Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century New England

**F**rom start to finish, from the artist's attempt to capture a likeness to the viewer's reaction to the completed work, a portrait demands a personal response. Every level of interaction, every moment of reaction, is governed by subtle, often unconscious, social and individual standards and ideas. In eighteenth-century New England the process of creating a portrait was threefold: the artist looked at a sitter; the artist translated a mental image into a physical representation; the completed portrait catalyzed a mental reaction in a viewer. This reaction was the final step in portraiture, and if we study the social parameters that shaped the genre we can approximate the conditioned response of an eighteenth-century viewer and so complete the creative process begun by an artist 250 years ago. The nature of these parameters may become clearer through an

examination of a type of verbal portrait endemic to the eighteenth century—the funeral elegy. Like the painted portrait, the elegiac poem was a succinct, artificially structured character sketch, the product of a well-established tradition. Examining the internal art historical traditions and the external social demands that shaped each medium can reveal not only what portraitists tried to accomplish but also what consumers expected of these pieces.

Painter John Singleton Copley was born in Boston in 1738 and lived and worked in New England until 1774. Although he resented the aesthetic ignorance that pervaded Boston and longed to explore the great picture galleries of Italy, his business was lucrative and he was reluctant to leave it behind. According to Copley's granddaughter and biographer Martha Babcock Amory, the painter knew exactly what his customers

wanted: "He had theories and principles about female attire that were carried out with a scrupulous elaboration... The rose, the jewel in the hair, the string of pearls around the throat, were no accidental arrangement, but according to principles of taste which he thoroughly understood."<sup>1</sup>

The notion of "taste" seems to have preoccupied the eighteenth-century social consciousness to an extraordinary degree. Joseph Addison's April 3, 1711, essay in the English journal *Spectator* hammered home to a large reading public the idea that "the Taste is not to conform to the Art, but the Art to the Taste."<sup>2</sup> External visual influences on portraiture were fairly minimal. The most impressive quantity of visual art was in the burial ground, where the impact of the symbolic image must have been powerful, if only because of the overall lack of visual imagery.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, eighteenth-century American artists worked for a highly literate audience. Verbal description was often the only means to convey a visual image.<sup>4</sup> If the eighteenth-century portrait painter is considered as an artist with a more literary than visual background, the attempt of so many portraits to tell stories, to sum up a life with a few symbolic objects, is understandable. Literary analyst Donald Stauffer has commented that even writers, working in a medium that allowed for explication, depended on the single character sketch to portray men "from the days of the colic to the days of the gout. The age of reason insisted upon simplification; and simplification, destroying the complex individual, was destructive to naturalistic biography."<sup>5</sup> Popular literature of the day—spawned by the periodical essays in England's *Tatler*, *Rambler*, and *Idler*—"was

readable, entertaining, came in small doses, used ordinary language and focused on limited, precise topics, often of a moral nature."<sup>6</sup> A life should be captured—whether with brush or pen—in a few strokes. To elaborate further would not be tasteful.

In the eighteenth century the terms "craftsman," "artisan," and "artist" were virtually interchangeable, equally applicable to poets and painters. Like many early American portraits, the eighteenth-century funeral elegy was often clumsy and unrefined. Poetry was a regular part of eighteenth-century American life; historian Kenneth Silverman has noted that "the weekly 'Poet's Corner' of newspapers in Boston or Charleston never lacked locally written pastorals, drinking songs, and satires. Verse being a popular medium of public discourse, Americans filled broadsides and pamphlets with anonymous poems on issues of the day."<sup>7</sup> Because it was such a common vehicle of expression, written by and about all sorts of people, the elegy—just like the painted portrait—conveyed conventional ideas in conventional language.<sup>8</sup> Even the techniques employed by each type of portraitist were similar; according to the eighteenth-century anatomist Pieter Camper,

The portrait painters of the present day generally describe an oval upon their panel before the person to be painted sits to be drawn, make a cross in the oval, which they divide into the length of four noses and the breadth of five eyes; and they paint the face according to these divisions to which it must be accommodated, let the proportions themselves be ever so much at variance.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, in the late seventeenth century, English poet John Dryden described

the highly artificial framework that shaped poetry:

The moral... is the first business of the poet, as being the groundwork of his instruction. This being formed, he contrives such a design, or fable, as may be most suitable to the moral; after this he begins to think of the persons whom he is to employ in carrying on his design; and gives them the manners which are most proper to their several characters. The thoughts and words are the last parts, which give beauty and coloring to the piece.<sup>10</sup>

Considering painting and poetry together would have seemed natural to the eighteenth-century mind. The historical tradition of unity between the arts was a long and honored one, traceable to Horace, who in the first century B.C. wrote, "Poetry is like painting... there is a kind which appeals to you more when you stand near and others when you step back farther,"<sup>11</sup> thence to the sixteenth-century Italian artist and author Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, who pointed out that because hieroglyphics were pictures, writing was a type of picture-making, and on to the sixteenth-century English poet and statesman Sir Philip Sidney, who described poetry as "the art of making 'speaking pictures.'" Renaissance and Mannerist aestheticians insisted that any literature, but especially poetry, related directly to painting. Both media could be vehicles of instruction by depicting the "Glorious enterprises" of worthy men.<sup>12</sup>

If similarities between paintings and poems were assumed, it followed that similarities were likewise expected between painters and poets. In 1730 Mather Byles published a poem entitled "To Mr. Smibert on the Sight of his Pictures" in which he neatly outlined

the similar creative processes of the poet and the painter. Alike in purpose and concept, differences appear only in execution:

