

The Making of Salem

*The Witch Trials in History,
Fiction and Tourism*

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Introduction

Producing Origins, Performing History

“The simulacrum is never what hides the truth. It is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.”

—Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*

This book, like countless primary school history lessons, actually takes its point of “origin” not from Salem, but from Plimoth Plantation, which was an original Pilgrim settlement from the early seventeenth century, and is today a reproduced tourist site at a mostly arbitrary geographic location.¹ Today’s Plimoth Plantation, sixty miles from Salem, recreates the year 1627, sixty-five years before the events of the witch trials occurred. A living history museum, Plimoth Plantation has much in common with many of the live-action historical sites in Salem. The first seed of inspiration for this project was generated by *Performing the Pilgrims*, Stephen Snow’s critical study of ethnohistorical role-playing at Plimoth Plantation. In the mid-1980s, Snow was an “interpreter” at Plimoth Plantation; interpreters play the roles of “actual” Pilgrims, studying historical tracts, diaries, and other primary source documents to create their characters. The interpreters are often very earnest (and perhaps there is a bit of Wilde in that adjective) in their preparations, and Snow reflects a common frustration as he discusses the lack of respect he encounters in certain tourist groups: “I remember one Sunday morning when two transvestites, who were obviously either drunk or on drugs, made their way down the main street of the Pilgrim Village. The incongruity of their presence was both

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funny and sad. What could the experience of the 1627 village possibly mean to them, as they giggled and wriggled their way from house to house?" (164–65). Though Snow clearly means this question to be a rhetorical one (with an implied, definitive answer of "nothing, of course"), the seemingly tenuous relationship between transvestism and living history can be mined to reveal some profound ways in which they are similar.² Consider, for example, the way that the transgendered subject performs gender. Masculinity and femininity are generally linked to anatomy, as our culture constructs the link between behavior and biology as natural, inherent, and unchanging. Transgender, however, not only inverts the sex-gender connection, but it also denaturalizes the very connection itself. Judith Butler addresses this phenomenon in *Gender Trouble*. She argues that cross-dressing reveals the very constructed nature of *all* gender identities; when a man dresses as a woman, he not only changes his gender, but he reveals all femininity to be a kind of performance, able to be enacted by any subject regardless of sex (33). What, then, might the similarities be between a transvestite and a Pilgrim interpreter?

Just as the transvestite reveals the precisely artificial character of gender, the Pilgrim interpreter reveals the artificial character of history. This is *not* to imply that history is not *real*. No one would suggest that gender, though culturally constructed and performable, is not real, and it is the same for history. History, like gender, is generally supposed in our culture to be natural, stable, and factual. One is either a man or a woman. A historical event either happened or it didn't. The past is understood to be lurking somewhere in the shadows, and the historian's task is generally thought to be to bring it into the light. The question is, then, are the transvestites "actually" men underneath their feminine attire, or does their very performance unsettle the customary ways we understand gender itself? For some visitors to Plimoth Plantation, those who, like the transvestites, seem to Snow to be missing the point of the site, the Plimoth Plantation experience is less about finding out the truth of what happened back then than it is about baiting Pilgrims and trying to make them break character, looking for signs of modern life behind the locked doors within the Village's parameters, and purchasing kitschy items at the gift shop. The Plantation (perhaps unintentionally) encourages its visitors to notice its nether regions, encourages them to be attracted to the perverse mix of

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authenticity and commercialism, and encourages them to experience the site as a liminal point that exists somewhere between — or outside of—1627 and today. Even Snow himself seems to come close to seeing the parallels between his own position as interpreter and the transvestites' position in both society at large and the society of the tourist site: "In truth, [the transvestites] were putting themselves on display as much as they were touring the re-created Plimoth" (165). The "in truth" is an ironic marker of Snow's desire to cut to the core, but instead he seems dismayed to remain in a world of display, of re-creation, and of performance. It is precisely the impossibility of cutting through the performance to some internal truth that functions in both drag and in history.

