

THE ANXIOUS ATLANTIC: WAR, MURDER, AND A “MONSTER OF A MAN” IN
REVOLUTIONARY NEW ENGLAND

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by
David W. Thomas
December 2018

Examining Committee Members:

Travis Glasson, Advisory Chair, Department of History
Mónica Ricketts, Department of History
Jessica Roney, Department of History
David Waldstreicher, External Member, The Graduate Center, CUNY
Richard Bell, External Member, University of Maryland

©
Copyright
2018

by

David W. Thomas
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

On December 11, 1782 in Wethersfield, Connecticut, a fifty-two year old English immigrant named William Beadle murdered his wife and four children and took his own life. Beadle's erstwhile friends were aghast. William was no drunk. He was not abusive, foul-tempered, or manifestly unstable. Since arriving in 1772, Beadle had been a respected merchant in Wethersfield good society. Newspapers, pamphlets, and sermons carried the story up and down the coast. Writers quoted from a packet of letters Beadle left at the scene. Those letters disclosed Beadle's secret allegiance to deism and the fact that the War for Independence had ruined Beadle financially, in his mind because he had acted like a patriot not a profiteer. Authors were especially unnerved with Beadle's mysterious past. In a widely published pamphlet, Stephen Mix Mitchell, Wethersfield luminary and Beadle's one-time closest friend, sought answers in Beadle's youth only to admit that in ten years he had learned almost nothing about the man print dubbed a "monster."

This macabre story of family murder, and the fretful writing that carried the tale up and down the coast, is the heart of my dissertation. A microhistory, the project uses the transatlantic life, death, and print "afterlife" of William Beadle to explore alienation, anonymity, and unease in Britain's Atlantic empire. The very characteristics that made the Atlantic world a vibrant, dynamic space—migration, commercial expansion, intellectual exchange, and revolutionary politics, to name a few—also made anxiety and failure ubiquitous in that world. Atlantic historians have described a world where white

migrants crisscrossed the ocean to improve their lives, merchants created new wealth that eroded the power of landed gentry, and ideas fueled Enlightenment and engendered revolutions. The Atlantic world was indeed such a place. Aside from conquest and slavery, however, Atlantic historians have tended to elide the uglier sides of that early modern Atlantic world. William Beadle crossed the ocean three times and recreated himself in Barbados and New England, but migrations also left him rootless—unknown and perhaps unknowable. Transatlantic commerce brought exotic goods to provincial Connecticut and extended promises of social climbing, but amid imperial turmoil, the same Atlantic economy rapidly left such individuals financially bereft. Innovative ideas like deism crossed oceans in the minds of migrants, but these ideas were not always welcome. Beadle joined the cause of the American Revolution, but amid civil war, it was easy to run afoul of neighboring patriots always on the lookout for Loyalists.

Beadle was far from the only person to suffer these anxieties. In the aftermath of the tragedy, commentators strained to make sense of the incident and Beadle's writings in light of similar Atlantic fears. The story resonated precisely because it raised worries that had long bubbled beneath the surface: the anonymous neighbor from afar, the economic crash out of nowhere, modern ideas that some found exhilarating but others found distressing, and violent conflict between American and English. In his print afterlife, William Beadle became a specter of the Atlantic world. As independence was won, he haunted Americans as well, as commentators worried he was a sign that the American project was doomed to fail.

To Dyana.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

By design, this dissertation is full of anxiety, alienation, and failure, and those sentiments could have easily overwhelmed my life at any step of the process were it not for the many people and institutions who supported me. To start, I have had a wonderful dissertation committee. Travis Glasson has been a consummate advisor from our first phone call, offering a perfect blend of scholarly guidance, organizational attention, and sociability. He somehow always knew what I needed most—incisive critique, encouraging remark, or just some time and space to think and write. No one has had to spend as much time with William Beadle, and many of the good ideas in these pages arose in our conversations. Travis read the drafts when I didn't yet know what the project should look like, and he helped me figure out how to tell the story with emotion and curiosity without getting mired in Beadle's mind or the gory details of the crime scene.

David Waldstreicher has been a dedicated mentor and unofficial second advisor throughout my years at Temple. He was the first to suggest my essay on the Beadle tragedy could grow to a dissertation. When I worried it might not be "Atlantic" enough, he patiently pointed out just how Atlantic every aspect of the story was. David, more than anyone, taught me how to read historiography creatively and passionately, and that was essential to this project. David left Temple for CUNY Graduate Center just as I finished my prospectus, and I cannot thank him enough for remaining centrally involved with my work. That generosity has made this dissertation better. It has made me a better historian, and, I hope, a better future mentor myself.

Three other excellent historians also served on the committee. From our first meeting, Monica Ricketts has offered insight and encouragement. In making sure I never lost sight of the Iberian Atlantic, she made me a better Atlanticist and, thus, made this a better Atlantic history dissertation. Jessica Roney joined the committee enthusiastically even though she arrived at Temple after the project was well under way. Her comments on anxiety as a historical subject alone have sent me forward as excited about this project as I was at the beginning. Finally, I was thrilled when Richard Bell agreed to serve as outsider reader. I first read the name William Beadle in Rick's book *We Shall Be No More*. Without that book, and without him, I would have never thought to write a word about the Beadles.

Many other members of the Temple University community deserve mention. Eileen Ryan joined Travis, David, and Monica on my comprehensive exams committee; reading on European nationalism and modern empire with her sharpened my take on national identity and colonialism in colonial America. Jay Lockenour, as department chair during my ABD years, extended funding for conference travel. The staff of the history department, namely Vangelina Campbell and the late Patricia Williams, assisted me innumerable times with forms, signatures, and the like, which I came to appreciate even more once I moved across the country. Outside the history department, Shawn Schurr and the College of Liberal Arts supported me with conference funding; the Graduate School provided a Dissertation Completion Grant that allowed me to finish the project.

My fellow graduate students offered unwavering support and plenty of fun along the way. Thanks to all of you, especially Carly Goodman, Brenna Holland, Brad Horst, Justin Hubbard, Tom Reinstein, Grant Scribner, and Seth Tannenbaum. Patrice Laurent offered encouragement and ideas on many train trips and happy hours; she gave me that all-important first ride to Wethersfield, CT. Jessica Bird and John Worsencroft were good friends and colleagues in Philadelphia; over the last year, from opposite sides of the country, they helped me through the final phase of this Ph.D. ordeal (and the simultaneous leap into job applications) with a lengthy email chain of laughter, commiseration, and encouragement in the archive to prove it. Finally, most of what I learned about Philly and much of what I found engaging about colonial America, came thanks to Tommy Richards, my office mate and fellow East Fallser. Our countless car rides to campus, walks to the pizza truck, and meet-ups at local pubs made grad school fun even when it wasn't.

I owe thanks to a few teachers who were in my life when all I knew of Temple was its basketball team. As an undergraduate, I learned to read critically and to construct and analyze arguments from Dr. Brad Frazier. Years before I'd ever hear the name William Beadle, Brad gave me my first readings on deism, and I've kept an eye out for it ever since. During those same years, Dr. Robert Barnett, a history professor, showed me how studying history could open the world to new interpretations and be a source of both profound joy and sorrow. He was the first person to encourage me to pursue a Ph.D. It was in his classroom that I first learned a lesson that proved essential for this project, namely, that a story also makes an argument.

History dissertations don't happen without archives. The hard-working staffs at the following institutions have my gratitude for aiding my search for William Beadle: the American Philosophical Society, the Congregational Library & Archives, the Connecticut Historical Society, the Connecticut State Library, the David Library of the American Revolution, the Harvard Law School Library, the Library of Congress, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the New England Historic Genealogical Society, and the Wethersfield Historical Society. Additionally, thanks to the town clerks in Derby, Fairfield, Stratford, and Wethersfield for dusting off the old records for me. Well before I knew of William Beadle, a Princeton history student named James Smart looked at many of these archives and wrote a wonderful undergraduate thesis that was an early guide into Beadle. Martha Smart, James' mother and a long-serving local archivist and historian in Wethersfield and Hartford, walked me through all of the research materials in the Wethersfield Historical Society archives (much of which would never have been tracked down and made available there without her).

Several organizations made those research trips possible. The Mid-Atlantic Conference on British Studies funded my trip to the Library of Congress. The David Library awarded me a fellowship to spend a month with their unparalleled collection of microfilm. I was lucky to share my residence at DLAR with two great historians, Rebecca Brannon and Jacqueline Reynoso, who inspired me with their own work and, just as important, made evenings away from the archives fun. Above all, the New England Regional Fellowship Consortium allowed me to spend a summer in residence at

four of the archives mentioned above (Congregational Library, Connecticut Historical Society, Harvard Law Library, and NEHGS).

Once I had all that archival material, a series of part-time jobs paid some bills as I wrote. Thank you to my coworkers at Seattle Bites Food Tours, Seattle Art Museum, and Sporcle.com for showing interest in my historian side and inspiring me with your own creative projects. Even more, thank you to those employers for generously (and repeatedly) holding my place on the team every time a research trip or grant period beckoned. Mike Hamilton, Rod Stiling, and the rest of the history faculty at Seattle Pacific University welcomed me as an adjunct instructor. Being back in the classroom and the halls of a history department convinced me I was on the right track whenever dissertation writing started to feel like a chore.

Family and friends—and the lack thereof—are at the core of the Beadle story; they're at the core of my story as well. My parents, Wayne and Ruth Thomas, showed me a love of reading and studying from a young age. They've offered unwavering support (even when others must have been asking them how their son could possibly still be in school). My brother Mark Thomas has always inspired me with his boundless creativity and work ethic. From the other side of the state, he and his partner Dani Carey have helped make Washington feel like home, and I continue to be amazed at their ability to live and work in ways fully aligned with who they want to be.

Some friends beyond Temple played big roles as well. Nick Malfitano and Leo Wong put up with me as a dissertating roommate. They have continued to shuttle me to airports and bus stations and accompany me on many food-and-drink adventures

whenever this work has brought me back to town. Four of my oldest friends helped so much they might as well have formed organizations and awarded me official grants. When we were all on the East coast, Jake Bentley and Jillian Bentley offered their Baltimore home as a base for numerous conference and research trips in the D.C. area. Once we all coincidentally returned to Seattle at the same time, the two of them and their daughter Nora have been a steady encouraging presence just down the street, knowing when to ask how the writing was going and knowing when to forget it. In Providence, D.H. Thaggard and Caitie Parker (and their son Henry) gave me a room for half a summer while I researched in Boston. That generosity extended my research time in New England and, just as important, meant I spent every evening and weekend for six weeks with my closest friends. They invited us to celebrate the project's completion at their home as well, now with another son, Jonah, in the mix. D.H. gets special recognition for continually wanting to know more than any non-historian should want to know about a dissertation, best friend or not.

Finally, my wife Dyana deserves the most thanks of all. She didn't just love and encourage a Ph.D. student—she loved and encouraged a Ph.D. student who one day announced, “I'm going to write about family murder” and proceeded to crowd our home with every possible book about murder, violence, execution, and burial practices. Dyana has championed me from my first graduate school applications to our post-defense trip to Wethersfield to lay flowers at the Beadle family grave (sorry, Dyana, that I failed to anticipate how hard it would be to find a flat headstone in four inches of snow...). She is an amazing partner and best friend who makes me laugh and smile and marvel every day.

Maybe I could have stumbled through a dissertation without her, but it would not be this one, and it would not be one nearly as rich. In her own work and her own living, Dyana has taught me how to think, write, feel, care, and wonder more deeply and broadly than I thought possible. I celebrate this finished dissertation wholly with her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Historiographical Context.....	5
On Microhistory.....	14
Project Outline.....	23
2. A TRAGEDY IN WETHERSFIELD: VIOLENCE, TRAUMA, AND THE PRINT AFTERLIFE OF WILLIAM BEADLE.....	28
Part One: On the Ground in Wethersfield.....	32
The Murders.....	32
Crowds at the Scene.....	38
Jury of Inquest.....	43
Family Burial.....	51
Part Two: Writing the Trauma.....	60
The Suicide Letters.....	60
Spreading the News.....	68
Trauma.....	78
Dissent in the Ranks.....	88
Spreading the Trauma.....	93

3.	ANXIOUS MIGRANTS: MOVEMENT, ALIENATION, AND THE THREATENING NEIGHBOR	101
	The Unknowable Neighbor.....	104
	Beadle the Migrant.....	108
	Con Men, Runaways, Counterfeiters, and Transients.....	125
	War and Its Effects on Movement in Connecticut.....	133
	From Neighbors to Suspects.....	142
	The Migrant As Monster.....	155
4.	ANXIOUS ECONOMICS: STATUS, CURRENCY, AND HELPLESSNESS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ATLANTIC.....	161
	The Rise and Fall of William Beadle.....	166
	Status.....	189
	Currency.....	216
	Helpless before the Machine.....	231
	From Economics to Enlightenment.....	240
5.	ANXIOUS ENLIGHTENMENT: DEISM, FREE WILL, AND SUPERSTITION.....	248
	The Words of William Beadle.....	254
	The Wider Transatlantic Enlightenment.....	265
	Machines and Free Will.....	289
	Dualities of Enlightenment.....	297
	Conclusion.....	310
6.	ANXIOUS IDENTITIES: AMERICAN FOOLS, ENGLISH VILLAINS, AND THE POLITICS OF INDEPENDENCE.....	314

Americans: Fools or Intellectuals?.....319

Performing Patriotism.....339

Americanness Versus Englishness.....352

Future American Monsters.....372

7. CONCLUSION: A SPECTER OF THE ATLANTIC WORLD.....383

 A Tragedy Remembered.....384

 William Beadle: Specter of The Atlantic World.....391

 Remembering.....396

REFERENCES CITED.....399

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Just after dawn on December 11, 1782 in Wethersfield, Connecticut, a fifty-two-year-old English immigrant named William Beadle murdered his wife and four young children in their sleep with an ax and a carving knife. He proceeded downstairs to the kitchen, arranged a packet of letters on the table, sat in a Windsor chair, and shot himself in the head with a pair of pistols. News spread quickly in the town of 3,500 just a few miles south of Hartford. For two days, crowds milled about the property uncertain what to do with the murderer's body. Finally, near sunset on December 12, the "frantic" crowd dragged Beadle's corpse, "bound with cords on a sled...and the bloody knife tied on his breast," to the western bank of the Connecticut River and dumped it in a hole "like the carcass of a beast."¹ This exemplary, symbolic punishment only insulted the residents of neighboring Glastonbury, who bristled at the thought of Beadle rotting away on property technically theirs.² The selectmen of Wethersfield relented and transferred the body to a distant spot in the woods. Within days, some playing children stumbled upon the second resting place. Town officials moved the body once more. They returned Beadle to the river—careful, this time, to dig the hole on Wethersfield property—but spring returned

¹ [Stephen Mix Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle* (Hartford, 1783), 11–12.

² Originally, the Connecticut River was the boundary line: Wethersfield to the west, Glastonbury to the east. Over the years, the river's course had changed significantly due to annual flooding and receding. By 1782, the Glastonbury line had extended to some portions of the western riverbank. For discussion and a diagram of this movement, see John Warner Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections: Containing a General Collection of Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, &c., Relating to the History and Antiquities of Every Town in Connecticut, with Geographical Descriptions* (Hartford and New Haven: B.L. Hamlen 1836), 113.

Beadle to life yet again. The river flooded, unearthing the remains with the flesh “washed from the bones.” Visitors in Wethersfield for the annual fish season broke the bones into souvenirs and “scattered” William Beadle “through the country.”³

The three futile burials only exacerbated the shock, despair, and fury the crime precipitated in Beadle’s erstwhile friends and neighbors. But more than a body made demands on the distressed. Residents needed answers as much as a satisfactory grave. Beadle was no drunk. He was not abusive, foul-tempered, or manifestly unstable. Quite the opposite, from his arrival in Wethersfield in 1772, Beadle was a respected merchant and solid member of Wethersfield good society. His closest friends, who included some of the area’s wealthiest and most prominent families, presumed him to be a devoted husband to his wife Lydia and a loving father to their four children. How did this Beadle—the honest merchant, the affectionate family man—become Beadle the familicide and suicide? How did Beadle, arousing no suspicion, entertain guests on the night of December 10 only to murder his family and take his own life hours later? What did this hidden “monster of a man” say about the community at large? What did such a horrific event foretell about the future of the newly independent nation?⁴

At the same time as the Wethersfield selectmen tried to solve the problem of Beadle’s resurgent corpse, writers and orators tried to answer these less tangible

³ Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, 2 vol. (New Haven, 1821), 1: 230. Dwight records this (and other information) as a quote from Colonel Thomas Belden, resident of Wethersfield.

⁴ For the “monster of a man” nickname, see John Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger of Striving with God* (Hartford, [1783]), 19 and James Dana, *Men's sins not chargeable on God, but on themselves. A discourse delivered at Wallingford, December 22, 1782. Occasioned by the tragical exit of William Beadle, his wife, and four children, at Wethersfield, on the morning of the 11th instant, by his own hands* (New Haven, [1783]), 25. Descriptions of Beadle as a respected family man and merchant with upper class friends prevail in the contemporary accounts to be explored throughout this dissertation.

questions. Newspapers, sermons, and pamphlets speculated on the cause of Beadle's transformation and hitched the horror of December 11 to the elations and anxieties of the Revolutionary moment. Print carried the story beyond Connecticut from New Hampshire to South Carolina. Writers quoted from the packet of letters Beadle left at the scene. These letters, addressed to his friends Colonel John Chester and Stephen Mix Mitchell, two of Wethersfield's most prominent residents, included a will and several months' worth of Beadle's observations on theology, economics, and American life. Just as Beadle's body spoke posthumously through its reappearances, so too did Beadle's words. Those words were alarming. They disclosed Beadle's secret allegiance to deism—the scandalous, Enlightenment-driven religion that denied revelation, miracles, and the divinity of Christ as superstition in favor of what could be known about God through reason alone. As if that were not frightening enough to American readers, Beadle went beyond many French and English radicals by also rejecting free will and moral responsibility. In the letters, Beadle also detailed how the Revolutionary War had ruined him financially, in his mind because he had acted like a patriot not a profiteer. In trying to make sense of Beadle's words and deeds, authors seemed especially unnerved with his mysterious past. In a widely published pamphlet, Stephen Mix Mitchell, Beadle's one-time closest friend, sought answers in Beadle's youth only to admit that over a decade he had learned almost nothing about the man who, the letters revealed, “had in contemplation for three years...the awful tragedy.”⁵

⁵ For the earliest (of many) examples of print drawing on the Beadle letters to reveal these secrets to the public, see *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782. The quote at the end of the paragraph is from that article. For Mitchell's admission, see [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 5. Beadle's letters, so central to this project, are not extant in their original form. Numerous writers quoted from them

This macabre story of family murder and the fretful writing that carried the tale up and down the coast is the heart of my dissertation. A microhistory, the project uses the transatlantic life, death, and print “afterlife” of William Beadle to explore alienation, anonymity, and unease in Britain’s Atlantic empire. As Stephen Mix Mitchell lamented over two hundred years ago, much of Beadle’s life before landing in America is shadowy and speculative. The narrative action here occurs almost exclusively in a narrow swath of Connecticut. Nevertheless, this is an Atlantic story. As migrant, merchant, supposed patriot, and self-proclaimed Enlightened intellectual, William Beadle had a life and death defined by transatlantic processes.⁶ The Atlantic world circumscribed the opportunities and impossibilities, successes and failures of that life. The story of William Beadle is a revealing one for Atlantic history. The very characteristics that made the Atlantic world a vibrant, dynamic space—migration, commercial expansion, intellectual exchange, and revolutionary politics, to name a few—also made anxiety and failure abound in that world.

in articles, sermons, and pamphlets at the time. Ezra Stiles, president of Yale, received full copies of the letters just a few weeks after the tragedy and transcribed large portions of them in his literary diary (more on this below). Excerpts from that transcription as well as a few remarks from Stiles can be found in Ezra Stiles, *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New York, 1901) 3:49-54. The original manuscript is at Yale. I used a microfilm edition: *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, Ezra Stiles Papers, Reel 9, American Philosophical Society (hereafter APS), Philadelphia, PA. Page numbers refer to that manuscript/microfilm edition.

⁶ Steven Wilf, a legal historian who has written on Beadle, recently recognized these transatlantic connections though he does not really explore them as such. See Steven Wilf, *Law’s Imagined Republic: Popular Politics and Criminal Justice in Revolutionary America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 106.

Historiographical Context

Such an Atlantic framework is a major historiographical expansion for the Beadle tragedy. The unforgettable nature of the crime, the relative quantity of published accounts, and the event's coincidence with the end of the American Revolution have made the incident an appealing anecdote and example for historians. Unsurprisingly, it has been especially popular in literary and cultural studies of murder. In a master's thesis, Neil King Fitzgerald considered Beadle and other parricides as American retellings of the biblical Abraham and Isaac story; in a subsequent doctoral dissertation, he argued for Beadle's influence on early American crime fiction, specifically on Charles Brockden Brown's 1798 novel *Weiland*.⁷ In a study of changing attitudes toward murderers and murder, Karen Halttunen argued that print representations of the Beadle murders were part of the creation of a Gothic literary form. She went as far as to call the print coverage the "first full-blown horror account in American murder literature." Considered alongside a handful of similar crimes, the Beadle murder revealed to Daniel Cohen that non-elite white men did not all experience the freedoms of the early republican era as beneficial. In his analysis, Cohen even offered potential medical diagnoses for Beadle and other murderers in the language of late twentieth-century psychology. Richard Bell, in his recent book on suicide from the Revolution to the Civil War, has registered the treatment

⁷ Neil King Fitzgerald, "Towards an American Abraham: Multiple Parricide and the Rejection of Revelation in the early National Period," (Master's thesis, Brown University, 1971) and Neil King Fitzgerald, "Wieland's Crime: A Source and Analogue Study Of the Foremost Novel of the Father of American Literature" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1980). Fitzgerald sees Beadle as the inspiration for the familicide at the heart of Charles Brockden Brown's novel, but, somewhat oddly, Beadle does not seem to come up in most studies of Brown—one exception is Shirley Samuels, "*Weiland*: Alien and Infidel," *Early American Literature* 25 (March 1990): 58-59. Even here, though, Samuels briefly discusses Beadle and notes some parallels with the plot of Brown's novel but does not argue any causal influence on the author.

of Beadle's corpse as an exemplar of widespread public rage against murderers who, by taking their own lives, refused to grant the public their legal right to execution.⁸

Fitzgerald discussed Beadle at length, but the work remains unpublished. For Halttunen, Cohen, and Bell, Beadle was an important example, but the story only warranted, at most, a few pages within their longer works. The arguments are insightful but understandably narrow.

Two historians in particular have recently given Beadle more extended attention. In a 2008 article and a chapter in his 2018 monograph, Christopher Grasso has considered Beadle alongside a reading of Ethan Allen's *Reason: the only Oracle of Man*, a 1785 deist diatribe against Christianity. For Grasso, Beadle was an example of deism's perceived impact on ordinary people, an impact that prompted New England clergyman to construct a "common sense" theology whereby good citizenship presupposed Christianity and belief in the Bible's divine inspiration. Grasso's work is invaluable in regard to the Enlightenment deism aspect of the story and demonstrates how a seemingly local event in a medium-sized town could resonate in conversations about the nation. Steven Wilf, in his 2010 book of linked essays *Law's Imagined Republic*, devoted half a chapter to the Beadle case. Wilf, drawing on Benedict Anderson's notion of imagination, argued that before, during, and after the Revolution, Americans created their law out-of-doors as much as they did in the courtroom or through constitutional jurisprudence. American law was, for Wilf, an intertextual menagerie of newspaper reports,

⁸ Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 51; Daniel A. Cohen, "Homicidal Compulsion and the Conditions of Freedom: The Social and Psychological Origins of Familicide in America's Early Republic," *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 4 (July 1, 1995): 725–764; Richard Bell, *We Shall Be No More: Suicide and Self-government in the Newly United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 124.

autobiographical criminal narratives, community rituals, and everyday conversation. He recognized the transatlantic connotations of Beadle's life, but his interest in the tragedy was primarily a legal one.⁹

The variety of historiographical contexts in which the Beadle story has proven useful—literature, criminality, law, religion, mental health—suggests its richness. Different aspects of the story beg for different modes of analysis: social, economic, cultural, political, and intellectual. Each of the authors mentioned above has provided insights useful for this project. Still, the Beadle tragedy and those who tried to make sense of it have more to say. It is understandable that Halttunen, Bell, Grasso, and Wilf would draw on the aspects of the story that suit their purposes, offer their analysis, and move on to other examples and stories. On the whole, they have given us great work; on a few occasions, the approach has led to single-minded emphasis or minor error. The Beadle story, for instance, might have characteristics of Gothic horror literature, but it also retains older Puritan tropes. Contemporaries certainly did have to discuss Beadle's mental state, but they did so with a different vocabulary than modern psychology. Commentators did fret about the future of a country that could harbor someone like Beadle, but they also looked backward to their English past as they struggled to make sense of him. While this dissertation gratefully draws on the work already mentioned, it does so as a microhistory committed to exploring the world in which Beadle lived and died in as full and as rich a way as possible. Historiographically speaking, it does so by

⁹ Christopher Grasso, "Deist Monster: On Religious Common Sense in the Wake of the American Revolution," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 1 (June 1, 2008): 43–68; Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith: from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 25-64; Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 104-137.

analyzing the Beadle tragedy as a piece of Atlantic history and as a story of the American Revolution.

Atlantic history provides the largest framework for the Beadle story. Aside perhaps from the notable exceptions of work on slavery, conquest, and Native Americans, Atlantic historians have painted a rather rosy picture of the Atlantic world. The very language that pervades some of the field's more well-known introductory texts and anthologies teems with enthusiasm, especially when it comes to the British Atlantic. Across the work of multiple practitioners, readers discover the Atlantic primarily as a "world of motion" and "kaleidoscopic movements" characterized by "exchanges," "expanding communities," "multiplicity," and "magnetism." Amid talk of endless "variety" and "potential" and the "exotic" and the "new," readers encounter "integrations" on page after page. They find a "diversity of lifeways constantly forming and changing" and "identities...constructed and reconstructed." This is an Atlantic world that sounds every bit as "fluid" and "interconnected" as our world. "Networks" bridge every divide. It is a world of "mass mobility" and "cultural hybridity," "multicolored," "multinational, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural," and a world of "universality." It "transcends" and "radiates." The British Atlantic world in particular is a world of superlatives: it is "so extensive" and "so broad." It is an "arc that swept" a vast swath of "inter-hemispheric civilization." One feels the excitement.¹⁰

¹⁰ The quoted terms and phrases in this paragraph are from the following: Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 61; Bernard Bailyn, "Preface," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), xiv-xvi; David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, "Introduction," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 1, 3-4; David Armitage, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)

Many of the same historians, eminent all, have described the field and its methodologies in similar tones. Given the fantastic work, how could it not be true that, as David Armitage proclaimed, “We are all Atlanticists now”? In scholarship, Atlantic history has forged networks of interconnection, charting “path-breaking developments” and “an explosion of interest” beyond history. The field, “like the Atlantic itself...is fluid, in motion, and potentially boundless.” As a field, it “links,” “facilitates,” and pushes us to “methodological pluralism and expanded horizons.” It has been called a “broader, more general, and inclusive history.” By tracing its origins, in part, to a post-World War II, trans-Atlantic alliance, Bernard Bailyn even put the field in lockstep with Cold War victory.¹¹

This Atlantic world has been a world of opportunities, exchanges, and connections, a dynamic seascape with the Atlantic Ocean “as a bridge rather than a barrier.”¹² Migrants crisscrossed the ocean to improve their lives. Merchants created commercial wealth that eroded the power of landed gentry. Books, ideas, and expeditions expanded horizons, fueled Enlightenment, and engendered revolutions. From a historiographical standpoint, historians have championed the Atlantic world as a way to leave behind the teleological constraints of the nation-state and to complicate one-dimensional stories of the Americas as derivative, creole peripheries of a European center. To be sure, the Atlantic world *was* such a place; its historiography *has* achieved

11-12, 14-15; Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan, “Introduction: The Making and Unmaking of an Atlantic World,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World c. 1450-c. 1850*, eds. Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1, 5, 11-13, 15-16.

¹¹ Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” 11, 26-7; Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, 4-30.

¹² David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8.

much. The Atlantic world was indeed full of movement, exchange, connectivity, and integration. The dynamism of the field and the exuberance of its language continue to draw historians into its orbit, and rightly so.

Indeed, take away his end in murder-suicide, and William Beadle confirms the optimistic tropes of Atlantic historiography. Atlantic empire offered a nondescript, unconnected twenty-five-year-old Beadle the chance to leave an English village and seek his fortune in Barbados and, later, Connecticut. It made it possible for him to arrive in North America with a small cache of goods, meander among New England towns for a decade in search of a promising spot, and, along the way, marry into a longstanding Plymouth family. It let him settle in Wethersfield as a merchant with products from around the European empires. His friends were the New England version of nobility: Stephen Mix Mitchell, fast-rising son of a Wethersfield family made rich on the West Indies trade; John Chester, Wethersfield's richest citizen and a local hero of the Revolution; Thaddeus Burr, Fairfield cousin of Aaron Burr. He seems to have been acquainted with Ezra Stiles, president of Yale, and Timothy Dwight, one of the Hartford Wits and a future president of Yale. Even his deism, universally maligned by American commentators, evinced notions of Atlantic intellectual exchange: Beadle, the non-scholar in a marginal Connecticut town, ignoring the strictures of his local church, and musing in his letters on Montaigne and Pope. On one reading, the Atlantic was very much a bridge that led to opportunity, self-creation, and social mobility for William Beadle.

Looked at differently, however, the story reveals a less optimistic Atlantic, even prior to Beadle's crime. The Atlantic world was no Eden. As Atlantic history privileges

movement and long-distance connection, there is a tendency to read wandering like Beadle's as a sign of an adventurous temperament or as the global commercial network at its best. But it is more likely that Beadle moved so frequently precisely because success proved so arduous. Beadle crossed the ocean three times and recreated himself in Barbados and New England, but migrations also left him rootless—unknown and perhaps unknowable. For migrants like Beadle, movement was more about repeated failure than entrepreneurial verve. Transatlantic commerce brought exotic goods to provincial Connecticut and extended promises of social climbing, but amid imperial turmoil, the same Atlantic economy left such individuals financially bereft. Political revolution extolled the rhetoric of liberty and freedom, but even for a free white man like Beadle, such ideals might have resonated little in the context of a civil war where it was unclear whom to trust. Innovative ideas like deism crossed oceans in the minds of migrants, but these ideas were not always welcome.

The Atlantic world of William Beadle was an “anxious Atlantic.” The very conditions that made migration, commerce, independence, and Enlightenment appealing also always carried the possibility—maybe probability—of fear and failure. This was not just the case for the Beadle family. Commentators strained to make sense of the incident and Beadle's writings in light of similar Atlantic anxieties. The story resonated precisely because it raised worries that had long bubbled beneath the surface: the anonymous neighbor from afar, the economic crash out of nowhere, violent conflict between American and English, and modern ideas that some found exhilarating but others found distressing.

The anxieties that confronted Beadle and, even more so, those who wrote about him after his death, arose in a Revolutionary moment. They were Atlantic anxieties, but they cannot be separated from the particular experiences of the American Revolution and War for Independence. War and Revolution impacted Beadle's movements, his business, his identity, and his turn to deism. William Beadle's three Atlantic crossings occurred during the Seven Years' War. His movement around Connecticut came against the backdrop of the Anglo-American antagonism that followed. By the time he settled in Wethersfield, boycotts and mercantile politics were everywhere. His Atlantic world was a world of imperial crisis; his America was an America of civil war. During this period, murder-suicide made Beadle an exception, but his hardships, failures, and hopelessness did not. Financial failure and worries over who to trust were commonplace. In trying to make sense of the tragedy, commentators unwittingly expressed their larger anxieties about the reality of independence. When these accounts reached readers, they did so in newspapers replete with accounts of victory and of defeat, tales of patriot brio and of hidden Tories. Authors wrote Beadle into the Revolution; readers received their words in a Revolutionary frame of mind.

The American Revolution thus figures heavily in each of the chapters that follow. While this project does not delve into some of the more traditional historiographical battles of the Revolution, it does have something to add to more recent work on the period. Like studies that have emphasized Loyalists or those who remained unaffiliated or disaffected from all sides during the war, this project does not assume patriotic allegiance or take expressions of such allegiance as primarily expressions of political

principle. Beadle and his neighbors were surrounded by British prisoners and suspected Tories. Newspaper articles issued threats to those who seemingly ignored patriotic strictures on behavior; Beadle lambasted his competitors for not following Congress' rules as strictly as he had. This was, in short, a world where one watched and was watched, where a "patriot" acted in certain ways and refrained from acting in others. It made for a fretful world of trust and distrust.

It was also a violent world. Like Peter Silver's *Our Savage Neighbors* or Holger Hoock's recent *Scars of Independence*, this project foregrounds violence as a primary experience for many during the war. It does so in a slightly different way, however, by emphasizing how Revolutionary violence was experienced in unexpected times and places beyond the battlefield. Most of the neighbors of the Beadle family—indeed, most of those everywhere who read about them—did not experience warfare firsthand, but violence was ever-present psychologically. They faced the threat (or reality) of British attack, the threat (or reality) of extralegal mob violence, the loss of loved ones to war, and the likely disruption of daily life. It was in this context that an extraordinary act of violence like the Beadle murders landed. It may not have been war violence strictly speaking, but it was part of the Revolutionary experience for the men and women of Wethersfield. For many, the Beadle murders were likely a prime memory of life during the Revolution. Just as Beadle reveals an underside of Atlantic life, so he reveals an underside of the Revolution, even as it neared its triumphant conclusion. While the

Beadle case has been understandably attractive for work on crime and murder, this project looks to combine that attention with the Revolution itself.¹³

On Microhistory

This dissertation takes a microhistorical approach to both Atlantic history and the history of the American Revolution. As a microhistory, it follows the longstanding legacy of the genre among historians of Europe such as Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis. Historians of colonial America and the American Revolution have, of course, taken up the approach as well. John Demos' *The Unredeemed Captive*, Alfred Young's *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale* have been especially influential in my thinking on the genre. General methodological influence aside, this project connects more closely to two specific types of microhistory that have recently gained in popularity.¹⁴

First, it is a microhistory with a grievous crime at its center. As sensational crimes tend to grab contemporary attention and leave behind documentation, it is not surprising that practitioners of microhistory have found murder appealing. Source material aside, violent crime allows for a rather rich analysis of the cultural and intellectual backdrop of a society. The extent to which a society feels the need to reorient itself and the means by which they do so say a great deal about the expected social and cultural order.

¹³ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008); Holger Hoock, *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth* (New York: Crown, 2017).

¹⁴ John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994); Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Marth Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

Descriptions of murderers and victims, legal officials and grieving community members, reveal a great deal about the conceptual vocabulary with which a culture forges identities. Whether fear, rage, grief, or revenge, emotions are often at a fever pitch in such circumstances, providing the historian an avenue to investigate changing historical experiences of feelings and emotions. Two recent criminal microhistories—Elaine Forman Crane’s *Killed Strangely: The Death of Rebecca Cornell* and Ava Chamberlain’s *The Notorious Elizabeth Tuttle: Marriage, Murder, and Madness in the Family of Jonathan Edwards*—have assisted my thinking in how criminal microhistory can elucidate Puritan New England life. Taken together, they touch on themes that permeate the Beadle case as well: murder within a respectable household, questions about insanity, the effect on neighboring towns, and the memory of the event. A third similar study, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary* by Angela Bourke, though set in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Ireland, shares with the Beadle case a widespread societal worry over crime and the confrontation between modernity and traditional belief.¹⁵

Second, microhistory has recently gained traction among some Atlanticists who, eager to fulfill a promise identified by Alison Games, hope that “enough such stories” will portray that world in “new, richly detailed, complex ways” with “people in the middle of a chaotic kaleidoscope of movement.” Through a microhistorical approach, many writers have decentered the European dominance of Atlantic history and described the experience of Africans and Native Americans in ways not entirely beholden to

¹⁵ Elaine Forman Crane, *Killed Strangely: The Death of Rebecca Cornell* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Ava Chamberlain, *The Notorious Elizabeth Tuttle: Marriage, Murder, and Madness in the Family of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: NYU Press, 2012); Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2000).

Western categories, while of course acknowledging that such categories indelibly shaped the subjects of their stories. Atlantic microhistories have provided something of an oblique look at Christianity, race, imperial politics, the power of storytelling, and the interplay between the local and the oceanic. More theoretically, such projects have served as “meditation[s] on silence in the archives.” However powerful our large-scale Atlantic histories, this shift of perspective, this meditation, highlights “the vitality and variety” of individual Atlantic experience.¹⁶

This project joins that pursuit. It uses the migratory vectors of William Beadle and the dates of his life to shape the contours of a particular Atlantic world; it also uses the print vectors of his afterlife to describe the transition from colonial to postcolonial in that Atlantic world. Unlike the subjects of some of the best Atlantic microhistories, William Beadle was a free, white Anglo-American male who clearly had some level of education. Nevertheless, his life challenges assumptions about the homogeneity of the Atlantic experience and the categories historians use to describe the early modern world. Told as the story of an aspiring merchant who was willing to travel, was capable of Enlightened conversation, and was ready for Revolution, Beadle’s experience and the commentary his

¹⁶ The first and last quotes are from Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006), 755-756. The “mediation” quote is Jill Lepore, *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 269. The microhistories that have inspired the rest of the comments in this paragraph are the following: James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Randy J. Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Joshua Piker, *The Four Deaths of Acorn Whistler: Telling Stories in Colonial America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Kristen Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

contemporaries offered on that experience crack the veneer of the emblematic eighteenth-century British Atlantic life. When it comes to aspiring Anglo-American merchants like Beadle, Atlantic history has asked historians to think big. It has succeeded in drawing long lines of influence and deep networks of connection. It has made the histories of the Old World and New World more macroscopic. Not surprisingly, then, Atlantic microhistories have found welcome terrain for specificity. By focusing on Beadle and those around him, one can get at just how Atlantic the Atlantic world felt on the personal level or just how Revolutionary the Revolution felt. How did repeated migration feel? What might drive someone to remain reticent about their past in such a world? How “Atlantic” did commerce feel for a middling colonial merchant? What did it mean to choose a side (or not) in a town engulfed in civil war? How did deism reach the peripheries of the intellectual world?

Additionally, the microhistory approach affirms that an Atlantic perspective remains valuable to studying the early modern world. Not surprisingly, the more entrenched Atlantic history has become as an area of specialization with journals, conferences, textbooks, and job descriptions, the more critical appraisals it has warranted. Its own research strategy—to connect remote areas, to cross borders, to trace routes wherever they lead—has encouraged historians to question whether its insights and contours can ever be creative or expansive enough. Why stop at Atlantic? Why not the global?¹⁷ These are valid critiques that can make for better history writing, but they do

¹⁷ For just a few examples of this kind of questioning, see the essays in Part III of Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Reappraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Atlantic in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

not negate an explicitly Atlantic approach. To tell the story of William Beadle and his Connecticut neighbors as an Atlantic story is, for sure, to make a choice, just as one might have chosen to tell such a story as a highly local one. It is a choice, however, that is particularly rich. William Beadle experienced an Atlantic world as surely as he experienced a New England or Connecticut one. Those who struggled to understand the senseless murders he perpetrated wrote in an Atlantic context as much as a Wethersfield or American one. Beadle moved through an Anglo-American empire connected (though sometimes separated) by the Atlantic Ocean. That Atlantic world delivered his commercial aspirations and fortunes, the deism he contemplated, and the Revolution he failed to live through. Beadle and those who wrote about him were bound to the British Isles by identities, politics, and commerce; they argued about God with reference to English and French intellectuals; they fought one another alongside the same French and Spanish empires with whom they surreptitiously traded in the Caribbean. For sure, those wars did spread elsewhere. Tea and other exotic goods in Beadle's store came from beyond the Atlantic, but the ocean he sailed on several occasions marked the foreground of his life experience and the categories he used to interpret it.

Microhistory is not without its pitfalls. Despite the genre's increased presence in Atlantic historiography, one of its proponents has admitted it remains "notoriously undertheorized" as a methodology.¹⁸ Another supporter, while calling for historians to explore global history through the genre of microhistory, has noted that Anglophone writers have not explored their methodology critically enough and have, at times, seemed

¹⁸ Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6 fn. 21.

too beholden to straightforward narrative form.¹⁹ Jill Lepore, in an essay on microhistory probably more familiar to American historians than any other, starts her reflections on the topic by admitting that any attempt even to define microhistory will surely fail, not least because few American historians are in the habit of claiming the label for their work. In one of her own microhistories—which, to add to the genre confusion, she also referred to as a biography—she opined, “the lives of the obscure make good fiction but bad history.” Camilla Townsend, another well-known practitioner of the form, opened one of her microhistories by conceding, “such a book is a dangerous one to write.”²⁰ Of course, Lepore and Townsend wrote their books anyway. As is often the case in historical writing, the theory may lag behind the monographs, but enough thinking on the genre exists to move forward. Microhistory may, at times, overlap with biography, but mine is meant to be the former much more than the latter. My telling of the life and death of William Beadle makes an argument less about him as a singular individual and more about the historical world he and his family and neighbors reveal. Nonetheless, I strive to treat William Beadle—as well as his wife, children, friends, and commentators—as real people who deserve attention as readily as any Founding Fathers, so perhaps the distinction is an artificial one. Townsend answers her own piquant comment about writing a dangerous book by noting that the microhistorian probably will have to speculate at times, but that this need not be irresponsible. A microhistory may not always

¹⁹ Francesca Trivellato, “Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?” *California Italian Studies* 2(1). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq>.

²⁰ Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *Journal of American History* 88 (June 2001): 130; Lepore, *Book of Ages*, 269; Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 5.

be able to answer the historical questions it wishes to pose in full, but speculation can be creative and desirable when it opens a historiographical conversation beyond debates about the factual record of the individual in question.

Not everyone who comments on microhistory is a fan. David Armitage and Jo Guldi, in their intentionally provocative *The History Manifesto*, have taken advantage of the genre's methodological and definitional ambiguity by suggesting historians should return to more expansive and (they presume) more influential analyses of a *longue durée* approach to historical writing.²¹ While this is not the place for a full debate on definitions and theories of microhistory, it seems worth spelling out what, from the perspective of genre and methodology, I see myself doing and why I think it is such a promising approach.

As in this dissertation, microhistory has typically focused on the unknown or obscured. Its human subjects are less than famous; its events, in their particularity anyway, are fairly singular. Famous people, after all, have plenty of biographers willing to dig deeply; events of obvious national or world importance have plenty of historians eager to offer analysis. As a genre, then, microhistory considers what otherwise might be only a telling anecdote at the start of a chapter, a memorable illustration in a lecture, or, in aggregate with other somehow similar historical tidbits, a significant historiographical point. The story may in some ways be a remarkable person, place, or tale. While that remarkability often is what ensures at least some scrap of information was left behind, it

²¹ David Armitage and Jo Guldi, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Armitage and Guldi have such an expansive definition of microhistory as to make it a meaningless term. For critiques of them on this point, see Deborah Cohen and Peter Mandler, "The History Manifesto: A Critique," *The American Historical Review* 120, No. 2 (1 April 2015): 530–542.

may sometimes raise the challenge of whether or not the story's characters and events are representative. This remarkability, however, does not wholly erase the revelatory nature about the world in which the life was lived or in which the event occurred.

Before getting at that larger world, however, the historian must dwell, must put under the microscope whoever and whatever the subject happens to be. This sustained dwelling is a necessity of the genre. It seeks to bring out the archival evidences (and silences) as fully and richly as possible, to make them appear, not surprisingly, in more complexity and detail than at first seems possible. Methodologically, this stretches one's approach. Any one particular type of history—political, social, cultural, etc.—is almost always insufficient. Any one historiographical angle is almost surely too narrow.

Such methodological flexibility, in fact, gets at the first of three things I think microhistory does particularly well: it demands creativity. One cannot think with a single theme or two. In a book on economics, it may do to read an advertisement for tea economically, but in a microhistory of William Beadle's world, that ad must also speak politically and theologically. It also requires the willingness to speak from archival silences even if it means giving up certainty. It nudges the historian comfortable with historiographical debate back to story and narrative, requiring one to pay attention to how the story itself makes an argument about the world in which it occurred. In telling a story, in stretching each small piece of evidence in different thematic ways, and in listening to the silences, a microhistory creates as rich and as expansive a world is possible. It does not, in any case, remain microscopic. If historical writing typically starts big and then

finds many small examples to support a thesis, microhistory creates a broader historical argument out of the many aspects of life that show up under its enhancing lens.

Those aspects are, like all human life, messy. The second thing microhistory does particularly well is urge the historian to think with that “messy” humanity. By starting with a life, or a few lives, a microhistory leaves no avenue of escape. One cannot simply abandon the individuals because their story gets too complicated or too difficult. It forces the historian—and hopefully the reader—to remember that feeling is as much a part of historical life as thinking. In constructing a few lives in their richness, it encourages empathy. As a term, microhistory implies smallness, but as a practice, it encourages expansiveness. It widens one’s outlook to take in the full scope of human life rather than focusing on a particular aspect separated analytically, chronologically, or geographically from the rest. Human lives, after all, do not always fit neatly within the categories of academic historical analysis.

That leads to microhistory’s third invaluable insight: it necessitates humility. Microhistory is a recipe for dead ends, perhaps even more than other historical approaches. The sources are limited, but one cannot just seek out a different example or disregard a troublesome case for some other instance that better fits the argument. The life under scrutiny does not always match standard historiographical divisions. The humility this engenders has its upsides. With it comes the recognition that what is true of those historical subjects is often true for us, too: people live life in their particular enclave, sometimes very much aware of large-scale, historical forces; other times, they have no sense of being part of any particular historical moment. Microhistory, then, is a

form of history that makes it easy to remember that we are not all that different from those we study.

These three microhistory benefits—creativity, humanity, and humility—are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive. They do offer a response to any hasty denunciations of microhistory (as in the aforementioned manifesto of Armitage and Guildi) that deride it as small, historiographically minute, or irrelevant beyond a narrow slice of the academy. Historians very well should, as Armitage and Guildi desire, consider longer temporal and geographical stretches; they absolutely should work in ways that appeal to policymakers or the larger culture. This does not mean, however, that historians should avoid other approaches to history. Nor does it mean that microhistory cannot accomplish the cultural and political influence Armitage and Guildi envision. The big picture has its moment but so does the individual, the family, or the town. I would argue, in fact, that the very things microhistory does so well are things that policymakers and cultural arbiters would most benefit from hearing. Behind every master narrative or data set, whether one writes of past or present, real human beings prosper and suffer. Our debates of policy and culture can only benefit from microhistories that encourage us to think beyond a single theme, to focus on individuals, and to legislate with humility.

Project Outline

In line with that perspective on microhistory, the opening chapter of this dissertation is largely narrative and is interested in issues of historical trauma and human feeling. It begins with the story of Beadle's crime, the discovery of the scene, and the

immediate behavior of his friends and neighbors. The multiple writings of the aforementioned Stephen Mix Mitchell, who admitted to not knowing his friend as well as he had thought, will be particularly helpful here, as he was one of the first on the scene. The narrative concludes by outlining the vast print response the murders provoked, including Beadle's own words in the form of letters he left at the scene. While this narrative provides essential context for the subsequent chapters, it has its own argument as well: the Beadle murders were particularly traumatic for local residents; then, in efforts to understand such a heinous crime, commentators—perhaps unwittingly—spread those traumatic feelings to much of the rest of the country.

The remaining chapters each consider the Beadle tragedy through the lens of a typical theme of Atlantic historiography. Chapter two focuses on migration and the movement of people. Atlantic history began when people crossed the ocean; Beadle became a protagonist of that world when he did the same. He crossed the ocean twice, spending time in Barbados before arriving in mainland North America in the early 1760s. Far from settling down, he continued moving among several Connecticut towns for a decade, landing in Wethersfield in 1772. The possibilities of continued movement defined the Atlantic life, but those possibilities did not always arise out of opportunity or result in better fortune. William Beadle was part of a larger nexus of continual movement highlighted by wartime displacement and material insecurity. Frequent moving increased the likelihood that even small-town neighbors might not know much of one another. Revolutionary New England was a world of war refugees and restrictions on movement. The story of the immigrant-turned-monstrous-murderer resonated, especially when

commentators pointed out how anonymous Beadle had remained even to those who thought they knew him.

For a trader and shopkeeper like Beadle, such restrictions and anonymity had direct economic consequences. From his first advertisement in the local newspaper, Beadle acknowledged the difficulty of running a business as a newcomer without established connections and relationships built on mutual trust. Worries over absconding debtors and unscrupulous traders resounded in Beadle's Connecticut. To combat his fears, Beadle resorted to a rather dramatic and irregular rejection of all credit. It was a particularly difficult business practice in a world always short on hard currency, and it encouraged him to hoard the wartime Continental dollars. In the end, scarcity of goods and unchecked inflation sent Beadle into an economic free fall, which pride compelled him to hide from the gentlemen he so wished to see as his social equals. His was not an uncommon story. Many of his neighbors struggled financially during the war. Inflation caused fortunes to disappear. Embarrassment and lost reputation were a common fear. Chapter three presents these experiences as the flipside of the ever-growing, transatlantic commercial economies of Europe's empires. It allowed men like Beadle to launch stores full of exotic goods from around the world and thus imagine themselves as part of an emerging merchant class with influence. That same economic expansion, however, could just as easily and just as quickly steal that opportunity and influence back, especially in a time of war and Revolution.

While money trouble was rampant in Revolutionary New England, nothing grabbed the public imagination like Beadle's deism and rejection of free will and

morality. Chapter four deals with this Enlightenment terrain. Enlightenment deism gave Beadle a way to feign superiority even as he admitted his declining fortunes. It gave those trying to understand him a motive that did not initially hit as close to home as economic woes. For a New England clergy whose influence was in decline, it provided an opportunity for an old-fashioned call for a communal return to Godliness. In the larger context, however, Enlightenment failed them all. It left Beadle further alienated from his neighbors. For those neighbors and the ministers that taught them, deism was dangerous. It raised worries about how to embrace new, modern ideas without creating a host of William Beadles hidden among the American landscape.

Amid a civil war, defining that American landscape and the people who inhabited it became a pressing issue. In combating Beadle's heresy, commentators relied on rumors of youthful visits to London deist clubs to remind all that this kind of heterodoxy was English and European at the core. With the War for Independence, Beadle's deism was a salvo in the fight over American identity. Chapter five considers the cultural politics of William Beadle's New England in which national identity and the performance of patriotism were of the utmost importance. What did it mean to be American in the Age of Revolution? How did someone like Beadle, an aspiring middle-class merchant, perform a patriotism every bit as important to his socioeconomic standing as the goods on his store shelves? As Beadle's fortunes fell, he became increasingly skeptical of the patriotism of those around him; eventually he disparaged the American cultural and intellectual character. Still, he insisted that he was a true patriot, brought low by his allegiance while other sunshine patriots flourished through underhanded means. As with movement and

economics, Beadle's struggle was not an uncommon one. His neighbors faced the same questions of how to be American. They lauded their character and encouraged intellectual growth, all the while fearful that Americans lagged behind their European betters. In trying to make sense of the Beadle murders, commentators betrayed these insecurities by highlighting his Englishness and recalling well-worn stereotypes about Englishmen and suicide. As a story of the Revolution, the Beadle tragedy was a story of cultural politics and the emergence of an unsteady national identity.

Analytically, it is possible to separate these aspects of Beadle's life and death into distinct chapters. Each theme, however, appears repeatedly alongside the others. The economy could lead to movement. Movement raised questions about one's national allegiances. Those allegiances affected one's economic prospects. Thoughts on God formed a worldview that shaped ideas about everything else. For the Beadle family, they all came together at dawn on December 11, 1782, William awake with a plan, Lydia Beadle asleep in one bedroom, the four children—Ansell, Lydia, Mary, and Elizabeth—and an unnamed maid asleep in the other. It is the middle of the story, with William Beadle's fifty years of life on one side, his extensive print afterlife on the other. It may be the middle of the story, but it is where we will start.

CHAPTER 2

A TRAGEDY IN WETHERSFIELD: VIOLENCE, TRAUMA, AND THE
PRINT AFTERLIFE OF WILLIAM BEADLE

In late December 1782, or perhaps very early in the new year, a broadside about the Beadle murders went on sale in the south end of Boston “near Liberty-Stump and next [to] the Swan-Tavern.” Wethersfield’s tragedy had escaped Connecticut and reached the hotbed of the Revolution. A black border of mourning frames the sheet and cuts across its middle, splitting the page into two halves. Across the top, oversized letters announce “A Poem, Occasioned by the most shocking and Cruel Murder” imaginable. Eight four-line stanzas follow. In rhyming couplets, the poem narrates the Wethersfield tragedy and begs God to bind Satan and save the land from further horrors. A crude illustration in the top left corner portrays several men, outdoors, hacking at small bodies with swords. It is unclear whether the drawing was meant as an illustration of the poem’s story or as a portent of America’s future should Satan maintain his hold. The broadside’s lower half has a picture, too: a neat row of six identical black coffins—one for each of the Beadles, including William—and a skull and crossbones. A three-column reprint of the first published report from the December 17 issue of Hartford’s *Connecticut Courant* finishes the bottom of the page.¹

¹ William Woods, *A Poem, occasioned by the most shocking and cruel murder that ever was represented on the stage; or the most deliberate murder that ever was perpetrated in human life ... Sold near liberty-stump and next the Swan Tavern, south-end* (Boston: Ezekiel Russell, [1782 or 1783]). The date of this broadside, a copy of which is held at the Connecticut Historical Society and available online through their digital collections, is unclear. It was printed by Ezekiel Russell within weeks of the original newspaper report of December 17. The CHS lists the date as “1782 or 1783.”

In just a single sheet, the broadside captured nearly every aspect of the prodigious print response to William Beadle and the traumatic feelings it invoked in Wethersfield and beyond. Hyperbole, emotionally charged language, theology, supplication, fear of the future—Woods’ poem has it all. The form itself mimics the unsteady response in Wethersfield: playful rhyme and simple prayers mismatched with “A murder of the deepest dye.” One line echoes the exasperation of the jury of inquest: “A deed so black, and yet his mind was sound.” Woods’ verse even singles out the problem that worried all the Beadle commentators: was he a man or a monster? Beadle was, Woods wrote, “A man,” but, he parenthetically observed, he was “unworthy of the name.” The less creative lower half of the broadside is equally representative of Beadle’s print afterlife: the *Courant*’s article, which was the earliest account and the account closest to the scene, popped up in newspapers well outside Connecticut.²

The Beadle murders and suicide tried the souls of the men and women of Wethersfield. In the days, weeks, and even months that followed, coping with the Beadle tragedy would hardly grow easier. Thanks to print like the Woods broadside, those anxieties spread beyond the region and put the tragedy into a larger cultural framework. This chapter focuses on those coping efforts, both on the ground in Wethersfield and in that larger print framework. From the discovery of the grisly scene to the many who gathered there both irate and in mourning, from questions of law to the ceremonies of burial, all efforts to make sense of the murders came infused with trauma and paradox. Those traumatic feelings made their way into the print commentaries on William Beadle.

² Woods, *A Poem*.

Historians who have stumbled across Beadle have certainly paid attention to the communal response and literary depictions of the crime. They have noticed, for example, how representations of the crime evinced a breakdown of traditional Puritan understandings of sin and murder and helped inaugurate a Gothic literary form focused on secular motives and an almost pornographic attention to increasingly gruesome details. They have followed the crowd to the river and seen a society creating law out-of-doors as much as in courtrooms, a society craving justice even as Beadle's suicide precluded any closure afforded by trial and execution. In the clergy's calls for a citizenship founded on Christianity and belief in the Bible's divine inspiration, they have sensed angst over Beadle, the "deist monster."³

Those uses of the Beadle case are certainly insightful. As Beadle was merely a single example in the thread of a larger argument, however, they were not typically concerned with just how traumatic the murders really were for the community. This chapter considers the Wethersfield tragedy first and foremost as an act of violence, as a traumatic experience that reached well beyond the local community and posed emotional challenges to all involved. Following trauma studies scholars, it suggests that subsequent social, cultural, and political analyses are enriched by paying close attention to the tremendous affect that imbues the historical archives of such an incident.⁴ Part one of this chapter is largely narrative and tells the story of the local, on the ground response to the

³ Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*; Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*; Bell, *We Shall Be No More*; Grasso, "Deist Monster"; Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*.

⁴ Eric Wertheimer and Monica J. Casper, "Within Trauma: An Introduction," in *Critical Trauma Studies: Understanding Violence, Conflict and Memory in Everyday Life*, eds. Eric Wertheimer and Monica J. Casper (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 5 and Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), ix.

Beadle murders. Drawing heavily on the contemporary accounts of Wethersfield luminary and Beadle's closest friend Stephen Mix Mitchell, it begins with William Beadle sending the family maid to the local doctor at dawn on the morning of the murders and follows the town's response through the family funeral a few days later. In addition to establishing necessary context for the chapters that follow, this narrative implies an argument: the Beadle tragedy profoundly impacted the local community both physically and psychologically. Part two of the chapter uses the print afterlife of the Beadle family to extend that argument beyond their Wethersfield community. The extensive print response to the crime turned a local affair into a story with a national voice. Print also served as an outlet for those affected to express a sense of having been traumatized by the crime.

By focusing on the violence of the crime and the expressions of trauma that followed, this chapter situates the Beadle tragedy in two ways. First, it draws on the language of trauma studies to emphasize how anxiety-inducing the event was and to suggest that, whatever else was involved, the repeated efforts to analyze William Beadle and discern meaning from the crime stemmed from a visceral need to work through the violence done to the community. Second, as a story of the Atlantic world and American Revolution, it participates in a growing literature interested in returning violence to the center of those worlds. While that might be an analytical track most easily pursued in military history, imperial history, or the history of slavery, the Beadle story reveals just how destructive an extreme act of unexpected violence can be. That violence in this case

occurred alongside the Revolutionary War and was as much a part of the town's experience of the Revolution as anything else.⁵

Part One: On the Ground in Wethersfield

The Murders

On December 10, the Beadle family entertained friends at their home in the center of town. It was never reported who was there, but the guests likely included Stephen Mix Mitchell, who later provided some details about the evening. William seemed, Mitchell insisted, “as chearful and serene as usual” that night. The whole family was present, and William had “attended to the little affairs of his family as if nothing uncommon was in contemplation.” The guests remained until nine. According to Mitchell, Beadle pressed them to stay even later.⁶

The next morning, it was still dark when William Beadle woke the maid who shared a bedroom with his four children. No details about her—not even a name—were recorded, but she was likely orphaned or from an overly large or indigent family. She was probably at least as old as the oldest Beadle child—Ansell, age eleven—and maybe a few years older, well able to provide household help and run errands for the family. Whatever her exact age or circumstance, the maid was now part of William Beadle's ghastly plan.

⁵ For examples of the type of studies that center violence, see Hoock, *Scars of Independence*; Wayne E. Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1685* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2007). For an older account of violence being at the center of the American Revolution, see Richard Maxwell Brown, “Violence and the American Revolution,” in *Essays on the American Revolution*, eds. Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 81-120.

⁶ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 8.

According to her later testimony, as recorded by Beadle's friend Stephen Mix Mitchell and several newspapers, William urged quiet so as not to wake the children. It was probably an unnecessary caution. Evidence at the scene suggested Beadle had slipped an opiate into the family's wine the night before to assure sound sleep. He coaxed the maid downstairs where he handed her a sealed note for Dr. Joseph Farnsworth, the friend and physician of the Beadle family. Mrs. Beadle "had been ill all night," William lied, and the maid was to rush for the doctor. She was not to return, he insisted, without Farnsworth. Mitchell, presumably on the girl's testimony, recorded that Beadle repeated this final order "sundry times with a degree of ardor."⁷

While the young girl hurried along the dark road, William Beadle murdered his entire family in their sleep. He struck each of them in the head with an ax and slit their throats with a knife. He left Lydia on the bed, her face covered with a cloth, handkerchiefs and a bowl carefully placed to keep the blood contained. He arranged his son Ansell similarly. He laid his three daughters—Elizabeth, Lydia, and Mary—"upon the floor, side by side, like three lambs." As with a shroud, he covered them in a blanket. Afterward, he went downstairs and arranged a packet of papers, including a will, on the kitchen table. He then took his own life with a pair of pistols.⁸

⁷ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 8. Speculation about the maid's background and age based on the discussion of child servant labor in Barry Levy, *Town Born: The Political Economy of New England from the Founding to the Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 237-262. Both the *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782 and the *Massachusetts Spy*, Dec. 19, 1782 reported the use of an opiate on the family; both clearly had accounts directly from the scene.

⁸ Mitchell later claimed there were reasons to believe William had murdered Lydia Beadle even before waking the maid, but he did not even hint at what those reasons were. See [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 9.

At the time of her death, Lydia Beadle was thirty-two years old. She had been born into an old Plymouth, MA family, the youngest daughter of Ansell and Mary Lothrop. Ansell died while Lydia was an infant. From 1756, she and her older siblings had lived in Fairfield, CT, with their uncle, Ebenezer Lothrop. The Fairfield family would not make it to the funeral. Her mother and two living sisters in Plymouth probably did not hear of her death until after she was buried. Ansell, the oldest Beadle child, was just shy of his twelfth birthday; he was named after Lydia's late father. The three Beadle daughters were younger—the youngest was six—and all named after family: Lydia, after her mother, and Mary and Elizabeth, likely after William's mother and stepmother.⁹

Lydia and her children, like the unnamed maid, got little chance to speak in the narratives that followed the crime. In highlighting how traumatic their deaths were for the community, however, it is worth remembering that they were likely well-known figures in their neighborhood and town. They lived on the same property as William's store, just around the corner from the church and other prominent families and businesses. Though Ansell had been born in Fairfield, all the children grew up in Wethersfield. Lydia had gone from a newlywed young mother of a baby boy to a mother of four in that decade. It seems probable that the friendship of William and Stephen Mix Mitchell extended to

⁹ For the birth records of the children, see Loraine Cook White, ed., *The Barbour Collection of Connecticut Town Vital Records*, Vol. 52 Wethersfield, 1634-1868, comp. Debra F. Wilmes (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1994), 16 and Loraine Cook White, ed., *The Barbour Collection of Connecticut Town Vital Records*, Vol. 12 Fairfield 1639-1850, Farmington 1645-1850, comp. Nancy E. Schott (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1994), 13. Elizabeth Beadle is the one child not listed in the birth records, but the gravestone that still stands lists them all. For Lydia, see Ruth Wilder Sherman, ed. *Vital Records of Plymouth, Massachusetts to the Year 1850*, comp. Lee D. van Antwerp (Camden: Picton Press, 1993), 121. I consulted digital copies of the guardianship papers for Lydia and her siblings at the New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, MA (hereafter NEHG): Bonds of Guardianship for Capt. Ansell Lothrop's 5 Children, Plymouth County MA Probate File Papers 1686-1881, No. 13220 Ansell Lothrop, Online database, AmericanAncestors.org, NEHGS, 2015. For more on the names "Mary" and "Elizabeth" being tied to William's mother and stepmother, see chapter two of this dissertation.

their families: Stephen had married his wife Hannah about the same time as the Beadles had wed; they had a number of children throughout the 1770s just as the Beadles did. A few remarks about Lydia and the children did make their way into print. The first newspaper account described Lydia as “a worthy and beautiful wife, in the midst of life.” Later accounts described her as attractive and serene. The newspaper referred to the children as “pleasant...like olive branches around” their father’s “table.” Mitchell later wrote of the children as having “cheared the hearts of their parents.” He remembered that both William and Lydia had seemed “uncommonly fond” of highlighting the children's’ “virtues and excellencies.” He mentioned displays of tenderness and affection within the family and noted that the children received proper education. More obliquely, he recalled seeing a nervous Ansell swim in the river and wrote of Lydia visiting women in town and sharing her bad dreams and family worries. The family, in any case, was an integral part of the town. The discovery of their deaths was bound to have a tremendous effect on their neighbors.¹⁰

That discovery happened very quickly. The letter William had sent with the maid to Dr. Farnsworth revealed all. Farnsworth later told Mitchell he had been “sensibly shocked” and was full of “horror” from the letter’s opening where William confessed, “Myself and family will enter into a much happier state before you have done reading this.” The letter continued by requesting Farnsworth leave the servant girl behind and bring Colonel John Chester and Stephen Mix Mitchell to the house instead. Both men were Yale graduates in their thirties who came from families long prominent in

¹⁰ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 13; White, *The Barbour Collection*, 52:209.

Wethersfield. They frequently held town, county, and state political posts. Chester was considered a local war hero: he had led a contingent of men to Boston at the first news of Lexington and Concord and subsequently fought in the siege of Boston and at Long Island, Trenton, and White Plains. Mitchell was a lawyer, whose family land abutted the Beadle property; he later admitted to having been Beadle's closest friend. Farnsworth did, in fact, contact the two men. He did not, however, heed Beadle's request about the maid. Perhaps hoping her return would interrupt Beadle's plan, he sent her back to the Beadle house straightaway without revealing the letter's true contents.¹¹

Dr. Farnsworth rode to Colonel Chester's with the note. Chester was unmoved. Yes, he admitted, Beadle was melancholic, but Chester was set to leave on personal business to nearby Middletown and felt his presence was "unnecessary" on the doctor's errand. As Farnsworth related to Mitchell, Chester was adamant "that nothing extraordinary had or would transpire." Mitchell was more amenable. He was alarmed at the letter's contents and in no way assuaged by Chester's assurances. Mitchell later wrote that as he readied himself to join Farnsworth, he became convinced his friend "had now ended in suicide, if not in something more horrid."¹²

¹¹ On Mitchell as Beadle's closest friend, see [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 5. See also *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782. For biographical information on Mitchell and Chester, see Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College with Annals of the College History*, 6 vol. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1885-1912), 3: 37-39, 3:177-180. On Farnsworth going to the houses of Chester and Mitchell but sending the maid back to the Beadle home by herself, see [Stephen Mix Mitchell], "A true Account of the Situation of the House, on the Morning after the dreadful Catastrophe," in *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle* (Windsor, 1795), 17. Hereafter cited as [Mitchell], "A true Account," this was an updated version of Mitchell's original text reprinted in 1794 and 1795 (I am using the later version because the text has been better preserved). Each edition contains Mitchell's 1783 narrative, extracts from Reverend John Marsh's 1782 funeral sermon for the Beadle family, and this "true Account," a six-page addendum that goes into more detail about the initial discovery of the scene.

¹²[Mitchell], "A true Account," 17.

It only took the pair a few minutes to reach the Beadle home. The signs awaiting them were ambiguous. No commotion, no pistol shots, seemed to have alarmed any neighbors, who were nearby and plentiful and, by that time, awake. Nothing had drawn the attention of two young men chopping wood across the street. The servant girl, however, remained outside. The doors and windows were locked; she had knocked and yelled but "could not make any body hear her." Just as they called the young men from across the street to chop the door down, someone discovered a loose window in the back room. They lifted the girl through the window, and she unfastened the door for the others. A back staircase led to the children's room. The men sent the young girl upstairs alone. Mitchell remembered she was shaking; she "obeyed," he wrote, "with trembling limbs."¹³

Her foreboding was justified. When the girl saw the four children, dead, she purportedly fainted and tumbled backwards down the stairs. Dr. Farnsworth caught the girl before she injured herself too severely. He revived her, but she would not or could not speak of what she had seen. The young girl was not the only one in shock. None of the men seemed capable of acting. The elderly Farnsworth pled with the young men to resume the girl's search, but the young men stood still and silent. Mitchell felt dizzy. Not wishing to share the girl's fate, he retreated through the backdoor "into the open air" and kept his feet only by hugging the garden fence.¹⁴

In the moments that followed, Doctor Farnsworth steeled himself to take the lead. He finally coaxed the two young men to at least follow him. In the first bedroom, they

¹³ [Mitchell], "A true Account," 18.

¹⁴ [Mitchell], "A true Account," 18.

found the bodies of the four Beadle children beneath a large blanket. It left them "overcome with excess of horror." Farnsworth again begged the younger men to perform the rest of the search without him; again they demurred. Once he convinced them to carry on together, the trio discovered the body of Lydia Beadle, face covered, across the bed. The men left the bedrooms. At the top of the front staircase, they noticed bloody footprints descending to the ground floor. They followed the trail downstairs and into the kitchen where they saw the murderer's corpse "nearly erect on the hearth, at the corner of the fire-place, supported against the front of a Windsor chair." An ax, a carving knife, and a pair of discharged pistols lay next to the body.¹⁵

Crowds at the Scene

No accounts relate how just Farnsworth and company alerted their fellow Wethersfeldians. Even Mitchell's narratives, so full of physical and emotional detail, skip from discovery to gathered crowds on the front lawn. In any case, word would have spread rapidly. Surely many came out of curiosity, but it was standard for friends, neighbors, and relatives to come to the home upon hearing of a death.¹⁶ The Beadles lived in the heart of town, just a short walk to the First Congregational Church and the finest homes of Wethersfield's elite, including the so-called "hospitality hall" of the prominent Webb family where Washington and Rochambeau met in the buildup to the Yorktown campaign. An inn that housed their soldiers was only a short distance away.

¹⁵ [Mitchell], "A true Account," 19-20.

¹⁶ Gordon E. Geddes, *Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 16.

The house across the street, where the young men were chopping wood when Farnsworth and Mitchell arrived, was far from the only dwelling within sight and earshot. That house likely still stands on Wethersfield's Hartford Avenue, so close to the Beadle property that neighbors could hardly miss hearing a cry or seeing Stephen Mix Mitchell draped over the fence post. Mitchell, in fact, was incredulous that "the neighbors were very near, and some then awake," yet "none heard the report of the pistols."¹⁷

Exact numbers are impossible, but a sizable crowd gathered quickly in the town of 3,500. Mitchell's shorter account describes "[m]ultitudes of all ages and sexes" on the eleventh arriving almost as soon as the house was thrown open. They returned the next day. Even "[n]ear the close of the day" on December 12, "the people" were "collected in great numbers" around the house. Later, in the extended treatment of the discovery, he wrote that a particular "remark" about the countenances of the victims and perpetrator "was made by hundreds." Of course, "multitude," "great numbers," and even "hundreds" are imprecise. Nevertheless, he had no real reason to invent a great crowd from nowhere, and it seems likely people would have congregated.¹⁸

The gathered men and women of Wethersfield were shaken. Marital homicide was low throughout the colonies, especially in New England where a mutual dependence between spouses and a tradition of household intervention in the name of community

¹⁷ The "hospitality hall" is now the Webb museum on Wethersfield's Main Street; information about that house and the Washington/Rochambeau summit is from my visit to the museum. Martha Smart, a local archivist at WHS, undertook land record research when her son James wrote his undergraduate thesis at Princeton; that research has allowed her to identify 47 Hartford Avenue, the current location of McCue Gardens, as the property on which the Beadles lived: Martha Smart, conversation with author, July 29, 2015. The thesis is James Smart, "A Life of William Beadle" (undergraduate thesis, Princeton University, 1989). The rest is [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 9.

¹⁸ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 10-11; [Mitchell], "A true Account,"²⁰.

discipline and godliness minimized extreme violence. Mitchell strained to capture the collective distress. He wrote of troubled souls and distorted nature. Bystanders reportedly oscillated from outpourings of "poignant sorrow" and "tender pity" to "[s]ilent grief, with marks of astonishment." Without warning, sorrow, pity, and grief transfigured into "furious indignation" that "vented itself in incoherent exclamations."¹⁹

Whatever emotions were on display, no one, that first day, could act. The crowd lingered. Beadle had covered the bodies of his victims, but Mitchell's report makes it clear that the bodies, including the faces, were visible. Farnsworth and company, early onlookers, or the jurymen who soon arrived to assess the scene must have removed the shrouds. While many came to view the bodies, none seemed certain of the appropriate next step. What should be done with William's body? For two days, none would touch him. Finally, according to Mitchell, by late afternoon on December 12, the oscillating mood of the restless crowd "grew almost frantic with rage." Some of those gathered, never named, grew tired of inaction and "demanded the body of the murderer." No one, however, would retrieve the body. This was not pedestrian squeamishness. In a culture where death was more present and less sanitized than our own, it was a sign of disrespect for one not to have family or friends to carry the body. According to Mitchell, after much conversing, "some Negroes" finally carried William's body outside to the crowd. Bent on revenge or determined to set an example, they floated the idea of impaling William's body on a stake "without any coffin or insignia of respect" at some prominent crossroads or another where it would rot in infamy as a warning to all. Even then, the crowd was

¹⁹ Randolph Roth, *American Homicide* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 109-123; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 10-11.

finicky; fear matched their rage. No one would consent to allow the corpse near their own home. The crowd's attitude shifted: they would banish the corpse to the riverbank. They tied the body to a sled hitched to Beadle's horse. As a final touch, someone lashed the bloody knife to William's breast. A "multitude" set off behind the horse toward the Connecticut River. The route was well-traveled and short, about one mile, but the going was not easy. Beadle did not farm or transport his own goods, so the horse was "unaccustomed to the draught" and led the way "with great unsteadiness." At times, the horse ran at full speed; at other moments, the horse stopped and stubbornly refused to continue. When finally at the river, some men dug a hole "between high and low water mark" and "without coffin or box" they "tumbled" Beadle in "like the carcase of a beast."²⁰

The crowd had acted on its own accord, rather than waiting for the sheriff to deal with the murderer's corpse. As Stephen Wilf has noted, much of their behavior symbolized Beadle's ostracized status and was part of a larger creation of law-out-of-doors in a tumultuous political period. Even in death, no one wanted him close to their home. Contrary to custom, they transported him via horse rather than by hand. They tossed him into a hole at the river, the fastest route out of town. Mitchell, portraying the crowd as "frantic," enraged, and demanding, clearly considered the whole business extralegal and indecent. However, the crowd's first idea, to stake Beadle at a crossroads, was not atypical. Public display of a corpse as a post-execution punishment had long precedent in English society. Gibbeting and staking was not uncommon. In England, just

²⁰ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 11-12; *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782; *Massachusetts Spy*, Dec. 19, 1782. On neighbors visiting the house and the disrespect of having no one to carry your body, see Geddes, *Welcome Joy*, 116 and 134.

thirty years before the Beadle murders, such treatment had been codified in the Murder Act of 1752, though the height of the practice actually predated the legal measure. In both England and America, suicides sometimes faced the same end though the tide seemed to be turning on that front. In fact, in the aftermath of William Beadle's death, two January newspaper editorials argued that his corpse should be resurrected and hung from a gibbet both to deter future familicides and to symbolically satisfy the community's responsibility for such grievous sin in their midst.²¹

What did the law say? It was a debate on the ground those first days in Wethersfield, and it played out in print for months afterward as well. Tradition aside, Mitchell and others insisted that neither "the law" nor "decency" prescribed what to do with the murderer's body. William Beadle was not, after all, a tried and executed criminal. Both pro-gibbeting editorialists acknowledged that Connecticut lacked specific statute law for the particular case before them. They did not, however, believe that fact mattered. One writer pointed out a recent incident in Massachusetts wherein the state "had no more of law than we, yet, twenty-five years ago, they ordered Capt. Codman's Negro man to be hanged on a gibbit, for poisoning his master, and there are some of his remains to this day." The second writer went further. American law was silent, but "the laws of England on the case are good," he argued. When otherwise silent, moreover, American law should follow English law. In a final step that suggested that some, in the heyday of Revolution and independence were uncertain about the status of English law,

²¹ Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 134-136; Zoe Dyndor, "The Gibbet in the Landscape: Locating the Criminal Corpse in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England," in *A Global History of Execution and the Criminal Corpse*, ed. Richard Ward (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 102-103; Bell, *We Shall Be No More*, 124-125; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 11-12; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783.

the writer insisted such laws were still valid. The Revolution, he concluded, was not against the English constitution but against the king and Parliament for breaking that constitution. Whether according to custom, law, or revenge, it was not clear what should be done with Beadle. That legal uncertainty no doubt contributed to his multiple burials. But there was a legal question the community did answer, and they did so quickly: the question of Beadle's sanity and culpability.²²

Jury of Inquest

Even as the crowd debated how to handle Beadle's corpse, aspects of legal bureaucracy were at work. Very soon after discovery, someone alerted Elisha Williams, justice of the peace and brother of long-serving Hartford County sheriff Ezekiel Williams. Elisha Williams immediately wrote Appleton Robbins, constable, that news had reached him "verbally" of "six persons...found dead this morning in a very extraordinary manner the cause of whose Death is yet unknown." Williams ordered Robbins "to summon twelve able and discreet men...as Jurors for the public" and "proceed to the [Beadle] house" to discern "manner and cause" of death. He needed to know if William Beadle was culpable for the "most awful and extraordinary" deed. His suicide forestalled a trial, but the law demanded an investigation. The findings of the jury of inquest potentially held consequences for dealing with William's body and estate, not to mention what a legal decision might do for the communal mind. Williams penned his

²² [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 11-12; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783.

note in a hurry: it was full of scribbles and blots. Perhaps he had heard enough to worry at what a crowd might do if the jury did not act first.²³

The jury's decision came quicker than Beadle's first burial. The twelve, some of Wethersfield's leading men including Chester Wells from one of the town's founding families and Leonard Chester, brother of Colonel John Chester, issued their verdict roughly twenty-four hours after the crime. They had no doubt William Beadle, "with a large Ax (used for cutting wood)" and "a large Carving or Butcher Knife," "put an Immediate Period to the Lives of each and every one" of his family before accomplishing "his Instant Death" with "a pair of Small Seven Band Pistols." They were no less certain when it came to the murderer's mental state. "We are of Opinion," the twelve jurors wrote, "from the papers with his Signature...and from other circumstances, that the above horrid transactions, were cruelly executed in full strength of his Reasonable Faculties." The act, they surmised, originated in "a desire of Freeing himself and Family from the troubles of this Life." Beadle had acted, they concluded, with "long premeditation" and "Without the least Appearance or Indication of Insanity, or perturbation of mind." In the first newspaper article just days after the murder, the *Connecticut Courant* out of nearby Hartford backed these leading men in their judgment. "Tis difficult," the paper reminded readers, "to determine where distraction begins." It was "evident," however, that Beadle

²³ Elisha Williams to Appleton Robbins, 11 December 1782, RG 003, Judicial Department, 1636-1991, Box 100, Connecticut State Library (hereafter CSL); Jury of Inquest Report, 11 December 1782, RG 003, Judicial Department, 1636-1991, Box 100, CSL.

“was rational on every other subject” but the final one, and on that final subject, “no one” had “conversed with him.”²⁴

Without personal records from the jurors, it is impossible to know of their deliberations. Perhaps some argued initially that William Beadle was insane or at least wondered if that verdict would ultimately alleviate communal pain by foreclosing the need to explain his actions further. If the men of the jury had any of the rage of the crowd, however, the idea of finding Beadle sane would have been alluring. For one, it provided a sense of accountability, even if there would be no trial and execution. With William himself dead, the inquest was the only opportunity for legally ascribing guilt.

Even more, the verdict had legal repercussions concerning Beadle’s body and estate. In English law, inquests determined whether a suicide was *felo de se*—“a felon of himself”—or *non compos mentis*—“not of sound mind.” If a felon, punishments both corporal and patrimonial could follow. With local variations, the corpse might be beaten, left to rot on the gallows, staked in a prominent square or crossroads, or buried unceremoniously beneath a pile of stones. The estate of the deceased forfeited to the crown. Both sets of punishments carried obvious notes of revenge; the champions of such treatment insisted posthumous punishments were a deterrent to others. Less obvious, the law also served symbolic needs. Banishment from the communal burying ground marked the suicide a pariah. Confiscating the estate emphasized the Christian subject had neither spiritual nor temporal right over their own life. Even physical acts against the dead body were highly symbolic. Such rituals afforded the chance to reforge communal bonds that a suicide breached. The latter seems akin to the role of the execution sermon in Puritan

²⁴ Jury of Inquest Report, 11 December 1782, CSL; *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782.

New England that served, in large part, to reorient the social body and renew the town's covenant with God.²⁵

From the English civil wars onward, however, English juries had grown increasingly fond of the *non compos mentis* verdict. By the last half of the eighteenth century, in fact, few suicides were deemed felons. Suicide was increasingly viewed as a consequence of mental illness, and local juries did not wish to see surviving family members punished through lost estates. American juries followed their English counterparts in the change. When the American Revolution prompted states to write new constitutions, many did away with forfeiture altogether. Not everyone, of course, relished the change. William Blackstone, for one, worried that juries too quickly considered the act of suicide as a sufficient sign of madness, which he believed set a dangerous precedent for other crimes. Many clergy and judges in New England expressed similar fears from the beginning of the eighteenth century. In Massachusetts, which had never even allowed for forfeiture, Chief Justice Samuel Sewall waged a full-blown campaign against leniency for suicides when it came to burial. He was known to order suicides to be buried on public highways next to a gallows with cartfuls of stones topping the grave. After a jury cited melancholy as having caused a loss of reason in the death by suicide of seventy-year old Boston attorney John Valentine in 1724, Sewall was irate. He convinced Valentine's minister not to participate in the funeral, republished an old Increase Mather diatribe against "the horrid Crime of Self-Murder," and castigated the coroner and jury in

²⁵ R.A. Houston, *Punishing the Dead? Suicide, Lordship, and Community in Britain, 1500-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Howard I. Kushner, *American Suicide* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 134-135.

a letter (in Latin!) to a Boston newspaper. It was a rearguard campaign that mustered little lasting traction. Public opinion had clearly turned on both sides of the Atlantic by the time of William Beadle's death.²⁶

Despite changing attitudes, *felo de se* verdicts did not disappear entirely on either side of the Atlantic. Juries continued to find culpable those suicides presumed guilty of other heinous crimes. One recent study has convincingly argued that in the early republic, criminal suicides were the one category of suicide that did not draw increasing sympathy from the public. As such suicides foreclosed "the community of the customary slivers of closure, comfort, and consolation...that Execution Day was designed to provide," communities longing for catharsis resorted to other means. In the case of a murderer, a *felo de se* verdict opened the door for posthumous legal retribution. It must have been tempting for jurors and judges to err on the side of a *felo de se* verdict in cases where a murder-suicide sparked public outrage. Was the Beadle affair such a case?²⁷

Some historians have offered interpretations along these lines by focusing on mental health or noting Ezra Stiles' description of William Beadle's act as "a mixture of temporary insanity."²⁸ The jury of inquest did not use the Latin vocabulary of English law, but they did declare him mentally sound and culpable for his actions, thus preserving

²⁶ Houston, *Punishing the Dead*; Kushner, *American Suicide*, 13-15; MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*; Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 134-135.