In the same Studies nature we pursue,  
I the Description touch, the Picture you;  
... Alike our Labor, and alike our Flame,  
'Tis thine to raise the Shape, and mine the Name.<sup>13</sup>

John Dryden's essay, "A Parallel of Poetry and Painting," prefixed to the 1695 edition of artist and poet Charles Alphonse duFresnoy's *De arte graphica*, offers useful insight into the goals and motivations of the eighteenth-century artist. Both the poet and the painter, Dryden insisted, strive to please their audiences by imitating nature: "To imitate Nature well in whatsoever subject, is the perfection of both arts; and that picture, and that poem, which comes nearest to the resemblance of Nature, is the best." The basis of art, and of the pleasure it generates, he explained, is deception: "The means of this pleasure is by deceit; one imposes on the sight, and the other on the understanding. Fiction is of the essence of Poetry, as well as of painting; there is a resemblance in one, of human bodies, things, and actions, which are not real; and in the other, of a true story by a fiction."<sup>14</sup>

The seemingly incongruous juxtaposition of truth and fiction was an essential aspect of eighteenth-century aesthetics. In 1710 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, argued that "the most natural beauty in the world is honesty and moral truth. For all beauty is Truth... In poetry, which is all fable, truth is the perfection."<sup>15</sup> Toward the end of his essay, Dryden explained how the compilation of truths leads to a perfection not found naturally: "Poetry [and]

Painting... present us with images more perfect than the life in any individual; and we have the pleasure to see all the scattered beauties of Nature united by a happy chemistry, without its deformities or faults."<sup>16</sup> According to material culture scholar Henry Glassie, strict realism was neither the goal of the portrait painter nor the expectation of the viewer; each would look for "small lies to approach large truths."<sup>17</sup>

In the eighteenth century "resemblance" referred to "the external appearance, or characteristic features, peculiar to an individual or a class of persons or things."<sup>18</sup> This was not a new definition; in fifteenth-century Germany, for example, Albrecht Dürer's teacher, the artist Michael Wolgemut, used the same woodcut print in the *Nuremberg Chronicle* to represent four different cities. Wolgemut's generic image successfully conveyed the essential information that a city was an enclosed group of many small buildings, some larger ones, and a church. In the seventeenth century, topographical artist Matthäus Merian portrayed Paris's Cathedral of Notre Dame with an image of an ecclesiastical building that bore little similarity to the actual French cathedral. Like Wolgemut, he was more concerned with conveying an idea than architecturally accurate information.<sup>19</sup> There was a continuum inherent in the eighteenth-century understanding of "resemblance" which allowed portraitists to move between the fine and the broad, between precise illustrations of individuals and more general depictions of individuals as part of a class or group. Every portrait fell somewhere on that line, and every point on this continuum called for the imaginative participation of the viewer.

All of these concepts of truth, beauty, deception, reality, nature, and resemblance shaped the prevalent attitudes toward painted portraiture in the eighteenth century. Although Horace Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting*, first published in 1762, provided reliable information about the history and appreciation of art,<sup>20</sup> Americans not involved in the production of portraits generally paid it little intellectual heed, as historian Neil Harris has noted:

The complex structure of neoclassical aesthetics was received by Americans in a passive manner; they engaged in little domestic debate about the theories of Hogarth, Reynolds or Barry. Conventions about the nature of art entered national thought but without any vigorous counterthrusting or measuring; there was little awareness of their implications and almost no directed argument about their meaning.<sup>21</sup>

Copley wrote bitterly of the artistic ignorance of the "New England connoisseurs" who surrounded him, but he pragmatically took advantage of their indifference to perfect his craft and sold them unsuccessful compositions as well as successful ones.<sup>22</sup> His patrons apparently did not mind. They were not shopping for works of art but for identifiable effigies.<sup>23</sup> If Copley's grander aspirations, nurtured by English painter Sir Joshua Reynolds's lofty theories, caused him to disdain portraiture in favor of the nobler and more sublime history painting, economic realities persuaded him to remain in Boston until the charged political climate (his father-in-law imported the tea that was dumped into Boston Harbor) made relocation to England expedient in 1774. His own talent, the absence of serious competition, and the general affluence that followed the French and

Indian War allowed Copley to earn enough from his painting to live quite comfortably on Beacon Hill, and yet there is virtually no record of any public reaction to his work. There were no exhibitions, no artists's guilds, and no evidence of any significant interest in artistic activities.<sup>24</sup> Proud of his talent as a painter, Copley complained at length about the apathy he encountered from his customers:

The people generally regard it no more than any other usefull trade, as they sometimes term it, like that of a Carpenter tailor or shewmaker, not as one of the most noble Arts in the World. Which is not a little Mortifying to me... and be my improvements what they will, I shall not be benefitted by them in this country, neighter in point of fortune or fame.<sup>25</sup>

This indifference to artistic creation cannot be overestimated. While it is true that colonial printers and booksellers kept English prints in constant supply (indicating an obvious consumer demand) through the latter half of the eighteenth century, prints were purchased as much for decoration as for inspiration or information and were frequently advertised along with wallpaper.<sup>26</sup> A painted portrait in eighteenth-century America was one more material possession, not inherently different from a tea service or a piece of case furniture. The creator of the product was less important than the final image; in many cases, in fact, the name of the sitter survives while that of the artist is forgotten.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, elegies were often published anonymously or signed only with the author's initials. Nevertheless, the painted portrait became an essential element of affluent pre- and post-Revolutionary decor. John Neal, America's most prolific early nineteenth-cen-

tury art critic, wrote in his *Observations on American Art*, "You can hardly open the door of a best room anywhere without surprising, or being surprised by, a picture of somebody plastered to the wall and staring at you with both eyes and a bunch of flowers."<sup>28</sup> As late as 1832 Americans were happily unconcerned with painters' artistic skill: "The finish of drapery was considered as the highest excellence, and next to this, the resemblance... ; I do not remember ever to have heard the words *drawing* or *composition* used in any conversation on the subject," wrote Frances Trollope in her scathing commentary, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*.<sup>29</sup>

