Silver Linings: Print and Gentility in the World of Johnny Tremain

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READERS OF THE *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* need no reminder of the Society's contributions to the scholarly study of early American history. They may be less familiar, however, with the Society's relationship to a book that, for more than six decades, has shaped popular perceptions of the colonial era: Esther Forbes's classic 1943 novel *Johnny Tremain*. Like the radiating sun etched on the silver goblet that proves essential to the novel's plot, *Johnny Tremain* sheds light on subjects ranging from Revolutionary Boston (which Forbes investigated under AAS's 'generous dome') to the culture of the 1940s. Fittingly, however, it especially illuminates one of AAS's central concerns in recent years: the social meanings of print. *Johnny Tremain* turns out to be, among other things, a book about the uses of reading.

Forbes's connections with Worcester began in 1891, when she was born into a family well established in that Massachusetts city and in nearby Westborough, her birthplace. Her mother, Harriette Merrifield Forbes, was an expert on early New England gravestones and a writer of local history; her father, William Trowbridge Forbes, was a lawyer and a judge. As a child, she became entranced

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by the nineteenth-century periodicals and books on witchcraft that she discovered in the attic of her home. While still a teenager, Forbes wrote stories set in the ancient world and in Renaissance Europe. In 1916, she took writing courses at the University of Wisconsin. Three years later she obtained a position in the Boston publishing house of Houghton Mifflin, where she worked for the editor Ferris Greenslet. She won the O. Henry Award in 1920 for a short story. Forbes's first professional success as an historical novelist came in 1926 with the publication of *O Genteel Lady*!, the tale of a nineteenth-century Boston woman; the Book-of-the-Month Club, founded that year, chose the volume as its 'main selection.' The novel's subjects—sexual fantasy and unrequited love (the latter also a theme in *Johnny Tremain*)—reappeared in Forbes's next and arguably most accomplished work, *A Mirror for Witches* (1928), which she set in seventeenth-century Salem. Except for an interlude in New York City between 1926 and 1933 (the period of her unhappy marriage to Albert Hoskins), she not only made her home in Massachusetts; as the book reviewer John Chamberlain later wrote, she also 'live[d] early New England history.' By 1938 Forbes had produced three additional novels based on New England materials.[1]

In the early 1940s, Forbes turned to nonfiction, in the form of *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* (1942). Collaborating with her mother, an accomplished researcher in her own right, she pored over primary sources on Revere's life and times. (Forbes spent day after day doing research in the west alcove off the AAS reading room, which became known as the Forbes Alcove. In recognition of her 'diligence' and generosity, she became, in 1960, the first woman elected to the Society.[2]) The resulting volume meticulously recreated the political and cultural atmosphere of pre-revolutionary Boston: the sounds and smells of the wharves,

1. David D. Hall, 'Forbes, Esther,' *Notable American Women: The Modern Period* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 246–47; 'Esther Forbes, Pulitzer Winner for Revere Biography, Is Dead,' *New York Times*, August 13, 1967; J. E. M., 'Esther Forbes Hoskins,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 77 (1967): 209–12.

2. 'Esther Forbes Hoskins,' 212.

the tumult of the taverns. It depicted Revere as an artisan who possessed 'a good mind, quick and usable, but not a subtle mind'—a 'sober' figure whose 'unglamorous day-to-day efforts led to the final success of the Revolution.' The book also refuted the common misconception that all Americans opposed the British and anticipated recent scholarship by drawing attention to the hardships colonial women endured. *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* earned Forbes wide acclaim. Repeatedly reprinted, it was a book club selection and a *Reader's Digest* condensed book. In 1943, it won Forbes the Pulitzer Prize in history.[3]

It was a short step from the Revere biography to the fictional adventures of an apprentice silversmith who also lived in Boston, observed the renowned craftsman at work, listened to his impassioned clandestine speeches, and carried the word to the sexton of the Old North Church that he was to position two lanterns in the steeple on the night of April 18, 1775. This was the tale Forbes produced the next year as *Johnny Tremain*. The hero of the story is a fourteen-year-old orphan whose full name is Jonathan Lyte Tremain. One day Johnny suffers a burned hand when a jealous fellow apprentice sabotages a rush order for John Hancock. Out of work and estranged from his master's household, which includes Johnny's love interest, Cilla, the injured boy grows desperate. In that condition, he enters the offices of a newspaper, the *Boston Observer*, which is something of a front for an organization of patriots; there he tells his troubles to a remarkably sympathetic young printer called Rab. Still unemployed, Johnny decides to make the haughty Merchant Lyte aware of their kinship by showing him an inheritance from his mother, a silver loving cup decorated with the Lyte family's emblem of the sun (also configured as an eye). Lyte has Johnny arrested for stealing the cup; Rab then hires Josiah Quincy to plead Johnny's innocence and then gives him a job delivering the *Observer* on horseback (fig. 1). As the Revolution heats up, Johnny's equestrian skills come in handy. He