²⁷ Quote from Bell, *We Shall Be No More*, 124. See also Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 134-135 and Alexander Kästner and Evelyne Luef, "The Ill-Treated Body: Punishing and Utilising the Early Modern Suicide Corpse," in *A Global History of Execution and the Criminal Corpse*, ed. Richard Ward (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 147-169.

²⁸ For some alternative interpretations, see Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 134-135; Bell, *We Shall Be No More*, 123-125; Cohen, "Homicidal Compulsion."

the community's right to utilize an oft-ignored Connecticut anti-suicide law allowing some action against Beadle's estate.²⁹ To be sure, anger sometimes fueled the local response, and it is clear that many in Wethersfield wanted revenge. The crowd at the house did, after all, drag Beadle's corpse to the river even though, as Mitchell recorded, they recognized their legal right to do so was problematic at best. It might even be true that individuals on the jury of inquest longed for such revenge. However, a closer look at the intellectual tenor and legal consensus of the day confirms that the jurors and commentators did in fact genuinely consider William Beadle sane even as they struggled to comprehend how any rational father and husband could kill his family so coolly.

From a legal standpoint, the jurors had no choice but to declare Beadle sane and culpable. English law had for centuries defined criminal culpability as requiring both an act and a requisite mental state. As the legal doctrines surrounding the latter developed, it became exceedingly difficult to render an insanity verdict. By the time of the Beadle case, Anglo-American jurors and judges operated according to Matthew Hale's 1736 treatment in *History of the Pleas of the Crown*. In commentary on a 1724 case in which Edward Arnold, a man long known as "Crazy Ned," had attempted to kill an aristocrat who Arnold believed responsible for bewitching him, Hale established two levels of insanity. Crazy Ned was indeed partially insane; no one believed the aristocrat was a witch. However, he was not totally insane, for he was quite able to read, write, and count. He worked, entered contracts, and was not under any medical treatment. Hale, following the judge's decision in the Arnold case, explained that a murderer could suffer "a degree of partial insanity" when committing a crime. Nevertheless, such a murderer was still

²⁹ Jury of Inquest Report, 11 December 1782, CSL; Bell, *We Shall Be No More*. 124.

culpable. Stiles' remark about "a mixture of temporary insanity" almost certainly followed the same logic. Only an individual suffering total insanity was inculpable. Total insanity meant the individual was incapable of all reason and had little or no memory and understanding. They were, in all parts of life, as "an infant" or "wild beast." On this understanding, William Beadle was obviously no wild beast. As the jurors had noted, except for the murder, Beadle "was rational on every other subject." He had continued to live in the community. He had planned the murders and even written a batch of philosophically themed letters. It would not be until 1800, in the famous Hadfield case involving an attempted murder of King George III, that Anglo-American law began to consider that a partial or temporary derangement should result in criminal exculpability even if the defendant had used reason and understanding to plan the crime. Even so, American courts regularly drew on Matthew Hale's standard through the first half of the nineteenth century. William Beadle, in short, was legally sane and culpable by the standards of his day.³⁰

Even more, the community never did seek revenge in the form of Beadle's estate, which further bolsters the notion that the jury's decision was genuine. For one, the state had no need to confiscate Beadle's land; they already owned it. At the time of his arrival in Wethersfield, a Londoner owned the land where Beadle lived and worked.

Consequently, Connecticut took control of the property during the war, and Beadle paid

³⁰ Matthew Hale is quoted in Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*, 211. On the changing nature of legal insanity more generally, including the Hadfield case, see Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*, 210-215; Jacques M. Quen, "Anglo-American Criminal Insanity: An Historical Perspective," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 4 (1974): 313-323; Anthony Platt and Bernard L. Diamond, "The Origins of the "Right and Wrong" Test of Criminal Responsibility and Its Subsequent Development in the United States: An Historical Survey," *California Law Review* 54, no. 3 (1966): 1227-260.

rent to the state. Beadle alluded to this fact in his will when he wrote, “The place I live on belongs to the public and may be called common ground.” Given his visible status as a merchant in the heart of town as well as the fact that many on the jury were prominent citizens regularly involved in Wethersfield politics, the public status of his property was surely not a secret. Moreover, there is little reason to think anyone fought to claim Beadle’s movable property for the state despite the fact that there were no local relatives to look after. By March 1783, Stephen Mix Mitchell and official administrator Isaac Lothrop, a distant cousin of Lydia’s from Plymouth, had settled the estate in the Hartford Probate Court without apparent incident. By May, the General Assembly confirmed that Mary LeBaron, Lydia’s remarried mother in Plymouth, was the closest living relative and thus the lawful recipient of the remaining estate. At the end of the day, the Wethersfield friends and neighbors of the Beadles seemed to care more about grieving the victims than seeking revenge against William. As will be seen shortly, that would not be so when it came to some anonymous writers who lacked a relationship to the Beadles. Before those writers stirred up trouble, however, the men and women of Wethersfield set to commemorate Lydia and the children.³¹

³¹ On ownership passing to a Londoner prior to the war, see March 24, 1770 Peter Verstelle to Barlow Trecothick (of London), Wethersfield Town Clerk, Wethersfield, CT (hereafter Wethersfield Land Records); for Beadle’s statement about the public owning the land, see *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783; *New Hampshire Gazette*, Jan. 18, 1783; William Beadle Probate, Hartford Probate District Packets 1641-1880, Reel 471, CSL (hereafter “Beadle Probate Record”); Charles Hoadly et. al., eds., *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 22 vols. (Hartford: Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1894-2018), 5: 152 (hereafter *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*). Lydia’s mother, Mary, had remained in Plymouth after Ansell Lothrop’s death and married Lazarus LeBaron, a doctor and lifelong Plymouth resident from a family of French immigrants.

Family Burial

The Beadle affair might have been odd, the treatment of William's body harsh and spontaneous, but the men and women of Wethersfield handled the burials of the rest of the family in more ordinary fashion. As was customary, the bodies of Lydia and the children remained at the house for a few days. A couple pounds from the estate covered the cost of washing and dressing the bodies. Typically, they would have lain in state in the best room of the house for visitors to pay their respects, but under the circumstances, they were perhaps moved outside. Without family present to make decisions about when and where to hold the burial, town officials or family friends presumably handled such arrangements. The newspapers did not specify whether food and drink was had before and after the funeral, but that would have been normal.³²

In regular Puritan fashion, the mourners began the funeral at the Beadle home. It was a different type of crowd than the mob that had buried William. Rage drove the men and women of Wethersfield to the river on December 12. By contrast, "affectionate concern" and "every token of respect" accompanied them on December 13 as they marched around the corner to First Congregational Church. Wethersfeldians, Mitchell recorded, "were anxious to express their heart felt sorrows in performing the last mournful duties." As was normal, children carried Ansell, Elizabeth, Lydia, and Mary, followed by "a sad procession of youths of the town, all bathed in tears." Similarly, a "great concourse" trailed those who carried Lydia Beadle "in solemn procession." They probably walked two-by-two as the church bell tolled. The newspaper and the published

³² For descriptions of typical New England funeral customs, see Geddes, *Welcome Joy*, 103-153 and Ann Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Virtue and the Formation of American Republics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 105-117.

version of the funeral sermon corroborated Mitchell's recollection, all referring to a large, though indeterminate, number of mourners. Once they reached the church, they left the coffins, uncovered, outside so residents could have a final look at their neighbors' faces. It was also typical not to hear the sermon in the presence of the coffin. The men and women filed by. It was so cold on that December day, that by the time everyone passed, the bodies "were stiffened with frost."³³

Reverend John Marsh, who had come to Wethersfield not long after the Beadles, delivered a sermon. Funeral sermons had increased in popularity throughout the eighteenth century. Sometimes a family requested one and subsequently paid for it to be printed. Given the circumstances, that assistance was hardly necessary. It had probably been no more than forty-eight hours since Farnsworth and company had sounded the alarm, but Marsh was ready with a full verdict. He had clearly read all or nearly all of Beadle's packet of letters. He unsurprisingly singled out William's pride, long the standard motive of sin in Puritan eyes. It was, he told his parishioners, an "awful tragedy," but it was also a humbling one: it revealed the "alarming evidence of the dreadful depravity of human nature;" it made manifest "the great danger of striving with our Maker."³⁴

In addition to his moral commentary, Marsh reminded the grief-stricken that this tragedy extended beyond Wethersfield. As it had only been a few days, none of Lydia's

³³ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 12; Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 28; *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782. On funeral procession customs, see Geddes, *Welcome Joy*, 103-153; Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 105-117; Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 134-136.

³⁴ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 29. On the sermons and the printing of them, see Geddes, *Welcome Joy*, 146.

relatives from coastal Connecticut had arrived to mourn. Even worse, Marsh imagined aloud, most of the family had yet to be notified. Lydia's extended family in Fairfield had likely already heard the horrid news. However, Lydia's mother remained in Plymouth, and Marsh believed she was still in the dark regarding her daughter and grandchildren. While "we weep," he exhorted the assembled, "let us think with tender sympathy of [Lydia's] aged surviving mother and other near relatives at a distance." Let us "pray...that they may be prepared for evil tidings—that their hearts may be fixed trusting in the Lord, and that they may have all that divine support and consolation which such a very singular trial and affliction may call for."³⁵

After Marsh's sermon, Lydia and her children were interned together in a single grave in the burial ground behind the church. It would be another decade before the grave received its permanent memorial stone. The very location, however, revealed the town's feelings for the dead. They laid the Beadles to rest on the side of the small hill in the center of the old burying grounds, next to Wethersfield's historically elite families, a stone's throw from Stephen Mix Mitchell's grave. It is one of the tragedy's enduring ironies. At the end of his life, William Beadle had dreaded being demoted from Wethersfield's gentlemanly ranks; the murders left the town so stricken they elevated the victims to a place alongside all the friends William had wanted, a grave secure from any possible flooding that overlooked the lesser sorts at the base of the hill.

As with the treatment of William Beadle's body, the funeral and gravesite in the case of the family also provided residents a chance to respond to the murderer. Within the

³⁵ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 28.

packet of letters William left on the table was a document serving, in part, as a will. In that will, Beadle had specified his wishes for the family's remains. For one, he rejected any funereal accouterments for the family. Beadle wanted them buried in their normal clothes without the least adornment. He wanted the entire family interred in a single "wooden box," simple, without ostentation, left "the natural color...God gave to the wood." Adamant that it was not to be a sad affair, he requested that no black should come near the coffin.³⁶

He was equally specific when it came to the burial ground. "It will not do," he stipulated, for any "of my principles to approach holy ground." He wrote it as a double entendre. William lived and died a deist, not a Christian: neither his theological principles nor those principles under his familial care should rest within the church burial ground. It would be best, he continued, to bury the family together next to the garden at their home. He implored attendees to happily return to their work as "the sun will still shine on that spot with the same benign influence it ever did."³⁷

Anyone reading William Beadle's funeral directives might have been uneasy, for both theologically and politically, his requests paralleled standard New England tropes. Puritan theology frowned on emotional displays for the dead. For the saved, death began life everlasting, the joyous entrance into God's glory. The mourners should temper their sadness with that hope: "Ye then that mourn, suppress the pious Tear," Isaac Backus, a well-known contemporary minister, wrote in 1769, for with tears "You wish her out of Heaven to wish her here." Even more, excessive grief was a dangerous act of rebellion. It

³⁶ These extracts from the will were published in *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783.

³⁷ *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783.

was to question God's will. It was, to use Marsh's own words from the pulpit on December 13, to strive against one's maker. Beadle's neighbors might have read his will as an impudent, manipulative reminder that funerals were a civil ceremony, a celebratory occasion, and the entrance of the deceased into everlasting light. He had done the same in his disingenuous letter to Farnsworth by insisting the family was on its way to increased happiness. Even more didactic, he interjected halfway through the note, "dread not to die" and do not "be dismayed or discouraged." In one of the other letters left at the scene, he chided Christians: "They dare not go to that Divinity they worship, but seem to dread Death." Beadle the deist monster surely relished the irony of his moralizing: the fear of death—approaching death with sadness or, worse, running from it—should be inimical for the Christian.³⁸

The clash between Beadle's words and the neighbors' grief, in fact, replicated a long-running back-and-forth between Puritan ministers and their parishioners. In the seventeenth century, Puritan stalwarts like Increase Mather had struggled to convince his parishioners, and even himself, that death was a boon for the saved; the obstinate uncertainty of one's divine election often clouded the celebratory message. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, these Puritan anxieties had abated, at least by some measure. Drawing on texts long popular in Europe but only recently printed in America—most notably Charles Delincourt's *The Christian's Defence Against the Fears of Death, With Directions How to Die Well*—New England clergy exhorted church

³⁸ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*; "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 173, Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, Ezra Stiles Papers, Reel 9, APS. Hereafter, the Stiles' copies of Beadle's letters are cited simply as "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters" followed by Stiles' page numbers. In Stiles' diary, some passages are underlined, but it is impossible to tell whether he was following Beadle's original. Thus, all quotations from the diary are presented here without underlines or italics.

members, often in sentimental tones, to see death as good fortune. Poetry, sepulchral art, sermons, and diaries all reflected a longing for the blessedness of death. Increase Mather had wavered when facing his own death; his successors tried even harder to remain strong. In 1741, for example, Charles Chauncy had frightened parishioners by reminding them there was “nothing betwixt you and the place of blackness of darkness, but a poor frail, uncertain life.” A decade later, under the new spell of men like the French Protestant Delincourt, the same Reverend Chauncy confidently reminded his listeners they would all soon celebrate in the presence of Jesus. Of course, prescriptive texts often hint that society has failed to measure up to the ideal. Beadle’s instructions ironically partnered with the standard reminders about death from the clergy. His call for a simple burial even matched that of Samuel Mather, grandson of Increase, who refused opulence at his death just a few years later.³⁹

Politically, Beadle’s instructions resonated as well. His calls for funerary simplicity implied the family belonged in the upper class Beadle so feared of being relegated from. Burial had taken on aspects of political performance during the Revolution for New England elites. Beginning with the response to the Sugar Act in 1764, New Englanders had eschewed fine new suits for burial and mourning as luxurious imports that played right into Parliament’s hands. Black ribbons or armbands sufficed as mourning clothes, and they dispensed with the customary practice of buying fancy imported gloves for family and close friends. As with so much of the period’s consumer politics, the “new mode” had begun with Boston merchants. Their new politics fit well

³⁹ David Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 49-51, 79, 86, 147-161 (all the eighteenth-century texts are qtd. by Stannard).

with some longstanding theological concerns of Massachusetts' ministers. By the turn of the eighteenth century, Massachusetts' Puritans could spend up to twenty percent of an estate on elaborate funerals. The extravagance was one way the Puritans of the New World had diverged from their Puritan counterparts across the Atlantic. Cotton Mather had sermonized against such prodigality from the early part of the century. Fifty years before the Continental Congress, the Massachusetts assembly had first considered legislating against it. The Revolution added secular weight to those earlier sacred appeals. Backed by religion and politics, New Englanders spread the message to the rest of the colonies.⁴⁰

Soon other towns and colonies pledged allegiance to the frugal practices, and newspapers extolled the elites who led the way. By forsaking luxury objects like imported gloves, they hoped the politics of economics would hit the pocketbooks of London merchants. When the First Continental Congress made recommendations for a moral program to the colonies in 1774, the New England-style funeral was among them. Beadle would have been aware of the trend. In the wake of Congress' moral program, the *Connecticut Courant* extolled the frugal way. The paper reprinted a piece from Boston praising the absence of gloves and other finery from the funerals of several unnamed notables. Closer to home, the paper reported that "*The Funeral Solemnity of a late very respectable Person in*" Hartford "*was attended by the Family in the frugal Manner recommended by the General Congress.*"⁴¹

⁴⁰ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 108-117; Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death*, 161.

⁴¹ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 28, 1774 and *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1774.

While town leaders and print editorialists encouraged all classes of people to follow suit, it was the elites who spearheaded the change as political performance. Funerals were a public statement, and in the context of the Revolution, they assured onlookers of a family's patriotic roots. At the height of such concerns, some elite New Englanders even departed from the formulaic nature of wills and implored their executors to bury them, and their family and friends to mourn them, in accordance with the new frugality. It was usually clear the writers hoped to be celebrated as patriotic examples in the troubled political times.⁴²

Mourners then had an additional layer of context through which to view the burial instructions of a man like William Beadle who presented himself a merchant unfairly brought low as he held the patriot line during the war. The instructions were a political act with class overtones. The Beadle family did not need new burial clothes; their regular wear would be just fine. They did not need black trappings, nor did they need the rest of the town to mourn extensively. Additionally, given how often his suicide letters maligned Connecticut's so-called patriots as money-grubbing hypocrites, the frugal burial was perhaps a way for Beadle to contrast his own political purity with the charades he envisioned around him. Even more, it was one way of reminding his neighbors where he belonged in the social ladder. Only the elite and wealthy could be said to have a choice when it came to a frugal burial. It was the elite who amended their wills to make sure it was done right. Stephen Mix Mitchell wrote that his erstwhile friend had "adopted a plan of the most rigid family economy" while maintaining the façade of "his former

⁴² Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 104.

affluence.” The war economy had ruined Beadle in life, but in death it was a last chance to stake a claim to elite status. At burial, a “rigid family economy” translated Beadle into the most respectable sort of person.⁴³

Perhaps some in town fretted as to whether Puritan theology dictated tears or joy; maybe a few spoke about Revolutionary frugality. Regardless, the men and women of Wethersfield did not care to heed the so-called will of the “monster of a man” already tossed into a hole at the river. They did not, of course, bury the six Beadles together in the yard of their home. Though Puritan cemeteries were, technically, secular ground, the Wethersfield burial ground adjoined the church. It was, no doubt, the “holy ground” William had wanted his family to avoid. As already related, Wethersfeldians did not, as Beadle had instructed, treat the funeral as a happy affair. They wept. They marked the grave with a large stone. It would take almost a decade to get the inscription, but when it came, it struck a mournful tone. It spoke of a “horrid sacrifice,” of “sorrows” and “fears,” of “sighs” and “plaintive chords,” of rage. It was not what William had directed, and once the town had buried the family as they wished, they were forced to reconsider their old neighbor in light of such directives. As commentators wrote their way through the trauma, they had to begin with Beadle’s own words.⁴⁴

⁴³ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7.

⁴⁴ I transcribed the tombstone on a visit to First Congregational Church in Wethersfield. The full text of the headstone is also available in Edward Sweetser Tillotson, ed., *Wethersfield Inscriptions: a Complete Record of the Inscriptions in the Five Burial Places in the Ancient Town of Wetherfield, Including the Towns of Rocky Hill, Newington, and Beckley Quarter (in Berlin), Also a Portion of the Inscriptions in the Oldest Cemetery in Glastonbury* (Hartford: W.F.J. Boardman, 1899), 17–18.

Part Two: Writing the Trauma

The Suicide Letters

Beadle's own words resounded in the aftermath of the trauma, and it was no accident. He had left a packet of seven documents on the kitchen table and obviously considered them of paramount importance. In a postscript to his note to Farnsworth, Beadle implored the doctor to "be very careful, in the confusion, of the packet directed to Colonel Chester." Each was written as a personal letter though he meant one to serve also as his last will and testament. He addressed five, including the will, to Colonel John Chester, and two to Stephen Mix Mitchell—the same pair he hoped would accompany Farnsworth to the house. Written over the previous month or so, the letters totaled twenty-six pages folio. In the letters, he tried to justify his actions and lay out his philosophical, religious, and political sentiments all in the framework of Enlightenment. The occasion was irregular and indecent, but the form was not. Letters of the famous were popular, and the Revolutionary struggle played out as much in letters as anything else. Beyond the Revolution, in the last half of the eighteenth century, friends in the British Atlantic middling and upper classes routinely shared literary and philosophical manuscripts with one another. It was a form of salon. To William Beadle, for whom intellectual standing seemed so important, leaving these letters on the table for his friends might have been rather ordinary. The originals are lost; but in addition to the plentiful quotations published in newspapers, sermons, and pamphlets, portions of each letter were preserved in the diary of Ezra Stiles.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *Salem Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1783; "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 172-189. On the importance of manuscripts, see Karin A. Wulf, "Introduction: *Milcah Martha Moore's Book*: Documenting

News of the letters spread every bit as quickly as news of the crime itself, and there was an early expectation they would be published. In a December 13 letter, Hartford merchant and occasional Beadle business associate John Jeffrey wrote the murderer had left "a number of papers giving his Reasons" for the act. Jeffrey went on, rather matter-of-factly, to note, "I suppose they will be printed." Come January, letters to the editor in several Connecticut towns expressed surprise that the writings had not yet been published. For example, a frustrated, anonymous author in New London exclaimed, "we are at a loss" as to why the "writings have not yet had the public eye." Mitchell, who as a prominent man and an addressee of Beadle's letters presumably had a say in the matter, admitted in his pamphlet that arguments existed for publishing the writings in full.⁴⁶

The clamor to read Beadle's words was not surprising; even he had seemed to think the letters would be shared. As had long been the case in England, crime literature was an exceedingly popular genre throughout New England and the rest of America. From the late seventeenth century into the nineteenth century, hundreds of crime-related pieces were printed in New England alone. These ranged across a wide swath of genres, forms, and voices. While execution sermons were paramount into the early seventeenth

Culture and Connection in the Revolutionary Era," in *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, eds. Karin A. Wulf and Catherine La Courreye Blecki (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 23-25; and Catherine La Courreye Blecki, "Introduction: Reading *Moore's Book*: Manuscripts vs. Print Culture and the Development of Early American Literature," in *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, eds. Karin A. Wulf and Catherine La Courreye Blecki (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 59-60.

⁴⁶ John Jeffrey to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 13 December 1782, Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers, I. Correspondence, 1768-1804, Box 21: John Jeffrey Correspondence, Folder 11, CHS (hereafter "Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS"); *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 16.

century, the literature grew more varied in the eighteenth. The Beadle murders occurred just as that American literature was turning more graphic, more secular, and more in the control of the market than the clergy. Meant for popular consumption, printers sold pamphlets at prices all but the poorest could afford; clergy regularly distributed copies of execution sermons for free. The popular appeal for stories of crimes and criminals no doubt helped drive the newspaper and pamphlet printings about the Beadle tragedy. The letters of William Beadle would have been the acme of print's treatment of the crime.⁴⁷

If the public expected to hear from Beadle, they certainly would have been shocked at what he had to say. His words confirmed that the incident did not match the typical household violence. Beadle did not murder his wife and children out of anger directed at them. He was not trying to escape an obviously volatile home situation or to exact punishment for some perceived slight or infidelity. Even more, Beadle's words subverted New Englander's traditional expectations for the criminal voice. Just as his suicide prevented him taking up the role of punished, repentant sinner on the gallows, so his letters refused to recreate a pious repentance for the reading public. Criminal literature was meant to reorder the society a crime had disrupted. Criminal narratives provided understanding by representing behavior in a cause and effect fashion that assured readers

⁴⁷ The remarks here about the popularity and style of crime literature are from the following: Daniel E. Williams, "Rogues, Rascals and Scoundrels: The Underworld Literature of Early America," *American Studies* 24, no. 2 (1983): 5-19; Daniel E. Williams, "Preface," in *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives*, ed. Daniel E. Williams (Madison: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1993), xiii; Daniel E. Williams, "Introduction," in *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives*, ed. Daniel E. Williams (Madison: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1993), 13; Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), especially ix, 4-5, 13; Victor Nueburg, "Chapbooks in America: Reconstructing the Popular Reading of Early America," in *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 81-113; Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*, 2-10. "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 179.

all was well while also affording moral lessons for society at large. The criminal, with clear self-loathing, was meant to confess.

Beadle's letters did the opposite. Far from confessing, Beadle insisted he had done nothing wrong; far from self-loathing, Beadle called himself a "diamond." On the human level, cause and effect all but dissipated in Beadle's world of fated behaviors and no free will or morality. He did not reaffirm the social order; he rejected it all, including the divinity of Christ and the revelatory nature of the Bible. Even when he did inadvertently play along with references to right and wrong or expectations of social and political order, he inverted the roles of hero and villain. As he saw it, he had been the true patriot and benevolent soul upended by a society full of sunshine patriots and scoundrels who cared more about financial gain than anything else.⁴⁸

Despite expectations and the popularity of criminal narratives, however, authorities on the ground in Wethersfield balked at publication. They did not read the letters as the posthumous ravings of a madman. They considered them as powerful documents, though few seemed sure whether their power lay in warning others not to stray from orthodoxy or, conversely, in diverting the weak into grievous sin. The monster of a man's words scared those authorities who were thinking about the health of society overall.

⁴⁸ Roth, *American Homicide*, 109-123. On the expectations of criminal literature and the role of the criminal in that process, see Daniel E. Williams, "'Behold a Tragic Scene Strangely Changed into a Theater of Mercy': The Structure and Significance of Criminal Conversion Narratives in Early New England," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 5 (1986): 827-47; Daniel E. Williams, "Preface," x; Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*, 7-59; Ronald A. Bosco, "Lectures at the Pillory: The Early American Execution Sermon," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1978): 156-76.

The letters were addressed to Chester and Mitchell, but nowhere did either man record exactly how they handled the documents. Reverend Marsh worked them into his funeral sermon, but whether any additional residents saw them at the scene or any additional town luminaries advised on next steps is impossible to say. Within two weeks, however, someone had decided to involve the out-of-town clergy. On Christmas day, New Haven minister Ezra Stiles received copies of the Beadle writings courtesy of Colonel John Chester. The writings, Stiles recorded in his diary, were "confided to Mr. [Chauncey] Whittlesey [,] Dr. [James] Dana and me for our Advice as to the Expediency of Publication." Whether the three officially deliberated together is uncertain, but they knew each other well and surely discussed the matter at some point.⁴⁹

All three clerical arbiters were leading ministerial lights in Connecticut. Stiles was, of course, president of Yale College at the time and was likely acquainted with the entire Beadle family. At the very least, he noted in the diary that he "fell in with" Lydia Beadle "on the Rode to N[ew] Haven" in early November. Whittelsey, from a family of Old Light Connecticut clergy, had abandoned his business career in 1758 for the pastorate in New Haven. When he died in 1787, both Stiles and Dana lauded his intelligence and piety. Dana, the youngest of the three, came of age under the direct influence of the Whittelsey and Stiles families. He was, in fact, related to the former and eventually left the pulpit in Wallingford to succeed him in New Haven. The triumvirate

⁴⁹ Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, 166-167, Ezra Stiles Papers, Reel 9, APS.

had tackled controversy together before. For instance, they had served on the ordination council during a contested pastoral appointment in the late 1760s.⁵⁰

While, unfortunately, none of the three wrote directly regarding the publication question, it is fairly clear they opted against sharing Beadle with the public. Stiles later transcribed large portions of the letters into his diary, hardly the actions of a man expecting a printed volume. From his pulpit in Wallingford, Dana preached one of the few sermons explicitly and entirely centered on Beadle; soon thereafter it was available in New England print shops. Dana felt obliged by "a spirit of fidelity" to speak on Beadle "as one appointed to watch over men's spiritual interests." He admitted, however, that he spoke uneasily, fearing the "danger" that "melancholy minds may make an ill use of such an occurrence and what is said upon it." If Dana were worried that even his own remarks might tempt the weak of mind, he surely did not wish the general public to have access to Beadle's unfiltered ideas.⁵¹

Mitchell, without mentioning names, repeated Dana's argument in his own defense against publication, making it all but certain they played a role in the final decision. Mitchell knew many wanted to see the writings, but he insisted publication was

⁵⁰ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 172; Ezra Stiles, *A funeral sermon, delivered Thursday, July 26, 1787. At the interment of the Reverend Mr. Chauncey Whittelsey, Pastor of the First Church in the city of New-Haven. Who died July 24th, 1787. In the LXXth year of his age, and XXXth of his ministry* (New Haven, [1787]); James Dana, *The reflection and prospect of a Christian Minister at the close of life. A Sermon Preached in the City of New-Haven, July 29, 1787. Being the Lord's Day after Funeral of the Reverend Chauncey Whittelsey, Pastor of the First Church in that City who died July 24, 1787, in the 70th Year of his Age, and 30th of his Ministry*, (New Haven: 1787); Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, 1: 613-616; 2: 92-97; Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 18 vol. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1970), 13: 305-322; Gerald E. Farrell, Jr., "Dana, Whittelsey, and Wallingford: Change in the Eighteenth Century," November 1987, CHS.

⁵¹ Dana, *Men's Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 20.

a position tenable only for "those who have not seen them." All "who have perused them," he continued, "have doubted the propriety of such a measure "lest they might have some effect on weak and melancholy minds." With Mitchell and the clergy in accord—and Chester, who had sent the copies in the first place, presumably in agreement—publication grew increasingly unlikely.⁵²

Unsurprisingly, not everyone was happy with the decision to suppress publication of Beadle's letters. Several pseudonymous editorials appeared even before the ministers' decision could have been widely known. Three days into the new year, the *Connecticut Gazette* out of New London, only fifty miles up the coast from Stiles' New Haven, printed the thoughts of "a humble Professor of Christianity" on the matter. Originally writing just ten days after the murders, the Professor was baffled as to why the letters had not already been printed and distributed for public perusal. He suspected the rumors on the matter that had reached New London were true: "the prudent part of the authority...of that town" dragged their feet from "fear the doctrines there held up to view, may have a tendency to draw others after him, or at least to corrupt the minds of others." The Professor's tone was evenhanded and prudent. He admitted at one point that the authority's fears that some "deist, if any such creature can exist" would co-opt Beadle's letter to make "proselytes" was ostensibly reasonable. Ultimately, however, he concluded the public should see the writings. He argued that "under any pretense whatsoever," "the town of Wethersfield" did not have "a right...to suppress or conceal his writings upon this shocking subject." A few weeks later, on January 21, a "Friend to Justice" echoed the

⁵² [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 16.

Professor's argument for readers in Beadle's own backyard. In a direct, scornful letter published in the same Hartford newspaper where Beadle had advertised his store, Friend demanded the "writings must be published soon," for the "public, at large, are very uneasy."⁵³

The editorialists did not win. Beadle's writings were never published in full. The originals, as well as all the copies except what Stiles recorded in his diary, disappeared. That did not mean, however, that Beadle's writings were hidden away immediately or wholly kept from the reading public. The jury of inquest read them. The Reverend John Marsh had clearly seen them by the time he delivered the funeral sermon for Lydia and the children on December 13. The December 17 article in Hartford's *Connecticut Courant* quoted Beadle extensively. Other newspapers followed suit, sometimes even printing large portions the ministers and Beadle's hometown newspaper had ignored. Before long, extracts from the will had spread to Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. Similarly, the short note to Dr. Farnsworth popped up in the newspapers in Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts. Readers, in short, had ready access to some of Beadle's words, perhaps just enough to leave them curious for more.⁵⁴

⁵³ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783. Hereafter, "Humble" is capitalized when used as part of the proper name "Humble Professor" for clarity and ease of reading even though it is not capitalized in the original text.

⁵⁴ Will extracts are in *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783; *Salem Gazette*, Jan. 16, 1783; *New Hampshire Gazette*, Jan. 18, 1773. The will and the Farnsworth letter are in *Pennsylvania Packet*, Feb. 8, 1783; *New York Gazetteer*, Feb. 24, 1783. The Farnsworth letter was also in the *Salem Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1783.

Spreading the News

No doubt news of William Beadle spread privately. There is evidence word of the Beadle murders left Wethersfield even before the first printed account. For example, by December 12, the day the crowd dragged William's body to the river, Yale president Ezra Stiles noted "a melancholly Event at Wethersfield" in his diary. Details, it seems, were still scarce in New Haven; he simply recorded that "W. Bedell killed his wife and children and himself" the previous morning. Closer to home, people already had more to go on. On December 13 and 16, Hartford notable and sometimes Beadle business associate John Jeffrey wrote of the killings to his financial partners Jeremiah Wadsworth and Peter Colt. He did not write at length, but his letters show familiarity with the means and timing of the murders. Jeffrey also mentioned Beadle's suicide letters and even seems to have heard something of their general tenor. People surely whispered in church pews, chatted in yards, and gossiped in taverns. They probably remarked in letters and reflected in diaries, now lost.⁵⁵

However much Beadle figured in conversation and correspondence, it was the press that transformed a private, local story into a public, almost national one. Print materials like the Woods broadside brought the dead Beadle to life. By March 1783, at least thirty-three Beadle-centered stories had run in nineteen newspapers. Spread over fourteen cities or towns in nine different states from New Hampshire to South Carolina, most of those newspapers published their initial stories within a month of the murders. They narrated the event, reported rumors, and printed letters-to-the-editor. They

⁵⁵ Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, 165, Ezra Stiles Papers, Reel 9, APS; John Jeffrey to Peter Colt, 16 December 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 11.

excerpted multiple portions of Beadle's will, reproduced his devious letter to Dr. Farnsworth, and resurrected an old advertisement for his store. By the time such items had run their course, printed sermons and pamphlets were ready. In September 1783, just weeks after British and American representatives finally signed the Treaty of Paris, Beadle went international as at least three London newspapers shared the story under the headline "American News."⁵⁶

William Beadle's print afterlife began with the *Connecticut Courant* in nearby Hartford. Beadle was no stranger to the *Courant's* readers. A string of advertisements for his store had appeared in the paper's pages over the previous decade. Even those who had never visited Beadle's premises might have recalled his eccentric ads. In style and substance, Beadle's ads in the *Courant* were often unique and memorable. In his first advertisement, for example, he introduced his new store with an oversized headline reading "A new PLAN. William Beadle, Informs the PUBLICK" and proceeded to reject, sometimes pompously, the typical merchant practice of trading on credit. Before a tea boycott, in the same paper, Beadle authored a lengthy, playful poem that encouraged tea-drinkers to sneak in a final purchase. On at least one occasion, when sales lagged, he even appeared to mock his desired customers by appending a snide "I wonder if this

⁵⁶ Stories about Beadle can be found in the following: *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782, Jan. 14, 1783, Jan. 21, 1783; *Connecticut Journal*, Dec. 19, 1782; *Independent Chronicle*, Dec. 19, 1782; *Massachusetts Spy*, Dec. 19, 1782, Jan. 23, 1783, Jan. 30, 1783, Feb. 13, 1783; *Salem Gazette*, Dec. 19, 1782, Jan. 16, 1783, Jan. 30, 1783; *Connecticut Gazette*, Dec. 20, 1782, Jan. 3, 1783; *New Hampshire Gazette*, Dec. 21, 1782, Jan. 18, 1783; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, Dec. 21, 1782; *Pennsylvania Packet*, Dec. 21, 1782, Jan. 2, 1783, Feb. 8, 1783; *New York Gazetteer*, Dec. 30, 1782, Feb. 24, 1783; *New Jersey Gazette*, Jan. 1, 1783; *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783; *Independent Gazetteer*, Jan. 4, 1783; *Providence Gazette*, Jan. 4, 1783; *The Continental Journal*, Jan. 16, 1783, Jan. 23, 1783; *Boston Evening Post*, Jan. 18, 1783 (2 pieces); *Virginia Gazette*, Jan. 18, 1783; *South Carolina Weekly Gazette*, March 1, 1783. For the London papers, see *London Chronicle*, Sept. 9, 18, 1783 and *Public Advertiser*, Sept. 20, 1783.

advertisement will do any good” to his list of sellable goods.⁵⁷ The Hartford-Wethersfield corridor was full of merchants, the *Courant*’s pages full of advertisements, but few were as memorable as William Beadle and his colorful notices.

After his death, the next issue of the *Courant* was not set to run until 17 December, but when it came, a page three headline promised "all the particulars of [the] unhappy affair." The article, filling an entire column with cramped type, narrated the proceedings from Beadle’s duplicitous sending of the maid to Farnsworth’s to the town’s treatment of the bodies in the ensuing days. It speculated on Beadle’s background, offered observations on his past familial dispositions, and reported his fledgling economic standing. It even quoted from the writings he left at the scene. In doing so, the article disclosed Beadle’s secret deism, his rejection of free will and moral responsibility, and his disbelief in hell. The story offered the first public commentary on the meaning of his act, and it did so, thanks to the established American print network, across a wide geography in a relatively limited amount of time.⁵⁸

The ink was barely dry in Hartford when, on 19 December, the *Courant* article appeared verbatim in the *Salem Gazette*, New Haven's *Connecticut Journal*, and Boston's *Independent Chronicle*. The same day, Worcester's *Massachusetts Spy* printed an equally long report on the "unparalleled murder" that at some points replicated the original article and at others provided different details. By the end of the month, at least three more newspapers ran the *Courant*’s story: the *Connecticut Gazette* in New London, the *New-*

⁵⁷ *Connecticut Courant*, April 20, 1773; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775; *Connecticut Courant*, March 20, 1775.

⁵⁸ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782.

Hampshire Gazette in Portsmouth, and the *New-York Gazetteer* in Albany. The *New-Jersey Gazette* in Trenton, the *Providence Gazette* in Rhode Island, and the *Independence Gazetteer* and *Pennsylvania Packet*, both in Philadelphia, reprinted the piece during the first week of the new year. On January 18, four weeks after the original *Courant* piece, the article ran in Richmond, Virginia. By the first of March, the Hartford paper's article had reached Charleston, South Carolina.⁵⁹

By reprinting the *Courant*'s article in full, these papers ensured their residents received a Wethersfield perspective of the event. Every reprint noted the local origin of the writing and filled the heads of readers with the same traumas and paradoxes Wethersfeldians faced. Even when newspapers were unable, or chose not, to copy the *Courant*'s article, they provided as close to an on-the-ground account as possible. For example, in late December, the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* and the *Pennsylvania Packet* both extracted from the letter Hartford's John Jeffrey had written to Jeremiah Wadsworth on 13 December. Jeffrey's pithy, unapologetic rendering—William Beadle, he wrote, had “Cut the Throats of his Wife and his four Children, then took a pair of Pistols and shot his own brains out”—underscored the sense of shock and surprise.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Salem Gazette*, Dec. 19, 1782; *Independent Chronicle*, Dec. 19, 1782; *Connecticut Journal*, Dec. 19, 1782; *Massachusetts Spy*, Dec. 19, 1782; *Connecticut Gazette*, Dec. 20, 1782; *New Hampshire Gazette*, Dec. 21, 1782; *New York Gazetteer*, Dec. 30, 1782; *New Jersey Gazette*, Jan. 1, 1783; *Providence Gazette*, Jan. 4, 1783; *Independent Gazetteer*, Jan. 4, 1783; *Pennsylvania Packet*, Jan. 2, 1783; *Virginia Gazette*, Jan. 18, 1783; *South Carolina Weekly Gazette*, March 1, 1783. The fact that it appeared in the *South Carolina Weekly Gazette* suggests that the story, probably in the form of the original *Connecticut Courant* article, reached all of the states. The extant newspaper issues from Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina, and Georgia are sparse if available at all. If the story reached Charleston, however, it seems likely it reached those other places, too, even if the relevant issues are no longer available to historians.

⁶⁰ *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, Dec. 21, 1782; *Pennsylvania Packet*, Dec. 21, 1782; John Jeffrey to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 13 December 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 11.

From the beginning, news outlets promised timely updates. The *Courant* implied more would follow by noting its story included only the “particulars” that “have as yet come to hand.” Jeffrey’s letter pledged to keep its recipient in the know, especially regarding the potential publication of Beadle’s writings. William Wood’s broadside announced that John Marsh’s funeral sermon would go on sale as soon as possible. The *Massachusetts Spy* assured readers it was doing its best to meet their requests for more.⁶¹

In January and February 1783, the press made good on its promises as a second wave of Beadle news came to the forefront. On January 4, the *Newport Mercury* of Newport, RI shared “a Letter from a Gentleman in Wethersfield” dated December 14. By the end of the month, it would appear in at least five more newspapers in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Clearly written before it was known the *Connecticut Courant*’s article would spread so widely, the letter narrated the crime with many of the increasingly familiar details. The gentleman included a few details of his own that rendered it probable he was at the scene: for example, that “as a strong opiate was found in a glass on the table” it was “highly probable not one of the five knew what hurt them” and that Beadle “had prepared” the carving knife “with the keenest edge for the business.” The author was also obviously familiar with the Beadle writings. He noted the addressees and that the “principal design” of the letters was “to justify his principles...and also, to justify his carrying his theory into practice.” He was particularly attentive to the letter Beadle considered his last will and testament. The Wethersfield gentleman recorded that Beadle wished the estate to go to Lydia’s female relatives “except [for] a few small legacies” and

⁶¹ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782; John Jeffrey to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 13 December 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 11; Woods, *A Poem*; *Massachusetts Spy*, Dec. 19, 1782.

had charged Colonel Chester with delivering “all the monies he can collect” to Fairfield, CT luminary and Beadle friend Thaddeus Burr for disbursement. Beadle had wished, the gentleman disclosed at the end of his letter, blessings for Chester “in case of his punctually fulfilling his will” but “a most terrible curse in case of neglect.” Somehow or other, the letter writer had even managed to copy the document. He appended a portion of the will in which Beadle outlined his intentions for the family’s funeral.⁶²

Other items popped up as well. The previously mentioned editorial by the Humble Professor of Christianity in New London ran in two Boston newspapers. On January 30, the *Salem Gazette*, which had already printed the original *Connecticut Courant* article and the “Letter from a Gentleman in Wethersfield,” published the text of Beadle’s deceptive letter to Dr. Farnsworth. In February, the *Pennsylvania Packet* and *New York Gazetteer* followed up their earlier coverage with the Farnsworth letter and extracts from the will. At the same time, Worcester’s *Massachusetts Spy* responded to inquiries of Beadle’s “character and abilities” by digging up the poetical ad Beadle had placed in the *Connecticut Courant* eight years before. Readers were hungry for more Beadle news, and the newspapers obliged.⁶³

Commentary did not end with those newspapers. From early spring 1783, just as the new wave of Beadle stories dried up and the spring freshet resurrected Beadle’s corpse for the final time, sermons and pamphlets appeared in northern print shops. The

⁶² *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783; *The Continental Journal*, Jan. 16, 1783; *Boston Evening Post*, Jan. 18, 1783; *Salem Gazette*, Jan. 16, 1783; *Massachusetts Spy*, Jan. 23, 1783; *New Hampshire Gazette*, Jan. 18, 1783.

⁶³ *Salem Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1783; *Pennsylvania Packet*, Feb. 8, 1783; *New York Gazetteer*, Feb. 24, 1783; *Massachusetts Spy*, Feb. 13, 1783.

funeral sermon Wethersfield's John Marsh preached for Lydia and the children, already somewhat familiar thanks to the *Connecticut Courant* article, used Beadle to warn against "Striving with God." Wallingford minister James Dana, one of the clergymen who blocked publication of Williams's writings, countered Beadle with a defense of free will and moral responsibility. When Ezra Stiles, who joined Dana in suppressing Beadle's texts, delivered the annual election sermon before the General Assembly in Hartford in 1783, the murderer served as a prime illustration of the dangers heresy posed to the new republic.⁶⁴

Alongside print versions of such sermons, Stephen Mix Mitchell offered the longest, most detailed account of William Beadle available. Mitchell, in a sense, could not stop writing about the tragedy. Less than a week after the murders, Mitchell, in his role as clerk for Wethersfield's Third School District, left a note in the district records that the regular meeting was canceled "by Reason of the general Consternation & confusion" engulfing the town (similarly, the rescheduled meeting on December 26 adjourned as soon as it was called to order). He went on to write two pages about the recent events. By February 1783, he borrowed much of the language from the school record and expanded it to a published, sixteen-page pamphlet. This *Narrative of the Life of William Beadle* went through numerous printings, some of which paired Mitchell and John Marsh together, an amalgam of the personal and theological. Mitchell was still not done. Over a decade later, there remained a market for the work, and he had more to say. In the 1794 and 1795 reprintings, Mitchell expanded his already grisly account of the

⁶⁴ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*; Dana, *Men's Sins Not Chargeable on God*; Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor* (New Haven, 1783), 86.

crime's discovery in a six-page appendix, "A true Account of the Situation of the House, on the Morning after the dreadful Catastrophe." A year later, Mitchell's *Narrative* even appeared in German in Pennsylvania. Into the 1790s, William Beadle popped up here and there in jeremiad sermons and theological treatises.⁶⁵

The full texts of sermons and Mitchell's pamphlet may not have spread as quickly or as widely as the *Connecticut Courant's* article, but they were significant nonetheless. While the newspapers included some analysis of the crime's motivation and meaning, sermons and pamphlets offered a more concerted deconstruction of the man and his murders. These supplements added depth to the newspaper coverage. Moreover, advertisements for Marsh, Mitchell, and Dana proliferated in New England newspapers throughout spring and summer 1783. Even the New Englander uninterested in reading the texts could not help but see a reminder of Beadle amid the mercantile offerings, runaway notices, and legal announcements of a newspaper's back pages.⁶⁶

Newspaper or broadside, sermon or pamphlet, print spread news of the Beadle murders beyond the greater Wethersfield area. It also did much more. With print, even local, personal acts of emotional negotiation—gatherings at the scene, treatments of the

⁶⁵ Stephen Mix Mitchell, Clerk Entry for December 17, 1782, Records—Third District 1772-1885, Wethersfield School Records, CSL; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*; [Mitchell], "A true Account,"; [Stephen Mix Mitchell], *William Beadles Lebens-beschreibung* (Ephrata, 1796). Christopher Grasso has recently suggested that "A true Account" was written by Joseph Farnsworth, the doctor who Mitchell accompanied to the house. Grasso does not give any reason for this suggestion, but presumably it is because he is the one in the narrative who was present throughout the entire episode. However, nothing substantive suggests that Mitchell did not write it based on his discussions with Farnsworth, and nothing in the published text is said to suggest that the authors of the two parts are different. In any case, even if Farnsworth did write it, Mitchell made the choice of returning to it eleven years after the fact for publication, so I have decided to treat it as if it were another attempt by him to come to grips with the event. For Grasso, see Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 518 n. 40.

⁶⁶ For a few examples of these Marsh, Mitchell, and Dana ads, see the following: *Connecticut Journal*, April 10, 1783; *Connecticut Courant*, May, 20, 1783; *Independent Ledger*, June 16, 1783.

bodies, church meetings—opened to larger audiences and preserved memories of the crime. Vivid details personalized the agony for readers. Nearly every publication delved into Beadle’s secret deist commitments and reported his economic woes. Once the surprise of deism and economic ruin faded, accounts offered other dreadful revelations: Lydia Beadle had suffered macabre dreams in the weeks before her death; Beadle had contemplated the deed for three years; since early November, he had carried a knife, ax, and pistols to bed. Such accounts spread the traumatic consequences of William Beadle’s afterlife. Readers were able to imagine the visceral grief of Wethersfield residents.⁶⁷

With each disclosure, each new detail, one writer after another—published in one location after another—agonized over the impossibility of adequately describing and understanding the tragedy. Hyperbole was ubiquitous; apologies for the paucity of language rampant. Authors routinely warned readers they could not adequately describe the situation, calling it a crime beyond all historical comparison, human language, and nature itself. The oft-reprinted “Letter from a Gentleman in Wethersfield” pronounced it “the most horrid murder that this or any other country...ever heard of.”⁶⁸ The cover of Mitchell’s first pamphlet announced “A Horrid Massacre!” It was the same phrase a pamphlet had used when British regulars killed five colonists on Boston’s King Street nearly thirteen years earlier. William Woods went further than analogy to the perils of the Revolution. He declared that nothing worse had ever even been dreamed in fiction: it was, he asserted in his headline, “the most shocking and CRUEL MURDER That ever

⁶⁷ Most of these specifics can be found in [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*.

⁶⁸ *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783.

was represented on the Stage.”⁶⁹ The facts alone were nearly unthinkable, the details sensationalistic. Writers longed to provide understanding but feared inadequacy. With the power of the old narrative of human depravity waning, authors struggled to fill in the gaps.

Words were all the writers had, but faced with William Beadle, words faltered. Everyday concepts were bankrupt: father, husband, man did not suffice for Beadle; he was an “infidel,” a “deist monster,” a “monster of a man.” The less adequate language seemed, the more exaggerated the names became. As they reached for suitable concepts, writers strove to match the emotional outpouring of the initial scene as reported by Mitchell. As Mitchell would write of “nature on the rack,” William Woods would insist Beadle had “violated Nature’s great Original law.” He would encourage readers to “drop a tear” at the story that “truly gives me pain...to pen down.” These emotional performances were communications in themselves, signaling to readers that Beadle threatened to destroy social reality as he had destroyed his family. Even densely theological texts joined the chorus of sentiment. For example, James Dana, pastor at Wallingford, claimed he wrote out of obligation though he knew “not well what to say upon it” as it was “one of those events which...overwhelm the spirit” into an uneasy “silence.” Hyperbolic outpouring can be a sign of trauma, and the writing on Beadle begs for that analysis.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*; James Bowdoin, Samuel Pemberton, and Joseph Warren, *A Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre in Boston* (Boston: 1770); Woods, *A Poem*.

⁷⁰ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 10; Woods, *A Poem*; Dana, *Men’s Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 20. On language and emotion signaling a destruction of social reality, see Nicole Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill:

Trauma

The field of trauma studies provides a helpful vocabulary for analyzing the effects of the Beadle murders on those in Wethersfield as well as the print recreations of those experiences. The Beadle murders were a traumatic event for the greater Wethersfield community; that trauma infused the written accounts that tried to make sense of the crime. To call the murders a traumatic event is neither exaggeration nor a sidestepping of social, cultural, and political analysis. Much of the contemporary writing on the crime, especially that of Beadle friend and first responder Stephen Mix Mitchell, reads as a record of traumatic experience. As many scholars of trauma have convincingly argued, analyzing trauma qua trauma heightens other types of historical analysis. One cannot fully appreciate the cultural and political connotations of the Beadle case without appreciating that those left to pick up the pieces and spread the news to the rest of the country had experienced a violent intrusion into their day-to-day reality.⁷¹

No commentator provides a better opportunity for trauma studies analysis than Stephen Mix Mitchell. For one, he was friends with the family and at the scene from the beginning and thus well positioned to give a personal and communal account. He wrote more words on the Beadle tragedy than anyone else, and his is the only commentary that treats so many different aspects of the incident. No one else constructed an entire narrative. Additionally, Mitchell kept writing. As noted, he went through at least three

The University of North Carolina Press, 2008). On hyperbole as a sign of trauma, LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, xi.

⁷¹ For discussion of trauma studies as heightening other aspects of inquiry, see Wertheimer and Casper, "Within Trauma," 5 and LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, ix.

versions of his story at three different times spanning one week after the murders to over a dozen years after the murders. By returning again and again to the incident, Mitchell appears to have been engaged in the repetitive working-through that trauma scholars discuss. The graphic detail of Mitchell's account is, at times, difficult to read. Still, it is important to grapple with some of the language as Mitchell wrote it. As trauma theorist and historian Dominick LaCapra has argued, history writing should sometimes strive for "empathic unsettlement." Trauma is disruptive for those who experience it; it should be a little disruptive for those trying to analyze it.⁷²

Mitchell, moreover, was important beyond William Beadle. He was routinely a selectman, justice of the peace, and state representative during and after the Revolution. That is how Beadle would have known him. He became even more important in Connecticut politics after Beadle's death. Mitchell represented Connecticut at the Constitutional Convention; a staunch Federalist, he subsequently sat in the state convention that voted for ratification. In the early republic, he served as a U.S. Senator and as Chief Justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court. He may not have, historically speaking, become a nationally remembered name, but he was a Founding Father nonetheless. As Mitchell would eventually represent his community to the nation in political matters, so too in the 1780s did he represent his community to the nation in the response to William Beadle. His narrative set the tone, and that tone was a traumatized one.⁷³

⁷² On empathic unsettlement, LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 41-42.

⁷³ Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, 3: 37-39.

Trauma scholarship relies on a language of disruption to describe its subject. To various practitioners, trauma is a rupture, a breach, or a shattering break. It is an experience that one cannot assimilate as experience as it happens. It “disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence” or impinges as a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world.” Trauma is often not just about the event or the experience of the event but rather strikes one so deeply because it is so unexpected. One is never prepared for it. Most importantly, the effects of trauma are delayed. Put differently, the effects remain over time as if in the present. Rupture, break, and breach are not easily mended, for as Cathy Caruth has argued, to suffer trauma is to repeatedly hear “a voice that witnesses a truth” one “cannot fully know.” That truth remains unassimilated, unknown, and unspeakable.⁷⁴

Because of this nature, traumatic experience often demands a working through—a giving voice to the past—in a figurative language, a literary “language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding.”⁷⁵ Mitchell’s extended treatments of the murders are exemplary of this need. Over and over, he preemptively apologized for his writing, for language itself, being unable to provide understanding. He insisted that any “description” of the scene “can do no more than faintly ape and trifle with the real figure.” On his own merits, he confessed that “[t]o paint the first transports this affecting scene produced...is beyond my reach.” He opened his extended treatment in fact by admitting that “no

⁷⁴ Wertheimer and Casper, “Within Trauma,” 3; LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 41-42, 186; Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3-6. The first quote is LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 41-2; the second quote is Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

⁷⁵ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 5.

language could, perhaps, convey a competent idea of the sensations experienced" by the friends and neighbors of the Beadles. Nevertheless, he tried repeatedly. With each literary return, Mitchell dwelled longer on the event and shared more graphic details. Like other commentators, he tried to explain Beadle's actions, but he did so primarily with repeated narratives, as if continually trying to heal the narrative rupture of the experience itself.⁷⁶

In these accounts, Mitchell's uncertainty as a writer—his perceived powerlessness in the face of trauma—mirrored the uncertainty and powerlessness he ascribed to those at the scene. Farnsworth could not convince Chester to accompany him. Mitchell and the doctor could not get to the house in time. The unnamed servant girl could not unlock the door. Only when the neighbors were ready to physically chop the door down did the group manage to find another way. Once inside, none of the adults would act; they sent the girl instead. Even once the action was underway, Mitchell emphasized the hesitancy. The account was full of "trembling," fainting, and retreating to the back lawn. No one could speak. The girl was revived but, Mitchell remarked, "horror stopped her utterance." The two young men from next door froze "almost bereft of power to act or speak." However accurate, those were the details Mitchell chose to present.⁷⁷

Mitchell's account of the gathering crowd matched that of the discovery. The residents of Wethersfield were stuck in place, gathering for two successive days before anyone could take action. The emotional tenor of the crowd oscillated. Mitchell, at times, blurred the lines between the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual: "The very

⁷⁶ Stephen Mix Mitchell, Clerk Entry for December 17, 1782, Records—Third District 1772-1885, Wethersfield School Records, CSL; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 10; [Mitchell], "A true Account," 16. On a question about the authorship of the 1795 account, see fn. 65 above.

⁷⁷ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*; [Mitchell], "A true Account," 18.

inmost souls of the beholders were wounded...and torn,” he wrote. He insisted the effects lingered. The "minds of the neighborhood" were "refused the kindly aid of balmy sleep for a time." If trauma invokes a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world,” Mitchell did his best to convey it: “nature recoiled” and “itself seemed ruffled;” “nature was on the rack with distorting passions.” When he returned to the scene in his longer account from the mid-1790s, Mitchell related an anecdote that further highlighted that kind of traumatic breach. As he recalled it, “hundreds” at the scene remarked “that smiling placid serenity graced the countenance of each of the children and their unfortunate mother” while “horror, and the most shocking distortion of countenance appeared in the corpse of Beadle.” Mitchell, of course, was there; he looked upon the bodies personally. Yet even he could not decide whether the judgment of the hundreds was genuine. The truth, he admitted, “is difficult at this time to determine.” There was just no way of telling if “it in fact was the case” or if it was the imagination run wild “from the feelings of the people towards the perpetrator of so dreadful a series of cruel acts.” It was as if Mitchell were admitting the factual truth mattered little. The “monster of a man” had rendered the men and women of Wethersfield unreliable narrators.⁷⁸

Even those from the outside—those whom circumstances might have prepared for such violence—appeared incapable of action in Mitchell’s account. Around mid-morning, Mitchell reported, some Continental soldiers passing through Wethersfield heard of the tragedy. Since the house was only a few minutes walk from the main road, the soldiers, “led by curiosity” like many already at the scene, deviated from their

⁷⁸ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 10-11; [Mitchell], “A true Account,” 20. The characterization of trauma as a breach in the mind’s experience is Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

original route. Upon seeing “the woman and her tender offspring,” the soldiers, “notwithstanding all their firmness,” lost their composure and “the tender sympathetic tear stealing gently down their furrowed cheeks...betrayed the anguish of their hearts.” Returning to the ground floor, the men were led to the kitchen and “showed the body of the sacrificer.” Indignant, “muttering forth an oath or two of execration,” the soldiers purportedly drew their swords to desecrate William’s body. Maybe they were still entranced by grief for Lydia and the children, maybe they simply recognized the futility of their instinctive gesture, for the soldiers abandoned revenge and left Beadle untouched. They “paused a moment” longer before William Beadle, and “with their eyes fixed on the ground in silent sorrow, they slowly went their way.” In just a few lines, the tale of the soldiers portrayed, in action, the dizzying temper Mitchell attributed to the public as a whole: curiosity turned to silent leave, crying to swearing, revenge to paralysis. Whoever the men were, whatever they had seen of war in reality, in Mitchell’s text they were veteran, battle-hardened soldiers not, one imagines, easily excitable by blood and death, yet Beadle undid the men just as he undid the civilians of Wethersfield.⁷⁹

With more space than the newspapers and less of a theological imperative than the sermons, Mitchell’s pamphlet described the crime scene in detail as well. In both editions, but especially in the extended later version, Mitchell emphasized the bloody aftermath of the scene. Over and over he mentioned the “fatal ax and great carving knife.” From room to room, he rehearsed encountering the victims, often in details it is

⁷⁹ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 10-11; Sherman W. Adams, *The history of ancient Wethersfield, Connecticut: comprising the present towns of Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington, and of Glastonbury prior to its incorporation in 1693: from date of earliest settlement until the present time*, ed. Henry R. Stiles, vol. 1 (New York: Grafton Press, 1904), 699-700.

now troubling to relate. He described the positions of the bodies. He wrote of them as “pale and motionless.” Faces were “white as snow, yet life seemed to tremble at their lips.” He delineated specific wounds, writing of bones and skulls, throats and arteries, fractures and cuts. He used graphic phrases like “weltering in their blood” and “swimming with blood;” his discoverers followed bloody footprints down the stairs. He was at his most lurid when writing of the murderer: the double pistol shots, he noted, “had blown” Beadle’s “brains against the walls and wainscoating in the kitchen.” Blood was everywhere in the Beadle house, and it was everywhere in Mitchell's account. This was not a clinical vignette of a crime scene; it was a chronicle of what Farnsworth and company had seen.⁸⁰

The graphic account in part signaled a larger shift in New England attitudes about murder and crime. New England was transitioning to a more secular attitude toward murder, and the transition encouraged more focus on gruesome physical details, what Karen Halttunen has called “the pornography of violence.” That transition played itself out in print and would continue to do so into the nineteenth-century's “Gothic imagination.” That transition made it possible for someone like Mitchell to write in the style he did (not to mention for readers to buy the pamphlets readily). Nevertheless, it should not overshadow the role trauma played in the text. People unable to speak or sleep, a feeling that nature itself was torn, the inability to tell fiction from reality, and the

⁸⁰ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 9-10; [Mitchell], “A true Account,” 18-20.

violently oscillating emotions: all signaled a writer, a witness, trying to work through a rupture in experience.⁸¹

Part of the reliving for the community, especially for a close family friend like Mitchell, was investigating signs of trouble they may have missed. One reason domestic murder had remained low in New England was the Puritan-inspired willingness of neighbors and local officials to intervene in troubled homes. Had the community failed the Beadles? When Mitchell mentally returned to that day a decade later, he believed both he and Chester had seen trouble coming. Chester, though refusing to come along that morning, had supposedly told Farnsworth that "from his own acquaintance with Mr. Beadle, and a knowledge of his lately indulged melancholy," the letter was worth checking on. Mitchell went further, portraying himself as wholly nonplussed on Farnsworth's arrival, full of "agitation," "horror," "evident alarm," and worried "that some event peculiarly horrid had transpired." He had also noticed oddities in his friend's "late behavior" and "state of mind." Just the day before, after all, "he had seen Mr. Beadle at a blacksmith's shop in the neighborhood, fixing his pistols, and grinding a large carving knife." Was Mitchell's memory trustworthy? It is almost beside the point. He rearticulated his traumatic experience through his writing, sharing details that put that horrible day and its aftermath into an almost-digestible narrative.⁸²

According to that narrative, other signs had spoken to the community as well. For at least a month before her death, Lydia Beadle had suffered from shocking nightmares. According to William's letters, Lydia had reported several nightmares full of death,

⁸¹ Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*.

⁸² Roth, *American Homicide*, 109-123; [Mitchell], "A true Account," 17.

dread, and blood. In mid-November, she dreamed of her husband fervently writing “many papers” all “spotted with Blood” while “earnestly concerned” about his wife. The same night, if not in the same dream, she witnessed “a man wound himself past recovery,” blood gushing “from different parts of his body.” Sometime toward the end of November, Lydia dreamed “she was suddenly seized and liable to great Punishment.” Even worse, come “*Thanksgiving night* she dreamed that her three daughters all lay dead, and that they even froze in that Situation.” While those details came from Beadle’s letters, Mitchell learned that Lydia had reached out to a friend just the day before her death. According to Mitchell, Lydia embarked on a long walk during the afternoon of December 10, ending at the house of an acquaintance. The acquaintance told Mitchell that Lydia, “uncommonly” and noticeably “pensive,” had confessed that “for months” she had “been troubled with frightful and uncommon dreams.” Indeed, the acquaintance continued, Lydia’s walk had been an attempt “to divert her thoughts,” for, “that very morning” she “dreamed violence had been offered her family and her children destroyed.” Mitchell reiterated the account of this unnamed Wethersfield woman by reporting that Lydia had “lately mentioned sundry dreams of a similar nature, which she had near six months since.” By the time Mitchell wrote his later account, he claimed to have known of Lydia’s dreams himself even before the murders. Just after relaying to Farnsworth the disturbing news of seeing William Beadle at the blacksmith, Mitchell also reported the dreams, noting that Lydia’s “mind was much disturbed, and apprehended the suspicion of danger, and fear of distress.” He concluded that “her gloom” presaged something terrible “from some source, not suspected by the neighbourhood.”⁸³

⁸³ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 182; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William*

Were these warning signs Mitchell and company should have heeded? Or merely the better judgment of hindsight? Mitchell and others could not seem to tell. Consider, for example, the paradoxical assessments of William Beadle as husband and father that popped up in numerous written accounts. Just as many insisted William Beadle had always been known as “a good neighbor” and honest businessman, so speakers and writers of all kinds insisted he had shown all the signs of being a good patriarch. Reverend Marsh, at the funeral for Lydia and the children just two days after their deaths, spoke of “an affectionate husband” and “a tender, fond parent.” Several newspapers used the language of “affectionate husband” and “tender father.” Additionally, the *Massachusetts Spy* insisted he showed “the greatest regard” to his children’s “welfare.” The *Connecticut Courant* noted Beadle “superintended” the children’s education “with great care and seeming solicitude.” Stephen Mix Mitchell, who surely observed the Beadle family more than any other commentator, did recall that William “at times declared it would give him no pain or uneasiness to follow his children to the grave.” Nevertheless, Mitchell hastened to add, the remarks “could not arise from want of affection or tenderness for his children,” but must, instead, have been Beadle “speaking rashly in jest.” Even on the evening of December 10, as the Beadles hosted friends at their home, William had treated his family as if all were fine in the world. Contrary to the image of a monster, they even learned that Beadle had sent the maid away (on more than

one occasion) because he did not think he had the moral right to harm her. Before Beadle the familicide, neighbors knew Beadle the family man.⁸⁴

The paradoxical affront of Beadle the monster having masqueraded as Beadle the family man threatened the everyday reality of life in the community. Trauma is a rupture, a breaking of the normal, but such breaks, for those who experience them and those who write about that experience, beg the question of just what the “normal,” after all, is. Beadle commentators like Mitchell appear to have returned time and again to memories of William Beadle in everyday life. What was he like as a father? A husband? A merchant? A friend? Only a monster could murder his family; but could a monster fit in so well? What, they asked repeatedly, was the proper response to something like this? Not everyone was ready to resume “normal” life. While Mitchell, Dana, Stiles, and company suppressed the writings and hid Beadle’s body away, others complained that was the exact opposite of what the community needed. The murders were a rupture of the normal. To repair that breach, some argued, the town needed to keep Beadle in sight. Otherwise, murderous deist monsters would never learn.⁸⁵

Dissent in the Ranks

William Beadle was not always the sole villain in the print accounts: on a few occasions, angry Connecticut residents took Wethersfield’s leaders to task. Most notably,

⁸⁴ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*; *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 13, 8; *Salem Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1783.

⁸⁵ On trauma raising questions about the “normal,” see Wertheimer and Casper, “Within Trauma,” 3.

the aforementioned Humble Professor of Christianity and Friend to Justice each argued that Wethersfield's decision makers were setting up the entire region, perhaps even the new country, for failure. By quickly and secretly disposing of Beadle's corpse, closing down legal proceedings, and refusing to publish the murderer's writings, they were effectively undermining the public's ability to work through the trauma, both socially and spiritually. If some wanted Beadle out of sight and out of mind, Professor and Friend pushed for the opposite. The tragedy had indeed enacted a violent breach in need of repair, but Wethersfield's chosen path forward, the writers warned, would lead only to further violence.⁸⁶

Like good Puritans, the two writers found parallels for the Beadle case in the Bible. Both editorials drew on Judges 19 and 20 to argue that, in addition to publishing Beadle's letters, authorities should exhume Beadle's body and subject it to further punishment. Writing first, the Professor found in that text a crime "so extraordinary" that "it was difficult for any particular judge or set of judges to determine upon it." The Judges passage relates the story of a vicious murder. A traveling Levite and his concubine stop for rest in the land of the tribe of Benjamin. While there, a handful of Benjamites, later identified as the sons of Belial, rape and murder the woman. Using some of the same adjectives so prevalent in the Beadle accounts, the Humble Professor wrote that these Benjamites "did in a most shameful, horrid and cruel manner, abuse her to death." The distraught Levite, unable to secure justice on his own, writes for help. He sends more than letters. In the portion of text copied as an epigraph, the Levite "took a knife and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones into twelve

⁸⁶ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783.

pieces, and sent her into all the coasts of Israel." Months after the Professor wrote his essay, visitors scattered Beadle's bones, but they stole them as souvenirs; the Levite, the Professor explained, sent bones to "excite...astonishment and just indignation." It worked. According to the rest of the passage quoted from Judges 19, the body reached the other eleven tribes of Israel, and "all that saw it, said there was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt, unto this day." The tribes gather and agree that justice must be had. When the Benjamites refuse to deliver the guilty, the other tribes attack. As the Professor told it, all of Benjamin "except a very few, were cut off from the face of the earth!"⁸⁷

It was a telling example. The Humble Professor clearly feared internal unrest. The New London writer, after all, would have known all about civil war. A coastal port town at the mouth of the Thames River, New London suffered the war firsthand. To area residents, the consequences of Revolution were palpable, felt with more immediacy than in Beadle's Wethersfield or Hartford fifty miles or so to the west. New Londoners also knew a thing or two about the heroes and villains of the era. Nathan Hale taught school there before joining the Continental Army; Benedict Arnold set fire to the town in his September 1781 attack on Fort Griswold in Groton just across the river. The villain William Beadle, seen through the lens of Judges 19 and 20, threatened more civil unrest.

Friend to Justice referenced the same passage in a more threatening fashion that explicitly invoked the possibility of civil war. "[W]e have lately heard," Friend began, presumably referencing the Humble Professor's recent editorial, "what was done to the tribe of Benjamin." The Professor had focused on Judges 19 and the actions of the

⁸⁷ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783.

aggrieved Levite. For him, the story had primarily indicated the need for an extraordinary response akin to the Levite dismembering his concubine's body to rally the tribes of Israel for justice. By contrast, a Friend to Justice liked Judges 20 where the tribe of Benjamin's refusal to cooperate erupted into civil war. After massive casualties on each side, the eleven tribes slaughtered Benjamin in its entirety, "save six hundred," saying "There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day." As the Friend to Justice told it, Wethersfield was the tribe of Benjamin.⁸⁸

What was the tribe of Benjamin to do? For both the Humble Professor and Friend to Justice, the answer was straightforward: the body and the writings of the prideful man must be brought to light. It mattered little what the law said, especially in a tumultuous period like the Revolution. After all, the Professor urged, the lesson of the Benjamite story from Judges was precisely that "such atrocious crimes" all but necessarily exceeded statute law and demanded exceptional measures. Again drawing on scripture, the Professor turned to the story of Queen Esther foiling the plot of the minister Haman to kill all the Jews. Haman did not even succeed in taking life, the Professor noted, yet "was thought worthy of a gallows at least fifty cubits high." In comparison, what did William Beadle, "this wretch who has despised his Saviour, and murdered his family" deserve? Beadle deserved "at least a gibbet twenty feet high." Similarly, Friend berated Wethersfield officials for bowing to "the friends of Mr. Beadle" and allowing "that monster of a man" to "rest and rot in his grave like an innocent man." Instead, Friend argued, "his carcass" must be "exposed on a gibbit" in Hartford "at the place where common malefactors are executed." Referencing the biblical fratricide story of Cain and

⁸⁸ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783.

Abel, Friend insisted the blood of the Beadle family cried from New England. Like the blood of Abel, it was "staining the land" and clamored for "some special atonement." In the Genesis text, Friend reminded, God marked Cain a murderer. In his self-serving interpretation, this marking rendered Cain "as it were, hung up as a spectacle of horror to all mankind." Beadle deserved the same in death.⁸⁹

It was not just a matter of atonement and punishment. It was, also, a matter of deterrence. For the Professor, the gibbet needed to be "in a public highway" where Beadle would "rot above ground" and "be devoured by birds of prey" as "an example for all atheists and deists." Friend to Justice agreed. In order to "deter others of like principles," Beadle should hang "on a gibbet...[so] that other infidels may hear and fear, and do no more so wickedly." Friend then asked, "If Mr. Beadle had known before hand, that this would have been his sentence and that he must hang in gibbets, Would he have committed this murder?" The answer, he said, was clearly no. Drawing on traditional Puritan notions of pride at the root of sin, Friend to Justice believed any like Beadle would not be able to stand the thought of ending in such ignominious fashion.⁹⁰

These pseudonymous editorialists shared the rage and grief of other commentators. They used some of the same hyperbolic language. Nevertheless, they came to a vastly different conclusion. Beadle would not disappear by keeping a body hidden or keeping words out of print. Secrecy and silence did not ward off violence. On the contrary, they would only lead to a repetition of violence. A monster "besuffered to

⁸⁹ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783.

⁹⁰ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783.

rest and rot in his grave like an innocent man” would only make more monsters. Only by unleashing violence on Beadle the murderer, only by bringing his body and words to light, could the community save itself.⁹¹

Spreading the Trauma

Print did more than merely spread news of Beadle’s crimes and engender emotional reaction across a wider geographic area: it also changed the context in which writers and readers encountered the event. As authors supplied initial meaning to Beadle and readers took up that meaning and modified it according to their own circumstances, they did so within the framework print culture established. Beadle was not represented—and those representations were not received—in a vacuum. On the small-scale, readers learned of William Beadle in the same issues where they mourned local deaths, worried over debt collection notices, or learned of deadly fires. On the larger-scale, the tragedy emerged in the nation’s periodicals alongside the challenges and changes in late eighteenth-century America. The meanings that could be attached to such a crime expanded, making it possible to place Beadle within some of the larger historical narratives of the period.

The story from Wethersfield was violent and traumatic, but many who heard of it were no doubt familiar with suffering and tragedy. Insurgency and riot were regular experiences in the Anglo-American world of the early modern era. The imperial crisis had only multiplied such events. Between 1760-1775, at least forty-four riots erupted in the colonies. Violence was pervasive whether urban, like the Boston Massacre or Boston

⁹¹ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783.

Tea Party, or rural, like the Paxton Boys in Pennsylvania or the Regulator movement in the Carolinas. In local communities throughout North America, as overtly political voices articulated “popular sovereignty,” Americans “perfected techniques of violence” to enforce it. “No taxation without representation” and stirring words about “the people” could give cover to brutal violence, psychological torture, and all manner of abuse and murder. For example, as William Beadle prepared for an impending tea boycott, a mob in East Haddam, CT stripped Dr. Abner Bebee naked, blistered his skin with hot pitch, tossed him into a pigsty, and slathered him with pig dung. Not satisfied, someone forced dung down his throat—Dr. Bebee had, after all, voiced his support for King George. Good patriot families still had to bear the worries over sons and fathers at war. A letter from camp might carry welcome news; instead, it might, as in the case of a nearly illegible note from the ailing Benjamin Taylor to his parents in Hebron, deliver a heartbreaking, deathbed plea for mom and dad to rescue a dying son. Even for those not touched by mobs or direct warfare, rumor of devastating violence was common. In September 1774, for example, word was everywhere that the British navy had destroyed Boston in a preemptive attack. Those at the Continental Congress heard the bells toll in lament even as they strained to prevent all-out war. They had scarcely learned the report was false before a new rumor replaced it: a spontaneous army had arisen of its own accord and was marching toward Boston for revenge.⁹²

⁹² Brown, “Violence and the American Revolution,” 82-83, 97, 102-103, 119-120; Benjamin Taylor to Honored Father and Mother, 18 July 1775, American Revolution Collection, 1776-1786, IX Correspondence, Box 11, Folder B, CHS; on the fake story from Boston, see Breen, *American Insurgents*, 129-159.

In short, writers and readers were in a Revolutionary frame of mind. Whether or not the war directly confronted them as individuals or communities, news of the military campaign and diplomatic maneuvering surrounded the announcements of the Beadle murders. The updates and commentary that followed initial reports of the crime shared the page with merchant advertisements, notices of bankruptcies, local government developments, and literary ephemera that often explicitly referenced the Revolution. Column upon column of tiny print gave the Beadle case a Revolutionary context that would have been hard to miss. Representations of war crowded representations of the local tragedy just as the effects of war crowded the realities of local life. By December 1782, there was hope on the mainland that the war was won, but war's effects still worried many.⁹³

That mix of hope and worry permeated many of the newspapers that reported on William Beadle. For example, the *Connecticut Journal* in New Haven followed their reprinting of the *Courant* article with a pledge by struggling merchants to burn the ships of those still engaging in the “scandalous and destructive trade with the enemy.” By the time the *Salem Gazette*'s subscribers reached the “Letter from a Gentleman in Wethersfield” on page three of the January 16 issue, they had presumably read the front-page story out of Charleston documenting, “for transatlantic perusal,” the continued British “barbarities” against the people and property of the United States. Alongside stories on Beadle, several newspapers followed, with both zeal and apprehension, a story from London about expatriate Americans peddling tales of U.S. weakness and disunity in

⁹³ Indeed, nearly every newspaper issue cited in this dissertation demonstrates this Revolutionary context.

an effort to undermine the Revolution. Even optimistic news found negative counterparts. With the *Connecticut Courant* reprint on the back page, the *Providence Gazette* ran a heated editorial on its front page that opened by celebrating the American cause that “had enraptured the world” and “overawed the conjectures of mankind.” From there, however, the tone soured as the author decried opponents of a five percent tax in support of the state; their opposition, he insisted, was “dishonourable to our patriotism.” Dishonor was a common theme. Numerous papers running Beadle stories worried about American dishonor surrounding the so-called Asgill affair in which Sir Charles Asgill, a prisoner of war, was set to be executed as retaliation for the hanging of an American privateer in British-controlled New York. In nearly every newspaper issue in which American men and women read of William Beadle, they also read of the obstacles and uncertainties of independence.⁹⁴

Obviously, contexts changed with shifting locales. Town, region, national, and international news could differ from one paper to another. Similarly, not every paper carried every Beadle item; not every print shop carried every sermon or pamphlet. Readers in Boston or New Haven might have their choice of Marsh, Mitchell, or Dana; those in New Hampshire or along the western frontier might not. The widespread sharing of the *Connecticut Courant*'s early article provided something of a common text. For some, that was all the printed news to be had. Many others, though, might have caught sight of the will or the note to Farnsworth or the letter from the Humble Professor of

⁹⁴ *Connecticut Journal*, Dec. 19, 1782; *Salem Gazette*, Jan. 16, 1783; *The Continental Journal*, Jan. 16, 1783; *Providence Gazette*, Jan. 4, 1783; *New York Gazetteer*, Dec. 30, 1782; *New Jersey Gazette*, Jan. 1, 1783.

Christianity—or even all three. Whatever the particulars in a given town, city, or state, the widespread commentary put William Beadle alongside readers’ experiences of Revolution and nascent independence. A reader in Salem or Albany or Richmond might not have felt the visceral trauma of Beadle’s erstwhile friends and neighbors, but they had plenty to worry about nonetheless. Details from the scene encouraged readers everywhere to make the story their own. The ironies and paradoxes that permeated the case and its coverage unsettled any looking for easy answers.

Historians have long grown accustomed to speaking of print creating “imagined communities.”⁹⁵ William Beadle was part of that nascent national imagination. Authors commonly wrote as if Beadle were a story for the nation, rife with dire warnings and harrowing lessons for the new United States and not just the New England town or region. That tone encouraged readers to see Beadle as part of their own stories, too, no matter how far they lived from Wethersfield. The mood of the Revolution played into this encouragement as well. Revolution alone may not have fully forged a nation out of the thirteen colonies, but it certainly brought them closer together, from necessity if nothing else. As American printers unified the colonies through shared stories of the Revolution and War of Independence, they made it possible for a story like the Beadle murders to spread quickly and widely. Print, in short, did create imagined communities, but sometimes those communities imagined horrors. Those horrors could unify in mourning, but they could also divide and vex. For example, through the anonymous letters of a Humble Professor of Christianity or A Friend to Justice, readers could imagine how

⁹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

communally destructive William Beadle might prove to be. When, alongside reports of Revolution and independence, authors resorted to hyperbole and decried the poverty of language and understanding, they implied an indictment of the new republic: a crime without precedent, a crime so horrid as to exhaust language itself, threatened independent America at its foundational moment.⁹⁶

No doubt the particulars of the case were largely responsible for the traumatized response. The gruesome nature of the scene, the helpless victims, the unsuspected culprit: it was all shocking. Beadle's profession also made it likely that he was no stranger to most Wethersfield residents. Given that his store and home shared a location, his customers surely knew Lydia and the children as well. On top of it all, there was very little context, little or no precedent, for understanding such a crime. Marital homicide had always been low in the colonies, especially in New England where a mutual dependence between spouses and a Puritan-inspired willingness of neighbors and local officials to intervene in troubled homes kept extreme violence minimal. There appears not to have been a single instance of multiple homicide involving a spouse and children during the colonial period. The first such case happened just a year before the Beadle murders in Tomhanick, NY, a frontier town near Albany. In that instance, a man deemed legally insane named James Yates slaughtered his wife, four children, and some of his cattle. It is possible Beadle's neighbors had heard of that tragedy; both the *Connecticut Courant* and the *Connecticut Journal* reported it. But those reports were only a single sentence noting

⁹⁶ As will be seen throughout the remaining chapters, the Beadle case provided a way for writers and readers to express their Revolution-era anxieties. Julia Stern has made a similar argument for the underappreciated sentimental novels of the early republic, which, according to Stern, were vehicles for expressing the traumas of war. See Julia Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

Yates' arrest. Beadle did not even fit the type when it came to family murder. Most of the rare spousal murders in New England were crimes of passion or the result of unmistakable mental illness.⁹⁷

The sensationalism of the crime, the startling nature of Beadle's own words, and the fears of what America's future held demanded explanation. The jury of inquest's verdict that Beadle had acted "in full strength of his Reasonable Faculties" kept such demands alive.⁹⁸ A verdict of insanity might have eased troubled souls. As Reverend Marsh put it at the funeral, the mind first considered "a sudden and most vehement frenzy" when speculating on the crime.⁹⁹ Otherwise, mourners faced the jarring—perhaps unfathomable—prospect of a murder on principle. Whatever comfort "frenzy" might have offered, Marsh insisted on taking Beadle at his word. The jury of inquest agreed. At the same time as newspapers provided descriptions of blood-soaked stairs and funeral mourning, they also publicized these legal decisions surrounding Beadle. Like the funeral mourners in Wethersfield, American readers were aware that insanity did not offer an easy way out.