Resemblance was the key for eighteenth-century portrait buyers in New England; Copley grumbled about it, Mrs. Trollope observed it. Copley's 1771 portrait of the Reverend John Ogilvie, who lived from 1724 to 1774, illustrates one definition of "resemblance"—the representation of a type (fig. 1). Few eighteenth-century professionals were so easily recognized by their clothing; presumably Ogilvie, the Anglican pastor of Trinity Church in New York, had a say in how Copley depicted him, and he had the artist emphasize the class or group to which he belonged. Although painted when Copley was at the height of his American success, this portrait illustrates few of the decorative accessories in which his talents flourished. There are no shimmering textiles, no highly polished wood or metal surfaces, no flamboyant use of color. The focus instead is on the head, the robes, the hands, the book. The robes establish the role of the subject. The head (source of intellect), the book (source of inspiration), and the hand gesturing persuasively create the character.

This painting is at the broad end of the resemblance continuum; it is less a picture of John Ogilvie, minister, than it is a portrait of a minister who happens to be named John Ogilvie. Whether or not the features of his face were accurately rendered on canvas was secondary. It is unlikely that Ogilvie himself would have demanded an exact image; this was primarily a representation of what he was, rather than what he looked like.

Still influenced by the symbolic universe of their Puritan forebears, it was not unusual for eighteenth-century portrait buyers to avoid the particular in favor of the general. Verbal portraiture exhibited a typological bent as well. By the early eighteenth century there were two recognizable varieties of biography—brief, sarcastic, journalistic pieces and the formal panegyric. The latter form, which included the funeral elegy, developed from the pious hagiography of earlier centuries. Elegists themselves admitted their portraits were idealized; literary analyst John Draper asserted that they “falsified the actual for the sake of the ideal... lying with a glorious and patent candor.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, the more personalized a biography was in the eighteenth century—the more it approached a precise resemblance—the less likely it was to find favor with its readers. When James Boswell claimed to present Samuel Johnson with “warts and all,” one critic objected: “Would any man who wish’d his friend to have the respect of posterity exhibit all his little caprices, his unhappy infirmities, his singularities... they disgrace a character to a reader as wens and warts would do a statue or Portrait to a spectator.”<sup>31</sup>

The tradition of literary portraiture as it existed in the eighteenth century depended

on idealization. The seventeenth-century Protestant community was nurtured on the exemplary life. For the individual Puritan, spiritual biography provided a guide for incorporating doctrine into earthly existence; it presented a role model by illustrating the transformation of a life from the ordinary to the pious ideal.<sup>32</sup> As the eighteenth century progressed and secular humanism became more entrenched, the exemplary life flourished—but the emphasis changed. Literary historian Richard Hankins explains that interest in spiritual role models was replaced by “a desire—conscious or otherwise—to provide legendary and mythical as well as historical and biographical materials for a new society and a new political experiment.”<sup>33</sup> When Mrs. Anne Belding, wife of the Reverend Mr. Joshua Belding, died in 1774, a youth of the parish fused Christian imagery with classical mythology in an unsigned elegy he wrote in her honor:

Not all the Charms of Piety nor Grace,  
Can save One of our mortal Race,  
Nor the least Succour give,  
Or Help afford,  
When by the holy Lord  
It is decreed, they shall not live.  
Such was her Fate! the Muse replies.

Piety gradually gave way to practicality. Painter John Durand’s advertisement in *The New York Journal* on April 7, 1768, revealed the artist’s awareness of the social role of portraiture: “Men who have distinguished themselves for the good of their country and mankind may be set before our eyes as examples and to give us their silent lessons.”<sup>34</sup> Durand’s words indicate an understanding of the intellectual relationship between art and

society. Benjamin West hoped his contemporary history paintings would inspire and instruct viewers, for “to instruct the rising generation in honorable and virtuous deeds ... are the good and great points which the historical pencil has to effect—and that can only be done, by placing before them, those bright examples of their predecessors or contemporaries.”<sup>34</sup> Samuel Johnson, the prolific English biographer of the late eighteenth century, recognized the importance of empathy to portraiture in his 1750 essay “The Dignity and Usefulness of Biography”: “All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the imagination... by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel... whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves.” Johnson explained why the imagination achieves empathy, why it is able to connect emotionally with circumstances or events beyond its immediate radius: “There is such an uniformity in the state of man, considered apart from adventitious and separable decorations and disguises, that there is scarce any possibility of good or ill, but is common to human kind.”<sup>36</sup> According to Johnson, underneath the externals (“adventitious and separable decorations and disguises”) people are alike. Examine the actions of one and you will find the motivations of all. Suddenly Copley’s frequently similar poses and accoutrements, and even Philadelphia artist Charles Willson Peale’s repetitive images, make sense: would not similar internal characteristics suggest a similar external cast?

Discovering universal truth in nature was the primary goal of Augustan writers—

including Pope, Addison, Swift, and Steele—in early to mid-eighteenth-century England. Benjamin Church, a popular literary figure in the northern colonies on the eve of the Revolution, modeled his own essays and poems on the diction and style of the English Augustans.<sup>36</sup> His “Elegy on the Death of the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew, D. D.,” published in Boston in 1766, consisted of fifty rhymed iambic pentameter quatrains. A portrait emerges from the confluence and development of three themes: the idealization of the subject; the solicitation of reader empathy; and the generalization of particular characteristics.