Before exploring in depth the repercussions of defining history as performance and thinking about how Salem's histories reflect this definition, I would like to spend a moment or two on the anxieties that have surfaced as this definition has gained credibility in the academy. The anxiety has generally been directed at post-structuralism, which has been accused by Terry Eagleton, for example, as being responsible for the "liquidation of history" (96). Perry Anderson has similarly admonished post-structuralism for "randomizing" history (48). The fear here seems to stem from the idea that if history is connected to its methodologies and narrative structures rather than its content than that content is somehow annihilated or trivialized. Anderson in particular laments the effect that any kind of post-structuralist reading might have on chronological, historical narratives. What happens to the story of the Pilgrim settlement at Plimoth if we treat Bradford's *Of Plimoth Plantation* not as a record of events, but as a text to be interpreted? Do we suddenly lose any ability to tell the story of what happened (or to *teach* the story of what happened) if we think of the account not as "true," but as "significant"? Barbara Johnson explains this post-structuralist maneuver as a shift from asking *what* a text signifies to asking *how* it signifies, a shift from focusing on persons to focusing on personas (36). As a result of this shift away from identity and toward structures that produce identity, critics such as Eagleton and Anderson worry that we drain history of its ontology, its power, and its political value.

But post-structuralists are often as concerned as New Historicists (and Marxists, for that matter) with questions about the political effects of historical texts. In "The Discourse of History," Roland Barthes argues

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that history tricks us by projecting the referent into a realm supposedly outside of the chain of signification. From this exterior position, it appears to precede and determine the discourse which posits it as a referent: “The fact can only have a linguistic existence as a term in a discourse, and yet it is exactly as if this existence were merely the ‘copy,’ purely and simply, of another existence situated in the extra-structural domain of the ‘real’” (17). What Barthes suggests is not that history is not real, but that it produces the very idea of the “real” even as it occupies a position within that term. In this sense, facts are not ontologically located before or outside of their representations; instead, the representations produce the categories of “before” and “outside” themselves. “The structure of the category of History,” writes Mark Cousins, “is a little theater in which the representations of the past are assigned their part” (129). By suspending their disbelief, Eagleton and Anderson watch history’s play as if it were happening spontaneously in front of them; both critics are chagrined when the *mise-en-scène* is exposed, wondering if the play will continue to matter once it is revealed to be art. Barthes might suggest, as do I, that instead of *representing* the thing (the historical event), the play *is* the thing. By collapsing the distinction between an original, past historical moment and the subsequent historical retellings of that moment, the theory of performing history can make concrete, real, and political the discourse of the past, while simultaneously it can explore how socio-political reality itself takes its shape from that very same discourse.

While theorists such as Lyotard define post-structuralism as an incredulity toward meta-narratives (21), the simple idea that history is not just a collection of facts is widespread, and New Historicism, which is often positioned against post-structuralism, has long been concerned with the problems inherent in any “objective” master narrative. In fact, what Alan Munslow calls the “deconstructive consciousness,” the “understanding that the genuine nature of history can be understood only when it is viewed not solely and simply as an objectivised empiricist enterprise, but as the creation and ultimate imposition by historians of a particular narrative form on the past” (2), is often used by multiculturalists to advocate for inclusion of non-Western historical accounts in European and American history courses and textbooks. Munslow’s own diction reflects the tension between a desire to be skeptical about metadiscursivity and a desire

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to replace one master narrative with another. His use of “genuine nature” implies that history itself has a core, a correct reading, which is either understood or misunderstood. Similarly, his use of “creation” and “imposition” suggest that historians develop their narratives out of thin air, and that they colonize history’s pure core with their invasive readings. The goal here is not to dismiss Munslow, whose *Deconstructing History* is in many ways an excellent introduction to the complexity of post-structuralism’s relationship to the past, but to note that the interesting slippage between wanting to resist a taxonomy of ontology and wanting to establish a new, solid (if polyvocal) historical methodology is a common slippage amongst politically concerned deconstructionists. If, as Hayden White famously argues, “History is as much invented as found,” then we must begin to think about what we, as deconstructionists, mean by the term “invented” (“*The Historical Text*,” 82). To avoid getting caught in the trap which can pitch historians and other scholars from revisionism to esoterics and back again, we must consider how it is that the category of “fact” is created, how, precisely, historical invention develops, and *how*, as Barbara Johnson would ask, history itself signifies.