Anyone with a copy of the *Courant* or its subsequent reprints read of the jury's findings with the additional assurance that it was "very evident he was rational on every other subject."¹⁰⁰ The qualifying "every other subject" signaled an uncertainty, a gnawing

⁹⁷ For Yates, see *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 15, 1781 and *Connecticut Journal*, Dec. 27, 1781. On Yates, see also Cohen "Homicidal Compulsion," 728. On the rarity of murders and the other information in this paragraph, see Roth, *American Homicide*, 109-123 and Cohen "Homicidal Compulsion," 725.

⁹⁸ Jury of Inquest Report, 11 December 1782, CSL.

⁹⁹ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782.

recognition that the sound mind of the jury's report was more a question than an answer. On one hand, the jury's decision deepened the trauma of the murders by disallowing the least horrific explanation of insanity. On the other hand, it opened possibilities for writers to find value in the tragedy in the form of lessons for the local, regional, and national community. In trying to explain the working of Beadle's mind, commentators added layers to the reading public's knowledge of the Beadle affair. They fashioned a print construct of Beadle that made him as much a symbol as an individual murderer/suicide. As symbol, Beadle expressed various cultural anxieties—both explicitly and implicitly—that faced Americans as the War for Independence drew to a close. Four such anxieties—dealing with migration, economics, religion, and nationality—demonstrate that the William Beadle murders and suicide had a larger significance than one might expect.

CHAPTER 3

ANXIOUS MIGRANTS: MOVEMENT, ALIENATION, AND THE THREATENING NEIGHBOR

In late December 1769, a crowd gathered at the Wethersfield doorstep of merchant Peter Verstille. Verstille, recently returned from his native London, was busily unpacking a bill of English goods delivered via Providence. The crowd believed Verstille's goods to be an infringement of the non-importation agreement. What exactly happened next depends on whose account one reads. The crowd may have been twenty-odd men; it may have been three hundred. The men might have calmly inquired; they might have waved "sticks and staves." Verstille may have protested even as he handed over the goods; he may have sheepishly released them without a fight. Differing accounts leave it difficult to say. Verstille remained in Wethersfield for a few years, but he held a grudge from the incident toward some of Wethersfield's leading citizens. In 1770, Verstille sold the property to an absentee landlord named Barlow Trecothick, and by spring 1773 at the latest, he had left Wethersfield himself. The newly arrived Beadle family moved into the vacant house and storefront. Verstille, perhaps wary of the newcomer's chances given his own experience, wrote tersely, "I heartily wish him prosperity."¹

¹ The "differing accounts" come from: Peter Verstille to Thomas Seymour, undated, document 4, Peter Verstille Papers 1770-1772, CHS; Thomas Seymour to Peter Verstille, 3 February 1770, document 5, Peter Verstille Papers 1770-1772, CHS; Peter Verstille, List of Rioters, document 6, Peter Verstille Papers 1770-1772, CHS; Silas Deane, I. Correspondence 1753-1795, Folders 1-3, Silas Deane Papers, CHS; *Connecticut Courant* Jan. 1, 1770; Adams, *The history of ancient Wethersfield, Connecticut*, 418-420. For Verstille selling the property, see March 24, 1770 Peter Verstille to Barlow Trecothick (of London), Wethersfield Land Records, Vol. 13, p. 360. For the letter mentioning Beadle, see Peter Verstille to Sir, [] April 1773, Verstille Family Correspondence 1754-1854, Folder 5 Peter 1754-1777, CHS.

William Beadle was a relative nobody when he arrived in Wethersfield, but Verstille and Trecothick were public figures. Verstille had operated on a transatlantic scale for years with shops in Hartford and Boston. In London, Trecothick had served as alderman, sheriff, and lord mayor. By the time he rented to the Beadles, he was an MP known for siding with the colonies. Verstille and Trecothick may have operated on a scale Beadle would never reach, but similarities united the three men. They were all Englishmen with an eye toward commerce and a tendency to move around. Trecothick's trajectory was like Beadle's in reverse: born in England, he spent the first half of his life in New England and the West Indies before finding his niche back in his native city. Verstille appears to have had a longstanding business relationship, if not friendship, with the Mitchell family. All three men had to deal with the realities of being newcomers in a time of great suspicion. The Atlantic world made it possible for the likes of Verstille, Trecothick, and Beadle to seek their fortunes on both sides of the ocean, but it also easily rendered them suspect. Verstille lost his goods and surely worried about more grievous consequences. Trecothick, in his political years, faced questions about his American upbringing and open friendliness toward colonial mercantile interests. If his poetical store ad from 1773 is any indication, William Beadle, selling out of the storefront owned by Trecothick and so recently occupied by Verstille, felt the need to buttress his American credentials by declaring, "Upon my Word, I am no Tory."²

² On Trecothick, see David Hancock, 2008 "Trecothick, Barlow (1718?-1775), merchant and politician," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 11 Sept. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.temple.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50005>. There are numerous letters to (or mentions of) Stephen Mix Mitchell and the Mitchell family in Verstille collections at CHS. For just a few examples, see Verstille Family Correspondence 1754-1854, Folder 5 Peter 1754-1777, CHS. In fact, in the letter where Verstille

The migrant life was practically ordinary by the time William Beadle arrived in Wethersfield. Over 125,000 Britons came to the Americas during the years of Beadle's migrations. The period between the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution witnessed a surge unlike Europe's American colonies had ever seen. Migration from Europe became big business. Americanists once told that story as a story of "settlers" who, upon disembarking their ships, tended to stay put, but in part because of the Atlantic turn, American historians now appreciate that those settlers remained migrants beyond an Atlantic crossing. Like Beadle, many continued to move again and again. That movement, often away from the coastal port cities and into the frontier, gave an Atlantic shape to the American colonies.³

This historiographical attention to Atlantic migration as a regular, pervasive phenomenon renders William Beadle, the "monster of a man," more ordinary. Beadle wound his way from London to Barbados to Connecticut as part of this mass movement. The same Atlantic world that forced the enslaved and the convict away from their homes made it possible for Beadle and others to strain to improve their lot through movement—to make their way to London, to risk an Atlantic crossing, and to chase a merchant dream in various colonies and towns. The Atlantic world provided opportunities for migrants like Beadle, but mobility for him and others could be just as much about desperation,

mentioned Beadle, the very next sentence is about how he's looking for a chair for Mitchell. Beadle's poem ad is *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775.

³ On numbers, see Whyte, *Migration and Society in Britain*, 117 and Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 26. On the surge, see Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West*, 7. On migration becoming big business, see Marianne S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999). On the older tendency of Americanists to see these migrants as "settlers" who stayed put, see Games, "Migration," 43-44. On the role of Atlantic migration in shaping the frontier of colonial America, see Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West*, 7-28.

uncertainty, and alienation, especially in a time of war. Beadle's own path in life—and the mystery that still pervades his biography, his choices, and his travels—was an Atlantic story that brought together the hopes and the perils of movement. His war years in New England highlighted the dangers and fears associated with that movement as he and his neighbors worried about strangers, counterfeits, and disguised Tories moving from one place to the next. After the murders, the rumors that filled gaps in Beadle's sparse biography accentuated an easily missed reality of the Atlantic world: as movement became ordinary, neighbors became less known. In life and death, William Beadle illuminated two possibilities for the Atlantic world's white free migrant. In life, he was the hopeful traveler eager to improve his standing against repeated failures; in death, he prompted thoughts about unknowable neighbors who could turn out to be monsters.

The Unknowable Neighbor

In the aftermath of the murders, neighbors clamored to know the real William Beadle, for the real Beadle was clearly not the soft-spoken merchant they had lived alongside for a decade. Less than a week after the tragedy, the original *Courant* announcement, which would become so widely shared, focused on describing who William Beadle was before even delving into the events of December 11. Readers knew what had happened; what they needed was an explanation of who the monster was. In the opening lines, the newspaper referred to “an unhappy affair” and “a deed...most extraordinary and astonishing.” The writer did not, however, actually disclose what had happened for nearly half the article. Instead, the piece spent ten lines providing

biographical details of Beadle and his family. Before getting to the murders, before revealing the failing business and the scandalous deism, the newspaper wanted to know the background of William Beadle.⁴

The first words spoken of Beadle were, in fact, words of origin: “a native of South-Britain.” He had, the paper continued, lived in Wethersfield nearly ten years “and in America, about twenty years.” The story of his familial life followed: married, “at Fairfield, in this State, about 14 years since” into “a reputable family” with “one son and three daughters.” The opening section concluded with the aforementioned references to Beadle’s solicitude and affection as a family man. Much of the subsequent publicity highlighted his religious deviance and economic failures, but here, from the start, the question of his biography was paramount. It gave readers a reason to see Beadle as the outsider, the migrant come from abroad who looked to America—just down the road in Fairfield, in fact—for his good reputation and family. Othered as a monster by the end of the article, Beadle was set apart as from elsewhere as soon as his name was mentioned. It was, however, an uneasy distancing. The newspaper disclosed Beadle’s south Britain origins only to admit, in the very same sentence, that he had lived in America for twenty years and in Wethersfield almost ten. He was not, in fact, fully a stranger after all. He was not, perhaps, the wandering migrant forever unknown.⁵

True, there is something pedestrian about the whole description, but its ordinary nature subtly clued the reader into the most disturbing aspect of the entire event: the

⁴ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782.

⁵ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782.

neighbor might prove to be a monster. The newspaper accessed all the typical socio-cultural descriptors: husband, father, businessman. The wife was “amiable,” the children “lovely and promising.” Juxtaposed with the last half of the article—which turned to discussions of deism, men as machines, and murder—the rather unassuming first half was simultaneously reassuring and alarming. It implied to the reader that all was under control, that William Beadle was understandable: a neighbor, a father, and a husband like many others. At the same time, however, those descriptors could do nothing to explain “a deed...most extraordinary and astonishing.” Beadle remained a mystery. All the typical descriptors in the world might still leave the south Britain native unknown to his Connecticut neighbors. Paradoxically, to see that he had lived in America twenty years both diminished Beadle’s anonymity—he was not so recently come from the outside after all—and recast that anonymity in a distressing light: had twenty years not been enough to discern the danger next door?⁶

The irony of the *Courant* opening its report with a string of biographical markers was that Beadle’s biography would remain so elusive to his contemporaries. As already mentioned, his close friend Stephen Mix Mitchell, who would write more about Beadle than anyone else, confessed to never hearing “a single syllable relating to his age, parentage, or early occupation.” Mitchell’s attempts to fill the gaps relied on an anonymous “gentleman” here, an “undoubted authority” there. While trauma and the fear of being held responsible may have prompted Mitchell’s vagueness, Mitchell’s diffidence on his friend’s background brings out the everyday unknowability of a life in the Atlantic world. Mitchell’s one-page biography presented a rather credible Atlantic life. His

⁶ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782.

speculation would have been tolerable under different circumstances. In the context of tragedy, however, that mixture of credible Atlantic life and ordinary uncertainty put readers on alert.⁷

Mitchell appreciated the stakes: “ignorance of the history” of William Beadle had made it impossible to provide answers. In confessing to being well positioned to have learned of William’s past, Mitchell was admitting, as Beadle’s friend and neighbor, that he should have known him better. To say, as he did, that asking him of his background “directly would have been rude,” was, perhaps, just a way to let himself off the hook. But it also gave readers a chance to appreciate how easy it was to remain unknown. They had lived near one another for ten years, but everyday manners had kept Mitchell from learning much about his friend—that could happen to anyone. He went on, in just a paragraph, to narrate Beadle’s entire life, including twenty-five years of travel: from Essex to Barbados and back, from London to New York to Connecticut, and, finally, among four different Connecticut residences terminating in Wethersfield. The occasion for its telling was exceptional, and he opened with hands thrown up at the paucity of fact. Nevertheless, in a very short time, he had uncovered at least these details. None of them, with the possible exception of a childhood at London deist clubs, would have raised eyebrows under different circumstances. That is, in fact, part of why continued “ignorance” of Beadle’s history was so unnerving. He had lived in a way that, much later, would fit the narrative arcs of Atlantic history with precision. While still alive, that lifestyle had provoked little interest from friends like Mitchell; propriety had been enough to keep questions to a minimum. In the midst of tragedy, however, it become ever

⁷ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 5-6.

so apparent how dangerous and frightening uncertainty about a friend or neighbor could prove to be.⁸

Beadle the Migrant

William Beadle spent much of his life on the move. It was reported that he left England around 1755, aged twenty-five or so, for six years in Barbados. After this Caribbean foray, he returned to London long enough to regroup for the colonial mainland and sailed to New York around 1762. He did not stay there, leaving immediately for Connecticut. Over the course of a decade, he lived in Stratford, Derby, and Fairfield along the coast. By 1772, he was in Wethersfield with a wife and several children. Some details are more certain than others; long stretches remain a mystery. It is worth looking closer at this biographical narrative, however, for even in its uncertainty, it shows William Beadle as revealing of life in the British Atlantic world.⁹

Very little about that pre-Wethersfield narrative is certain. No record places William Beadle absolutely in Great Burstead in Essex. Nothing directly corroborates Mitchell's speculation that he was the "natural son of some gentleman" who was at times around the court in London. If William Beadle did sail to Barbados, he appears to have left no trace; he is absent from the records of Governor Charles Pinfold, to whose household he was supposedly attached. Similarly, any return trip to England and subsequent business dealings there leading to a final transatlantic voyage to New York is without firm record. His early years in mainland America are equally opaque. Unlike his

⁸ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 5.

⁹ This narrative follows the timeline of [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*.

tenure in Wethersfield, Beadle never appeared in the newspapers during his residence in Derby, Stratford, or Fairfield. The records of those towns do not include a William Beadle involved in town matters or any land transactions.¹⁰

If nothing, or next-to-nothing, is certain, some information is highly probable. On his 1770 marriage certificate to Lydia Lothrop, Beadle recorded Great Burstead as his place of birth, listing his father as one Samuel Beadle. While William does not appear in the parish records directly, Samuel Beadle does, having married twice in Great Burstead, first to Mary Upton on 15 June 1730 and again, just a few months after Mary's death, to Elizabeth Dore on 7 December 1735. That makes it almost certain that Samuel was indeed his father. Beadle's reported age would have had him born to Mary.

Circumstantial evidence hints that William was the son of Mary but raised by Elizabeth. After all, he named two of his daughters Mary and Elizabeth. Perhaps William, in naming his daughters, paid homage to a mother he likely had no memory of and a stepmother who raised him.¹¹

¹⁰ The quote is from [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6. For Barbados, see Charles Pinfold Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. I checked the following coastal newspapers: *Connecticut Gazette*, New Haven; *Connecticut Journal*, New Haven; *Connecticut Gazette*, New London. I checked land records for Stratford, Derby, and Fairfield at the respective town clerks. I also consulted "Fairfield Records, Minutes of Town Meetings" at the Fairfield Town Clerk and a collection titled "Town Meetings/Births/Marriages/Deaths, 1722-1844" at the Derby Town Clerk. Stratford does not have extant town records in addition to the land records.

¹¹ For William and Lydia's marriage, see White, *The Barbour Collection*, 12:13. The original Beadle and Upton records are in the Essex Record Office, but I consulted copies in "Essex Record Office Report on Genealogical Search," William Beadle Research File, Box 1, Great Britain Essex Records Folder, Wethersfield Historical Society, Wethersfield, CT (hereafter WHS). For more on the idea of connecting the names of the Beadle children to William's mother and stepmother, see Smart, "A Life of William Beadle," 52. The parish records have a burial record for Mary, wife of Samuel Beadle, dated 13 August 1735. The names Mary and Elizabeth, of course, were common. They existed in Lydia's family background, too.

Commentators, of course, had reason besides factual accuracy to characterize Beadle's life in certain ways, especially when it came to scandalous aspects like his deism. Still, some of the information reported by Mitchell and others seems in the realm of truth at least. For example, all reported that Beadle had spent time in London. Most notably, Mitchell and the *Connecticut Gazette* editorialist Humble Professor of Christianity related stories about Beadle visiting London deist clubs as a young man. As will be seen later, this rumor served several purposes, but the notion that William had first picked up deism around London during his upbringing has support. His letters demonstrate real familiarity with natural religion, and deism was still trending in the London of his youth. Mitchell went further than deist clubs and suggested Beadle had spent his early years in or around London. Wherever that information came from, it was a likely guess. London was a magnet for Britons looking to improve their lives, especially for unmarried, mobile young men. It long had provided more migrants bound for America than anywhere else. During Beadle's childhood years, as many as one in six people in England had direct exposure to the capital. Often men and women from rural England resorted to an Atlantic crossing as a secondary option once London did not pan out; they were too embarrassed to return home and face questions about their failure in the big city. Great Burstead was even close enough to London for Beadle to have felt its influence without a long-term move. However much time he spent there, he had caught the commercial bug that culminated in his American efforts, and London's mercantile life was a likely source for such an aspiration. What better place to see the commercial opportunities and products the colonies offered than London's shopping districts?¹²

¹² On London as a source for American migration, see Bailyn, "Introduction: Europeans on the

Less certain are the notions that Beadle grew up the son of a gentleman around the court. It is possible, of course. After all, William would later demonstrate a keen awareness of the value of high-society friends. He admitted to hiding his financial troubles from them and found the idea of dropping into a lower-class existence intolerable. On the other hand, the only evidence of Samuel Beadle's economic standing is evidence of omission that points to a lower-class life: he does not appear in the Essex Freeholder Book around the time of William's birth; that would suggest he neither owned land worth £10 nor possessed a long-term lease on property worth £20.¹³

Between Great Burstead and Wethersfield, certainty remains fleeting, but on balance, the general contours of Beadle's purported movements seem reliable. Definitive record of him in Barbados is absent, but there is no reason to doubt he went. It might even explain why he was drawn to Connecticut; several of his neighbors in Wethersfield kept up trading connections with the island. Perhaps, while in Barbados, he encountered trading ships from New England and saw an opportunity. One hint, however slight, that he had in fact resided in the sugar colony comes from an offhand remark in his letters. In a letter in which Beadle enumerated all the credits to his character, he mentioned desiring "the Emancipation of every slave on Earth." Beadle's concern with slavery here is not, of

Move," 2; Games, "Migration," 33-4; and Horn, "British Diaspora," 37-8; on the extent of London's reach and as a source for mercantile aspirations, see E.A. Wrigley, "A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy 1650-1750," *Past and Present* 37 (July 1967), 49-51.

¹³ For William Beadle's thoughts on being poor, see "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 174-175, 177. For Samuel Beadle, see F.G. Emmison, ed., *Essex Freeholders Book, 1734* ([Essex]: Friends of Historic Essex, 1982). While it only covers one year, we know Samuel Beadle still lived there during that year because of his two marriages in Great Burstead in 1730 and 1735. The law had recently changed to include those with the long-term leases of £20 properties.

course, definitive in any way, but it does show that it was on his mind. Perhaps six years of life around sugar plantations had affected him.¹⁴

Whatever the specifics of Beadle's tenure in Barbados, he fit a pattern in leaving England for America when he did. In the long eighteenth century, over one million Europeans made their way to mainland America or the West Indies. The 1750s in fact provided a major wave of such movement. Beadle himself, in his early or mid-twenties when he left for Barbados, was even the typical age of free English migrants. Statistics for the period suggest well over half the migrants were between 15-29, a percentage far exceeding their share of the total population.¹⁵

Beadle's time in Derby and Stratford is murky, too, but there is no reason to suspect he lied about living in both places. Fairfield marks the entry of William Beadle into verifiable American records. Town records show William Beadle, son of Samuel of Great Burstead, Essex, marrying Lydia Lothrop of Plymouth, Massachusetts, on 15 April 1770. William and Lydia's first child, a son they named Ansell after Lydia's late father, was born there on 2 February 1771.¹⁶

As with his earlier move to Barbados, much of Beadle's migration to the mainland fit a broader pattern even if he was in the minority in certain ways. He likely

¹⁴ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 175. Smart, "A Life of William Beadle," investigated Beadle's remark about slavery against his time in Barbados to see if he could find any links between the two, but he came up empty. For a few examples of Beadle's neighbors engaging in trade with Barbados, see the following: Isaac Ishmael to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 18 June 1782, Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers, Reel 1; James Lockwood to Barnabas Deane, 6 May 1772, Silas Deane Papers, VII. Barnabas Deane 1768-1792, Box 11, Folder 1, CHS; *The Public Records of Colonial Connecticut*, 14: 439.

¹⁵ Horn, "British Diaspora," 33, 50; Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West*, 128.

¹⁶ White, *The Barbour Collection*, 12:13.

arrived at the end of the Seven Years' War, and migration usually peaked after wars. He was part of a wave of 125,000 men and women who left Britain between 1760-1775. While those men and women were increasingly Scottish, Irish, and German migrants headed for the Middle Colonies, it was still fairly normal for an Englishman like William Beadle to set his sights instead on New England. The majority of the movers remained convicts, servants, or artisans, but the expansion of British territory and trade after 1763 provided new incentives for the middling and upper sorts eager to make their name through business, trade, military service, or governance. Mercantile occupations accounted for the majority of free emigrants; aspiring merchants and small-time traders landed in coastal port cities with regularity.¹⁷

While Beadle became a public figure with an archival trail very quickly in Wethersfield, he appears to have remained transient and under the radar throughout his first decade in Connecticut. Absent from the town records of Derby, Stratford, or Fairfield, Beadle also never published advertisements in any of several local newspapers. He neither bought land nor raised livestock. Most curiously, given his clear mercantile aspirations, Beadle never became involved with Nathaniel and Thomas Shaw, who ran an extensive trading network throughout the state from the family home in New London, not far from Beadle's first stops. They would have been an obvious contact for a newcomer like Beadle.¹⁸

¹⁷ Horn, "British Diaspora," 36-37; Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West*, 107-110, 149-154, 205; Games, "Migration," 38-9; Whyte, *Migration and Society in Britain*, 117.

¹⁸ On the conclusion about the newspapers and the town records, see p. 106, fn. 10 above. The livestock comment is in reference to the Derby town records which contain extensive lists from the time period of the "earmarks" each resident used to differentiate his livestock grazing in common areas. On the Shaws, I looked at Nathaniel and Thomas Shaw Papers 1755-1799, DLAR (hereafter "Shaw Papers").

Taken together, these absences suggest that prior to his marriage and relocation to Wethersfield, William Beadle's American life was more about potential than achievement. In the terms of Atlantic history, he remained an active migrant looking to better his position in one town or the next. One even wonders if Mitchell's remark that Beadle had brought merchandise from England, as if to begin retailing immediately, could be a false assumption: why no advertisements for a store? Similarly, was Mitchell mistaken to say Beadle had originally traded on credit? If Beadle had been a retailer with enough goods to trade on credit, why no advertisements, no announcements in print that it was time to settle accounts, no mention in the books and correspondence of a nearby large importer like the Shaws? The later advertisements in Wethersfield, both in quantity and originality, suggested he was comfortable in the public eye; the lack of advertisements from his first decade in Connecticut might mean that Beadle had nothing to advertise.¹⁹

That said, Beadle must have filled the ten years with some kind of labor. The fact that no one ever mentioned him working in a trade or at anything other than retailing is significant. It suggests that he was already pursuing the mercantile life upon his arrival. He befriended the affluent Burr family—before or after marrying Lydia Lothrop, cousin to Priscilla Burr, is unclear—and started a family—all things that signal some level of prosperity. While the Beadles moved away, the two families stayed in touch. Mitchell said Beadle arrived in Wethersfield with approximately 1,200 pounds movable property,

Some 23 reels of microfilm, Beadle does not appear on any receipts, ledgers, or correspondence despite the fact that many of the other names in this story do.

¹⁹ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6.

not a small sum. Whatever the exact figures, he had enough to lease a house and store in a prime location that had previously been sufficient for a much larger trader. His store ads began not long after his arrival, and he was doing quite well according to tax rolls from early in his residence. All of this points to a picture of a William Beadle making steps toward a modest level of commercial success. To put it differently, it is hard to imagine a fledgling William Beadle in England, Barbados, Stratford, and Derby who, out of nowhere, befriended one of Connecticut's leading families in Fairfield and then arrived in Wethersfield, in his early forties, with enough property to open a store and a sudden penchant for newspaper advertising.²⁰

Who then was the migrant William Beadle? Did he come from nothing and set out for the empire out of desperation? Was he an alienated, disconnected wanderer who never bought land, raised livestock, or settled into community until Wethersfield happened, for a brief moment, to work out for him? Or, was he the “natural son of some gentleman” who moved around the court in London, knew the governor in Barbados, and gradually built a modest retailing operation in Connecticut? These are two poles on a spectrum of possibilities, and Beadle was likely somewhere in between. Ultimately, the historian is left, not unlike Stephen Mix Mitchell, with a handful of near-certainties, a heap of speculations, and a nagging curiosity driven, at least in part, by a questionable idea that the life of William Beadle can explain the events of December 11, 1782.

²⁰ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6; Peter Verstile to Sir, [] April 1773, Verstile Family Correspondence 1754-1854, Folder 5 Peter 1754-1777, CHS; *Connecticut Courant*, April 20, 1773. Priscilla Burr, nee Lothrop, was the sister of Isaac Lothrop, who would eventually be the executor of the Beadle estate, and married to Gershom Burr, brother of William Beadle's friend Thaddeus Burr. Evidence that the families remained in contact comes from a 1779 letter of Priscilla Burr's in which she mentions having recently received a letter from William Beadle. See “Letter of Priscilla Lothrop,” *Bulletin of the Connecticut Historical Society* 8 (August, 1936): 2-4.

Biographical uncertainty sometimes translated into ambiguity and anxiety about Beadle's very personality. Timothy Dwight, in a travelogue written while president of Yale, recalled William Beadle's determined countenance. Alongside Beadle's roster of high-society friends—"he was cheerfully admitted to the best society in this town," Dwight acknowledged—it might have given the impression of a confident, outspoken, public man. On the contrary, Dwight contrasted that determined look with the "suspicious circumstance" that Beadle "rarely looked the person, with whom he was conversing, in the face." Instead, he "turned his eye askance." Beadle also, according to Dwight, always exhibited "a degree of reserve and mystery," which, the *Hartford Wit* mused "might merit the name of suspicious."²¹ Not only did Beadle leave others unsure of his origins; he also left them unsure of his demeanor. Was he obviously a gentleman or was he mysterious? Was he at home in polite society, or could he not even look someone in the eye? Was it a matter of personality, or did it indicate something more sinister?

This remaining uncertainty, however, is not altogether unfortunate. It may not satisfy the curiosity surrounding a "monster of a man," but it elucidates how that "monster" was, after all, part of his world. Whatever the specifics, William Beadle lived an Atlantic life of multiple migrations and the drive to do a little better at the next stop on the line. Like others on the move in this Atlantic world, he carried his background with him: the European books he bequeathed in his will or the deist ideas he picked up in London. Perhaps his noted reticence was simply a quirk. Maybe, however, it was a sign that William Beadle, like so many others in the Atlantic world, saw the Americas as a chance for a new start, shorn of an unwanted past. The uncertainty also gives Atlantic and

²¹ Dwight, *Travels in New England*, 230.

American historians a reason to pause: migration, for some, might have held hope or promise, and it might have sometimes delivered; just as often, however, that promise might have fizzled, the migrant left wondering what was next.

Beadle, too, seems to have learned from all the moving around. There are signs, at least, that he changed his ideas as he moved. For starters, the sheer number of movements suggests he was regularly looking for a new start. He concluded along the way that it was best to remain mobile (he seems not to have purchased land, for example). He wanted his property movable, but he found some types of movability frightening. Whatever happened along the way, William Beadle obviously decided against trading on credit. Such trading would have allowed him to carry credits and debits from one place to the next, but it also meant others could do the same. Somewhere, in all of his moving and trading, Beadle learned that the moving and trading of others could work to his disadvantage if he were not careful. Beadle, however odd particular aspects of his behavior might have been, was particularly revealing of one consequence of the Atlantic world's opportunity for movement: it provided a certain kind of freedom, but that freedom necessitated new choices about what type of property to pursue and what type of trading to engage in.²²

One additional lesson Beadle learned well was the value of notable friends. As already mentioned, he stood in polite society in Wethersfield and had the right associates to prove it. From at least his stay in Fairfield, Beadle successfully courted friends whose

²² Beadle does not show up in any land records for Derby, Stratford, Fairfield, or Wethersfield. For copies of the records of him paying rent for the Trecothick property in Wethersfield, see "Payment Table to Oliver Ellsworth, State Attorney," William Beadle Research File, Box 1, WHS (originals are at CSL).

reach extended beyond the neighborhood: Thaddeus Burr, John Chester, and Stephen Mix Mitchell were only the ones he named in the letters. Presumably he had additional connections. For example, his land in Wethersfield abutted not just that of the Mitchells but several other prominent families as well, including the Beldens—Thomas Belden, like Chester, was a respected colonel during the war—the Webbs—Joseph Webb hosted the summit between Washington and comte de Rochambeau in 1781—and the Deanes—Silas Deane was the most visible revolutionary in town and eventually served as a diplomat to France before being embroiled in scandal. William Beadle was, in other words, surrounded by some of the community's leading figures and locations. Looking further back, it may be impossible to prove whether Beadle had, as Mitchell reported, been part of Governor Pinfold's household in Barbados or ever been around the court in London. The fact that Mitchell reported as much is ultimately more to the point than its factual accuracy. Those ideas about Beadle came from somewhere, and he had clearly let them stand. Maybe he originated them himself.²³

The influence of Beadle's friends was more than imaginary. During William's time in Fairfield, Thaddeus Burr held several offices including sheriff. As the Revolution evolved, he was one of the men charged with relaying information between the coastal regions and Hartford. At times, he was a member of the state legislature. Similarly, Colonel John Chester and Stephen Mix Mitchell almost always held offices at both the local and state level. Not long after Beadle's arrival in Wethersfield, both Chester and Mitchell were part of Wethersfield's Committee of Correspondence. Mitchell was also a

²³ For the location of the property, see March 24, 1770 Peter Verstille to Barlow Trecothick (of London), Wethersfield Land Records, Vol. 13, p. 360.

selectman. At the height of the War for Independence, either Chester or Mitchell always served as one of Wethersfield's representatives to the state assembly; sometimes the two of them comprised the town's whole delegation. Chester, in addition to his military involvement early in the war, routinely served on special committees dealing with the state's financial accounts and complaints against its military officers. From February 1781, he joined Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull's Council of Safety (Burr had been part of the group for several years). Chester was frequently a local Justice of the Peace; Mitchell was a yearly lock as a JP for Hartford County. In his assemblyman role, Mitchell, early in 1782, was part of a small team ensuring that previously unpublished legislative resolves would be printed and bound together as a pamphlet for public consumption.²⁴

These noteworthy names and lists of offices impress on two points. First, they indicate that William Beadle really did enmesh himself in high society. However close (or not) his relationships with any of these men were in fact, he was publicly known as their associate. Mitchell, recall, admitted to being close with him, which he would surely have avoided had it been entirely a figment of Beadle's imagination. Similarly, neither Burr nor Chester publicly denounced having had a friendship with the deist monster. In life, it seems, William Beadle had managed to ingratiate himself into surprisingly high circles. Second, they put the outsider William Beadle close to the most inside-type of information. Rather quickly, he went from a peripatetic stranger of the Atlantic world to the neighbor of men directing his town's official response to Revolution. He was in a

²⁴ These various appointments can be tracked in the volumes of *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*.

position to hear of legislative maneuvering, governmental worries, and backroom gossip. Beadle was not, in short, merely friendly with men above his means: he was close to those entrusted with the public welfare.

Beadle's own words to those friends, when added to his biography, further underscore tension between alienation and belonging, anonymity and renown. Sometimes, that tension overlay his Atlantic wandering to an uncanny degree. For example, when writing Colonel Chester of his suicidal thoughts, Beadle stated, "I was willing twenty years past to make the tryal." Whether factually accurate or not, this located the origins of December 11, 1782 with Beadle's very arrival in mainland North America during the early 1760s. It implied to Chester and others who reflected on the tragedy that Beadle's two decades in America had carried as much despair as hope. Whatever had actually happened during Beadle's years in Barbados, the statement to Chester also hinted that Beadle-the-Atlantic-migrant had not been as happy and successful as Wethersfield good society had imagined him to be. It was one thing to tell the story of their neighbor as an English merchant always on the move in pursuit of profit; it was quite another to say that his initial foray into the Atlantic life had sent him to the mainland colonies with thoughts of suicide. Similarly, in what proved to be one of the most scandalous revelations the newspapers had to offer, Beadle's remark in the same passage that the family murders had "been three years in Contemplation" encouraged readers to approach the story as bedeviled by secrets. Three years felt a long time for

such a secret to fester. It meant that for three years, neighbors had failed to see a monster in their midst. The newcomer had tricked them.²⁵

Beadle's incongruous attempts to guard his posthumous reputation similarly highlighted the disconnect between "monster" and "friend" while asking old neighbors to see him as both. When imagining any number of interlocutors objecting that suicide should not extend to his family, Beadle thanked them for their compassion. To readers, nothing surely struck the paradoxical note like the oft-quoted Beadle line about fatherhood: humanity, fondness, and friendship drove his actions, Beadle insisted, "for never did a mortal father feel more of these tender Ties than myself." A subsequent letter argued that it was mercy which convinced him to include Lydia in the plan. One need not get in the business of reading Beadle's mind to appreciate the significance of this rhetoric. He clearly recognized the cultural capital involved in presenting oneself as fulfilling the proper social roles. He wanted part of the final record to involve words about William Beadle, husband and father. Surprisingly, commentators obliged him. Recall that early accounts and even the long piece from Mitchell juxtaposed Beadle-the-monster with memories of Beadle, doting father and loving husband. It was as if the men and women of Wethersfield wanted to know that proper neighbor William Beadle even as they faced the reality of his actions.²⁶

However self-serving, Beadle's words in reference to his family and himself recast the free white migrant experience for Atlantic historians. While migration and risk-taking could lead to exciting opportunities and family growth, it could just as easily lead

²⁵ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 178.

²⁶ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 174.

to loneliness, failure, and despair. Even when articles, pamphlets, and sermons roundly condemned William Beadle, they aired those sorrowful-sounding lines to readers and listeners. For example, when Beadle thanked imaginary persons for their compassion toward his family, he concluded, “I know how quickly the world would crush them as it has me.” Similarly, he justified taking Lydia’s life on the grounds that were she to live, she would live a life of extreme mental duress with little chance of finding another partner or livelihood. Besides, he finished the thought, as they had “enjoyed Competence and Suffered Poverty together” so they “had better take our Leaves of Life together also.” In both cases, Beadle’s words, whatever he hoped to accomplish with them, planted in readers’ minds the idea that the entire Beadle family was cut off from the community. That sentiment only grew stronger when Beadle described himself. He wrote, as quoted by Reverend Marsh in the funeral sermon, “My person is small and mean to look on and my circumstances were always rather narrow, which were great disadvantages in this world.” Those are hardly the words of a mercantile adventurer of the Atlantic world. Whatever one made of Beadle’s sincerity, the sentiments resounding in the aftermath of the tragedy included these: the family of the monster was also the family of a migrant, and they may have felt disconnected and defeated.²⁷

William went even further than the family; he also wrote neighborly words about the men and women his actions would so unnerve. In the letter to Dr. Farnsworth from the morning of the murders, for example, Beadle asked the physician to apologize on his behalf—to give his “kind love”—to Mr. Mills, a neighbor to whom Beadle had

²⁷ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 175, 178; Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 22.

disingenuously sent the maid once before when he had earlier considered enacting his plan. Beadle continued, in the same letter, to ask Farnsworth to spare the maid by leaving her at the doctor's house. Elsewhere, he wrote of wishing not to frighten the servant girl at all. Likewise, he requested Farnsworth "alarm the neighbors gently" so as not to scare them excessively. As with the husband and father sentiments, calling attention to Beadle's ostensibly considerate words for the neighbor is meant neither to absolve him nor to uncover "what he really thought." Rather, it is to recognize the larger cultural desire for neighborliness. William Beadle, Atlantic migrant, here and there a few years at a time, knew what was expected of good neighbors even if he was reticent about his past and his darkest thoughts.²⁸

William Beadle had even more to say about his status within the community when it came to his final resting place. The request to be buried in his yard, which belonged "to the public," carried a message: Beadle-the-English-migrant belonged within Wethersfield. He belonged in the ground that belonged to all. He wanted the town to treat him like a good family man they wished to remember fondly. However unsettling the request may seem, it became part of the Beadle conversation. Multiple newspapers in several states carried the extract from the will.²⁹ Like Beadle's words in reference to his family and friends, this extract underlined for readers that Beadle posed questions about who belonged to the community and about who, in the topsy-turvy world of Atlantic revolution, fulfilled their social and cultural obligations. If acknowledging Beadle's long

²⁸ *Salem Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1783.

²⁹ For example, it ran in Boston and Newport. See *The Continental Journal*, Jan. 16, 1783 and *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783.

residence in America suggested he belonged, newspapers countered by first identifying him as born and raised in Britain. If describing him as having been a good family man suggested he fulfilled his household duties, disclosing that it was a crafty charade let the locals off the hook and marked Beadle as being less than a true neighbor. He had, as the first newspaper account divulged, done all “[w]ith the utmost secrecy, unperceived by any” for several years.³⁰

Whether in newspapers like the *Courant* or Mitchell’s pamphlet or rumors of Beadle’s own words, his biography was enticing to those left reeling by the murders. The spun tale of Atlantic crossings, repeated movements, and highly respected associates remains suspicious on some particulars. Factual or not, however, it was believable, indicative of the kind of life someone might lead—or want to lead—in an age of increasingly global economics and politics. It represented the mix of curiosity and uncertainty that many might have had about new neighbors come from afar. In most cases that curiosity could remain innocent and forgettable. In the face of a tragedy like the Beadle murders, however, it easily transformed into hostile fear and desperation. It was not just the murders though that heightened the anxiety surrounding Beadle’s unknown biography. Those murders occurred at the intersection of Atlantic migration and Atlantic war. The New England of William Beadle was a New England where movement was suddenly suspicious, and unknown persons were potentially criminals. It was a New England, Mitchell reminded all, caught “in the extreme distress of war.” Beadle the

³⁰ Quotes are from *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782, but other papers took similar tactics. For example, the *Massachusetts Spy*, Dec. 19, 1782, emphasized he was a “native of Great-Britain” and talked about Beadle hiding his true character with “the greatest secrecy.” The printers of that article had clearly seen a copy of what had just appeared in the *Courant*.

migrant, the unknowable neighbor, resonated so strongly with commentators and readers precisely because so many of them had spent the Revolution hearing of shadowy strangers and the dangers of unchecked movement.³¹

Con Men, Runaways, Counterfeiters, and Transients

Wethersfield residents were united in their shock that William Beadle was not, in fact, the loving father and husband, respected merchant and hospitable neighbor, they had all experienced him to be. Whether those remembrances were self-serving or not, the contrast for the reading public was obvious: William Beadle was not some common criminal everyone saw coming. He was no knave flitting in and out of the community whenever it suited his schemes. William Beadle's world, however, was full of such scoundrels. Beadle and his neighbors needed to look no further than the local paper to see that. The *Courant's* back pages were rife with con men, runaways, counterfeiters, and transients. Beadle may have been exceptional in the extent of his iniquity, but his society was full of mysterious criminals hiding their true characters. The disturbed realizations that no one really knew William Beadle's background emerged against this perceived backdrop of miscreants around every corner.

Those miscreants, it seemed, often came from elsewhere, whether from across the ocean or just a few towns over. In the newspaper stories, they were often on the move, eluding justice or, after being caught, escaping prison regularly. To again stretch the movement of the Atlantic world from migration, narrowly defined, to mobility broadly construed, these everyday criminals formed part of the modern, Atlantic world

³¹ [Mitchell,] *Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 16.

experience for the men and women of New England towns like Wethersfield. Sometimes, that experience was of what some historians have termed the “criminal Atlantic:” convicted felons sentenced by English courts to transportation to the colonies. Commentators on both sides of the Atlantic had long debated the practice and the portrait of the colonial landscape it presented, but in the midst of civil war, those debates grew more accusatory. Viewed from the metropole, the colonies were a dumping ground full of convicts; viewed from the colonies, Britain contained an endless flow of immoral persons who threatened the Americas. Transported felons aside, indentured servants and the poor still comprised the majority of emigrants to the colonies. Americans frequently employed criminalizing language to such arrivals, some even stating explicitly that there existed little obvious difference between the indentured and the transported. Revolution already encouraged suspicion. In that climate, the line between newcomer and criminal, stranger and suspicious was thin.³²

Increasing growth and heterogeneity made it even easier for established residents to fear those they did not recognize. Between 1760-1776, the time of Beadle’s arrival in Connecticut, New England was adding an average of eighteen new towns a year; that number was at six per year in the first half of the century. Population growth in existing towns and cities made communities more diverse. Those changes happened less in New England than in the Middle and Southern colonies, but even there, heterogeneity was becoming the new normal: 30% of New Englanders came from outside of England in

³² On the transportation and criminal Atlantic, see Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton, *Eighteenth-Century Criminal Transportation: The Formation of the Criminal Atlantic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). On the indentured and how Americans portrayed them, including examples, see Horn, “British Diaspora,” 35.

1760. In Beadle's Connecticut, a quarter of the population was African, Scottish, Irish, or Scots-Irish (the numbers were even higher in Rhode Island). Other changes occurred, too: different people from different places increased religious diversity; expanding commercial networks changed local trading patterns. By the time of the Revolution, only nine of sixty-eight Connecticut towns contained a single parish. Four towns had as many as nine parishes. This was not just a matter of population numbers. It was also an expansion of voices and meeting places.³³

This kind of growth lent itself to worries over strangers, and New England was one of the least welcoming regions in the colonies on the eve of the Revolution. The region had long cultivated a tradition of "warning out" whereby town clerks scoured streets, taverns, wharves, and private homes for unregistered newcomers. Few such newcomers were actually forced to leave town, and the procedure seems to have been more about the bureaucracy of poor relief than keeping tabs on unknown folks, but it still served as a way to highlight just how many new arrivals there were. It was easy, in a time of war, to notice how many unsettled strangers populated the streets.³⁴

Print, too, carried a message of suspicion. Overt criminality in the form of con men, counterfeiters, and unidentified thieves loomed in the newspapers. When Beadle was still in coastal Connecticut, he might have read about a con man duping the

³³ For overall discussion of the growing heterogeneity, see Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). For specific numbers about the origins of population in New England, see Butler, *Becoming America*, 10. On the increased number of towns in New England, see Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West*, 10. On the parish numbers, see Bruce H. Mann, *Neighbors & Strangers: Law and Community in Early Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 4-5.

³⁴ On New England as one of the least welcoming (along with Virginia), see Games, "Migration," 47. On the "warning out" system, see Cornelia H. Dayton and Sharon V. Salinger, *Robert Love's Warning: Searching for Strangers in Colonial Boston* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

housekeeper of a prominent tradesman or of an exasperated resident offering rewards for information about who was opening his mail without authorization. As his store was getting off the ground in Wethersfield, he could have checked for advertising space only to see that an Irishman using a string of false names was accosting people on the road to Hartford. For years, in both coastal newspapers and inland, readers heard of the infamous robber Richard Steele, always on the move, escaping custody, and trying out false identities. A prominent Beadle neighbor named Joseph Webb advertised the search for a thief and publicly floated the idea that it was the same individual responsible for an earlier burglary. When it was not robbery or burglary, readers might see stories of counterfeiters at work. Just as Beadle advertised his new store and no-credit policy, the *Courant's* front page announced the arrest of four New Englanders for counterfeiting money. A decade later, in the same issue where Friend of Justice raged about Beadle, a public notice warned residents that someone was trying to pass off fake notes. Throughout the war, commissaries dealt with peripatetic imposters buying supplies on military accounts. In such reports, the perpetrators were almost always coming from elsewhere and/or on the move, whereabouts unknown. In the pre-modern age, even the most notorious felt it was possible to pretend to be someone else. Upon his arrest in Beadle's one-time home of Derby, the seemingly omnipresent Richard Steele, for example, cast himself as a first-time offender under an alias. In that instance, the law's efforts to track the dangerous won out as the branding Steele had received from a previous conviction gave him away.³⁵

³⁵ *Connecticut Journal*, Nov. 13, 1767, April 17, 1772; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 18, 1774; *Connecticut Journal*, Nov. 30, 1767; *Connecticut Courant*, Feb. 5, 1771, Oct. 8, 1771, June 19, 1775, Aug.

Runaways and transients were just as plentiful in newspaper pages as fakes and thieves. A stranger from Denmark caused trouble in Hartford; “a transient Irishman named Parker” went missing from his regiment; a second Irishman attacked someone on behalf of the king. As the war ramped up, so too did the published ads for deserters. Soldiers were only one variety of absconding individuals visible in the advertising section. Hardly an issue went by without multiple reports of servants disappearing or slaves running away. Around the time the Beadles made their final move, for example, readers might have learned that an “Irish servant boy,” escaped from his master’s New York home, was rumored to have been spotted in Hartford. A few paragraphs down, they would have seen that “a negro man named Tom,” age nineteen, had run away. Such ads always highlighted place of origin when appropriate as well as physical descriptions of their hair, complexion, and clothes. Often, these ads included details that highlighted the ways a person might disappear, but also how they might be found out. The “Irish servant boy,” for instance, was known to have used a particular alias; Tom could speak Dutch in addition to English. Much closer to Beadle’s home, a Wethersfield apprentice was reported to have run away, no doubt, according to the master, under the influence of “some designing person.” Vagabonds and transients, soldiers, servants, or the enslaved, the newspapers kept the mobile social misfit in the public mind. Most of the time, such persons were already criminal in the eyes of the law. Readers must sometimes have

looked at strangers' faces with the latest round of newspaper descriptions ready-at-hand.³⁶

The newspapers printed similar advertisements for escaped prisoners. Ezekiel Williams, Wethersfield resident and long-serving Hartford County sheriff, ran regular ads for prisoners on the loose, especially once he became deputy commissary general of prisoners of war for Connecticut. Prisoners sometimes disappeared from the Hartford jail or while out on laboring duty, but throughout the 1770s, most ads dealt with escapees from Newgate, a copper-mine-turned-jail, a dozen miles or so north of Hartford, that had been named after the infamous London prison. Sometimes ads merely identified thieves—including, of course, Richard Steele, who always seemed to get away—other times Tories. Either way, the nearly constant reminders to the reading public that prisoners were so close and so prone to get away were unsettling.³⁷

These announcements were never just newspaper gossip or a way to sell ad space. They also represented some of the headaches the Connecticut government dealt with during the Revolution. The governor, council, and state assembly heard petitions for reimbursements for tracking the “infamous Richard Steele”; they issued early release for prisoners who did not join in the jailbreaks; they commissioned John Chester, among others, to investigate fraudulent military contractors. On one occasion, Sheriff Ezekiel

³⁶ *Connecticut Courant*, Nov. 27, 1769; June, 12, 1776; July 29, 1776; May 5, 1777; Oct. 22, 1771; Nov. 27, 1778. On the relationship between runaways, the print industry, and the Revolution, see David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).

³⁷ For examples of the escape ads, see *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 4, 1774; Dec. 5, 1774; Nov. 25, 1776; Feb. 24, 1777; July 7, 1777; all September 1778 issues. On anxiety over Tory prisoners, see Richard Buel, *Dear Liberty: Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), 93-94.

Williams asked the assembly for guidance when a prisoner, granted early release on the condition he remain in New London, showed up in Hartford only to land in jail after causing a disturbance. They heard petitions from counterfeiters wanting clemency and let many people out early if they promised to behave and support the American cause. Debates even sometimes registered the nerves of the public: less than two weeks after the Declaration of Independence, a committee reported on “the dangerous situation of Newgate prison...especially since a number of tory prisoners” were there. The committee noted both a “great uneasiness of the people concerning them” and that “the keeper is uneasie with his situation.”³⁸

In some instances, multiple aspects of prejudiced mistrust combined to really emphasize how unsettling strangers, transients, or potential runaways could be, especially during wartime. William Beadle probably encountered one such instance when his closest friend, Stephen Mix Mitchell, was caught up in some thefts blamed on a transient, ex-British soldier and an enslaved minor. As recorded in a criminal complaint by Grand Juror Josiah Robbins to Justice of the Peace Elisha Williams (the same JP who would supervise the Beadle grand jury), John Warren, “a transient person” had spent spring 1780 stealing from local residents. First, corn went missing from a windmill. Shortly thereafter, ten gallons of rum disappeared from a house. Finally, the complaint alleged that Warren had convinced “a Negro boy named Limri belonging to Mrs. Armenal Mitchell” to steal two Spanish dollars from Stephen Mix Mitchell, Armenal’s stepson. Even more, the grand jury argued that for months, Warren had used Limri “secretly to

³⁸ *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15: 53-54, 205, 479-480; *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 246; 4: 51; 5: 128-130.

rob & plunder the house of sd. Stephen Mix Mitchell.” Given the friendship between Beadle and Mitchell, the two surely discussed the incident(s). The proximity of their land alone might have made someone like Beadle a little worried.³⁹

The importance of the incident, however, exceeds the involvement of Mitchell. The criminal complaint expresses a wide range of the anxieties men and women might have about those on the move in the Atlantic world. John Warren, for example, was not simply “a transient person”: he was a transient “now resident in Wethersfield.” To underline the suspicion, Robbins and Williams noted that Warren was “late a soldier in the british army.” To use the word “plunder” was to further draw attention to the wartime situation. The items delineated—corn, rum, dollars—were all in high demand. For months, he had plundered “secretly.” Perhaps most dangerous of all, after a few break-ins to the mill and the home of James Lockwood, Warren had escalated his activities. The crime against the Mitchells was aggravated by the involvement of Limri, a member of the household itself. The language of the complaint tells a story of anxious New Englanders in a world of constant movement and civil war. Transients became temporary residents, turning neighbors into strangers. Soldiers arrived from the Atlantic, left their posts but continued to plunder. Outsiders skulked through town, magnifying suspicions and depleting necessary resources. They even turned the liminal members of households such as Limri into covert accomplices. The ex-British redcoat and the enslaved African: they were the apotheosis of dangerous strangers lurking on American streets and in American houses. These worries were not just the worries of individuals. They were, as the

³⁹ “Complaint of Josiah Robbins against a transient, John Warren, May 15, 1780,” Town Records of Wethersfield, Town Papers, Listed Papers, Box 4, Documents 893-899, CSL.

Revolution proceeded, worries for the state, and to the state, some types of movement looked like acts of war.

War and Its Effects on Movement in Connecticut

By the time William Beadle arrived in Wethersfield, his story was not just one of transatlantic migration; it was also the story of Revolution and, ultimately, war. That was not atypical. The Atlantic world was a world of imperial war as much as anything else. Whether talking of cause, consequence, opportunity, or obstacle, the movements of people and their goods were often enmeshed in warfare. This reality becomes especially apparent once one abandons the simplistic notion of Atlantic movement as a one-time migration across the ocean and instead recognizes repeated movement as normalcy, flux as ever present. War was a factor that might force unplanned movement and open or close opportunities.⁴⁰

In the long eighteenth-century, Britain and its empire were at war half the time in over half-a-dozen major conflicts. Beyond the effect periods of war had on the transoceanic migration rate, war shaped movement within British colonies in particular ways. War meant the recruitment and impressment of soldiers and sailors. Those men and all who helped supply them came from both the British Isles and the colonies. Many who moved to fight in wars never returned home, and that was often by design. Just as William Beadle made his way to the mainland in the early 1760s, for example, many of the 60,000 soldiers who had come from England to fight in the Seven Years' War found themselves unable to undertake the reverse Atlantic voyage. The army classified most as

⁴⁰ Horn, "British Diaspora," 29; Games, "Migration," 31-32.

ineligible for official transport and encouraged the men to stay behind in America. They became semi-permanent wanderers in search of temporary work in places like Boston. Throughout that particular war, thousands of Catholic exiles from French-speaking Nova Scotia were shipped to various colonies. As always in war, widows and orphans likewise found themselves on the move out of desperation.⁴¹

The Revolution and War for Independence similarly impacted William Beadle's Connecticut. That round of imperial war sent husbands, fathers, and sons to march with their regiments. Women, children, the elderly, and the infirm struggled without them back home. Families filled the roads to New York as wives and mothers followed the campaigning armies to care for their husbands and sons. Some, like Beadle's old neighbors in Fairfield, found their towns burned and plundered. British armies never attacked Wethersfield, but with the government sitting in Hartford, residents there surely heard news of refugees and those living behind British lines. The migrations of William Beadle were complete by the time war broke out, but movement—or its prohibition—still characterized his world.⁴²

The wartime records of Governor Trumbull, the Council of Safety, and the Connecticut legislature, in fact, present a Connecticut government overstretched by the business of managing the movement of people and goods, both authorized and illicit. New laws proscribed travel and the shipment of goods except in precisely delineated circumstances. Individuals pleaded for exemptions. Whole communities short on supplies

⁴¹ Horn, "British Diaspora," 33. On the soldiers who remained after the Seven Years' War and their transiency in places like Boston as well as the plights of the Acadians, widows, and orphans, see Dayton and Salinger, *Robert Love's Warning*, 150-165.

⁴² Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 80.

begged for help. Refugees, parolees, and divided families variously sought permission to stay put, move yet again, send for belongings left behind, or accept newfound assistance.

Throughout the period of the Revolution, Governor Trumbull and the legislature enacted one law after another in an often vain attempt to control the transportation of goods and people within and without of Connecticut. They often framed such attempts as necessary to stop the suspicious and perfidious. Weeks after the Declaration of Independence, for example, the legislature issued a “Resolve for stopping suspected Persons” that began by expressing fear that many “do wander from place to place with intent to spy.” No one henceforth could travel without a certificate “from some Congress, Committee of Safety or of Inspection...magistrate, justice of the peace, general or field officer” that listed the traveler’s origin and destination as well as affirming the person’s allegiance. The act even stipulated that no one be exempt, whether they appeared a gentleman, regular traveler, or run-of-the-mill beggar. A year later, reiterating the requirements, only persons “well known and esteemed” or traveling under military command could travel town to town without a certificate.⁴³

The government likewise strained to control the movement of goods and money. Illicit trade plagued state governments throughout the Revolution even as they encouraged some for purposes of reconnaissance. From the opening of hostilities, they levied embargos on food necessities like wheat, corn, pork, and beef. Each year, the legislature renewed restrictions. They seemed especially concerned with food leaving via the Connecticut River or other waterways except as stores for sea-bound vessels or as

⁴³ *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15: 486-487; *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 228.

supplies for troops. They added land and water embargoes on West Indies goods once it became apparent that hoarders were looking to sell rum, sugar, and molasses at inflated prices outside the colony. When residents wished to transport agricultural goods outside the state in exchange for a necessity like salt, the legislature expected local officials to inspect the trade and adjust the quantity of exported produce as necessary. If exporting the goods via water, the Connecticut resident had to provide a bond triple the value of the goods. Even persons looking to buy goods elsewhere and bring them into the state were subject to legal restrictions. At the state border, importers needed a certificate of transport from a justice of the peace or similar official. Even after the embargoes on food items ended in late 1781, the legislature tightened controls on the illicit trade of manufactures, continuing to disallow any goods manufactured in British territories unless acquired through authorized privateering.⁴⁴

These restrictions on importing and exporting goods were as much about trust as were the laws regarding travel. To be sure, the government wanted to control the use of essential goods during the hardships of war, but the state legislature clearly distrusted many of its residents as well. In a wartime Connecticut economy flooded with increasingly deflated paper money and buzzing with opportunities to supply the army, every citizen suddenly looked capable of becoming a swindler, speculator, or hoarder; short of that, it was still tempting to shift money and goods around internally in hope of turning a profit on transactional rates and delivery. Controlling the movement of goods was a way to mitigate this distrust. Many of the legislative acts, for example, disparaged

⁴⁴ Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 257-267; *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15: 135, 413-414, 314; *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 414-415; 4: 161.

hosts of monopolizers supposedly harming their fellow citizens. Some opened with stylized polemics regarding the immorality of “conspiracies...to enhance the prices of merchandise or any of the necessities or conveniences of life.” It was not just wrong: it was also “pernicious to the State...especially so at the present time.” Such persons were, almost automatically, inimical to the state and its residents as a whole. The burden was on the mover to prove their allegiance. Anyone who wanted to enter the state with goods not only had to prove they legally acquired the goods; they also had to prove they were a good neighbor by demonstrating they were “friendly to the liberties of America.”⁴⁵

Movement was more complicated given the proximity of the British. Throughout the war, the personal links between Connecticut and British-controlled New York were plentiful and often troublesome. Long Island was a temptation to some Connecticut residents unsure about the American cause. To others, it was the location of family trapped behind British lines. Refugees who had made it to Connecticut missed family or dreamed of how the money and material objects they had left behind might alleviate their poverty in a new home. Whether they missed people or material items, they were subject to the same laws about travel and transport. Additional laws specified strict requirements for sending anything to Long Island. In 1780, for example, the legislature outlined procedures for appraising goods intended for New York to ensure they did not exceed a £30 limit.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 230-231, 413, 414. On all looking suspicious and being tempted by below-board means, see Janet A. Riesman, “Money, Credit, and Federalist Political Economy,” in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, ed. Richard Beeman and Edward C. Carter (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 131.

⁴⁶ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 3: 15-19.

These laws regarding travel and the movement of goods demanded community involvement. Most explicitly mandated that civic officials throughout the state be extra vigilant in patrolling borders and watching for contraband. No doubt William Beadle's friends Stephen Mix Mitchell and John Chester, elected so often to various official positions, contributed to Wethersfield's efforts. The July 1776 measure against unauthorized travel, for instance, demanded that all civil officers stop travelers for documents and questioning. Larger towns, the act suggested, should establish overnight "watches and wards" lest any wanderers "practice mischief" while officials slept. The 1777 iteration spelled out that it was not just the right but the duty of all officials to detain any suspected of illegal travel. That language of the duty to interfere likewise permeated acts with an eye toward restricting the movement of commercial goods, military supplies, or intelligence. Further acts required towns to create "Inspectors of Provisions" committees to check all the goods coming and going. Towns sometimes needed extra help in controlling all the people and goods that entered and exited. As late as 1782, the selectmen of Beadle's former home Derby, for example, were asking the governor for naval commissions to cruise the adjoining rivers, claiming that enemies had been stealing provisions the town sent out.⁴⁷

Fines, imprisonment, disenfranchisement, and/or the confiscation of property awaited those caught flouting the rules of movement. A 1775 measure announced menacingly that if anyone found inimical refused the sheriff's warrant of disarmament,

⁴⁷ *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15: 486-487, 192-194; *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 228; 2: 450; Selectmen of Derby to Governor Jonathan Trumbull, 20 February 1782, American Revolution Collection, 1776-1786, X. Naval Affairs, Box 10, Folder I Letters to Gov. Jonathan Trumbull 1781-1782, CHS.

they were to be treated as a soldier ignoring a command. The same act allowed the colony to confiscate the real estate of any resident who “aided or assisted in carrying into execution the present ministerial measures against America.” Five years later, a law made any vessel sailing to enemy territory subject to forfeiture. Any person traveling to such territory without the necessary permit was proscribed from living within two miles of a waterway. To ignore the rules or to fail to pay fines meant six months in Newgate. Importing or exporting goods to places under enemy control meant three months imprisonment. Tories were liable to have estates confiscated throughout the civil war. By May 1781, the Connecticut legislature moved to authorize the final confiscation of any outstanding land belonging to those who had left the state for British-controlled territory.⁴⁸

Legal restrictions notwithstanding, people looked to move for many of the same reasons they did during peacetime: material scarcity, economic opportunity, family obligations, and political discontent, to name a few. These would-be-movers deluged the legislature, governor, and council with petitions looking to move themselves or their goods. Some of these were convoluted and memorable. For example, a native Irishman who had, like William Beadle, come to the colonies as a self-described merchant, wrote of being captured by the British on the return portion of a quick trip to Ireland in 1775. He had been jailed for a year in Ireland before finally making his way to Long Island, merchandise in tow and war underway, with hope of Connecticut allowing him entry. Other petitions involved those with key connections. The nephew of New Jersey’s patriot

⁴⁸ *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15: 192-194; *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 3: 15-19; 4: 162.

governor William Livingston, for instance, had landed in New London after being taken prisoner at the end of a five-year business trip to Florida and Jamaica and needed permission to travel to New Jersey with his servant and baggage. Most sounded more pedestrian but were surely no less urgent to the petitioners. War refugees in Lyme, CT pled for temporary return to Long Island to retrieve household goods and small amounts of money that might sustain them. One Long Islander, loquacious on his allegiance to America and how that allegiance had greatly cost him financially, wished to return home for money to avoid “calamity.” A young man who had crossed enemy lines to visit his ailing father wanted permission to bring some clothing back to Connecticut. Beadle and his neighbors would almost certainly have known men and women in their communities submitting these types of requests. Around the time of the Beadle tragedy, for example, a Wethersfield widow named Margaret Hancock asked the state for permission for her daughter to travel from New York City; the memorial was granted on the condition that she stop at Stamford for official inspection.⁴⁹

Governor Trumbull and his Council of Safety, which included Beadle friend John Chester, similarly answered countless petitions from outsiders looking to transport goods to stave off desperation. A stream of such petitions came from the official representatives of towns more enmeshed in the destructions of war. Martha’s Vineyard and other coastal locations in Massachusetts and Rhode Island regularly appealed for assistance,

⁴⁹ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 3: 552; 5: 91; “At a Meeting of the Governor and Council of Safety, 17 July 1776,” Governor and Council of Safety Records, doc. 3, CHS (hereafter GCSR); David []ail and John Clarke to Jonathan Trumbull, 28 February 1781, GCSR, doc. 30; Ebenezer Plath to Jonathan Trumbull, 27 March 1781, GCSR, doc. 49; [damaged document] to Jonathan Trumbull, 5 September 1778, Jonathan Trumbull, Sr. Papers, I. Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 3, CHS.

sometimes begging for food exports, sometimes seeking to import salt or sugar to Connecticut for corn. Like those wanting to travel, the petitioners almost always vowed allegiance. Often they pledged vigilance as when a representative of Warwick assured the governor he was “a Man who will take every necessary precaution that may tend to prevent its falling in the way of the Enemy.” However untrusting anyone actually felt, all were aware of the importance of convincing the powers-that-be of both their integrity and their ability to sniff out the dishonest.⁵⁰

The level of making law and submitting petitions, of course, is not accessible to all, especially in a time of war. To be sure, the memorials that reached Trumbull’s desk represented a wide range of socioeconomic statuses, from the sons of governors to hungry refugees. That range notwithstanding, men and women looking to escape the threat of guns or to search out the promise of grain were surely not always aware of the latest legal restrictions on their wandering. Recall, after all, the assembly tasked Stephen Mix Mitchell with trying to keep the far corners of the state abreast of the legislature’s unpublished resolves. Those in need of help did not always have recourse to official channels. If the many apologies of letter writers and newspaper publishers are to be believed, they often may have lacked the very paper necessary to contact the government bureaucracy. For every memorialist who could attach a respected name to their document, certainly many others lacked anyone of importance to help their cause. In short, the records of governor, council, and legislature gesture toward the anxieties of

⁵⁰ Joseph Glading to Jonathan Trumbull, 19 May 1781, GCSR, doc. 80. This collection in general is replete with such petitions.

movement during the war, but those records do not exhaust the everyday worries of everyday people.⁵¹

Whether looking to move themselves or looking to move goods, these petitioners sought the mobility that characterized the Atlantic world. It came of opportunity, but it also came of desperation. It came, in the span of Beadle's life in Wethersfield, as part of a civil war, just one war among the many that raged throughout the larger era. War heightened the need to move and amplified the government's need to monitor that movement. Even as restrictions diminished, caution remained. When Connecticut dropped its embargoes in October 1781 to promote commerce, for instance, traders still had to post a bond to ship via water; the captains doing the actual sailing had to do the same and take an oath of allegiance. One could never be too careful. Carefulness often manifested as outright distrust of neighbors. Even before Connecticut residents wrung their hands over the "deist monster," they worried about each other.⁵²

From Neighbors to Suspects

The ads in the newspapers and the laws emanating from the assembly suggested that Connecticut teemed with "inimical" persons. The boycotts of the early Revolution may have bred trust, but that trust did not always run deep or last long. Friends and neighbors became foes and hostiles. The con men, runaways, counterfeiters, and transients set the tone for suspicious persons from afar. Wartime hardships lent that tone

⁵¹ On Mitchell's job with the published laws, see *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 4: 23. The characteristics of these petitions are evident in any number of them from GCSR.

⁵² *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 3: 519-520.

an urgency. Neighbors, even those of longstanding, were suddenly as suspicious as the newcomers with few social ties. One might not simply be selfish or criminal but also treasonous.⁵³

Everyday economic activity was a source of concern. Worries over monopolies and price gouging led to an act against any “inimical” persons buying necessities in quantities exceeding the family’s own use. The same act empowered officials against any untrustworthy residents buying under the false pretense of being a commissary agent or selling at unreasonable prices. Repeated acts allowed the confiscation of property of all inimical residents. Some expressly forbade such persons to buy or sell land at all. In October 1780, perhaps wary that such persons remained hidden, the assembly specifically requested each of its members to check with their towns about any possible estates left to be confiscated. In moments when Revolutionary morale dropped, the politicians making the laws became targets. In 1781, for instance, after state bankruptcy prompted numerous editorials about officials taking advantage of the public for their own personal gain, Governor Trumbull himself felt compelled to address the General Assembly regarding rumors of his involvement in illicit trade.⁵⁴

Sometimes the inimical were not those present; they were those missing from Connecticut. Amid the legal language of property confiscation, some of the above acts fretted about how many Connecticut residents had left or surrendered to the British. A November 1780 measure proceeded on the assumption that countless Connecticut

⁵³ On trust and the boycotts, see Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*.

⁵⁴ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 413-414, 412-413, 9, 181; Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 267-268.

families had been sending their sons to the enemy to avoid military service. The act required selectmen to inspect their town for missing sons. If parents could be shown culpable, they were to pay the cost of hiring a replacement. Absent neighbors were a constant worry. From fall 1777, the state could take control of any real estate not owned by an actual, present resident of Connecticut and lease it to a “proper person” for “reasonable rent.”⁵⁵ One such “proper person” was William Beadle who, recall, rented his home and storefront from Londoner Barlow Trecothick. In such bills, non-resident landowners—a fixture of the Atlantic world—were now “Aliens.”⁵⁶

Town representatives throughout Connecticut openly worried about untrustworthy sorts in their midst whether native to their town or from elsewhere. Not long after the Declaration of Independence, for example, New Haven, citing the “fears and apprehensions they are under on account of sundry persons suspected to be inimical to the liberties of America,” petitioned the assembly for the right to remove those suspects from the town. In 1779, New Haven, Fairfield, and Lichtfield counties all complained to the assembly of having jails full of men and women who had deserted British lines but were open to charges of treason. Letters to Governor Trumbull complained about the plotting enemies rampant in Stamford or the refugees arriving in Guilford. Suspected Loyalists banished to New York wrote asking for parole. Men and women caught in civil war did not know whom in town to trust. Sometimes those in official positions drew the most suspicion. Petitions from Saybrook, a coastal town halfway between New Haven

⁵⁵ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 181, 234-235.

⁵⁶ “Payment Table to Oliver Ellsworth, State Attorney,” William Beadle Research File, Box 1, WHS (originals are at CSL); *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 412-413.

and the Rhode Island border, accused one William Worthington, a colonel in the militia and commander of the coast guard, of being intentionally negligent in curtailing illicit trade with Long Island and even, at times, abetting it through disingenuous intelligence-gathering missions. Guilty or not, Tory sympathizer, mere opportunist, or something else entirely, it was a charge that made sense given the climate.⁵⁷

Hartford, William Beadle's backyard, was often full of worry and mistrust as well. From the moment of independence, area residents murmured as Tories began arriving at nearby Newgate prison. They worried about nighttime escapes given a lack of watchmen, but they also worried about traffic the other way: men and women from anywhere might visit the enemy prisoners and provide aid or open themselves to bad influence. Hartford County Sheriff Ezekiel Williams received numerous letters emphasizing how dangerous men in his jails might prove to be. After the ex-mayor of New York City was entrusted to his care, Governor Trumbull advised Williams to take special attention in choosing sentries: "it will be proper they should be frequently changed" the governor ordered, adding "no one person should be long about him." A few years later, the assembly appointed a panel to investigate how prisoners of war had so easily been escaping from the Hartford county jail. A few months later, attention shifted from jail to the town streets as the gentleman Tories and British officers allowed to live there on parole had begun causing sundry "inconveniences." With the outcome of the war assured, the assembly in Hartford was still worrying about those prisoners: a May 1782

⁵⁷ *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15: 526; *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 178; 3, 405; numerous letters and petitions in Jonathan Trumbull, Sr. Papers, I. Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 1, CHS.

act still aimed to keep POWs from escaping by establishing a new round of consequences for any who “harbour or entertain them” and reiterating that it was a duty of all civic officials to apprehend escapees. They even promised a monetary reward for regular citizens who caught someone.⁵⁸

In a climate of civil war, it was unsurprising if the tenor sometimes reached hysteria, but there were plenty of reports of actual wrongdoing involving people on the move. One John McKee was convicted of “harbouring and secreting” Connecticut residents on their way to “join the enemies of this and the United states.” William Beadle’s local paper, the *Connecticut Courant*, regularly reported stories that would have furrowed the brows of nervous readers. Just one spring 1778 issue, for example, ran a trio of such pieces out of Fishkill, NY: a Tory band of horse thieves robbing “an honest Whig;” nighttime jail raids by armed Tories that let loose seven “very mischievous fellows;” and a list of detected “venomous plots” by Tories who, “like snakes in the sun” had begun “to crawl out of their holes.” Even when the trouble was on a more personal level, the war atmosphere turned migration into treason. Beadle’s friend Stephen Mix Mitchell reported that two men who owed him money had left Fairfield County without paying, a regular enough occurrence that William Beadle was probably trying to avoid by refusing to extend credit. That regular occurrence carried new overtones during the war:

⁵⁸ Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 93-94; *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15: 479-480; Jonathan Trumbull to Ezekiel Williams, 1 August 1776, Ezekiel Williams Collection, CHS; *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 3: 247, 386; 4: 158-159.

Mitchell believed the pair had slipped across enemy lines before such behavior was officially treason, thus precluding him from taking normal legal action.⁵⁹

In all such cases, the lines between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies, blurred. Labels like “Tory,” “enemies,” or “inimical persons” suggested a clear break between true Americans and dishonest Loyalists. Such styling, however, probably said more about the psychological need to sort friend and foe than anything else. McKee had been “harbouring and secreting” men and women who had been, until very recently, good Connecticut neighbors rather than untrustworthy sorts flitting away to the British. The news from Fishkill likewise emphasized just how difficult it was to know who was the enemy and where and when one might encounter them. The “venomous plots” list involved a British officer in disguise. Undercover Loyalists always gave cover to Tory thieves on the run. When the arch-traitor Benedict Arnold plundered New London and Groton in 1781, accusations resounded that many able-bodied men had failed to defend their towns out of patriotic malaise. Sometimes that malaise was a survival mechanism. When prospects looked dim, as they did at the time of Arnold’s attack right after the state went bankrupt, nervous patriots and citizens with uncertain allegiances often kept their mouths shut: better not to let a Tory see you as a rebel agitator in case of a British victory.⁶⁰

Whatever was fact, whatever fiction, these reports carried the truth of civil war: your missing neighbor might be on the way to the enemy with the help of someone else

⁵⁹ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 307; 4: 64-65; *Connecticut Courant*, April, 14, 1778.

⁶⁰ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 307; Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 114, 272-274.

you thought you knew; criminal gangs and Tories were synonymous, always looking for patriots to accost, again with the aid of once-friendly folks down the street; anyone out for a short trip down a main road might find themselves in a deadly battle with strangers. No wonder, readers might have thought, the government looked to proscribe travel and keep tabs on all who were suspect.⁶¹

If neighbors were sometimes the untrustworthy ones leading the weak-minded astray, they might also sometimes serve as a bastion of virtue in a tumultuous world. To this end, prisoners granted parole often had to agree to return to their hometowns or other locations convenient to the authorities and stay put under the watchful eyes of the good Americans there. A New Haven man confined to Newgate for counterfeiting, for example, upon claiming that his conviction had unjustly relied on improper testimony, was granted release but only on the condition he remain in Wallingford, the town just across the river from Hartford. Movement helped create the Atlantic world, but in this context, keeping tabs on the Tories meant keeping them in place. Parolees of course had to promise “not to give any intelligence or do or say anything against the rights and interest of the United States of America.” They also had to remain in place or else forfeit the bond posted as added security. In some instances, such persons used their continued good behavior as support for being allowed to move as when David Wooster, Jr. of Waterbury, one year out of Newgate, sought permission to once again move west of the Connecticut River after his initial parole restricted him to the east side of the river.⁶²

⁶¹ *Connecticut Courant*, April, 14, 1778.

⁶² *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 4: 41; 1: 161; 5: 71.

In William Beadle's Wethersfield, any neighbor could be a suspect even in cases that would otherwise be everyday affairs. For example, with the Declaration of Independence still on the horizon, a meeting of some of the town's most respectable ladies called on Benjamin Tallmadge, future Revolutionary War spymaster then living in Wethersfield, to help deal with a local resident thought to be selfishly hoarding linen for personal use. Only a single piece of linen hung in the balance, but Tallmadge, resolving on the part of the group that "every Engrosser is an Enemy to his Country," called on William Lockwood, the resident in question, to step in line. Otherwise, Tallmadge was authorized to forcibly take the linen and, even more, reveal Lockwood's true character to the public, ensuring that he "be advertised in the publick papers as an Enemy to his Country...and that all good men brake off all Commerce and Dealings with said Tory." Whatever Lockwood's actual motivations, the attitude from Tallmadge and the women's committee was clear: some residents were not what they appeared to be, and it was up to the good neighbors to publicly reveal the dishonest among them.⁶³

Similarly, what might have been routine business transactions easily became evidence of clandestine aid to the British. For example, Timothy Edwards, son of the famous theologian and pastor Jonathan Edwards, wrote Ezekiel Williams in spring 1778 to speculate on a new inmate sent to Williams in Hartford. Ezekiel Stone, Edwards insisted, had for many years "ever manifested disaffection" to the American side of the Revolution. The past winter, Stone had sold his cattle and "conducted in other matters." In early spring, he had aroused "very general suspition." That behavior added up to

⁶³ Benjamin Tallmadge to William Lockwood, May 1776, American Revolution Collection, 1776-1786, IX Correspondence, Box 11, Folder C.

Edwards' conclusion: by mid-April, when Stone "left his home," he must have done so with "a design, to join the enemies of America." Stone may very well have sold his cattle and engaged in other surreptitious behavior with the aim of helping the British. He may have vanished from his Stockbridge, Massachusetts home en route to British lines. His actual intentions, however, are beside the point. In the Revolutionary New England of William Beadle, it made sense to notice someone selling their cattle or disappearing on flimsy pretenses. Commerce and movement raised eyebrows. A major part of the problem, as Edwards admitted at the end of his letter, was that war had weakened the ability of some jurisdictions to keep friend and enemy straight. "Authority is in a state so weak in this County," Edwards lamented, "that it may not be in our power to bring offenders" to proper justice.⁶⁴

Mistrust ran deep enough that neighbors were easy culprits for anyone looking to clear their own name. One might, like Elisha Mansfield, plead innocence from Newgate on the grounds that the only evidence against him came from "a Person of an infamously bad Character." Even if one admitted guilt, neighbors were still a favorite target for blame. The governor and assembly heard many petitions from supposedly reformed Tories begging for leniency on the grounds of malign influence. John Davis of Beadle's old town Derby, after returning to Connecticut from Long Island, claimed his usually trustworthy neighbors had induced him to leave by amplifying his fear of war with the insistence the British were too strong to defeat. Memorialists often added neighborly or family influence to their stories of the dire circumstances of war and a poor state of mind.

⁶⁴ Timothy Edwards to Ezekiel Williams, 25 May 1778, Ezekiel Williams Collection, CHS.

From Newgate, one Benjamin Chaffee sick and “suffering for his own madness and folly” after having been led astray by neighbors’ “false and delusive Sentiments,” wished to be released in order to see his family through the rest of the conflict. Sometimes, the devious neighbors were actually family. From Hartford’s jail, Joel Hicox of Waterbury wrote the assembly in 1782 to explain he had been “induced” to leave for Long Island in 1776 and then again a few years later when he escaped Newgate. That inducement, at least in the original instance, had come from his father.⁶⁵

Of course, those in jail or suspected of disloyalty had all the incentive in the world to cast blame elsewhere. It is equally likely that many did indeed choose sides after listening to their friends, family, and neighbors weigh in repeatedly. That, in fact, is expressly the point. Civil war meant anyone might side with anyone, almost certainly blend in and, perhaps more than once, change their mind. Why not follow your father’s lead? Why not listen to your neighbor’s advice? At times, it appeared that the state, too, wished to release its own citizen-neighbors from culpability by shifting blame to those from the other side of the Atlantic. In a 1779 measure offering clemency to any defectors wishing to return, the assembly recognized how easily men and women might leave “one of the best constituted and most free governments in the world” for life under their “most unnatural and blood-thirsty enemies.” At least some of those traitors, they concluded, had merely been “deceived by the treacherous arts of [those] subtle and secret enemies.” The

⁶⁵ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 4: 41, 76, 212; 1; 52-53, 64.

British had once been the foremost neighbors and families of the colonists; now, they were devious, the ultimate source of mistrust.⁶⁶

Hartford and Wethersfield did not suffer attack like coastal Connecticut, but by virtue of the location of Newgate and the importance of Ezekiel Williams to the Continental Army's POW system, plenty of suspicious people must have generated gossip. Given Beadle's prominent friends, it seems likely that he heard more than most about such goings-on. In fact, not all the British and their allies remained under lock-and-key. Some were quite visible in the area. Many captured British officers had the freedom to live on parole in Hartford, but as tensions mounted, the Connecticut General Assembly rethought the practice. In May 1781, they banned parolees from living in Hartford or any town near the major roads that led into Hartford County.⁶⁷

The General Assembly acted only in 1781, but the problems with captured officers on Hartford's streets had been longstanding. The diary left behind by Major Christopher French, a British officer who escaped custody just after Christmas 1776, details what some of those inconveniences might have been. French and several companions had been captured upon their arrival from Britain in summer 1775 and subsequently spent over a year residing in Hartford. The diary shows French an intense partisan, eager to feel insulted and overflowing with contempt for American rebels. He was only too happy to record every damaging rumor in his journal. While sometimes

⁶⁶ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 1: 279.

⁶⁷ *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, 3: 386.

short on nuance or reliability regarding specific matters, French's diary nevertheless reveals a Hartford and Wethersfield full of suspicion.⁶⁸

Especially toward the beginning of his Hartford residence, French, as a gentleman officer, had considerable freedom of movement. He regularly dined with visiting rebel dignitaries, including General Charles Lee and, around the corner from Beadle's house at the home of Joseph Webb, Bunker Hill hero Israel Putnam. Even at some such dinners, however, he ran afoul of Connecticut residents whom area gentlemen could not always control. In January 1776, for example, when news of the American loss at Quebec reached town, a crowd purportedly interrupted French's dinner and card game after word got around that French and company had been "rejoicing" over the news. He claimed that thirty to forty Hartford residents surrounded the house again the next day. In the months that followed, he routinely reported on minor skirmishes with people in town. He was always hearing rumors of riflemen readying to shoot him, mobs plotting to force him into jail, or rebel gangs pledging to cut the throats of Tories. When he was not reporting on mob politics, he was listing all the area residents arrested or otherwise harassed on suspicion of being Tories. All it took, apparently, was saying the wrong thing or offering bail for the wrong person. French clearly took pride in causing trouble. He relished hearing a member of the Committee of Correspondence wish French could be returned to

⁶⁸ Major French's Journal, Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society, DLAR. (Hereafter "Major French's Journal" with dates of entries).

his regiment as he caused more problems walking the streets of Hartford than he possibly could on the battlefield.⁶⁹

French's diary, which regularly mentioned Wethersfield and people from there, gives a sense of the climate during the early war years when Beadle was still a relatively new resident. It is a Wethersfield and Hartford full of rumors, mobs, and shifting glances. Outsiders like French drew attention but so did any number of residents who might stand up for those under arrest. By late in the war, the assembly's solution was to ban such persons from Hartford or any road that led there, but for most of the Revolution, their presence was a reality.

All these suspicions surely made it to the streets of William Beadle's Wethersfield. As early as the ousting of Peter Verstelle that opened a space for Beadle's last migration in the first place, worries over who was a friendly neighbor and who a secret foe were widespread. Even in peacetime, the Atlantic world, with so many people arriving and departing from so many places, might see neighborliness strained. This is not meant to imply a nostalgic vision of the colonial past as a halcyon realm of community and neighborly trust. Rather, the very conditions of late eighteenth century life—population increase, economic change, increasing diversity, and open war—encouraged unease.⁷⁰ In the civil war of Beadle's final years, anonymity became more dangerous. Trusting the wrong person could cost lives. That, at least, is how it seemed to

⁶⁹ Major French's Journal, Jan. 14, 1776, April 9, 1776, Jan. 16, 1776, March 20, 1776, May 18, 1776, July 6, 1776, July 7, 1776, March 7, 1776, April 9, 1776, July 7, 1776, July 11, 1776.