Growing from the tradition of the seventeenth-century exemplary life, Church undertook his attempt at portraiture by idealizing—nearly deifying—his subject in an effort to create a model of human virtue. This began in the apologetic “Advertisement” prefixed to the poem:

Elegy on the Death of the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew, D. D., Who Departed This Life July 9th, Anno Domini 1766, Aetatis Suae 46.

#### Advertisement

The Author of the following POEM, having composed it in the Intervals of Business, designing it till towards the Close for the private Inspection of a Friend—thinks it necessary to inform the Publick, that had he originally intended to publish it, he should have endeavoured that it might have appeared more seasonably, and more worthy the exalted Subject—such as it is, he hopes for a candid Reception of it, not having sufficient Leisure at present to introduce it into the World in a better Dress.

Except for the title, Church never actually named his “exalted Subject” until the

twenty-second stanza—almost halfway through the poem. Earlier, however, he explained the motivation underlying his versified portrait: the preservation of an “Exemplar” for future generations, for “The Good, the Wise, the Virtuous, and the Just, / Demand the Stamp of Immortality.”

Mayhew was the Puritan pastor of West Church in Boston and a friend of political radicals Samuel Adams and James Otis; his spirited sermons and essays were known for urging political independence for the colonies.<sup>38</sup> Even with these rich sources on which to draw, however, Church never chronicled specific incidents in Mayhew’s life. Instead, he offered only vague political allusions:

His earliest Joy was *Liberty*, for this  
 His Soul to labours, Watchings, Prayers he gave,  
 Freedom was all his Ardor, all his Bliss  
 His Heart turn’d Rebel at that Tho’t, a *Slave*.

Church left no doubt over the excellence of Mayhew’s character. After proclaiming that “A mortal Being never rose more fair” than Mayhew, and after describing him as “god-like,” Church concluded his elegy by depicting Mayhew as super-human, unique in goodness and piety. The three final stanzas paint a poetic vision of the Reverend Mayhew holding forth among the heavenly host, a wonder even among angels:

Methinks I see him with his beaming Face,  
 Pour in some Seraph’s Ear his wondrous Tale,  
 Of mighty Power he speaks, redeeming Grace,  
 While Love by turns, and rev’rent Awe prevail;

Around attent, illustrious Spirits Throng,  
 Catch from his lips, the well-instructed Lore,  
 Then shout, such Dictates from a mortal Tongue,  
 Such Strength of Mind, they never knew before;

Then clasp the heav’nly Stranger, and with Joy,  
 Wooe his Acquaintance, his Arrival bless,  
 All emulous to please, their Harps employ,  
 To teach the rapt’rous Song, with glad Success.

Church’s elegy exaggerated, certainly, but relied upon a type of exaggeration the eighteenth-century audience, groomed as it was by what historian Kenneth Silverman has called “the groaning grief of Whig sentimentalism,”<sup>39</sup> expected of elegiac verse. Church, however, did not rely on literary convention alone to keep his work from being dismissed as mere hyperbole. Throughout the poem, he skillfully connected his subject and his readers to accent their common ground. Kinship is assumed as early as the third stanza, as “on our Parent-Isle our Eyes revert.” Church even created a link between himself and his readers; in the first stanza, after describing his own grief, he explicitly included his audience in his sorrow: “To Woe’s low Murmurs patient is thine Ear, / Thy Soul responsive to a Tale of Pain.” He complimented his readers on their sensitivity and later built on this presumed sympathy with lavish descriptions of Mayhew’s mourners:

And thou once-envied, now compassion’d Spouse!  
 Whose streaming Eyes, a ceaseless Tribute shed,  
 While fond Reflection, still forbids Repose,  
 And bleeding Love still hovers o’er the Dead;

Say shall th’ intruding Muse demand thine Ear,  
 Point to yon Shroud, and moralizing say?  
 “Suppress thy Sorrows, stop th’ effusive Tear,  
 “Thy dear-lov’d *Mayhew* beckons thee away:

That awful Stroke which widow’d thee of Joy  
 Too soon thy Virtues shall to Bliss translate,  
 Some future Bard, shall all his Powers employ,  
 To paint thy Beauties, and lament thy Fate:

Till then thine Offspring claim thy fostering Care,  
 Dear lovely Pledges of a mutual Flame,  
 Those infant Cherubs to thy Virtues rear,  
 And crown the Blessing, with their Father's Fame:

While stor'd Remembrance pains the grateful Heart,  
 In speechless Agony, see yonder Train!  
 Unhappy Flock! we share a tender Part,  
 Adopt the Pang, and weep him o'er again.

Church smoothly illustrated the rippling effect of grief, beginning with Mayhew's "once-envied, now compassion'd Spouse!" moving to Mayhew's children, "Dear lovely Pledges of a mutual Flame,/Those infant Cherubs"; and finally encompassing Mayhew's congregation, "Unhappy Flock! we share a tender Part,/Adopt the Pang, and weep him o'er again." In these stanzas (forty-one through forty-five) Church exploited the method he neatly contained in the first stanza: he elicited sympathy by describing grief and then included his audience through a direct address ("we share a tender Part"). Yes, Mayhew was described as godlike, but still his was an image understandable to any of Church's readers who had experienced or who could imagine sorrow. The audience became part of the poem.