3. 'Esther Forbes, Pulitzer Winner'; Esther Forbes, *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942), 58, 81.

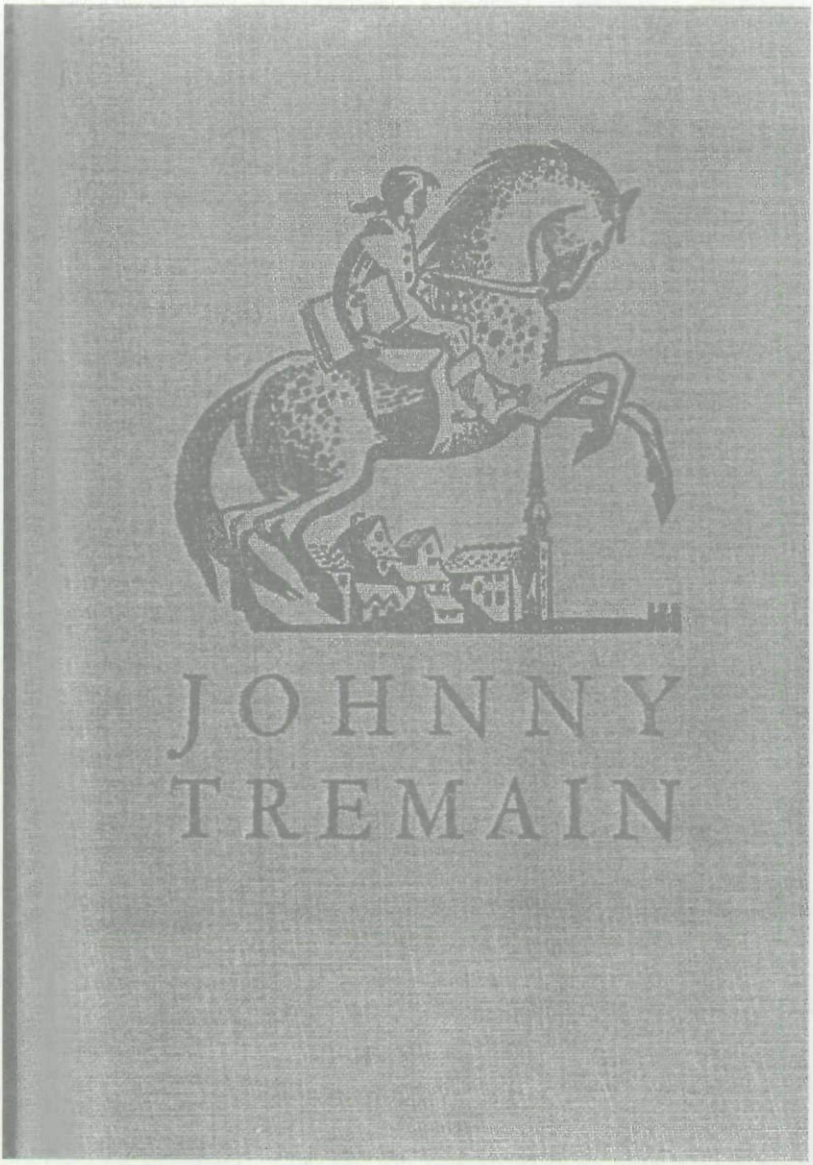

Fig. 1. Johnny Tremain on horseback delivering the *Boston Observer.* Cover by Lynd Ward from *Johnny Tremain* by Esther Forbes. Copyright © 1943 by Esther Forbes Hoskins, renewed 1971 by Linwood M. Erskine, Jr., Executor of the Estate of Esther Forbes Hoskins. Used by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

alerts Sam Adams, James Otis, and others to secret meetings. Carrying messages for British officers, he learns vital secrets about the Redcoats' movements. The end of the story finds Johnny vindicated in his claim to be a Lyte and happy in Dr. Joseph Warren's assurance that surgery can improve his hand, but what matters to him is the assistance he provides the patriot cause when the battles of Lexington and Concord break out. Although Rab dies of his wounds, Johnny no longer needs his example; he has grown up and will live to defend American freedom.