⁷⁰ On the dangers of treating "community" this way, see Mann, *Neighbors & Strangers*, 2. Mann suggests Perry Miller's declension model of colonial New England might have subtly pushed the historiography of later New England in this direction.

the men and women watching the likes of Christopher French walking the streets or to those keeping an eye on Newgate. And that is just how it seemed to the men and women of Wethersfield trying to make sense of an unknown “monster” in the days after December 11.

The Migrant as Monster

The Beadle murders unfolded in this context of a New England in civil war where the normalcy of movement in the Atlantic world easily looked sinister. Prisoners escaping from Newgate, British officers walking the streets of Hartford, or refugees looking to travel to enemy-controlled Long Island raised suspicions. They heightened awareness that almost anyone could be other than what they appeared to be, especially if they were from somewhere else. Those feelings permeated the Beadle story as it unfolded in Wethersfield and spread via print to the rest of the country. They compounded the traumatic experience of the murders. From the outset, the Beadle story was already a story of the unknown—perhaps unknowable—migrant, the Atlantic traveler who looked to be one thing and turned out to be quite another. For commentators and readers alike, the story forced consideration of what it meant to live in a world where one might be alienated from one’s neighbor. In this sense, William Beadle was more typical than exceptional. What made him exceptional—his murderous end—in fact highlighted to his former friends and neighbors just how frightening it might be to live in a world where repeated migration was normal. The migrant could be a monster, whether they came from across the ocean or from the next town along the river.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, Wethersfieldians faced the shifting line between knowing someone as a neighbor and fearing that neighbor as a stranger. The people, Stephen Mix Mitchell recounted, came to the Beadle property immediately; they returned the next day as well. The proximity of the Beadle house to the center of town helped make that possible and emphasized that the outsider Beadle had lived right at the heart of their community. Mitchell would later number the crowd as a “multitude” or of “great numbers,” possibly even “hundreds.” The count was imprecise, but it encouraged the imagination to picture the whole town as affected. Mitchell continued to say that “the minds of the neighborhood” were left restless—this was a matter for the community, not just individuals. When he described the scene, he continually referenced “every mind” and “every heart,” a subtle indicator of unity against the mysterious Beadle. When obvious outsiders entered Mitchell’s narrative, they were soldiers—from somewhere beyond the neighborhood, yes, but the very defenders of the town, state, and country from monsters like William Beadle.⁷¹

The treatment of the bodies of the deceased, including, as always, the print reporting of that treatment, continued to mark who was and was not in the community. Trauma, disgust, or superstition might have been the proximate reason that, when it came to William’s body, “none would approach him” or consent to allow him to be staked, hanged, or buried near their property. Similarly, rage might have driven the mob to finally toss Beadle into a hole along the river. As the story unfolded in print, however, those actions resonated more widely as symbolic of William’s banishment. Mitchell reported later, for instance, that it took “some Negroes” stepping forward to throw Beadle

⁷¹ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 10; [Mitchell], “A true Account,” 20.

“out of the window” before anyone else would touch him. The men and women of Wethersfield wanted to cast Beadle away as the ultimate outsider but were unwilling to do it themselves, relying instead on their society's consummate outsiders to do the gruesome labor. The aforementioned travails of keeping the body buried in one place took that sentiment even further: Glastonbury resisted when Wethersfield tried to push the body onto their land; the selectmen then turned to the woods, long a place with out-of-bounds connotations, but could not keep Beadle hidden; finally, the river, the very source of the town's connection to the outside world, returned Beadle to their midst during the flood season. The figure of the untouchable Beadle stood in stark contrast to the rest of the family, towards whom Mitchell emphasized the towns' “duties,” a term signifying belonging and communal obligation. Similarly, the bodies of Lydia and the children had one resting place: the First Congregational Church, focal point of the community. The town banished William, but Lydia and the children belonged.⁷²

In the months that followed the funeral, rumor heightened the tension between William Beadle as outside threat and William Beadle as alienated insider. The string of pseudonymous letters that started in Connecticut newspapers in January 1783 relied on that dynamic. To Benevolens, a pseudonymous writer appearing in the *Connecticut Courant*, William Beadle revealed the dangers of mindless neighborly connections. Haphazard relationships could mean an “untimely” and “tragical” end, for the “principles” of infidels “will allow them to take away our lives at any time.” The Humble Professor of Christianity reiterated what the papers had already said: William Beadle was “a reputable

⁷² [Mitchell], “A true Account,” 20.

trader in that town," a formulation that emphasized his place in the community. By committing the murders, Beadle had "deprived the public of five valuable subjects." His crime was a crime against the body politic.⁷³

As seen in the last chapter, both Humble Professor and Friend to Justice, who wrote a few weeks later, tied Beadle to a story from the Book of Judges in which Israel faced civil war when the tribe of Benjamin refused to bring murderers to justice. William Beadle was, in that telling, wholly part of the community, and that was precisely the problem: his belonging made him the responsibility of the community as a whole. Friend to Justice was the most explicit. When, even before turning to Judges, Friend compared William Beadle to Cain, he was making a statement about Beadle's location. He was not a stranger from somewhere else: he was part of the local family, and he had killed another part of that family. The Judges text had even more frightening overtones. The Judges story was a story of civil war, redolent of New England's current situation. Moreover, Friend to Justice implied that civil war might continue even if Great Britain surrendered unless Wethersfield satisfied God's justice. As he warned that unrest within the community might continue, he left little doubt that some in their midst continued to be responsible. When, in a play on his own pseudonym, Friend to Justice blamed "friends" of Mr. Beadle for holding up the pursuit of justice in the community, he illuminated how mixed up he believed that society to be. Beadle was a monster; he was

⁷³*Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 14, 1783; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783.

unknown; but he continued to be on the inside with highly placed friends. Consequently, the godly sort Friend to Justice spoke for remained outside the spheres of influence.⁷⁴

Whether pseudonymous editorials, ordinary news reports, Stephen Mix Mitchell's pamphlet, or the minsters' sermons, the print afterlife of William Beadle continued his Atlantic migration story. Stories and information, as much as people and material goods, moved with increased frequency and rapidity as the interconnected world grew. That movement could encourage a positive sense of connection while also nodding toward fears of the stranger, counterfeit, or criminal hiding in plain sight. William Beadle and others like him had access to a wide Atlantic empire, and print carried the story of Beadle to a significant part of that empire. Just as migration signaled connectivity, reading of the Wethersfield events might have shortened the distance between New England and South Carolina, especially in the context of a civil war that necessitated cooperation. Newspapers copied one another's stories. On occasion, as with the use of the Book of Judges, different writers in different papers could draw on the same cultural texts to make sense of the crisis. At the same time, just as wartime movement could fray nerves, the shortening of distance via print could prompt worries. It encouraged worries of one's own local context: who was the outsider-turned-insider hiding in my neighborhood? Who do I not know as well as I think I do? Printing encouraged a sense of togetherness but at the expense of highlighting how frightening it could be to have an unknowable neighbor.

Even the story of visitors carrying William's bones away played along. He had come to America a migrant but settled in a home for a decade. Now Americans would carry him away from that home. It was a fitting symbolic end for the immigrant who

⁷⁴ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783.

became a resident and ended a monster. Beadle's insensible request to be buried in the yard of the family's home was, of course, ignored. Just as he could not stay put in life, so his body did not remain still in death. After three resting places, men and women who never knew him and had never known his victims carried pieces of him away. They physically removed him from the one place he had lived an extended period of time as an adult. Even as they took him away from home, however, he became a perverse relic in the homes of the takers.⁷⁵

The story resonates even more when contrasted with the final resting place for the rest of the family. Lydia and the four children were not forced away. They were, instead, buried in the one place William had specifically requested they not end up: the church burial ground. Even more, they were buried together on the right side of the knoll directly behind the church, the grave surrounded by the family plots of Wethersfield's finest. William's actions and words ensured he would remain a monstrous other, as dangerous and unwanted as a snake-like Tory runaway from Newgate. His victims, however, became the very heart of his old home.

⁷⁵ *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783; Dwight, *Travels in New England*, 1: 230.

CHAPTER 4

ANXIOUS ECONOMICS: STATUS, CURRENCY, AND HELPLESSNESS IN THE
REVOLUTIONARY ATLANTIC

In his long letter to Colonel Chester, Beadle wrote his wealthy friend, “I am in such a Situation that I cannot procure food, ram’t nor fuel for myself and family.” Given the circumstances, “Is it not time to die?” he then asked. After all, “ a desperate Disease requires a desperate Cure.” Things might be different, Beadle confessed, “if I was in your situation or in that of many others.” In that case, he assured Chester, “I shd. incline to swim thro’ Life as I could.” Beadle would spend more time in the letters on philosophy and religion than economics. At the broadest level, he resorted to fate or God’s will to explain all human actions, most infamously his own, but money ailed the Beadle family there and then. As William Beadle imagined Chester and other Wethersfeldians vilifying his decision to take the lives of his family and himself, he turned first to material afflictions as an attempted justification.¹

Beadle’s resigned talk of a “desperate Disease” is not the attitude historians so often associate with the merchants of the Atlantic world. Merchants have long appeared as protagonists in Atlantic historiography. They were, the story often goes, sources of optimism, innovation, and networking who, perhaps more than any others, created the Atlantic world in the first place as they transformed themselves from outsiders into men of means and influence. Within Atlantic historiography, adjectives like “dynamic” abound. One early and eminent work in the field ended by praising some wildly successful London-based merchants as “necessary men of that moment...who made

¹ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 174.

things work” and “carved out a new place for enterprise and entrepreneurs in the world” in what amounted to a “practical Enlightenment.” That estimable characterization, in fact, predates an explicit Atlantic turn among American historians. As early as 1955, Bernard Bailyn, of course a leading voice in Atlantic history, sang the merchants’ praises. From the beginning of the Puritan errand into the wilderness, the merchants “were involved in European affairs,” “linking the Old World and the New.” By the middle of the eighteenth century, they “were towering figures.” It followed that “an important part of our Revolutionary history is written in terms of their group interests.” The historiographies of colonial New England, Revolutionary America, and the Atlantic world coalesce in such paeans to the merchant as avatar. Declension stories shift to expansion stories of commercial networks forged by innovative merchants. With those networks, the narrative continues, Americans became “stronger and more independent of British merchants and manufacturers.” In the Revolutionary moment, merchants were transatlantic political forces. Atlantic historiography has no shortage of mercantile heroes for any interested in New England’s past.²

² For the “practical Enlightenment” quote, see Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 396. For an example of “dynamic,” see Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 383. For Bailyn, see Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), vii. For the “independent of British” quote, see Cathy D. Matson, “A House of Many Mansions: Some Thoughts on the Field of Economic History,” in *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions*, ed. Cathy D. Matson (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 16; on the shift in colonial New England historiography, see the same piece, 18, 22. For the role of merchants in Revolutionary America, see T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). As Cathy Matson has noted in an article on Stephan Girard during and after the American Revolution, “scholars of these heady years tend to emphasize the stories of success and optimism in the Atlantic world’s tangled transnational networks of merchants....” See Cathy Matson, “Accounting for War and Revolution: Philadelphia Merchants and Commercial Risk, 1774-1811,” in *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 184. She cites nearly a dozen such texts including the aforementioned Hancock book and her own *Merchants and Empire*.

Such optimistic narratives are not wholly misplaced. Commerce in the Atlantic world *was* dynamic and integrative. Merchants did often have a certain “freedom of action” that bolstered self-esteem and a sense of importance. They did connect America and Europe, and one cannot tell the story of the Revolution without them, though their allegiance—as so-called Progressive and neo-Progressive interpretations of the Revolution have shown beginning with the work of Arthur Schlesinger, Sr.—was often ambiguous. They were the vanguard of economic politics, but that meant they could derail the movement as easily as lead it. The needs of war only heightened that two-way influence and ensured that they could appear as model patriots or as selfish moneygrubbers. Apart from the Revolution, their presence in the Atlantic world made them, for some, exemplars to copy. That world made it possible for an unknown, unassuming man like William Beadle to crisscross the ocean and remake himself time and again. It helped endear him to highly placed men like Thaddeus Burr, John Chester, and Stephen Mix Mitchell. That world of opportunity, however, relied on a fluidity that promoted uncertainty as much know-how, anxiety as much as optimism, and failure as much as achievement. As one recent study of early modern commerce put it, “in every national market, uncertainty...placed anxiety on a conscious level in the mind of all merchants” and, thus, “only rarely did merchants cease agonizing.” The Revolution only increased that agony. Against the tendency of American historians to blithely equate the risk-taking of eighteenth-century merchants with universal prosperity, Thomas Doerflinger has reminded us that, day-to-day, merchants faced a “tense reality” that was “demanding,” “nerve-wracking,” and “highly uncertain.” The Beadle tragedy highlights

this ubiquitous, unrelenting anxiety of the merchant's Atlantic world and fits into a more recent, more pessimistic Atlantic historiography of economic sentiments and emotions.³

In the previous chapter, we saw how wartime hardship bred constant movement and how constant movement bred fear, alienation, and anonymity. Economic woes often fueled those movers and would-be movers; proscriptions against their movement often amplified those woes. Whether Long Island refugees, suspicious vagabonds, or new-to-town merchants, the migratory anxieties of the Revolutionary Atlantic were not inseparable from the economic anxieties of that world. Not surprisingly, then, William Beadle's economic (mis)fortune was enmeshed with his peripatetic life. This chapter, while drawing on the stories of wartime hardship and the experiences of anonymity discussed previously, focuses on the anxieties of life as an Atlantic merchant.

The print response to the murders spread the commercial anxiety Beadle expressed in the letters. While Beadle's deism grabbed the headlines, no one could entirely ignore economics. Reports routinely announced Beadle's economic decline. They reminded Americans about the hardships of war and the increasingly worthless

³ For the Progressive interpretations and the dual standing remarks, I have in mind Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution 1763-1776*, new ed. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957); Thomas Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); John W. Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986). On the "freedom of action," see Clé Lesger, "Merchants in Charge: The Self-Perception of Amsterdam Merchants, ca. 1550-1700," in *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 91. For the quotes on the uncertainty, anxiety, and agonizing, see Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan, "Introduction," in *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6, 9. For the Doerflinger quote, see *A Vigorous Spirit*, 135. One influence on my drawing attention to the "anxieties" of the merchant life here is Emma Rothschild who has insisted that "some sort of economic history of sentiments or emotions is important, and even unavoidable, in trying to understand the great economic and political transformations of the eighteenth century." See Emma Rothschild, "An Alarming Crisis in Eighteenth-Century Angouleme: Sentiments in Economic History," *The Economic History Review* 51:2 (May 1998), 269.

Continental dollars. Readers heard that Beadle called human beings “machines” to signify the absence of free will. He extended this logic to his dismal economic circumstances. War had revealed an economic reality of indiscriminate loss and gain, and publishers and commentators propagated this mindset even as they denounced it. Beadle’s language of “machines” found its way into nearly all the printed accounts, associating the despondency of arbitrary economic ruin with a lack of human freedom and raising the specter of human beings under the control of a market void of morality. Economic anxieties during the Revolution and war surely resonated with many Americans. If anything, Beadle’s worries here made him too identifiable for comfort.

Commerce in the Atlantic world was indeed increasingly integrated and expansive. It afforded someone like William Beadle significant opportunity and optimism. Hope and success were not, however, limitless. Beadle sailed the ocean and wandered the Caribbean and mainland North America for twenty-five years. His fortunes rose and fell as Atlantic exchange offered opportunity with one hand and failure with the other. For Atlantic history and Revolutionary New England, the budding merchant has proven to be an easy icon, but that ease has borne a cost. New England’s Atlantic economy enriched some merchants and thrust commercial actors to center stage, but in the case of William Beadle and others, it left them despondent without any chance of recovery or real control. The merchant has played an invaluable historiographical role, but that historiography should not forget that for every mercantile hero, numerous others failed in their aspirations. This chapter, after surveying Beadle’s financial biography, analyzes this Atlantic failure along three related axes: status, currency, and helplessness.

Historian Stephen Wilf has called Beadle “one of eighteenth-century America’s self-made men.” That is not altogether wrong given Beadle’s likely humble origins, but self-making could take one only so far and constantly threatened to unravel. Status was slippery; currency was capricious. Commercial life depended on freedom to act, but as William Beadle and others like him discovered, the market economy of the Atlantic world, especially in wartime, could turn that freedom into dependence.⁴

The Rise and Fall of William Beadle

The economic narrative of William Beadle’s life, like his family background and early years or the specifics of his imperial traipsing as an adult, remains frustratingly incomplete. Details increase once Beadle arrived in Connecticut, but those details often accrue as much from Beadle’s archival absence as his presence. Only his decade in Wethersfield left much positive trace. At times, it almost feels possible to tell the story of Beadle’s last decade through the eleven advertisements he placed in the *Connecticut Courant*. Still, even in Wethersfield, even with the ads, a shroud remains. It definitely seemed that way to his friends and those who tried to sort out the tragedy in print—as the ads themselves expressed, it often seemed that way to Beadle himself. He struggled to make sense of the ups and downs; after his death, his friends struggled to make sense of his failures, too, without becoming Beadle apologists.⁵

⁴ Wilf, *Law’s Imagined Republic*, 126.

⁵ For example, as noted previously, Mitchell wrote and wrote about the tragedy as if trying to make sense of it and seemed genuinely upset that he could not say more about his old friend. From Beadle’s perspective, as will be seen below, the ads often expressed a sense of disbelief that nothing seemed to work out.

As seen already, it is hard to trace Beadle with specificity and certainty prior to his arrival in mainland America. While Mitchell speculated that Beadle had grown up an illegitimate son of a gentleman in or around the Court in London, there is no evidence the Beadle family flourished economically to any significant degree during William's years in England. In fact, it is likely, based on extant records from a few years after William's birth, that the household did not even amount to freehold or copyhold property worth £10 a year. Mitchell further recorded that Beadle left for Barbados in 1755 with "a fair character for integrity and honesty," but he had nothing to say about what sent Beadle to the West Indies or what financial standing Beadle had. Mitchell believed Beadle had emigrated to the household of Governor Pinfold, which included the governor's commercially savvy brother Joseph. Whatever amount of truth in Mitchell's claim, William Beadle does not appear in the governor's papers. Thriving, fledgling, or something in between, Beadle purportedly left Barbados six years later. He was said to have returned to England just long enough to purchase some merchandize before sailing to New York in 1762.⁶

Stephen Mix Mitchell later reported that Beadle, rather than tarrying in New York, "immediately removed" to Connecticut. Perhaps Beadle did not like his chances among the four hundred plus merchants buying and selling along New York's streets and

⁶ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 5-6. On the claim about Beadle's family, see Emmison, *Essex Freeholders Book*. That volume records those households amounting to £10 property; the named locations covered by the list include Great Burstead, Beadle's supposed birthplace. Samuel Beadle—William's likely father—does not appear. Interestingly, there is a 40 year old William Beadle listed with a £20 estate located in Hatfield Peverel (page 88). There is no reason to believe or disbelieve a relation. On Beadle and the Pinfold family, the primary records for Pinfold are his official papers as governor, 11 volumes at the Library of Congress. See Charles Pinfold Papers, Library of Congress. While it is true that much of the material is official government business that might not include Beadle anyway, he does not appear in any of the papers.

harbors. Or perhaps his time in Barbados put New England in his mind. From as early as the English Civil Wars, New Englanders had forged direct trading relationships to the West Indies. That trade had contributed significantly to the vibrancy of the New England economy by the 18th century. Wethersfield itself was known for exporting sweet onions to the Caribbean. A number of Beadle's eventual neighbors and colleagues traded in the West Indies, some even in Barbados. Beadle's decision to go straight for Connecticut may not have been arbitrary.⁷

The towns Beadle lived in were not bustling by New York City standards, but relatively speaking, Connecticut teemed with aspiring merchants when he arrived. By the 1760s, 7% of Connecticut men over forty identified as merchants, nearly double the 1700 figure, with most of the growth happening from mid-century. In the first half of the eighteenth century, most Connecticut towns had one or two merchants or shopkeepers; major centers had ten to fifteen. By the 1760s and 1770s, a major center might have upwards of forty merchants, and even small towns might reach double figures. The mercantile life was understood as carrying the promise of social mobility, and merchants held high opinions of themselves, believing they were essential to the success of the whole empire. William Beadle, then, was far from alone in believing Connecticut

⁷ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6. On New York merchants, see Cathy Matson, *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 171. She says by 1760, New York City had 100 or so large or "eminent" merchants and another 300 middling or lesser merchants. On New England trade with West Indies, see Richard B. Sheridan, "The Domestic Economy," in *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, eds. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 56 and Matson, "A House of Many Mansions," 22. On the Wethersfield onion trade, see Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections*, 114 and Dwight, *Travels in New England*, 1: 226. On connections of Beadle's neighbors and colleagues to the West Indies see, e.g., Isaac Ishmael to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 18 June 1782, Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers, Reel 1; James Lockwood to Barnabas Deane, 6 May 1772, Silas Deane Papers, VII. Barnabas Dean 1768-1792, Box 11, Folder 1, CHS; *The Public Records of Colonial Connecticut*, 14: 439.

amenable to the merchant life. He was in like-minded company when he arrived in the colony in the early 1760s.⁸

Merchant aspirations in Connecticut had translated into beneficial practices and infrastructure. Throughout the eighteenth century, Connecticut residents created an economy increasingly beneficial to merchants like Beadle. Against older histories that painted New England's agricultural and economic trajectories as stories of decline, more recent work has depicted an adaptive and vibrant commercial world. Farmers became more specialized and commercial in outlook, often working with traders to bring products to external markets. In Connecticut, this contributed to extensive road construction between towns in the decade before Beadle's arrival. Consequently, even smaller towns on the periphery had regular commercial connections to a thriving center like Hartford. Wethersfield, just down the road from Hartford, was particularly suited for the mercantile life. Situated along the Connecticut River, it was easily connected to the coast. Just as important, the river was deep enough to allow boats to easily pick up Wethersfield produce. Before Beadle's arrival, its agriculture had already shifted from subsistence to commercial. These successes and budding networks gave New Englanders more of a chance to experiment with paper money and small manufacturing; the importance of shipping encouraged innovations when it came to insurance and loans. By the time Beadle arrived, the middling sorts were directly connected to a larger transatlantic world

⁸ For the figures on Connecticut merchants, see Jackson Turner Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut* (Princeton University Press, 1985), 279 and Bruce Daniels, *The Fragmentation of New England: Comparative Perspectives on Economic, Political, and Social Divisions in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 10-11. For the merchants and social mobility, see Bailyn, *The New England Merchants*, 194-195 and Miller, *The New England Mind*, 398-399. On the merchant's sense of self-importance, see Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize*, 2.

and comfortable with mobile property. Larger-scaled merchants might even study the market's future and take significant commercial risks. Some even looked to the Far East or the American frontier. Yes, it was risky—sometimes even reckless—but to many a merchant, it seemed no less risky than the dry goods and West Indies trades had been all along. Furthermore, every new merchant sought a competitive edge, even if they saw the many bankruptcies lining the way to wealth.⁹

What was William Beadle's initial place in this new economy? It is impossible to say for certain. Beadle's first North American decade—roughly 1762 to 1772 in Derby, Stratford, and Fairfield, CT—tells us more through his archival absence than his presence. He neither bought land nor seems to have been issued an earmark to differentiate any livestock. Unlike most of his friends and many of the merchants throughout the region, Beadle does not appear in the extensive business records of Nathaniel and Thomas Shaw, seaboard Connecticut's preeminent traders. Finally, while neither Derby nor Stratford nor Fairfield had newspapers of their own, many buyers and sellers in those towns made ready use of the three newspapers out of New London and New Haven. Beadle, in stark contrast to his frequent appearances in the *Connecticut Courant* during the 1770s, appears not to have advertised in any of them. Just what

⁹ For the specific descriptions in this paragraph, see Matson, "A House of Many Mansions," 22, 29, 36; Sheridan, "The Domestic Economy," 56, 57, 71; Bruce C. Daniels, "Economic Development in Colonial and Revolutionary Connecticut," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37, No. 3 (July 1980): 429-450; Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit*, 135-136; Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 124. See also Isabel S. Mitchell, *Roads and Road Making in Colonial Connecticut* (Literary Licensing, LLC, 2013); Howard S. Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England* (Lebanon: UPNE, 1982); Margaret Ellen Newell, "The Birth of New England in the Atlantic Economy: From Its Beginning to 1770," in *Engines of Enterprise: An Economic History of New England*, ed. Peter Temin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 11-68; Gloria L. Main and Jackson T. Main, "Economic Growth and the Standard of Living in Southern New England, 1640-1774," *Journal of Economic History* 48, no. 1 (March 1998): 27-46; Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

Beadle was doing is hazy, but what Beadle was *not* doing is more clear: he was not investing in land or livestock, spreading word of his efforts via print, or ingratiating himself into the business dealings of Atlantic-scale merchants.¹⁰

Whatever kept Beadle on the move, whatever discouraged him from buying land, he must have found some success in his first ten years in Connecticut. After all, it is hard to imagine a penniless transient befriending the Burr family as William Beadle did in Fairfield or marrying into a family traceable to the early years of Plymouth. He must have made something of his name in that first decade. By the time Beadle reached Fairfield in the late 1760s or early 1770s, the colonial economy had settled from the Stamp Act Crisis into momentary prosperity and calm. Years later, Stephen Mix Mitchell would recall Beadle arriving in Wethersfield with “about twelve hundred pounds property.” In his first year on the Wethersfield tax rolls, Beadle owed for importing saleable goods from England valued at £500. He had enough money to buy several advertisements in the local paper straightaway, and he rented an established business space (with a house) upon arrival. Like Barbados and England, then, the specifics of Beadle’s Stratford, Darby, and Fairfield years remain hazy, but it is clear some things went well on the business front.¹¹

¹⁰ Beadle does not appear in the town record or land records of any of the stated towns. The Derby record had multiple listings of earmarks for the years Beadle would have been around, but his name is never listed. The Shaw collection is ledgers, account books, letter books, and over 8,000 bills/receipts spanning the years 1755-1799. It runs to 23 microfilm reels. The collection contains an extensive index in which Beadle does not appear. Many of Beadle’s friends have multiple entries in the index. To see if he might have been mentioned in a letter to/from someone else or in a bill/receipt primarily involving someone else, I looked through all the documents related to people known to Beadle as well as documents from people I knew to be familiar in the Wethersfield area during his time there. I also collected names from merchant advertisements in the the New London and New Haven newspapers and cross-referenced them to the Shaw records. Beadle did not appear in any of the material related to those identifiable area merchants.

¹¹ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6. 1773 Wethersfield Tax Abstract, RG 62, Wethersfield Tax Abstracts 1750-1773, Box 12, CSL. Sheridan, “The British Credit Crisis,” 163.

Beadle announced himself to the Wethersfield and Hartford public with an advertisement in the *Courant* in April 1773. The ad not only introduced his new store in the old Wethersfield premises of the well-known Peter Verstill; it also presented Beadle as a public figure with an eccentric streak and odd ideas. Dispensing with the customary list of articles for sale, Beadle instead argued for a novel way of doing business. “A new PLAN,” the ad led in large, bold type: “William Beadle, Informs the Publick.” The intriguing headline gave way to Beadle’s promise that all goods would be sold at the lowest possible prices—but there was a catch. In order “to prevent all Distinctions, and the Difficulties and Inconveniences that attend the common Practice of trusting,” Beadle announced he would not extend credit at his shop, “not even a Shilling.” It was, Beadle insisted, a practice with both public and private benefits. While he focused mostly on those who would be looking to buy from his shop, Beadle extolled “this Method” as a general improvement in business practice. The piece ran in the paper for five weeks, and Beadle repeated the policy without elaboration in a few otherwise normal ads over the next year. After spring 1774, Beadle dropped mention of the policy from his newspaper ads. Nevertheless, he seems to have continued the practice. Mitchell reported that Beadle “refused to give any credit” during his Wethersfield years.¹²

Beadle’s plan was a risky one. It was not typical business practice. As credit became more and more important in the English world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a financial revolution bolstered the British Empire’s world standing. Credit had long existed on a personal, face-to-face level between neighbors, but by the

¹² *Connecticut Courant*, April 20, 1773; Nov. 16, 1773; April 5, 1774. [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6.

time Beadle embarked on his career, credit had infiltrated almost every transaction no matter the distance. In the cash-scarce colonial society, instruments of credit played an important role in the economy, from large wholesale purchases across an ocean to day-to-day neighborly transactions in a town like Wethersfield. At some juncture and to some degree, most transactions involved credit, and most people recognized its necessity. Just before the Revolution, for example, one Virginia colonist reported, “not one person in a hundred...pays the ready money for the goods he takes”; another writer noted it was not odd to see a merchant with credits and debits on the books exceeding a thousand pounds. We will see below how Beadle’s no-credit commitment and the public rhetoric that announced it played into anxieties of status in the Atlantic world. Here though, it is worth pausing to briefly appreciate how Beadle’s practice deviated from this credit-ready norm.¹³

In terms of cash, a merchant in Beadle’s New England typically dealt with several forms of currency. Specie in the form of gold and silver coins of Spanish and Portuguese origin circulated widely throughout the Atlantic world. In British North America, copper English coins were often small change. To cover immediate costs, especially during wartime, each of the colonies periodically issued bills of credit—sometimes through a land bank—that functioned like paper money. By tacit agreement, colonists accepted the bills from neighboring colonies. The New England colonies had even treated one another’s bills on par without constraints to mid-century. In addition to the specie, then, a

¹³ Mann, *Neighbors & Strangers*; David T. Flynn, “Credit and the Economy of Colonial New England” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2001). Flynn studied account books from Connecticut and found that the majority of transactions in eighteenth-century CT involved credit of some kind. Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: the English Financial Revolution, 1620-1720* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1; Sheridan, “The British Credit Crisis,” 163.

trader like William Beadle, both during his years on the coast and along the Connecticut River near Hartford, handled bills from, at least, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York. While the variety expanded the pool of buyers and sellers, it also required a deft touch. However much merchants coveted specie, especially the Spanish silver dollars, weight, purity, and widespread counterfeiting were always concerns. For someone like Beadle, every cash transaction involving non-Connecticut bills meant keeping up with current exchange rates. Moreover, all did not get along. Connecticut bickered especially with New York about currency policy. From spring 1775, the Continental Congress, without the power to tax and needing to quickly outfit an army, began issuing Continental currency. For reasons discussed below, these Continental dollars would be especially attractive to Beadle; they would also be his undoing.¹⁴

Credit similarly expanded trade while also making it more complex. Merchants routinely extended and accepted credit in several ways. Relatively informal book debt had long dominated the daily commercial world of the colonies. Nearly everyone in a community kept accounts of sales and services with one another, whether a commercial merchant operating a business or one neighbor helping out another. A storekeeper might supply goods to a blacksmith; the blacksmith would provide work for a farmer; the farmer would bring in produce to the storekeeper: each would credit and debit in his books and periodically settle up without cash transactions at each step. As Atlantic commerce expanded in the 1700s, however, more formal credit mechanisms grew

¹⁴ Mann, *Neighbors and Strangers*; Charles W. Calomiris, "Institutional Failure, Monetary Scarcity, and the Depreciation of the Continental," *Journal of Economic History* 48 no. 1 (1988): 47-68.

popular. Most notably, a merchant might use promissory notes—signed IOUs with an interest rate—or bills of exchange—documents akin to personal checks that could easily be transferred to third parties on either side of the ocean and eventually traced back to cash accounts with London banks. All such mechanisms relied on “trust.” Promissory notes were obviously risky. Not unlike modern loans or credit cards, some financiers, small and large, turned these into business. Bills of exchange, while less risky given the theoretical bank terminus, still relied on trust to a degree. How was a Connecticut merchant in Wethersfield to know if a bill of exchange originating in London was still valid? What if too many bill holders drew on that account at once and bankrupted the issuer? By the time Beadle arrived in New England, these more formal mechanisms (and their accompanying clear legal procedures) had come to dominate intertown commerce, as well as commerce involving rural areas. In a more urban center like Hartford and its surrounding towns, book debt remained popular.¹⁵

What exactly then was Beadle’s “new PLAN”? How did he envision his “NO TRUST” approach working? As with so much of Beadle’s story, it is impossible to say for certain how far he wanted to (or was able to) operate a store without credit. It is clear he wanted cash. In 1774, he placed an ad offering to part with his goods wholesale for 400-500 dollars. Before the Continental currency appeared in 1775, he would have wanted specie or any bills normally operable in Connecticut. Mitchell’s pamphlet, Beadle’s letters, and the probate records all make clear that Beadle’s no-credit policy

¹⁵ Mann, *Neighbors and Strangers*, 11-46. For a helpful summary of many of the types of payment and financial instruments of the time, see Joseph Albert Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 245 and the glossary of terms at the beginning.

eventually found him dealing primarily with Continental dollars. The fervor with which Beadle pledged to accept “not even a Schilling” suggests a hard line when it came to credit. Surely he did not intend to accept promissory notes. One imagines he was not keen on book debt either, at least not as something to be explicitly offered. Upon his death, he did have small open accounts with a number of local gentleman. Maybe, after a few years in town, he had eased his policy. More likely, a few pounds of book debt accrued here and there incidentally, with Beadle diligent about keeping the balances nearly even. This was unavoidable. For example, a buyer and seller might not have currency in the right denominations to make full change. Or, a storekeeper might unload a purchased shipment of goods from a wholesaler and find some damaged cloth; next time around, he would have that credited to start a purchase. Beadle may or may not have approved of bills of exchange. Again, citing his fervor and Mitchell’s corroboration, it seems probable that Beadle hoped to avoid bills of exchange; they did, after all, require trust.¹⁶

However much Beadle’s policy marked him as different or made it difficult to operate his business, he appeared as a successful merchant in his early Wethersfield years. On the 1773 tax assessment, Beadle ranked 79th out of the 322 people listed in the Wethersfield tax roll, putting him in the 75th percentile of taxpayers. He placed over half his total advertisements in the first two years of his time there. He became friends with the Mitchells and Chesters, which seems unlikely if he had failed from the start. He established a reputation that would later allow him to be chosen to collect a special tax

¹⁶ *Connecticut Courant*, April 20, 1773; *Connecticut Courant*, April 5, 1774; Beadle Probate Record.

and perform business dealings for a large Hartford-based mercantile interest. On his death, the newspapers remembered him as a once-successful merchant, with the *Massachusetts Spy* describing him as having once been “a trader of considerable note.” Even if those portraits involved selective memory, even if Beadle had managed to feign affluence, some foundational prosperity would have been necessary. As Beadle had acknowledged in his initial advertisement, he was a newcomer without reputation; something must have gone right for him early to earn a place within the community.¹⁷

Initial success notwithstanding, Beadle’s fortunes declined. As early as 1775, a trio of ads in the *Courant* sounded desperate. First in January, Beadle published an ostentatious poem ad begging customers to “Pray help me out” with this “hundred Weight, or so” of tea left in stock. It was not an innocent time for tea. Tea, so central to the British imperial economy of the Atlantic world, had, of course, become a hot button issue of the Revolution with the Boston Tea Party in December 1773. As with that memorable Tea Party itself in Boston, tea to a merchant like Beadle carried explosive local consequences of the larger global crisis. By fall 1774, the Continental Congress, in response to the Coercive Acts, decided on the Continental Association: no import, export, or use of British goods beginning March 1, 1775. East India Company tea was at the top of that list. Beadle was not alone in fretting about surplus stock. Earlier, merchants survived non-importation because they could still sell and use old stock. March 1775 was a more serious gambit. A merchant like Beadle had to balance patriotism, local feeling, and the need for income in the buildup to the full boycott. Perhaps he hoped that the

¹⁷ The original tax documents are at CSL, but I relied on the reproduction in Smart, “A Life of William Beadle,” 141-147. *Massachusetts Spy*, Dec. 19, 1782.

playful tone of a poem that recognized both patriotic fervor and economic need was his best option. While pledging loyalty to Congress, Beadle pled with customers to drink up. The tea was, he boasted, “as good as e’er was tasted,” so why then should Wethersfield’s finest let “all this be lost and wasted?”¹⁸

It did not seem to work. Two months later, in a short nondescript ad for nails, whalebone, and sewing silk, a clearly agitated Beadle complained about his ads doing no good. Finally, in May, Beadle cut short a listing of goods by claiming he could not afford any more ad space. It was Beadle’s busiest advertising year, but it was also his most combative. From the playful but fretful ad before the tea boycott to the disgruntled remarks about ads not doing any good and, finally, claims of being short on funds, things appeared to be going downhill just a few years into Beadle’s Wethersfield years. After that, he disappeared from the *Courant*’s pages for two years. Others faced similar predicaments. As the imperial crisis turned to Revolution and full-blown war, the fractures in Connecticut’s long-troubled economy became clearer. The boycotts ground trade to a standstill; what the colonial boycotts did not stop, British blockades often did. The loss of trade with Britain carried other consequences as well, most notably the absence of sterling bills of exchange and British manufactures. When fighting began, many of the Connecticut men who enlisted did so because it meant more pay than they had been getting as laborers. Some loans from Europe arrived, but they were

¹⁸ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775. On the global dimensions of the Tea Party, see Benjamin Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party and the Making of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) and Jane T. Merritt, *The Trouble with Tea* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017). On the difference between this and previous agreements and the merchant’s need to balance various concerns, see Merritt, *The Trouble with Tea*, 69, 108-111.

predominantly for supplying the military. Privateering and speculation were games for men who already had money.¹⁹

From 1777 to 1781, Beadle returned with a few ads, but they remained short and shorn of his trademark eccentricity. Only a few lines each, Beadle made no mention of his trading policies. He certainly was not bragging about his new plan or healthy array of goods. He listed only a few items on each occasion, most of them rather pedestrian. Sewing silk and ginger were as fancy as he could manage. At one point, he even offered to trade goose feathers for wood.²⁰ Similarly, Beadle's tax assessments indicated a plummeting income. The £73 Beadle owed in his first year in Wethersfield lowered to £31 by 1776. By 1781, he owed only £24. Amounts owed tended to drop throughout the war across the board, but Beadle's decline appears starker in terms of his ranking. From the 75th percentile of taxpayers in 1773, Beadle dropped to 213th out of 339, the 37th percentile, by his final assessment. Far from the £1,200 estate he brought with him to Wethersfield, probate records show he died with just over £300 of property, most of which, of course, was not liquid.²¹

While Connecticut's economy had earlier received a boost from its prime position as a supplier of Continental forces, 1777 brought an economic crisis that hurt many. Continental currency depreciated significantly, which further stalled trade, depleted

¹⁹ *Connecticut Courant*, March 20, 1775; Jan. 30, 1775; May 1, 1775. Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 39; Allan Kulikoff, "Such Things Ought Not To Be": The American Revolution and the First National Great Depression," in *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic: Land, Labor, and the Conflict for a Continent*, ed. Andrew Shankman (New York: Routledge, 2014), 136-137.

²⁰ *Connecticut Courant*, June 16, 1777; Oct. 13, 1778; Jan. 2, 1781.

²¹ Smart, "A Life of William Beadle," 141-147; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6; Beadle Probate Record.

credit, and made many, especially farmers, wary of selling their goods. It made for a vicious cycle and spurts of agitation. On occasion a military victory or political action gave some a sign of hope, but it was almost never enough. In spring 1779, for example, some Connecticut residents cheered at the news that citizens in Philadelphia—without elite support—had enacted price regulations, which, for a few weeks, even drove the value of the currency up. That happened to coincide with a lucky streak for Connecticut privateers that had some in the state's business community claiming a rebound. It did not last: by July, Britain hit the coastal cities, and the currency plummeted to new lows; renewed efforts in Hartford to regulate prices were abandoned.²²

Much of Beadle's loss was tied up in his reliance on those deflating Continental dollars. No doubt Beadle's refusal to trade on credit had made the appearance of Continental dollars in 1775 an enticing prospect. The continentals, however, suffered from deflation from the start. That deflation intensified during the latter years of the 1770s. When first issued in 1775, continentals traded at par with specie. In the 1777 crisis, the value dropped to 5 to 1. By the beginning of 1780, they exchanged at 1/40 of face value. By December, it was 1/100, and they quickly ceased to operate as a medium of exchange altogether; hardly anyone but speculators would take them. The failure of the Continental dollars hurt other forms of currency as well, especially the Connecticut bills of credit, which exchanged 75 to 1 versus the Spanish dollar after the continentals fell. As Mitchell reported, however, throughout the war, Beadle had both refused to inflate his

²² Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 57-58, 84-85, 144-145, 166-168, 188-199; Kulikoff, "Such Things Ought Not To Be," 139-140; Margaret Ellen Newell, *From Dependency to Independence: Economic Revolution in Colonial New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 314-315. On efforts to control prices without consulting gentlemen, see Riesman, "Money, Credit, and Federalist Political Economy," 133.

prices and continued to accept the continentals at face value. The result was a depleted stock and most of his money-on-hand in the form of a practically worthless currency.²³

It was a daunting situation, but in 1782, Beadle had one more shot at turning things around. By spring, William Beadle had entered the orbit of Hartford's Jeremiah Wadsworth. At that time, Wadsworth was commissary for Rochambeau's French army; previously, he had been commissary general for the Continental Army. Wadsworth parlayed those positions into great personal wealth. At the end of the war, he was the richest man in Connecticut. Wadsworth's official positions kept him on the move, but John Jeffrey and Peter Colt served as his Hartford-based emissaries. Perhaps it was Beadle's earlier successes, perhaps his influential Wethersfield friends, perhaps, even, he had visited Peter Colt's Hartford bookstore—somehow William Beadle came to the attention of Jeffrey and Colt.²⁴

For a few months, Beadle's connection to this world offered a lifeline. On April 22, 1782, John Jeffrey dispatched William Beadle to Boston on behalf of the vast Wadsworth enterprise. Jeffrey and Colt had interests in the *Fire Brand*, a ship just landed in Boston. William Beadle was to be their man on location. In addition to safeguarding whatever their claim of the booty, Beadle was to supervise arranging the ship's next launch. It could not come fast enough. Upon hearing that Beadle had left for Boston, Colt

²³ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7. On the fluctuating prices of continentals, see Calomiris, "Institutional Failure;" Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 144-145, 166-167; Kulikoff, "'Such Things Ought Not To Be,'" 139-140. Authors sometimes give slightly different dates and values, especially toward the end of the continentals use. This seems likely because the value could vary widely depending on where one was and what one was trying to buy. For example, Buel reports that in 1779, the value ranged between 8 to 1 and 90 to 1 in different parts of Connecticut.

²⁴ John David Ronalds Platt, *Jeremiah Wadsworth, Federalist Entrepreneur* (New York: Arno Press, 1982); Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, 198; *Connecticut Courant*, Oct. 10, 1774.

advised Jeffrey that “should Mr. Beadle want any Money to fit the Fire Brand to sea again sooner than he can raise it out of the Goods you will please advance it to him and charge my account.” The pair clearly trusted Beadle to get the job done on their behalf.²⁵

The pair trusted Beadle with other business as well. Jeffrey mentioned Beadle offhandedly in a June letter. In August, Woodbury, CT resident Shadrack Osborne wrote Jeffrey with £7.11.01 and a letter to pass to Colt via William Beadle. “Mr. Beadle,” Osborne reminded, had “the care of Mr. Colt’s Books” at the time. A month later, Jeffrey updated Beadle on the latest news from Wadsworth and the French Army, noted that no additional letters had arrived in Hartford for Beadle or Colt, and requested that any correspondence intended for Wadsworth be ready by the next Monday. Jeffrey’s letter has the feel of a response, as if answering a series of questions from Beadle, but Beadle’s initial query, if it ever existed, is lost.²⁶

The relationship made a difference, if only a short-term one. Just after the trip to Boston, Beadle printed his longest ad since 1775. It had been seven years since Beadle had scrounged enough goods and enough cash to run an ad listing more than a few items; after connecting with major businessmen, he was back. Running for three issues beginning at the end of May, Beadle spent nearly a dozen lines listing the goods then available at his Wethersfield store. A hint, however small, of the old Beadle angst even made an appearance. “William Beadle of Wethersfield,” the ad began, “Invites all his Old

²⁵ John Jeffrey to Peter Colt, 27 April 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 3; Peter Colt to John Jeffrey, 7 May 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 4.

²⁶ Shadrach Osborne to John Jeffrey, 14 August 1782, Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers 1782-1789, Reel 1, January 1782-October 12, 1782, DLAR; John Jeffrey to William Beadle, 7 September 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 8.

Customers, and as many more as incline, to come and see a Few Goods, they never saw before.” The goods were unseen only in the literal sense; nothing in the inventory was out of the ordinary. But it was as if Beadle were acknowledging that his shop had been rather empty of goods for some time. Even more, by bidding his old customers to return, he was recognizing that few had continued frequenting his establishment during the leanest years.²⁷

The rebound, of course, did not last. Within a few short months, Beadle began plotting the murder-suicide in earnest. He was, he felt, a failed merchant and that, he believed, made him a failed father. In his letters, when explaining why he did not simply take his own life and allow his children to live, Beadle wrote that he was vexed at his inability to protect them from a world that would surely grind them down. The last thing he could do for them, he insisted, was to “choose to consign them over” to God. The choice of the word “consign” was telling. Whether he meant it as the cruelest of jokes or was so lost in his world of despairing merchant that he no longer noticed, Beadle’s children had become surplus. They were the leftover goods of a worn out, washed up trader. Any distance between life and language had evaporated.²⁸

Economically, it is tempting to frame the story of Beadle’s Wethersfield years as initial, resounding success followed by steady, mostly secret decline. William Beadle himself encouraged that view in the letters by heaping scorn on the depreciation of Continental currency that plagued his final years. Mitchell and other commentators seemed to verify that story. The first news reports, for example, described Beadle’s

²⁷ *Connecticut Courant*, May 28, 1782.

²⁸ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 175.

business as “declining some years since.” Mitchell’s tale began with William Beadle as the illegitimate son of a London gentlemen, detoured through the governor’s house in Barbados, described Beadle as having a good amount of property and income in the early Wethersfield years, and then ended with the bad luck and worse decisions that sent Beadle to his demise. In economics, as in morality, the narrative form is the jeremiad: a slippery slope toward a pride-infused destruction.²⁹

This story arc is not altogether wrong, and the secondary literature has stuck to it. Beadle’s declining advertisements and drop in the tax rolls further entrench that narrative. While that narrative holds true in the big picture sense of Beadle’s final decade, it is worth noting that within that period, the family’s economic life likely fluctuated regularly. That is especially true if one thinks beyond the bottom line to the emotional tenor of their situation. Beadle must have maintained a minimal level of success even during the toughest of years: the family remained in the old Verstelle property; he was still in a position to be trusted by Jeffrey and Colt; he managed to hide his declining worth from his friends. Still, doom and gloom had its moments. Beadle’s ads from 1775 displayed an irascible temper. At times he had little to sell. Sometimes, he had little cash, which was especially troublesome given his perspective on credit. In an almost cruel twist of fate, Beadle experienced the last gasp of the *Fire Brand* bounty, only for things to fall apart. It was, to say the least, a tumultuous commercial life.

Much of that tumult stemmed from the nearly incessant conflict among Europe’s empires. Imperial conflict, wherever the fighting occurred, added to the unsettling life of

²⁹ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 180-181; *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*.

the merchant. The British Empire fostered trade and made a merchant like Beadle possible, but it also fostered war. As Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton have observed, war was the real “engine of change in North America.” When it came to the commercial minded, that change made fortunes for some, but it ruined the lives of others. Even those eventually ruined by it, however, were just as likely to see war as an omen of excitement than a portent of doom.³⁰

From Beadle’s years in Barbados to his arrival in Connecticut, the lesson of war was an optimistic one for aspiring merchants. In England the economy boomed as residual fears of the 1745 Jacobite revolt faded and the military needs of the Seven Years’ War grew. As England’s financiers industrialized at home and looked for markets abroad, the colonial economies reaped the benefits. American merchants enjoyed unrestrained credit. In New England, even those who, like Jonathan Trumbull, the future Connecticut governor, were based in secondary ports and ran businesses much smaller than a genuinely Atlantic operation, found eager London bankers with capital to spare. During the war itself, any North American merchant willing to take a risk could make a handsome profit trading with the French. Some of that trade was even legal, or quasi-legal, in accordance with the longstanding early modern practice of “flag-trucing” through which merchants of warring nations traded under the cover of prisoner exchanges. Illicit trade, of course, ran greater risks while also delivering greater rewards. From Philadelphia to New York, Rhode Island to Boston, colonial merchants ignored the grumbles of the British government and traded extensively with France, French Canada,

³⁰ Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Conflict in North America, 1500-2000* (New York: Viking, 2005), xiv.

and, especially the French West Indies, where the North American traders finally managed to snag a portion of the lucrative sugar trade the British government had always kept firmly out of their hands. The trade fueled the colonial economy. Beyond the large merchants and the politicians who made it possible, trade with the French provided lucrative work to dockworkers, tradesman, and shopkeepers throughout port cities. While the British government did not approve and arrested some, most probably felt little guilt. The automatic association between trading with the enemy and treason did not yet exist in the vocabulary of European political economics.³¹

The end of war could mean the end of prosperity. The British economy stalled as the Seven Years' War drew to a close, and some American merchants felt the pinch. In New York City, for example, the "great riches" a wartime traveler had described gave way to streets of idle sailors, a harbor of stalled ships, and warehouses of imported goods that no one had an inkling, let alone the money, to buy. The loss of war-time supply contracts, not to mention the British troops who might have remained consumers had they not already left for the Caribbean and a possible war with Spain, took its toll in many places. Still, merchants probably assumed war made for good business. In Connecticut, for example, at the height of the Seven Years' War the government was able to transfer British debt payments into a London account, thus allowing it to draw on sterling bills of

³¹ Buel, *Dear Libert*, 9; Newell, *From Dependency to Independence*, 266; Richard B. Sheridan, "The British Credit Crisis of 1772 and The American Colonies," *The Journal of Economic History* 20, no. 2 (1960), 162; Paul Kosmetatos, *The 1772–73 British Credit Crisis* (New York: Springer, 2018), 7-11; Thomas M. Truxes, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-8.

exchange to issue new bills of credit. Throughout the colony, demand for state currency rose, and its value stabilized.³²

The Seven Years' War had taught more prosperous, more established North American traders that imperial war could mean new commercial opportunities. For some, those lessons translated into fortunes during the American Revolution even if that involved risky or suspect trading practices. For example, while the War for Independence stalled Atlantic trade and all but halted the traffic between New England and the West Indies, many of the wealthiest merchants found continued prosperity by financing privateering. Such ventures were especially lucrative in Connecticut where some three hundred ships engaged in government-authorized smuggling and privateering from river and coastal ports. Provisioning troops, of course, was big business. Just as colonial merchants had not blinked an eye at trading with the French during the Seven Years' War, few seemed to consider it wrong to translate public service into private gain. Robert Morris, so-called "Financier of the Revolution" for example, funneled public business to his numerous firms en route to becoming the richest man in the country. Connecticut's central role in provisioning the rebel forces opened doors for men in Beadle's immediate orbit as well. Jonathan Trumbull, for example, who was by then governor of Connecticut, had spent the early 1770s dodging his London creditors from the Seven Years' War boom. Revolution allowed him to postpone those settlements. It provided possibilities for recouping losses as well by, for instance, supplying the militia through his Lebanon, CT, store and having his son as a commissary for the Continental Army. After the governor's son died in 1778, the post went to the Connecticut son of a Trumbull associate, the

³² Truxes, *Defying Empire*, 172; Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 9.

previously mentioned Jeremiah Wadsworth. Wadsworth complained that New Englanders chased “wealth by a disgraceful inland trade” that hindered his commissary efforts but all the while traded on his own account alongside those negotiations on behalf of the army. Finally, in Wethersfield, the brothers Barnabas and Silas Deane, holders of semi-public roles, expanded their retail business into wholesaling, money lending, and various commercial products. Some such merchants definitely faced complaints from competitors and ordinary citizens struggling during the war, but as Margaret Newell has put it, in war the “line between hard bargains and corruption was fine.”³³

Whether advantageous bargain or outright corruption, those opportunities, were usually beyond the reach of most middling and lesser merchants, traders, and shopkeepers. Even before the war, as more and more New England men sought their livelihoods through trade, the gap between elite port merchants and the struggling middling traders grew more defined. Larger operatives could, of course, take on more risk. Even for smaller merchants, however, those risks might be appealing. Not everyone had public office, but even a middling sort like William Beadle might know a few people. Beadle, of course, worked on the fringes of Wadsworth’s expanding mercantile empire; the Deanes lived nearby, and Barnabas seems to have been mixed up in Beadle’s circles as well.³⁴

³³ Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 189, 203; Newell, *From Dependency to Independence*, 299-307; Daniels, *The Fragmentation of New England*, 12; Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: “The People,” the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 62; Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, 197-198; Riesman, “Money, Credit, and Federalist Political Economy,” 142-156.

³⁴ Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 189, 203; Margaret Ellen Newell, *From Dependency to Independence*, 299-307; Daniels, *The Fragmentation of New England*, 12. Beadle was never a major player in the Atlantic merchant world, and his middling or lesser status had much to do with his ultimate failure. For the

But in economics as in politics, imperial war had both winners and losers.

William Beadle and many other families in his world suffered throughout the Revolution. Incomes plummeted or disappeared. Both citizens and soldiers were at the mercy of near-constant scarcities. Farms went unattended. Credit markets fluctuated. Those who could not afford the rising price of imports or insurance had few options. Beadle felt ruined financially by 1782, and personal records, newspapers, and petitions to the governor all suggest many felt the same. The disruptions of war were only part of the equation. For all the opportunities afforded merchants in the Atlantic world, that world also offered many ways to fail and many reasons to feel anxious. In this, Beadle was not alone. The anxieties he faced, the failures he suffered, were familiar to others as well. The next three sections consider Beadle's economic journey of opportunity and failure through different lenses tinted with this anxiety: the importance of status, the fluctuations of currency and credit, and the feelings of helplessness before the global commercial world.³⁵

Status

In the letters left at the scene, William Beadle painted a bleak picture of his economic situation. He claimed, probably disingenuously, to have no way of providing food or fuel for his family. More than the bottom line, however, aggravated the despairing merchant. It was status—his reputation before those he imagined reading his letters—that provoked the most anxiety in Beadle. As he put it in the letters, any “man

importance of not treating “merchant” as a uniform category, see Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, 2-4, 265 and Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots*, 7.

³⁵ On the disruptions of war, see Matson “A House of Many Mansions,” 43; Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, 265.

who has once lived well, meant well, and done well” cannot possibly allow himself to “be laughed at and despised and tramped on by a set of mean wretches as far below him as the moon is below the sun.” Beadle pitched his family’s situation as a topsy-turvy reversal of how things should be in the world. Smart, honest, self-made merchants like himself, he all but said, should not be left penniless while devious or maladroit competitors climbed the social ladder.³⁶

Beadle, clearly embittered, hoped in vain to justify his atrocious behavior. Nevertheless, his infatuation with status is telling. Status was everything for an eighteenth-century Atlantic merchant. In the more horizontal sense of being well connected to one’s colleagues, good status could open a world of possibilities; its lack could mean isolation and insolvency. Facing the unpredictability of rapidly fluctuating imperial markets with little institutional support, the merchant life was as much about performing a certain level of standing in public as it was about keeping the books. Socializing with one’s peers at coffee houses or in their homes was essential to commercial success even when the topic of conversation strayed from business. In the more vertical understanding of the term, status announced a merchant like Beadle as a person of influence to a wider social world. That is, the merchant was a public figure: in print, around town, or in the parlors of established gentlemen, the likes of William Beadle hoped to cut a certain figure for both economic and social rewards. The story of William Beadle, including the tragic end to the tale, shows these multiple status anxieties at work. The life of an eighteenth-century Atlantic merchant was as much about status as the

³⁶ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 177; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7. The quote from Beadle is primarily from the extracts in Stiles. The phrase “and tramped on...sun” is omitted in Stiles but included in Mitchell.

bottom line. William Beadle and others continuously wavered in-and-out of the most desirable status positions; that very uncertainty created anxiety. As in so many areas of life, the realities of war heightened the status pressure.³⁷

Even as the men of commerce gained in stature throughout the Atlantic world, merchant activity and the unabashed pursuit of profit could still attract disdain. As late as 1800, for example, one French text assumed a “capitalist” was “a man with a heart of brass, and who has only metallic affection.” In Connecticut, even as the economy had become increasingly commercial with more and more merchants filling the towns, the old Puritan ethic of New England still viewed the merchant as suspicious. During the Revolution, Puritan and republican theory sometimes rendered the prosperous merchant as a dubious threat to the virtue a republic required. William Beadle and other merchants, then, had to think both of their commercial status and their moral status. Politeness, respectability, and social grace all mattered. As commerce expanded and become regional and transatlantic, more and more people traded with strangers they would never meet face to face. Reputation and trust became of paramount importance.³⁸

³⁷ On the merchant’s need to perform for status, see Toby L. Ditz, “Shipwrecked: or, Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *The Journal of American History* 81:1 (June 1994): 50-81. For examples of the kind of sociability that was essential to mercantile success, see John Rowe Diaries 1764-1779, DLAR. Rowe, a Boston merchant, was always meeting people for meals or at the coffee houses, including the likes of Hancock, Otis, John Adams, etc.

³⁸ The French quote is from Jacob and Secretan, “Introduction,” 1. See also page 2. On Puritan New England, see Edmund Morgan, “The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution,” in *The Challenge of the American Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976), 95. For just two examples of republicanism’s suspicion of the merchant, see relevant chapters in J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1985) and T.H. Breen, “Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 50 (June 1993): 471-501. On trading with strangers, see John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3-4.

Traces of William Beadle's drive for status—both with his socioeconomic betters and potential customers—appear prominently in his string of advertisements in the *Connecticut Courant*. The newspaper could provide a merchant publicity for their name, their style, and their specific offerings. Especially for a merchant not entrenched at the highest levels of transatlantic commerce and politics, it was the best resource available for accruing all the ever-changing market information a trader would need. Just as Beadle arrived in Wethersfield, in fact, others in Connecticut pushed for this kind of mercantile-focused periodical. In the same pages of the *Courant* where Beadle turned for publicity, publishers in Norwich prodded the businessman, the farmer, and the manufacturer—anyone, really, interested “in facilitating Business of every Kind”—to subscribe to the proposed *Norwich Packet*. Publishers envisioned it bringing Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island commerce together. This kind of newspaper, they boasted, was the most “beneficial Mode, of establishing an Intercourse between Men in Business, that Human Sagacity could have suggested.” Hyperbole aside, the would-be newspapermen had a point: print opened merchants like Beadle to a wider audience both as an advertising outlet and as a fount of knowledge in pursuit of the next big deal. In either case, newsprint played a major role in the quest for status. This might have been especially appealing to a merchant like Beadle who was new to town and lacked the face-to-face networks of more established traders.³⁹

³⁹ Ad is from *Connecticut Courant*, June 1, 1773. For discussion of early modern merchants seeing themselves as men of knowledge, see Jochen Hoock, “Professional Ethics and Commercial Rationality at the Beginning of the Modern Era,” in *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 147-160 and Deborah E. Harkness, “Accounting for Science: How a Merchant Kept his Books in Elizabethan London,” in *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 205-228.

When it came to print, Beadle made a splash from the start. With his first advertisement in the *Courant*, the announcement of a cash-only business model played into concerns of status in several ways. On one hand, the reliance on impersonal mediums of exchange like paper currency and silver downplayed the importance of the status of those involved. Credit was indispensable to the economy, but that economy had not developed institutional knowledge for determining the worthiness of those seeking credit. Thus, the whole enterprise could feel unavoidably risky. Credit had become normal practice in part because of a scarcity of cash, but it was as much an epistemological change as a financial one: to embrace credit meant to embrace one another and a whole array of financial instruments that depended on trust. Those theorizing at the time nevertheless recognized that this kind of trust created worry. Credit, the British political economist Charles Davenant admitted, hung “upon Opinion,” and spun chance, accident, and uncertainty into everyday economic practice. One’s status—that is, one’s name—was the signal distinction in such an economy, and Beadle specifically cited the desire “to prevent all Distinctions” as one reason for his no-credit policy. By refusing “to trust at all, not even a Shilling to any Person whatsoever,” Beadle must have thought he could sidestep reputations and social standing. A shilling was a shilling, no matter whose hand held it. Perhaps that sounded good to the peripatetic Beadle who was not used to staying in one place long enough to sort the haves from the have nots.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *Connecticut Courant*, April 20, 1773. On the indispensability of credit and its inherent uncertainty in the eighteenth century, see McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 3-4, 15-16, 27-28. On trust and Davenant, see Wennerland, *Casualties of Credit*, 1-2.

As both a buyer and seller, Beadle would have had much to gain and lose based on his reading of the credit system, and it was not always an easy thing to read. As will be seen below, the no-credit model was a tremendously risky way of balancing the books; it was equally risky when it came to the cultivation of status and sociability, both essential to the successful Atlantic merchant. Stephen Wilf has suggested that the practice cemented Beadle's status as an outsider in a way that paired economic ideas of anonymity and reason with his deistic theology that saw religions as a rational understanding of a distant God. Wilf is right about the potential consequence of Beadle's monetary policy, and the symmetry between his deism and economic theory is tempting. Nevertheless, there are several explanations for Beadle's decision that might have made sense with others.⁴¹

For one, Beadle, with or without reason, may just not have trusted others very much. Whether Beadle suffered from a credit mishap of any significant magnitude is impossible to say. Both he and Stephen Mix Mitchell were creditors of a Fairfield jailer named John Camp who petitioned the General Assembly for assistance as an insolvent debtor in 1774, but there is nothing that suggests it was for a sizable amount or that Camp had acted treacherously. Even if Camp (or an incident with someone else) did not spoil credit for Beadle, he was not alone in worrying about trust. Trust meant opening up oneself to debt, and one strain of patriot ideology, however at odds with merchants' increased risk-taking, feared debt as leading to dependence. It might have been strange for him to announce a permanent, no-credit, no-exceptions policy, but he was far from the only one lacking trust in customers and potential partners. None other than Peter

⁴¹ Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 128-129.

Verstille in fact had, during his early years in Boston, struggled to overcome slow sales, an undependable partner, and customers suspiciously claiming to have no cash. A more established merchant named Sam Hughes gave the young Verstille advice: Focus on finding “a good assortment of Goods” and “you will never want Customers,” the older associate began, “and when they find you will not trust they will bring their ready money.” If they continued to hesitate, Hughes concluded, be patient and stick to the plan, for sooner or later, their desire for goods will overcome their reluctance to part with cash. Whether Verstille did in fact refuse to trust for any lengthy period of time is unclear, but Hughes presented the idea as a fairly normal one.⁴²

Even more, with so many vectors between people and places, near and far, just keeping all appraised of current balances was a chore; this was especially true when war threatened to disrupt correspondence. Perhaps Beadle had just grown weary of the credit system throughout his mercantile career. Maybe he had continually struggled to master the ever-fluctuating markets and rates. After all, it was tenuous to reputations even when debts were paid. To give one example, John Wright of Wethersfield, who would appraise William Beadle’s estate a year later, had to write major Connecticut merchant Thomas Shaw with a plea to halt the legal action Shaw had initiated over a hundred pound debt. Wright had recently paid the amount to Thomas Shaw’s brother and business partner Nathaniel—whose testimony Wright had enclosed—but as word had not reached the

⁴² John Camp Petition, Insolvent Debtors, First Series, 1762-1787, 156-157, CSL; Sam Hughes to Peter Verstille, 20 May 1754, Verstille Family Correspondence, 1754-1854, Folder 5, Peter 1754-1777, CHS; Riesman, “Money, Credit, and Federalist Political Economy,” 128-130.

appropriate parties, legal action continued. Failure to quickly step in, Wright worried, would “doubtless be a great damage” to his commercial status.⁴³

Whether or not Beadle’s bottom line or status took a hit from the credit world prior to his “new Plan,” the fluctuations of the global economy might have directly influenced his choice. Beginning in summer 1772, the British economy experienced a credit crisis that involved continental Europe and, by extension, the colonies around the world of the major European powers. The credit boom of the Seven Years’ War and a resurgence following the Stamp Act Crisis fueled economic expansion. When the credit bubble burst, runs on London banks overwhelmed currency reserves. London papers fanned worries of “universal bankruptcy” and painted a picture of city streets full of distressed families. Worry was not just the province of printers eager to sell newspapers. Intellectuals worried as well: in the epicenter of the Scottish Enlightenment, David Hume wrote Adam Smith with news of “Continual Bankruptcies, universal Loss of Credit, and endless Suspensions.” The crisis fully reached colonial shores by 1773 just as William Beadle set up shop in Wethersfield. Perhaps his “new plan” was not wholly his idea; it might have been the consequence of London firms and banks being more restrictive in their extension of credit and acceptance of bills of exchange. Maybe, whether he lost in real terms or not, the credit crisis spooked Beadle enough to opt out of credit altogether. Even though most traders and commentators continued to extol the necessities of credit and differentiate between wise and unwise uses of the credit system, the crisis did lead to

⁴³ John Wright to Thomas Shaw, 3 February 1782, Shaw Papers, Reel 19, docs. 9189-9190. Most of the business correspondence of the men involved in this dissertation are filled with letters worrying about who is trustworthy as well as obvious signs that many letters were never reaching their intended destinations.

some stark assessments in the papers: “CREDIT, public or private, is a most destructive cancer in any state,” wrote E.M. in the *London Chronicle* just a week after the first bank runs. “Whoever turns his Eyes towards the various Wrecks [caused by the crisis] must exclaim, *These are they Works, Oh Credit!*” With those kinds of attitudes circulating, a shopkeeper trying his hand at a no-credit business model sounds less outlandish.⁴⁴

The preference for cash, however, might just as well have been a well-established, well-understood attempt to undercut the area’s more entrenched traders. From mid-century, Connecticut merchants willing to pay farmers in cash had siphoned business from those farmers’ creditors. Previously beholden to merchants who had extended them credit, farmers with a newfound supply of cash could pay their debts and henceforth look to sell to the highest bidder. This created periodic animosity between the established traders and the cash-paying new arrivals. Right about the time William Beadle arrived in Connecticut, over a dozen Hartford merchants took to the *Courant* to threaten area farmers to steer clear of a new shopkeeper. An angry farmer unwilling to take orders from his old creditors fired back. He encouraged his comrades to stand their ground and resist the oppressive merchants who “mean to enslave us.” Perhaps Beadle’s plan had less to do with the excessive risks of absconding debtors and more to do with a daring end run on his competitors. Either way, it identified him as an outsider in an economy where connections and sociability were essential.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Kosmetatos, *The 1772–73 British Credit Crisis*, 4-5, 18 (Hume quoted on 5, E.M. on 18); Sheridan, “The British Credit Crisis,” 170-176.

⁴⁵ On the old merchant/new merchant/farmer disputes and the *Courant* quote, see Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 119-121.

From a different angle, the whole enterprise marked William Beadle as one to watch. As a recent Beadle commentator has noted, the proposal to some degree announced Beadle as “ahead of his time” in preferring the anonymous market relations of supply, demand, and price to the more communal credit economy.⁴⁶ In any case, the announcement of such an eccentric and daring plan surely brought the newly arrived merchant some much-valued attention. The very language of the advertisement itself encouraged this mindset. Like a good man of Enlightenment, Beadle emphasized that this was a “new” way of doing business. He was innovating and proud to announce it. He used over half his purchased ad space on the topic, variously explaining, justifying, extolling, even apologizing for, his refusal to extend credit. What better way to catch an eye than to splash his name in large print under the heading “A new Plan” and then outline an alien model sure to arouse pique? Beadle also believed, or at least pretended to believe in the hope of ameliorating any umbrage from readers, that his new plan was good for everyone. He specifically targeted “all Persons who are convinced of the Utility of Business being done in this Method” as his ideal customers. In a parenthetical aside, he suggested this utility had both a public and a private nature. Whether due to a lack of space or a lack of systematic argument altogether, Beadle did not elaborate on these advantages. He left it a vague implication. Perhaps, he imagined, he was the outsider arrived to show Americans a better alternative to “the common Practice of trusting.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 129.

⁴⁷ *Connecticut Courant*, April 20, 1773. On economic innovation as part of the Enlightenment in America, see Caroline Winterer, *American Enlightenments: Pursuing Happiness in the Age of Reason* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 1-17.

To a stranger with no connections, webs of credit could be relationships. Proving oneself reliable today was often the secret for being considered reliable tomorrow. Beadle would, of course, prove to be a rather secretive, introspective fellow over the next decade, and maybe that was as much about his personality as it was about his frequent migrations. Nevertheless, to extend credit was to extend a relationship. Credit did not mean friendship, but it did mean sociability. To an outsider, especially one who seemed to have his sights on high society, this should have been as valuable as the shilling Beadle would not extend in trust.⁴⁸

Beyond announcing his idiosyncratic distaste for credit, Beadle's advertisements also played for status through the list of goods he had on hand. Merchants like Beadle made names for themselves with the exotic goods they could offer. In the *Courant's* back pages, traders frequently enumerated entire lists of available goods, making sure to highlight origins in England, the West Indies, or India. At the best of times, Beadle listed upwards of fifty goods and promised hundreds more, all "suitable for the present Season." For a store away from the seaboard, Beadle had quite the exotic array. He boasted of products from France, Spain, and India. He offered tea, coffee, sugar, and chocolate. He bragged of having "Spices of all Kinds" including pepper, allspice, cinnamon, and cloves. The thirsty could find wine of the "best quality," French brandy, West Indies rum, and various "Wild cherry Rums." Beyond food and drink, Beadle advertised a wide array of cloths, velvets, silks, chintzes, calicoes "of all colours," and satins "flower'd and plain." He had tapestries, linens, Dutch quilts, and "Barcelona

⁴⁸ On the importance of the credit relationships, see McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 3-4, 16.

Handkerchiefs,” silverware, and pearl buttons. However exhaustive such lists might seem, he occasionally concluding by assuring his customers he had “all other Articles as usual.” Mitchell confirmed that, at the start of the war at least, Beadle had “on hand a very handsome assortment of goods.” Like any good Atlantic merchant, then, Beadle offered items from beyond the immediate locale of his customers; he was a window onto the Atlantic world for them.⁴⁹

If French brandy and West Indies rum elevated Beadle’s stature, he was also at the mercy of availability. Again turning to his own advertisements, it is clear Beadle was not always in a position to brag. For every fifty-item list in the *Connecticut Courant*, Beadle placed another ad of only a line or two. He not infrequently only had a few items to list. Just over a year after opening his store, Beadle ran an ad that simply said “Good tea, To be Sold by William Beadle.” He might only have “Bow Strings and Looping for Hatters” or an assortment of nails. Instead of promising hundreds more articles, at times he could only add “about half a Dozen other Articles” to an already short list. Beadle’s status was at the mercy of what he could stock, and in time of war, instability was the rule. It was hardly ever a linear process: he was at a low point one month and back on top two months later only to fall again.⁵⁰

Specific business models and merchandise aside, Beadle’s stylistic quirks could draw attention as well. Most notable in this regard was the aforementioned 1775 poetical

⁴⁹ *Connecticut Courant*, Nov. 16, 1773; May 1, 1775; May 28, 1782; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7.

⁵⁰ *Connecticut Courant*, June 28, 1774; March 20, 1775; June 16, 1777; Oct. 13, 1778; Jan. 2, 1781.

ad in which gaudy couplets urged “Fair Ladies” to Beadle’s store before their “China, which attracts the Eye, / Like Lumber, must neglected lie” for the duration of the tea boycott. Beadle was by no means the only advertiser who resorted to verse; like premodern advertising jingles, poems appeared often enough in the *Courant*’s pages. Poetry had been a regular feature of colonial newspapers from the early 1700s, appealing across class lines. It was an ordinary form of entertainment and communication in the print culture, but it was also often explicitly political and economic. Well before William Beadle and the Revolution, the poetry of British America’s pamphlets and newspapers took up questions of colonial rights and the mercantile wealth of the empire. Throughout the Revolution and early Republic, newspaper poetry remained a vital medium of political speech, and readers would have understood poetry’s political resonance, not to mention that talent with verse signaled education. Beadle’s poem, however crass it might appear, told his contemporaries that he was creative, smart, and in tune with the marketplace politics of the Revolution.⁵¹

Even when not written as poems, advertisements were performances. They created demand as part of an expanding consumer culture. They told the story of who the newcomer William Beadle wanted to be. For a storekeeper who had been on the move for so long, being noticed and being remembered was paramount. Likewise, throughout the

⁵¹ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775; *Massachusetts Spy*, Feb. 13, 1783. For the remarks about poetry’s use in the colonies and Revolution, see Colin Wells, *Poetry Wars: Verse and Politics in the American Revolution and Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017) and David Shields, *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America 1690-1750* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). On poetry as a mark of education, see Karin A. Wulf and Catherine La Courreye Blecki, “Preface,” in *Milcah Martha Moore’s Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, eds. Karin A. Wulf and Catherine La Courreye Blecki (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), xiii.

1770s and early 1780s, others begged, cajoled, and threatened in the *Courant*'s advertisement pages. Storekeepers pleaded with customers to remember them after they switched locations; skilled laborers and craftsmen strained to remind all of their abilities as they switched from one trade to the next. Borderline insults were not entirely misplaced: the *Courant*'s publisher routinely threatened to cut the paper's size if subscribers did not pay up. Stylistically, too, Beadle was not an anomaly. While poetry did not appear on anything like a weekly basis, it appeared regularly enough, ranging from front-page political commentary to back-page lost-and-found notices. Beadle and others turned to the newspapers to find a voice and draw attention. Succeeding commercially was as much about appearance as anything, and these ads might make or break one's appearance.⁵²

Beyond advertisements, appearances and reputation certainly mattered to Beadle. As previously mentioned, Beadle criticized his own appearance and called his life circumstances "narrow." Perhaps that struck readers as the false humility of a prideful sort. Nevertheless, the second remark at least held a grain of truth. Socially, William Beadle had always punched above his weight. Even at his most comfortable, his circumstances paled by comparison to many of his friends; he was never close to the life of a big-city merchant with a townhouse, country home, London furniture, carriage, and

⁵² On ads as performance that could create demand as part of the new middling class consumer revolution see Carl Robert Keyes, "Early American Advertising: Marketing and Consumer Culture in Eighteenth-century Philadelphia" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2007); Richard L. Bushman "Shopping and Advertising in Colonial America," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), especially 235; Breen *The Marketplace of Revolution*, especially 55; Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, eds., *The Birth of a Consumer Society: Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). Examples of other poetry include the following: *Connecticut Journal*, Jan. 1, 1668 and *Connecticut Courant*, April 18, 1780.

all the accoutrements of that life. It is easy to forget that the term “merchant” could mask vast differences of station. William Beadle, at the end of the day, was a shopkeeper. He was dependent on his better-off friends and the wholesalers or large traders he crossed paths with (men like Verstelle, Jeffrey, Colt, and Wadsworth). Beadle’s merchant status was always aspirational. As a shopkeeper, his aspirations might have looked upward, but when times were hard, shopkeeper was a status that could easily devolve into peddler.⁵³

Beadle lived in ways clearly designed to mask this tenuous position. His posturing as an Enlightenment gentleman played into the increasingly widespread idea of the merchant as a bookish, scientific sort who could perform a valuable social role both in terms of business and general knowledge. More specifically, in Fairfield, he was probably right alongside Thaddeus Burr when the latter came under public attack in the local paper for relying on wealth to gain influence unwarranted by his abilities. In Wethersfield, according to Mitchell, Beadle was quite the social host. Perhaps the exotic goods that filled out some of his earliest advertisements disappeared in acts of hospitality toward his social betters. Mitchell reported that even after his fortunes declined, Beadle “kept up the outward appearance” and “to the last entertained...with his usual decent hospitality.” In their final months at least, the Beadle family had suffered under a strict budget to ensure William could avoid “the mortification of being thought by his friends

⁵³ On the costs of a rich merchant lifestyle, see Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: “The People,” the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 57. On paying attention to the differences too often hidden by “merchant,” see Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, 2-4, 265.

poor and dependent.” He had, Mitchell noted, a “former affluence.” When affluence vanished, so too did status.⁵⁴

Beadle and others spoke in ways that highlighted a concern with lost status. In his earliest and longest letter, Beadle emphasized his socio-economic decline in terms that rendered acceptance of such a fate unthinkable. When he complained that his inferiors had risen above him and thus might laugh at him, he insisted one could not tolerate such a fate without becoming “meaner than meanness itself.” The successful merchant was someone; the fallen merchant was only an object of ridicule and contempt. According to Beadle, this was especially true if those doing the laughing were, in reality, inferior. It was no small criticism to accuse such a person of being “meaner than meanness itself.” At that time, “meanness” had connotations of stinginess and inferiority or smallness of person, appearance, and character. Beadle, as already mentioned, was insecure on these counts. He expressed pure disdain for anyone who would so succumb and ended his opinion saying he hoped such a fallen person would “have ten years added to his natural life to punish him for his folly” of allowing the lower sort to criticize him. Others suffering displacement and financial hardship during the war used less vindictive, but equally anguished, tones when describing their situations. Letter after letter that reached Governor Trumbull and the Council of Safety spoke of families left “destitute.” In almost formulaic fashion, many of the petitioners used the charged language of being

⁵⁴ On the role of the business professional as an Enlightenment figure who took a scientific approach to business and the world around him, see Hook, “Professional Ethics and Commercial Rationality” and Harkness, “Accounting for Science.” Beadle qtd. In Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*. [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7. For the incident involving Burr, see *Connecticut Journal*, May, 19, 1769 and June 16, 1769.

“embarrassed” at their neediness. Whether it was Beadle refusing assistance or others entreating the state of Connecticut, neediness clearly evinced chagrin.⁵⁵

In the Wethersfield of William Beadle, this loss of status was not simply abstract. Beadle and his neighbors would have seen the consequences to reputation and practical life all around them. If significant enough, a fledgling business, paltry harvest, or reckless investment might lead to the legal appointment of an overseer. Throughout the 1770s, the Wethersfield selectmen and other esteemed gentlemen—including Beadle’s friends and merchant peers—routinely assumed financial control of those in a downward spiral. For example, in February 1773, just as Beadle arrived in town, selectmen Elisha Williams and Josiah Robbins put one David Belding under the watch of an overseer. As the legal document explained, the selectmen had “inspected into the affairs and Management” of Belding and found him “reduced to want” due to “Idleness[,] Mismanagement and bad Husbandry.” For the coming year, Belding was to have no legal right to make contracts without the approval of the overseer. This was a fate diametrically opposed to Beadle’s idea of the merchant free to enter contracts, strike bargains, move at will, and think for himself. It was a public reckoning of one’s failure. It may even prove more than temporary. The town records of the 1770s are full of cases where selectmen renewed the overseer’s authority after a year.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Portions of the Beadle lines are in Stiles, but the full passage is in [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7. GCSR is full of the “embarrassment” petitions. On the idea of embarrassment in general, see Ditz, “Shipwrecked: or, Masculinity Imperiled.”

⁵⁶ David Belding Overseer Document, Town Records of Wethersfield, Box 7, CSL. This and other boxes are full of similar records. For a general study of the role of communal control and discipline on the New England economy see Levy, *Town Born*.

Similarly, Beadle and his neighbors would have no illusion about the fate of dependents when it came to delinquent patriarchs. While an overseer was to rescue an adult male “reduced to want,” indenture might await the children. From the settling of the New England colonies, town leaders had routinely removed children from households as they saw fit. Thousands of children, some in infancy, were sent to various households, never to return home. While moral or religious reasons, strictly speaking, might lie behind such decisions, the economics of work played a large role, too. There was, the town patriarchs thought, too much work to be done for children to idle away in households unable or unwilling to make full use of their labor potential. In the years of the Revolution, some New England men took advantage of the system and used such child labor instead of buying slaves or paying wages to workers. It also freed their children for leisure. That type of arrangement remained the exception. Nevertheless, removed children could expect strenuous work in a new environment without necessarily receiving the benefits of a more lucrative household. Even the most ardent Sons of Liberty seemed willing to take a little advantage of the situation. Samuel Adams wrote James Warren in spring 1772 asking for help “in procuring for me a Boy” to be kept until age 14. Adams noted that he would provide some education at home because he would not be able to “spare him the time to attend School.” The Beadle family themselves, of course, knew something about the system. After all, the young girl Beadle sent with the letter to Farnsworth on December 11 was almost certainly in their household as part of this type of arrangement.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ On this regime of child labor, see Levy, *Town Born*, 237-262. On men using children in place of slaves, see 250. For the Adams and Warren exchange, including the Adams quotes, see 249.