Church nicely demonstrated that this interaction worked the other way as well, from his side of the page outward:

O ye happy, ye selected few!  
 Who to his social Heart had soft Access,  
 ... What you have lost, I read in your Distress.

In this elegy Church provided glimpses of Jonathan Mayhew's human characteristics, and it is in these flashes that Church's assumption of an intellectual or imaginative interaction with his readers is most apparent. Rather than describing Mayhew's personal virtues Church reminded his readers of what they already knew—"Why need we mark



Fig. 2. Richard Jennys, Jonathan Mayhew, mezzotint, 1766. Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

that all-discerning Mind,/That shot thro' Science with a Light'nings Speed" in the twenty-eighth stanza; "Why need we note that Dignity of Soul,/That 'stablish'd Reason's controverted Sway?" in the twenty-ninth stanza; and "Why need we note his Honesty



Fig. 3. *Robert Feke, James Bowdoin III, oil on canvas, 1748.*  
*Courtesy Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine;*  
*bequest of Mrs. Sarah Bowdoin Dearborn.*

of Heart,/That every Sentiment with Freedom taught” in the thirty-first stanza. As in Copley’s portrait of Rev. Ogilvie, readers learned here as much about Mayhew—and about portraiture—by what was said as by what was left out; Church did not feel obliged to elaborate these points because he assumed the mention of Mayhew’s name was enough to foster recollection of his virtues. Church used this elegy, this verbal portrait, as a catalyst for the memories and imaginations of his audience; he avoided the particulars of Mayhew’s life and allowed his readers to supply their own images of brilliance, dignity, and honesty. Similarly, painter Richard Jennys provided imaginative cues in his mezzotint

portrait of Jonathan Mayhew (fig. 2). Advertised for sale in the *Boston News-Letter* within eight days of the minister’s death,<sup>40</sup> Jennys’ engraving is dominated by Mayhew’s ecclesiastical robes. This costume, together with the figure’s wide eyes, full cheeks, and pursed mouth, prompt imaginative assumptions about Mayhew’s character.

Because Benjamin Church worked at the broad end of the resemblance continuum in the sense that he avoided precise description in his elegy, Mayhew’s versified personality became a generalization. Jonathan Mayhew was transformed into Goodness itself:

*Mayhew!* In thy fair Bow’r of Bliss  
 enthron’d,

Bold in the Front of Angels rise erect,

Had’st thou one Fault unwept, or unatton’d?

Hadst thou one Virtue clouded with defect?

The same kind of exaggerated idealization also appeared in Robert Feke’s 1748 portrait of James Bowdoin II (fig. 3). In 1748 James Bowdoin was an affluent, influential young New England merchant; Feke portrayed him in a commanding pose, close to the foreground, with a lofty gaze that will not quite meet a viewer’s eye. His clothes are lavishly detailed, but the landscape behind him is a generalized scene of rolling hills and trees. The implication is that Bowdoin is larger than life, moving through a world that is bland by comparison.

Eighteenth-century portrait makers

were not primarily concerned with psychological character studies. Because their works were representational, they focused instead on external, visible qualities, sometimes to an extraordinary degree. Descriptions of physical traits and mannerisms developed markedly in eighteenth-century biographies.<sup>41</sup> But appearances and manners were expected to fit within prescribed limits, both in life and in portraits, as evidenced by English portraitist and painting theorist Jonathan Richardson's advice to portrait painters: "The Figure must not only do what is Proper, and in the most Commodious Manner, but as People of the best Sense and Breeding... would, or should perform such Actions. The painter's People must be good Actors... There must be no Awkward, Sheepish or Affected Behaviour, no Strutting, or Silly Pretense to Greatness."<sup>42</sup>

Personal physical appearance was the primary concern of both portraitists and their subjects. When botanist John Bartram planned a visit to plantations in Maryland and Virginia in 1738, a friend recommended that he purchase a new set of clothes, "for tho I would not Esteem thee less to come to Mee in what Dress thou Will, yet these Virginians are a very gentle, Well Dress'd people, and look phaps More at a Man's Outside than his Inside, for these and other Reasons pray go very Clean, neat and handsomely Dressed to Virginia."<sup>43</sup> In painted portraits, decades-old prints were frequently used as the composi-

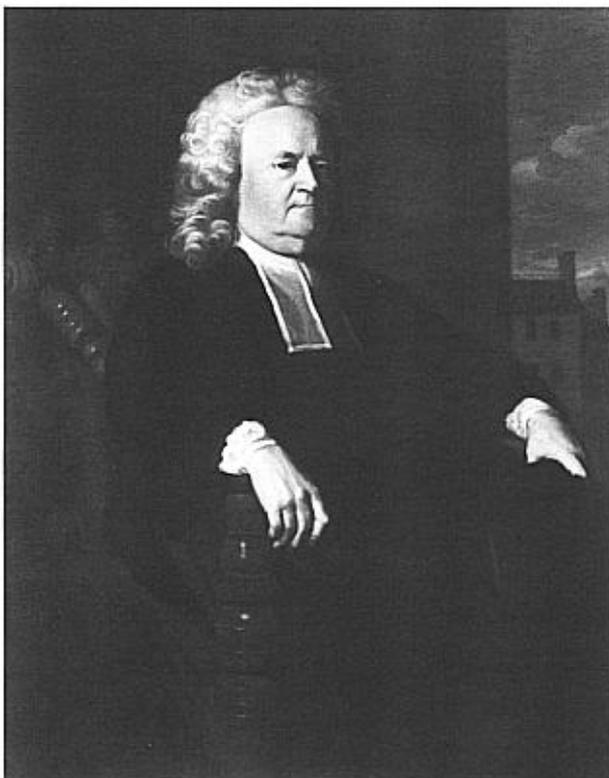


Fig. 4. John Singleton Copley, Edward Holyoke, oil on canvas, 1759-61. Given to Harvard College by Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Ward, granddaughters of Edward Holyoke, 1829. Courtesy Harvard University Portrait Collection.