Reportedly furnishing Forbes more personal satisfaction than the Revere volume,[4] *Johnny Tremain* has enjoyed steady sales and influence since Houghton Mifflin first issued it in 1943. One year after publication, it had sold more than thirty-five thousand copies.[5] The novel came out in a Dell paperback in 1969; in that version it sold 4,142,000 copies over the next twenty-six years.[6] Forbes's subtitle, 'A Story for Old and Young,' suggests some attempt to reach the adult market, but the book was primarily a 'juvenile,' winning the Newbery Medal for children's literature in 1944. It was also made into a Walt Disney movie. A survey in 1996 ranked it fifteenth on a list of 252 children's books with sales above one million copies from the date of appearance in paperback format.[7] In 2004 the National Endowment for the Humanities named the novel one of fifteen classic books on the theme of courage selected for free distribution to schools and libraries as part of the 'We the People Bookshelf.' As National Park Service tour guides on Boston's Freedom Trail can attest, *Johnny Tremain* enjoys an ongoing life among young adolescents who, having read the book in school, frequently accompany their parents to

4. 'Esther Forbes Hoskins,' 211.

5. November 3, 1944, bMS Am 1925 (616), Esther Forbes Papers, Houghton Mifflin Company Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Hereafter cited as Forbes Papers. Quotations from the Forbes Papers are used by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and Linwood M. Erskine, Jr.

6. 'All-Time Bestselling Paperback Children's Books,' *Publishers Weekly* 243 (February 5, 1996): 29.

7. The book heading the list had sold 7,184,103 copies. 'All-Time Bestselling Paperback Children's Books,' 29–32.

see the places where the story occurs. Furthermore, AAS, to which Forbes donated her royalties for this book when she died in 1967, continues to receive letters addressed to the author.[8]

Apart from its durability in the educational curriculum, the popularity of *Johnny Tremain* over the years has resulted from several factors. In the period immediately after the novel's initial publication, Forbes's reputation as a best-selling author no doubt influenced its reception. Another part of the explanation for its appeal lies in the book's relatively timeless aspects. Forbes deftly combined the coming-of-age genre with elements of adventure, mystery, and suspense. She also possessed a notable flair for character development. Johnny is proud and even arrogant about his intelligence and natural ability as an artisan; he makes mistakes, talks too much, and exhibits fear as well as courage. As she noted in her Newbery acceptance speech, Forbes deliberately created in Johnny a lifelike figure with 'room enough to change and grow'[9]—one to whom adolescent readers could easily relate.

Yet it is unlikely that Forbes's talents would have won *Johnny Tremain* a wide following if her career had not capitalized on two specific historical circumstances. First, Forbes's Revolutionary War-era novels, like her earlier work and the two volumes of historical fiction she completed after 1943, participated in the discovery of Americana in the early decades of the twentieth century. Among the developments of the interwar period were the founding of Colonial Williamsburg, the establishment of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Henry Ford's restoration of the Wayside Inn, the display of American folk art at the Museum of Modern Art, the critical rediscovery of American literature, and, during the Great Depression, a craze for historical fiction.[10]

8. Peter Canellos, 'A Classic Lives: "Johnny Tremain" Goes on 50,' *Boston Globe*, April 19, 1993, 17.

9. Esther Forbes, 'Newbery Medal Acceptance Speech,' reprinted in Jack Bales, *Esther Forbes: A Bio-Bibliography of the Author of* Johnny Tremain (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 144.

10. On the popularization of Americana, see, for example, Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1992), and Joan Shelley Rubin, 'A Convergence of Vision: Constance Rourke, Charles Sheeler, and American Art,' *American Quarterly* 42 (1990): 191–222.