William Beadle probably assumed his children would meet the same fate were he to take his own life while leaving them alive. Sending out was extremely common on the death of a parent. Recall, for instance, that Lydia Lothrop, the future Lydia Beadle, and her siblings had left their mother's home in Plymouth after their father had died. The Lothrops might have freely chosen to send the children to the household of their uncle in Fairfield, but in many cases, families had little say. For example, in June 1779, the Wethersfield selectmen, a group that then included Colonel John Chester, placed four-year-old Mary Davis as an apprentice to Josiah and Meliscent Francis. According to the selectmen's report, Mary's father Samuel had just died and her mother Hannah was "unable competently to provide for her." Until she turned eighteen, then, Mary was to "faithfully...serve" the Francis family in "all lawful Business." This was not uncommon. Perhaps the unnamed servant girl in the Beadle household at the time of the murders was under a similar indenture. Typically, selectmen placed orphans in households within town. Nevertheless, a regional market for orphan labor did exist in New England; some were sent away from the only area they knew. Like the appointment of an overseer, it was one more way for the community to exert control and, more to the point at hand, effectively pronounce a loss of status for the head of a household.⁵⁸

Given his very public role as a merchant and his friendships with many of the men entrusted with these decisions, Beadle likely saw the potentially shameful

⁵⁸ Mary Davis Overseer Document, Town Records of Wethersfield, Box 7, CSL. Other boxes are full of similar records. On the servant girl in the Beadle household, it is difficult to say for certain. Beadle's probate include £6 "Allowance to Mary Warner for the fulfilling her indentures" (see Beadle Probate Record). I have not tracked down that name or come across any indication of the maid's name. On the practice in general, again see Levy, *Town Born*, 237-262. Remarks about the regional market for such labor are on 254.

consequences often. Mitchell, recall, suggested his old friend would have been mortified at being seen as “dependent.” Timothy Dwight later recalled that a close friend, possibly Mitchell, had offered Beadle a loan of any amount to see his family through the war, yet Beadle had refused, a decision Dwight attributed to pride. In the long letter to Chester, Beadle imagined an interlocutor asking why he did not just take his own life but spare the lives of Lydia and the children. Part of Beadle’s reply overlapped with the logic and language of the overseer and indenture documents: I have failed them, Beadle acknowledged, and so I send them to God, to “better hands.” In the context of a war economy with so many families struggling, Beadle’s feeble attempt at invoking divine aid must have struck someone like Mitchell to the core. Beadle could not stand the idea of being laughed at or found publicly wanting with the assignment of an overseer or the indenturing of his children, yet he implicitly acknowledged it was exactly what was needed: “better hands” than his own.⁵⁹

Some of the men Beadle feared were laughing at him were potentially lucrative business contacts. Not every merchant was created equal, and Beadle had some connection to men of higher status. While Beadle publicly claimed that his no-credit policy would lessen the importance of reputation and status when it came to business, he must have appreciated the attention and opportunity well-known figures could leverage. In 1773, for example, he stepped right into the premises vacated by the wealthy London merchant Peter Verstillle. However much Verstillle’s reputation might have suffered from the non-importation scandal of Christmas 1769, he was a well-known businessman with a

⁵⁹ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7; Dwight, *Travels in New England*, 1: 231; “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 175.

well-known store. Beadle was connected to Verstillle by more than the house they each occupied: the Mitchell family did business with Verstillle before Beadle arrived, and Stephen Mix Mitchell appears to have maintained the business relationship even after other local notables, merchant Silas Deane among them, had driven Verstillle from town.⁶⁰

Beadle does seem to have entered normal business relations with the upper crust of Wethersfield society. His home and shop abutted land owned by prominent families like the Webbs, Deanes, and Mitchells. The friendships with Mitchell and Chester were no small feat and could only have helped him financially. Beadle's probate shows open accounts with other well-established area gentlemen whose family names—Wells, Webb, Robbins, and Riley—would have been familiar to all Wethersfieldians. Beadle even had a very small open account with Peter Vandervoort, a New York merchant immersed in the entire region's trading networks. Vandervoort, who spent part of the war years in Hartford, routinely dealt in figures over £1,000 pounds and corresponded with traders Beadle knew, including Verstillle. Beadle's balance was only a little over three pounds, but it might still be the case that Vandervoort was a primary wholesaler for Beadle.

Perhaps Beadle had worked to keep the account balance even.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Verstillle Family Correspondence, Folder 5, CHS contains numerous letters between Peter Verstillle and Stephen Mix Mitchell on topics that include settling accounts between the two men and their families. Peter Verstillle's probate, which included a settling of account with Mitchell, also goes some way to showing how much larger his enterprise was than Beadle's. Beadle's probate was 3 documents totaling 15 pages; Verstillle's was 24 documents totaling 54 pages. Additionally, he had a balance with Hayley and Hopkins of London for £1230. For Verstillle's probate: Peter Verstillle Probate, Hartford Probate District Packets 1641-1880, Reel 606, CSL.

⁶¹ Beadle's neighbors can be found in the 1766 land sale entry by which Peter Verstillle took ownership of the property: July 8, 1766 John Keith to Peter Verstillle, Wethersfield Land Records, Vol. 12, p. 508. For amounts of Beadle accounts, see Beadle Probate Record. The information about Vandervoort is

Ironically, Beadle reached his highest status socially—though not financially—not long before his death. His aforementioned tenure with Wadsworth, Jeffrey, and Colt came just six months or so before he plotted murder. Beadle flirted with the upper echelon of regional trade, which says something about the status he had maintained. It is impossible to say exactly how or when the relationship between Beadle and the Wadsworth circle began, but it outlasted Beadle himself. In a flurry of December 1782 letters, Jeffrey alerted Colt and Wadsworth of the murders. To Colt he promised Barnabas Deane would soon write “respecting the matters you left in Beadle’s hand,” which, Jeffrey squeezed in the margin after the fact, “are all safe.” Months later, when Isaac Lothrop and Stephen Mix Mitchell settled Beadle’s probate, Colt received a small amount of money and goods.⁶²

What does a trip to Boston and a handful of letters that mention William Beadle mean? For the story of William Beadle specifically, it further demonstrates the fickle nature of status among Atlantic merchants. Beadle was keeping books for Colt; Colt, from 1781, had been keeping books for Wadsworth; Wadsworth was well on his way to being the richest man in the state. Beadle, then, had made connections. Beyond the friendships with Thaddeus Burr, Stephen Mix Mitchell, John Chester, and other luminaries, William Beadle had also forged notable business relationships. Those connections raised Beadle up but failed to save him.

culled from Shaw Papers—the correspondence between them is widespread throughout the records. On Vandervoort’s correspondence with Verstile, see Peter Verstile to Peter Vandervoort, January 1771, Peter Verstile Account Books 1749-1780, Letterbook 1765-1777, CHS.

⁶² John Jeffrey to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 13 December 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 11; John Jeffrey to Peter Colt, 16 December 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 11; Beadle Probate Record.

These connections also opened up Beadle, provincial storekeeper, to new lines of business. He was no longer just selling goods from the storefront attached to his home. No, he was traveling to Boston as agent for a wealthy operation. He was engaged in privateering ventures. He handled the affairs of prominent men, even settling accounts for Colt who was presumably so engrossed by Wadsworth's business that he could no longer keep an eye on his own private affairs. It must have all seemed fitting to gentlemen around town who knew Beadle as a peripatetic merchant with a background in the London court and the governor's household in Barbados. It also demonstrated that the war might be other than a financial disaster. Beadle had watched his goods dwindle and his stockpile of cash grow worthless, but Wadsworth and company made war profitable. Hitched to them, Beadle had a chance to recover, and he seemed aware of it: the September exchange with John Jeffrey insinuated that William Beadle saw the movement of Wadsworth and the French army of Rochambeau attached to his own success.⁶³

As was so often the case in the Atlantic world, however, Beadle's opportunities always carried failure with them. He might rise with prominent friends, but if those highs did not become normal for him personally, they could reveal new lows. He might invite customers old and new after reaping the relative bounty of the *Fire Brand*, but that supply did not last. Nothing in the probate suggests he had much left. While the spring correspondence described Beadle as outfitting the *Fire Brand* for a subsequent voyage, he does not seem to have remained a part of the enterprise. He may have been keeping the books for Colt, but that was clearly not the £500 a year job Peter Colt had keeping

⁶³ Shadrach Osborne to John Jeffrey, 14 August 1782, Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers 1782-1789, DLAR; John Jeffrey to William Beadle, 7 September 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 8.

Wadsworth's books. He may have been interested in the marching orders of Wadsworth and the army, but if the army did not march his way, it was to no avail. In an operation the size of Wadsworth's, William Beadle remained an expendable cog.⁶⁴

It was more than just a failure of the bottom line. These were disappointments of a personal nature, a reminder that middling status might disappear as easily as a deal might go someone else's way. If a mission to Boston or a stint keeping books offered someone like Beadle a new lifeline, the end of the assignment might still spell personal disappointment. That personal disappointment might evolve into bitterness. In his so-called will, Beadle decried all those who had voted to depreciate the currency; many like Wadsworth had made money off it. In the same document, Beadle went on to affirm his support for the Revolution, but he also aligned his family with all those who had suffered and died because of it. Beadle, of course, was grasping for justifications, but the fact that he grasped at the Revolution was telling: the war, he believed, ruined his business, and his last chance at a reprieve fizzled out alongside temporary partners who had made fortunes off privateering and the commissariat. Perhaps they were the "mear wretches" Beadle pledged not to submit to.⁶⁵

Beadle's relationship to Wadsworth's operation also points out a more general fickleness to the status of merchants in the Atlantic world. William Beadle was both in and out when it came to larger players like Wadsworth. There he was in the spring and summer of 1782 working on behalf of Wadsworth and associates, but he was never really

⁶⁴ Beadle Probate Record; Jeremiah Wadsworth and John Carter to Peter Colt, 30 December 1781, copy, William Beadle Research File, Box 2, WHS.

⁶⁵ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 180-181; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7.

one of them. For example, it was clear when Jeffrey wrote to Wadsworth with news of the murders, that the former did not truly expect the latter to know who William Beadle was. When first addressing Beadle by name, Jeffrey added the descriptor “of Wethersfield” to help Wadsworth along. He did not refer to Beadle’s role in their business. He did mention business, of course, when writing of the murders to Colt. In that letter, it is clear he expected Colt to know the murderer by name (at least), but even so, it was not personal. He promised the business was in order and then moved on to other commercial matters without even a segue. In both letters, Jeffrey sounded shocked by the murders—as indeed every one was—but not touched by them in the way of a close Beadle associate like Mitchell. He wrote numerous other letters the same week—some even the same day—without mention of the tragedy. He had already moved on by the time he wrote Colt again the next week. Wadsworth wrote back to Jeffrey within days but made no mention of anything Beadle-related.⁶⁶

Not only was Beadle expendable when it came to Wadsworth, Jeffries, and Colt, but he also never fully broke into the elite ranks of Connecticut merchants more generally. In fact, he seems to have remained outside certain trading circles one would have expected to find him racing toward. He never developed a lasting relationship with Peter Verstelle, despite Verstelle’s friendship with the Mitchells. Verstelle even overcame the tarnish of the importation affair enough to continue selling from Hartford, but there is

⁶⁶ John Jeffrey to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 13 December 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 11; John Jeffrey to Peter Colt, 16 December 1782, Jeffrey Correspondence, CHS, Folder 11.

no indication Beadle worked with Verstelle.⁶⁷ Similarly, as previously mentioned, William Beadle failed to engage Nathaniel and Thomas Shaw, two brothers from New London whose family name carried great economic and political weight throughout Connecticut. Nearly everyone Beadle knew, might have known, or might have traded with, appears in the voluminous Shaw family business records and correspondence. Men from Wethersfield bought shares in their privateering ventures and wrote them to ask favors for their friends. At various times, they were even involved with the *Fire Brand*. It would have been hard for Beadle to operate as a merchant in Fairfield, Stratford, or Derby without crossing their path. Wethersfield residents traded with them as well, but Beadle, it appears, did not.⁶⁸

Even when Beadle did trade with notable names in Wethersfield and beyond, the amounts were trifling. Probate documents show balances with a number of notable merchants including, not surprisingly Colonel John Chester and his brother Leonard; Peter Vandervoort, the wholesale New York merchant who removed to Hartford during the war; and Joseph Webb, whose home, which Beadle likely would have visited, was known locally as “Hospitality Hall” and had hosted the famous Wethersfield rendezvous between Washington and Rochambeau. In all cases, however, the amounts were relatively insignificant, a few pounds here and there. The case was not altogether different with Peter Colt, the Wadsworth emissary for whom Beadle handled the books

⁶⁷ Beadle does not appear in any of the existing Verstelle family records aside from the aforementioned time that Verstelle wished him well (to a third party) upon moving into his old store.

⁶⁸ For an example of letters to the Shaws that mention people Willam Beadle knew, see Shaw papers, Reel 13, Packet 90, doc. 5277. For the *Fire Brand*, see Reel 17, Packet 123, docs. 7899-7913.

throughout the summer of 1782. John Jeffrey had sought to assure his friend Colt that his property was safe after the murders, but the probate suggests it was on a level that would hardly worry the likes of Colt and Jeffrey. The estate paid Colt £8 and turned over £2.6 worth of unspecified “Sundries” that belonged to Colt but had been in Beadle’s temporary possession.⁶⁹

Beadle may have been close to the powerful, but it is likely they did not even see him as worthy of the name merchant. As merchants became more plentiful and visible, many looked to reserve the term for specific kinds of businessmen. Dictionaries and popular business manuals increasingly reserved the term “merchant” for wholesalers in the import/export trade with a noticeable reverence for those in overseas commerce. Lesser businessmen more often found themselves labeled traders, retailers, and shopkeepers. Much of the print material documenting that change came from England, and it had reached Beadle’s Wethersfield by 1782. The first newspaper accounts of the murders referred to Beadle’s business as “that of a trader.” His friend Mitchell said his business was “retailing.” Even when he described Beadle as having a “handsome assortment of goods” on hand, he qualified the praise: it was handsome “for a country store.”⁷⁰

Whatever Jeffrey, Colt, and company thought of him, however they would have referred to him, it was clear Beadle worried about not getting his due respect. He was in and out of the gentlemanly circles in Wethersfield, felt the need to keep up appearances,

⁶⁹ Beadle Probate Record.

⁷⁰ On the changing definition and use of merchant, see Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 9-10; Perry Gauci, *Emporium of the World: The Merchants of London 1660-1800* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 1-2. *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782. [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6-7.

and even called on preeminent men to handle his posthumous affairs. Some like Mitchell obliged; others like Chester seem to have declined. Status anxiety played a major role in the Beadle tragedy, but it was a matter for all the mercantile men looking to make good in the Atlantic world.

Currency

For all his self-congratulatory philosophizing and disdain for traditional Christianity, William Beadle was most derisive when it came to the Continental currency and those who had supported its depreciation. In the so-called will left for Colonel Chester, Beadle lamented having nothing but “a parcel of Continental Trash.” According to Mitchell and later commentators, Beadle had, unwisely or at least stubbornly, hoarded the Continental dollars, refusing to divest the earnings out of capricious hope even as their value plummeted. By the time he wrote the will, the bills were useless. The irony was surely not lost on William. This “parcel of Continental Trash,” Beadle informed Chester, “cost me from first to last Twelve hundred pounds.” That figure might have been imprecise, but it was surely not arbitrary: £1,200, recall, was the amount of property Beadle supposedly brought to Wethersfield; the “Continental Trash,” Beadle thus implied, had cost him everything he had managed to string together during his Atlantic sojourns.⁷¹

His philosophical rejection of free will to the contrary, he did not think all were blameless in the matter. Above anyone, the guilty individuals were the assemblymen who

⁷¹ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6-7; Dwight, *Travels in New England*, 1: 227-228; *Newport Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1783.

had transformed precious Continental dollars into parcels of “Continental Trash.” They had, he seemed to think, turned his commercial dreams into garbage. For that, they should pay: Beadle implored “Heaven that the temporal interest of each Man that voted for the Depreciation of that Money...may sink in exact proportion that those have done thro’ their Means.”⁷²

Beadle of course wrote those words as a self-serving exercise, but however horrific his actions, it is worth imagining how devastating it must have been to watch the currency plummet day by day. William Beadle’s currency problems, however, were not limited to the depreciated continentals, and Beadle was not alone in fretting over his cash flow. The vagaries of currency—its form, its availability, and its value—plagued nearly everyone in the Atlantic world. The men and women of Beadle’s New England, amid Revolution and war, felt the negative repercussions of those vagaries acutely. Currency, like so many other financial products at the time, offered chances for innovation, and historians have, on the whole, found colonial-era policy to be more successful than previously thought. Nevertheless, the men and women of Beadle’s world complained incessantly about their currency woes. To individuals and families, overgeneralizations about successful monetary policy would have meant little when faced with acute shortages of currency or irremediable inflation. While cash problems always involve the bottom line to some degree, here the emphasis is more on the emotional toll these currency problems exacted.⁷³

⁷² “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 180.

⁷³ Calomiris, “Institutional Failure, Monetary Scarcity, and the Depreciation of the Continental.” For the shift from older views that saw inflation as handing debtors the upper hand to newer views that see

Currency was a worry for everyone. Even before the Revolution, it was a regular imperial and domestic political issue. Americans always felt money was scarce, and Britain's prohibitions against the colonies printing money aggravated the matter. Always already an imperial political issue, partisans within the colonies were also usually engaged in political disputes for and against various currency and banking schemes at home. Paper money strategists envisioned a robust, expanding economy and abundant opportunities for all. By the time Beadle reached Connecticut, the Currency Act had thrust disagreements over paper money to the forefront of the imperial crisis' taxation issues as colonial governments navigated the money-scarce, depressed economy following the Seven Years' War. By the late 1760s, Connecticut felt the strain acutely. The Sugar Act had made smuggling more risky and authorized trade less rewarding, resulting in more bills of credit disappearing to cover bills of exchange that colonial traders had drawn on English loans during the credit boom. The fight over whether Connecticut and her colonial neighbors could issue more bills continued. By the outbreak of Revolution, most had been issuing bills again. At the time of the Declaration of Independence, some eight million dollars in various paper currencies circulated among

policies as more successful, see Sheridan, "The Domestic Economy," 72. See also, E. James Ferguson, "Currency Finance: An Interpretation of the Colonial Monetary Practices," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3, no. 10 (1953): 153-180 and Leslie V. Brock, *The Currency of the American Colonies, 1700-1764* (New York: Ayer Co Publishing, 1975). On the problems of overgeneralizing, see the same and also Robert Craig West, "Money in the Colonial American Economy," *Economic Inquiry* 16 (1978): 1-15. On innovations paired with incessant complaining, Cathy D. Matson, "A House of Many Mansions: Some Thoughts on the Field of Economic History," in *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions*, ed. Cathy D. Matson (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 33.

the states with a high proportion settling in New England in no small part because Connecticut's role in supplying the army made the region a magnet for money.⁷⁴

Even in Connecticut, however, William Beadle and his neighbors faced currency woes. Well before the downfall of the continentals, Beadle had a currency problem, or so he believed. Ironically, that currency problem began precisely because Beadle pinned his hopes on currency to mitigate the unreliability of credit. It was a type of innovation that historians have noted in a period when war and the consequences of war sowed distrust of government policy among ordinary people. In his first advertisement, Beadle had promised his cash-only scheme would obviate "the Difficulties and Inconveniencies" of credit. It may have guarded the peripatetic Beadle from customers unable to pay any time soon or traders ever ready to disappear without settling accounts. As inflexible policy, however, it put William Beadle at the mercy of the money supply, and the money supply was nearly always short.⁷⁵

Almost from the start, Beadle's advertisements exposed the predicament of his no-credit disposition. Just a year after he opened in Wethersfield, just a few months after he had reiterated his "no trust" policy in print, Beadle nearly begged for cash in the back pages of the *Courant*. After a customary list of the goods on hand, an April 1774 ad announced, "Said Beadle wants to purchase directly, four or five hundred Dollars." He promised to release the best of his goods at the best possible price in exchange. In an

⁷⁴ Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 11-12; Newell, *From Dependency to Independence*, especially 238 and 310; Ernst, *Money and Politics*, chapter 4 and 241-242.

⁷⁵ On those innovations born of distrust, see Matson, "A House of Many Mansions," 33. Beadle advertisement is *Connecticut Courant*, April 20, 1773.

almost comical retreat from his opening offer, Beadle immediately clarified that if no individual would part with so much, he would gladly contract with four or five persons at one hundred apiece. Even there, Beadle appeared skeptical of success. He was, he admitted in the next line, willing to “take them in fifties, twenties, tens, fives, or even down to one.” Dollars were important. Beadle wanted them so specifically, so badly, that he ended his ad basically saying he would take them in any denomination he could get.⁷⁶

Over the next few years, Beadle’s advertisements echoed this lack of currency. In one instance, he boasted of a replenished stock only to admit “I cannot afford to Pay the Printer for telling you” all the items. Even if a gimmick penned with a wink, it was likely true under the circumstance. Another time, as if he knew currency were a lost cause, Beadle looked to barter goose feathers, tea, and rice for, respectively, wood, butter and cheese, and grain. More generally, throughout the decade, Beadle’s advertised available merchandise almost certainly fluctuated in accordance with his cash on hand. Several factors contributed to a merchant’s ability to replenish his stock. Without cash, however, Beadle’s hands were tied.⁷⁷

Beadle’s unceasing scramble for currency was ironic, for his no-credit policy was meant to assuage the anxieties of hypothetical currency. To trade on credit was to rely on currency materializing in the right place at the right time somewhere down the line. According to Mix Mitchell, that was a risk William Beadle had entertained prior to his arrival in Wethersfield. Why did he change his policy? It is impossible to say for sure, but

⁷⁶ *Connecticut Courant*, April 12, 1774.

⁷⁷ *Connecticut Courant*, May 1, 1775; *Connecticut Courant*, Oct. 13, 1778

Mitchell does provide a clue in saying his old friend wished “to keep his property within his own reach, believing it always secure while his eye was upon it.” Perhaps someone had burned a trusting William Beadle during his ten years in Stratford, Derby, and Fairfield.⁷⁸

It may not even have taken a bankruptcy or dishonest borrower to persuade William and others to keep their currency close at hand. The credit system relied on buyers and sellers performing a juggling act amid the constant moving of goods and people, all in the midst of war. Newspapers everywhere brimmed with notices that accounts were due. Whether hyperbolic or understated, the language made the anxiety of it all palpable. Whole columns in the *Connecticut Courant* were routinely filled with obituaries calling on all creditors and debtors to come settle the books with the deceased’s executors. Merchants looking to move on or replenish their stores begged, cajoled, or threatened customers to make good on earlier purchases. One Robert Hazard of Wethersfield, for example, having politely informed his customers that “circumstances being so altered” as to necessitate leaving town, asked “all those indebted to him by book, note or bond, to settle the same immediately.” On the same page, the same Hazard, listed under his new address, was trying to settle the estate of someone else. Beadle’s own friends and neighbors suffered the same headaches. Wethersfield merchant Alexander Fraser, eager to leave the state altogether, veiled his request for former customers to pay up as his looking to spare them future hassle. Joseph Webb, whose home Beadle might have visited with the likes of Mix Mitchell, struggled to settle both his late fathers’ estate and the books of his friend Silas Deane, then in Paris on behalf of

⁷⁸ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6.

the Continental Congress. Such appeals often masked threats with politeness. Webb, for example, reminded “those in arrear” they would not have “a better or more easy time to make payment” to Deane and then let slip that in the future, “these old tedious accounts” might require action “truly disagreeable” to all.⁷⁹

Similarly, private correspondence among merchants teemed with worries over who had hard money at different times and different places and who could part with various amounts. Webs of credit and debt interconnected merchants. Debtors pled bad circumstances; creditors sighed about their longsuffering. No less than Governor Trumbull begged off sending money to creditors because those who owed him had gone bankrupt, leaving him in a currency lurch. In response, his creditors reminded him how patient they had been and called his honor into question. During the rough patch surrounding his alleged improprieties, Peter Verstelle sent his brother partial payment as a good faith effort at keeping things okay between them. One creditor might shrug his shoulders at having wrongly assumed the local blacksmith would always have business and thus cash; another might wring his hands over rumors that his recent debtor was a known “shuffler” who “parts with Money with utmost reluctance.” Letters often noted feelings of “great damage” or “disappointment” at a lack of payment. If a merchant was desperate enough, he might start writing to a debtor’s friends. Down the street from Beadle, Silas Deane received a letter from a New York merchant asking him to run “kind Interference” on Joseph Webb for £533 borrowed two years before. The story was similar, though with higher stakes, at the levels of state finance. Those involved with

⁷⁹ *Connecticut Courant*, Feb. 10, 1777; Jan. 20, 1777; March, 24, 1777.

Wadsworth in the supplying of the military begged one another for currency. Henry Champion, for example, assured Beadle's contact John Jeffrey that he would be arriving in Hartford soon but would be unable to leave until someone got him £1,000. A few months later, a Philadelphia merchant wrote directly to Wadsworth that Peter Colt had just drained his entire reserve of 12,000 dollars.⁸⁰

At times, it even seemed like there was no hard money to be had anywhere, from anyone. Whether individuals, trading firms, or government officials, many in and around Beadle's Connecticut implored one another for currency while apologizing for its scarcity. Just as Beadle arrived in Wethersfield one local merchant griped, "money is very scarce among us and difficult to be had." Not long before the murders, a Hartford trader gave Jeremiah Wadsworth the bad news that "the Circulation of paper money amongst us has Ceased for some time past." Officials in Connecticut, Continental Congress delegates, and militia regiments variously wrote of being "distressed" or "destitute" of hard currency. Regiments stayed put or hospitals remained unfinished while correspondents assured the governor that the incessant demands on the treasury were inconceivable.⁸¹

⁸⁰ On Trumbull, see most of the letters in Jonathan Trumbull, Sr. Papers, I. Correspondence, Box 3, CHS. On Verstelle, see Peter Verstelle to Brother, 18 August 1770, Peter Verstelle Account Books, Letterbook, 1765-1777, CHS. On Deane, see Philip Livingstone to Silas Deane, 21 August 1775, Silas Deane Papers, Correspondence 1753-1795, Box 1, Folder 19, CHS. On Champion and Colt, see Henry Champion to John Jeffrey, 24 February 178, and John Chaloner to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 9 September 1782, both in Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers 1782-1789, DLAR. For the rest of the incidents mentioned in the paragraph, see Stephen Mears to Peter Verstelle, 6 July 1773, Verstelle Family Correspondence 1754-1854, Folder 5, CHS; Manuel Josephson to Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., 24 January 1777, Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. Papers, Correspondence, Volume 3, CHS.

⁸¹ Solomon Welles to Peter Verstelle, 11 August 1773, Verstelle Family Papers, CHS; [] to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 19 February 1782, Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers 1782-1789, DLAR; Oliver Walcott, Sr. to Matthew Griswold, 9 March 1776, Oliver Walcott Sr. Papers, DLAR; Connecticut Light Infantry to the Committee from the Army, [] April 1783, American Revolution Collection 1776-1786, III. Pay Table

With money in such demand, amid what amounted to civil war, counterfeiting proved an additional layer of anxiety in Beadle's Connecticut. The newspapers reported incidents of counterfeiters at work. When Continental dollars began circulating, Trumbull and his legislature quickly passed a law to punish its counterfeiting. Patriots worried that British partisans had produced bogus currency and were advertising its sale. Ezekiel Williams, sheriff at the time of the Beadle murders, had his hands full on this front as Commissary of Prisoners. He was under orders not to let any British prisoners send away for money, lest they flood the local economy with fraudulent bills. A letter from Valley Forge tipped him off that a recently arrived Colonel Barton must have received counterfeit money because the prisoner had left the Pennsylvania camp empty handed. Currency woes became exaggerated when one could not even be sure the currency at hand was real.⁸²

Those who did acquire money suffered from the same depreciation worries that left Beadle raging at his "parcel of Continental Trash." Connecticut soldiers who managed to get paid were sometimes left with Continental dollars so devalued they implored the state to grant them confiscated estates; the state, unable to sell many of the estates, often consented. One Fairfield resident named William Wheeler recorded in his diary that locals composed a song about the neighbor whose inheritance only bought her some cloth for her headdress due to deflation. It was common, Wheeler noted, to see

Records, Box 3, Folder A, CHS. GCSR is full of petitioners using "destitute." GCSR and Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. Papers, Correspondence, Volume 2, CHS are full of regiments, suppliers, hospital builders, etc. unable to move forward due to lack of currency.

⁸² *Connecticut Courant*, July 6, 1773; Counterfeiting Bill, 21 October 1776, Jonathan Trumbull, Sr. Papers, III. Sermon Notes, Memo Books, Diaries, Box 10, Folder 3, CHS; Elias Boudinot to Ezekiel Williams, [] December 1777, Ezekiel Williams Papers (Photocopies) Prisoners 1774-1789, CHS.

families ruined once a thousand dollar savings dropped in value to twenty-five dollars. Even those higher up the social ladder complained. Governor Trumbull grumbled about it in his correspondence, often wondering what the Congress would do. On one side, merchants fretted that even a delay of a single day in closing a deal was tantamount to throwing money away because of deflation. On the other side, debtors tried to use devalued currency to their advantage much to the chagrin of merchants. Nathaniel Shaw urged an associate to prosecute a Boston man who had borrowed £20 in sugar from Shaw but, once the debt came due, paid with devalued currency without making up the difference. Beadle and his neighbors would have seen one story after another on the topic in the *Connecticut Courant*. As early as 1778, an essay there complained about the poor chances of anyone ever receiving the nominal values of their bills. The fledgling continentals plagued everyone.⁸³

Some vented less about the currency itself and more about just how anxious everyday Americans seemed about it. In late 1779, Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., son of the governor, wrote to Samuel Huntington, the Connecticut politician then serving as president of the Continental Congress, on the matter. Trumbull was flabbergasted at his countrymen's inability to settle into paper currency. He believed that a fixed standard of value and a shift in perspective would suit everyone: "If we could...realize our Paper

⁸³ For soldiers, see GCSR doc. 50, 88. The Wheeler story is in Elizabeth Hubbell Schenck, *The History of Fairfield, Fairfield County, Connecticut* (New York: [], 1905), 409-410. For Trumbull, see Jonathan Trumbull to the Honorable Delegates from Connecticut in Congress, 24 September 1777, Jonathan Trumbull Sr. Papers, I. Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 2, CHS. On Shaw, see John Erving to Nathaniel Shaw, 30 July 1778, Nathaniel and Thomas Shaw Papers 1755-1799, Reel 2, Item 334, DLAR; Nathaniel Shaw to James Lowell, 31 January 1781, Nathaniel and Thomas Shaw Papers 1755-1799, Reel 5, Packet 24, Item 1535, DLAR. For newspaper examples, see *Connecticut Courant*, May 12, 1777; Dec. 2, 1777; Oct. 2, 1779; Dec. 21, 1779. The newspaper essay is *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 15, 1778.

Currency to be what it only is, a *Substitute*, a *Credit*, and use it as such, we should in a great Measure cure the Malady we so much complain under.” Alas, he admitted, resolution seemed unlikely; people could not get their minds around it.⁸⁴

Even more, one need not be a murderer like William Beadle to disparage the bills or cast blame in the most scornful terms. In early 1781, as the Continental Congress still hoped the new issue of continentals would hold up, one state official wrote Trumbull and the Council of Safety requesting the state trade the continentals for Connecticut bills as no one proved willing to take the worthless continentals anymore. One Connecticut resident wrote that the currency was “no Better than oak leaves & fit for nothing But Bum Fodder.” Ebenezer Huntington, brother-in-law of Beadle’s friend Colonel John Chester and half-brother of Jedediah Huntington, son-in-law of the governor, scoffed at any who would call America “a Land of Plenty” when “Money is good for nothing.” Like Beadle, Huntington thought unworthy men were rising to the top of the social ladder. He specifically castigated speculators as the cause. For such “Rascalls,” Ebenezer wrote his brother in 1780, “any thing short of Eternal Damnation would be a light Punishment for the Crime.” If anything, Ebenezer made Beadle sound tame. Wethersfield’s monster of a man had simply dreamed all those who benefited from depreciation would have ten years of suffering added to their lives.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. to Samuel Huntington, 10 December 1779, Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. Papers, Correspondence, Volume 3, CHS.

⁸⁵ [] to Jonathan Trumbull, 22 March 1781, GCSR, doc. 45; “Bum Fodder” quote is from Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 199; Ebenezer Huntington to Andrew Huntington, 8 January 1780, Jedediah Huntington Papers, Series 1, Folder 13, CHS; “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 180.

Still, Beadle was far from alone in trying to make the Continental dollars work even as the value plummeted. Whether looking to unload property or hoping to collect on debts, Hartford-area residents routinely advertised a preference for continentals in the late 1770s. Even in the spring of 1780, as continentals struggled at 1/40 of face value, a Hartford dry merchant asked for it in the *Courant*. Not long after the Beadle murders, a Hartford merchant offered an unspecified stash of continentals for sale. Perhaps William Beadle was not the only who had hoarded the bills in the hope of a rebound. Many, it seemed, knew someone who had staked their future on the continentals, only to be disappointed.⁸⁶

The hoarding made even more sense to merchants wealthy enough to risk loss for the chance of a rebound, whether through the market or a political settlement at the end of the war. Beadle perhaps fancied himself enough of a market genius to see a rise coming; he might also have assumed, through conversations with his politically savvy friends, that an American victory would result in a government appreciation of the paper money he had put his faith in. After all, the Continental Congress was already considering such an action regarding the government bonds dispensed to fund the war once the currency was worthless. By the time of the Beadle tragedy, Robert Morris had already been urging Congress to encourage speculators in the bond market, hoping that wealthy gentlemen could obtain the bonds for next-to-nothing, ride out the end of the Revolutionary storm, collect big on a government-backed scheme, and secure their

⁸⁶ For examples of ads desiring continentals, see *Connecticut Courant*, March 3, 1777; March 17, 1778; Nov. 17, 1778; March 9, 1779. For the 1780 example, see *Connecticut Courant*, April 25, 1780. For the merchant selling them after the murders, see *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 7, 1783.

rightful place at the top of the socio-economic order. In the years following the war, 90% of the bonds transferred from original holders like soldiers, farmers, and shopkeepers to wealthy speculators who could wait on a windfall.⁸⁷

For a trader who wished to deal only in hard currency, the Continental dollars must initially have seemed a real boon for William Beadle. Beadle, unwilling to trust how people might represent themselves, turned to hard currency. It was a way, perhaps, to rationalize and make uniform, financial transactions that otherwise depended too much on slippery status. He started the war with a significant allotment of goods, which he gladly sold for the new continentals. Year-by-year, those continentals revealed their illusory nature. In the end, they were only paper. Did currency really require less trust than credit?⁸⁸

Still, even as the currency started to depreciate, Beadle followed the law and continued to sell at non-inflated prices; he accepted the bills at face value. Beadle may have gained some patriotic traction with the practice, but it undid him financially. He reached a tipping point where the only option was to stubbornly hold on to the dim chance that the currency would rebound. Perhaps he hoped the Continental Congress would eventually come through with a victory settlement that would reward those who had supported their currency. Mitchell recorded that his former friend had hoarded the continentals “waiting and expecting the time would soon arrive when he might therewith

⁸⁷ Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 36-37; Bouton, *Taming Democracy*, 72-73.

⁸⁸ As David Waldstreicher has shown, worries of wealth, personal identity, and language were linked as a “crisis of representation” during the 1780s. See David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 53-107.

replace his goods, resolving not to part with it until it should be in as good a demand as when received by him.” Waiting only made his currency problems worse, and the lesson was a harsh one. That waiting coincided with the three-year period Beadle supposedly had been plotting his and his family’s end.⁸⁹

Currency, not surprisingly, outlasted William Beadle as a major political issue for Americans. In Beadle’s last years, Connecticut followed the lead of the Continental Congress in depreciating the wartime currency. Some proponents of these measures, most notably Robert Morris, hoped to get the government out of the paper money game altogether, relying instead on private banks to issue currency. For men like Morris, colonial and state governments had become too democratic, responding to public clamor for money with new rounds of bills. Private banks would answer to creditors, not the debtors or small-time shopkeepers like William Beadle. The debate was not just of interest to commercial titans like Morris. Taxpayers threw up their hands when asked to pay taxes with currency they could not get: in Rhode Island, for instance, one newspaper editorialist, referencing the biblical Israelites being forced to make bricks without straw by their Egyptian masters, wondered how Rhode Island expected citizens to pay a tax the total of which was greater than the amounts of bills circulating in the state. At the same time, by contrast, creditors, speculators, and those looking to expand their commercial reach blamed state currency emissions for deflation. Even more, they argued, credit was non-existent, whether from American or European sources, because none would lend to a country where the government bailed out debtors by printing more bills. The debate remained fierce throughout the decade following the war. Every condemnation of paper

⁸⁹ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7.

from the likes of a Philadelphia merchant who accused politicians of resorting to currency “tricks” and “Follies” to appease the masses met its counterpunch in men like Luther Martin, Maryland delegate to the Constitutional Convention, who complained that too many were wrongly “smitten with the paper money dread.” Both sides would probably have agreed that little trust remained. Paper money, after all, was as much about trust as credit always had been. The collapse of the continentals and state bills of credit eroded the people’s trust in government paper. Now men like Robert Morris wanted even to stop using land as collateral. Money was untrustworthy, but there was no cash to have anyway.⁹⁰

Statesmen regularly debated the fate of men like Beadle, and some had no sympathy. In the aforementioned letter on currency from Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., to Samuel Huntington, the governor’s son urged the Continental Congress president not to appreciate the rapidly deflating currency: “what Folly in the World,” he wrote, “can be equal to that of hoarding a Depreciating Currency? Certainly none.” It was a folly, but once committed, it became increasingly difficult to change course. Large-scale merchants like Nathaniel Shaw corresponded with associates about the daily lessening of the money’s value; similarly, Mitchell reported that Beadle felt his “expectations” that the continentals would rebound “daily lessening.” All had unraveled. Still, Beadle was not quite ready to give up on the bills or the government that might have it in its power to resuscitate them. In his so-called will, even while “greatly incensed with the public for Depreciation,” he ordered Colonel Chester to hang on to the “Continental Trash” for

⁹⁰ Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 217-222, 236; Bouton, *Taming Democracy*, 55, 65-69; Houlton, *The Unruly Origins*, 21-45, 184.

seven years and see what happens.” It was a last gasp of hope from William Beadle even as he undermined it in the same writings.⁹¹

Helpless Before the Machine

Just two months after the notable poem advertisement, William Beadle took a less jocular tone in the *Connecticut Courant*. In a terse few lines, he offered customers a rather uninspiring list of whalebone, black sewing silk, nails, and “about half a Dozen other Articles.” Just below these paltry offerings, Beadle added, “I wonder whether this ADVERTISEMENT will do any GOOD?” Icons of a pointing index finger drew attention to either side of the question. Perhaps the results of the poetical advertisement had disappointed him? However much poor sales irked Beadle, it is hard to spin this cranky addendum as a reasonable response. It was more insulting than inviting. It painted Beadle as precisely the type of irascible shopkeeper one would avoid if possible. Newspaper readers might even have wondered if the strange line was meant as insulting wordplay, the use of “GOOD” drawing attention to the relative lack of goods in the advertisement’s body, which, Beadle implied, was the fault of *Courant* readers who did not visit his store. Considered less as a business tactic and more as a reflection of Beadle’s economic experience, the snide remark foreshadowed a demoralized Beadle increasingly unable to envision a way out of financial despair.⁹²

⁹¹ Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. to Samuel Huntington, 10 December 1779, Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. Papers, Correspondence, Volume 3, CHS; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 7; “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 180.

⁹² *Connecticut Courant*, March 20, 1775.

Beadle's flippant remark about the possible futility of advertising in the *Courant* opens a third component to the anxious economics of the Atlantic world: a sense of individual helplessness before an increasingly large, impersonal commercial world. William Beadle was not alone in feeling that world's weight. The commercial freedom of Atlantic empire was all-important to someone like Beadle, but it easily brokered its opposite. Eighteenth-century merchants often struggled against the unpredictability of imperial markets with rapid fluctuations in supply and demand. There was little institutional support to protect against the vagaries of fortune. In an era when most businesses intersected with family relations, more than a sole proprietor often suffered. Even as specialized mercantile knowledge and information become more widespread, merchants like Beadle were often at the mercies of uncertain forces beyond their control. An individual might, to be sure, make a ruinous mistake, but one could just as easily be the helpless victim of bad luck, deceit, or government policy. Merchants like Beadle faced that uncertainty and its accompanying anxiety on a daily basis.⁹³

Those uncontrollable forces elevated the appeal of freedom and independence in the merchant's mind. To counter bad luck, merchants glorified a notion of their own "tireless effort." Ironically, that appeal often encouraged the same merchants to plot their ups and downs first and foremost as personal failures. As Toby Ditz and others have argued, this was as much about ideas of masculinity as money. As Ditz put it in her analysis of the correspondence of eighteenth-century Philadelphia merchants, "the

⁹³ On anxiety even with more readily available information, see Matson, "Intro," *The Economy of Early America*, 33. On the lack of institutional safeguards and the intersections with family life, see Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1660-1780* (University of California Press, 1996).

merchants depicted business reversals as bringing a servile dependency in train and thus as a derogation of rank and a ‘stain’ on manhood.” The white male merchant, the champion of many Atlantic histories, was always as close to failure as to triumph; the fear and reality of failure was a ceaseless threat to the merchants’ masculine privilege. In the case of the Beadle tragedy, feeling of helplessness amid war clashed with that desire to blame.⁹⁴

The very newspaper pages that William Beadle hoped would bring cash-rich buyers to his Wethersfield doorstep just as readily reminded him and others how ubiquitous hardship had become, how fragile any stability was, and how futile any attempt to overcome might prove. Even before the war, all knew what awaited men in dire situations. For example, right about the time Beadle arrived in coastal Connecticut, the newspaper out of New Haven routinely filled entire pages with notices of who had just been imprisoned for debt. That struck a particular cord with merchants. Independence was not just at stake in the civil war with Britain; it was also the merchant’s defining feature.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ On the uncertainty and anxiety of commercial life and attempts to counter that with “tireless effort” rhetoric, see Jacob and Secretan, “Introduction,” in *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, 7; on personal failures taking precedence over social forces in the minds of the merchant classes, see Ditz, “Shipwrecked: or, Masculinity Imperiled,” 55-56, 57-58, 58, 71. As Ditz has warned elsewhere, though, we should be wary of interpreting every anxious moment for white males as a gender crisis. See Toby L. Ditz, “The New Men’s History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Some Remedies from Early American Gender History,” *Gender and History* 16:1 (April 2004), 20. For arguments about middling merchants in England raising sons to have an appropriately masculine sense of independence, see John Smail, “Coming of Age in Trade: Masculinity and Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England,” in Jacob and Secretan, eds., *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 229-252.

⁹⁵ On the near-universal celebration of “independence” as essential to the mercantile life, see Smail, “Coming of Age in Trade,” 236.

Small declines in that independence appeared in the newspapers. In particularly tough times for everyone, advertisements reminded less about the goods that might be had and more about the property already lost. That change even mirrored a downturn in Beadle's own print appearances. He did not place a single advertisement from summer 1775 and summer 1777. In that span, especially 1776, much of the *Courant's* advertisement room went to notices of lost money, missing livestock, runaway servants and slaves, and accusations of theft. These ads insinuated not only that times were hard but also that making do was outside of one's control. They were pleas for help in recovering what one could not seem to keep hold of.⁹⁶

The anxieties of status and currency in the previous sections easily created a sense of helplessness. Not surprisingly, Beadle's advertisements begin to tell this story here. Less overt but no less revealing than the "do any GOOD" barb were the more mundane aspects of Beadle's ads. The aforementioned ebb and swell of goods could easily breed chance where a man like Beadle might have preferred control. It was, for example, surely frustrating to have goods but not the means to advertise them.

On a few occasions, Beadle's words and tone in the ads hinted at a man bordering on resignation. For example, in the ad where Beadle asked for customers willing to buy his goods wholesale for five hundred dollars cash, he walked himself down from an initial request of one hundred dollars per customer. He eventually admitted he would "condescend" to sales "even down to one." Perhaps it was a rhetorical gimmick, but in the pages of the local paper, it raised the possibility of a merchant rendered impuissant.

⁹⁶ An example of the debtors in jail pages is *Connecticut Gazette* (New Haven), Nov. 5, 1763.. The other observations are my assessment of general trends in the *Connecticut Courant* during the middle of the 1770s.

Beadle was not alone in these nail-biting public displays. For example, in late 1779, about the same time William Beadle purportedly began contemplating the murders, a man named John Watson from nearby Windsor pleaded for information about the robbery of his house and savings. In a string of advertisements in the *Courant*, Watson offered increasing rewards to any who could help. Presumably getting nowhere, he went as high as £7,000. Sounding as desperate as Beadle's willingness to "condescend...even down to one," Watson even promised £3,000 no questions asked to any robber who returned his property before apprehension. People were desperate.⁹⁷

John Watson suffered from a specific crime, and William Beadle had put himself in a specific predicament, but the newspapers at the time were full of signals that other men and women felt helpless. Even outside the chattel slavery of the South, much of the colonial-era workforce was unfree in some fashion. Poor children under forced indenture could expect harsh circumstances; poor apprentices had little room to bargain for better treatment and pay. Rhetorical hopes for free labor during the Revolution did not include everyone. Notices for runaways, both slaves and servants, abounded. The aforementioned debtor notices highlighted a literal loss of freedom beneath the yoke of economic want. Beyond the newspapers, Beadle surely heard from his office-holding friends about their endless actions among the destitute and dependent: Mitchell and company routinely approved indentures, placed insolvent men under overseers, confiscated foreclosed estates for the town, and answered requests from the sick and indigent. Such was the dreaded antithesis of Beadle's freedom as an Atlantic merchant: the chased runaway or

⁹⁷ *Connecticut Courant*, May 1, 1775, Nov. 23, 1779.

the debtor not even able to sign his own deals without permission. Examples would have been inescapable.⁹⁸

War only made things harder among Beadle's friends and neighbors. Governor Trumbull and the Council of Safety seemed to spend as much time on the petitions of refugees, hungry emissaries from beleaguered towns, the families of POWS, and unpaid soldiers as anything else. Whether asking for permission to travel or permission to trade, payment in food or payment in confiscated estates, these petitioners struck desperate chords. The war and its effects had swallowed them up; their only hope was another monolith, the Connecticut state bureaucracy. Personal letters resounded similar attitudes and described nearly impossible choices. One young soldier wrote his parents with news that he was deathly ill. In a poor hand, the soldier entreated his parents to visit camp before it was too late but immediately second-guessed the request for fear it would harm their own well-being—only travel, he decided, if it can be done “with out Doing your Bisnes” harm. Such fears of unavoidable destruction were not limited to the lower classes. For example, Thaddeus Burr, Beadle's wealthy friend in Fairfield threw his hands up at whether he and his family would make it through the summer of 1781 such was the fear of “[t]he Enemy frequently making depredations” nearby with no patriot help in sight. Right about the time Beadle was asking about the movements of Wadsworth and the French army, Wadsworth himself heard from a Wethersfield merchant, “We are the Sport of Fickle Fortune. When she will be Propitious to us is uncertain.” In the same newspaper pages that would soon tell of Beadle's demise, one

⁹⁸ Runaway ads are common in every newspaper mentioned. Debtor notices are similarly prevalent. Examples of the work of the selectmen are in Town Records of Wethersfield, Town Papers, Listed Papers, Boxes 3 and 4, CSL and Town Records of Wethersfield, Box 7, CSL.

local merchant out to make a point chided the devil for afflicting Job physically. All he had to have done, the embittered merchant insisted, was make Job a merchant shopkeeper, for none could withstand such hardships.⁹⁹

In plenty of instances, others, like Beadle, blamed forces out of their control for their demise or admitted to wondering if their duress was beyond hope of recovery. The eminent Silas Deane heard such complaints from his family. Weeks after the Beadle murders, one of his brothers wrote that some in government were so “Bitter” and “Jealous Against the illicit Trade with the British that they” have enacted “oppressive Laws” that only hurt “the Fair Trader.” As the Deanes, like all others, awaited news of peace negotiations, this “Fair Trader” admitted pessimism when it came to the prospects of turning things around. “I hope we may have peace soon,” he wrote, “or this will be a Wretched Country to Live in.” As if that were too positive an assessment, he quickly added, “indeed I never Expect to see it in so happy a Situation as it was before this warr.” Even more irate, Ebenezer Huntington’s aforementioned tirade against speculators and the suffering their licentious dealings caused in the army expressed both anger and worry over the state of the country. Having mocked the idea of America as “a Land of Plenty,”

⁹⁹ GCSR; Benjamin Taylor to Honored Father and Mother, 18 July 1775, American Revolution Collection, 1776-1786, IX Correspondence, Box 11, Folder B, CHS; Thaddeus Burr to Aaron Burr, March 1781, The Papers of Aaron Burr 1756-1836, Reel 1, Correspondence 1757-1785, DLAR; Barnabas Deane to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 15 September 1782, Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers, Correspondence, Box 10, Folder 12, CHS. On unfree labor, children, apprentices, and the rhetoric of the Revolution, see Matson, “A House of Many Mansions,” 30; Christopher Tomlins, “Indentured Servitude in Perspective: European Migration into North America and the Composition of the Early American Labor Force, 1600-1775.” In *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions*, ed. Cathy D. Matson (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 146-182; John E. Murray and Ruth Wallis Herndon, “Markets for Children in Early America: A Political Economy of Pauper Apprenticeship,” in *Journal of Economic History* 62 (June 2002): 356-382. The Job article is qtd. in Wilf, *Law’s Imagined Republic*, 130-131.

he seemed skeptical the law would hold speculators accountable. If not, he concluded to his brother Andrew, “I will Imbrue my hands in their blood.”¹⁰⁰

Beadle’s feeling of economic helplessness cohered with his philosophical doctrine of determinism. According to his theology, every human being was but “a perfect machine” able to “do nothing” except “as he is operated upon by some superior power.”¹⁰¹ Beadle was invoking God or fate, but the machine language equally described his experience in commerce. Publishers and commentators propagated this mindset even as they denounced it. Beadle’s “machine” line found its way into nearly all the printed accounts of his crime. Marsh and Dana took special notice of it in their sermons. The notion of human beings as machines pervaded their remarks even when they were not quoting Beadle directly. At times, their sermons became dense theological treatises on freewill as the pair resisted Beadle’s amoral conclusions and tried to carve space for human culpability within their determinism-laced Calvinism. Even if philosophical theology was their primary ground, economics appeared in their remarks as well, hinting at Beadle’s linkage of mechanistic theology and economics.¹⁰²

This link was even more apparent in the secular texts. Beadle’s economic status came first in the *Courant*’s portrait; his financial turnabout introduced his embrace of deist mechanics. Vigilance—human effort—mattered little. Even as commentators condemned Beadle—whether his specific act or the “machine” principle that underlay

¹⁰⁰ [] Deane to Silas Deane, 4 January 1783, Silas Deane Papers, I. Correspondence 1753-1795, Box 4, Folder 85, CHS; Ebenezer Huntington to Andrew Huntington, 8 January 1780, Jedediah Huntington Papers, Series 1, Folder 13, CHS.

¹⁰¹ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 17.

¹⁰² Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*; Dana, *Men’s Sins Not Chargeable on God*.

it—they presented his perspective. His economic plight became part of the conversation with the repetition of human beings as machines. In a double irony, Beadle's Enlightenment-founded mechanistic understanding matched prevailing New England thought in content if not in tone. For one, throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, Puritan ministers and moralists made room for finance by emphasizing personal piety alongside a market run by natural principles. By the time Beadle entered the New England world, mercantile ambition was portrayed as more about skill than cupidity. The same Enlightenment and commercial ethos that created William Beadle also ensured that many Beadle commentators saw the emerging market as a rational, scientific system that could be mastered and explained through natural or divine law. For obvious reasons, none were comfortable with Beadle's language of helplessness, but a mechanistic system was on their minds. Even more, this polite and commercial mechanism replaced the more traditional Puritan notion of the market as a human construct as prone as any such human undertaking to sin and corruption. It was all, perhaps, too close for comfort: the monster's economic theory forced other New Englanders to confront questions of helplessness and sin at the heart of the modern economy.¹⁰³

Politically, this discourse further contrasted with those Founding Fathers who championed economic independence as part and parcel of political independence. Throughout the Revolution, the material needs of the army and the civilian hardships of non-importation encouraged the increase of American manufacturing. Many of the

¹⁰³ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782. On the transition to the Enlightenment view of the market, see Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize*, 234-235, 248-249.

Revolution's well-known spokesmen explicitly framed this as a political project. Even before the Declaration of Independence, for example, Benjamin Rush told a crowd promoting the American Manufactory in Philadelphia that such projects comprised "an additional barrier against the encroachments of tyranny. A people who are entirely dependant upon the foreigners for food or clothes, must always be subject to them."¹⁰⁴ As Revolution fomented, men like Benjamin Franklin encouraged domestic manufacturing also as a way to alleviate the social burden of poverty; manufactories had a ready-made workforce in the poor.¹⁰⁵

The manufacturing projects of these years were not the fully mechanized factories of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the abundant "machine" language of Beadle-inspired news items emerged alongside a growing American manufacturing sector that was moving toward industrialization. As the capitalists behind upstart mills and manufactories experimented with mechanization and new forms of labor, men like Beadle were starting to feel less like individuals and more like cogs.

From Economics to Enlightenment

For Atlantic historians, William Beadle is a reminder that the mercantile dreams of the commercial Atlantic were often nightmares in reality. If some of Beadle's economic decisions might have struck contemporaries as unorthodox, they still understood him as a respectable merchant and part of their mercantile community. His

¹⁰⁴ Rush quoted in Lawrence A. Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution: The Intellectual Origins of Early American Industry*, Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*, 32.

experience as a shopkeeper amid the Revolution is revealing of the economic anxieties of his society. Beadle's experience reveals three specific anxieties over status, currency, and feelings of helplessness. These purveyors of anxiety, of course, were never entirely distinct. They were mutually constitutive. The fears and failures of any one of them fed the others. For example, Beadle the newcomer, somewhat helpless without a reputation and existing contacts, relied on currency to get started. Regular shortfalls and irregular inflation on that front only encouraged a sense of powerlessness before the immense, unyielding economy. Admit to problems or get caught cutting corners, however, and status and reputation suffered. At times, it all must have felt intractable.

The economy that survived the Beadle family did not rebound quickly for most, especially their neighbors in Connecticut. As Richard Buel, the historian of Connecticut's wartime experience put it, "Peace came but came too late to save Connecticut." For nearly a quarter century after the war, independence greeted lower- and middling-class Americans in the form of the country's first Great Depression. Currency was scarce and worth little; credit evaporated; freedom from British control over the economy turned out to mean being prohibited from trade with the British West Indies. The sheriff's debtor wagon loaded with possessions from foreclosed homes became common in the 1780s. Not everyone, of course, felt the slump so acutely. The financiers and speculators able to take part in schemes like Robert Morris' government bond plan accumulated most of the available capital. They, along with the largest of the merchants, manufacturers, and farmers, obtained credit and rebuilt operations and commercial networks. Wealth inequality soared. In Philadelphia, for example, during the war, a little more than half of

the city's wealth was in the hands of the lowest 90% of earners. By the end of the 1780s, that was down to 33% of the total wealth; in 1795, the figure was 18%. The phenomenon was similar in cities, towns, and countrysides throughout the states. The many watched, growing despondent and bitter, as the few with access to money and credit thrived.¹⁰⁶

No wonder determinism so appealed to Beadle and caught the attention of commentators and readers alike. Of all the ideas and turns of phrase in the Beadle letters, none grabbed the public as much as Beadle calling human beings machines. Beadle directly seized on such language as self-justification regarding the murders. Both in his letters and in the hands of commentators, the passage mostly arose as a philosophical and theological discussion. Its philosophical underpinnings notwithstanding, Beadle's machine trope fit into a larger discourse of anxious economics as well. Beadle's philosophical rejection of free will mirrored his own and others' anxious experiences of the Atlantic economy, especially during the years of the American Revolution. The ups and downs of status and currency already discussed combined with other unsettling aspects of the period to create a sense that the economy itself was one such "superior power" that might reduce a human being to "a perfect machine." To many, at the final reckoning, the Atlantic economy added up to indiscriminate loss and gain. Human beings like Beadle were nothing but machines acted upon by some superior power that struck the apparent good and evil of human actors from the equation. Ironically, the ubiquity of Beadle's phrase in the newspapers, pamphlets, and sermons that followed the tragedy encouraged the mindset economically even as commentators rejected it theologically.

¹⁰⁶ Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 283; Bouton, *Taming Democracy*, 77-88; Holton, *Unruly Americans*, 28; Kulikoff, "'Such Things Ought Not To Be,'" 134-135.

Beadle evaluated his misfortune and supposed lack of options in a manner quite congruent with his mechanistic formulation of human beings. Most notably, he described his fall as “unavoidable” when complaining about the “wretches” looking down on him. It had not always been so. As Mitchell explained it, Beadle, perhaps grown weary of the volatile side of Atlantic commerce, had moved to Wethersfield and foregone credit “intending to keep his property within his own reach” precisely because he believed property was “always secure while his eye was upon it.” Kept close, one had some control. Alas, that mentality dissipated before the reality of devaluation. Mitchell once again: “[T]he Continental currency taught him that wealth could take to itself wings and fly away: Notwithstanding all his vigilance.” Beadle’s final decade as a merchant in the Atlantic world had changed his mind: no matter how close he guarded his accounts and fine-tuned his business principles, larger mysterious forces could disrupt it all. To his own mind, Beadle was no more to blame for his financial free fall than he was for the murder of his family. If his fall was “unavoidable,” it was undeserving and suggested the economy was not a fair game after all. The same held true for the apparent triumph of the laughing, despising, and trampling “wretches.” Beadle had acted according to the law by accepting Continental currency and maintaining prices, yet his reward never came. On the contrary, he was punished.¹⁰⁷

The letters similarly expressed no hope that he or anyone else could expect better. To readers on their way out of Revolution, such considerations of the future took on political overtones. In the long letter to Chester, Beadle sought to answer the objections

¹⁰⁷ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6, 7.

of any who would grant him the right to his own life but insist he spare Lydia and the children. “I thank them for their compassion for my family,” Beadle answered incongruously, but “I know how quickly the world would crush them as it has me.” Even when he did not use the “machine” language explicitly, then, Beadle exhibited a mindset of powerlessness before the impersonal forces of the economy.¹⁰⁸

Beadle perceived himself as being on the verge of economic destitution. Poverty was his future. He was a failed merchant with no land of his own and no confidence of recovery. Whether on someone’s farm or in one of the new manufactories, he faced dependence—William Beadle the laborer rather than William Beadle the independent, mobile merchant who could make his own business decisions. He was not the only one left in such a bind. The hyperinflation of the war turned some risk takers rich, but it decimated many more who, like Beadle, had played it safe.¹⁰⁹

For both the nation and the individual, some historians have emphasized the independent, egalitarian consequences of the changing economy. Some have insisted that the American Revolution unleashed a spirit of equality that allowed the free white man to pursue his own benefit outside the hierarchical, communal ethos that infused the previous era.¹¹⁰ This mentality “crept into the consciousness” of merchant, farmer, artisan, and laborer during and after the war, especially in the North and Northeast.¹¹¹ Beadle evinced the flipside of that consciousness. If the onset of mature capitalism demanded a

¹⁰⁸ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 175.

¹⁰⁹ Gilje, *Wages of Independence*, 173.

¹¹⁰ Gilje, *Wages of Independence*; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

¹¹¹ Gilje, *Wages of Independence*, 170.

widespread mental shift, part of that shift—as symbolized by Beadle—was the recognition of the market’s impersonal, destructive potential. Freedom and independence, in Beadle’s experience, figured as a mechanized, poverty-threatening dependence. In his writing and in commentator’s liberal use of “machines” alongside observations of Beadle’s financial collapse, the underside of the new economy slipped into print. This vision associated the despondency of arbitrary economic ruin with a lack of human freedom. It melded the vision of human beings as mere machines with the consequences of poverty. Theologically, Beadle raised the specter of human beings void of moral significance under the control of a lever-pulling deity; economically, he raised the specter of human beings under the control of a market void of morality.

In American historiography, optimistic portraits of an egalitarian mindset burgeoning in the Revolution and early republic play a role similar to the rosy sketches of enterprising merchants and transoceanic connections in Atlantic history. Some of the most-prolific and most-respected American historians have given us a Revolution of Americans bound together by trust, capitalist enthusiasm, and the liberty that flowed from free-market liberal democracy. Like their Atlanticist counterparts, these interpretations are not so much factually wrong as factually slight. Boycotts, politics, and war did require trust. Plenty of eager capitalists did march through the early republic, eyes wide. Economic liberalization did certainly affect the social and political lives of some in positive ways. But sometimes trust was more like browbeating. Eagerness could fade as fast as paper money could depreciate; liberalization could swallow up just as easily as set free. This is not, for the historiography of the American Revolution or the Atlantic world,

a simple choice of good or bad, positive or negative. It is always all of those things, and they often rely on one another for their historical and historiographical force.¹¹²

Beadle's decline must have felt so steep precisely because everything had looked so promising. The fall must have hurt worse when one could see the likes of Wordsworth and company counting their sums. People with Continental dollars and government bonds trusted the rhetoric of the Revolution would see their fortunes rise. To hear the successful exclaim the virtues of a free market and political liberty is to be expected, but those exclamations are more interesting alongside ambivalence. To put it in terms of Beadle, bloated lists of exotic goods gave way to a few nails and some thread; a spirited poem for tea one month morphed into a caustic aside about ads being worthless a few months later. The Atlantic was a bridge, not a barrier, and that gave the likes of Connecticut shopkeepers chances for success, but barriers sometimes protect, and bridges sometimes deliver failure to Connecticut doorsteps. The Revolution and its aftermath was full of excitement and launched successful ventures, but many felt it as an economic depression made all the heavier because of those who looked to be doing so well.¹¹³

¹¹² On the too optimistic side of Revolution historiography, see David Waldstreicher, "The Vexed Story of Human Commodification Told by Benjamin Franklin and Venture Smith," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (summer 2004): 268-278. For the other side of the argument, see See Gordon Wood, "The Enemy is Us: Democratic Capitalism in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (1996): 293-308; Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*; Joyce Appleby, "The Vexed Story of Capitalism Told by American Historians," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (2001): 1-18; Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Thomas Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility," in *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 107-160; Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*.

¹¹³ On the importance of noting ambivalence and not stopping at the expected optimistic words of the successful, see Waldstreicher, "The Vexed Story," 276-277.

Commentators very well could have told the Beadle story as a primarily economic tale as his plight was understandable to many. This is not to say that deism and politics were shadow aspects. Rather, it is to recognize that, as with the Revolution itself, choice of emphasis is revealing. The economic suffering of William Beadle was perhaps too revealing, too representative, of the ups and downs, complexities and insecurities of Revolutionary economic life. For a commentator to focus on economics was to risk that writer and readers alike might feel too aligned with the monstrous Beadle. An economic interpretation of Beadle's demise was scary, ironically because he looked less monstrous when described as a merchant who followed the rules and was left destitute. The imperial crisis had turned to Revolution and war, in part, as a battle for control of the American economy. For families like the Beadles, that battle never ended even once American victory was palpable. They had wrested control from Britain, but they still felt controlled by their economy. People understood William Beadle's economic failures precisely because they were experiencing these turmoils as well, whatever the gulf separating them in their minds from the "deist monster." They needed other ways of understanding him, ways that did not hit so close to home, ways that emphasized his monstrousness. In "the land of steady habits," Enlightenment deism seemed a safe bet.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ On the imperial crisis as battle over economic control, see Newell, *From Dependency to Independence*, 237-238. On the idea of politics displacing economics as a way to avoid the patriots looking like selfish, anti-tax moneygrubbers, see, for example, Staughton Lynd and David Waldstreicher, "Free Trade, Sovereignty, and Slavery: Toward an Economic Interpretation of American Independence," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (October 2011): 597-630 and Waldstreicher, *Runaway America*.

CHAPTER 5

ANXIOUS ENLIGHTENMENT: DEISM, FREE WILL, AND SUPERSTITION

When Timothy Dwight, successor of Ezra Stiles as Yale president, wrote about his travels throughout New England, he gave half a dozen pages to the story of William Beadle. In writing of the tragedy, Dwight drew both from the account his old tutor Stephen Mix Mitchell had left in the Wethersfield school district records and from the reminiscences of Colonel Thomas Belden, the friend who shared those school records with him. Dwight also mixed in his own thoughts on the matter: having spent some of the war years as a New Haven exile in Wethersfield, Dwight claimed to have known the Beadle “family intimately.” Unsurprisingly, Dwight was not ultimately sympathetic to the “monster of a man.” He would, in fact, become one of the young nation’s loudest crusading voices against deism and unorthodoxy. Nevertheless, amid the opprobrium, Dwight did offer a curious observation about the nature of Beadle’s personality: “He was contemplative, possessed good sense, loved reading, and delighted in intelligent conversation. His manners were gentlemanly; and his disposition hospitable.” He might as well have been describing any gentleman of the Enlightenment.¹

William Beadle was not, of course, just any gentleman of the Enlightenment though he would have loved the compliment. He spent his last days feverishly laying out his philosophical view of the world, focusing more of his letters on deism than anything having to do with finances, family, or politics. Once the Beadle story left the physical confines of the bloodstained house and entered newspaper, it was that deism that drew the

¹ Dwight, *Travels in New England*, 1: 229-230.

most consideration and wrath. Nothing came to define the life, death, and print afterlife of William Beadle like deism, and that seems fitting. It was, after all, the age of Enlightenment. The political and economic anxieties of William Beadle cannot be fully separated from his religious views. Similarly, as much as American historiography of the period might skew toward the political and Atlantic historiography toward the commercial, the story of the eighteenth century cannot be told apart from the story of the Enlightenment. To understand his world, William Beadle turned to Enlightenment; to understand William Beadle and those who wrote about him, we must do the same.

Historians have decentered and diversified that story of Enlightenment in a number of ways pertinent to the Beadle tragedy. If Enlightenment was once a wholly, even inherently, anti-clerical movement spearheaded by French *philosophes* in Paris, it has become more plural in both geography and content. For example, English historians have carved out a space for a more conservative, clerical Enlightenment in an England where political and religious settlement rendered anything more radical unnecessary. As a consequence, historians of deism have rethought the social standing of the so-called English deists who had for so long been assumed as the country's virulently anti-Christian export. In the process, these historians have questioned the coherence of deism as a movement over all.² Similarly, Atlantic historians have resisted seeing

² On English Enlightenment, see J.G.A. Pocock, "Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment," in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: the Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000); and, even though he does not use the term much, Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). On the new historiography of deism, see Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment* (New York: Routledge, 2009) and Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England: Theology, Politics, and Newtonian Public Science* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). This is not just a shift for how historians of the English-speaking

Enlightenment as a purely European phenomenon and traced it across an ocean. Most importantly, they have resisted easy, unidirectional narratives of Enlightened metropolitan centers diffusing intellectual innovations to provincial backwaters. By contrast, the Atlantic Enlightenment saw American expeditions and colonials as playing a chief role. From the earliest experiences of, and ideas about, the Americas, Enlightenment was never a one-way endeavor.³ More thematically, historians have blurred the line between the rational and irrational—the scientific and superstitious—in the eighteenth century. If there was no single Enlightenment in terms of geography, there was also often no clear break between “Enlightenment” and “anti-Enlightenment” or between forward-thinkers and traditionalists.⁴ Finally, and in part because of all these innovations, historians have shown interest in moving beyond the famous names of salons and capturing how Enlightenment functioned at differing levels of society.⁵

world. Historians like Jorge Canizares-Esguerra have similarly expanded Enlightenment beyond the French salons in studies of the Iberian Atlantic. See, for example, Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) and Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

³ For examples of this work, see Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and Caroline Winterer, *American Enlightenments*.

⁴ For example, see Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) and Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). For this move in English history, see Lionel Laborie, *Enlightening Enthusiasm: Prophecy and Religious Experience in Early Eighteenth-century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

⁵ Much of Robert Darnton’s work accomplishes this for eighteenth-century France. See especially, Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

The story of William Beadle's Enlightenment participates in this diversification. Within an English Enlightenment, he draws attention to the diversity of deist thought and its effect on society. He represents the appeal of natural religion, deism, and critical biblical scholarship outside the halls of Oxford and Cambridge. When William Beadle crossed the ocean, those ideas crossed with him. As Atlantic historians have spread Enlightenment to the Americas via the book trade, state-sponsored expeditions, and the international correspondence of lauded scientists, William Beadle highlights that Enlightenment spread in the memories and predilections of everyday migrants as well. That spread is more difficult to track but poignant nonetheless. While most of the work on Atlantic Enlightenment has been laudatory of intellectual exchanges, the Beadle case reminds us that new ways of thinking were worrying as well as exhilarating. Beadle—and those who wrote about him—also embody the sometimes-fraught discrepancy between Enlightenment and superstition.⁶

Additionally, this story also enlarges what we might call the emotional tenor of Enlightenment historiography. Enlightenment, of course, was about the celebration of reason, science, and progress, but men and women did not always aspire to these ideals in the abstract. They considered deism or new ideas about politics and the natural world as they continued to live their everyday lives. To put it bluntly, they philosophized while trying to provide for their families during war, or they considered the consequences of natural religion while grieving over a communal tragedy. As microhistory, the story of

⁶ Along some of these lines, Christopher Grasso recognizes Beadle as a chance to think about how Enlightenment resonated beyond major figures like Jefferson and Franklin—see Grasso, “Deist Monster,” 45, fn. 6—but it is not really the focus of his essay. Neil King Fitzgerald addressed this in his master's thesis and doctoral dissertation, on which more below.

William Beadle adds feeling to the Enlightenment narrative. By going small, it enriches the experience of Enlightenment beyond macroscopic portraits of long-term intellectual trends. It allows us to see how ideas and beliefs we have come to associate with the Enlightenment played out alongside other facets of life in real human situations. Anxiety lay at the center of William Beadle's Enlightenment. That anxiety was not just about ideas: it also mixed, for Beadle, with envy of one's neighbors and the emptiness of one's coffers and, for commentators, with worries about the postcolonial moment and a new nation's prospects.

A few scholarly voices have previously noticed what William Beadle adds to our picture of the Enlightenment. Most notably, Christopher Grasso has recognized that the Beadle story joins "longer-standing theological and philosophical debates" with both "everyday concerns" and the "revolutionary moment" of Beadle's New England. Stephen Wilf has briefly observed the transatlantic context of Beadle's deism. Neil King Fitzgerald has appreciated the story as an example of the non-scholar and Enlightenment. The Beadle tragedy and its literary aftermath, however, have more to say about anxiety and the Enlightenment. Grasso and Wilf are ultimately more concerned with the law and politics of the early republic; Fitzgerald has his focus on family murders and literature.⁷

William Beadle's Enlightenment was an anxious response to an anxious world. The vocabulary of Enlightenment may have promised relief, but it ultimately revealed new reasons to be afraid. For a time, Enlightenment perhaps provided stability to Beadle the peripatetic migrant or a sense of superiority to Beadle the struggling merchant.

⁷ Grasso, "Deist Monster"; Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 25-64; Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*; Fitzgerald, "Toward an American Abraham" and "Weiland's Crime."

Ultimately, it provided him a way to reinterpret his repeated failures as a higher form of success. Beadle understood intellectually what most others missed, or so he told himself, when describing all notions of morality and free will as illusory. Enlightenment thus answered some of Beadle's anxieties, but those answers beget new forms of alienation, failure, and fear, all in an Atlantic crucible. When writers struggled to deliver communal understanding in the wake of the Beadle murders, the realm of ideas and the language of Enlightenment offered a tempting answer. By focusing on Beadle's deism, commentators came as close as possible to explaining what they feared was inexplicable. That explanation came with a cost as they realized unwelcome ideas could spread like wildfire. For William Beadle, his larger New England community, and those who tried to make sense of his crimes, a profound ambivalence marked Enlightenment. It provided a framework for understanding and aspiration, but it also always threatened to undo those successes.

This chapter begins with the words of William Beadle. After laying out Beadle's stated philosophical and theological positions, the second section places those ideas in a larger transatlantic context wherein religious innovation, specifically, and Enlightenment, more generally, had long been both celebrated and feared. The middle of the chapter will home in on Beadle's most discussed idea, namely, his description of human beings as machines; that description thrust the Beadle murders into wider Enlightenment and Calvinist debates about free will. Finally, the chapter concludes by looking at several dualities within Beadle's letters. Those paradoxes—certainty versus skepticism, science

versus superstition, and rationality versus sensibility—resonated with commentators insofar as they lay at the heart of the Enlightenment project itself.

The Words of William Beadle

William Beadle embraced the label “deist” without qualification throughout his letters. In fact, he claimed it with pride. His intention was to “die a proper Deist.” To call him a deist is thus rather easy; to fully articulate what that meant is less so. While some scholars continue to breezily list the tenets of classical deism, eighteenth-century deism was never as fixed in meaning as we often assume. Some of the more famous English deists themselves never fully settled their mind even on things often considered key positions. Difference of opinion between deists and, even more, the scattershot ways fearful critics applied the label, rendered deism somewhat ambiguous throughout the century. Placing Beadle within deism’s ranks is more a matter of family resemblance than precise definitions, and in nearly every instance, Beadle’s Enlightenment religion overlapped with scholarly views of the time.⁸

The closest Beadle came to defining his deism was to embrace the idea that a proper deist “does not believe what is called Revelation.” As some scholars of deism have pointed out, even this falters as a simple, undisputed definition. While no self-

⁸ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 176. For an example of a leading deist scholar still listing the key tenets, see Kerry Walters, *Rational Infidels: The American Deists* (Longwood Academic, 1992), 9-10 though his work is not sloppy or careless by any means. For general discussion of the wide variety of perspective among the deists, see Hudson, *The English Deists* and Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England*. On shifting designators,” see Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, and Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, “Introduction: Atheism and Deism Revived,” in *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650-1800*, eds. Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 1-12. On family resemblance of deists, see Peter Harrison, *‘Religion’ and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 62.

proclaimed deist felt comfortable with a naive acceptance of all supposed revelation, not all deists abandoned revelation altogether. Nevertheless, Beadle—and many others then and now—saw a suspicion of revelation as more or less capturing what deism was all about.⁹

Without revelation, Beadle was free to innovate beyond the Bible. Ironically, as briefly seen in the previous chapter, Beadle put this intellectual and religious freedom toward abandoning human freedom altogether. From a Christian perspective, Beadle admitted in a long letter to Colonel Chester, the Bible insisted human beings were “free agents.” By contrast, he continued, “when I consider man as a Deist [...] I think him a perfect Machine, and that he can do nothing but as he is operated upon by Some Superior Power.” It would become his most infamous pronouncement. Elsewhere in the same letter, Beadle revealed the amoral upshot of this fatalist position. Explicitly referencing Alexander Pope’s famous “Whatever is, is right” from the poet’s *Essay on Man*, Beadle explained, “I really think there never was any thing done wrong in the World.” All human action is right, for “we are all impelled to say and act all that we do Say or act.” To drive the point home, Beadle gave examples of both high and low registers. Whether “a Tyrant King or 2 or 3 fierce republicans deluging threequarters of the World in blood” or “my killing my family” or “a man destroying a nest of Wasps” or “a fly escaping from another man that means to kill it,” every act, great or small, momentous or trivial, “is as much directed by the Hand of Heaven as the making this whole World was.” Everything

⁹ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 179. On a rejection of revelation as an unsuitable definition for “deists,” especially when we consider those who were accused of deism but may not have embraced the term themselves, see Hudson, *The English Deists*, 29-30. For an example of a famous English deist agreeing to some revelation, see the remarks of Edward Herbert of Cherbury in Peter Gay, *Deism: An Anthology* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1968), 42.

Beadle or any human being had done or might do was equally part of the divine plan as much as the very creation of the cosmos. Everything Beadle or any human being had done or might do, however, was thus void of any moral component. William saw it clearly: “[I]f this is the case there is no Such Thing as Sin.” In his present situation, perhaps such fatalism helped render his intended actions tolerable to himself.¹⁰

Beadle went one step further: as no free will meant no sin, so no sin meant no hell. A just God cannot punish machines, and thus, Beadle reasoned, he and all others would go to heaven. Beadle seemed aware that under the circumstances, most would consign him to hell rather than heaven. Perhaps that awareness lay behind his repeated, though sometimes shaky, conviction that heaven awaited him. Against any who feared the afterlife, he argued that “[i]f our God is really good he can and will take Care of us after Death.” Even in the letter he wrote Dr. Farnsworth on the morning of the murders, William insisted he and his family were happily “going to visit our God.” Beadle’s machine route was a circuitous one to universalism, but that endpoint would have surprised no reader familiar with the English deists. For example, any number would have agreed with Anthony Collins’ assurance that humans should have “no fear of any future Misery or Evil from his [God’s] hands.” Whatever variety existed among deists in actuality, their detractors often accused them of universalism, as if the accusation were proof enough of folly.¹¹

¹⁰ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 179, 176; Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man and Other Poems*, Dover Thrift Editions (New York: Dover, 1994), 53.

¹¹ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 173; *Salem Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1783. The Collins quote is in Gay, *Deism: An Anthology*, 83. For another example, see selections from Charles Blount in the same source, p. 49.

Beadle was aware his unorthodoxy might cost him social capital, and he took pride in imagining such persecution. Deism, he bragged, was certainly no easy creed in the face of “a lot of Bigots” who ignorantly labeled it atheism, an “invented Epithet of Reproach.” Critics of the day did frequently conflate atheism and deism; any whose ideas rendered God somewhat irrelevant might be labeled “atheist.” Anti-deist tracts with titles like *The Folly of Atheism and What is now Called Deism* or *A Satyr Against Atheistical Deism* solidified the association. A 1783 text that alluded to Beadle suggested that English heretics had originally invented the term “deist” as a respectable veneer for their atheism. When not wholly equating the two, polemicists sketched deism on a slippery slope to full-blown atheism, an assumption historians have largely perpetuated. Like Beadle, other deists had struggled against the charge. Anthony Collins, for instance, made Beadle’s frustration appear tame when he distanced his own brand of deism from “any such *rare Monster* as an *Atheist*.”¹²

As he set out his tenets and defended himself against charges of atheism, Beadle demonstrated an obvious familiarity with Enlightenment language more generally. Several times, for example, Beadle grounded his defense of deism with reference to “Nature” or the “Book of Nature” as did popular deists like Matthew Tindal. There was, Beadle insisted, “eno’ in this World” to understand God “if a man would but learn to read

¹² “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 176-177. On the quote about the use of “atheist” as a label, see Hudson, *The English Deists*, 29. For discussion of conflation between deism and atheism and/or the picture of deism as a stepping stone to atheism (including historians’ guilt here), see Hudson, *The English Deists*, 29 and Hudson, Lucci, and Wigelsworth, “Introduction: Atheism and Deism Revived,” 2-5. For Collins, see Gay, *Deism: An Anthology*, 93. *The Folly of Atheism* is a 1692 work by Richard Bentley. The 1783 text is [John Murray], *Bath-Kol: A Voice from the Wilderness* (Boston 1783), 97, 165. For discussion of this and its fears of a secret “deist” sect that were really “atheist,” see Hudson, *The English Deists* 79-80. The Satyr pamphlet is by Mungo Craig from 1696 and was part of the testimony against the last person executed for blasphemy in Scotland.

it.” He concluded a long passage that praised Jesus’ character but denied his divinity with the charge, “But now look on Nature the great Book I preach from.” In what was surely his last writing, a letter to Chester dated the evening of December 10, Beadle joyously declared himself and all “Sons of Science” as “k’ndred Spirits.”¹³

When it came to Christian doctrine, the Bible, and religion in general, Beadle had more in common with the latest Enlightenment scholars in Europe than most of his neighbors in Connecticut. To Beadle, reason demanded an elevated perspective: the Bible scrutinized like any other text, Christianity considered alongside other religions, and Christ compared as a man with other prophets. English deists had encouraged these practices even before Beadle was born. Charles Blount, for example, had brought classical history to bear on Christianity, considered Christ alongside Mohammed, and approached the Bible with the latest analytical methodologies. By the time Beadle wrote his letters, these practices were more mainstream. Throughout the eighteenth century, English and German scholars increasingly read the Bible as a cultural artifact. At the same time, and not unrelated, English thinkers popularized the idea of comparative religion. William Beadle felt increasingly detached from his neighbors in Connecticut, but he all the while shortened the distance between himself and European scholars.¹⁴

¹³ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 183, 184, 185, 187. On Tindal, see Gay, *Deism: An Anthology*, 10.

¹⁴ On Blount, see Hudson, *The English Deists*, 60-68 and Gay, *Deism: An Anthology*, 47-48. For eighteenth-century Bible scholarship, see Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). For comparative religion, see Harrison, *‘Religion’ and the Religions*. Ironically, many of the new methodologies originated as an attempt to rescue the Bible from deist criticism. On that, see Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 38.