tional bases of paintings that depicted sitters in contemporary styles of clothing.<sup>44</sup> Lamenting that he did not have time to introduce his 1766 elegy for Jonathan Mayhew "into the World in a better Dress," Benjamin Church demonstrated the same concern through poetic metaphor. Clothing and accessories could serve a dual function in portraits, both establishing or reinforcing a desired persona and grounding the image in a specific place and time. This focus on external objects rather than on internal personalities created a beautiful, tactile facade and presented each subject in his or her own social role.<sup>45</sup> As Jonathan Richardson wrote,

“The painter’s People must be good Actors.”

Reverend Edward Holyoke (1689–1769), one of Copley’s earlier portraits, illustrates these concerns (fig. 4). Dated 1759–61 and completed when Holyoke was seventy-two, the portrait shows the stout cleric in his twenty-fourth year as president of Harvard University. He is seated in a sixteenth-century Welsh chair which he gave to the university as the “official occasion chair.”<sup>46</sup> As expected of an ecclesiastical portrait, the format of this work is uncomplicated. But while the painted body of Copley’s Rev. Ogilvie could have supported virtually any ministerial head, this portrait is inextricably linked to Edward Holyoke. Working toward a more precise form of resemblance, Copley showed the cleric not as a general type, but playing a specific role—presumably the role by which he wished to be remembered. Like Ogilvie, Holyoke wears clerical garb and holds a book, but he is seated in a site-specific ceremonial chair. Instead of using a generic set of books and shelves to define the background space, Copley seated his subject by a window that seems to frame some of Harvard’s buildings. (This link with the college is especially intriguing; no such buildings survive on the campus today, nor is there conclusive documentation that they ever existed. Were they drawn from life? Or did Copley, like Wolgemut in the fifteenth century, merely intend to suggest the sort of architecture that might reasonably be found in an academic setting?) Copley’s portrait of Holyoke is thus a “resemblance” halfway between the characteristic features peculiar to an individual and those ascribed to a class of persons or things.

Captain Thomas Smith’s late seven-



Fig. 5. *Thomas Smith, Self-Portrait, oil on canvas, ca. 1680-90. Courtesy Worcester Art Museum.*

teenth-century *Self-Portrait* is another, earlier, example of a portrait that utilized personal symbols to illustrate a specific social role (fig. 5). The composition is typical of the period, with the sitter posed at a table in front of a window; the landscape in the window, however, is not the usual rolling hillside but a tempestuous seascape, an appropriate reference to Smith’s primary occupation and a visual echo to the gloomy poem he included in the work. Smith pulled the idea of life’s transience (the undercurrent of every portrait) into the foreground, with a death’s head and a melancholy elegy: “Why, why should I the World be minding/therein a World of Evils Finding/Then Farwell World: ...I am not sorye.” By including this poem, and by showing himself with his hand resting on the skull, the aging artist suggested his readiness to touch death; Smith directly combined the arts of poetry and painting to create a visual and versified portrait.

While it is true that by the mid-eighteenth century American poetry had lost some of its religious intensity, it still exhibited a strong sense of general piety and moralism.<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Richardson advised eighteenth-century painters to study and seek inspiration from past masters,<sup>48</sup> and writers likewise looked backward for form and content. Ancient literary sources, in fact, provided a tremendously influential example of the depiction of a person in a fairly one-dimensional way: the New Testament portrays Christ in the “role” of Messiah. Ecclesiastical biographers could not ignore this example. The most significant American biographical work of the time was Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, but none of Mather’s subjects show any signs of character development or growth.<sup>49</sup> Like a portrait painter, Mather united personal detail with an existing conception of a social role; he wove together realism and typology into an aesthetic whole.<sup>50</sup> The funeral elegy, which evolved from religious biography, often did the same in verse.

An Elegy to the Memory of that pious and eminent servant of Jesus Christ the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, Who departed this Life the 30th of September, 1770. Aetatis suae 56.

Nullos virtutibus pares habemes, et habebimus Gloria Neminem. Plin. Epist.

(“We have none his equal in virtue, and will not have any his equal in glory.” *Pliny’s Letters*)

In spite of this elegant and laudatory beginning, Benjamin Church wrote his elegy for the itinerant revivalist George Whitefield with metaphor and restraint and delineated a believable character. Church sketched Whitefield’s preaching style, touched on Whitefield’s evangelistic tour, and imag-

ined him dying and entering heaven with the same zest he evinced in life:

He sprung at once, and flung corruption by,  
... And storm’d the golden portals of the skies.

Although Church enabled readers to come away from this elegy with some sense of the man, the poem is not a fully developed character study.

Who compass’d oceans, travers’d every shore,  
The busy herald of his Saviour’s love?  
Heav’n’s swiftest envoy scarce could labour more  
Or raise such levies, to the choirs above.

Who brav’d the tempest, try’d the various clime,  
Encounter’d dangers, and embrac’d distress?  
To point our view beyond the wreck of time,  
And in that prospect, to instruct, and bless.

Who rais’d the humble, startled the secure?  
And shook proud rebels, from their gilded car?  
To plaintive Lazars shed the balm of cure,  
And with bold sceptics wag’d successful war.