Secondly, *Johnny Tremain* drew on the heightened urgency the impulse to venerate the American past acquired as World War II threatened the survival of the nation's ideals. Although readers today can easily miss the wartime context, Forbes conceived of both *Paul Revere* and *Johnny Tremain* as contributions to the war effort. Her decision to undertake the Revere biography, she remarked, came after two years' work on a fictional account of a man who had stayed neutral during the Revolution. 'Then the Nazis attacked Poland, and I was suddenly the most unneutral woman in the world,' Forbes explained. 'That destroyed all that I'd been writing about. A person who could stay neutral in war!'[11] Instead, she bent the research she and her mother had already done to tell Revere's life story. Sent abroad in an Armed Services edition, *Paul Revere* actually supported American troops in World War II directly. On the home front, *Johnny Tremain* reflected Forbes's commitment to depicting for the nation's youth how much hardship colonial children had endured, 'how much responsibility they were given, and took like men.' Forbes explained: 'Our young flyers today have much in common with young captains of the Revolutionary period and with those of the War of 1812 . . . and as many of these boys will lose, or have lost, older brothers, I let Johnny lose Rab. I also wanted to show that these earlier boys were conscious of what they were fighting for and believed it worth dying for, and that many of the same issues are at stake in this war as in that earlier one. We are still fighting for simple things, "that a man may stand up."'[12]

The difference, of course, was that in 1943 Forbes faced the tricky task of transmuting a current ally into a prior enemy, while accomplishing her stated purpose of helping to 'bridge the gap between British and American children.'[13] That dilemma accounts for the repeated emphasis in *Johnny Tremain* on the human qualities of the patriots' adversaries. Johnny and the British lieutenant

11. 'Esther Forbes, Pulitzer Winner.'

12. Esther Forbes to Dale [Warren], c. May 1942, Forbes Papers; Dale Warren to Esther Forbes, May 25, 1942, Forbes Papers; untitled, undated manuscript, Forbes Papers.

13. Esther Forbes to Grace [Hogarth], [1944], Forbes Papers.

who admires his horse achieve mutual respect; Johnny has trouble thinking of him and the other Redcoats as 'targets.' James Otis declares: 'Did any occupied city ever have better treatment than we've had from the British?' Most important, Otis reminds the Sons of Liberty that their torch 'was lighted upon the fires of England,' that 'the battle we win over the worst in England shall benefit the best in England,' and that their struggle was for rights that would, like a sun, 'illumine a world to come.'[14]

Thus, to borrow the phrase Forbes applied to Paul Revere, the world Johnny Tremain lived in was the world of the 1940s as much as that of 1775. Yet his world is also *our* world, and not only because of the entrenchment of American Studies in the post-war period. Along with the identifiable facets of Forbes's life and times that account for the novel's popularity, *Johnny Tremain* captured a persistent theme within American culture: the tensions surrounding the place of art, gentility, and information in a democratic society. Johnny's journey is from the world of a child to that of an adult, just as the nation sheds its colonial dependency and becomes politically autonomous. But the story entails a cultural trajectory as well, represented in Johnny's shift in occupations: from the production of teapots and sugar bowls to the linings, so to speak, of the newspaper—from the world of silver to the world of print.

Silver bears a number of associations in Forbes's story. It is, first of all, the token of Johnny's real identity. Silver in the colonial economy was a commodity of enduring value, one that could not be alienated from its owner as easily as currency. So, too, Johnny's possession of the silver loving cup with the Lyte crest—originally a gift of Merchant Lyte's great-grandfather to his sons—symbolizes the truth beneath appearances, the lineage that accident and deception could not erase. As was the case in eighteenth-century Britain and America, moreover, silver was inextricably connected to hierarchies of status and class, both in the work-

14. Esther Forbes, *Johnny Tremain: A Story for Old and Young* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 170, 178, 179–81.

place and in society at large. Within the shop of Mr. Lapham, Johnny's master, a sharp line delineates the boundary between master craftsman and apprentice. Early in the story, one of Johnny's transgressions is to chafe against the expectation that he defer to his rival apprentice, the more experienced but dimwitted Dove. The display of silver also signified the owner's genteel standing—or, at least, genteel aspirations. Johnny knows this, borrowing a coat with silver buttons from Rab so as 'not to appear too meanly' before Merchant Lyte.[15]

In Johnny's experience, however, silver loses its sheen as a means to self-definition. His mother's presumption that the cup would establish bonds of kinship that might prompt feelings of obligation turns out to be ill-founded. Furthermore, while the buttons embolden Johnny to enter the Lytes' Beacon Hill house, they cannot overcome the class prejudices of the Tory aristocracy. The merchant and his family, identifying Johnny as a member of the 'lower classes,' accuse him of theft.[16] When John Hancock bestows silver coins on the disabled Johnny to compensate for refusing to hire him, he is only somewhat less patronizing.