Beadle might as well have been in a cutting-edge salon when he praised the Bible as a cultural treasure and Christianity as a decent moral system while still insisting each lacked a divinely assured foundation. To Beadle and the English deists, reason revealed a freeing, thought potentially unsettling, truth about Christianity: it held no special epistemological status.¹⁵ The Christian religion was, Beadle admitted, “a most benevolent System;” the Bible contained “ten thousand Beauties;” Jesus Christ was “sublime[,] noble and benevolent to the greatest degree...the most perfect and the best in all respects, that ever appeared in all History.” But the Bible was not revelation, Christianity not the only religion, and Christ no more than a man. In this, he might as well have been Jefferson, scrubbing the New Testament of the miraculous and irrational while celebrating its overall character. To the Enlightened mind, even worthwhile books answered to a higher standard.¹⁶

If any were to answer with talk of Christ’s miracles, Beadle was ready to deny them. The miraculous was “unnatural,” which meant, rationally, it was all “Inconsistency.” The “miraculous parts” of Scripture, Beadle concluded, were “full of Absurdity.” A disbelief in miracles and superstition was readily to be found among deist

¹⁵ For more on this line of attack in the work of the British deists, see chapter one of Diego Lucci, *Scripture and Deism: The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth-century British Deists* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

¹⁶ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 172, 184. Beadle sometimes offered his own exegetical understanding of the Bible when arguing against its inspired nature. For example, consider this passage from 184-185: the New Testament itself, he claimed, if read rationally, spoke against Christ’s divinity. When the Gospels said “he took the nature of man on him,” Beadle argued, it was only “the Nature of a very good Man.” Christ hardly seemed divine: after all, the “Savior,” Beadle pointed out, “seems to have infirmities just like man.” Like a human being, when faced with immense suffering, “he prayed [...] that the Cup of Death might pass from him.” Besides, how could God condescend to put up with such weak followers? “But look, my friend,” Beadle urged Chester, if Christ “was really a God [...] what must be his feelings at the monstrous Conduct of almost all his Disciples?”

writers like Herbert, Blount, and Woolston. Even more, one hardly had to be a deist in the eighteenth century to question the assumption that the miraculous waited around every corner.¹⁷

For Beadle, custom, not reason, declared Christianity, the Bible, and Christ as epistemologically different from other faiths. Having opened his first and longest letter by praising Christianity's benevolence, Beadle confessed, "I have as many doubts about the Truth" of Christianity "as I have about any other scheme of religion." If one did not presuppose Christianity's validity, its miraculous aspects were no more believable than "the Whims and frenzys" of those Christendom condemned as "Idolaters." Rationally, Jesus was a man who "lived in this World and died" just "like [any]body else," just as Moses had "lived and died," just as "Mahomet lived and died." Lest any boast that Christianity had improved upon ancient polytheism, Beadle pointed out that just as the "antients held a plurality of Gds. [...] we purified Christians, altho' we profess to own but one God, take care to split him into three parts." Any who celebrated Christian theology as philosophically sound were simply being intellectually dishonest. Christians, in reality, were just as mixed up as the ancients who openly embraced polytheism. To make the point, Beadle elaborated on the Christian notion of the Trinity. Not only did Christians mask polytheism with the concept, they offered a convoluted chain of transformations to explain their message. The Christian narrative held "that one of those parts must be a man first turned from God into an Infant, from Infant into man, and from Man into God

¹⁷ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 173, 184. For Herbert, see Gay, *Deism: An Anthology*, 29; For Blount, see Hudson, *The English Deists*, 66; for Woolston, see James A. Herrick, *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists: The Discourse of Skepticism, 1680-1750* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 105.

again.” Beadle did not bother with further argument on the point. It was as if, having made the analogy to ancient paganism, this simple statement of Christology would fall on its own. It was, Beadle implied, every bit as implausible as any pagan myth.¹⁸

Ever the Enlightenment empiricist, Beadle wanted human evidence in the present. Beadle saw, in Christianity and all religions, humanity’s fallible attempts to approach the divine. The Biblical authors were laudable, but rationally there was no reason to assume they were inspired more than “any man that thinks and speaks as he passes along the Street.” If God really deigned to walk the earth, Beadle wanted to see and hear for himself: “When I see a figure in human shape or in any other that speaks the human voice given with Evidence of their really existing ever Since time began, I will then believe.” It was the standard that reason demanded, and it was a standard traditional religion failed. Beadle, sounding more like Jefferson or Hume than a provincial storekeeper, found the miraculous components of Christianity “unnatural” and “full of Absurdity and Inconsistency.” God had granted human beings rationality, science, and the Book of Nature. To use these gifts was to justify belief with evidence. Evidence, true evidence, was more than hearsay. It was more than theology taken as true *a priori*.¹⁹

That the peripatetic Beadle who had settled in what amounted to the edge of European empire so readily invoked the language of Enlightenment is telling. He fashioned himself an intellectual more generally as well. Along the way, he praised

¹⁸ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 172-173, 184.

¹⁹ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 172-173, 184.

Montaigne the skeptic and quoted Pope the quasi-deist.²⁰ He boasted of reading the essayist William Temple and the poet James Thomson. Elsewhere, he did not just suffer; he had, with Shakespeare, “born the ‘slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.’” He ended his final letter with verse of his own about “soul and sentiment” forming “the great forever.”²¹ Finally, Beadle’s often-discussed 1775 poem ad played into his intellectual mystique as well. It may have been an advertisement, but to many, poetry in any form was a mark of education. Beadle might have seen this as a way to connect with local intellectuals like Timothy Dwight, notable poet of the Hartford Wits who spent some of the war years in Wethersfield and presumably socialized with his old tutor and Beadle friend Stephen Mix Mitchell.²² On philosophy and theology, the names Beadle dropped and the texts he owned and referenced may not have been those of the infamous English deists. Still, he was clearly familiar with deist thinking. He had embraced the new methodology of Biblical criticism and comparative religion. He had absorbed the language of nature and science, so fashionable among Europe’s intellectuals, into his everyday, colonial merchant vocabulary. Beyond deism strictly speaking, he clearly fancied himself a learned man of the Enlightenment, and that self-presentation meant a great deal to him.

²⁰ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 181, 176. Of all those Beadle mentioned, Pope comes closest to an outright deist influence. According to Pope scholar, Leopold Damrosch, it is incorrect to label Pope a full, unabashed deist, but thanks to his deist friend Viscount Bolingbroke, a deist perspective, or at least a perspective shorn of revelation, structured *Essay on Man*. See Leopold Damrosch, Jr., *The Imaginative World of Alexander Pope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 170-172.

²¹ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 22. “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 187. I haven’t been able to identify the two lines as quoted from Thomson or anyone else. It’s wholly possible Beadle himself wrote them given his earlier proclivity for poetry in his store advertisement.

²² On poetry as a sign of education, see Wulf and Blecki, “Preface,” xiii. On Dwight, see Colin Wells, *The Devil & Doctor Dwight: Satire & Theology in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Beadle celebrated his deism as an intellectual, even personal, achievement. Deism, he believed, demanded a “superior sense.” Whether from the necessary intellectual acumen or the unceasing public reproaches, Beadle saw deism as a hard bargain. “There are but a few men capable” of it, he boasted. The true deist is so rare, in fact, that “[t]hey are when found like a Diamond among a million of pebbles.” When leaving some books to friends in the so-called will, he boasted of his reading ability and book selection (despite the fact that he owned only a few books). He had little but worthless Continental dollars to his name, but he was a gemstone. He had, it seemed to him, “suffered great disadvantages in this world.” He was, he admitted, “small and mean to look on,” and his “circumstances were always rather narrow,” yet deism settled these delinquent accounts. Throughout the letters, Beadle presented himself as well read, educated, even enlightened, “a man of good taste.”²³

Beadle sometimes framed this sense of superiority as Enlightenment progress. For example, deists had improved upon the polytheism of the ancients and Trinitarian Christians. Elsewhere he suggested that it was cowardice and foolishness that kept human beings chained to a fear of death. Rather than claim their own beliefs, Beadle saw most of the “ignorant mortals” of humanity merely succumb to whichever “Religions of the World” were “foistered” upon them. At his most direct, he left no doubt that deism was a grown-up approach to religion compared to the childish religions he saw around him. In Christianity and “all other Religions,” Beadle declared, “the Populace tumble about just as Babies do their play things.” The Enlightened had, conversely, matured.

²³ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 177, 185, 182; the “great disadvantages” line is in Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 22; Grasso, “Deist Monster,” 57.

Commentators might have read this talk of “Babies” and “Diamond[s]” as vanity, but, as in so many other instances, Beadle’s language here mirrored that of well-known intellectuals. Just before Beadle left England for Barbados, for example, French physician Julien Offray de La Mettrie had, in English translation, contrasted the wisdom and courage of the few with the masses who are “voluntary slaves” to “childish prejudices” and “no more capable to come at the truth, than frogs to fly.”²⁴

Beadle thus found a momentary solace in Enlightenment. This sense of achievement and maturity afforded him a chance at renewed self-worth, even superiority, despite the upheavals and failures that continued to mark the political and economic aspects of his life. His intellectual prowess, he believed, provided “great reason to think that” his “soul is above the common mould.” Only the deist, Beadle believed, “truly sees God,” while the masses “tumble about” their popular religions like children. It might have been only mildly boastful under different circumstances, but in the context of the horrid murders, Beadle’s self-congratulatory proclamations turned repulsive. Nevertheless, they are important. Whatever Beadle’s purposes, whatever he did or did not really think about God and his actions, the Enlightenment tenor of the letters is telling. On the outskirts of the British empire, a provincial shopkeeper invoked the Enlightenment. Beadle did not need to be at Cambridge or Oxford to present himself an ally of the new reason and science and, thus, peer down on the masses he agonized over joining in the financial sense. His specific philosophical positions—fatalism, amoralism, universalism—and his theological rejections—of the Bible’s revelation, of Christ’s

²⁴ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 173, 177, 185; Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine* (London: 1749), 1, 6.

divinity, of Christianity's exceptionalism—combined into a loosely-defined deism that would not necessarily have shocked the intellectual elite of Europe. His language of light, nature, and maturity would have been familiar to readers of the latest periodicals. Even more, as the next section will show, Beadle's American neighbors were not as unfamiliar with such things as he believed. They met Beadle's deism in a transatlantic context of Enlightenment in which it was never clear where to draw the line between champions of progress and dangerous heretics.²⁵

The Wider Transatlantic Enlightenment

English deism comprised a host of views with the label just as often a catchall of derision as a carefully defined grouping. Recently, historians have suggested studying English deism (as well as atheism) as a “shifting designator.” Others write of the deists sharing a “family resemblance” more than an agreed upon program. For any easy definition, some deist or another chimes in as contrarian. Even that which we take for granted—that God does not intervene in the world—had its deist opponents. Beyond doctrine, it is not even clear just who the English deists were. When using the term, many historians mean at least Herbert of Cherbury, Charles Blount, John Toland, Anthony Collins, Matthew Tindal, Thomas Woolston, Thomas Chubb, and Thomas Morgan. During Beadle's century, many more earned the name as an occasional rebuke including Locke, Hume, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke. Indeed, if John Leland, author of the anti-deist *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers* in the mid-eighteenth century, is allowed to set the terms of debate, a deist was anyone who championed natural religion to the

²⁵ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 22; “Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters,” 185.

detriment of revealed religion—hardly a fringe position in Enlightenment Europe. However much deism’s opponents and traditional Enlightenment historiography have cast the deists as radicals bent on undermining society, most remained invested in larger English society or even the Church and saw their deism as one identity among others. When it comes to Anthony Collins, for example, one might fashion him all at once an atheist, deist, Church of England member, and freethinker not because Collins was a hypocrite or secretive but because his writings were many-layered. To make it even more difficult to pin deism down, anti-deist writing proliferated to a suspicious level as clergyman vied for attention and promotion via polemics in the blossoming print culture of England. Those clergyman as well as prosecutors heightened the drama with hyperbolic language and sensationalist warnings.²⁶

Just how and where Beadle encountered that deism is impossible to say with exactitude, but that multi-layered English deism grabbed his attention somewhere. Two generations before Beadle, deism emerged in London and the universities. By the turn of the century, any number of “heretical” ideas that would come to appeal to a man like Beadle—anti-Trinitarianism, rejection of Christ’s divinity, denial of miracles, the rational scrutiny of all religious texts—permeated the intellectual landscape. While the rumor that

²⁶ This description of English deism draws on a number of texts: Hudson, *The English Deists*; Wayne Hudson, *Enlightenment and Modernity: The English Deists and Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Wayne Hudson, “Atheism and Deism Demythologized,” in *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650-1800*, eds. Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 13-24; Hudson, Lucci, and Wigelsworth, “Introduction: Atheism and Deism Revived,” Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England*; Harrison, ‘*Religion*’ and the *Religions*; James A. Herrick, “Blasphemy in the Eighteenth Century: Contours of a Rhetorical Crime,” in *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650-1800*, eds. Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 101-118. For a contemporary critic acknowledging variety among the deists, see [Murray], *Bath-Kol*, 100. For Collins description, see Hudson, *The English Deists*, 19. For family resemblance, see Hudson, *The English Deists*, 29-30.

Beadle had discovered such heresies as a young man in a London deist club rings of paranoia in the climate of the American Revolution, the sentiment was probably true. By the time Beadle was born, some two thousand coffee houses lined the streets of London; by the time he left England, eight thousand alehouses beckoned London passersby. These were spaces perfect for a new public sphere where politics, religion, culture, and science might hold sway. Such establishments even added side rooms where groups like Beadle's rumored deist club could meet.²⁷ In hindsight, historians see that deism had already started to subside in the English mind by the time Beadle was born in the early 1730s, but he still would have had plenty of opportunity to stumble upon the hodgepodge of doctrines, whether in a club or in print. Like a young Benjamin Franklin apprenticing in London, Beadle might even have leaned toward deism thanks only to the anti-deist tracts that introduced deist ideas with hopes of shooting them down. Some have suggested he would have read Leland's anti-deist text though it first appeared while Beadle was in Barbados. In any case, it is all but certain that deism was not an end-of-life discovery for Beadle. While the *Connecticut Courant* and the sermon of James Dana suggested Beadle had recently turned to deist and skeptical literature, it is hard to imagine that would have been his first introduction. For one, no such books are listed in the estate or in Beadle's letters. Beadle also wrote that he had thought suicide proper for decades, and given the

²⁷ Markman Ellis, *The Coffee House: A Cultural History* (London: Orion Publishing, 2004), xiv; James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 226-247.

importance of deism in justifying his thinking, it seems likely he had picked it up before coming to the colonies.²⁸

That is not to say Beadle's pursuit of Enlightenment was impossible in the colonies. Few espoused deism outright, but plenty of New England booksellers catered to reading tastes of an Enlightened European. North America in the late eighteenth century provided all the strands of Enlightenment that could be found in Europe, and people of numerous professions sought these strands out.²⁹ Newspapers throughout Beadle's Connecticut regularly printed bookshop advertisements with detailed title lists that often filled entire pages. Even before Beadle visited Boston, he knew from the newspapers that its booksellers offered "A very Grand Assortment of the most modern Books." When he settled in Wethersfield, he was a short easy journey from Hartford's own literary suppliers. Throughout the early to mid-1770s, the Hartford partnership of Smith and Colt (the same Colt Beadle later worked with) routinely listed over three hundred available titles. They boasted "as universal a collection of Books as was ever brought into Connecticut." Hezekiah Merrill stocked just as many at his store down the street. Even

²⁸ For discussion of England as full of opportunities for heresy, see Herrick, *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists*, 2-7. He cites a number of reasons why England was fertile ground for such free thinking: relative religious freedom, a period of social and political stability from 1688, burgeoning press industry including the notion of an "opposition" press, lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695, and even increased travel to the Continent where intellectuals picked up anti-Catholic sentiments easily applied to the Anglican church. The idea deism waned by the 1730s (or early 1740s) is a commonplace, but for a classic formulation, see Gay, *Deism: An Anthology*. A few disagree: Herrick, for example, sees spirited public outcries for and against the deists especially on topics like miracles throughout the 1740s and into the 1750s. He argues that the deists remained visible on the public stage until 1770. See Herrick, *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists*, 21. On Franklin, see Walters, *Rational Infidels*, 47-58. On Beadle reading Leland, see Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 127. On Beadle thinking of suicide, see "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 178.

²⁹ See the Introduction of Winterer, *American Enlightenment*.

toward the end of the decade, war raging, merchants and bookbinders announced smaller but still significant lists.³⁰

The ads promised works spanning every conceivable subject from religion to law to medicine. They sold classics of the ancient world and the most recent issues of London's leading periodicals. Through these shops, Beadle and his companions had ready access to the English voices that had shaped the tenor of Enlightenment elsewhere, philosophers and scientists like Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and John Locke. Works by eighteenth-century thinkers like Joseph Addison, Joseph Butler, William Blackstone, Alexander Pope, David Hume, and New England's own Jonathan Edwards lined the shelves of bookstores. While some of these men were not radical freethinkers, they were all enmeshed in the major issues of Enlightenment discourse.³¹

In person and in writing, someone like Beadle also had plenty of chances for involvement in Enlightenment debates. Beadle hid many of his religious convictions, but his writings do indicate evening discussions with friends on topics like the morality of death and suicide. While still in eastern Connecticut, he might have seen the notices for a "London Coffee House" providing "Genteel Entertainment." By the mid-1770s, the Hartford Library Company formed to procure books for the benefit of the public since "the Utility of Public Libraries...and their smiling Aspect on the Interests of Society,

³⁰ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Oct. 9, 1767; *Connecticut Courant*, Oct. 10, 1774; *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 14, 1773.

³¹ For examples of some of these authors on sale, see the ads in the previous note.

Virtue and Religion are too manifest to be denied.” Calls for new library subscriptions and announcements of subscriber meetings appeared frequently in the *Courant*.³²

As with William Beadle’s letters, the vocabulary of that New England print culture was often the vocabulary of a much larger Enlightenment. The Connecticut newspaper ads for books and periodicals highlighted themes typical of Enlightenment; the language of these ads was replete with the touchstone concepts of Enlightenment thought. Most obviously, New England booksellers might advertise texts such as *Locke’s Two Treatises of Government*, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Even more important than specific titles, however, book and periodical announcements evinced ready attachment to the spirit of Enlightenment. Booksellers and publishers, for example, appreciated the allure of the new, the sense that what was happening and what was then available was innovative. A New London bookseller announced receipt of “the most modern Books.” A Hartford periodical bragged it was the “first of its Kind” and vowed to treat questions and topics “of Novelty.” This “modern” outlook encouraged a feeling of universality, and advertisers took notice, offering a comprehensive knowledge for a comprehensive clientele. Hartford’s Smith and Colt promised “as universal a collection of Books” as had ever been seen. *The Royal American Magazine* used “Universal Repository” as an alternate title and suggested it was a time in which knowledge could “be more universally” received. Even when not using that language explicitly, book lists or publications claimed an interest in “every Branch” of learning or begged for the attention of “all Ranks and Professions.” As

³² “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 188-189; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), May 18, 1770; *Connecticut Courant*, Feb. 2, 1774; March 27, 1775; April 3, 1775.

“politeness” came to define the age in England, the New England literati adopted the term as well: bookshops had the latest in “polite Literature, Arts and Sciences;” periodicals referenced “this polite age.” Just as Enlightenment thinkers in Europe sought to remake a society befitting rational beings, New England intellectuals advertised their work as procuring social betterment. They would report on, and contribute to improvements in, all areas of society and culture including traditionally intellectual categories like medicine, surgery, politics, religion, and the arts as well as less scholastic endeavors like manufacturing and commerce. They would provide “all that is requisite...for the enjoyment of social happiness” and “to encourage and cultivate every thing tending to promote this great gift of heaven among mankind” whatever “their various employments on this stage of action.”³³

Even more, those ads from the 1770s shared a vocabulary with William Beadle’s secret writings from late 1782. At the most general level, advertisers and essayists praised reason and venerated nature as a guide to knowledge just as Beadle would do in his letters. One book promised to explain and defend the Bible “by strength of reason;” a periodical would bring happiness to “rational beings.” An essay reprinted on the front page of the *Connecticut Courant* in 1774 strung together human goods with nature metaphors: in America, the essayist claimed, “the streams of wealth, the beams of science, the stars of wisdom, the light of virtue, and the sun of liberty, will all unite their

³³ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Oct. 9, 1767; *Connecticut Courant*, March 24, 1772; Oct. 10, 1774; Aug. 17, 1773.

rays.” The common language is no surprise coming from intellectually engaged minds in the late eighteenth century.³⁴

More curiously, Beadle and the others sometimes utilized the same particulars of language in less expected ways. Beadle, as mentioned, wrote that all “Sons of Science” were “k’ndred Spirits.” Likewise, the publishers of the *Royal American Magazine*, in celebrating the cultural effects of printing, lamented, “Before the art of Printing was known the Sons of Science suffered greatly.” Both uses clearly emphasized a shared intellectual tradition, a common mission. “Sons of Science” conjured feelings of family as did Beadle’s use of “k’ndred.” That familial bond crossed the distances of time and space. To the publishers, printing allowed that crossing. Similarly, Beadle felt distance erased whenever he looked “on the exalted” in great books or “hum[med] a fine piece of Music...composed by one you never saw or heard.” In such instances, he exclaimed, a “Son of Science” experiences “a force of sympathy that “binds” one’s “soul” to that of the creator. Here, at least, both Beadle and the publishers used identical language to connect their own enlightened aspirations with a larger movement, a shared terminology at anyone’s disposal, whether Boston writer or provincial merchant.³⁵

When it came to religion and philosophy, both William Beadle and his intellectual neighbors grappled with topics long fashionable in Europe. In his letters, William confessed deism, fatalism, and universalism; he read scripture and considered theology as a skeptical exegete and practitioner of comparative religion; he looked askance at

³⁴ *Connecticut Courant*, Aug. 17, 1773; Feb. 22, 1774; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Oct. 9, 1767.

³⁵ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 187; *Connecticut Courant*, Aug. 17, 1773.

miracles and superstition. Those who commented on the Beadle murders felt compelled to address this troubling constellation, but at the level of ideas, nothing was entirely unfamiliar. If nothing else, they would have seen them in the ads of the *Connecticut Courant* or *Connecticut Gazette*. They might have seen Jonathan Edwards' work on free will and, over and over, in multiple newspapers, an ad for Stephen West's *An Essay on Moral Agency: Containing Remarks on a late anonymous Publication, entitled, "An examination of the late Reverend President Edwards's Enquiry on Freedom of Will."* With miracles and Hume in mind, they could consult *A Dissertation on Miracles, containing an Examination of the Principles advanced by David Hume, Esq. in an Essay on Miracles, by George Campbel, D.D.* There were any number of new defenses of Christianity and the Bible including *Stackhouse's new History of the Holy Bible, from the Beginning of the World to the Establishment of Christianity*, which pledged to answer controversial questions; explain "remarkable passages;" rectify translation errors; and, through "strength of reason and arguments" "silence the cavils and objections which have hitherto given shelter to profanements and infidelity" and "stop the noisy mouth of the scoffer." Beadle and authors like Stackhouse had clearly reached different conclusions, but all recognized such debates were necessary by the late eighteenth century. In the last two years of Beadle's life, he and his neighbors might have discussed certain books individually advertised in their local paper: one an attack on a dangerous "Religious Scheme, taught and propogated by a Number of Europeans" in New York; another with the odd title *A Droll, A Deist, And A John Bacon, Master of A[] Gently Reprimanded*; or a third titled *The Doctrine of Universal Salvation, Examined and Refuted*. Just months

after the murders, as Beadle's claims of a mechanistic universe renewed as the anti-Beadle sermons appeared in print, the *Connecticut Courant* repeatedly advertised *A New System of Philosophy, or the Newtonian hypothesis examined*. Beadle's heterodox philosophies, then, were not entirely absent from public discourse. Before the murders, before snippets of Beadle's writings compelled commentators to wring their hands at religious innovation, such innovation was already on the mind of America's theologically- and philosophically-inclined citizens.³⁶

These similarities and overlaps between William Beadle and the intellectual culture around him highlight several historiographical points. First, Enlightenment interest in rethinking religion and society was widespread. If the booksellers and magazine printers of inland Connecticut had a market—or felt they had a market—for such topics, it is clear Enlightenment had crossed the Atlantic. William Beadle was not an anomaly. He may have reached conclusions unpopular to the New England mind regarding God, the Bible, free will, or hell. He may have channeled those conclusions into unconscionable actions. Nevertheless, the mental life behind those actions and topics of intellectual interest were representative. Second, there existed a common vocabulary of Enlightenment available to the intellectually interested. This vocabulary was not just the province of professors at Harvard, polymaths like Franklin, or genteel lawyers like Jefferson. It was available to anyone who cared to scan the newspaper.

While both William Beadle and his New England neighbors shared in the larger spirit of Enlightenment sweeping the Atlantic, it was understandably difficult for

³⁶ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters,” 179; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Oct. 9, 1767, May 18, 1770, Sept. 9, 1772; *Connecticut Courant*, April 3, 1781. For the “New System” book, see spring/summer 1783 issues of *Connecticut Courant*.

Americans to identify at all with a murderer. Commentators rushed to condemn Beadle's deism. At times, they seemed afraid of their age's intellectual mentality more broadly. Who could blame them as Beadle's words posthumously defended family murder on the grounds of Enlightenment religion? It would be simplistic, however, to tell the story of the print aftermath as one of conservative backlash on the part of the traumatized. The print response was more complex than that. As in the case of Beadle, commentators found both a tempting solace and a slew of new anxieties in their Enlightenment turn. The more they could see the Beadle murders as the consequence of ideas, the more understandable Beadle became. That understanding, however, proved only a brief reprieve, for as writers and readers soon realized, ideas could spread, and they could do so in secret. Deism explained Beadle, but what if deism brewed beneath the surface of every supposedly respectable merchant? Even more, the specifics of Beadle's doctrines fastened to already-present concerns about free will, the nature of divine punishment, and the consequences of religious liberty.

Financial ruin may well have prompted Beadle's murderous turn, but commentators readily latched onto theology as the root problem. After all, money was mundane, deism otherworldly. An act so atrocious demanded an explanation more extraordinary than economic woes. By the late eighteenth century, Puritans might have been Yankees and clerical authority might have slipped, but religion still provided an inescapable framework for interpreting a man like William Beadle. To many New Englanders, pride still lay at the root of all falls. Surprisingly, no one bothered to mention that Beadle's theological statements remained, strictly speaking, illegal in Connecticut,

but clergymen like John Marsh and James Dana, of course, condemned Beadle's deistic rejection of revelation and denial of free will and morality. More significantly, they raised fears that other William Beadles lurked throughout the American landscape. The Revolution had already upset the social order. Now heterodoxy threatened to do the same. Beadle was not just a present trauma; he was the country's future should citizens forsake ministerial warnings. Moreover, Beadle was not just a case of bad theology; he was a case of Enlightenment gone awry. Print, both ecclesiastic and secular, constructed Beadle as a deist monster that represented the dangers of Enlightenment.³⁷

Newspapers and sermons, even while mentioning financial turmoil, seized on Beadle's secret deism as an obvious motivation for the tragedy. The problem of William Beadle became the problem of deism. That gave commentators and their readers a recognizable cultural menace. While Beadle became something of a symbol of that deist menace, the fears that made it possible had a longer history in eighteenth-century New England. As the deist threat supposedly waned in England around mid-century, it arose anew on the Continent—particularly in France and Germany—and in the colonies. That which felt old in England still felt on the rise in New England. By the time Ezra Stiles read Beadle's letters for instance, he had been haranguing deism's perceived influence at

³⁷ On Puritans becoming Yankees, see Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*. On the slip in clerical authority, see Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). The waning of the clerical monopoly is a theme among those studying murder during the period, even if they disagree on the reasons for, and timing of, that waning. For two different takes on the cause and timing of declining ministerial influence, see Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul* and Daniel A. Cohen, "Blood Will Out: Sensationalism, Horror, and the Roots of American Crime Literature," in *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America*, eds. Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 31-55. On the illegality of deism and the Revolutionary upheaval, see Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 61 and 30.

American colleges for decades.³⁸ By the late 1770s, rumors of deism at Harvard swirled among Massachusetts' clergy and the parents of students.³⁹ Yale had a particular reputation for deism. Jonathan Edwards had held nothing back in his assessment: at least "Heretics, Arians, Socinians, and others" still "own the Scriptures to be word of God" and believe "the Christian religion to be the true religion." Their mistakes seemed minor compared to the "Deists" who "wholly cast off the Christian religion, and are professed infidels." Isaac Backus, a New England Baptist minister influenced by Edwards, wrote and received nervous letters about deism and universalism throughout the 1780s. Backus himself published an anti-universalism book the same year as the Beadle murders. By the time William Beadle entered the national mindset, Massachusetts minister John "Damnation" Murray was sure even doctors, military officers, and the "politer part of society" had all already succumbed to the "poison" of deism.⁴⁰

The worries over deism and other innovations were not limited to the conservative side of New England ministers. Some in deist circles worried, too, about the effects their doctrine would have on social stability if and when the "masses" joined their side. Even in 1786, no less a freethinker than Franklin advised a friend not to print an unorthodox

³⁸ On deism's move to France and Germany, see Gay, *Deism: An Anthology*, 143, 159-160. On Stiles, see Kerry S. Walters, *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic* (Lawrenceville: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 26.

³⁹ Andrew Elliot to Samuel Langdon, 14 August 1778, Harvard College Papers, 1st series, 1636-1825, 1831, Volume 2, 1764-1785, 1793, Harvard University Archives, sequence 120, item 99, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.ARCH:11030735?n=120>.

⁴⁰ On Yale, see Walters, *Rational Infidels*, 8-9. Edwards quote is in Gay, *Deism: An Anthology*, 11. For examples of Backus' correspondence, see The papers of Isaac Backus, Reel 8, DLAR. For Damnation Murry, see [Murray], *Bath-Kol*, 97-99. Interestingly, John Murray was known as "Damnation Murray" to distinguish him from a universalist minister of the same name (called "Salvation" Murray). See Grasso, "Deist Monster," 46 and *Skepticism and American Faith*, 28.

tract: people acted badly enough with religion, Franklin warned, let alone without it. Drawing on such multidirectional fears, the *Connecticut Courant* quoted Beadle's intention "to die a proper Deist" and suggested a deistical rejection of revelation was directly responsible for his rejection of morality and free will and the notion that a husband/father possessed the right of life and death over his family. According to the papers, Lydia and the children were "a sacrifice to such mischievous error."⁴¹

Following a similar line of analysis, clergy extrapolated from Beadle as individual to the general principles that fueled "such detestible and more than savage conduct." In his funeral sermon, John Marsh, Calvinist minister of The First Church of Wethersfield, quoted Beadle's claim that "we are all impell'd" in speech and action as an indictment of deist logic. Beadle, Marsh explained to those in attendance, translated his belief in fatalism to a corresponding belief in amoralism, believing that all actions, since determined, were right. Beadle, Marsh explained, wielded the axe, knife, and pistol confident that God's goodness negated any notion of future punishment.⁴² Marsh concluded by insisting "there are so many in this land" who, like Beadle, scoff at and ridicule the glorious gospel of the blessed God."⁴³ Perhaps, Marsh hoped, those guilty of such sins might, through Beadle, recognize the error of their ways.

Letters in the newspapers echoed Marsh's interpretation: Beadle's deist principles were to blame. As seen earlier, commentators often resorted to hyperbolic language that

⁴¹ For deists worried about their movement's effects, see Walters, *Rational Infidels*, 5. For Franklin, see Walters, *Rational Infidels*, 6, 44-45. As Grasso notes, many anti-deist sermons and writing conflated rejection of the Bible with rejection of morality. See Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 27.

⁴² Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 17.

⁴³ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 23.

signified William Beadle as inscrutable, his deed incomprehensible. Even as they did so, however, writers conveyed the opposite message: deism explained all. For example, the letter from Benevolens that appeared in the *Connecticut Courant* a few weeks after Marsh's sermon reinforced the notion that "infidelity" was to blame. William Beadle was a deist, deists are infidels, and "[s]uch is the fruit of Infidelity! to such tragical ends is its natural tendency." There was "not an infidel of them all" who would not by "their own tenets" and "under similar circumstances...commit a similar deed."⁴⁴

The firebrand Friend to Justice agreed a few weeks later in the same newspaper. His diatribe referenced "Beadle's principles," "infidels," and those of "like principles" repeatedly. In fact, Friend was so adamant that the corpse of this deist monster be hanged on a gibbet precisely because the link between Beadle's principles and his actions was so clear, the downward spiral so quick. Only the fear of such punishment could thwart the telos of such infidelity. Writers agreed even outside the immediate Wethersfield area. In New London, the Humble Professor of Christianity reminded readers that they had "seen the fatal tendency" of Beadle's "doctrines" and "principles." As if that were not clear enough, he continued, "This shocking murder, committed by such a man" was committed "under such an influence (i.e.) the influence of such principles." Perhaps deism rendered the monster understandable after all.⁴⁵

The secret deist was, if anything, so worrisome precisely because it was so believable. It was hard to imagine one's neighbor a murderer, but it did not take much work to imagine that neighbor a deist. Authors were certain that infidels like Beadle were

⁴⁴ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 14, 1783.

⁴⁵ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783.

everywhere disguised as ordinary husbands, wives, friends, and neighbors. Those deists were as monstrous as Beadle. As “Damnation” Murray reminded his congregation, any deist was a “monster that threatens to extirpate all the remains of virtue and piety from among us.” Benevolens warned all who might accidentally acquaint themselves with deists, as such sinners might “take away our lives at any time.” Friend to Justice saw a straight line between deism and atrocity: all “those of Beadle’s principles” were one displeasure away from taking “it in their heads to poison half the neighbourhood, half the town or half the state, and then murder themselves.” Writers like the Humble Professor of Christianity and Friend to Justice engaged in one-sided arguments about whether Beadle’s letters should appear in print. As they saw it, godly New Englanders should see Beadle’s erroneous principles precisely in order to successfully combat them. In the broadside poem of William Woods, Americans should fear Beadle’s satanic reasoning as much as his actions. They should “[d]etest the errors” that “drew” William Beadle “to this deed.” The only real hope was that God would “[d]rive these destructive errors from the land” and prohibit Satan from further ideological deceptions.⁴⁶

Even without specific mention of William Beadle, fears of deism and related heresies expanded in the decade or two after his death as the philosophy’s proponents embraced media attention. On the pro-deist side, clergyman-turned-deist Elihu Palmer set up deist societies throughout the states. In 1785, Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen published *Reason, the Only Oracle of Man*, a confusingly written defense of deism indebted to Collins and Tindal. Allen, whose political writings had routinely appeared in

⁴⁶ Bath-Kol, 165; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 14, 1783; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783; Woods, *A Poem*.

the *Connecticut Courant* during the Revolution, had wanted a Hartford press to distribute the treatise two years earlier, but, in large part because of Beadle, the printers had demurred. The book became a bellwether for some, a scandal for others, even as relatively few actually read it entirely. Many of the copies burned in a fire, but as the first defense of deism from an American, it certainly drew ire. Ezra Stiles and Timothy Dwight, both intimately involved in the Beadle affair, were among those who decried Allen on his death in 1789. In general, some scholars have detected a more public, more vehement push for deism after the 1780s. Deists became increasingly vocal in denouncing church and scripture even if partisans like Palmer still exaggerated in claiming tens of thousands of adherents.⁴⁷

As firebrands like Palmer and well-known figures like Allen openly espoused deism, fears of its hold only grew. Even when ministers admitted that few in their congregations were looking to abandon traditional Christianity for the deists, they worried anyone and everyone could accidentally be led astray. Some detected an uptick in so-called “pious criminals” like Beadle, which highlighted the potential pitfalls of the long-standing Puritan commitment to encouraging people to interpret the Bible for themselves. Baptist associations throughout New England continually updated one another on their fight against the “Triumphant Reasoning of the Deists” who “have said so much against the Holy Scriptures and against Jesus of Nazareth.” In the aftermath of the Revolution, Baptist converts commonly repented of deism, which some specifically identified with the culture of war. One Connecticut veteran wrote that during his army

⁴⁷ Walters, *Rational Infidels*, 10-12, 84-93; Fitzgerald, “Towards an American Abraham,” 41-49. On Allen in relation to Beadle, see Grasso “Deist Monster” and *Skepticism and American Faith*, 25-65. On Allen and the Hartford printers, see *Skepticism and American Faith*, 25.

service he “imbibed very pernicious principles, and advanced from bad to worse” until he ended up, by the time he encountered Paine’s *Age of Reason* in the 1790s, “one of the most open, daring, and blasphemous infidels of the age.” Baptist associations and converts were keenly aware that the independence and religious liberty they cherished also had its downfalls. In connecting deism with overseas politics, some commentators began labeling deists “Jacobins.” Most frightening to some, religious and political liberty had seen deism radiate beyond the upper classes. Magazines like Palmer’s *Prospect* made deism available to all. Sometimes even deists themselves worried about the consequences. A “Rich Deist” admitted in an 1802 issue of *Temple of Reason* that while very few in high society cared about religion personally, they had quite a vested interest in their servants remaining good, obedient Christians.⁴⁸

Yale was a flashpoint for Connecticut anti-deists involved in the Beadle affair. In a 1783 sermon, Yale president Ezra Stiles confessed to his own skeptical turn as a young man. The temptation of learned skepticism was such a “cloudy darksome valley,” Stiles continued, that even when he believed he was dying during a college illness, he had spun the orthodox answers a visiting minister wanted to hear while harboring doubts in his

⁴⁸ Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: the Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 6-7; Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 76-77; Fitzgerald “Toward an American Abraham,” 11, 36-41, 49; Fitzgerald “Weiland’s Crime,” 112-115; Hezekiah Smith and William Hooper to Warren Baptist Association, 12 June 1788, The papers of Isaac Backus, Reel 9, Item 1922, DLAR. On the Connecticut soldier reading Paine, Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 191-195, quote from 194 (original is from *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*). The connotation in that quote is that his time in the army loosened him from good morals and gave him the freedom to find his own destructive path. The letter from Reel 9 in the Backus Letters that decries deists, universalists, shakers, etc. starts with praising how religious freedom lets the Baptist worship as they see fit—i.e. an implied recognition that that same liberty has shaped this fight against heresy. Walters, *Rational Infidels*, 10-11, 35-36. Fitzgerald “Towards an American Abraham,” 43-44.

heart. After succeeding Stiles to the Yale presidency, Timothy Dwight, who also admitted to a youthful brush with skepticism, hoped to scare his students away from a similar fate with a commencement address published as *The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy*. Before listing the usual suspects of English deism, Dwight rallied listeners with hyperbole: “[t]he ravages of Alexander were probably less injurious to the human race, and less guilty before God,” Dwight thundered, “than the ravages of the moral world by Hume, or Voltaire.” Others joined in fretting about secret or not-so-secret deism at the college. In 1793, for example, Yale student Lyman Beecher bemoaned that very few of his classmates still attended church and had become deist-leaning skeptics fond of nicknames like Paine, Voltaire, Rousseau, and D’Alembert. The word from William and Mary, Dartmouth, and Harvard was no better.⁴⁹

Deism—and, by extension, fatalism, universalism, or amoralism—was a useful shorthand for Beadle commentators, but writers also tied Beadle to a larger Enlightenment-era anxiety surrounding books and inflated intellectual pretensions. As his business declined, Beadle, the first newspaper account reported, “betook himself more to books than usual.”⁵⁰ This was not a benign observation but the hinge between Beadle’s financial woes and his turn to false theology. James Dana portrayed the murders as a direct consequence of Beadle’s reliance on books. Beadle’s literary turn, the minister

⁴⁹ On Stiles and Dwight having youthful flings with skepticism, see Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 2, 47. The Stiles sermon is “The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor,” which will be discussed in chapter 5. The Dwight quote on Hume and Voltaire is Timothy Dwight, *The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy* (New Haven: 1798), 45. He lists Herbert, Hobbes, Shaftesbury, Woolston, Tindal, Chubb, and Bolingbroke as guilty English thinkers. Walters, *Rational Infidels*, 8-11; Fitzgerald “Towards an American Abraham,” 43-44.

⁵⁰ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782.

lectured, was “a most improper course for the cure or relief of a distempered mind.” Referring both to Beadle specifically and distempered minds more generally, Dana lamented those “most unsuitable and dangerous books” that imparted “skeptical principles.” Once implanted, such principles activated a “reasoning pride” that incrementally encroached upon God’s moral sovereignty and abandoned all morality.⁵¹

Marsh also contrasted Christian humility with the almost unfathomable pride of William Beadle who, the minister informed his audience, “had a high opinion of his intellectual abilities.” As usual, he turned to Beadle’s writings, letting the murderer hang himself by sharing Beadle’s proclamations about having a soul “above the common mould” and being “a diamond among a million of pebbles.” Marsh took special satisfaction in deflating Beadle’s self-estimation. However brilliant Beadle had esteemed himself to be, Marsh pointed out that William eventually supplemented his philosophy with a contrary recourse to “fanaticism and superstition” in reference to his wife’s dreams.⁵² The condemnation here was sharp: not only was Beadle a godless philosopher, he was not even a very good one.

In their commentaries, both Marsh and Dana set Beadle’s intellectual pride and bookish predilection within the spirit of an enlightened age. In doing so, they revealed ambivalence about such a characterization of their time. Some of that ambivalence was with changes in the term itself. Marsh, having ridiculed Beadle’s superstitious dream interpretation as astonishing, quickly backtracked on his choice of adjective: “But why do I say astonishing? Can any thing be so in one, who, in an enlightened age, so far sets

⁵¹ Dana, *Men’s Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 22.

⁵² Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 19.

himself against God as to reject a revelation attended with all the evidence...the nature of the thing will admit?" Similarly, Dana, having acknowledged that many had "seen and lamented the prevalence of sceptical principles" for many years, insisted "that no one ever exploded revelation, in an enlightened age, but fixed down in atheism." On the surface, both men associated "enlightened age" with revelation. In a meaning that dated to Plato's cave analogy, Marsh and Dana used "enlightened" here chiefly to mean the soul enlightened by God. After Christ, human beings were in an "enlightened age," the age whereby human being was illuminated by God. A Humble Professor of Christianity echoed the ministers. Thanks to revelation, "how much more natural light and reason we have than" any infidels, he celebrated. As rejection of revelation was contrary "to the light of reason," Beadle was un-enlightened. At the same time, however, the ministers must have been aware that the eighteenth century had brought new meaning to the term. "Enlightened" became a term that applied to secular pursuits as well—politics, science, economics, etc.—as human beings brought their own illumination to the world. The ministers invoked the term even as they subtly admitted an uneasiness with their "enlightened age." After all, books, skepticism, and religious innovation were hallmarks of any enlightened terrain. That both authors saw other skeptical Beadles lurking in the American landscape suggests they were aware of, and concerned with, a larger shift that might render "enlightened" and "revelation" as adversaries. Beadle provided an opportunity to counter that antagonism, to show the ghastly consequences of the skeptically enlightened and buttress the rational credentials of a revelatory enlightened.⁵³

⁵³ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 21; Dana, *Men's Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 19, 23. On the changing use and meaning of the term "enlightened," see Winterer, *American Enlightenments*, 8-9.

If, however, men like Marsh and Dana at times maligned Beadle for an unhealthy obsession with books and learning, this was no cursory dismissal of Enlightenment. Just as Beadle oscillated between solace and despair in his pursuit of Enlightenment, so ambivalence pervaded the intellectual responses to Beadle. Just as the watchwords of Enlightenment—“light” or “nature” or “reason”—abounded in the newsprint of Beadle’s Connecticut, so these familiar tropes permeated the texts of Beadle commentators. Enlightenment was everywhere, not least in the critiques of Beadle’s deism.

Some involved in the Beadle case, for example, had high intellectual reputations; a few tended toward a more liberal mindset. Chauncey Whittelsey, Ezra Stiles, and James Dana—the three ministers asked to review Beadle’s writings—had long been Old Light stalwarts in New England. While the Old Lights tended to be more authoritarian than the Enlightenment’s “know thyself” motto could tolerate, they were, on the whole, more aligned with Enlightenment thinking on religion than the New Light enthusiasts. Stiles was a longtime correspondent of Franklin and, in a letter a few years after his anti-deist sermonizing surrounding the Beadle case, revealed himself to be rather tolerant—at least when it came to respectable intellectuals. Nearly obsequious in tone, Stiles begged for an open, sincere account of the doctor’s thoughts on the nature of Christ. In the request, he left no doubt that whatever the response, men like Franklin “of every Age, Nation and Mythology who reverence the Deity and are filled with Integrity, Reghteousness and Benevolence” will find “happy Immortality.” Similarly, while Reverend Dana was too conservative for the Harvard Armenians, most Calvinists found him shockingly liberal.

Jonathan Edwards, Jr. denigrated him a “heretick.” Timothy Dwight echoed his uncle by associating Dana with the likes of Voltaire and Ethan Allen.⁵⁴

Even the arguments against Beadle were on an Enlightenment plane. Reverend Marsh ridiculed Beadle for giving credence to dreams; James Dana condemned Beadle’s actions and ideas as “violence to reason.” For Dana, reason was so contrary to Beadle that even if any revelation purported to support Beadle’s ideologies about God, “we could not but conclude such system was from beneath, not above.” Stephen Mix Mitchell chastised his old friend for arguments that “contain many inconsistencies.” Benevolens, implicitly invoking Pascal’s wager, countered Beadle by arguing that the more prudent, more rational behavior would have been to follow Christianity since “whether it be true or false,” it at least held the promise “of a future blessed and happy existence.” The Humble Professor of Christianity saw irrationality at the core of Beadle’s decision: “if I could be persuaded such a doctrine were true, I would endeavour to live here always, or at least to protect my life out to the very last moment.” When editorialists like the Professor clamored for the publication of Beadle’s writings, they insisted it was for the sake of public reason. Contrary to the harried authorities withholding Beadle’s words from print, the Humble Professor saw “no foundation in reason” to “fear the doctrines...may have a tendency to draw others after him.” After all, Beadle’s ideas themselves possessed no “foundation in reason” but were “to the last degree absurd.” As the Professor saw it, nothing would dissuade the public from deism more than seeing the ridiculous doctrines of Beadle for themselves. Whoever was right notwithstanding, the

⁵⁴ Ezra Stiles to Benjamin Franklin, 28 January 1790, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, American Philosophical Society and Yale University, Packard Humanities Institute (digital edition), <http://www.franklinpapers.org/>. On Dana, Edwards, Jr., and Dwight, see Grasso “Deist Monster,” 51-52.

message was clear: commentators in the 1780s felt compelled to take their answers beyond biblical exegesis. William Beadle was not just a matter for scripture; he was as much a matter for reason.⁵⁵

As writers lauded their reason over the supposedly enlightened Beadle, they reused many familiar Enlightenment phrases; on occasion, they even inadvertently cited Beadle's favorite authors. Both Marsh and Dana celebrated the "light of nature."⁵⁶ Marsh especially, outwardly conservative in his periwig as he was, was fond of the formulation. In his view, Beadle stood "in contradiction to the light of reason;" his ideas were "inconsistent with the *light of nature*;" and he was "condemned by the light of nature."⁵⁷ In an introductory line to his poem, William Woods wrote Beadle had "violated Nature's...Law." The Humble Professor praised Christianity's "natural light and reason." Even more than phrases, commentators occasionally even shared some of Beadle's favorite authors. The Humble Professor, for example, ended his rebuke with words of wisdom from Alexander Pope, the very writer William Beadle had named a particular "friend" in portions of the letters never printed for the public. The Humble Professor's editorial closed with nearly twenty lines from Pope's *Essay on Man*. Beadle of course had quoted the same poem to defend his fatalism. Beadle and his antagonists, in short, often worked in the same vein despite the intellectual chasm each assumed lay between

⁵⁵ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 22-23; Dana, *Men's Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 21; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 16; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 14, 1783; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783.

⁵⁶ Dana, *Men's Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 7; Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 6, 21.

⁵⁷ Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 24.

them. That overlap, even in antagonism, was nowhere more visible than in contemporary debates about free will.⁵⁸

Machines and Free Will

To Beadle's mind, politics and economics had threatened his family's freedom; ideas afforded one last chance to secure it. For all that Enlightenment offered him, this was perhaps its riskiest wager. For Enlightenment, Kant would soon write, "all that is needed is *freedom*," and it initially gave Beadle just that. With Enlightenment, he might be free to rearticulate his own repeated failures. He took doctrines of deism and other religious innovations that had swirled the English capital during his youth and made sense of his current predicament out of the medley. Ironically, this freedom delivered Beadle into fatalism. Christianity, he had admitted in the long letter to Chester, rendered human beings free. To the contrary, deism, Beadle insisted, made human beings "perfect Machine[s]" capable of nothing except as "operated upon by Some Superior Power." In the context of the murders, Beadle's use of fatalism unsurprisingly struck commentators as self-serving to the worst degree. It was, indeed, self-serving, but not just when it came to the murders: fatalism served certainty to Beadle. Throughout the letters, for all his intellectual swagger, Beadle often wavered, and fatalism provided a temporary salve for that wavering. Fatalism meant, philosophically, to rise above the vagaries of fortune, the limits of earthly appearances, and the pains of mental doubt. Free will meant that a messy

⁵⁸ Woods, *A Poem*; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 176. As far as I can tell, the portion of Beadle's letter that referenced Pope was never printed, which means that the Humble Professor was unaware of Beadle's use of the English poet and thus, was not being being ironic or otherwise re-appropriating Pope by quoting him at length.

world was, in fact, messy; fate made messiness an illusion. To designate himself and all others machines brought sense to the senseless. In the wider context of the response to the tragedy, it interpolated the deist monster into Calvinism's internecine debates about free will and the nature of God.⁵⁹

The full significance of Beadle's "machine" language has sometimes been lost amid discussions of possible insanity or as a reason to question whether the provincial merchant had really gotten deism right. Even if calling human beings "machines" strikes the ear as suspicious or deists more typically celebrated human freedom as an upshot of their thinking on God, however, Beadle's wondering about a mechanistic universe was hardly beyond the pale for the time. Newton's mathematical description of the cosmos had put machines on the minds of many thinkers. Scientists began to speak less of a "soul" and more of a machine-like mind. Montesquieu, for example, wrote of the "physical state of the machine" when discussing the gloominess of the English people in *Spirit of the Laws*. *L'homme machine*, Julien Offray de La Mettrie's classic mid-century materialist text, appeared in English translation as *Man a Machine* during Beadle's last years in England. Grappling with Locke, Leibniz, Descartes, and others, La Mettrie challenged readers to "[d]are to throw off those prejudices" that had "fetter'd" humans and "conclude boldly...that man is a machine," made of the "one substance" comprising "the whole universe." Just a few years after Beadle's death, Benjamin Rush, founding father of American psychiatry, envisioned a public school system that would "convert men into republican machines." An overt denial of free will was not even entirely absent

⁵⁹ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" trans. H.B. Nisbet, in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55; "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 179.

from deist writing. While some historians strongly correlate deism with a celebration of free will, the philosopher Anthony Collins, one of the chief English deists, took his devotion to materialism to a decidedly determinist position. Not long after Collins and just a few years before William Beadle was born, a youthful Benjamin Franklin then apprenticing in London argued in a *Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain* that human beings could hardly be immune from the mechanistic laws that governed the rest of creation. With a mix of science, natural religion, and the New England Calvinism that Beadle would later encounter, Franklin assumed that all was willed by God, human freedom only an illusion. In short, others would have recognized Beadle's language and position as arguable even if they remained unconvinced.⁶⁰

Even more, the very language Beadle used in his terse pronouncement allowed for ambiguity. "Machine" at the time was a word in flux with uses at different points along a literal-figurative spectrum. Context signals that Beadle first and foremost used the word in relation to a divine being directing human action. This automaton connotation leads the modern ear to the Industrial Revolution and its factories, engines, and railways. Perhaps Beadle did envision early industrial machines; after all, that understanding of machines was certainly present. It was not, however, the most widely heard usage. Beadle—and even more the many who heard of his infamous "perfect machines" phrase—might not have solely imagined robotic, unchangeable actions. The term could have sent listeners

⁶⁰ For other historical interpretations of Beadle's "machine" language, see Bell, *We Shall Be No More*, 124 and Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic*, 127, 134-135. The mechanistic mind is in Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 57-8, 64; Montesquie is in MacDonald and Murphy *Sleepless Souls*; Julien Offray de La Matrie, *Man a Machine* (London: G. Smith, 1750), 83, 85; Rush is quoted in Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 154; on Franklin, see Walters, *Rational Infidels*, 47-58. As Walters notes, Franklin later regretted the pamphlet, and some have even argued he wrote it as satire though Walters believes it was sincere. For Collins, see Anthony Collins, *The Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty* (London: 1717).

into a number of directions from stage sets and literary devices, to human and animal physiology, to numerous modes of transportation. At times, when discussing human beings, writers chose the term precisely because it waffled between the figurative and the literal, allowing for an insulting ambiguity between rational and irrational, free and slave, Western European and not. For instance, in a 1779 letter to John Jay, Alexander Hamilton advocated the military use of enslaved Africans by citing the "maxim" that if "officers be men of sense and sentiment," then "the nearer the soldiers approach to machines perhaps the better." Hamilton's logic was, of course, demeaning and relied on the assumption that not all human beings possessed the same level of intelligent agency (he threw Russians in with Africans on that score), but it allowed him to preserve a habituated, servile agency for those humans he saw as lesser. Beadle's phrase likewise might have struck readers in a similarly ambiguous fashion. After all, this was the decade Europe met "The Turk," the mechanized contraption that tricked the Enlightenment world into believing an automaton could play chess.⁶¹

No one reveals just how much anti-Beadle writing had in common with contemporary arguments over "machines" like the Reverend James Dana. It was no accident Dana focused on Beadle's denial of free will and morality, no afterthought that he titled his Beadle sermon *Men's sins not chargeable on God, but on themselves*.

William Beadle was not the first man to draw Dana's attention to the question. By

⁶¹ On the various meanings of "machine," with dated examples, see "machine, n." OED Online. July 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.temple.edu/view/Entry/111850?rskey=92poa7&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed October 03, 2018). The entry references the Hamilton letter, but for the full text, see the following: Alexander Hamilton to John Jay, [14 March 1779], *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, 1779–1781, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 17–19.

December 1782, Dana had been carving out a space for free will within Calvinism for over a decade; the late Jonathan Edwards was his primary antagonist. Edwards, like Dana, thought it logically and spiritually impossible to charge God as responsible for human sin, but Edwards' Calvinism required some theological acrobatics to square human agency and moral culpability with divine omnipotence. The several hundred pages of his *Freedom of the Will* took up the job with a subtitle that would have fit any discussion of Beadle's amoralism, with Edwards noting that free will was "*supposed to be essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame.*" Not to be outdone, Dana did not limit his thoughts to the length of a sermon. In the early 1770s, he published two books—some three hundred pages—arguing against Edwards on the matter. To the second book, Dana appended "Strictures on the Rev'd Mr. West's 'Essay on Moral Agency.'" That piece answered the attacks of Stephen West, a former anti-Edwards partisan who had converted and taken it upon himself to rebut Dana's earlier book.⁶²

Though Dana respected Edwards as much as he despised Beadle, he saw their positions as dangerously similar. To Dana's Arminianism, any attack on free will was an attack on God, whether from the estimable Jonathan Edwards or the villainous William

⁶² Dana, *Men's Sins Not Chargeable on God*; Jonathan Edwards, *A careful and strict Enquiry into The modern prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will, Which is supposed to be essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* (Boston, 1754); James Dana, *Examination of the late Reverend President Edwards's "Enquiry on Freedom of Will"* (Boston, 1770); James Dana, *The Examination of the late Reverend President Edwards's "Enquiry on Freedom of Will" continued* (New Haven, 1773). Grasso discusses the connection to Dana's earlier work as well in "Deist Monster," 51-52. On West see Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 135. Note that West was mentioned earlier in this chapter when discussing the books advertised in the local Connecticut papers.

Beadle. Edwards' New Light Calvinism did not reject freedom of the will and moral responsibility as brazenly as did Beadle's writings. Nevertheless, according to Dana, "Mr. Edwards's book was wrote with a view to subvert the opinion of self-determination, and establish the doctrine of universal necessity." Dana was correct that Edwards had wished to preserve "necessity" and dismiss the "Modern Prevailing Notions" of Arminianism's libertarian conception of freedom, whereby a person's will is free only if a person's action is not fully determined by some other source and if that person is always able to do otherwise. To preserve both necessity and human culpability, Edwards elaborated a theory of "moral necessity." Human beings are culpable, Edwards argued, because moral necessity "arises from such *moral causes*, as the strength of inclination, or motives," and "the connection which there is in many cases between these and such volitions and actions" are always internal to the will of the person in question. That contrasts, Edwards continued, to any natural causes or natural necessity arising from external forces.⁶³

Dana did not buy it. However much Edwards or his defenders wanted to parse the technicalities of cause and effect, Dana insisted that Edwards' conclusion "can be defended on this only hypothesis, that God is the cause of sin." Indeed, as the Wallingford minister saw it, the hundreds of pages he, Edwards, and West had written were "reducible" to "this single question" of whether God was "the efficient cause of moral evil." Dana felt he had good reason to answer with a resounding no, for "should we

⁶³ Dana, *The Examination...continued*, 137; Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 21. My reading of Edwards here is influenced by Sam Storms, "The Will: Fettered yet Free (*Freedom of the Will*)," in *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, eds. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 201-220 and Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

presume to affirm that he is this cause, it would, we doubt not in the least, be striking at the foundation of all religion." Dana clearly had more patience with Edwards than with West. On Dana's reading, the former at least "denies (in words) a positive divine influence or efficiency in moral evil" while "Mr. West expressly maintains it." Nonetheless, Dana believed Edwards remained wrong. His philosophical parsing amounted to the same as West's more straightforward assertion. Religion could not, for Dana, operate under such an idea any more than it could under the cruder ideas of a William Beadle.⁶⁴

Dana was not the only Beadle commentator perturbed by similarities between the monster's fatalism and Edwardsian Calvinism. Even the less philosophical Reverend Marsh hinted at it when trying to unravel Beadle's theology. Within months, the debate reached the newspaper. In June 1783, the pseudonymous "Friend to pure Scriptural Orthodoxy" dragged Beadle into an editorial skirmish in the *Boston Continental Journal*. He denounced a previous writer as "an Edwardian" who "would acknowledge the horrid act of Beadle and all other suicides" as flowing from God's "irresistable agency." Beadle "was a fatalist," Friend explained, which meant he had "held precisely your sentiments respecting the necessity of all human actions; and believed himself as innocent when murdering his wife and children, and cutting his own throat." As far as Friend to pure Scriptural Orthodoxy saw things, this "conclusion was just," for how could Beadle be guilty "when the action was unavoidable, omnipotence the agent, and he only the instrument by which all this mischief was brought about?" A decade later, Israel Holly, a minister in Suffield, just north of Hartford along the Connecticut River, resurrected

⁶⁴ Dana, *The Examination...continued*, 141, 143.

Beadle to make a similar point. In a new addition to his previously published *Old Divinity Preferable to Modern Novelty*, Holly lambasted the New Light position for, on his reading, positing that God created sin. His title page decried the position as “folly and absurdity.” On the last page of the pamphlet, he reminded readers that the “execrable monster William Beadle” had believed much the same thing about sin. That alone, Holly thought, should conclude the philosophical argument.⁶⁵

If, then, anger, curiosity, or fear often drove the need to write about Beadle, for ministers like Dana and Holly, Beadle was one more opportunity to weigh in on philosophical and theological issues that had bedeviled New England thinkers throughout the eighteenth century. Dana's responses to Edwards, especially, occurred on a level of high philosophy that would make any scholastic proud. The pair could be impenetrable and were surely not standard fare for the average reader intrigued by Beadle. Even so, the case reused much of the same language. For example, when Beadle imagined human beings as “machines,” it echoed Dana’s charge nine years earlier that West had replaced “moral agency” with “mechanism.” Edwards, as previously mentioned, saw the problem, too: he acknowledged that many accused his position of making “Men no more than meer Machines” even though he rejected the indictment. The language of machines might come from one of America's leading theologians or from one of its most notorious murderers, and Dana was ready either way.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Grasso, “Deist Monster,” 52, fn. 20 mentions these connections and references but does not elaborate. For Marsh, see Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 23. For a “Friend to pure Scriptural Orthodoxy,” see *Boston Continental Journal*, June 26, 1783. The Holly text is Israel Holly, *Old Divinity Preferable to Modern Novelty* (New Haven, 1780).

⁶⁶ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 179; Dana, *The Examination...continued*, 144; Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 220. On the impenetrability of Edwards and that effect on debates at the time and

In the case of Beadle, the readiness might have gone in the other direction as well. While there is no certain evidence that Beadle and Dana ever met or that Beadle was acquainted with the Dana-West debate, it does not take much imagination to get there. Dana's Wallingford church was only twenty miles or so from Wethersfield, and Beadle did have a habit of acquainting himself with the area's leading voices. For example, Stiles implied he knew the family. Mix Mitchell's former student and Stiles' successor at Yale, Timothy Dwight, wrote as if he had met Beadle during his wartime residence in Wethersfield. Even if the two never met, Beadle might have been acquainted with Dana in print: ads for the Dana-West exchange on free will, a topic of obvious interest to Beadle, appeared frequently in the newspapers. Whether acquainted or not, debates on free will brought them together after Beadle's death. It was Beadle's most notorious theological statement despite—perhaps actually because of—the fact that it came closest to Calvinist orthodoxy.

Dualities of Enlightenment

In hindsight, it is easy to cast the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as an age of reason, science, and a self-assured belief in progress that banished sentiment, superstition, and ignorance in a march toward modernity. While the letters of William Beadle definitely celebrated the former trio, they also bristled with the latter. He propped up his theological convictions with claims of reason, called himself a “son of science,” and ridiculed those not mature enough to embrace deism. At the same time, however, he

historical assessment later, see Conrad Wright, “Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will,” *Harvard Theological Review* 35 (October 1942): 241.

justified his actions with reference to feeling, drew heavily on dreams as divine omens, and repeatedly admitted he did not really know anything after all. Both contemporaries and later historians have sometimes cited these antagonistic pairings as evidence of Beadle's instability, but they just as readily remind us how unstable the Enlightenment itself was. It is incorrect to pretend there was a clean break between some pre-modern, superstitious ignorance and a modern, scientific rationality. Part of what was underway was the development of the very idea of such a division as possible and desirable. The story of the Beadle murders, then, highlights a number of dualities at the core of the Enlightenment project.

The puffed up, self-assured Beadle who celebrated his own intelligence and scorned his neighbors as dense and hypocritical was the Beadle who most often appeared in the sermons, pamphlets, and newspapers after his death. But Beadle was just as often unsure. He could admit the possibility of error. He could exclaim from the beginning of the very first letter, "I really believe that the true G[o]d supports me!" only to admit two pages later that the deity prompting him could turn out "not a good God" but "an evil Spirit," a reality Beadle admitted might see him "yet to inhabit terrible Hells and burnings forever." In the same letter, he denounced Christianity, then nonchalantly added, "If it is really true I shall be saved by it." He echoed the uncertainty in another long letter to Chester from early December. He was "convinced in a steady[,] calm and reasonable way, that...it is God himself that prompts and directs me...." It could be otherwise. In the very next sentence, Beadle conceded that "Mr. Devil or any evil Spirit" might be his guiding light. If that were the case, Beadle shrugged, "all I can say about it

is, that I was born a very unlucky fellow.” Such might-be-right, might-be-wrong confessions surely exacerbated the likes of Mitchell, Dana, and Stiles. How, they might have thought, could William Beadle be so casual about beliefs drafted into the service of death?⁶⁷

Other admissions of ignorance flowed less from recognition of his own personal limitations than a more general, abstract assessment of human intelligence. At one point in the longest letter to Chester, for example, Beadle scorned “The Wisdom of Philosophers, the Trophies of Conquerors and the Squabbles of Divines” as “in reality more ridiculous than the droll faces and Tricks of Baboons and Monkies.”⁶⁸ Beadle may have written this while pondering his beloved Montaigne who repeatedly compared humans to animals in an effort to deflate human pride. Perhaps that turn of phrase in the letter to Chester was meant to echo Montaigne’s ridicule of “our monkey tricks.”⁶⁹ Regardless, the analogy was not an occasion for Beadle (or Montaigne) to elevate his own wisdom over the animalistic refrains of other philosophers, conquerors, and divines. On the contrary, the poverty of their achievements confirmed Beadle’s own intellectual poverty. “This being the case,” he continued, “I choose to leave this World as I found it, honestly confessing that I know not what to make of it nor never did.” There was no other conclusion, no course of study, no degree of reflection that could alter this state, for “never” will “any man that thinks” possibly “know what to make of” the world “while he

⁶⁷ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 174, 176, 172, 186.

⁶⁸ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 179.

⁶⁹ For this comparison b/t Beadle and Montaigne, see Grasso, “Deist Monster,” 57. For examples of Montaigne’s use of comparisons to animals, see Michel de Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, trans. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003).

Stays in it.” Beadle sought knowledge, but he also questioned our ability to ever find it. The limits of Beadle’s rational thought about the world and our place in it were indicators not of his own singular shortcomings but, rather, the inherent and inescapable deficiencies of the human mind.⁷⁰

Beadle’s oscillation between confidence and humility, certainty and skepticism, aligned him with one of Enlightenment’s many dualities.⁷¹ Enlightenment encouraged optimism and the freedom to think beyond convention, but it also demanded realism and the discipline to think within the evidence. Enlightenment writing overflowed with “a peculiar mix of skepticism and confidence.” Some of the century’s most original voices like Voltaire, Samuel Johnson, and Beadle’s “friend” Alexander Pope “invented a new style of writing authoritatively about their own ignorance.”⁷² Perhaps Beadle’s confident-one-minute, humble-the-next statements were insincere, incoherent babbling, or merely hedges against judgments, human or divine. Nevertheless, as with many of his interests and much of his terminology, Beadle’s wavering tone matched the Enlightenment ethos. This resonated with those trying to sort out the repercussions of the tragedy.

As Beadle expressed an Enlightenment skepticism at human knowledge, he also occasionally blurred the edges between reason and superstition. On one level, to be sure, Beadle’s letters seemed simply to express whatever arguments or explanations were most immediately self-serving to their author, regardless of rationality. Nevertheless, the letters could meander between reason and superstition precisely because no clear line existed

⁷⁰ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 179-180.

⁷¹ For a quick discussion of such dualities, see Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment*, x.

⁷² Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 68.

anyway. Both Beadle and those who wrote of him expressed a desire to weed out irrationality in favor of modern thinking—that much was a shared commitment to Enlightenment. Still, it was not always clear, especially once God and revelation became involved, what counted as rational, what as nonsense. To a significant degree, moments like the Beadle murders were part of the process of sketching such contours.

For example, Beadle certainly ascribed importance to the frightening dreams Lydia endured in the last months of her life. As she related nighttime visions of familial destruction, Beadle looked for confirmation of his plan. First, in every instance, Beadle treated the dreams as tests for his resolve. Having sketched the gruesome scenes, he took solace in feeling “unappalled” and “little affected.” Even more, he implied that the dreams themselves, as well as his reactions, were divine encouragements for the plan. The image of the bloody papers and blood-covered man not only left William “*unappalled*,” it also allowed him to “think the hand of Heaven is really with us.” When he noted that the dreams of Lydia seized for punishment and his daughters frozen in death left him “little affected,” he immediately added “O my God! Wonderful indeed are they Works.”⁷³ When it came to those works, “All must be right,” Beadle wrote, or else he was “hardened in Truth.” Even in his reverie, he was aware that naysayers would interpret the dreams and his own stoicism as “the Suggestions of the Devil.” To them Beadle could only insist that “a much higher power...alone” directed and supported him. Perhaps he expected the form of Lydia’s second dream to influence Mitchell and any

⁷³ In the attempted reconstruction of Beadle’s letters from Stiles, the sermons, and the newspapers, James Smart here inserts a single sentence quote from Marsh: “In the highest Wisdom hast thou contrived them all!” It is a likely guess given the tone and content, but of course there’s no way to tell for certain. See Smart, “A Life of William Beadle,” 36.

other readers. As Beadle reconstructed it, Lydia was seized, which “created great Confusion, but She afterwards got free and was happy.” By design or not, that version paralleled Beadle’s own confessed state of mind in the paragraph as well as his appreciation for how others would read things. That is, at the start of this letter to Mitchell, Beadle viewed the dreams and other potential signs with a skeptical eye much like the initial “Confusion” instantiated in Lydia’s sleep.” But just as Lydia’s vision ended with the dreamer free and happy, so Beadle’s hesitancy concerning the divine omens dissipated into a free and happy celebration of God’s works. He surely desired the same process would work within the minds of his readers: he knew the story would turn them to “Suggestions of the Devil,” but he hoped they would find that “higher power” at the end of it after all.⁷⁴

Beadle’s words concerning Lydia’s dreams were even more significant from the standpoint of Enlightenment epistemology. They were part of a larger body of evidence William presented himself when considering just what the will of God was. For example, just before describing the second and third dream, William confessed that while he “used to be a great Enemy of Superstition,” he had come to believe he had “lately had Sundry Intimations...from God” that supported the plan. While Beadle said he would not or could not describe these “Intimations,” the dreams were a part of the conversation. While he did not provide more specifics at that point, the letters were full of moments that easily fit the description of such “Intimations.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 188.

⁷⁵ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 188.

Whatever forms the “Intimations” took, Beadle the rationalist shoehorned them into supporting his plan. First, Beadle of course interpreted events as God-ordained, and he did so in the most personally convenient fashion. He had, for example, always struggled with whether or not to include Lydia in his plans. All his argumentation as to why he ultimately included her notwithstanding, William saw God’s hand at work in the matter as well. Lydia’s unplanned trip to Fairfield just as Beadle set a date for the family’s deaths was a providential answer to his conscience; much the same, her surprise return “ten days sooner than...expected” provided new instruction. Beadle seemed unconcerned about God’s fickleness. Equally self-serving, he seemed unaware of the inconsistency when not interpreting the servant girl’s early reappearance as a sign God wished her to die as well. Second, Beadle had a disturbing habit of role-playing the murder in order to assess his countenance. The letters, he intimated, were a way of “meditating [on] this intended Deed,” and while writing, he “felt no singular Anguish of Mind.” He could “handle...the Weapons of Destruction” and “look on...the dear objects that are to fall by them without” the slightest “Tremor and without Fear.” He found himself “convinced in a steady calm and reasonable way” whenever he dwelt on it. Just days before his death, he even “rose before the Sun” and, weapons in hand, crept into the children’s room, and felt “no fear trembling nor Horror.” He went to the next room and inspected his face “in the Glass, but...could discover no Alteration” of “Countenance or feelings.” In all these cases, it is clear Beadle saw God’s hand at work. Even as he denied revelation of any kind, he felt, in such moments, that it was “God himself that prompts and directs me in all my Reflexions and circumspection.”⁷⁶ Only God, he insisted, had

⁷⁶ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 178, 182, 183, 186, 188; Marsh, *The Great Sin and*

the power to supply that kind of confidence and strength.⁷⁷ Third, he made passing remarks that, on closer reading, would suggest he felt God was actively prodding him. After describing some of Lydia's dreams to Mitchell, Beadle admitted that many would call Satan the author of these so-called "Intimations," but to Beadle's mind, the balance of evidence suggested it was God who directed him.⁷⁸

The point is neither to catch the deist in an inconsistency nor to deride the supposed man of the Enlightenment for dabbling in superstition. Both options would presume an ordered, coherent body of doctrines that spelled out deism or rational religion for one and all. Both would presuppose the Enlightenment as a clean, comprehensive division of the rational and irrational, the scientific and the superstitious. Historians of deism and Enlightenment more generally have dispelled both presumptions.⁷⁹ This is, in fact, a place where the story of William Beadle makes a double contribution to Enlightenment historiography. First, the story indicates that those far away from metropolitan salons, clubs, and societies could still engulf themselves in the languages and practices of Enlightenment. Put differently, Beadle knew there was a tension between "reason" and "superstition." He clearly felt nervous when reporting his more "superstitious" evidence. As we will see below, those who wrote about him played on the distinction as well. Second, the story reminds that what might appear as deviation, hesitation, or muddled thinking may not have been so. In other words, it was not

Danger, 26.

⁷⁷ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 186.

⁷⁸ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 188.

⁷⁹ See, for example, the recent literature cited above on 259, fn. 2 and 265, fn. 8.

necessarily Beadle's place in society that caused his slips into superstition or his lack of a fully coherent, stable deist program. Those types of instabilities permeated Enlightenment everywhere. A dozen years after Beadle wrote his letters, the arch-deist himself Thomas Paine would write that deism did not disavow all revelation. No one, Paine explained, would insist that an all-powerful God lacked the ability to communicate to a human being. Rationally, however, any such communication was "revelation to that person only" and hearsay to every other. Paine, of course, was not trying to absolve the likes of William Beadle; nevertheless, intellectuals were clearly still grappling with the relation between revelation and Enlightenment empiricism.⁸⁰

Moreover, in William Beadle's America, there was not always a clean divide between traditionalists and skeptics. As Enlightenment historians have pointed out, for every Thomas Paine or Jonathan Edwards who belonged so obviously in one camp or the other, one could find a Benjamin Rush or James Madison who seemed to move within both. While commentators ridiculed Beadle for lambasting Christianity as irrational only to rely on dreams, this hardly would have rendered Beadle irregular. The world of Enlightenment was full of those whom Conrad Wright has called "rational supernaturalists," those who extolled natural religion but still felt the human mind needed something a bit supernatural now and again.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason Part One*, in *The Thomas Paine Reader*, eds. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1987), 402.

⁸¹ Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Fitzgerald, "Weiland's Crime"; Conrad Wright, *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 1-21.

Both presumptions also ignore the anxious core of Beadle's Enlightenment. Enlightenment has come to mean rationality, but emotion was ever present as well. As Beadle sorted through the varieties of deism and analyzed his circumstances with Enlightenment's discerning but never definitive eye, he did so as a flesh-and-blood human full of angst, uncertainty, and pain. One need not slip into anachronistic mental health jargon or diagnosis to recognize Beadle's distress. He had lost everything, or so he believed, after a lifetime of wandering and work and nearly a decade of Revolutionary support. For years, "every circumstance, from the greatest to the smallest trifle" had buried him, Beadle insisted, as if "the utmost malevolence of fortune was, and is, against me, on earth."⁸² Having fallen "into Poverty," Beadle feared embarrassment at the hands of hypocrites who had flourished during the war. He was certain that if he spared Lydia and the children, life would be unkind. More than admissions of want, these lines and others like them show a William Beadle who was worn down, embittered, and hopeless. How would that not have affected his thinking in its consistency, tone, and content? He had carried the question of his own life's worth "twenty years past;" December 11 had "been three years in Contemplation." These were heavy burdens, and Beadle was not one to shy from mental strain. "Any Man that undertakes any great affair, and at the same time thinks," Beadle lectured Chester, "ought to be very deliberate indeed; and think and reflect again and again." Think and reflect, "again and again," is exactly what Beadle did. For all his moments of certainty, he just as often admitted he might be wrong about everything. He was, in any case, feeling as much as thinking. Even under a reason-centric

⁸² Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 22; Smart, "A Life of William Beadle," 25.

interpretation of Enlightenment, it would possibly be more rational to check in with other modes of being once in awhile before acting on something so irrevocable.⁸³

From a historiographical perspective, Beadle's anguish and consequent turn to what he admitted was "Superstition," reminds us that an intellectual history void of body, feeling, circumstances, and temperament misses a great deal. Enlightenment emphasis on science and careful, comparative, rational analysis notwithstanding, Beadle did not think in a vacuum—and neither did anyone else. Beadle's deist turn was a response to his economic and political fall, as much about feeling better as it was about better explaining the world. The same was true of premonition, dreams, and omens. It was the feeling of "calm" that encouraged his conviction. Any evidence that assuaged uncertainty was an aid to his Enlightenment deism. And why not? That thinking alleviated his "singular Anguish of Mind."⁸⁴

Beadle's simultaneous celebration of reason and attention to feeling embodied a larger Enlightenment spirit that did not necessarily separate the two. For example, while it is easy to write of Enlightenment solely in terms of "reason" and "science" with little notice of the passions or sentiments, Beadle-the-murderer also embodied the "sensibility" that Sarah Knott has shown to have been so valued on both sides of the eighteenth-century Atlantic. Sensibility—the ability to comport oneself with sympathy and sensitivity to others and the world—arose alongside, or even as a part of, Enlightenment. Often drawing on the psychology of John Locke, philosophers as central to

⁸³ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 177, 175, 178, 186; Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 19.

⁸⁴ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 174.

Enlightenment as David Hume and Adam Smith in Scotland and Denis Diderot in France championed the virtues of moral sentiments. They emphasized a reason never fully abstracted from the world of feeling. It was a transatlantic phenomenon, especially popular among the middling classes and progressive political voices. Early in the imperial crisis, gentlemanly Americans even sought to portray a cultivated emotion in their arguments against the British. While William Beadle certainly boasted of his rational ability to embrace the deism that less elevated minds could not, he equally embraced this softer side of Enlightenment gentility.⁸⁵

Ironically, Beadle used this duality in an attempt to portray his actions—indeed, his whole character—as compassionate and attuned to feeling. Over and over, in the letters to Chester and Mitchell, Beadle insisted his motives were “of the purest kind:” “to close the Eyes of six persons thro’ perfect Humanity, and the most endearing fondness and Friendship.” No “mortal father,” he insisted, had ever felt such “tender Ties” as strongly. The tender ties, he insisted, were the main reason he had delayed his leaving the world. For up to twenty years, Beadle had contemplated suicide. At some point in the 1770s, he had settled the morality of suicide to his own satisfaction. It was “no Crime,” perhaps even “sensible.” All the same, that fondness and friendship for family stayed his hand. For years, he confessed to Chester, “my only disturbance” when it came to suicide, had been “how to divide myself from myself that is my family.” His very formulation—“myself from myself”—highlights the emotional attachment Beadle claimed with his family: they were inseparable from himself. The thought of that separation was often

⁸⁵ Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), especially pages 5-9, 16-18; Eustace, *Passion is the Gale*, 387.

enough to make him “lament [...] ever having” a family as he contemplated suicide. The issue at hand is not whether Beadle was genuine; rather, it is the very fact that he reached for this type of language while writing as a self-styled Enlightenment philosophe.⁸⁶

Similarly, Beadle often portrayed himself as stepping away from the mind and rationality and instead looking toward the body and the sensible: was there “Anguish” when “meditating” on the “intended Deed”? Did his hands “Tremor” when picking up “the Weapons of Destruction”? Did he see “fear” or “trembling” or “Horror” on his face when he stood before the mirror and imagined carrying out the plan? In turning to others, he thanked any potential readers who might object to his actions “for their compassion” toward the well being of his family. Just a few lines later, he promised he had worked hard “to promote the Happiness of” his “fellow men.” He called for “the Emancipation of every slave on Earth.” He insisted he had always shown “Charity...to the Brutes and to the insects, neither of which” he “could even bear to see tormented nor torment” himself “unless by an Instant death.” The implication was subtle but present nonetheless: Beadle believed his sensibility exceeded that of most of his neighbors.⁸⁷

The response to Beadle joined in the language of sensibility as well. The commentators had plenty to say about Beadle’s apparent devotion and warmth as a father and husband. He was cited as a generous and hospitable friend and neighbor. It matters little if, under the circumstances, Beadle’s words strike one as hollow. The point is that both William Beadle and those who wrote about him reached for the language of sensibility.

⁸⁶ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 174, 178, 185-186.

⁸⁷ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 174, 183, 186, 175.

Skepticism, superstition, and sentiment were as much a part of the late eighteenth-century world as intellectual confidence, science, and rationality. Beadle participated as much in Enlightenment when confessing ignorance as when defending deism and championing his imagined intellectual prowess. His sensibility and appeal to feeling was as germane as his devotion to science and reason. The letters struck commentators so much in part because of these very dualities. Like Beadle, commentators were quite familiar with the ambivalence. Even the controversy surrounding Lydia Beadle's dreams evinced this uncertain Enlightenment. William Beadle and those trying to understand his actions were also always trying to figure out what the "modern," enlightened mind should take seriously. No one could pretend Lydia's nightmares were wholly meaningless; they just could not wholly decipher their meaning in an age where science and superstition were parting ways.

Conclusion

The Beadle tragedy made the Enlightenment concrete. Ideas gave William Beadle a temporary solace even as they ultimately left him bereft. Deism or innovative ideas about the Bible and Christianity did not, of course, turn him into a monster even if he used them as cover for monstrous actions, but that distinction would have meant little to Lydia Beadle and the children who suffered from William's Enlightenment pursuits. For men like Dana, Dwight, Mitchell, and Stiles, the Beadle affair brought Enlightenment into the flesh and blood of life circumstances. Just as Beadle worked out his deism amid political, economic, familial, and psychological turmoil, so those who commented assessed

the situation less from an ivory tower and more from the scene of the crime, both literally and figuratively. The same “enlightened” idea sounded one way from a Jefferson or Franklin and quite another from a William Beadle, and it was not just hypocrisy or elitism that made it appear so to American intellectuals. As ideas of religious liberty grew normalized, context of expression sometimes became more important than the beliefs themselves. A private polite exchange of views among scholars would hurt no one, but Beadle had announced his beliefs with an ax and knife, forcing the ideas of Enlightenment religion into the communal consciousness at a high emotional pitch.⁸⁸

The deism of William Beadle was so frightening because his actions were so horrific. The anxiety, however, was even more personal; its roots ran deep. In focusing on deism rather than economics, commentators gave readers a chance to distance themselves from the “infidel.” They may have understood economic hardship, but they were not deist monsters. Ironically, however, especially in the hands of moralizing clergy or fear-mongering, pseudonymous letter writers, the gambit forced readers to admit their own doubts. You cannot appreciate the difference between your face and that of a monster without looking in the mirror, and Beadle's skepticism could easily prick one's conscience. As Christopher Grasso has recently said in relation to skepticism and Christianity more generally, “deists, skeptics, and freethinkers were so threatening because they gave voice to the doubts Christians had about their own faith or about the fidelity of the fellow in the next pew.” Beadle's ideas, not to mention the secrecy with which he held them, could furrow the brows of anyone already entertaining a seed of doubt and raise alarms about who else might be keeping the worst kinds of secrets. New

⁸⁸ On context mattering more than beliefs, see Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 2-5.