Who heir’d from God, sagacity divine,  
To pierce the human heart’s remotest cell;  
To drag each fell usurper from his shrine,  
And lash reluctant demons into hell.

Who cinctur’d virtue, in unsullied white,  
Emboss’d with stars, and smiling heav’nly fair?  
Who vice pourtray’d, so baneful to the sight,  
The monster shudder’d at her image there?

Such Whitefield is thy praise: while here you sleep,  
And deck this shore with consecrated dust;  
O’er thy cold urn shall widow’d virtue weep,  
While pensive Angels guard the darling trust.

Like Mather’s biographical descriptions, this elegy presents us with Whitefield as he was—or how he was thought to be—not how he came to be that way.

Portraitists employ various techniques to evoke emotional responses from their audiences. The oil painter, for example, may make a pair of painted eyes seem to peer directly at a viewer. Or the moment depicted may be a particularly moving one, as in Peale's portrait of his wife weeping over their dead child. In the Whitefield elegy readers encountered effusive grief, which led to a direct address to them:

While smiling Angels thine arrival greet,  
And plausive Cherubs shout thy title fair:  
A world in tears shall reach thy glad retreat,  
And snatch one pang, from endless raptures there.

Forgive the tempest, should our sorrows rave,  
While o'er thy mould'ring dust our heads decline;  
We wish to glut the av'rice of the grave,  
Bid us to die,—'tis harder to resign.

Church exploited the writer's version of direct address throughout this poem, continuing through the twenty-first stanza and the Latin epilogue:

How could our bosoms bear the dreadful shock,  
Should his dear Jesus take our Master home?  
... Our friend is gone and pours out his soul into the  
air:  
Who in the telling of these things would keep from  
tears?  
... this man we will mourn as having passed away!

As in his Mayhew elegy, Church thus wrote his audience into his poem.

The "Elegy to... George Whitefield" is perhaps the closest verbal parallel to a painted portrait created in eighteenth-century New England. In keeping with the temperament of his era, Church intertwined the literary and visual arts when he claimed the charismatic George Whitefield "limn'd reli-

gion to the sinners choice." Like a painter working in chiaroscuro, Church metaphorically balanced areas of light against areas of dark, quiet sounds against booming noise, sensations of heat against sensations of cold: against "virtue, in unsullied white" is "vice pourtray'd, so baneful to the sight"; against "the soft persuasive magic of his voice" is "the vollied thunder of his zeal"; against "seraph's flame" is "the ice of Death." Church used this method to shape literary, if not psychological, dimensionality.

It is impossible to miss the similarity of this antipodal technique to the strong value contrasts of eighteenth-century American paintings. Such contrasts are particularly evident in Copley's portrait of Mrs. Joseph Mann, the wife of a tavern keeper, painted when the artist was about fifteen (fig. 6). Copley scholar Jules Prown explains that the composition of *Mrs. Joseph Mann* was derived from an Isaac Beckett mezzotint portrait of Princess Anne, which in turn was made after an oil painting by William Wissing (fig. 7).<sup>51</sup> The mezzotint medium cannot support subtle color modulations; a mezzotint made after a painting inevitably has more pronounced contrasts of light and dark than the original work. The deep shadows in the corners and drapery in Copley's portrait of Mrs. Mann, like those in Beckett's mezzotint, add depth and weight to the figure and serve to highlight her face and hands. Just like Church, Copley used dark tones to throw light onto key features.

While an elegy was most often composed at the end of a life, a painted portrait might be made at any time; in each case, however, the subject was illustrated at a particular stage, leaving the details of all that came



(above) Fig. 7. Isaac Beckett after William Wissing, Princess Anne, mezzotint, 1710-30. Courtesy Winterthur Museum.

(at left) Fig. 6. John Singleton Copley, Mrs. Joseph Mann (Bethia Torrey), oil on canvas, 1753. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; gift of Frederick H. and Holbrook E. Metcalf.

before to the imagination. Painted portraits of children represented the flip side of this idea. Copley, for example, captured a fleeting moment of childhood in his double portrait of Mary and Elizabeth Royall (fig. 8). Arguably Copley's first real masterpiece, the painting hints at the lively energy of its subjects: a hummingbird perches tenuously on Mary Royall's fingertips, a small dog nervously sniffs the air as Elizabeth strokes its ears. Unlike an elegy, written as a summation of a person's life, Copley's portrait of the Royall sisters tantalizes a viewer with ideas of what will come *next*. At the very least, the hummingbird will fly off and the puppy will shift position. The statuesque pose of the girls challenges the intellectual realization that they will grow, they will change, and this intimate glimpse of childhood will vanish.

Artists could not escape the practical social applications eighteenth-century consumers assigned to portraiture. Whether painted on canvas, verbalized on tombstones or in diaries, or versified in poems, portraits could commemorate specific events, highlight social positions, or honor persons's memories upon or after death.<sup>52</sup> In her poem "To the Memory of My Dear and Ever Honoured Father," written in 1653, New England poet Anne Bradstreet alluded to the expectation that elegies would be composed upon the death of esteemed individuals:

By duty bound and not by custom led  
 To celebrate the praises of the dead,  
 My mournful mind, sore pressed, in trembling verse  
 Presents my lamentations at his hearse,  
 Who was my father, guide, instructor too,  
 ... While others tell his worth, I'll not be dumb.