Silver also figures in *Johnny Tremain* as a form of art. Paul Revere first appears in the story as a craftsman, not a patriot; he sketches the proper proportions for the sugar basin Johnny is making for Hancock, telling him to avoid slavish imitation. Yet revolutionary fervor soon displaces the love of beauty: the fight for democracy appears incompatible with creative expression, which seems as much a luxury as the valuable metal itself. 'There's a time for the casting of silver and a time for the casting of cannon,' Revere declares to Otis as the patriots embrace the Revolution.[17] Johnny, too, leaves silver behind, rejecting the chance to reclaim his cup when the Lytes abandon their country home.

By that time, however, Johnny has already discovered another mode of self-definition. The accident that wrenches him from

15. *Johnny Tremain*, 72.
16. *Johnny Tremain*, 157.
17. *Johnny Tremain*, 180.

silversmith's shop to newspaper office forces him to participate more fully in the culture of print, a circumstance which proves to be—there is no better phrase for it—the silver lining of his misfortune. In Forbes's rendering, the production and distribution of the written word entail values markedly different from those connected with silver. First, compared to Mr. Lapham's establishment, Mr. Lorne's printshop is egalitarian ground. As Johnny noticed on his initial visit to the *Observer*, Rab, although an apprentice, 'did not immediately spring into action to make a good show of his industry before his master. He had none of the usual "yes, sir," "no, sir," "please, sir."'[18] Similarly, once Johnny goes to work for the printer as a delivery boy, his schedule permits him to spend four days of every week as 'his own master.'[19] The relatively non-hierarchical organization of the printing office, as Forbes conceived of it, makes it a kind of laboratory of revolutionary ideology; on Lorne's premises, there is none of the tyranny of journeymen over apprentices, no hazing by the chapel ghost such as Benjamin Franklin described in his *Autobiography*.[20] Furthermore, as was historically true, the newspaper is instrumental in spreading the patriots' grievances and ideals. 'Without you printers,' Sam Adams remarks to Lorne, 'the cause of liberty would be lost forever.'[21]

More subtly, in contrast to silver, the consumption of print—reading—affiliates characters in Forbes's story with personal liberty. For all her careful research, Forbes unwittingly misrepresented the level of literacy in colonial Boston. For example, she wrote that pictorial images hung over shop doorways to indicate the nature of the business inside because a significant part of the population could not read. Within the Lapham household, only Mr. Lapham and Johnny, thanks to his mother's instruction, read 'easily and well.' In fact, in New England almost all men and most

18. *Johnny Tremain*, 48.
19. *Johnny Tremain*, 96.
20. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. L. Jesse Lemisch (New York: Signet, 1961), 59.
21. *Johnny Tremain*, 106.

women on the eve of the revolution were literate, if one separates the ability to read from the skill of writing.[22] Yet, issues of historical accuracy aside, within Forbes's plot the ability to read replaces the possession of silver as the hallmark of authentic identity and the prerequisite for access to power.

The most striking episode involving reading occurs after Merchant Lyte has Johnny arrested for theft of the cup. Johnny's best hope of acquittal lies in having Cilla testify that the apprentice once secretly showed her the cup and identified it as an inheritance from his mother. Mrs. Lapham, bribed by Merchant Lyte's promise to purchase a silver tankard, determines to prevent Cilla's appearance in court. Rab, however, shows her a letter signed by the governor; because she cannot read it, she believes it is a summons for Cilla to attend the trial. Johnny, who while in jail reads books Rab supplies, goes free. Thus, literacy supplants wealth as the route to gaining control over one's destiny and over the actions of others as well.