England in the Atlantic world was not an orthodox bloc of "traditional" Christians with a few heterodox cranks in the bigger towns and cities. The people in Atlantic New England were from all over and had inner lives as complicated as our own. Like the young Ezra Stiles on his pseudo-deathbed, some could recite the answers the minister wished to hear while shuddering at the litany of questions they dared not whisper. Just as economic expansion was beneficial for some, destructive for others, and back-and-forth between the two for most, so Enlightenment was thrilling, frightening, and everything in between.⁸⁹

That pitch meant Beadle commentators wrote out of a sense of desperate responsibility for their community and new nation, even when their words were hyperbolic or self-aggrandizing. Dana could have been confessing for many when he allowed that only duty kept him speaking at all. The whole affair was "so new, so affecting to every human breast," Dana admitted, "that I know not well what to say upon it, though my mind is full of the subject." As his congregation waited for their minister to make some meaning out of the tragedy, Dana described it as "one of those events which so overwhelm the spirit, that silence is most expressive of the impression." Perhaps already aware of the public clamor for Beadle's letters, he worried that "melancholy minds" would put his own ministerial words to "ill use." Nevertheless, Dana spoke and, like many others, published. As he explained to his parishioners, only "a degree of philosophic firmness" and a "spirit of fidelity" as one "appointed to watch over men's

⁸⁹ Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 7.

spiritual interests” gave him the strength to do so. It was a bit contrived in delivery perhaps, but surely it was still the truth.⁹⁰

Dana’s hesitancy between speech and silence in fact symbolized the larger predicament for writers and readers in the aftermath of William Beadle. As theologians and citizens, they saw, in William Beadle, their worst fears of the most dangerous type of Enlightenment come to life. They could hardly pretend, however, that those frightening ideas about free will or skepticism did not resonate with inescapable concerns. When men like Dana, through “philosophic firmness,” spelled out the intellectual implications of Beadle’s heresies, they found a moment of relief from “events which so overwhelm the spirit.” That relief, however, came at the end of a civil war and amid threats of violence from anonymous neighbors desperate to see Beadle’s letters published. It came only by recognizing how fully Beadle had tricked them all with his secret ideas. Relief thus brought fresh worries. In a new nation with heightened demands for citizenship and solidarity, in an enlightened world where print encouraged more voices, ideas were scary. Beadle proved that. All the “philosophic firmness” in the world could not guarantee Americans safety from other William Beadles skulking in momentary silence. It was not enough, then, for Beadle and his interlocutors to battle over revelation and the divinity of Christ; that battle necessarily had to spill into the realm of politics and national identity.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Dana, *Men’s Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 20.

⁹¹ Dana, *Men’s Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 20.

CHAPTER 6

ANXIOUS IDENTITIES: AMERICAN FOOLS, ENGLISH VILLAINS, AND
THE POLITICS OF INDEPENDENCE

In the second letter, the so-called will, William Beadle declared his family “Martyrs to that Cause that I fondly believed to be the Cause of Justice, Virtue and freedom.” One might expect the language of martyrdom from a tarred-and-feathered Tory sympathizer or one of the many Loyalists who lost their estates to Revolution. Beadle, however, was no Tory—at least, he did not appear to be. No, when Beadle labeled his family “martyrs,” he meant to interpret their tragic end as arch-patriotism. He and his household, he averred, were the good patriots, the true Americans. The Beadles, William insisted, were victims of the very cause they championed.¹

Unsurprisingly, commentators did not rush to second Beadle’s patriotic interpretation of the Wethersfield tragedy. In fact, most of the politics in their responses arose in transmuted form as they discussed theology and economics. Still, politics was ever present; the Revolution made certain of it. Amid a civil war, the cultural politics of national identity cut through the Beadle affair as surely as religion and commerce. It matters little whether Beadle truly saw himself as a patriot in life and death. More significant is the very fact that he reached for the language of patriotic martyrdom and that commentators almost inadvertently contrasted a degenerate William Beadle with the expectations for a virtuous American citizenry.

In chapter two, we saw how the migratory opportunities of the Atlantic world might breed alienation and erode neighborliness. Unfamiliarity made for fraught

¹ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 181.

relationships during war. In chapter three, we saw how that unfamiliarity could sever commercial networks and dash economic hopes. This final chapter considers that alienation and uncertainty at the level of political discourse surrounding national identity. Who was a Revolutionary patriot? Who were the martyrs? Who was American? What did it mean to be American? How did that identity fit or contrast with Englishness? As the British military threat diminished, how did the “monster of a man” loom as a new peril?

Like the Revolution during which it took place, the story of William Beadle raises the story of national identity.² Nationalism continues to make historians nervous. With the nation-state serving so long as the discipline’s guiding light, even the more benign “national identity” causes hand-wringing for those hoping to escape national borders and teleologies.³ Such worries often pitch that national identity as merely “embryonic” or “superficial,” with misleading wartime patriotic expressions paling in comparison to “infinitely more immediate identities.”⁴ Historians have no doubt pushed the study of early American history beyond any simplistic nationalist narrative. Some have focused on

² On the importance of belonging and identity to the study of the Revolution, see Edward Countryman, *The American Revolution*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), xvi-xvii.

³ We hear worries, for instance, that historians make a “too-comfortable move from English empire to American nation” or that most historians overemphasize the importance of a “national idea” in the Revolution and the constitution period and too quickly and easily make loyalty to the nation trump other identifications. For the first quote, see Christopher Grasso and Karin Wulf, “Nothing Says ‘Democracy’ Like a Visit from the Queen: Reflections on Empire and Nation in Early American Histories,” *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 3 (Dec. 2008), 764. For the second, see Jack P. Greene, “Colonial History and National History: Reflections on a Continuing Problem,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 64, No. 2 (April 2007), 235-250, especially 242-3 where he’s referencing David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003).

⁴ Jack P. Greene, “State Identities and National Identity in the Era of the American Revolution,” in *Creating the British Atlantic: Essays on Transplantation, Adaptation, and Continuity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 359.

the British aspect of British America or the continued social, cultural, and intellectual Englishness of colonial life. Others have stretched their geographical frameworks to Atlantic, continental, hemispheric, or global dimensions. Thematically, some work has emphasized treating colonial and post-colonial America in a comparative imperialisms fashion.⁵ These have all been welcome methodological shifts. Without such perspectives, it is difficult to imagine a study centered on an Enlightenment-obsessed merchant who traveled between London, Barbados, and New England and presented himself as a stalwart American patriot amid an impending boycott of a global product like tea.

Nevertheless, transnational perspectives should not banish all talk of national identity before and during the Revolution. One can write about the nation without abandoning a British, Atlantic, or transnational vantage point.⁶ After all, as John Elliott, one of the foremost practitioners of Atlantic and comparative history, long ago pointed out, all the inhabitants of the New World colonies were constantly defining and

⁵ For the first major call to treat early American history as British American history, see Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); for treatment of the Revolution and its era with an eye toward English inheritance, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) and J.G.A. Pocock, ed. *Three British Revolutions 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). On deeply-rooted Royalism, see Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Examples of American history from an Atlantic, continental, hemispheric, or global framework are numerous. On treating it alongside other colonial and postcolonial stories, see the following: Jack P. Greene, David Armitage, Eligah H. Gould, Michael Zuckerman, Kariann Yokota, Adam Rothman, and Robin L. Einhorn, "Roundtable," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (April 2007): 235-286 and Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶ Some historians have written as if one must choose between talking about the nation and taking transnational approaches seriously. For example, see Joyce Chaplin, "Expansion and Exceptionalism in Early American History," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 4 (March 2003), 1433. Chaplin there suggests books that focus on feelings of nationalism or national identity in the early republic—she names works by David Waldstreicher, Jill Lepore, Jeffrey L. Pasley, and Joanne Freeman—are explicit rejections of the British- or Atlantic-oriented trends in favor of theorists like Benedict Anderson and Jurgen Habermas. My perspective in this chapter is that one can, and probably should, talk both about national identity and Atlantic orientations alongside one another.

redefining themselves, struggling in particular with the paradoxical feeling of being both the same and not the same as the distant metropole. Amid the Revolution, that defining and redefining grew even more acute. Independence and Revolution did not necessarily require a wholly formulated American identity or national character. It certainly did not require abandoning a host of other identities that might, at times, prevail over a national one. Still, as contemporaries noticed, there was a fortuitous partnership among the colonies. For the first time, residents of British America started using the once-rarely-known and recently unwelcome term “American.” Even debates about the rights of Englishmen forced Americans to consider themselves as a distinct people. As Edmund Morgan noted, to reject the classic English argument for virtual representation was, counterintuitively, to insist “that the American colonies were different national communities from that one that was represented in Parliament.”⁷

This chapter then treats that national awareness—or at least the awareness that national community was now a question to consider—from the perspective of William

⁷ John H. Elliott, “Introduction: Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World,” in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 9. For a similar idea about American and England, see Michael Zuckerman, “Identity in British America: Unease in Eden,” in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 115-157. On independence not needing a full American identity, see Anthony Pagden and Nicholas Canny, “Afterward: From Identity to Independence,” in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 270. Remarks from contemporaries about the fortuitous partnership among the colonies are forthcoming in the chapter, but historians have followed suit: see for example, Jack P. Greene, “A Fortuitous Convergence: Culture, Circumstance, and Contingency in the Emergence of the American Nation,” in *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992), 290-309. On the use of “American,” see Joyce Chaplin, “Creoles in British America: From Denial to Acceptance,” in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (New York: Routledge, 2007), 46-65. As she notes, most Americans would not have readily heard the term until after the Seven Years’ War and most did not embrace it themselves until 1773 or so when it became apparent the English would not see them as equals. Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 243.

Beadle and those who mourned his family and disparaged his character. In this, it rejects the idea that to talk about national identity is to automatically assume that a coherent, national consciousness existed, that it is the historian's job to reconstruct such an identity, or that it exists as a Platonic idea against which different periods are measured up.

Scholars of the early modern world rightly describe a multiplicity of allegiances and identifications; Atlanticists remind us that the movement of people includes the fluidity of cultural politics. That very multiplicity, that very fluidity, made the possibility of a national idea more potent but also more dangerous. Empires and conflicts over competing identities and loyalties foment nationalism. Multiple, fluid allegiances made it all the more likely that anxieties of belonging and identity would be at the core of the Revolutionary struggle.⁸

Scholars of the Revolution and early national period have long emphasized divisions within American society and the ways in which conflict, as much as agreement and cooperation, created American nationalism. The Beadle story and the fights in print over how to understand it offer an opportunity to continue that interrogation into how tragedy and conflict can create identity. Concrete, local experience provides substance to the imagined community of national identity. That is especially true when, as in the

⁸ On belonging and identity, again see Countryman, *The American Revolution*. On the need to stop treating American nationalism in isolation as if Americans have no other allegiances, see Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 6. See 1-16 for a more general discussion of the idea of nationalism not being a "Great Idea" that "waxes and wanes," as if we could measure a society's nearness to the ideal nationalism.

Beadle case, local experience emerges via a print culture that is entirely meant to spread information to new locales.⁹

The Beadle murders and the writing that responded to them could not help but touch on the politics of Revolution. Beadle's relationship to what America might mean—to what it might mean to be an American patriot—was anxious and ambivalent. He praised the Revolution but denigrated Americans. His patriotism sounded like opportunism, but it also sounded familiar. The cultural and political identity of William Beadle in fact mirrored the larger anxiety and ambivalence of American identity amid the Revolution. In trying to make sense of Beadle, commentators wrestled with those fears and uncertainties. As America separated itself politically from Britain, those commentators worried that Beadle—and what he stood for—might not be so easily separated from America's future.

Americans: Fools or Intellectuals?

Beadle just as often struck a decorous tone as a contemptuous one in his letters.

With the so-called will, however, propriety gave way to scorn as Beadle directly attacked

⁹ For just one example of the longstanding sense of division in American society, consider Merrill Jensen writing fifty years ago that the Revolution "is not the history of a united American people...It is instead a history of a divided people, many of whom, if they had been free to choose, would have remained with the British Empire." See Merrill Jensen, *The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1968), xiii. There has also been a resurgence of interest in Loyalism in recent years that is part of the same historiographical spirit. See, for example, Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*. While similar to what I have in mind here, the Loyalism approach runs the risk of simply casting the Loyalists in the role of nationalism's antagonists. They become, as it were, the more sophisticated cosmopolitan citizens of empire over and against the provincial Americans clamoring about the nation. For recent attempts at recognizing division without assuming a patriot-Loyalist binary, see Travis Glasson, "The Intimacies of Occupation: Loyalties, Compromise, and Betrayal in Revolutionary-Era Newport," 29-47 and Aaron Sullivan, "Uncommon Cause: The Challenges of Disaffection in Revolutionary Pennsylvania, 48-67. On the ideas of division and conflict—and its reproduction in print—creating American nationalism, see Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 9-10.

the American intellectual character. Many Americans, Beadle remarked, were fools and unworthy when compared with the great minds Europe could offer. The insults were part of Beadle's Enlightenment persona. The disparaging comments resonated within a larger cultural ambivalence about America's place in Europe's Enlightenment culture. Europe and Europeans set the universal standard, and England and Englishness continued to shine for many Americans. Even as Revolution neared, North Americans in search of refinement looked to London. A shared language with recognizable authorities in the metropolitan capital strained the political vocabularies of Revolution. While Enlightenment helped create the Americas as a laboratory with horizontal ties between the curious of metropole and colony, those ties remained ambiguous and tentative. A laboratory, after all, is a place for experiments, and experiments can go wrong—or sometimes lead to frightening places even when they go right. In New England, William Beadle was far from alone in pursuing the latest intellectual fashions. For Beadle and his contemporaries, however, the transatlantic Enlightenment always carried the prospect of America framed as backward or deficient. Even aside from the specific deist tenants that commentators found so troubling, Beadle's intellectual remarks forced already-brewing questions about the nature of American culture and the American mind.¹⁰

¹⁰ On Anglicization in general, see Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) and the recent collection on the work of John Murrin (including contributions from Murrin himself), Ignacio Gallup-Diaz, Andrew Shankman, and David J. Silverman, eds. *Anglicizing America: Empire, Revolution, Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). On looking to London specifically, see Julie Flavell, *When London Was Capital of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). On the problems of a shared language, see David Simpson, *The Politics of American English, 1776-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the Diaspora, 1750-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). On America as a laboratory within the longer tradition of Europe as the universal, see Jack P. Greene "America and the Creation of the Revolutionary Intellectual World of the Enlightenment" in *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural*

In the will, Beadle derided Americans as fools, using the residents of Fairfield and Wethersfield as proxies. This lack of respect for the American mind was most notable when William gifted books to friends. As he left two volumes of Michel de Montaigne's essays to Colonel Chester, William smirked that "the whole Town of Wethersfield is not worth...half the Wisdom contained in that Book." Fairfield, where Beadle had met Lydia and befriended the distinguished Burr family, fared no better. That town was "not as Dust in the Ballance" when weighed against the wisdom of Sir William Temple's *Miscellany*, left to Thaddeus Burr. The jabs at all the people—friends, family, neighbors, customers—in the very places Beadle had spent most of the last two decades of his life were obvious. He might have lived with them, dined with them, sold to them, but they were not his equals. He had sided with America politically, but he sided with Europe intellectually.¹¹

Beadle grew pedantic in explaining Montaigne to his American friend. At his most condescending, Beadle observed, "Men in general read the best of writers as Clowns eat a delicate Dish, swallow it quick indeed but never taste it nor think of it more." In showing Chester how to properly digest Montaigne's work, Beadle described the Frenchman as famous though "an Author perhaps you never met with" and assessed his reputation as deserved "altho' the greatest Egotist on Earth." The irony did not end with Beadle's remark on Montaigne's ego. Beadle had dragged Montaigne to America, the discovery of which had unsettled some of the ideas the sixteenth-century Frenchman

History (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992), 362-365. On the transatlantic horizontal ties of Enlightenment, see Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity* and also Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire*.

¹¹ "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 181-182.

had inherited. America had helped the shrewd Montaigne belittle Europeans' assumption of cultural perfection. Though far from a democrat himself, Montaigne articulated some of the very ideas necessary for a common man like Beadle to engage Enlightenment and stand alongside a Revolution that could, in words at least, valorize the "people." More immediately, while Beadle clearly respected Chester on some level, this was an opportunity for him to showcase his own knowledge and reading ability over a man at the pinnacle of small-town American society. While Montaigne was not completely absent from the colonies, some have suspected he was read there not so much as an original thinker but as a trove of famous quotations. Beadle, then, was probably bragging, but he was not necessarily wrong. Chester and his other friends may not have known the French skeptic's work.¹²

Amid the American Revolution, specific remarks about Wethersfield and Fairfield shaded Beadle's more general intellectual arrogance as cultural and political polemics. Borrowing a familiar Enlightenment trope, Beadle cast his take on religion as a sign of rational maturation beyond the Christianity of his child-like neighbors. As seen previously, he described well-meaning Christians as "ignorant mortals" who "tumble about just as Babies do their play things." Christian orthodoxy, he argued, had not advanced beyond the paganism early Christians had disparaged. It was "as full of Absurdity and Inconsistency and as unnatural as any of the Whims and frenzys of any

¹² "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 181-182. On Montaigne and America and democracy, see James T. Kloppenberg, *Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 21-26. Montaigne had long been popular in England—often more so there than in France—but would not be famous in New England until Emerson wrote on him in 1850. See Rebecca Hein, "Montaigne in America" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1966), 2-5. Hein suspects many Americans who owned copies of Montaigne mainly used his writings as a reference for famous quotes by other writers.

Idolaters or of those we pronounce Impostors.” By comparison, Enlightened deists had a “superior sense.” In embracing deism, Beadle described his own soul as “above the common mould.” He was a “Speculative Genius,” part of an elite few “like a Diamond among a million...pebbles.” The critique of Christianity, of course, pointed beyond New England. Still, for his longsuffering neighbors, the criticism must have felt personal: to Beadle, the men and women alongside him in Revolution were ultimately like children.¹³

The ill-mannered tutorial for Chester was just one part of Beadle’s sprawling putdown of America’s intellectual landscape. Perhaps he would have said much the same had he remained in Great Burstead or some other sleepy English village. But he mocked the men and women of Fairfield and Wethersfield even as he maligned the supposed patriots he held responsible for his economic distress. The cultural character of America was wanting. Beyond his aforementioned characterization of the deist as extraordinary and beyond the two books he left his friends, Beadle carefully presented himself as learned throughout the letters. He alluded to Shakespeare and referenced Alexander Pope as “my friend.” He boasted of reading the poetry of Pope’s contemporary James Thomson, a Scot who memorialized the likes of Isaac Newton and, most famously, composed the lyrics of “Rule, Britannia.” On his final day, he wrote Stephen Mix Mitchell of perusing a copy of Thomson’s *Summer*, which left him “[s]erene and even joyful.”¹⁴ Whatever genuine satisfaction or solace Beadle found in Thomson and the

¹³ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 185, 173, 187, 177.

¹⁴ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 187; Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 22. There is a small uncertainty about this reference to Thomson. In Stiles’ diary, he records it as “Thompson’s Summer, 1710.” Thomson did not publish the poems until 1730; in fact, in 1710, he was ten years old. However, it seems likely this is who Beadle was talking about and either he or Stiles simply made a mistake about the year of publication.

other writers, he used such rhetoric to elevate himself even as he admitted his economic failure. He gave up on America while reminding all of his English and European pedigree.

Of course, the residents of Wethersfield and Fairfield had more reason than intellectual slights to loathe William Beadle. Still, Beadle's contempt for the American mind resonated. For example, the clergy, as we will see in more detail below, took special satisfaction in detailing Beadle's logical missteps. Even looking beyond specific responses to the murders, Beadle's criticisms entered a cultural landscape where enthusiasm over the prospects of a uniquely American intellectual achievement clashed with longstanding worries of America's intellectual deficiency. Just as Beadle celebrated his own intellectual prowess and denounced his American neighbors as fools, he and those neighbors could just as easily have been having that conversation in the newspapers.

Beadle pretended he was a lone enlightened rebel surrounded by shallow minds, but he could hardly have missed that other New Englanders participated in the discussions of Enlightenment he suggested were beyond their grasp. Newspapers had plenty of evidence that many shared William's intellectual pursuits even if they came to different conclusions. Even limiting our attention to the print culture of Connecticut, that reality would have reached Beadle both during his decade along the coast and his decade just outside Hartford. True, Fairfield was no Paris nor Wethersfield a London, but Enlightenment had certainly crossed the Atlantic. Booksellers, upstart literary journals, meeting places, and editorials all evinced an Enlightenment in William Beadle's New

England. He would have noticed it simply by scanning the newspaper that ran his own store advertisements.

Most obviously, the newspapers were full of proposals for publications that would connect America's literati with Europe while also encouraging new, truly American ideas. Many New England intellectuals set their sights on homegrown American periodicals. For example, in 1772, right as William Beadle left the seaboard behind for Wethersfield, some Hartford polymaths issued "PROPOSALS For Printing by Subscription, Literary Questions, upon various Subjects, Political, Scientific, and the useful and fine Arts." They promised to cover law, current court cases, new methodologies in medicine and surgery, and all "Improvements in Arts, Manufacturers, Commerce and Oeconomy." A year later, the *Courant* repeatedly ran a full-sheet ad for a proposed fifty-page monthly out of Boston titled *The Royal American Magazine, Or, Universal Repository*. Befitting its title, the periodical would include reports on the House of Commons, reprints of the latest and best "British Magazines" and "Reviews," and analysis of any debates, from England or the Continent, germane "to the whole British empire." Even non-subscribers might see essays from *The Royal American Magazine* in their local paper. In 1774, for example, the *Connecticut Courant* reappropriated "The Address of AMERICAN GENIUS to the PEOPLE in the American World" from the magazine. The piece rallied Americans to collectively engage their minds on intellectual and literary matters.¹⁵

¹⁵ *Connecticut Courant*, March 24, 1772; August 17, 1773; Feb. 22, 1774.

These upstart periodicals encouraged participation beyond mere subscriptions. The ad for the 1772 Hartford serial solicited four hundred to five hundred questions its future pages might answer for the public. This “first of its Kind” enterprise desired the attention of “the Literate of all Ranks and Professions.” The publishers wanted questions and ideas from “Professors of Liberal Arts” as well as “Artisans, Husbandmen and Manufacturers.” *The Royal American Magazine*, while promising the latest work from Europe, wanted writers “*throughout this extensive continent*” to contribute. The publishers hoped to hear from “the learned, the witty, the curious, and the candid.” In short, *American* printers wanted *American* writers: this was about forging a mature American literature as much as it was about preserving the literature of the Old World.¹⁶

Widespread printing made it possible for these publications to envision a larger audience of “Americans.” As seen in a previous chapter, an explosion of print changed political culture in both England and America. Historians have rightly emphasized how such an expanding print network fed the American Revolution, but that same network encouraged the spread of Enlightenment ideas and projects as well. It was a material development not lost on New Englanders at the time. For example, in announcing their new monthly, the Boston-based publishers of *The Royal American Magazine* explicitly celebrated the cultural and intellectual consequences of print’s expansion. Before “that useful vehicle the Printing Press,” they lamented, countless “valuable essays” were “buried in oblivion.” Ideas only reached the few. Fortunately, the ad continued, all was changed in an age “when Printing flourishes.” Print meant that everyone, “from the King upon the throne to the peasant in his cottage,” could keep up with the latest political,

¹⁶ *Connecticut Courant*, March 24, 1772; Feb. 22, 1774.

ecclesiastical, and intellectual developments. Even more, it would be permanent.

Newspapers were delightful, the publisher admitted, but they were not the best format for the learned discourse they had in mind. Most obviously, newspapers were inherently temporary, their usefulness fleeting. An intellectual magazine, however, not only reached the king and the peasant, it also reached the future: print took the best intellectual “performances to the public” and to their “children” and “down to posterity.”¹⁷ Publishers imagined these projects would last for a future American audience.

Beyond publications, in terms of physical space, William Beadle’s New England imitated the metropolises of Europe’s late eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century, an “urban renaissance” saw England’s streets brimming with coffee houses and pubs that served as bases for innumerable clubs and societies. Literature, politics, and science were, more than ever, public activities for public spaces. Libraries and library services reported on and preserved the work in those spaces. Beadle’s newspapers advertised similar libraries and meeting spaces. The Hartford Library Company or a coffee house in New London participated in this cultural transformation. The scale was smaller, but the enthusiasm in the ads for these ventures suggests that forms of burgeoning, metropolitan

¹⁷ *Connecticut Courant*, Feb. 22, 1774. On publishing and the press during the American Revolution and the early Republic, see Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench, eds., *The Press & the American Revolution* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1980); Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, eds., *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, A History of the Book in America v. 2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Carol Sue Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833*, History of American Journalism no. 2 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996); Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. On England, see Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

civil society had reached what was still, relatively speaking, the provincial edges of empire.¹⁸

Just as Beadle found solace and self-worth in being a “son of science,” so these publishing projects and urban renaissance soothed the New England and American mind. It kept the colonies and, by the end of Beadle’s life, the independent states, connected to Europe culturally and intellectually. More specifically, it kept them connected to England and English culture. This was no small feat amid the political turmoil of the period. If Americans and English fought on the battlefield, they continued to engage in shared literary pursuits. American authors, including people with connections to Beadle like Timothy Dwight, did not so much desire to abandon English literature as recreate it; cultural and political Englishness, they hoped, was as movable as the transatlantic book trade would suggest. The Revolution was a civil war, but civil war signals cultural and political sameness as much as difference.¹⁹

Nevertheless, difference was there, and independence mattered. The cultural narratives unfolded less as stark opposites and more as heretical renditions of one

¹⁸ On “urban renaissance,” see Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, especially 6. For general descriptions of this cultural scene see Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People* and Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World*. On public science, see Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England* and Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, *Selling Science in the Age of Newton: Advertising and the Commodification of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2010). On the English coffee house, see Aytoun Ellis, *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-Houses* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956) and Markman Ellis, *The Coffee House*. As James Van Horn Melton notes, the trend of alehouses as hotbeds of political discourse crossed to America. For example, in the 1760s, 20% of the Boston Sons of Liberty were tavern-keepers. See Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public*, 234-235. For the Hartford Library, see *Connecticut Courant* 3/27/1775. For the New London coffeehouse, see *Connecticut Gazette* (New London) 5/18/1770.

¹⁹ On American authors, including Dwight, trying to recreate English literature and show Englishness as moveable, see Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English*. On similar themes, see Paul Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

another.²⁰ Counterintuitively, the American heretics grasped at English and Enlightenment culture in part as a way to stand on their own feet. Enlightenment, the themes of which fit so well with the Revolutionary fervor for liberty and freedom, encouraged Americans to see themselves as deserving and capable of independence. Against Beadle's characterization of Americans as foolish children unequal to reading the likes of Montaigne, New England intellectuals were creating an image of cultured Americans that might withstand political severance.²¹

Many American intellectuals might have wanted political independence, but they wished to remain connected to the cultural and intellectual world of Europe. Politically, America fought to separate itself from the authority of the Old World. As with economics, however, political independence did not mean intellectual seclusion. Enlightenment in the Atlantic World was about connection. Provincial booksellers in the colonies-turned-states never missed a chance to brag of having books "Just Imported From London" and the latest issues of the city's most popular monthly periodicals. William Beadle and his neighbors could peruse "All the Magazines and Reviews Printed in Great-Britain." When they congregated somewhere like the London Coffee-House in *New London*, they might have felt participants in the talk of *old* London. When they imagined their own American publications, they promised the best articles from London and records of political debates from the Continent as well as England. However the

²⁰ Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections*, 2.

²¹ This is similar to how Americans looked to England or Europe as desirable models even as they strove for independence. See for example, Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) and Flavell, *When London Was Capital*.

politics shook out, print ensured America remained intellectually up-to-date. White American men like Beadle's friends and neighbors could be sons of science or men "of genius."²²

Enlightenment's emphasis on autonomy and freedom also appealed given the political climate. There was, of course, the fact that titans of Enlightenment political thought like Locke and Montesquieu loomed large for America's ruling class however disparate the sources of America's Revolutionary ideology in fact were. Even deeper than that, it was no coincidence that American writers fixated on freedom and liberty—with slavery as the flipside—in their rhetoric. Yes, it was a rhetoric of the Commonwealthmen, a language resonant with the rights of Englishmen, but it was also, more broadly, the language of Enlightenment. William Beadle felt linked to European culture as a son of science, a reader of Montaigne, and a quoter of Shakespeare. America's Revolutionary writers, in seizing on freedom, were linked to the intellectual spirit of their age.²³

That spirit, after all, summed up exactly what the American colonists were doing (or at least claimed to be doing if one puts the Revolution in its most flattering light): courageously declaring independence from the mother country. Immanuel Kant described Enlightenment as "*man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity*" not long after the Revolution came to a close. The freedom necessary for such an emergence, he continued,

²² *Connecticut Courant*, July 6, 1773, Feb. 22, 1774; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), May 18, 1770.

²³ Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment*, ix. On the Commonwealthman, see Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959) and Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins*.

was simply the ability and courage “to make public use of one’s reason in all matters.” In some quarters at least, the Revolution must have seemed the template for Kant’s upcoming pronouncement. Independence was a call to count as a nation-state alongside, and equal to, the great states of the Old World—to be politically mature as a people. Similarly, the appeals to Europe’s political theorists and the rallying around a trope of liberty reconnected American intellectuals to the leading minds across the Atlantic. They longed to be mature partners in the discussion. It gave political resonance to what Crèvecoeur had said in *Letters from an American Farmer*: America, he promised, was the adoptive parent who would enable immigrants “to become men.” Europe would keep them in servile immaturity; America would allow them to grow.²⁴

This celebration of a new American maturity and the responsibilities that came with it, however, might carry some disappointment as well. In 1783, for example, the very title of Yale president Ezra Stiles’ election sermon hinted at the murky situation: “The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor” resounded with pro-American grandeur even as it subtly reminded that America was recently not in a position of glory and honor and that it took devastation to enact the elevation. In the actual text, Stiles, so integral to the Beadle affair, was even more explicit. In a series of clipped phrases framed by measured punctuation, he rhetorically asked, “Oh! How painful and distressing the separation and dismemberment...Oh England! how did I once love thee? how did I once glory in thee! how did I once boast of springing from they bowels....” Despite the hyperbolic language, one imagines Stiles to be genuine; despite past tense, it is easy to

²⁴ Gould, *Among the Powers*; Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”
54Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*.

believe Stiles still mourned. America's new position came with a loss of its old relationship as it provided a chance for a new one in the process. Stiles then admitted that, even at the end of a long war for independence, he "could leap the Atlantic." Rather than a leaping toward that which he loved, however, it would be a temporary mission "to rescue an aged parent from destruction."²⁵

Like so much of the Enlightenment that Beadle and his neighbors experienced, then, the motifs surrounding maturity and familial relationships were ambivalent. They might encourage competing senses of what it meant to identify as American in relation to England. It remained unclear whether any type of child/parent relationship held and, if so, what that meant for the Revolution and America's self-conception. This is evident in an imaginary debate in *Common Sense*. In the section "Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs," Paine took up the objection that America owed obedience to Britain as a child to a parent. The Revolution's chief provocateur slandered the argument as "papistical." England was not the parent, Paine insisted. Rather, "Europe" was "the parent country of America." After all, he pointed out, America had proved a haven for liberty-seeking men and women from the entire continent. Moreover, even if one granted a mite of truth to the America-England analogy, that only justified rebellion further. Immigrants do not run from kind mothers "but from the cruelty of the monster." To call Britain a mother only invited more shame upon her as "[e]ven brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families." Lest one argue that Britain's conduct was nowhere near as tyrannical as Paine averred, he ultimately hinted British treatment of the colonies was beside the point. America may have begun a child, but it was no longer

²⁵ Stiles, *The United States Elevated*, 32.

so. To insist on continued obeisance to a parental England, one “may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat.” If all of Paine’s formulations headed in the same direction—justification for American independence—the multivalent nature of these passages demonstrates how slippery the Enlightenment maturity theme could be. Was America a descendent of Europe? More of England? Were Americans fighting off a monster or a parent? Was the emerging American identity born of self-defense or simply a maturing away from the protections of the parental home? Paine never settled on one way of putting it, but he obviously realized that these metaphors appealed to some of his neighbors. He even worried they might work, and in the process of acknowledging that worry, he gestured toward the same stereotypes of the American mind that Beadle would turn to in the suicide letters. The parent country arguments, he suggested at one point, originated from the “King and his parasites” who “jesuistically” hoped to win “an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds.” One might assume, given his insistence that Americans were ready for independence, that Paine attributed that description of the American mind to the mistaken and arrogant thinking of the British court. Nonetheless, he left the phrasing ambiguous; the fact that he argued so strongly against the parent claim suggested that the answer to the riddle was not obvious to most American minds.²⁶

Present in Crèvecoeur, Stiles, and Paine, quintessential texts of the 1780s, was the sense that Americans were ready to speak for themselves in a new way. The periodicals that advertised in Beadle’s local newspaper bear out this longing. Publishers did promise

²⁶ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, in *The Thomas Paine Reader*, eds. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1987), 81-82.

the latest work from Britain, but they just as often proclaimed the power of a uniquely American voice. *The Royal American Magazine*, according to its printers, would as “a Monthly,” fill a void that had so “long been complained of by men of the greatest ingenuity in the American world.” Plenty of American thinkers had supposedly promised pieces to run alongside those “of our European brethren.” Such magazines, in other words, allowed American intellectuals to be the brothers of their European counterparts, and brothers might be equal partners in the enterprise.²⁷

For both the New England mind and the mind of William Beadle, however, this psychological comfort was temporary and incomplete; Enlightenment just as easily generated new pains. In the case of William Beadle, Enlightenment reconnected him to the Old World but, ironically, disconnected him from his neighbors in the New World. They were not the instinctively anti-Enlightenment dolts he ridiculed in his will, but that mattered not at all. His perceived intellectual superiority heightened the alienation from his neighbors and magnified his sense of having been wronged. Conservative wariness of religious innovation likely nudged Beadle into further intellectual solitude.²⁸ Deism and rational religion eased his mind, but his understandable fear of others’ disdain meant he hid his cherished beliefs from everyone. Those beliefs provided a helpful way to see the world but at the cost of losing everything, including his own sense of conscience and freedom.

Similarly, in terms of the larger American culture, Enlightenment’s comforts easily became agonies. Some of America’s Founding Fathers, for instance, longed for

²⁷ *Connecticut Courant*, Feb. 22, 1774.

²⁸ Grasso, “Deist Monster,” 45.

European sophistication while subtly—and not so subtly—evincing worries that their country was not up to the task. The Renaissance had popularized an idea that, from the Garden of Eden onward, civilization had arced westward with the sun. The metaphor had dissipated in Europe by the time of the Revolution, but American intellectuals found it appealing for obvious reasons. Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, for example, both extolled America’s role in marching civilization across a continent now that Europe had leapt the Atlantic. Their hopes betrayed their fears. The model of America’s cultural mission relied on inheritance from England, a connection that politics was in the process of possibly breaking. Even more, it was apparent that America was not quite ready to march in cultural step with the sun. Toward the beginning of the imperial crisis, Franklin had unhappily admitted England’s intellectual superiority in a tone not altogether different from Beadle’s remarks about Wethersfield and Fairfield: “Why,” he complained, “should that petty Island which compar’d to America is but like a stepping Stone in a Brook...enjoy in almost every Neighborhood, more sensible, virtuous and elegant Minds, than we can collect in ranging 100 Leagues of our vast Forests.” Franklin’s Enlightenment counterpart Thomas Jefferson similarly admitted that his penchant for collecting items of cultural refinement was, in part, to counter the realities of his nation’s deficiency. The parlor of Monticello, lined with portraits of his icons—Bacon, Newton, and Locke to name a few—provided for his own personal edification, but, hopefully, too, he admitted to James Madison, it would encourage Americans to better themselves and boost the standing of the American mind in Europe.²⁹

²⁹ Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6, 64, 75.

In popular culture, similar agonies of ambivalence often appeared like stress fractures amid expressions of Enlightenment enthusiasm. In advertisements for books and periodicals, selling points could easily be read as confessions of American inferiority. For example, attention-grabbing exclamations like “Just Imported From London” provoked interest and excitement. After all, throughout the eighteenth century, American consumers greedily filled their houses with British furniture, art, and clothing.³⁰ At the same time, it was a subtle reminder of how dependent on the metropole Americans still were when it came to the latest books. It would not have been lost on leading intellectuals that the vast majority of learned books for sale were from European authors. When Hartford intellectuals proclaimed their new periodical as “first of its Kind,” they meant for novelty to generate ardor. The phrase “first of its Kind,” however, also contained an implied “in America” or “in Connecticut” at its ending; it was an admission that Hartford was no London, America no England. The great books were just reaching America’s shores. Likewise, the physical spaces in which Americans explored cutting-edge books and ideas might have reproduced the cultural spaces of London, but that very reproduction could also leave some onlookers abashed. Colleges, clubs, societies, and professional organizations proliferated in part from an American fear of falling short of metropolitan models. The more cultural spaces that emerged the easier it was to notice that, for many Americans, cultural refinement was more ostensible than substantive. In

³⁰ Bushman, *The Refinement*.

New England especially, this unease over deficiency relative to England easily paired with the longstanding worry of declension compared to their Puritan forebears.³¹

The Royal Magazine out of Boston displayed such ambiguity openly. When announcing that their monthly would fill a void in American letters, the publishers likened their product to “the many performances of this kind, which are so frequent in Europe.” This certainly extended the promise of Europeanness, but the very allure highlighted the American lack. They continued: “While we are *selecting* from the labours” of European writers and have “engaged all the British Magazines,” “we shall not fail of making the strictest searches after curious anecdotes, and interesting events in British America.” Again, they juxtaposed the promise of European connection made easy with a desire for American substance that would demand “the strictest searches.” They could reproduce British periodicals with little effort, but “in order to complete” the American “part of the plan,” they pleaded for “the learned, the witty, the curious, and the candid of both sexes, *throughout this extensive continent*,” to send content. Even the magazine’s physicality both inspired and embarrassed. The publishers vowed that “one elegant Copper Plate Print, at least, will be given monthly” to ensure “this American Performance” was “at least as valuable as any of the British Magazines.” America might equal Europe intellectually, but the very aspiration noted American deficiency and acknowledged the worry of failure.³²

³¹ For this interpretation of the burgeoning of Enlightenment spaces and the fear of failing to live up to London paired with more traditional declension fears, see Jack P. Greene “Search for Identity: An Interpretation of the Meaning of Selected Patterns of Social Response in Eighteenth-Century America,” in *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992), 167.

³² *Connecticut Courant*, Feb. 22, 1774.

Some inquisitive minds in Beadle's Connecticut worried their new republic would not adequately support literary genius, a failure that would belittle America's standing in the world. For example, just as newspapers throughout the states reprinted the *Connecticut Courant's* account of the Wethersfield tragedy, the Hartford paper ran a front-page essay in January 1783 worrying about America's literary deficiencies. "The encouragement of works of Literature and Genius," the essayist began, "has in all great and civilized nations been esteemed an object worthy the public attention." Such work delivered "rational entertainment to the mind[s]" of a country's citizens and was the means by which "foreign nations" would "form their opinions of the character of a people." The American character and reputation hung in the balance. While, the essayist admitted, "America is known and celebrated throughout Europe for her martial spirit, her military genius, and that ardor of liberty" which overcame "the usurpation of Britain," the country risked a reputation "as stupid and illiterate" for having not "cultivated and encouraged" any "works of genius." The successful revolution had elevated the Americans to the world stage, but they were not assured to remain there. William Beadle had compared Americans to Montaigne and Temple and found his neighbors wanting. Here, in his local newspaper, less than a month after his death, another Connecticut resident did the same in different words.³³

However much William Beadle disparaged the intellect of his neighbors, his fellow New Englanders had plenty of opportunities to engage the leading books and periodicals of the day, even amid Revolution. By participating in the transatlantic

³³ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 7, 1783.

Enlightenment, America joined an intellectual maturity to the project of political autonomy. As political autonomy meant joining the ranks of nations more than it meant severing ties to Europe completely, so intellectual maturity meant establishing America as a cultural peer with the Old World. William Beadle found temporary solace in pursuing Enlightenment: it rejoined him to his pre-migration roots, gave content to his air of intellectual superiority, and outlined a world in which he might, ironically, enjoy freedom from his financial turmoil. It ultimately came crashing down. Beadle ended his life as intellectually secluded, trading the common fear of hell for the depressing conviction that life was in “no want of Hells” on this earth.³⁴ The experience of the larger Enlightenment around him mirrored this solace and suffering duality. Among the cultured, hope for America’s intellectual ascendancy always carried notice of its own failures and worries that maturity and autonomy were ultimately out of reach.

Performing Patriotism

In one of the many paradoxes of the Beadle tragedy, Beadle celebrated himself a moral American patriot even as he smirked at his supposedly vacuous American neighbors. Similar to his impulse toward intellectual superiority, he presented his Americanness as morally outstripping that of his neighbors, especially the assemblyman he held responsible for his economic woes. For example, buried in a lengthy philosophical passage in the first letter to Chester, Beadle listed his supposed American allegiance as one of many charitable qualities, referencing his “strenuous Exertions for that System of Government I tho’t the best for mankd.” In the same passage, to drive

³⁴ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 173.

home his moral standing, he highlighted his “continued Effects to promote the Happiness of my fellow men, even to the Emancipation of every slave on Earth.” That line surely got the attention of the slave-owning Colonel Chester and the anti-slavery minister James Dana. The aforementioned language of martyrdom amplified Beadle’s self-ascribed patriot status. Beadle would soon be called a monster, but in the will, he described himself as a torchbearer of justice, virtue, and freedom, watchwords of the Revolution all. The Beadles, in their austerity, had been the true patriots. They had lived the “Cause”; they had suffered for it; they died for it. Now everyone would know.³⁵

In the context of the letters, this tone was, of course, self-serving and pretentious. It is thus easy to dismiss Beadle’s patriotism after the murders as mere show, but it is worth taking a closer look. Beadle’s public life as a merchant with politically involved friends meant that he could not avoid political stands. Before he was a murderer, Beadle left a political record—a patriotic performance—that would have seemed quite fitting to his friends and neighbors. Put differently, the Beadle murders occurred in a context in which Americans everywhere had long been asking what it meant to be an American patriot. No identity, moreover, had been as politically charged as that of a coastal merchant. They had been wondering who counted as sufficiently patriotic and how best to express that patriotic urge. Both in life and in posthumous letters, William Beadle performed as a patriotic American supporter, and that could not so easily be dismissed by those trying to make sense of his horrific final acts.

³⁵ “Extracts from Mr. Beadle’s Letters,” 175, 181. On Chester, see Frank Andrews Stone, *African American Connecticut* (Trafford Publishing, 2008), 48. For Dana, see James Dana, *The African Slave Trade. A Discourse Delivered in the City of New-Haven, September 9, 1790, Before the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom* (New Haven, 1791).

During his time in Wethersfield, Beadle was involved in somewhat ordinary public displays of American allegiance that, genuine or not, marked Beadle to his neighbors as on the right side of the cause. In summer 1774, for instance, Beadle answered the call of the town assembly for Wethersfeldians to assist Boston after the imposition of the Intolerable Acts with the seventh largest donation. Closer to the end of his decade in Wethersfield, the town assembly voted Beadle a fit choice to collect one of the many special taxes necessary during the war. While that was no highly influential post, it was the type of job typically undertaken by the same cast of residents regularly chosen as selectmen. When Beadle was assigned in 1781, several of those who joined him were financially and socially noteworthy. His Wethersfield friends like war hero John Chester and future Federalist lawmaker and Connecticut Chief Justice Stephen Mix Mitchell were visibly on the patriot's side. Such posts, one assumes, did not go to men suspected of bad politics; such friends were not the friends of one rumored to be a Tory. Finally, Beadle's attitude toward currency, however much economics factored into his decision, might have appeared as patriotic. Currency, as mentioned earlier, was almost always a political issue; decisions about currency thus made political statements, especially during war. It said something when a patriot like Robert Morris refused to print more currency for supplying the army when in a spat with Congress; in contrast, when a merchant like William Beadle publicly extolled Continental and Connecticut bills, he expressed trust in the government that backed them. However despised in death, William Beadle managed the role of the good American patriot during his Wethersfield tenure.³⁶

³⁶ Town Meeting, 16 June 1774, Wethersfield Town Records, Volume 2, 1717-1794, p. 226-227,

Beadle's 1775 poem advertisement was an even more self-conscious and stylized display of patriotism. Poetry, as mentioned in the earlier economics discussion, had a long history as political rhetoric in British North America. Merchants and intellectuals used poetry to sort out the colonies' place with the commercial politics of empire. Amid the civil war of the Revolution, poetry, even in the form of an ad like Beadle's, was a way of speaking authoritatively in a moment when authoritative bodies were frequently using texts to speak. Even more, Beadle's political text in verse was about tea. No material good would come to symbolize the American Revolution like tea, and as a merchant, Beadle could not remain neutral on the matter. The oft-mentioned poem advertisement, which appeared in early 1775 in the *Connecticut Courant* under the headline "Advertisement to the Ladies," was an early performance at American allegiance for Beadle the peripatetic Englishman. Structured around the impending consumption boycott on tea, Beadle's twenty-three couplets pled with Connecticut's ladies to buy his remaining tea for patriotic reasons. It was, perhaps, overwrought, even desperate. Strangely, that fit the desperate times. The aftermath of the Tea Party had forced a merchant like Beadle to struggle with competing allegiances when it came to such a lucrative product. He wanted to appear patriotic while also not hiding the fact that he need to make sales before March 1. It might have been easy to read it as more self-serving than patriotic. In part because of that, however, it lays bare how much political

Wethersfield Town Clerk, Wethersfield, CT (hereafter "Wethersfield Town Records"). For Beadle's contribution and sum, see Smart, "A Life of William Beadle," 110-111. For Beadle elected to the tax collecting gig, see Town Meeting, 15 January 1781, Wethersfield Town Records, p. 262. On the noteworthy past holders of those jobs as well as the standing of the men who joined Beadle in 1781, see [Martha Smart] to James Smart, [1988/89], William Beadle Research File, Box II, Folder 16, WHS. On Robert Morris and currency as an act of political trust, see Bouton, *Taming Democracy*, 68-69 and Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 84-85.

allegiance was a performance whether or not some genuine belief underlay the effort. Beadle wanted to sell tea but that meant selling himself as a stalwart supporter of the colonial cause. In doing that, he rendered himself a proper American, his place of birth notwithstanding.³⁷

In the poem, Beadle treated tea as indispensable—or at least he hoped to convince the “Ladies” they could not do without it. Beadle referred to March 1, the date set for non-consumption of British goods, as “That woeful day” when the ladies would have to forgo their “darling Nectar.” He went on to lament how the attractive tea china would languish like unused lumber, how the teakettle would become a lowly porridge pot. The decision to boycott tea was a “fatal Vote, That must deprive us of our Joy.” He suggested there remained “a Month to make your Plea, Concerning this same Idol, TEA.” The poem ended with a final manipulation: customers should buy his last one hundred pounds of tea as a way of maintaining the Beadle family virtue. Here, as with the ad as a whole, Beadle’s concerns were wholly gendered, depicted with the trope of women as unable to withstand the pleasures of tea: after detailing his plan to lock up any leftover tea on the first, he exclaimed “Yet stop a Moment! on my Life! / For now I think on’t, I’ve a Wife!” He worried Lydia would prove “of Eve the Daughter” and smash the lock when he was gone. His solution: ask other ladies to save his family. If his readers did not want to tempt Lydia, “Then help us keep our virtue sound, / And quickly purchase ‘tother pound.”³⁸

³⁷ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775; *Massachusetts Spy*, Feb. 13, 1783. On poetry’s political use in the colonies and Revolution see poetry’s use in the colonies and Revolution, see Wells, *Poetry Wars* and Shields, *Oracles of Empire*. On the specifics about authoritative bodies turning to texts, see Wells, 1-2. On merchant conundrums with the boycott, see Merritt, *The Trouble with Tea*, 108-111.

³⁸ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775.

This concern with virtue appeared several times in the ad. As the watchword of republicanism, “virtue” allowed Beadle to depict himself as a patriot. This possibly countered any Loyalist assumptions regarding the English-born Beadle. Tea was, in the first half of the poem, “darling,” a “Joy,” and an “Idol,” but it was also British, the arch target, symbolically, politically, and financially, of the patriot cause. The use of “idol” right at the poem’s midway point signaled a change in tone. The term’s ambivalence—the idol as object of the greatest devotion but a devotion with unholy connotation—nicely captured the twin perspectives of Beadle. Tea was joy and darling, but it was also, in the poem’s second half, the “noxious herb” and “potent Poison.”³⁹ It was a temptation Beadle vowed to withstand after March 1. Lest he seem too enraptured by tea, Beadle pledged, “though I tell this Story, / Upon my Word, I am no Tory...And now I pledge my Word, and say, / The noble Congress I’ll obey.” In solidarity with that body, he would “Dare to be free and virtuous still.” He would, faced with “all tyrannic Tools” always “follow Virtue’s Rules.” No matter what it cost him financially, Beadle swore his days selling tea were numbered: “When March sets in, I vow at once,” that “A Joe shan’t purchase half an Ounce.”⁴⁰

Beadle-the-poet used this commitment to virtue and freedom as a marketing tool. His advertisement sought to create cultural and political identifications among potential customers. However garish, the ad is an example of changes in consumer culture in the late eighteenth century. Some advertisements—including a few of Beadle’s—still read as

³⁹ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775.

⁴⁰ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775.

banal lists of available goods, but even many of those were lists meant to create consumer desire and encourage a middling class to differentiate themselves socially through consumption. More evocative advertisements like the poem took the additional step of relying on an explicitly creative medium for this purpose. Beadle sold himself as a staunch patriot, and he suggested to readers they could be the same if only they stopped by his store. If non-consumption were about to be patriotic, consumption was still the patriotic cause in the meantime. By the time the ad appeared, his customers had just more than a week until non-consumption took effect. By hurrying to Beadle's store, the ladies of Wethersfield and Hartford saved the Beadle family. They also supported a patriotic merchant. Reminding the ladies that non-consumption meant a merchant like himself would be missing a prosperous market, Beadle implored them, "Pray help me out." The ad's final couplet pointed out that it was not just about money; it was about neighborly assistance for a family as well. Perhaps playing on New England frugality, Beadle all but called on the ladies to be good stewards. His tea was "as good as e'er was tasted," he promised, then asked, why "must all this be lost and wasted?"⁴¹

The rhetoric of virtue also allowed Beadle to demonstrate he understood the gender politics of the moment. For years, tea consumption had been a moral issue and poetry had been a major outlet for moralizing about it. As tea became commonplace throughout the empire, hands wrung about luxurious vices and frivolous spending.

Women bore the brunt of that moralizing. By the 1700s, the image of women as

⁴¹ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775. On advertisements as creating demand and/or as part of a middling consumer culture, see Keyes "Early American Advertising,"; Bushman "Shopping and Advertising," especially 235; Breen *The Marketplace of Revolution*, especially 55; McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*.

especially fond of tea showed up in poetry as a mark of realist depiction. Moralists portrayed women as suspect and unable to control their cravings for the extravagance of tea sets. The Alice Addertongue letters in a young Benjamin Franklin's 1730s *Poor Richard's Almanac*, for example, suggested as much. At the same time, merchants relied on women for sales, so their ads tended to portray them in a more positive light. Beadle's advertisement showed a nuanced appreciation for such subtlety. He recognized that, in the political context of the day, virtue was paramount and that when it came to tea, women were easily portrayed as both weak-willed sinners and stalwart heroes.⁴²

Consider, for example, the end of Beadle's advertisement. He closed the poem with a lurid tale meant to display the lengths to which he would go to protect his and his neighbors' virtue. By March 1, any leftover tea would be secreted away. He warned, "I'll lock, and barr, and set a Spell on't," lest any "mortal ever smell on't." It was at this point that Beadle drew on the trope of the wife as unreliable daughter of Eve, especially when it came to the temptation of tea. He feared that Lydia might "have a Kind of Hank'ring after / This noxious herb," a "Hank'ring" so strong in a body so weak that she would plot to "find this potent Poison out" whenever the virtuous husband was away. It was an eerie, portentous conclusion: Lydia, taking up "Ax or Hatchet" and "With Arm and Will, both bold and stout" smashing the lock that protected her from the deadly tea leaves. Gender trumped place of birth: Beadle's story ironically reversed his and Lydia's heritage. Lydia, though born to the distinguished Plymouth family, could not be trusted to keep the course; William, the English migrant protected virtue on behalf of the whole community.

⁴² On tea, poetry, gender politics, and Franklin, see Merritt, *The Trouble with Tea*, 7, 47-49.

The other women of Wethersfield could display the virtue Lydia lacked by, no surprise, buying up all the tea before March 1.⁴³

It is easy to make too much of the ax and hatchet language. It would be seven more years before William took up the tools as weapons, but it was a fitting close to his performance as the patriotic merchant. To a family whose fortune relied on consumption, the Revolutionary boycotts could seem a matter of life and death. Tea could be both lifeline and, thanks to politics, poison. It could be the difference between a hearty meal and a growling stomach. As merchant, Beadle was both accidental leader—one positioned to enforce, or not, the patriot policy—and automatic suspect—one with much to lose. His poetic wavering was to be expected and was far from the worst hypocrisy. Other merchants, like Philadelphia's Henry Drinker, showed far less compunction. In an early round of boycotts, Drinker actively complained that weak-kneed Americans lacked the virtue to stick to the cause; by the time of the Tea Party, he excitedly planned for the windfall he expected after his firm was chosen to sell the East India Company's tea in the city. Only hints about tarring and feathering from some local radicals gave him pause.⁴⁴ If Beadle appeared safe when it came to tea, he had the additional issue of his place of birth. As an Englishman still relatively new to Wethersfield, Beadle also must have wished to prove his allegiance. By repeatedly announcing himself on the side of the "noble Congress" against the "tyrannic" Tories, Beadle publicized his supposed civic virtue. It would be wrong to insist that English birth automatically shaded one a Loyalist to neighbors, but it is not presumptuous to assume that it was on Beadle's mind.

⁴³ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775.

⁴⁴ Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit*, 167-168.

Eight years later, when the *Massachusetts Spy* reprinted the poem for readers eager to learn more about William Beadle, it probably only confused those trying to separate themselves from the murderer: Beadle-the-monster recast as Beadle-the-amateur-poet so concerned with virtue and the patriotic cause. Perhaps, under the circumstances, his patriotism resounded as disguise, merely a ploy to unload some tea. After all, the tea ad was risky and peculiar to say the least, as it walked the precarious line between reaffirming allegiance and inviting suspicion. It was not, however, altogether unique. Beadle's wartime Connecticut was full of men and women obliged to wear their patriotism regularly. Beadle's mix of unabashed economic interest and political statement was indeed self-serving. To ignore it as fluff or the unfortunate degradation of an emerging public sphere, however, owes more to nostalgic ideas about the purity of discourse surrounding the American Revolution than it does reality. As many have noted, advertisements and the revenue they afforded printers helped create the public sphere so essential to the American cause; put differently, they were part of the imagined community coming to call itself American. Few would have thought it strange for an advertisement in the paper to strike a flamboyant tone in order to get noticed. Furthermore, mixing economic and political interest was par for the course. Throughout the Revolution, merchants lobbied Congress for permission to sell leftover tea after boycotts had begun. More hypocritically, smuggling remained rampant. Early on, Revolutionary titans such as John Hancock even pressured others to hold the non-importation line while ignoring the strictures when it came to their own operations. The

politics of tea was a dirty business. Beadle's mildly two-faced ad would have fit right in.⁴⁵

When it came to form, Connecticut readers saw all kinds of poems in their newspapers regularly. On the level of amusement, the *Courant*, for example, often ran a "Poet's Corner" column. Those with financial concerns sometimes turned to verse, presumably as a way to grab attention in the crowded back pages of the paper, as when one petitioner used eight couplets to ask if any readers had found his missing banknote. In the charged atmosphere of the Revolution, writers making a political point often turned to verse. A few years before Beadle's poetic turn, the *Connecticut Journal* out of New Haven filled half its front page with a poem meant for "Times of Debt, Distress and Danger" by a man who loved "Country" and "Nation." The writer even implied it was a form that better served one who was, like William Beadle, outside the walls of power: he explained his "Transition, / From Peasant to a Politician" by pointing out that "ev'ry Man has some Concern / In public Matters, this we learn."⁴⁶ Poet's Corner in the *Courant* ran a "A Liberty Song" not long before Beadle's advertisement appeared. Six months after the Declaration of Independence, in the *Courant*, "a young Lady of Fifteen" published a paean to General Washington that opened with the "raptures" of a vision in which she

⁴⁵ *Massachusetts Spy*, Feb. 13, 1783. On advertisements and the public sphere, again see Keyes, "Early American Advertising." Also see David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); T. H. Breen "Baubles of Britain": The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth-Century," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994); Breen *Marketplace of Revolution*; Breen "Narrative of Commercial Life." On smuggling and Hancock, see Merritt, *The Trouble with Tea*, 73-74.

⁴⁶ On this kind of political participation, see, for example, Barbara Clark Smith, *The Freedoms We Lost: Consent and Resistance in Revolutionary America* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

could “see *Britannia* fail, / And the United Colonies prevail. / See them triumphant over land and seas, While haughty *Brittons* humbly sue for peace.” Those poems were not selling tea, but they were selling patriotism. Beadle joined his financial interest with his political interest and used the poem to draw customers. It was tawdry but no more so than most jingles of our more familiar advertising age.⁴⁷

The *Courant*'s subscribers received Beadle's ad as just one performance among others: politics was everywhere, and it was often eccentric and accusatory. As Beadle appealed to a supposedly feminine patriotism among potential tea buyers, the newspaper printed other pieces addressed “to the Ladies” designed to guide women through the tumult. The Revolutionization of tea had, not surprisingly, placed women in an ambiguous position—either praiseworthy or blameworthy depending on how the boycotts fared. Just days before the Boston Tea Party, the *Courant* ran a front-page “Constitutional Catechism” about the colonies' stance toward tea as well as the resolves on the matter from individual colonies. At the same time, one *Courant* writer with plenty of patriarchal condescension to spare, huffed at the “Ladies,” that no matter how upset with their husbands, “it might be worth your while to consider whether by your abandoning that accursed Tea, you will preserve your country and posterity in peace and good order.” The alternative, according to the writer, was to “expose twenty five thousand of them to spill their blood, in defence of their undoubted Birthright.” The tone

⁴⁷ *Connecticut Courant*, April 18, 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, Jan. 1, 1768; *Connecticut Courant*, Oct. 31, 1774; Jan. 13, 1777.

made Beadle's lines about a weak-willed Lydia being unable to resist tea seem rather harmless.⁴⁸

Beyond tea, readers who would have seen Beadle's ad were never far away from thinking of patriotic obligation and the consequences of failing in that regard. On the front page of the issue carrying Beadle's poem for the first time, readers could peruse the resolves of the countywide meeting in Hartford in response to the Continental Congress' Articles of Association. Around the same time, front-page announcements for days of fasting contained warnings for the area's "Episcopal brethren," lest they show insufficient zeal. On the same page as Beadle's poem, readers learned that one James Percival had violated the Continental Congress' rules by hoarding goods and inflating prices. As Beadle's ad neared the end of its run, a notice from Wethersfield told of some would-be Tories caught badmouthing Congress at a local pub. In the self-congratulatory telling of those Wethersfield patriots, they literally chased the naysayers out of town with shouts and hisses.⁴⁹

By the next spring, the *Courant* had begun listing names and residences of all "inimical to the Country." The publishers promised to continue the public shaming until "a deep sense of their Guilt, and Promise of Amendment, shall restore them to the Favour of their insulted Country." Significantly, William Beadle was never among those listed. It does not seem, before his death, that he was suspected of being antagonistic or even

⁴⁸ *Connecticut Courant*, March 13, 1775; Dec. 14, 1773; Dec. 7, 1773.

⁴⁹ *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 30, 1775; Jan. 9, 1775; Feb. 2, 1775; Feb. 13, 1775.

lukewarm. As a merchant, he abided by the rules. In public, he said the right things and kept the right friends. He performed his patriotism well.⁵⁰

As the *Courant's* practice indicates, the print media of the Revolution-era had begun to think in terms of country and American. Whatever his actual convictions, Beadle left a performance of American patriotism—taking action after the Intolerable Acts, publishing a flamboyant poem in the newspaper, assuming the role as collector of the special tax—that would have made sense to his neighbors. That sense, however, clashed with the monster they discovered on December 11, 1782. His life had suggested he had become American, but in his death and afterlife, William Beadle's Englishness mattered more.

Americanness Versus Englishness

During the Revolution, it became increasingly easy for American print to align the English with vice, the Americans with virtue. However long he had lived in the colonies, then, it was easy to pair William Beadle's place of birth with his almost unimaginably horrid actions. The origin of the Beadle as "monster of a man" was England. This was especially true given Beadle's embrace of Old World intellectual trends like deism. Even Beadle's death fit with longstanding stereotypes about the English as especially prone to suicide. As critics struggled to find answers that might alleviate social pain and anxiety surrounding the trauma, some looked to Beadle's biography. A fascination with that biography—specifically Beadle's English pedigree—and the insertion of Beadle news into a print culture dominated by reports on the

⁵⁰ *Connecticut Courant*, April 8, 1776.

Revolution revealed an underlying anxiety over Englishness and Americanness. To be sure, no one specifically blamed the tragedy on the contingency of William's birthplace. Nevertheless, some evinced a suspicion about his English upbringing especially in reference to his religious beliefs. Additionally, discussions of Beadle's precarious finances and business decisions made Revolutionary loyalty an explicit consideration. These conversations occurred within a citizenry in the process of sorting out an American identity as distinct from an English one.

By December 1782, Beadle's old neighbors were well accustomed to portraits of the English and Tories as wicked. During the war years, the *Connecticut Courant* routinely maligned Tories as morally deficient, criminal versions of the good Americans defending themselves against injustice. The Hartford paper announced, for instance, that New York Tories were severely mistreating the patriotic Americans stuck there. In that article, "Tory" was merely an "alias": the perpetrators were in reality "renegade Americans." The paper seemed to revel in stories of Tories-turned-petty-criminals with any "honest Whig" as the hero seeking justice. In language symbolic of how the patriots saw their own cause, for example, a story from Fish-Kill involved a Whig "resolved to defend his house" against Tory horse stealers after he "was apprized of their design." The good American inadvertently stabbed the ringleader John Huston who, not surprisingly, was dragged away to the closest Tory house where he died. Similarly, a father and son walking the highway bravely confronted a group of escaped Tory prisoners—"very mischievous fellows"—and when the Tory knaves refused to submit to moral order, the son, out of "necessity," shot one of the culprits. Combined with the regularly published

lists of those “inimical to the Country,” such stories, some less subtle than others, hinted that Tories were either not Americans at all or could very easily be excised from the body politic. When, in 1776, a body of patriots said to be 3,000 strong rescued the besieged Hartford Sons of Liberty, the *Courant* hoped the Tory leaders would be treated as “traitors to the American States.”⁵¹

Beyond energized newspaper rhetoric, civil war made it easy for Connecticut’s leaders to define Englishness by barbarism and dishonesty in stark contrast to a virtuous American citizenry, but in reality, patriots were not always heroes and Loyalists (not to mention the unaligned) were not always villains. In nearby Darien, CT, for example, a patriot mob accosted Walter Bates, demanding the fifteen- or sixteen-year-old reveal where his older brother and other supposedly armed Loyalists were hiding. Threatening to kill him, ringleaders stripped Bates naked and tied him to a tree in a salt marsh teeming with mosquitos. After a whipping failed to break the teenager’s resolve, they talked aloud of hanging him before settling on keeping him in jail for the night. The next day, some members of the mob returned and threatened him with torture. Later, Bates recalled they seemed to favor the idea of lashing him to a log and feeding it through the sawmill. An influential local arrived just in time, letting the boy go, not so much out of decency as disbelief that Bates had withstood the abuse without confessing.⁵²

About the same time as Darien patriots were torturing a teenager, in official channels, it was the British who were barbarous. Just before Christmas 1777, an emissary

⁵¹ Smith, *Freedoms We Lost*, 152; *Connecticut Courant*, June 23, 1777; April 14, 1778; July 15, 1776.

⁵² Hoock, *Scars of Independence*, 119-120.

in the war office pleaded with Governor Trumbull for help with the dire situation of American prisoners in New York and Philadelphia. The British captors, he wrote, had refused to observe “even the common line of humanity” and had, throughout the war, acted “with more than savage cruelty.” As a result, American lives were in peril, a calamity that would have easily been avoided if the British had “observed a Conduct equally humane with that which has been inviolably adhered to by the States in their treatment of the british prisoners of war.” Whether the prisoners were in danger or not, the moral arithmetic was unmistakable: even in war—perhaps especially in civil war—Americans were humane, Britons less so.⁵³

Trumbull should have cringed at any talk of the British lacking humanity toward their American prisoners. Just down the road from Hartford and Wethersfield, the old Simsbury mines, reappropriated as Newgate prison, hid away Tories, court-martialed Continental troops, and a rotating assortment of criminal felons in some of the worst conditions imaginable. Called the “catacomb of Loyalty” by Connecticut Loyalist minister Samuel Peters, the prison was little more than the old mine itself. From a guardhouse at ground level, prisoners descended via trapdoors, ladders, and platforms into the heart of the mine. The holding area was 185 feet long with varying width and a sharply sloped floor. One patriot paper, far from ashamed, celebrated the “subturanous Apartments” as just what “those sons of darkness” deserved. It was nearly airless, lacked all light, and was always damp; it must have brimmed with disease. Dozens remained for lengthy spells. As many as one hundred were there on occasion. After a series of escape

⁵³ Joseph Nourse to Jonathan Trumbull, 22 December 1777, Jonathan Trumbull Sr. Papers, I. Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 2, CHS.

attempts, Connecticut officials finally closed the prison in 1777, but the closing proved temporary: by 1780, they had reinforced security and brought the prisoners back.⁵⁴

Despite the hell in his backyard, Governor Trumbull still employed an easy division between moral Americans and immoral British. When discussing what he called “a Civil War” with Dutch nobleman Joan Derk, Baron van der Capellen, Trumbull characterized the British as serial liars. They were repeatedly “disseminating false and disgraceful reports” about America, its people, and the on-the-ground support for the Continental Congress. America’s European friends, Trumbull insisted, should not believe lies about Americans wantonly declaring independence or being “disgusted” with American representatives. No one should believe British dispatches about rapidly growing Loyalist ranks or increasingly heated internal strife. Those were British lies more characteristic of the British character. On the contrary, the colonies had only sundered ties with Britain after “continued injury.” Nearly all Americans had renounced “allegiance to the King of Great Britain, and sworn to support...the liberties and independence of his country.” The Continental Congress took action with “the most hearty approbation” of the people. Citizens north and south had come together immediately when faced with hardship. Even those who might appear to be loyalists, Trumbull explained, were more likely good Americans “whom misfortune” reduced “to the necessity of a partial and temporary submission to avoid the horrid alternative of fire, captivity, and slaughter.” Such Americans were in fact those most likely to turn “revenger[s].” Trumbull was guilty of hyperbole to be sure, but his observations relied on a hardening moral division and the creation of a national character out of civil strife:

⁵⁴ Hoock, *Scars of Independence*, 48.

Britain sought to disparage the American character, but in the process only showcased American virtue.⁵⁵

From the beginning, print reports on the Beadle tragedy subtly reproduced this morality divide that had helped justify the American cause during the war. All the early reports noted that Beadle was born and raised near London. In contrast, they clearly identified Lydia Beadle as American—from a Plymouth family to boot—and praised her upbringing and well-mannered disposition.⁵⁶ Even by the late eighteenth century, an English native in the Americas was not odd, and Beadle had spent twenty uninterrupted years in Connecticut. He was hardly a foreigner. But amid a civil war, when creole and migrant, rebel and Loyalist, all spoke the same English and drew on the same cultural background, it could be difficult, even impossible, to draw the lines of allegiance.⁵⁷ The timing and manner of Beadle's demise rendered him suspicious. The contrast between the notable American family of the victim and the shadowy, English past of the perpetrator was unmissable as the War for Independence came to a close. That contrast was even more ironic given that Lydia's American family was not loyal through and through. One

⁵⁵ Jonathan Trumbull to Joan Derk, Baron van der Capellen, 31 August 1779, Jonathan Trumbull Sr. Papers, I. Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 4a, CHS.

⁵⁶ *Connecticut Courant*, Dec. 17, 1782.

⁵⁷ The shared language of Britain and America was an issue even apart from uncovering dangerous minds in American society. David Simpson, in fact, has elucidated the ways in which a shared language, whose linguistic authorities resided in London even after the Revolution, posed problems for the Founders. See Simpson, *The Politics of American English*.

of Lydia's cousins had married into the prominent Arnold family of Rhode Island and was the mother of Benedict Arnold, the arch-traitor.⁵⁸

The distant connection to the Arnolds was never mentioned in print (and was perhaps unknown), so William's mysterious background took center stage. That shadowy, English past became all the more suspicious when his close friend Mitchell admitted he knew next to nothing about Beadle's past.⁵⁹ When trying to fill in the gaps, Mitchell provided his former friend with the possibilities of a gentleman father, a metropolitan upbringing around the Court, and the patronage of a colonial governor. This elevated Beadle's pedigree and class standing, yet it also marked him as suspicious amid the Revolution. In that climate, on the cusp of definitive severance with the metropole, these particular biographical disclosures marked Beadle as outsider. To American patriots and the English Commonwealthmen tradition that inspired them, the court was the locus of vice, immorality, and corruption. Drawing on the message of the English populist politician and journalist John Wilkes, it was everything the patriots hated. Even if someone invented the court rumor, the monster had still spent his formative years in London, the epicenter of all the Americans were fighting. If, in a sense, being "the natural son of a gentleman" depicted a William Beadle at home among Wethersfield's finest, it also further imbued his character with disrepute. Of course he went to the court, they

⁵⁸ This comes from a genealogical report on the Lothrop family prepared by the Pilgrim Society of Plymouth for James Smart during his research: see Elaine M. Corbett to James Smart, 21 December 1988, William Beadle Research File, Box 1, Folder 3, WHS.

⁵⁹ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 5-6.

might have said, for it was ingrained in his character from birth. Only time had ever stood between William Beadle and a sinful end.⁶⁰

Additionally, on the ground in a civil war, a London gentleman at court sounded suspiciously like a Tory—especially given Beadle’s hesitance to speak of his past. On some of the very same news pages that reported on the Beadle event, Americans left little doubt as to how they felt about such people. For example, an anonymous letter next to a printing of Beadle’s will in the *New Hampshire Gazette* complained about surreptitious Tories who remained in America’s midst: “take yourselves off to the island of *little* Britain,” the angry patriot commanded, “and there worship *your own IMAGE*—and no longer trouble the land you would not lend a hand to protect.” The letter made no mention of Beadle, but it connected Englishness with several tropes from the Beadle case like secrecy, pride, selfishness, and misdirected worship.⁶¹

Several writers directly connected that Englishness with Beadle’s deism. While most early accounts simply asserted a secret deistical turn, the Humble Professor of Christianity offered a biographical explanation centered on the texts of the infamous English deists of the early eighteenth century. Stephen Mix Mitchell, in his full pamphlet, would later relate an anonymous rumor of a young William visiting deist clubs in London.⁶² Despite Beadle’s professed admiration for the Frenchman Montaigne, only the English freethinkers—never the French—found their way into Beadle commentary,

⁶⁰ On the Commonwealthmen, see Robbins, *The Eighteenth-century Commonwealthman*. On their influence in America, see Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins*. For one take on Wilkes’ influence, see chapter 4 of Wilson, *The Sense of the People*.

⁶¹ *New Hampshire Gazette*, Jan. 18, 1783.

⁶² *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6.

subtly underscoring that in the climate of civil war, moral depravity was aligned with Britain, not the previously more common target, France. Whatever the Professor's and Mitchell's sources, however intentional the ignoring of French heretics, the men and women of Connecticut likely exchanged tales of Beadle's downfall that sounded similar themes.

The Professor especially put the hearsay to good use. Alongside other biographical rumors, the Professor spun a tale of Beadle's devolution that placed his fall well before he arrived in America. In the Professor's hand, the story became a micro-jeremiad, a step-by-step morality tale of proper devotion, devilish temptation, and lustful pride. "[I]n his youthful days," the Professor began, William Beadle "was of a serious turn of mind." He was "thoughtful about a future state" and "read the bible" and "meditated suitably thereon." It was likely, according to the Professor's sources, that young William "had made considerable progress in the christian life...and thus far run well." The fall came quickly. Beadle, innocently or otherwise, met "some acquaintance of a deistical turn" who placed "some authors of that cast...into his hands." The "serious impressions" of William's youth "soon began to wear off." Of the devolution, the Professor had no further details, or, at least, he did not share any. He didn't need them. The Puritan jeremiad—the traditional New England narrative of an individual or community retreating from godliness inch by inch—brought the end into focus. Even in 1783, with the jeremiad's force waning and a more secular understanding of murder edging out the long-powerful emphasis on human depravity, readers could fill in the particular blanks. William Beadle met a deist; he perused some deist texts; "from step to

step" he "became a profest deist" and "gave up the word of God." A once serious mind came to see Christianity only as "cunningly devised fables."⁶³

Mitchell was quicker in his telling, but he added a significant detail: deism ran in the family. An unnamed gentleman, Mitchell wrote, had disclosed some "little incidents which happened to [Beadle]...with his father" in England. He included only one in the pamphlet, but the one he chose is telling. During his upbringing, Mitchell told readers, Beadle, through his father, "very early became acquainted with a club in London who were Deists, where 'tis probable he received the first rudiments in those principles."⁶⁴ In marking Beadle's distant past as deist, Mitchell implied that the murdering and suicidal philosophy stemmed from his being thoroughly English—from being raised in a London milieu where deism resided. In reality, any acquaintance with London deists on Beadle's part would have been over twenty-five years in the past by 1782. Indeed, it had probably been longer. Mitchell reached far back in Beadle's life for evidence of some exposure to false theology without any recognition that Beadle's reception of "the first rudiments" of deism could hardly have been fresh in William's mind. America was the child who had outgrown its English parent; Beadle, by contrast, had never truly left his heretical English father behind. It also reaffirmed the notion that Beadle the Wethersfield merchant was

⁶³ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783. This step-by-step path to destruction was typical of Puritan thinking though by the time of Beadle, it was starting to change in favor of portraying someone like him as a subhuman monster. On this, see Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*. On the relationship between early Puritan fears of degeneracy and notions of American identity, see Chaplin, "Creoles in British America." On the continued back and forth accusations of degeneracy between metropole and colony, see Zuckerman, "Identity in British America." On the differences and interplays in the Revolution-era between private virtue and civic republican virtue, see Jack P. Greene, "The Concept of Virtue in Late Colonial British America," in *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992), 208-235.

⁶⁴ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6.

mere cipher: deistical principles lurked beneath the surface of his friend's honest, respectable demeanor. In a moment of crisis, Beadle's English upbringing had returned with a vengeance. The potential of Beadle the monster had been present all along, its origin a heterodox London cultural scene. As the English prepared to renounce their formal political claims on the colonies, Beadle's true English character reclaimed his life.⁶⁵

Similarly, suicide highlighted Beadle's Englishness in the American mind. In fact, this connection stretched well beyond the figure of Beadle. In both Europe and America, the English had a reputation for resorting to suicide. As mentioned earlier, the eighteenth century saw an Enlightenment-fueled outbreak of debate on suicide and the appropriateness of the criminal penalties surrounding it. That debate was certainly transnational, but it resonated especially in the British world as Britons had long been cast, by themselves and by others, as melancholic and more prone to suicide. Enlightenment sophisticates and Grub Street hacks frightened English moralists with their defenses of suicide and calls for criminal reform. As they did so, the old association between the English and suicide continued unabated. Montesquieu, for example, in locating suicide in distempers of the "machine" of the human body, remarked that the criminalization of suicide in England was absurd since climate and national disposition pushed Britons toward it. Even those who sometimes questioned whether England really saw more suicides than anywhere else just as often reaffirmed the stereotype. Voltaire, for instance, was skeptical of any English proclivity for suicide, yet he could not help, when discussing the popularity of suicide in Rome, wondering whether Roman Britons

⁶⁵ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6.

had been especially involved. The idea was such a commonplace that Rousseau could make the ironic choice of having a Frenchman defend suicide against an Englishman in *Julie, or the New Heloise*. As the likes of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau would indicate, eighteenth-century defenses of suicide were easily identifiable with Enlightenment. In Britain, David Hume and the Grub Street writer Charles Gildon made it easy to identify such ideas with religious heterodoxy. The latter offered a defense of suicide after his well-known deist friend Charles Blount died by suicide.⁶⁶

In reality, the supposed predilection for suicide among the English was likely just a print-born phenomenon. In London and the provinces, English newspapers and periodicals covered suicides with more frequency and depth than in other places. The tendency to print such notices in batches made it easy for readers to imagine an almost contagious atmosphere. Of course, if more extensive press coverage reveals English proclivities to suicide as illusory, it does not wholly negate the idea that suicide resonated more strongly with the English national character. Increased print coverage was a cultural phenomenon: if nothing else, the English seemed more willing to discuss suicide and, whether they liked it or not, it was an ever-present issue.⁶⁷

The Beadle affair brought suicide, deism, and Englishness visibly together for the men and women of 1780s New England, but there had already been similarly infamous incidents in the English-speaking world. In 1732, right about the time of William Beadle's birth, a London couple named Richard and Bridget Smith killed their young son

⁶⁶ MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, 146-154, 312.

⁶⁷ On the print coverage, see MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, 300-313.

and then took their own lives. Much as in the Beadle case half a century later, the Smiths left notes at the scene outlining both material and philosophical justifications for their actions. Richard was a humble bookbinder and the pair felt unable to escape the crushing debt that had befallen them. Similar to Beadle, the pair espoused a quasi-deistic understanding of God that absolved them of their sin and withdrew the possibility of hell. They were, allegedly, especially beholden to the Piedmontese writer Count Alberto Radicati. Radicati had himself recently been arrested in London upon the publication of his book *Philosophical Dissertation Upon Death*, an Epicurus- and Spinoza-fueled defense of suicide. While there is no direct evidence Beadle or anyone involved in his life discussed the case, it is not much of a stretch to assume they heard of it. Papers and pamphlets within England speculated on the Smiths and other possible influences—Tindal was a favorite target. It was covered on the Continent as well where Voltaire and Diderot wrote of it. In any case, it remained part of the shared discourse in England for years to come.⁶⁸

That shared discourse was still alive and well in Anglo-American culture in the age of the Beadle suicide. In fact, New England ministers did not have to create national worries about widespread suicide wholesale. The English were already in on it. Dissenting minister Caleb Fleming, for one, sounded the alarm in the opening of his 1773 work *A Dissertation Upon the Unnatural Crime of Self-Murder*. The Londoner's subtitle revealed the current climate: *Occasioned by the Many late Instances of Suicide in this City*. Fleming opined that “[I]evity, luxury, impiety, and enormous vice” had delivered the nation to serious misfortune. He went on to list many of the usual sins like gambling

⁶⁸ On the Smiths, MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, 157-159.

and over-indulgence, but most of his list were socioeconomic woes of a grand scale: disappearing public credit, increased unemployment, and the loss of “industrious” citizens to emigration. By the end of the first paragraph, the outcome was clear: “The insolvent, and dissatisfied, are cruelly laying violent hands on themselves, in great numbers!” A few pages later Fleming speculated that no people during the age of Christianity had ever suffered more suicides among them. Quite the polemicist, Fleming frequently engaged issues of natural religion and deism and was far from archconservative, but when it came to suicide, he was afraid for the country. Drawing on a popular comparison among such moralizers, Fleming suggested that suicide flourished in Rome during the empire’s waning days. It was a discourse the New England ministers could have readily understood.⁶⁹

Like his New England counterparts, Fleming looked abroad for the sources of such “unnatural” evil. Ministers responding to the Beadle murders narrowed their eyes at England, yet Fleming portrayed his home as a victim just like the colonies. The rising numbers of suicides, he admitted, were “an irrefragable proof of the deep depravity of the moral of our country,” but that depravity originated with the “insidious and restless enemies of Britain’s welfare.” Those enemies had “succeeded in disseminating skepticism and infidelity,” which Fleming enumerated as a rejection of providence,

⁶⁹ Caleb Fleming, *A Dissertation Upon the Unnatural Crime of Self-Murder: Occasioned by the Many late Instances of Suicide in this City* (London: 1773). The “levity” list is the unpaginated dedication. The claim about the “insolvent” is 15-16.

revelation, and future punishment. He did not name any other nations, presumably because all would have known he meant the insidious French.⁷⁰

Fleming's interpretation was also present not far from Beadle's Wethersfield home. Just two months after Beadle's suicide, a piece in the newspaper from still-occupied New York City grumbled about the supposed stain on the English national character. The author repeated the normal charges of English melancholy and fondness for suicide as if all were familiar. He made certain to highlight the characterization came from "foreigners" only and further insisted that were the foreign press to pay better attention to details in their own locales, all would realize that suicide was equally prevalent everywhere. Leaving aside that the writer was probably correct, it was a neat trick: the English malady reformulated as English virtue in the form of intrepid journalism. In the larger context of the piece, which was a reply to the overall portrait of the English in a new, foreign-authored book, the author hedged against the possible truth of the melancholy English. Why would the English not be emotionally charged in those trying times as "a love of liberty renders the feelings of the english acute when they meet with adverse circumstances"?⁷¹

Americans, then, might have resisted the stereotype of the suicidal English, but amid civil war, it was easier to retain the old narrative. If eighteenth-century Americans felt English, the colonial discourse on suicide marked a fissure in that identity. Even before the Revolution gave Americans reason to worry about any "immoral" English residue, they routinely used the "English malady" as a euphemism for suicide. In addition

⁷⁰ Fleming, *A Dissertation*, 15.