Portraits could be sent to geographically distant family members, or they could descend to heirs yet unknown.<sup>53</sup> Every portrait was a reminder of time's swift passage and the transience of earthly life.<sup>54</sup> Even with this general consistency of purpose, the accepted definition of "resemblance" was wide enough to allow skilled portraitists to modify their artistic strategies to accommodate the personalities of particular individuals. Following English poet Alexander Pope's urging, artists had to know what they wanted to say before they could determine an appropriate way to express it:

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,  
 As those move easiest who have learned to dance.  
 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offense,  
 The sound must seem an echo to the sense.<sup>55</sup>



Fig. 8. *John Singleton Copley, Mary and Elizabeth Royall, oil on canvas, about 1758. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Julia Knight Fox Fund.*

Copley's portrait of Newburyport Congregational minister Thomas Cary (1745-1808), for example, shows him to be friendly, accessible, and easy to like (fig. 9). His mobile expression—the arched eyebrows, the hint of a smile—hovers on change, to grin perhaps, or even to laugh. An amiable young man in comfortable clothing and surroundings, clearly at ease in his viewers' company, Thomas Cary turns sideways in his chair, as though he might jump up at any moment. Copley presented the Rev. Thomas Cary on an unusually intimate level, for an ecclesiastical portrait, but without having attempted to hide Cary's profession—the minister's collar is clearly visible. Although conveyed casually and informally, the silent lessons of Rev. Cary's portrait are as sonorous as those of

Holyoke's and Whitefield's. In his private life, Cary obviously appreciated material things—a comfortable chair, a good book, a luxurious satin robe. But even here, in the inner circle to which only his closest friends would seemingly have access, Cary showed himself to be aware of his calling: Copley gave his viewers an arresting face, and just beneath that smile is the tell-tale collar. Cary's fingers are interlaced, as if in relaxed prayer. But Cary is not Ogilvie, the symbolic cleric. He is not Holyoke, surrounded by the achievements of a lifetime. Thomas Cary is a real man who has chosen to be a servant of God. His youth, expression, and the restrained dynamism of his pose call to the viewer on an emotional level, tempered by intellectual re-



Fig. 9. *John Singleton Copley, The Rev. Thomas Cary of Newburyport, oil on canvas, about 1773. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; gift of Mrs. Richard Cary Curtis.*

minders of his social role. Like the New Testament parables, the portrait of Thomas Cary utilized everyday objects as symbols to tell a tale of Christian service.

Anne Bradstreet demonstrated the symbolic potency of ordinary objects in poems she wrote upon the deaths of her grandchildren. The 1665 elegy “In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet” makes poignant use of natural imagery as the poet mourns the toddler’s untimely death:

By nature trees do rot when they are grown,  
 And plums and apples thoroughly ripe do fall,  
 And corn and grass are in their season mown,  
 And time brings down what is both strong and tall.  
 But plants new set to be eradicate,  
 And buds new blown to have so short a date,  
 Is by His hand alone that guides nature and fate.

Copley employed vernacular symbols

in a more cheerful way in his portrait of Mrs. Ezekiel Goldthwaite, the wife of a prosperous merchant (fig. 10). Like Thomas Cary’s, Elizabeth Goldthwaite’s eyes meet ours as we spy her reaching for a piece of fruit. This fruit, along with the gleaming mahogany table and the richly upholstered chair, establish the domesticity of the scene. Although fruit was often included in paintings of this period simply for its sensual appeal, in this portrait it carries additional connotations: fruit was a typical literary image of fertility, and Mrs. Goldthwaite had thirteen children; and it may also refer to the subject’s elaborate gardens, which were famous throughout Massachusetts.<sup>56</sup> The pattern of vines and flowers in the upholstery also conveys these themes. The placement of Mrs. Goldthwaite’s hand over the bowl of fruit and the confidence of her expression suggest her command of her domestic world. Just as he did in the portrait of



Fig. 10. *John Singleton Copley, Mrs. Ezekiel Goldthwaite, oil on canvas, 1771. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; bequest of John T. Bowen in memory of Eliza M. Bowen.*

Thomas Cary, and just as Boswell did in his biography of Samuel Johnson, in the portrait of Mrs. Goldthwaite Copley immersed himself in the precise end of the resemblance continuum; he created an image by concentrating on specific and personal details.

There was no notion of art for art's sake in colonial America; a portrait was more than an attractive face on a wall or a few lines of verse on a broadside. A portrait was a tool, a reference point, a catalyst. An eighteenth-century viewer of a portrait played as active a role in the creative process as the artist or subject. Portrait makers used a kind of shorthand routinely, dotting their works with oblique references and abbreviations and depending on their viewers or readers to fill in the blanks. The inscription at the bottom of Richard Jennys' mezzotint portrait gave the name of the sitter; the image itself contained no clues, no symbols, no indication of who Jonathan Mayhew was. Yet for the portrait to have meaning, that information had to come from somewhere. It came from the imaginations of the consumers who bought the prints. Clearly skilled portraitists were able to guide and direct the responses of their audiences. But the act of creating a portrait in the eighteenth century depended on involvement from someone on the other side of the canvas or page. Early New England artists and sitters were willing to gamble on a favorable response. As Jonathan Richardson wrote in 1715, however, they knew it was a gamble: "Upon the sight of a Portrait, the Character, and Master-Stroke of the History of the Person it represents are apt to flow in upon the Mind, and to be the Subject of Conversation: So that to sit for one's Picture is to have an Abstract of one's

Life written, and published, and ourselves thus consign'd over to Honour, or Infamy."<sup>57</sup>

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- 46 From the files of the Art Museums of Harvard University. The chair, which tips easily, is still used by Harvard's president at graduations and similar ceremonies; it is difficult to imagine its relatively small seat comfortably accommodating Rev. Holyoke's weighty (more than 235 pounds) bulk.
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