Afterwards, when Johnny begins his 'new life' at the *Observer*, he engages in 'an orgy of reading.' Up to then he seems to have been what some historians have called an intensive reader, one with access to a limited number of texts. His mother's books had been 'few'; he teaches Cilla from a book with pictures of 'Calvinistic martyrs'; he reads Bible passages aloud. Exposure to Mr. Lorne's library simultaneously permits extensive reading along with intensive re-reading: 'He read anything—everything. Bound back copies of the Observer, Paradise Lost, Robinson Crusoe—once more, for that was one of the books Rab had brought him to read in jail—Tom Jones and Locke's Essays on Human Understanding, Hutchinson's History of Massachusetts Bay, Chemical Essays, Spectator Papers, books on midwifery, and manners for young ladies, Pope's Iliad.' This practice, which Johnny experiences as satisfying a hunger, earns him Aunt Lorne's cakes

22. *Johnny Tremain*, 9; Ross W. Beales and E. Jennifer Monaghan, 'Literacy and Schoolbooks,' in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 380–81.

and her affection ('she, Uncle Lorne, and Rab all took it for granted that Johnny ought to read') rather than Mrs. Lapham's discomfort at the sight of 'so "idle" a boy.' Thus, in Johnny's new surroundings—which prefigure Boston's rebirth—print is neither reserved for a leisured minority nor is it a luxury like silver. Reading allows Johnny entrée into 'a world of which he never had guessed while living with the Laphams,' a world that is also America's future, while silver belongs to the past.[23]

Forbes's construction of an opposition between 'silver' and 'linings' echoed certain cherished tenets of the republican ideology that underlay the American Revolution. Republicans deplored luxury as a symbol of political corruption and social decay. Although, because it could be functional, silver presumably fared better than painting and sculpture, art was routinely implicated in the patriotic attack on the trappings of wealth; moreover, silver connoted the 'mysterious and enervating wealth of the Orient.'[24] Furthermore, like the silver buttons in Forbes's story, art incurred republican opprobrium because of its tendency to feed aristocratic pretensions and class division. By the same token, widespread literacy was essential for the educated citizenry republican government required. Independence of mind, participation in collective decisions, vigilant regard for liberty: these attributes depended on the democratic diffusion of print. *Johnny Tremain* speaks to us in part because the egalitarian impulses it epitomizes are as much articles of national faith today as they were in 1943 or 1776.

Yet republican ideals have always coexisted with a more complicated reality that undermines any neat dichotomy between 'silver' and 'linings.' The post-revolutionary period witnessed what Richard Bushman has called the 'refinement of America.' Instead of rejecting luxury, Americans of middling status sought to attain attributes of gentility. The rhetoric of decadence versus

23. *Johnny Tremain*, 90, 96–97.
24. Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790–1860* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 34.

simplicity, so effective in the wartime campaign against the British, became a strategy in the argument for the production of domestic consumer products. Ambivalence attended this phenomenon, and buying silver in quantity remained a prerogative of wealth, but middle-class purchasers of silver spoons took satisfaction in the 'vernacular gentility' the economy of the new nation permitted.[25] There were approximately twice as many silversmiths working in Philadelphia in 1789 as there had been prior to the Revolution. By 1810 the Philadelphia silversmith Samuel Williamson exemplified the manufacture of silver as an 'industrial venture'; he employed twelve workers who enabled him to export ready-to-sell silverware to coastal markets. In the same period, Paul Revere became what historians have called an 'entrepreneur-craftsman,' relying on a mass-marketed design for his 'Revere pitchers.'[26] This development both democratized silver by making it more available and hardened the line between the middle and upper classes and those at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Similarly, art came to occupy a place in the homes of middling people as a token of refinement. Artists, however, did not necessarily celebrate that fact, because it exposed them to troubling dilemmas: in a democratic, practical society, who should set standards of taste, and what should be the relationship between the artist and the market? Those questions not only dogged painters such as John Singleton Copley (who resolved the issue by leaving for England) but plagued writers from James Fenimore Cooper to the expatriates of the 1920s; they inform our debates over public art today.

Thus, the picture of silver as luxury left behind at Lexington and Concord necessitates some retouching. As for the realities of print culture, Hugh Amory and David D. Hall remind us in a more recent AAS project, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, that the

25. Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992), passim.

26. *American Art: 1750–1800, Towards Independence*, ed. Charles F. Montgomery and Patricia Kane (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), 208, 209, 212.

Boston press used print to oppose the British, but the British used print in response; it was the 'voice' of 'the loyalist *and* the revolutionary.'[27] Notably, print did not eradicate class boundaries either before or after the Revolution. As Johnny learned, knowledge was indeed power, but the emergence of an information marketplace by the mid-nineteenth century actually strengthened occupational and class distinctions because Americans made specialized choices about what to read. The Pennsylvania Dutch engraver Matthias Weaver, for example, on the margin of respectability, read natural science, history, and biography to achieve a 'cosmopolitan appearance.' By the same token, a farmer whose work did not require reading might seek access to print primarily for religious or recreational purposes. Furthermore, members of an educated elite continued to dictate 'standards of respectable knowledge.' Along with the limitations distribution networks imposed, income, gender, and slavery likewise constrained the availability and uses of printed texts.[28] The democratization of print, like the democratization of gentility, never entailed wholesale leveling.