⁷¹ *New York Gazette*, Feb. 17, 1783.

to a widespread stereotype of the gloomy, suicidal English, American newspapers fed the colonists twice as many British suicide stories as American ones.⁷² Americans—even before independence—divorced themselves from their fellow Englishmen at least on this count.

The Revolutionary era heightened the distinction. The political necessities of independence led Americans to define themselves in opposition to their recent English identity. Self-destruction was an English vice, a weakness; Americans were sturdy, resourceful, and pious enough to shun such horrific measures. However, as more American newspapers took articles from one another, Americans learned that suicide was not so absent from the new country. Richard Bell has calculated that, depending on the region, Americans read two, three, or four times the number of domestic suicide notices by the turn of the century as they had in the 1780s. As a consequence, Americans came “to wonder whether their fellow[s]” had “developed their own defining proclivity for suicide.”⁷³ This fear made it even more important for Americans to displace the source of suicidal tendencies.

Such displacement was easiest when the suicide in question was an English immigrant like William Beadle. James Dana’s sermon included a lengthy aside on suicide that drew on this notion of self-murder as an English proclivity. Dana—agitated, angry, even incredulous—longed for the days when suicide was to be “found only among savage and unenlightened nations!” Alas, it had become “an heroic act in Christendom”—and not just among Catholic heretics. Suicide, Dana forlornly admitted,

⁷² Bell, *We Shall Be No More*, 3; see also Holton, *Unruly Origins*, 44.

⁷³ Bell, *We Shall Be No More*, 3-4.

had become “somewhat characteristic of the english [*sic*] nation.”⁷⁴ Beadle’s exit ran counter to natural and divine order, but, as Dana explained, it melded quite easily with his national background.

Beadle was by no means the only immigrant suicide so characterized. Just three years later, the *Connecticut Courant* described the suicide of English immigrant John Cooper as the “celebrated English method of getting rid of the troubles of life.” The paper did not see this as an anomaly: Cooper was just “the latest instance” of such English infection, for suicide, the article proposed “has lately been performed with wonderful success, in a variety of instances, in different parts of this country.”⁷⁵ Political independence had been won, but a residual English immorality still threatened. The Beadles and Coopers of the 1780s and beyond symbolized the troubling possibility that Americans lacked the virtue necessary for republicanism. Marking Beadle and Cooper as English provided a sense of postcolonial security. With independence, place of birth could offer a clearer acknowledgement of Americanness. At the same time, the *Courant* lament evinced an anxiety over the growing prevalence of suicide. Attributing Beadle’s death to his Englishness offered a salve, but it did not eradicate all worry as Americans wondered what English characteristics had infiltrated the American character.

Beadle’s chosen form of death—and its association with Englishness—at the climax of the War for Independence also affected interpretations of his behavior during the American Revolution. Contemporary commentators could have fashioned an image of Beadle the patriot, but it was, of course, unlikely Beadle’s poetical lauding of the

⁷⁴ Dana, *Men’s Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 23-24.

⁷⁵ Qtd. in Holton, *Unruly Americans*, 44.

“noble Congress” or his donations to Boston relief efforts would find their way into assessments of his character. Similarly, newspapers reported his economic misfortune without mentioning his patriotic insistence on selling at pre-war prices in exchange for Continental currency taken at face value. This reticence is all the more striking given that newspapers had previously shamed merchants who violated the very laws Beadle followed. Mitchell did acknowledge that war and depreciating currency played their part in Beadle’s demise, but he gave the impression that the late merchant had, at best, fallen victim to bad luck and, at worst, had promoted his own suffering through his refusal to invest in land or more merchandise.⁷⁶ Only Timothy Dwight, writing later, granted Beadle the Englishman a patriotic impetus. Dwight described William’s commitment to “normal” prices and the face value of Continental currency as evidence he “had adopted American principles.” However, within a few pages, Dwight’s tone drastically changed. By the end of his reflection, Dwight counted Beadle’s decisions not as steadfastness to American principles but as stubborn foolishness. Dwight claimed that a mutual friend had recently confessed to having offered Beadle a loan of any amount to see him through but that Beadle—too prideful in Dwight’s estimation—refused the offer. Besides, Dwight concluded, William Beadle’s cries of abjection were fraudulent: “He died worth three hundred pounds sterling.... What would become of the world if every man in it who was worth no more than three hundred pounds sterling were to murder himself and his family?” To give a comparison, Dwight noted that Connecticut’s yeoman farmers “were,

⁷⁶ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 6-7.

at an average, probably not worth more at the same period.”⁷⁷ The implication was clear: Beadle thought himself above the hard-working American farmer, hardly the evaluation of a man driven by love for the American cause.

Beadle’s murderous end cancelled out his support of the Revolution and made it possible for commentators to paint him a traitor. Indeed, there was precedence in New England newspapers for treating suicide—more than location of birth—as the signifier of anti-patriotic impulses. The same year William and Lydia Beadle settled in Wethersfield, a newspaper in Salem ran a piece from London announcing the death of a Mr. F who “went out of the world *in the English way*.” By way of obituary, the paper noted, “This gentleman was once the bosom-friend of Mr. Wilkes, though he afterward betrayed the patriot.” Mr. Wilkes, of course, was John Wilkes, populist English politician and libertine, whom American whigs championed as a patriotic defender of liberty against English governmental corruption. “Is it not strange,” the *Essex Gazette* wryly observed, “that almost all the principal persons who either persecuted or deserted Mr. Wilkes, have come to an *untimely end*.” The paper supported the supposition with a list of three such individuals who preceded Mr. F. in his English exit. Wilkes, who supported the American rebels, was the right kind of English; in suicide, his detractors and betrayers confirmed that they were the wrong kind.⁷⁸

True, in the case of Beadle, no one went as far as to claim outright treason against the American cause. Like Dwight’s remark about the nation’s yeoman farmers, the political criticisms were more oblique. Typically, they were tied to his religious heresies.

⁷⁷ Dwight, *Travels in New England*, 1: 227-228, 232.

⁷⁸ *Essex Gazette*, April 28, 1772.

The Humble Professor of Christianity, for example, compared William Beadle to Christendom's arch-traitor Judas Iscariot. Beadle died "as Judas when he fell by transgression," puffed up with a pride that selfishly forsook Christ for "the condemnation of the devil." Given the Professor's concern with the health of the nation—recall his use of a story of civil war among the tribes of Israel—to reach for Judas was to imply that the monster was also a traitor. Ezra Stiles, in his 1783 election sermon full of warnings against deism and suicide, joined William Beadle to Christianity's greatest villain when he asked, rhetorically, "Where then will a *Judas*, and a *Beadle* appear?" For New England ministers immersed in the Revolutionary spirit, the two went hand in hand: Judas the traitor to Christ, Beadle the traitor to Christ and Christ's new chosen people.⁷⁹

Some fifteen years later, a New England theologian extended the Beadle-Judas connection to the most infamous "traitor" of the Revolution. In 1796, Samuel Green, the same New London printer who first ran the Humble Professor's letter, published Joseph Huntington's *Calvinism Improved*. That text made Beadle's treacherous standing even more explicit. Buried near the end of the dense, 350-page treatise that, ironically, outlined a Calvinist version of universalism, Huntington composed a list of "the most horrid monsters of wickedness that ever have been in the world." It began with some of the usual suspects: Alexander the Great, Nero, Herod, Richard III. Huntington ended the list with two contemporaries, both of whom had called Connecticut home: William Beadle and Benedict Arnold. The merchant Beadle had not betrayed America as obviously as had Arnold the turncoat general. Still, by including only those two contemporaries, the

⁷⁹ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; Stiles, *The United States Elevated*, 86.

connection was clear: both began as patriots; both ended in treachery. The fact that Huntington turned to the list as part of his discussion of Judas Iscariot solidified the association. Beadle was not just a monster. He was a traitor to a nation with a salvific purpose.⁸⁰

If Beadle's continued residence and apparent commitment to "American principles" downplayed his Englishness at the moment of the country's emergence, his suicide revealed his true English—i.e. not American—colors. Someone like Mitchell could, without hesitation, emphasize Beadle's English upbringing without qualification precisely because Beadle had taken the English way out of his troubles (real or imagined). In doing so, he had proven his true loyalties. Beadle's actions had made palpable a host of fears lurking beneath the surface. He symbolized a criminal threat come from abroad in the form of the migrant; the anonymous neighbor whose good manners belied a malicious heart; and the selfish Englishman who jealously decried American virtue to hide his own laziness and extravagance. Beadle's deism, and the ease with which his writings allowed American commentators to conflate it with his Englishness, showed the clergy's longstanding fears of heterodoxy to be unfortunately prescient. Beadle the monster was a threat to a people on the tail end of civil war.

Future American Monsters

However much commentators could locate Beadle's dark soul in his Englishness, they could not absolutely escape the fact that he had lived and died in America. He was

⁸⁰ Joseph Huntington, *Calvinism improved: or, the gospel illustrated as a system of real grace, issuing in the salvation of all men* (New London: 1796), 147.

as much American as English. Beadle lingered as a sign that hellish danger lurked in America's near future. Was something rotten with the American experiment? Had a residual Englishness and the vice it stood for already infiltrated the young nation? How would this affect America's position as God's new Israel? Such worries over America's future emerged in the writing about the Beadle murders. Whether facing Beadle's remarks about the American mind, considering his claims to patriotism, or thinking about his origins in England, writers could not help but wring their hands over what he presaged about post-Revolutionary America. Like the well-to-do patriots eager to retreat from some of the Revolution's more democratic politics, New England ministers saw, in William Beadle, the possibility that patriots had marched religious liberty too far.⁸¹

The clergy especially saw Beadle as a danger to the new body politic and urged the young country to heed their warnings. If not, the new United States was in trouble. John Marsh's moralizing explicitly connected the principles of a William Beadle to the state of the nation as it secured independence. America's religious liberty, which Marsh cautiously praised, demanded vigilance just like the liberty won from Britain. Those who abused this liberty were flesh-and-blood dangers to American society. "How unfit are such persons," Marsh asked rhetorically, "to be intrusted either with private or public important affairs, whatever their accomplishments may be in other respects?"⁸² James Dana, in his own sermon, echoed Marsh's concern. Anyone who would second Beadle's fatalism, Dana thundered, "must immediately become a most dangerous member of

⁸¹ As will be seen more below, Grasso discusses the relationship between Beadle and fears of religious liberty in "Deist Monster" and *Skepticism and American Faith*.

⁸² Marsh, *The Great Sin and Danger*, 22.

society; the public safety requires that he should be ordered to some place of confinement.”⁸³ John “Damnation” Murray, who had gone to great lengths to describe English deism as an “infection” and “poison” that had reached America’s shores saw Beadle as a new normal for an immoral public. Deism, Murray argued, had already “habituated” Americans to the news of atrocious acts such as a “husband” and “father imbruing his hands in the blood of the beloved wife and all the tender offspring.”⁸⁴ Marsh, at one point in his funeral sermon, had mourned “the very singular fate” of Lydia and the children, but it was clear that he, Dana, and Murray did not, at other points, see the Beadle massacre as a singular, local struggle. Much more ominous, it was a public, national challenge. Such ministers drew a figure of Beadle that expressed their antecedent concerns about religious innovation at the birth of the republic. Beadle was not just a present trauma; he was the country’s future should citizens forsake ministerial warnings.

At the same time, ministers not directly involved in the Beadle affair offered theological glosses just as concerned with heresy’s effects on the national moment. For example, not long after the Beadle tragedy, Stephen Johnson, pastor in Lyme, CT, wrote a lengthy treatise against universalism, a heretical scourge he traced to books “imported among us” from London. He saw his time as a particularly “degenerate age.” Similarly, Connecticut native and staunch Edwardsian Samuel Hopkins framed his anti-universalist message as particularly timely: “There seems to be a special call for this *now*,” Hopkins wrote, as the message of universal salvation was “more open and common of late” and

⁸³ Dana, *Men’s Sins Not Chargeable on God*, 26.

⁸⁴ [Murray], *Bath-Kol*, 165. For a take on Murray’s understanding of Beadle, see Grasso, “Deist Monster,” 47-48.

“zealously espoused by many.” To be sure, the timeliness had something to do with politics no matter one’s viewpoint. Hopkins, writing as America entered independence, worried that without the fear of hell, civil oaths became meaningless, which would “sap the foundation of civil government,” end citizens’ trust in one another, and open society to a spate of suicides and murders. Johnson’s concerns about book imports hinted that English vice might still infiltrate American shores even as the war ended.⁸⁵

As ministers, writers, and politicians looked forward, deist infiltration was explicitly political. The Revolution and constitution making of the period placed the legality of various religions on the docket. When religious liberty began to win the day over the older notion of tolerance with its associated legal and political disadvantages for members of minority faiths, discussion about public displays of religion was rampant. In print, deists and anti-deists engaged in “infidel controversies” with both sides claiming the long-term health of the country’s republican institutions were at stake. Even a shift in terminology betrayed the growing fear of cultural and political degeneracy. For centuries, a freethinker who innovated too far was a “heretic” and considered a traitor to the Christian body politic. By the end of the eighteenth-century, “infidelity” was the preferred charge. That change, present in the Beadle case, did not so much negate the traitorous implication of heretic as subsume it and expand upon it. A heretic—a traitor—was someone on the inside, a once-legitimate member of the political community; an

⁸⁵ Stephen Johnson, *The Everlasting Punishment of the Ungodly, Illustrated and Evinced to Be a Scripture Doctrine...* (New London, 1786), ii and xiii. Ironically, the title he cites was the work published anonymously in London by New England’s own Charles Chauncy, the Old Light leader who represented the liberal wing of Boston ministers. Double the irony—on xv, Johnson actually cites Chauncy as the type of clergy whose work stands against the universalists. For Chauncy’s work, see [Charles Chauncy], *The Mystery hid from Ages and Generations, made manifest by the Gospel-Revelation: or, The Salvation of All Men* (London, 1784). For Hopkins, see Samuel Hopkins, *An Inquiry Concerning the Future State of Those Who Die in their Sins* (Newport, 1783), iv, 178-9.

infidel had always signified an outsider, a Jew or Muslim, someone who did not belong enough to make heresy possible. In merging infidelity and heresy, anti-deist writers doubly-condemned free white male deists: they were, of course, members of the political body, and thus traitors, but their treason was so foundational as to cast their insider status into serious doubt.⁸⁶

Work by Christopher Grasso and Richard Bell has shown that William Beadle continued to play a starring role in these political battles. According to Grasso, Puritan thinkers used Beadle to construct a “common sense” response to religious liberty that forged a connection between religious doctrine and republican citizenship. Good citizenship in the new republic, according to this philosophy, presupposed Christianity, specifically the morality that emerged from a divinely inspired Bible. Thus, challenges to divine inspiration were not only irrational or heretical but also un-American. Bell has recently documented an anti-deism/anti-universalism rhetoric from the Revolution to the Jacksonian era that sought to discredit these theologies by tying them to persons like Beadle. As Marsh drew universalism as a logical consequence of Beadle’s deism, so later writers saw the modern Universalism movement as “the direct descendant of Beadle’s deism.” After 1820, according to Bell, “attacks on Universalism...gave readers the distinct impression that every domestic massacre in living memory had been committed by a follower of that faith.” Such attacks sometimes invoked William Beadle explicitly.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 4-7, chapters 1 and 2 passim.

⁸⁷ See Grasso, “Deist Monster,”; Bell, *We Shall Be No More*, 177, 197. One such anti-universalist attack that mentions Beadle by name was, according to Grasso, probably written by Samuel Whittemore, a member of Murray’s church. See Grasso, “Deist Monster,” 48, fn. 14.

The clerical concerns about Beadle fit easily with the already-present worries about America's continued unity and success. Both religious and secular writing in and around Beadle's New England evinced hope for America's future while also fearing that future would crumble. It made sense given the difficulties of a long civil war that had relied on cooperation between colonies not always known for amity. While Governor Trumbull, for example, worried about being immersed in "all the present and future Horrors of a Civil War" to Baron van der Capellen tot den Pol, a Dutch supporter of the American cause, he also argued that those horrors carried the prospects of a brighter American future. At the start of the war, Trumbull admitted, South and North felt almost wholly disconnected. Civil war with England, however, had joined them into a "union" of the "the firmest, most amicable foundations." Wethersfield's John Marsh echoed Trumbull in a thanksgiving sermon on the one-year anniversary of the Beadle murders. In a grandiose retelling of the Revolution, Marsh saw a divine hand in uniting the previously disparate colonies. Reverend Marsh was especially thankful that God had raised up George Washington to unify American patriots against the Goliath of Great Britain.⁸⁸

Like the story of Goliath, these stories combined a surprising victory with recognition of divine promise all along. Trumbull described the newfound American unity as but one step in a longer narrative of his colony's history: the founding of Connecticut to revolutionary America made sense after all. Marsh had no sooner thanked God for revolutionary victory in the present than he drew attention to God's blessing in

⁸⁸ Jonathan Trumbull to Joan Derk, Baron van der Capellen, 31 August 1779, Jonathan Trumbull Sr. Papers, I. Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 4a, CHS; John Marsh, *A Discourse Delivered at Wethersfield, December 11th, 1783. Being a Day of Public Thanksgiving, Throughout the United States of America* (Hartford: [1783]).

the past. From the beginning, Marsh noted, God had led early settlers to found the very seminaries that years later provided the necessary patriots for service to church and state. Around the same time, Ezra Stiles couched the same general idea in an even more prophetic voice. In his 1783 election day sermon, the Yale president spoke of “God’s American Israel.” The Revolution was a civil war, but this was a civil war meant for American greatness from the beginning.⁸⁹

Stiles’ comparison to biblical Israel was no accident as he and others celebrated what the American character could offer the Old World. The United States, which Stiles insisted was the same population as Moses’ Israel, could, like Israel, serve as God’s light to the world. The errand in the wilderness still resonated with New Englanders after all. Not only were they effecting a “great american revolution,” it was a revolution necessary for the continued protection of England and the entire Old World. The United States, Stiles prophesied would collect and even perfect all the knowledge of the modern world that it “may reblaze back from america to europe, asia and africa, and illumine the world with truth and liberty.” It would encourage political liberty “at large throughout europe” and ensure religious liberty around the world as well. The effects to Stiles’ once-beloved England were the most pronounced. Americans’ “spirited and successful stand...against tyranny,” he exclaimed, “will prove the salvation of *england* and *ireland*.” Stiles hoped it might urge Scotland to independence, and he was strongly encouraged by increasing independence for Ireland. The future of the Old World was tied to that of the New World;

⁸⁹ Jonathan Trumbull to Joan Derk, Baron van der Capellen, 31 August 1779, Jonathan Trumbull Sr. Papers, I. Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 4a, CHS; Marsh, *A Discourse Delivered at Wethersfield*, 7; Stiles, *The United States Elevated*, 7.

the future of Britain was tied to the future of the United States. It was an attitude implied by Trumbull's and Marsh's expressions of longstanding divine intervention.⁹⁰

William Beadle threatened that future. However small the Beadle murders might seem when compared to the fates of nations, writers could not help analyzing Beadle in that same spirit of enhanced American destiny. Some of the spontaneous writing on Beadle in the immediate aftermath of his death employed similar biblical language that tied America to Israel. In doing so, these writers implied Beadle was a threat to an emerging American society or way of life. By extension, he signaled a threat to America's divine mission. Most notably, the often-mentioned pseudonymous letters from Humble Professor of Christianity and Friend to Justice both assumed an emergent American identity aligned with biblical Israel as they fretted over the consequences of Beadle's actions. Recall that the Humble Professor framed his remarks around the story of civil war among the tribes of Israel and that Friend to Justice reminded readers of the connection a few weeks later. The new American nation was in a position similar to the tribes of Israel, distinct in some ways but brought together as a people by God for a specific purpose. That calling carried a price: as heinous sin from one tribe unleashed war and slaughter, so might the Beadle murders signal a new civil war just as the war with Britain wound down. Just as all the tribes of Israel had a stake in one tribe's sins, the American people "of the thirteen united tribes or states," the Humble Professor argued,

⁹⁰ Stiles, *The United States Elevated*, 5-7, 48-49, 52-55.

should take concerted action in response to Beadle and Wethersfield officials' supposedly lackadaisical response.⁹¹

Additionally, both writers used language that suggested the American project was a new venture that required a coherent, creative identity on the part of the American people. For example, as discussed earlier, Friend to Justice, by way of reminding New Englanders that murder required punishment, considered the story of Cain and Abel. In doing so, he evoked a story of original murder and original family. The Beadle murders put America in a similar bind: they were a new people, an original people, and the need for expiation threatened the people from the start. From a less overtly religious perspective, both writers also acknowledged that the American people had some legal and political innovation to perform. In response to the argument that no further punishment could be done to Beadle's body because "[w]e have no law for it," Friend remarked, "we are a law to ourselves." The Humble Professor of Christianity, always more tempered, acknowledged the local or even state level might be insufficient. This, he speculated, was a matter for the new Congress.⁹²

It made sense to fret over what Beadle meant for America because the cultural and political landscape was already so full of the fear of degeneracy. It had been there from the first insecure arrivals troubled by the potential effects of life in a new environment with non-European neighbors. The Puritans, of course, painted their fear of degeneracy in the New World with a particularly harsh theological brush. By the time of

⁹¹ *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783.

⁹² *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), Jan. 3, 1783; *Connecticut Courant*, Jan. 21, 1783.

the Revolution, the private virtue of Puritan Calvinism matched with the concerns over civic virtue at the heart of the emerging republicanism. In one sense, William Beadle was just one monster, but whether thinking from the pulpit or the town meeting, he was potentially just the first of many. Besides, as the comparisons with biblical Israel no doubt reminded all, one monster was enough to derail a people and call down God's judgment.⁹³

William Beadle raised the possibility that it was too late to right the ship. If Beadle's hometown newspaper was any indication, some Americans could not celebrate their country's divine mission without also subtly worrying that they were all too English to succeed. Even toward the beginning of the Revolution, for example, the *Connecticut Courant* printed a sixty-eight line poem called "A Liberty Song" that grappled with the troubled present by celebrating Britain's past but America's future. Great Britain, "the Wonder of the world!," deserved "honor and revere" for having allowed freedom to so long flourish, but its time was passed. It was "weary'd out" like "antient Rome." Consequently, the vanguard of freedom had "o'er th' *Atlantic* fled." Freedom, which the author referred to as a synonym for virtue, needed sanctuary; it was up to Americans to grant it. "A Liberty Song" complicated the narrative, however, by recognizing that not everything blown across the Atlantic was welcome. Along with freedom, the Atlantic winds had swept British tyranny "[t]o our late peaceful Shore." Americans, who were freedom's last chance, had to hope "the Western Gales / Will fan the' infected Air, /

⁹³ On the relationship between early Puritan fears of degeneracy and notions of American identity, see Chaplin, "Creoles in British America." On the continued back and forth accusations of degeneracy between metropole and colony, see Zuckerman, "Identity in British America." On the differences and interplays in the Revolution-era between private virtue and civic republican virtue, see Greene, "The Concept of Virtue."

Blow off those Vermin from our Coasts, / And leave our Country clear.” England then was the source of both virtue and vermin. The reference to “infected Air” implied worry over English residue. William Beadle, in the hands of the anxious writers of New England, was an example of that residue left by the “infected Air” of Englishness.⁹⁴

In the aftermath of the murders, then, it felt particularly important to sort out the Americanness (or not) of William Beadle. The cultural and political identity of William Beadle mirrored the larger American ambivalence toward England and Englishness during the Revolution. Prior to December 1782, Beadle was a noble patriotic citizen: whatever his place of birth, he was a public supporter of the American cause, a respected husband and father, a neighbor entrusted with gathering a tax. After the murders, everything about him seemed foreign, suspicious, monstrous. Similarly, England stood for all that was good until it did not. However stark the oppositions might sound—merchant or monster, colonial subjects or independent Americans—it sometimes proved difficult to keep the dividing lines tidy. Just as Stephen Mix Mitchell or the anonymous newspaper writers could admit respect for Beadle-the-merchant or Beadle-the-doting-father even as they rebuked the monster of a man, so overt political voices might simultaneously praise and condemn their English inheritance. The anxious Atlantic had sprung an anxious America.

⁹⁴ *Connecticut Courant*, Oct. 31, 1774.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: A SPECTER OF THE ATLANTIC WORLD

Just under a decade after fishing migrants hauled William Beadle's bones away, the monster of a man finally got a headstone—of sorts. In 1790, the Honorable John Davis of Boston prepared an epitaph for a memorial stone to the grave shared by Lydia and her children. The estate's executor, Isaac Lothrop, paid for its installment two years later. The victims, Davis wrote, "Fell by the hands of William Beadle, / an infatuated Man, / who closed the horrid sacrifice / of his Wife and Children / with his own destruction." Davis closed the inscription with a commemorative poem. Near the end, the mournful "Soft sighs" of earlier lines "swell to plaintive chords." This sorrow, in the final line, turns angry as "Indignations half unsheath their swords." At the time, visitors would have caught the reference to the soldiers who started to draw their weapons at the sight of Beadle's corpse. Davis thus ensured that anyone walking through the northern part of the Wethersfield cemetery might have occasion to reflect on the emotional costs Beadle's "infatuation" hung over the town.¹

Around a century later, few would have appreciated Davis' words. If anyone in Wethersfield still visited the grave, it apparently no longer drove them to "half unsheathe their swords" in righteous indignation. In *The History of Ancient Wethersfield, Connecticut*, lifetime resident Sherman Adams felt compelled to explain to his late-

¹ For the full text of the headstone, see Tillotson, ed., *Wethersfield Inscriptions*, 17–18. On the interpretation of the poem, see Adams, *The History of Ancient Wethersfield, Connecticut*, 700. Items pertaining to its installation are Receipt for Beadle Stone, Joel Hall/Archibald Hall Folder, William Beadle Research File, Box 1, WHS and Beadle Gravestone, Isaac Lothrop Folder, William Beadle Research File, Box 1, WHS.

nineteenth-century readers just why Beadle had caused such a stir. The event “awakened the greatest interest and horror throughout New England,” Adams explained, since “such occurrences” were “not then...as common as they have since become.” Adams’ account, to be sure, rings with some nostalgia for a non-existent simpler time. After all, the men and women of 1782 Connecticut had seen plenty of violence during their lives; theirs was no idyllic world. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine any time and place (and certainly not late nineteenth-century Connecticut) where a husband and father murdering his wife and four young children before taking his own life would not incite “the greatest interest and horror” from all who heard the news. Nostalgia notwithstanding, the point resonates. Aside from the faded headstone in a cemetery full of headstones, the markers of the tragedy had disappeared. In print, Adams’ comment suggests that Beadle was only the beginning for tragedy in an American print network. Indeed, such representations were apparently so prevalent that Adams and his readers felt inundated; it was hard for them to appreciate the shock a William Beadle imposed on their community. Beadle did not fade from memory immediately, however, and he has never disappeared entirely.²

A Tragedy Remembered

The Humble Professor of Christianity and Friend to Justice never got to raise the corpse of William Beadle on a gibbet as they desired. For at least two decades though, Beadle’s house stood as a physical reminder of the tragedy. In September 1789, Samuel Davis, a jeweler and antiquarian from Plymouth, stopped on his autumn tour of New

² Adams, *The History of Ancient Wethersfield*, 699. The book was a long-time project of Adams. Only after his death did Henry Stiles compile the published work from Adams’ manuscripts. On the increase of such Gothic murder literature after Beadle, see Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*.

England. In his diary, Davis lavished praise on the town, comparing its architecture and residents favorably to Boston and Cambridge. He walked down the street of the Beadle property, mentioning Beadle's name without elaboration as if none were necessary. It seemed he had visited, in part, to see where the infamous Beadle had lived and died. Upon seeing the house, he noted it was "shut, with its shop, none being willing to occupy it." Seven years, and still it sat, empty and unused. On the way back to Plymouth, he visited both Stratford and Fairfield, two of Beadle's former homes. In the latter, he paid calls to Timothy Dwight and the Burrs. While Davis did not note discussing Beadle with them, one imagines he did.³

At the turn of the century, the house likely remained as Davis had seen it. The property was still in the hands of the British-based heirs of Barlow Trecothick, the London MP who had purchased the land and house from Peter Verstelle and subsequently rented it to the Beadles before the state of Connecticut took temporary control of it during the war. Finally, in April 1803, the heirs sold it, "two acres & Seventy two Rods...together with all Buildings thereon" to a Wethersfield farmer named Norman Clapp. While an adjacent house down the street probably stood in 1782, the house on the old Verstelle-Trecothick-Clapp land, a block away from the church on what is now Hartford Avenue, was almost certainly not the house occupied by the Beadles. A two-story brown Georgian, local archivists at the Wethersfield Historical Society believe it replaced the original structure in the early 1800s. A number of houses along Main Street around the corner definitively date to Beadle's lifetime. Similarly, some of the extant

³ Samuel Davis diary, 1789, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA, 8-9, 12-15.

houses along routes to the Wethersfield Cove and Connecticut River were standing at that time. They may have been along the mob's route on the evening of December 12, 1782.⁴

In print, Beadle has continued to appear over the years. As previously mentioned, Mitchell's pamphlet returned in the mid-1790s with a more detailed account of the crime's discovery. At the same time, when Joseph Huntington's posthumous *Calvinism Improved*, which, ironically defended a form of universal salvation, listed Beadle as one of history's great villains, he did not even feel the need to say who Beadle was. As if a household name, Huntington simply listed Beadle alongside the more famous Alexander the Great, Nero, and Richard III. Ironically, the only other contemporary to make the list was the very person who might have stained Lydia Lothrop's reputation, her cousin's infamous son Benedict Arnold. As others have noted, Beadle popped up well into the nineteenth century whenever a religious scold needed a one-name rebuke of theological heterodoxy. By the 1820s, ministers like New York Methodist Timothy Merritt resurrected the morality tale of William Beadle to warn listeners of the dangers universalism posed to the young republic. Merritt drew a direct genealogical line between the deism of William Beadle and the Universalists troubling Jacksonian America.⁵

⁴ April 1, 1803, Estate of Barlow Trucothick to Norman Clapp, Wethersfield Land Records, Vol. 23, p. 71. Local archivist and historian Martha Smart first scoured the property records when her son James wrote about Beadle for his undergraduate thesis at Princeton in the late 1980s. In a conversation at the Wethersfield Historical Society on July 29, 2015, Ms. Smart told me how she figured out that 47 Hartford Avenue was the most likely site of the Beadle land. Her conclusion that the house there today is not the site of the murders is based on a record of the land being void of buildings and the fact that the current house fits stylistically with houses in the neighborhood built after 1800.

⁵ [Mitchell], "A true Account"; Huntington, *Calvinism Improved*, 147. On Merritt and the anti-Universalist use of William Beadle, see Bell, *We Shall Be No More*, 177-178. Bell notes that anti-Universalist screeds published after 1820 "gave readers the distinct impression that every domestic massacre in living memory had been committed by a follower of" Universalism.

On occasion, brief reappearances signaled changing contexts for the deist monster, however small. The 1830s was apparently long enough for a *Cincinnati* magazine to abandon the ambiguous ramifications of Beadle's English background amid a civil war. The opening sentence of their 1832 retrospective referred to Beadle simply as a "foreigner." By contrast, his Wethersfield was a "peaceful village," his neighbors "distinguished for their attachment to good order." Three years later, an Albany magazine printed a supposed tradition concerning a tree near William Beadle's grave (just which grave they did not say). As they had it, someone had carved a poem, every bit as tawdry as Beadle's verse about tea, into the trunk: "William Beadle! Here he lies, / Nobody laughs, nobody cries,— / Where he's gone, or how he fares, / Nobody knows, nobody cares." Maybe no one cared after fifty years, but it is hard to see Humble Professor of Christianity or Friend to Justice allowing that sentiment. Local historians like the aforementioned Adams continued to care, too. When writing of Beadle in the last part of the nineteenth century, he fully identified Chief Justice Mitchell as the author of the well-known Beadle pamphlets. It had only been a few years, Adams noted, since searchers had first matched the published *Narrative* with the archived school records account, a connection that definitively pegged Mitchell as the author. By then, Beadle was not just a monster; he was a famous one. A seeker of notable autographs snatched the single scrap of paper bearing the handwriting of William Beadle for his collection. A 31 July 1780 receipt from the Connecticut Loan Office recording the Wethersfield merchant trading in some bills of exchange, a clear, stylized—one might even say, gentlemanly—"W Beadle" adorns the bottom of the well-preserved manuscript.⁶

⁶ *Cincinnati Mirror, and Western Gazette of Literature, Science, and the Arts* Vol. 2, No. 7 (Dec.

Less directly, Beadle, at least as literary type, made his way into fiction. With Mitchell and Huntington just published, one of the founders of American literature, Charles Brockden Brown gave us the first rational madman in his 1798 Gothic novel *Wieland: or, The Transformation: An American Tale*. In Brown's macabre plot, the title character murders his wife and children before eventually taking his own life. Like Beadle, Wieland believed himself innocent of moral wrong; he was simply following the dictates of a higher power. Brown scholars have not flocked to the previously mentioned theory of Neil King Fitzgerald's doctoral dissertation that Beadle was the direct influence of the novel. There is, after all, some compelling evidence at the level of shared language that Brown was reading reports of a 1796 family massacre in Tomhannock, New York when he wrote his book. Nevertheless, similarities exist between accounts of the Beadle case and Brown's story. The perpetrator in both cases was seen as a consummate family man, highly intelligent and of modern mind, surrounded by well-off and well-educated friends. As with Lydia Beadle, ghastly dreams filled the sleep of the central female character. Reason and superstition frequently clashed and, just as frequently, complemented one another side-by-side. Beadle believed his deism took him to the root of knowledge about God while most others remained in the dark; Wieland similarly longed for a singular encounter with the deity. Even frequent movement had a place: the narrator never left her Pennsylvania home, but many of the characters crossed the Atlantic again and again, and whether to remain in Europe or America was a frequent

22, 1832), 52; *Albany Bouquet and Literary Spectator*, June 13, 1835, 38; Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 38; Adams, *The History of Ancient Wethersfield*, 695; William Beadle Receipt, William R. Lawrence Collection, Box 3, Folder 4, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.

topic of conversation. As if to demonstrate the disconnect between public and private selves, the rationally-explicable and the supernatural, much of Brown's plot centered on a mysterious bilquist—one with the ability to speak in multiple voices, impersonate others, and pitch their voice to different locations. No voice could be assumed authentic. Whether Brown knew the Beadle case or not, it was a recognizable type of the early republic.⁷

More recently, aside from the historical scholarship discussed already, the Beadle story has occasionally appeared in magazines or blog posts. It is easy to understand why it remains popular: the crime feels original in its abhorrence no matter how pervasive representations of violent murder have become, Mitchell's account and other shorter pieces are excellent primary sources, and it aligns chronologically with the Revolution. Especially in Connecticut, it makes for a compelling "From the Past" magazine feature or a "Today in History" post on a website. For example, two issues of a 1945 magazine reproduced Mitchell's account. Just recently, a historical society interested in the Revolutionary economy posted about Beadle under the title "A Revolutionary Currency Crash." The Wethersfield Historical Society has made excerpts from James Smart's thesis available on its site along with photographs of the William Woods broadside, an anonymous poem from the period, and the gravestone. The Connecticut Historical

⁷ Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland: or, The Transformation*. Fitzgerland, "Wieland's Crime." On the evidence Brown took language from the New York murders, see Fred Lewis Pattee's "Introduction" to the Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1926 edition of *Wieland*, xxxiv. The rational madman of the novel sounds very similar to Conrad Wright's "rational supernaturalists" discussed in chapter five. For one mention of Beadle in the context of Brown's novel, see Shirley Samuels, "Weiland: Alien and Infidel," 58-59. While Samuels briefly discusses Beadle and notes some parallels with the plot of Brown's novel, she does not argue any causal influence on the author.

Society has hosted brown-bag lunch lectures on the topic. William Beadle even made a cameo in a 2009 *New Yorker* piece about America's murderous past—and present.⁸

In Wethersfield, just as in 1783, remembering and forgetting still clash. As if a wish the Beadles had never arrived from Fairfield, a commemorative historical map of old Wethersfield now adorning the wall of a local business mistakenly lists later owner Norman Clapp as resident in 1782.⁹ Some in Wethersfield, however, still remember the family's story. Before writing on Beadle at Princeton, James Smart grew up hearing of the murders. The tales felt close to home: his family lived on property that supposedly abutted the Beadle land. Beadle makes regular "appearances" on the annual Halloween "Lantern Light Tours" hosted by Wethersfield Historical Society. A few town residents have been known to leave flowers on the family grave every December 11. Archivists at WHS even report periodic rumors about William Beadle's lost bones. For example, when construction between the burying ground and the river unearthed some unexpected remains, Wethersfield buzzed with gossip about Beadle's final resting place. Perhaps,

⁸ Copies of the following publications, mentioned in this paragraph, are available in the WHS Beadle collections (missing citation information is due to incomplete information in the collection): Diana Ross McCain, "From the Past: A Horrid Massacre," in *Connecticut*, November 1985, 125; Cynthia J. Clancy, "Beadle Murders Shocked Wethersfield" [newspaper without visible name or date]; Mitchell reprinted in the August and October 1945 issues of *Tally*. Websites include: Mary Pat Knowlton, Today in History feature for ConnecticutHistory.org run by Connecticut Humanities (<https://connecticuthistory.org/the-beadle-family-murders-today-in-history/>); New England Historical Society, "A Revolutionary Currency Crash—The Story of William Beadle." (<http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/revolutionary-currency-crash-story-william-beadle/>); Wethersfield Historical Society, <http://www.wethersfieldhistory.org/articles-from-the-community/the-story-of-the-murder-of-the-beadle-family-by-william-beadle/>; Connecticut Historical Society <https://chs.org/2015/08/the-first-documented-mass-murder-suicide-in-north-america-wethersfield-connecticut-1782/>. *The New Yorker* piece is Jill Lepore, "Rap Sheet: Why Is American History So Murderous?" *The New Yorker*, November 9, 2009. Lepore uses Beadle as a quick example of how murders left more archival presence than other crimes. While she quotes from the headstone poem, she oddly reports that only 2 children died at his hand.

⁹ The map hangs in Village Pizza, across the street from the First Church of Christ where Lydia and the children are buried. I observed it on a November 16, 2018 visit.

they speculated, the fishing-season visitors from the old stories had not made off with everything. The remains, unsurprisingly, were not the “deist monster,” but in recalling the legend of the scattered bones, the story gestures at the premise of this dissertation: the Beadle tragedy was, to be sure, a local one, but any attempt to understand it must leave Wethersfield for a larger context.¹⁰

William Beadle: Specter Of The Atlantic World

My story of William Beadle has been an Atlantic one. At times, from certain angles, the Atlantic experience of William Beadle looks similar to the dynamic, opportunity-filled world Atlantic historians have described so well. As a free white male born in England, William Beadle, though most certainly from humble background, traveled the British empire. He crossed the ocean multiple times. He traded in Barbados. He found his place in Connecticut after a few false starts. He married and started a family. He opened a store, climbed in the tax rolls, became a public figure in the newspapers, and befriended regional elites. He joined in the spirit of the Revolution and read himself into Enlightenment. In life, most of his archival presence was limited to a town along the Connecticut River. Nevertheless, in its broad contours and themes, it represented an Atlantic life, and that Atlantic life was an anxious one. William Beadle was an Atlantic dreamer, but the realities of life on every level—local, regional, national, imperial—proved devastating.

The ocean crossings may have carried an air of adventure, but they just as easily may have signaled past failures and the need for fresh starts. Movement let the reticent

¹⁰ Martha Smart, conversation with author, July 29, 2015.

Beadle start anew, but it also meant he lacked some of the connections necessary for a merchant. Once he became a murderer, his erstwhile neighbors were baffled. Even Mitchell, his best friend, shuddered in ignorance: they had not known him as well as they thought they had. What other newcomers, during the Revolution and its aftermath, were not as they appeared to be?

The mercantile life that drove Beadle's migrations was an exciting proposition open to more and more classes of people. That life, however, was always rather wary. Beadle flitted from one place to the next with his goods. His moment of success quickly gave way to worry over destitution. It was a life preoccupied with status, market fluctuations, and an overall sense of powerlessness as the imperial wars of the Atlantic world unleashed rampant inflation and wrecked the economic fortunes of some. In death, Beadle blamed others for these financial misfortunes. That resonated so much with war-weary Americans that they never could seem to tell the story as primarily an economic one.

For ministerial commentators, that left the age-old Puritan fallback: religious heresy. Beadle's professed deism and the determinism, amoralism, and universalism he postulated from it made it easy to blame his monstrousness on modern philosophy. Intellectually, however, William Beadle was not as out-of-bounds as the murders made him seem. He may not have been a scholar, but he was conversant in the theological tropes of Enlightenment. Like many, he strained to integrate hyper-rationality with the miraculous. His determinism and universalism had respectable proponents on both sides of the Atlantic. Beadle drew support from the conviction that he was an Enlightened

diamond among the pebbles of ignorant mankind, but this mindset further alienated him. In death, others castigated him a “deist monster,” but all the while, they worried this philosophy from abroad was becoming a new normal. As independence beckoned, the possibility of a residual English immorality grew more and more worrisome.

One way to distance good Americans from such deist monsters was to recall Beadle’s English roots. Beadle had appeared a patriot in life. From his influential friends, to his monetary contributions, to the rhetoric of his ads, and his embrace of Continental dollars, William Beadle performed the American allegiance necessary in a world where civil war made national identity a pressing concern. In death, he maligned false patriots and portrayed the Beadles as having died in service of the American cause. To those trying to understand him, this raised profound worries. What if too much English inheritance tainted the American experiment? Could America stand alone intellectually and culturally? What if other William Beadles were hiding in America’s port cities, small towns, and rural farmsteads? Despite his patriotic record, they could cast Beadle across the Atlantic once again: an Englishman brought up in London deist clubs who exited life in the telltale English fashion of suicide. Any relief, however, was fleeting. Beadle might have been an English monster, but he was an English monster living as an American.

William Beadle was a specter of the Atlantic world. In his print afterlife, he became one for Americans as well, haunting the men and women of Wethersfield, New England, and beyond. The trauma of the scene and its aftermath in Wethersfield spread in print throughout most of the country. As they squabbled about burials and the publication of Beadle’s letters, they also worried about his legacy. Similarly, William Beadle is a

specter for Atlantic historiography. His end was rather singular, but his larger story is revealing. Connections and links spread traumatic stories as easily as opportunities. Mass mobility, expanding commerce, revolutionary politics, and innovative ideas are signposts for Atlantic historians. The Beadle story reveals the other side of those signs. Each of those dynamic features made the Atlantic world an exciting place, but they also made it an anxious one replete with failure. Those features have made Atlantic historiography an exciting prospect; they should also point to moments of fretting and disappointment.

In the introduction, I noted examples of the exuberant vocabulary of Atlantic historiography and suggested that exuberance, while historically appropriate and potent, betrayed a picture of Atlantic experience that was too sunny. Even more than its optimism, that historiographical vocabulary paralleled much of the vocabulary of life as we Atlantic historians knew it at the turn of the millennium. Our commercial- and communication-driven globe, like the Atlantic world of historians, teems with “networks” and “connections,” “links” and “integrations.” The “cultural hybridity” that Atlanticists celebrated in narratives of a “multicolored,” “multinational,” and “multi-ethnic” world is a touchstone of our life outside the archives. Happy remarks about the “diversity of lifeways constantly forming and changing” or “identities...constructed and reconstructed” might apply to the early modern world or the twenty-first century. No wonder Bernard Bailyn could write in 2005 that the Atlantic world was “[a] deeply embedded part of early modern history” and also “peculiarly relevant for understanding the present.”¹¹

¹¹ The representative language is from the following: Bailyn, “Preface,” xiv-xvi; David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, “Introduction,” 1, 3-4; David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” 11-12, 14-15; Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan, “Introduction: The Making and Unmaking,” 1, 5, 11-13, 15-16. The 2005 Bailyn remark is Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, 4.

As with the introduction, this is not meant to denigrate Atlanticists. We all write in our moments, and that vocabulary remains historically compelling and historiographically productive. Bailyn was not wrong. While historians should probably hesitate to cast for easy parallels between past and present, Bailyn's "peculiarly relevant" insight is too tempting to ignore. As he wrote it, the early modern Atlantic could help us understand the present. Now perhaps, the present can help Atlanticists understand early modern life.

Our world remains full of networks, connections, links, and integrations. It remains defined by flux and movement, diversity and exchange. Identity is fluid. Communication is instantaneous and global. In many senses, the globe is a more appropriate context than the nation-state. But not always, not fully. Many are disgruntled. The nation-state retains appeal, with its walls and its Brexits. The movements of some are welcome, but others are turned away. Communication can be intercepted, hacked, stored, and sold. If some embrace fluid identities, others champion supposedly static expressions with tradition on their side. Calls for "law and order" harangue flux and movement; violence rails against diversity and exchange. Networks still connect, but they are often connections imbued with hate. Real integration is elusive. Not everyone, it turns out, wants to celebrate the twenty-first century global experience. For some, that experience carries anxiety and failure as sure as hope and success. When the anxious strike, others suffer.

Atlantic life in the early modern world was just as dualistic. The forces that opened up the achievements of an Atlantic world also opened that world to disasters.

Optimism and despondence were counterbalanced, each perilously close to overtaking the other. As networks and connections, exchanges and diversities continue to make our world dynamic and creative but also explosive and despairing, so too did Atlantic forces offer and take at the same time. Atlantic historians have readily appreciated this when it comes to the slave trade or the conquests. Anxiety, however, pervaded the entire Atlantic experience. It is a specter of Atlantic historiography; William Beadle gives shape to that specter.

Remembering

As seen earlier, in one of his letters William Beadle infamously called his family "martyrs of the Revolution."¹² Having already rejected his own culpability by denying free will, he did so even more by presenting his victims as victims of the politics and war that engulfed their society. However self-serving Beadle's characterization, it has its place. Lydia and the children did lose their lives in the turmoil Revolution brought to their modest Connecticut town. Similarly, they were martyrs of the Atlantic world. Unlike the case of the Revolution, they did not even know to call their world by that name. Nevertheless, it was the world in which they lived and died. The movements of people, money, ideas, and philosophies that world engendered also delivered loss to many people who might otherwise have benefited. Lydia Beadle and her four children suffered that loss in all its fullness. In one sense, of course, it is a loss that is forever beyond understanding. In another sense, the sense historians work with, the concepts of Atlantic history provide a modicum of insight.

¹² "Extracts from Mr. Beadle's Letters," 181.

Remembering is a precondition of history; reminding is one of the things historians can do. We can remember Lydia Beadle; we can retell her dreams, reimagine her dread. We can remember the children, Ansell and Mary and Elizabeth and Lydia; we can pause before the fear they might have felt in their final months. We can remember the poor servant girl, never named; we can, for a moment, lose “utterance” with her as she hurries down the dark road or falls faint down the stairs. We can remember Beadle’s friends and neighbors, as if “on the rack,” grasping for meaning in a vengeful funeral at the river. We can restate the paradoxes and ironies that kept them up at night for weeks alongside our own stories of suffering without any final satisfaction. We can, as historians do, re-place their stories into our historiographies: tears alongside the triumphs of Revolution; bewilderment alongside the enthusiasm of Enlightenment; financial free fall alongside the globe’s new economy.¹³

Beyond historiography, however, the Beadle family should simply be remembered as human beings. We should remember Lydia and the children as bearers of immense suffering. We should remember them, along with the unnamed maid who fainted and was never heard in the historical record again, because they did not get to speak for themselves. They did not get to speak about their lives, their community, their hopes and fears. Perhaps that remembering is what an unidentified scribe had in mind when adding, next to Lydia’s birth entry in the Plymouth vital records, “murthred [blot]

¹³ [Mitchell], “A true Account,” 18; [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 10.

Willm. Beadle her husband with four children at Weathersfield in the state of Connecticut.” That coda lives as a marginal reminder in the published editions.¹⁴

The indefatigable Stephen Mix Mitchell did speak briefly for the victims. Given his presence throughout this story, his seems an appropriate last word. He surely knew them better than any other commentator. At the same time, he wrote anonymously, as if no individual could tell the whole truth or as if the Beadles now resided as memories in them all. Lydia Beadle, he remembered, was “unusually serene, sincere, unaffected and sensible.” She was “a comely person” who tragically “died in the middle of life.” The four children, ages six to twelve, exited life like “early tender buds nipped by untimely frosts.” Ansell, Lydia, Mary, and Elizabeth had, Mitchell assured his readers, “cheered the hearts of their parents.” Each had been full of “virtues and excellencies.” One wonders how often Mitchell thought of them. Perhaps he and others close to him would pass the old property and grieve. Perhaps some were surprised to find that whenever they discussed memories of the Revolution, their thoughts drifted to December 11. The story was as much a part of their Revolution as any battle after all. Maybe after church or when in the cemetery for a funeral, some of the men and women and children of Wethersfield would find themselves, unawares, on the right side of the small hill, reading, again, of the “horrid sacrifice.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Sherman, ed. *Vital Records of Plymouth*, 121.

¹⁵ [Mitchell], *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 12-13.

REFERENCES CITED

Archival Sources

American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles [microfilm]

Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford

American Revolution Collection, 1776-1786

Barbour Collection

Comptroller Record Book

Connecticut Comptroller's Office Papers, 1771-1885

Ezekiel Williams Papers

Governor and Council of Safety Records, 1776-1785

Jedediah Huntington Papers

Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers

Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. Papers

Jonathan Trumbull, Sr. Papers

Joseph Trumbull Papers

Newgate Prison Records, 1779-1815

Peter Verstelle Account Books, 1749-1780

Peter Verstelle Papers, 1770-1772

Silas Deane Papers

Tax Extracts

Verstelle Family Correspondence, 1754-1854

Verstille Family Papers, 1760-1846

Wethersfield Town Records and Papers

Williams Family Papers

Congregational Library and Archives, Boston, Massachusetts

Connecticut State Library, Hartford

Connecticut Archives: Crimes and Misdemeanors [microfilm]

Hartford Probate District Packets [microfilm]

Insolvent Debtors [microfilm]

RG003

RG62

School District Records

Town Records of Wethersfield

David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania

American Loyalists Claims Commission [microfilm]

Christopher French Journal [microfilm]

Isaac Backus Papers [microfilm]

Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers [microfilm]

John Rowe Diaries [microfilm]

Nathaniel and Thomas Shaw Papers [microfilm]

Oliver Walcott, Jr. Papers [microfilm]

Oliver Walcott, Sr. Papers [microfilm]

Samuel Adams Letters [microfilm]

The Papers of Aaron Burr [microfilm]

Derby Town Clerk, Connecticut

Derby Land Records

Derby Town Record

Fairfield Town Clerk, Connecticut

Fairfield Land Records

Fairfield Town Record

First Church of Christ, Wethersfield, Connecticut

Harvard University Archives

Harvard College Papers [digital]

Harvard Law School Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Charles Pinfold Papers

Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston

Samuel Davis Journal

New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, Massachusetts

Plymouth County MA Probate File Papers 1686-1881 [digital]

Rockefeller Library, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

Stratford Town Clerk, Connecticut

Stratford Land Records

Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut

William R. Lawrence Collection

Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum, Wethersfield, Connecticut

Wethersfield Historical Society, Connecticut

William Beadle Research File

Wethersfield Village Cemetery, Connecticut

Wethersfield Town Clerk, Connecticut

Wethersfield Land Records

Wethersfield Town Record

Published Primary Works

Adams, Sherman W. *The history of ancient Wethersfield, Connecticut: comprising the present towns of Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington, and of Glastonbury prior to its incorporation in 1693: from date of earliest settlement until the present time*, edited by Henry R. Stiles, vol. 1. New York: Grafton Press, 1904.

Barber, John Warner. *Connecticut Historical Collections: Containing a General Collection of Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, &c, Relating to the History and Antiquities of Every Town in Connecticut, with Geographical Descriptions*. Hartford and New Haven: B.L. Hamlen 1836.

Bowdoin, James, Samuel Pemberton, and Joseph Warren, *A Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre in Boston*. Boston, 1770.

[Chauncy, Charles]. *The Mystery hid from Ages and Generations, made manifest by the Gospel-Revelation: or, The Salvation of All Men*. London, 1784.

Collins, Anthony. *The Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty*. London, 1717.

Dana, James. *The African Slave Trade. A Discourse Delivered in the City of New-Haven, September 9, 1790, Before the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom*. New Haven, 1791.

Dana, James. *Examination of the late Reverend President Edwards's "Enquiry on Freedom of Will."* Boston, 1770.

Dana, James. *The Examination of the late Reverend President Edwards's "Enquiry on*

Freedom of Will'' continued. New Haven, 1773.

Dana, James. *Men's Sins Not Chargeable on God, but on Themselves. A Discourse Delivered at Wallingford, December 22, 1782. Occasioned by the Tragical Exit of William Beadle, His Wife, and Four Children, at Wethersfield.* New Haven, [1783]).

Dana, James. *The reflection and prospect of a Christian Minister at the close of life. A Sermon Preached in the City of New-Haven, July 29, 1787. Being the Lord's Day after Funeral of the Reverend Chauncey Whittelsey, Pastor of the First Church in that City who died July 24, 1787, in the 70th Year of his Age, and 30th of his Ministry.* New Haven, 1787.

Dwight, Timothy. *The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy.* New Haven, 1798.

[Dwight, Timothy]. *The Triumph of Infidelity.* [Hartford], 1788.

Dwight, Timothy. *Travels in New England and New York,* 2 vol. New Haven, 1821.

Edwards, Jonathan. *A careful and strict Enquiry into The modern prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will, Which is supposed to be essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame.* Boston, 1754.

Emmison, F.G., ed. *Essex Freeholders Book, 1734.* [Essex]: Friends of Historic Essex, 1982.

Fleming, Caleb. *A Dissertation Upon the Unnatural Crime of Self-Murder: Occasioned by the Many late Instances of Suicide in this City.* London, 1773.

Hoadly, Charles, Leonard W. Labaree, Alfred E. Van Dusen, Christopher Collier, Dorothy Ann Lipson, and Douglas Arnold, eds. *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut,* 22 vols. Hartford: Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1894-2018.

Holly, Israel. *Old Divinity Preferable to Modern Novelty.* New Haven, 1780.

Hopkins, Samuel. *An Inquiry Concerning the Future State of Those Who Die in their Sins.* Newport, 1783.

Huntington, Joseph. *Calvinism improved: or, the gospel illustrated as a system of real grace, issuing in the salvation of all men.* New London, 1796.

Johnson, Stephen. *The Everlasting Punishment of the Ungodly, Illustrated and Evinced to Be a Scripture Doctrine.* New London, 1786.

- Kant, Immanuel Kant. "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'"
Translated by H.B. Nisbet. In *Kant: Political Writings*, edited by Hans Reiss, 54-60. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- La Mettrie, Julien Offray de. *Man a Machine*. London, 1749.
- "Letter of Priscilla Lothrop." *Bulletin of the Connecticut Historical Society* 8 (August, 1936): 2-4.
- Marsh, John. *A Discourse Delivered at Wethersfield, December 11th, 1783. Being a Day of Public Thanksgiving, Throughout the United States of America*. Hartford, [1783].
- Marsh, John. *The Great Sin and Danger of Striving with God*. Hartford, [1783].
- [Mitchell, Stephen Mix]. *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*. Hartford: 1783.
- [Mitchell, Stephen Mix]. "A true Account of the Situation of the House, on the Morning after the dreadful Catastrophe." In *A Narrative of the Life of William Beadle*, 16-21. Windsor, 1795.
- [Mitchell, Stephen Mix]. *William Beadles Lebens-beschreibung*. Ephrata: 1796.
- Montaigne, Michel de. *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. Translated by Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003.
- [Murray, John]. *Bath-Kol: A Voice from the Wilderness*. Boston, 1783.
- Paine, Thomas. *Age of Reason: Part One*. In *The Thomas Paine Reader*, edited by Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick, 399-451. New York: Penguin, 1987.
- Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense*. In *The Thomas Paine Reader*, edited by Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick, 65-115. New York: Penguin, 1987.
- The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, 1779–1781. Edited by Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. Digital edition. Packard Humanities Institute.
www.franklinpapers.org.
- Pope, Alexander. *Essay on Man and Other Poems*. Dover Thrift Editions. New York: Dover, 1994.

- Schenck, Elizabeth Hubbell. *The History of Fairfield, Fairfield County, Connecticut*. New York, 1905.
- Sherman, Ruth Wilder, ed. *Vital Records of Plymouth, Massachusetts to the Year 1850*, compiled by Lee D. van Antwerp. Camden: Picton Press, 1993.
- Stiles, Ezra. *A funeral sermon, delivered Thursday, July 26, 1787. At the interment of the Reverend Mr. Chauncey Whittelsey, Pastor of the First Church in the city of New-Haven. Who died July 24th, 1787. In the LXXth year of his age, and XXXth of his ministry*. New Haven, [1787].
- Stiles, Ezra. *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, edited by Franklin Bowditch Dexter. New York, 1901.
- Stiles, Ezra. *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor*. New Haven, 1783.
- Tillotson, Edward Sweetser ed. *Wethersfield Inscriptions : a Complete Record of the Inscriptions in the Five Burial Places in the Ancient Town of Wethersfield, Including the Towns of Rocky Hill, Newington, and Beckley Quarter (in Berlin), Also a Portion of the Inscriptions in the Oldest Cemetery in Glastonbury*. Hartford: W.F.J. Boardman, 1899.
- Trumbull, J. Hammond and Charles J. Hoadly, eds. *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15 vols. Hartford: Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1850-1890.
- White, Loraine Cook, ed. *The Barbour Collection of Connecticut Town Vital Records*, Vol. 52 Wethersfield, 1634-1868, compiled by Debra F. Wilmes. Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1994.
- Woods, William. *A Poem, occasioned by the most shocking and cruel murder that ever was represented on the stage; or the most deliberate murder that ever was perpetrated in human life ... Sold near liberty-stump and next the Swan Tavern, south-end*. Boston: Ezekiel Russell, [1782 or 1783].

Newspapers and Magazines

Albany Bouquet and Literary Spectator

Boston Evening Post

Continental Journal [Boston]

Cincinnati Mirror, and Western Gazette of Literature, Science, and the Arts

Connecticut Courant [Hartford]
Connecticut Gazette [New Haven]
Connecticut Gazette [New London]
Connecticut Journal [New Haven]
Essex Gazette [London]
Independent Chronicle [Boston]
Independent Gazetteer [Philadelphia]
Independent Ledger [Boston]
London Chronicle
Massachusetts Spy [Worcester]
New Hampshire Gazette [Portsmouth]
New Jersey Gazette [Trenton]
New York Gazette [New York City]
New York Gazetteer [Albany]
Newport Mercury
Pennsylvania Evening Post [Philadelphia]
Pennsylvania Packet [Philadelphia]
Providence Gazette
Public Advertiser [London]
Salem Gazette
South Carolina Weekly Gazette [Charleston]
Virginia Gazette [Richmond]

Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 2006.
- Anderson, Fred and Andrew Cayton. *The Dominion of War: Empire and Conflict in North America, 1500-2000*. New York: Viking, 2005.
- Appleby, Joyce. *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Appleby, Joyce. "The Vexed Story of Capitalism Told by American Historians." *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (2001): 1-18.
- Armitage, David. "Three Concepts of Atlantic History." In *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, 11-27. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Armitage, David and Jo Guldi. *The History Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Armitage, David and Michael J. Braddick. "Introduction." In *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, 1-7. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Bailyn, Bernard. "Introduction: Europeans on the Move, 1500-1800." In *Europeans on the Move: Studies on European Migration 1500-1800*, edited by Nicholas Canny, 1-5. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Harper & Row, 1955.
- Bailyn, Bernard. "Preface." In *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, xiv-xx. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.

- Bailyn, Bernard and John B. Hench, eds. *The Press & the American Revolution*. Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1980.
- Bell, Richard. *We Shall Be No More: Suicide and Self-government in the Newly United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Blecki, Catherine La Courreya. "Introduction: Reading *Moore's Book*: Manuscripts vs. Print Culture and the Development of Early American Literature." In *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, edited by Karin A. Wulf and Catherine La Courreya Blecki, 59-106. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.
- Bleichmar, Daniela. *Visible Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Block, Kristen. *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.
- Bosco, Ronald A. "Lectures at the Pillory: The Early American Execution Sermon." *American Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1978): 156-76.
- Bourke, Angela. *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2000.
- Bouton, Terry. *Taming Democracy: "The People," the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Breen, T. H. *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the People*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2010.
- Breen, T. H. "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth-Century." In *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994.
- Breen, T. H. *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Breen, T. H. "Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution." *William and Mary Quarterly* 50 (June 1993): 471-501.
- Brock, Leslie V. *The Currency of the American Colonies, 1700-1764*. New York: Ayer Co Publishing, 1975.

- Brown, Richard Maxwell. "Violence and the American Revolution." In *Essays on the American Revolution*, edited by Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, 81-120. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973.
- Buel, Richard. *Dear Liberty: Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1980.
- Bushman, Richard L. *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765*. Rev. ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Bushman, Richard L. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Bushman, Richard L. "Shopping and Advertising in Colonial America." In *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994.
- Butler, Jon. *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Calomiris, Charles W. "Institutional Failure, Monetary Scarcity, and the Depreciation of the Continental." *Journal of Economic History* 48, no. 1 (1988): 47-68.
- Canny, Nicholas. "English Migration into and across the Atlantic during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." In *Europeans on the Move: Studies on European Migration 1500-1800*, edited by Nicholas Canny, 39-75. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Canny, Nicholas and Philip Morgan. "Introduction: The Making and Unmaking of an Atlantic World." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World c. 1450-c. 1850*, edited by Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan, 1-17. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Canizares-Esguerra, Jorge. *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-century Atlantic World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Canizares-Esguerra, Jorge. *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.
- Carp, Benjamin. *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party and the Making of America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Chamberlain, Ava. *The Notorious Elizabeth Tuttle: Marriage, Murder, and Madness in the Family of Jonathan Edwards*. New York: NYU Press, 2012.
- Chaplin, Joyce. "Creoles in British America: From Denial to Acceptance." In *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, edited by Charles Stewart, 46-65. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Chaplin, Joyce. "Expansion and Exceptionalism in Early American History." *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 4 (March 2003): 1431-1455.
- Cohen, Daniel A. "Blood Will Out: Sensationalism, Horror, and the Roots of American Crime Literature." In *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America*, edited by Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein, 31-55. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- Cohen, Daniel A. "Homicidal Compulsion and the Conditions of Freedom: The Social and Psychological Origins of Familicide in America's Early Republic." *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 4 (July 1, 1995): 725-764.
- Cohen, Daniel A. *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Cohen, Deborah and Peter Mandler. "The History Manifesto: A Critique." *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (1 April 2015): 530-542.
- Countryman, Edward. *The American Revolution*. Rev. ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.
- Crane, Elaine Forman. *Killed Strangely: The Death of Rebecca Cornell*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Damrosch, Jr., Leopold. *The Imaginative World of Alexander Pope*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- Daniels, Bruce C. "Economic Development in Colonial and Revolutionary Connecticut." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37, No. 3 (July 1980): 429-450.
- Daniels, Bruce C. *The Fragmentation of New England: Comparative Perspectives on Economic, Political, and Social Divisions in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

- Darnton, Robert. *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic Books, 1984.
- Darnton, Robert. *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Darnton, Robert. *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Dayton, Cornelia H. and Sharon V. Salinger. *Robert Love's Warning: Searching for Strangers in Colonial Boston*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.
- Delbanco, Andrew. *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.
- Demos, John. *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
- Dexter, Franklin Bowditch. *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College with Annals of the College History*, 6 vol. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1885-1912.
- Ditz, Toby L. "The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Some Remedies from Early American Gender History." *Gender and History* 16, no. 1 (April 2004): 1-35.
- Ditz, Toby L. "Shipwrecked: or, Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia." *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (June 1994): 51-80.
- Doerflinger, Thomas. *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.
- Dyndor, Zoe. "The Gibbet in the Landscape: Locating the Criminal Corpse in Mid Eighteenth-Century England." In *A Global History of Execution and the Criminal Corpse*, edited by Richard Ward, 102-125. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Elliott, John H. "Introduction: Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World." In *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, edited by Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, 3-14. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

- Ellis, Markman. *The Coffee House: A Cultural History*. London: Orion Publishing, 2004.
- Ernst, Joseph Albert. *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973.
- Eustace, Nicole. *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Ferguson, E. James. "Currency Finance: An Interpretation of the Colonial Monetary Practices." *William and Mary Quarterly* 3, no. 10 (1953): 153-180.
- Ferguson, Robert A. *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820*. 3rd. ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Ferreira, Roquinaldo. *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Fitzgerald, Neil King. "Towards an American Abraham: Multiple Parricide and the Rejection of Revelation in the early National Period." Master's thesis, Brown University, 1971.
- Fitzgerald, Neil King. "Wieland's Crime: A Source and Analogue Study Of the Foremost Novel of the Father of American Literature." PhD diss., Brown University, 1980.
- Flavell, Julie. *When London Was Capital of America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Flynn, David T. "Credit and the Economy of Colonial New England." PhD diss., Indiana University, 2001.
- Gallup-Diaz, Ignacio, Andrew Shankman, and David J. Silverman, eds. *Anglicizing America: Empire, Revolution, Republic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.
- Games, Alison. "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities." *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006): 741-757.
- Games, Alison. "Migration." In *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, 31-50. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Gauci, Perry. *Emporium of the World: The Merchants of London 1660-1800*. London: Bloomsbury, 2007.

- Gay, Peter. *Deism: An Anthology*. Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1968.
- Geddes, Gordon E. *Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981.
- Giles, Paul. *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Gilje, Paul A. "The Rise of Capitalism in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 2 (July 1, 1996): 159-181.
- Glasson, Travis. "The Intimacies of Occupation: Loyalties, Compromise, and Betrayal in Revolutionary-Era Newport." In *The American Revolution Reborn*, edited by Patrick Spero and Michael Zuckerman, 29-47. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Gould, Eliga H. *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Grasso, Christopher. "Deist Monster: On Religious Common Sense in the Wake of the American Revolution." *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 1 (June 1, 2008): 43-68.
- Grasso, Christopher. *Skepticism and American Faith: from the Revolution to the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Grasso, Christopher. *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Grasso, Christopher and Karin Wulf. "Nothing Says 'Democracy' Like a Visit from the Queen: Reflections on Empire and Nation in Early American Histories." *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 3 (Dec. 2008): 764-781.
- Greene, Jack P. "America and the Creation of the Revolutionary Intellectual World of the Enlightenment." In *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History*, 348-368. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992.
- Greene, Jack P. "Colonial History and National History: Reflections on a Continuing Problem." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 64, No. 2 (April 2007): 235-250.

- Greene, Jack P. "A Fortuitous Convergence: Culture, Circumstance, and Contingency in the Emergence of the American Nation." In *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History*, 290-309. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992.
- Greene, Jack P., David Armitage, Eligah H. Gould, Michael Zuckerman, Kariann Yokota, Adam Rothman, and Robin L. Einhorn. "Roundtable." *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2007): 235-286.
- Greene, Jack P. "Search for Identity: An Interpretation of the Meaning of Selected Patterns of Social Response in Eighteenth-Century America." In *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History*, 143-173. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992.
- Greene, Jack P. "State Identities and National Identity in the Era of the American Revolution." In *Creating the British Atlantic: Essays on Transplantation, Adaptation, and Continuity*, 340-359. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013.
- Greene, Jack P. and Philip D. Morgan, eds. *Atlantic History: A Critical Reappraisal*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Greene, Jack P. and J. R. Pole, eds. *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Gross, Robert A. and Mary Kelley, eds. *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*. A History of the Book in America v. 2. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Halttunen, Karen. *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Hancock, David. *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Hancock, David. 2008. "Trecothick, Barlow (1718?-1775), merchant and politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 11 Sep. 2018.
<http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.temple.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50005>.
- Harkness, Deborah E. "Accounting for Science: How a Merchant Kept his Books in Elizabethan London." In *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan, 205-228. New York: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2008.

Hein, Rebecca. "Montaigne in America." PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1966.

Harrison, Peter. *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Haskell, Thomas. "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility." In *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation*, edited by Thomas Bender, 107-160. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Hendrickson, David C. *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003.

Herrick, James A. "Blasphemy in the Eighteenth Century: Contours of a Rhetorical Crime." In *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650-1800*, edited by Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, 101-118. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.

Herrick, James A. *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists: The Discourse of Skepticism, 1680-1750*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.

Holmes, Stephen R. *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000.

Holton, Woody. *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2008.

Hook, Holger. *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth*. New York: Crown, 2017.

Hook, Jochen. "Professional Ethics and Commercial Rationality at the Beginning of the Modern Era." In *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan, 147-160. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Horn, James. "British Diaspora: Emigration from Britain, 1680-1815." In *The Oxford History of British Empire: Volume II: The Eighteenth Century*, edited by P.J. Marshall, 28-52. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Houston, R.A. *Punishing the Dead? Suicide, Lordship, and Community in Britain, 1500-1830*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

- Hudson, Wayne. "Atheism and Deism Demythologized." In *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650-1800*, edited by Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, 13-24. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.
- Hudson, Wayne. *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Hudson, Wayne. *Enlightenment and Modernity: The English Deists and Reform*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Hudson, Wayne, Diego Lucci, and Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth. "Introduction: Atheism and Deism Revived." In *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650-1800*, edited by Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, 1-12. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.
- Humphrey, Carol Sue. *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833*, History of American Journalism no. 2. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Hunt, Margaret. *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1660-1780*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Jacob, Margaret C. and Catherine Secretan. "Introduction." In *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan, 1-16. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Jensen, Merrill. *The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution, 1763-1776*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1968.
- Juster, Susan. *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Kästner, Alexander and Evelyne Luef. "The Ill-Treated Body: Punishing and Utilising the Early Modern Suicide Corpse." In *A Global History of Execution and the Criminal Corpse*, edited by Richard Ward, 147-169. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Keyes, Carl Robert. "Early American Advertising: Marketing and Consumer Culture in Eighteenth-century Philadelphia." PhD diss. Johns Hopkins University, 2007.
- Kloppenber, James T. *Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Knott, Sarah. *Sensibility and the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

- Kosmetatos, Paul. *The 1772–73 British Credit Crisis*. New York: Springer, 2018.
- Kulikoff, Allan. “‘Such Things Ought Not To Be’: The American Revolution and the First National Great Depression.” In *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic: Land, Labor, and the Conflict for a Continent*, edited by Andrew Shankman, 134-164. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Kupperman, Karen Ordahl. *The Atlantic in World History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Kushner, Howard I. *American Suicide*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991.
- Laborie, Lionel. *Enlightening Enthusiasm: Prophecy and Religious Experience in Early Eighteenth-century England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Langford, Paul. *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Lee, Wayne E. *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1685*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Lepore, Jill. *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin*. New York: Vintage Books, 2013.
- Lepore, Jill. “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography.” *Journal of American History* 88 (June 2001): 129-144.
- Lepore, Jill. “Rap Sheet: Why Is American History So Murderous?” *The New Yorker*, November 9, 2009.
- Lesger, Clé. “Merchants in Charge: The Self-Perception of Amsterdam Merchants, ca. 1550-1700.” In *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan, 75-98. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Levy, Barry. *Town Born: The Political Economy of New England from the Founding to the Revolution*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- Loughran, Trish. *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

- Lucci, Diego. *Scripture and Deism: The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth-century British Deists*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Lynd, Staughton and David Waldstreicher. "Free Trade, Sovereignty, and Slavery: Toward an Economic Interpretation of American Independence." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (October 2011): 597-630.
- MacDonald, Michael and Terence R. Murphy. *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- Main, Gloria L. and Jackson T. Main. "Economic Growth and the Standard of Living in Southern New England, 1640-1774." *Journal of Economic History* 48, no. 1 (March 1998): 27-46.
- Main, Jackson Turner. *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*. Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Mann, Bruce H. *Neighbors & Strangers: Law and Community in Early Connecticut*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987.
- Matson, Cathy D. "A House of Many Mansions: Some Thoughts on the Field of Economic History." In *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions*, edited by Cathy D. Matson, 1-70. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.
- Matson, Cathy D. "Accounting for War and Revolution: Philadelphia Merchants and Commercial Risk, 1774-1811." In *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan, 183-204. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Matson, Cathy D. *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- May, Henry F. *The Enlightenment in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- McConville, Brendan. *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- McCusker, John J. and Russell R. Menard. *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985.
- McKendrick, Neil, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, eds. *The Birth of a Consumer Society:*

Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.

Merritt, Jane T. *The Trouble with Tea*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

Miller, Perry. *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.

Mitchell, Isabel S. *Roads and Road Making in Colonial Connecticut*. Literary Licensing, LLC, 2013.

Morgan, Edmund S. *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*. Rev. ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988.

Morgan, Edmund S. "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution." In *The Challenge of the American Revolution*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976.

Morgan, Gwenda and Peter Rushton. *Eighteenth-Century Criminal Transportation: The Formation of the Criminal Atlantic*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Murray, John E. and Ruth Wallis Herndon. "Markets for Children in Early America: A Political Economy of Pauper Apprenticeship." *Journal of Economic History* 62 (June 2002): 356-382.

Newell, Margaret Ellen. "The Birth of New England in the Atlantic Economy: From Its Beginning to 1770." In *Engines of Enterprise: An Economic History of New England*, edited by Peter Temin, 11-68. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Newell, Margaret Ellen. *From Dependency to Independence: Economic Revolution in Colonial New England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Nueburg, Victor. "Chapbooks in America: Reconstructing the Popular Reading of Early America." In *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson, 81-113. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Pagden, Anthony and Nicholas Canny. "Afterward: From Identity to Independence." In *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, edited by Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, 267-278. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Parrish, Susan Scott. *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

- Peskin, Lawrence A. *Manufacturing Revolution: The Intellectual Origins of Early American Industry*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Piker, Joshua. *The Four Deaths of Acorn Whistler: Telling Stories in Colonial America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Platt, Anthony and Bernard L. Diamond. "The Origins of the 'Right and Wrong' Test of Criminal Responsibility and Its Subsequent Development in the United States: An Historical Survey." *California Law Review* 54, no. 3 (1966): 1227-260.
- Platt, John David Ronalds. *Jeremiah Wadsworth, Federalist Entrepreneur*. New York: Arno Press, 1982.
- Pocock, J.G.A. "Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment." In *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, edited by Perez Zagorin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Pocock, J.G.A., ed. *Three British Revolutions 1641, 1688, 1776*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Pocock, J.G.A. *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*. New York, 1985.
- Porter, Roy. *The Creation of the Modern World: the Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.
- Quen, Jacques M. "Anglo-American Criminal Insanity: An Historical Perspective." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 4 (1974): 313-323.
- Rediker, Marcus. *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2007.
- Riesman, Janet A. "Money, Credit, and Federalist Political Economy." In *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, edited by Richard Beeman and Edward C. Carter, 128-161. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.
- Robbins, Caroline. *The Eighteenth-century Commonwealthman*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.
- Roth, Randolph. *American Homicide*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Rothschild, Emma. "An Alarming Crisis in Eighteenth-Century Angouleme: Sentiments in Economic History." *The Economic History Review* 51:2 (May 1998): 268-293.

- Russell, Howard S. *A Long Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England*. Lebanon: UPNE, 1982.
- Samuels, Shirley. "Wieland: Alien and Infidel." *Early American Literature* 25 (March 1990): 46-66.
- Schlereth, Eric R. *An Age of Infidels: the Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Schlesinger, Sr., Arthur M. *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution 1763-1776*. New ed. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957.
- Sensbach, Jon F. *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Sheehan, Jonathan. *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Sheridan, Richard B. "The British Credit Crisis of 1772 and The American Colonies." *The Journal of Economic History* 20, no. 2 (1960): 161-186.
- Sheridan, Richard B. "The Domestic Economy." In *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, edited by Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, 43-85. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Shields, David. *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America 1690-1750*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Shipton, Clifford K. *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 18 vol. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1970.
- Silver, Peter. *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.
- Simpson, David. *The Politics of American English, 1776-1850*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Smail, John. "Coming of Age in Trade: Masculinity and Commerce in Eighteenth Century England." In *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan, 229-252. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Smart, James. "A Life of William Beadle." Undergraduate thesis. Princeton University, 1989.

- Smith, Barbara Clark. *The Freedoms We Lost: Consent and Resistance in Revolutionary America*. New York: The New Press, 2010.
- Sparks, Randy J. *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Stannard, David. *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Stern, Julia. *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Stone, Frank Andres. *African American Connecticut*. Trafford Publishing, 2008.
- Storms, Sam. "The Will: Fettered yet Free (*Freedom of the Will*).” In *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor, 201-220. Wheaton: Crossway, 2004.
- Sullivan, Aaron. "Uncommon Cause: The Challenges of Disaffection in Revolutionary Pennsylvania.” In *The American Revolution Reborn*, edited by Patrick Spero and Michael Zuckerman, 48-67. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Sweeney, Douglas A. and Allen C. Guelzo. *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Sweet, James H. *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- Tennenhouse, Leonard. *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the Diaspora, 1750-1850*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Tomlins, Christopher. "Indentured Servitude in Perspective: European Migration into North America and the Composition of the Early American Labor Force, 1600-1775.” In *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions*, edited by Cathy D. Matson, 146-182. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.
- Townsend, Camilla. *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.
- Trivellato, Francesca. "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?" *California Italian Studies* 2(1). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq>

- Truxes, Thomas M. *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Tyler, John W. *Smugglers and Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986.
- Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Valeri, Mark. *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Melton, James Van Horn. *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Vickers, Daniel. *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.
- Waldstreicher, David. *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Waldstreicher, David. *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2004.
- Waldstreicher, David. "The Vexed Story of Human Commodification Told by Benjamin Franklin and Venture Smith." *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (summer 2004): 268-278.
- Walters, Kerry S. *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic*. Lawrenceville: University Press of Kansas, 1992.
- Walters, Kerry S. *Rational Infidels: The American Deists*. Longwood Academic, 1992.
- Warner, Michael. *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-century America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Wells, Colin. *The Devil & Doctor Dwight: Satire & Theology in the Early American Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Wells, Colin. *Poetry Wars: Verse and Politics in the American Revolution and Early Republic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.
- Wennerlind, Carl. *Casualties of Credit: the English Financial Revolution, 1620-1720*.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Wertheimer, Eric and Monica J. Casper. "Within Trauma: An Introduction." In *Critical Trauma Studies: Understanding Violence, Conflict and Memory in Everyday Life*, edited by Eric Wertheimer and Monica J. Casper, 1-18. New York University Press, 2016.

West, Robert Craig. "Money in the Colonial American Economy." *Economic Inquiry* 16 (1978): 1-15.

Whyte, Ian D. *Migration and Society in Britain 1550-1830*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

Wigelsworth, Jeffrey R. *Deism in Enlightenment England: Theology, Politics, and Newtonian Public Science*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.

Wigelsworth, Jeffrey R. *Selling Science in the Age of Newton: Advertising and the Commodification of Knowledge*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Wilf, Steven. *Law's Imagined Republic: Popular Politics and Criminal Justice in Revolutionary America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Williams, Daniel E. "Behold a Tragic Scene Strangely Changed into a Theater of Mercy': The Structure and Significance of Criminal Conversion Narratives in Early New England." *American Quarterly* 38, no. 5 (1986): 827-47.

Williams, Daniel E. "Introduction." In *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives*, edited by Daniel E. Williams, 1-65. Madison: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1993.

Williams, Daniel E. "Preface" In *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives*, edited by Daniel E. Williams. Madison: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1993.

Williams, Daniel E. "Rogues, Rascals and Scoundrels: The Underworld Literature of Early America." *American Studies* 24, no. 2 (1983): 5-19.

Wilson, Kathleen. *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Winterer, Caroline. *American Enlightenments: Pursuing Happiness in the Age of Reason*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Withington, Ann. *Toward a More Perfect Union: Virtue and the Formation of American*

- Republics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Wokeck, Marianne S. *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.
- Wood, Gordon S. "The Enemy is Us: Democratic Capitalism in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (1996): 293-308.
- Wood, Gordon S. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: Vintage, 1993.
- Wright, Conrad. "Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will." *Harvard Theological Review* 35 (October 1942): 241-261.
- Wright, Conrad. *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
- Wrigley, E.A. "A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy 1650-1750." *Past and Present* 37 (July 1967): 44-70.
- Wulf, Karin A. "Introduction: *Milcah Martha Moore's Book*: Documenting Culture and Connection in the Revolutionary Era." In *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, edited by Karin A. Wulf and Catherine La Courreya Blecki, 1-58. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.
- Wulf, Karin A. and Catherine La Courreya Blecki, "Preface." In *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, edited by Karin A. Wulf and Catherine La Courreya Blecki, ix-xviii. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.
- Yokota, Kariann Akemi. *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Young, Alfred F. *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.
- Zaret, David. *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Zuckerman, Michael. "Identity in British America: Unease in Eden." In *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, edited by Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, 115-157. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.