There is no better artistic representation of those ideological and social complexities than John Singleton Copley's finished portrait of that other Boston silversmith, Nathaniel Hurd. Copley produced two paintings of Hurd around 1865, the first of which the artist abandoned in midstream for unknown reasons. The initial effort depicted the silversmith in rough dress and with a good deal of bare skin; in the second, Hurd is elaborately clothed. Both the uncompleted and the completed versions were the subject of a recent symposium that linked the Hurd images to the subjects of silvermaking, engraving, and portraiture as well as to *Johnny Tremain*.[29]

27. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, 'Afterword,' in Amory and Hall, *Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 484–85.

28. Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 229, 277, 282.

29. 'About Face: Copley's Portrait of Nathaniel Hurd, Colonial Silversmith and Engraver,' was a symposium held at the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester in April 2000. Papers from the symposium may be found in the Gallery's journal, *Porticus* 20 (2001).

Having mastered the visual vocabulary of class, as Carrie Rebora Barrett has noted, the painter conflated the silk and embroidery of a gentleman (as well as the turban of a scholar) with the open collar and unruffled cuffs of an engraver. The unfinished portrait of Hurd is thus the artisan as figure of wealth and leisure. Other Copley portraits did not so much examine as allude to that doubleness in an attempt to overcome it. A prime example is Copley's reinvention of John Hancock, in which the merchant appears as a populist hero. Citing Hancock's record of opportunism, Paul Staiti accounts the portrait one of Hancock's 'crafty political gambits.'[30]

Forbes undoubtedly knew the Hurd and Hancock paintings. She was familiar with colonial artifacts generally and Copley's gift for 'grasping' his sitters' 'essential characteristics' in particular. Imbued with the spirit of another war, however, she regarded matters differently, praising Copley's portrait of Paul Revere as one of the 'very few' the artist did that contained no 'elegant self-consciousness.' In the depiction of the silversmith seated at his workbench and wearing a 'coarse waistcoat,' Forbes saw only the figure of a genuine democrat. Writing to obtain permission to reproduce the painting in *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In*, where it appeared as the frontispiece, she declared: 'There are few portraits of the period so definitely appealing to us today, for Copley painted Paul Revere without the powdered hair, wig, and elaborations which make one conscious of looking back through a century and a half. . . . The portrait speaks more eloquently than words can of the manner of man he was.'[31]

At one point in *Johnny Tremain*, Johnny asks to have a tray carried to John Hancock's bedchamber to alert him to a secret meeting. On the tray are two items: a silver tea set and a bill for the *Observer*. Not long afterwards, Johnny blows a silver whistle to signal

30. Carrie Rebora [Barrett], 'Nathaniel Hurd,' in Carrie Rebora [Barrett] et al. *John Singleton Copley in America* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 208–11; Paul Staiti, 'Character and Class,' in Rebora et al., 71.

31. Forbes, *Paul Revere*, 113–14; Esther Forbes Hoskins to Mr. Ticknor, July 1, 1941, Forbes Papers.

participants in the Boston Tea Party. Later, Johnny and Cilla go back to the Lyte's country house to retrieve the merchant's silver; although Johnny forsakes his cup, Cilla, his implied future wife, is determined to save the rest of the pieces from the mob. By representing the coexistence and intermingling of silver and print, art and republicanism, and gentility and democracy, these juxtapositions, minor details in the plot, are more faithful to the reality of colonial America than Forbes's overarching framework.

Yet for the historian the significance of Forbes's novel turns less on the book's degree of verisimilitude than on the lines of inquiry it establishes. *Johnny Tremain* invites investigation into the uses of reading, both in the period Forbes chose to write about and in the world of the 1940s. Moreover, like the best new work in the history of the book, it directs attention to competing values and permeable boundaries—not only between gentility and democracy but also between colony and metropolis, tradition and modernity, the high and the popular. In so doing, Forbes's novel—like the emblem of the rising sun within it—brings new light to the interpretation of the American past.