As Richard Schechner writes in “Restoration of Behavior,” “History is not what happened (that’s its press) but what is encoded and performed” (5). Schechner argues that once any historical event is “scored and notated,” even “exact replication” of the event is different from the event itself (5). Schechner’s parenthetical allusion to history’s press seems to me the most important of his observations. What is unique about history is not so much its distance from its own original (which is perhaps a condition of its linguistic character), but its insistence on the denial of this distance in its self-definition. This denial is part and parcel of history’s own narrativizing force. Hayden White poses the relationship between history’s self-colonizing narrative force and its denial of its own reliance on distance from the events that it describes as a set of questions: “What is involved ... in that finding of the ‘true story,’ that discovery of the ‘real story’ within or behind the events that come to us in the chaotic form of ‘historical records’? What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that *real* events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherence of a story?” (“*The Value of Narrativity*,” 23). History emerges here as a complex and invisible system that simultaneously collapses itself

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into its topics as it also places its topics into its own exterior organizing structure.³ History, then, is both an object (that which *is* that which *happened*) and a subject (that which *creates* the frame to *hold* what happened).

In “Restoration of Behavior,” Schechner relates a useful anecdote about Mickey Rooney. One night during a vaudevillian performance, Rooney was mistakenly de-wigged on stage. The audience roared with laughter, and at every subsequent performance, Rooney “mistakenly” lost his wig (36). History is constantly de-wigging itself, pretending to expose its own mechanisms and methodologies, while in actuality it is simply performing its part with deft dramatic skill. Revisionist history is a prime example of this Rooney-esque dexterity. Two of James Loewen’s recent titles provide interesting fodder for discussion. *Lies My Teacher Told Me* and *Lies Across America* focus on historical inaccuracies in school textbooks and American monuments, respectively. His “corrective” brand of history is paradoxically aware of its own subjective position *and* critical of exclusionary or untrue historical narratives. For example, he criticizes the fact fanatics who pen many history textbooks: “[These authors] seem bent on presenting ‘facts’ for children to ‘learn.’ Such an approach keeps students ignorant of the reasoning, arguments, and weighing of evidence that go into social science” (*Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 76). Just a few pages earlier, though, he criticizes these same textbooks for getting the facts wrong. He writes, “Starting the story of America’s settlement with the Pilgrims leaves out not only the Indians but also the Spanish. The very first non-Native settlers in ‘the country we now know as the United States’ were African slaves left in South Carolina in 1526 by Spaniards who abandoned a settlement attempt” (*Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 67). How does one make sense of these two competing impulses: on the one hand, to update and revise historical narratives based on new information, and, on the other hand, to remain critical and skeptical of a full investment in any one master narrative? Though Loewen is aware of the problematics of any fetishization of the facts, he, like Mickey Rooney, bills himself as de-wigged, as the “real” McCoy behind the historiographical bias.⁴

Is there a way to do history at all if the reliance on “fact” is completely dismissed? It’s not hard to understand, with questions as revolutionary as this, why critics such as Eagleton and Anderson fear a post-structural approach to history. What would a fact-less history would

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look like? Certainly, Loewen demonstrates that the slippage into factualization is difficult to avoid even for historians who are skeptical about relying on the concept of a master narrative. These issues came to a head for me at a 2000 conference in Boston sponsored by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts. As a young graduate student, I was invited to present the outline of an early version of this project to this esteemed group of experienced historians. Many of the Society's members are Salem experts (indeed, the keynote speaker, whose talk immediately followed mine, was John Demos, the renowned Yale historian who wrote a critically acclaimed psychological history of the trials, *Entertaining Satan*). It was the first history conference that I, a graduate student in an English Ph.D. program, had attended, and I was stunned at the hostility which I encountered as I suggested — however timidly — that Salem's past is as much created by our current historical moment as it was by any actual seventeenth-century events. There were two kinds of scholars at the conference: those who disagreed with me that it was impossible to recreate perfectly the events of the past, and those who disagreed with me that it was politically *responsible* to *avoid* revisionist narratives which refigured, for example, the positions of Salem's slave and Indian populations⁵. In other words, to put it crudely, conservative old-school historians were convinced that there were a series of facts about Salem that were indisputable; these scholars were disputed with by revisionists who believed that they had some of their facts "wrong." I attempted to suggest that the most interesting thing about this debate was the relative agreement on both sides that something actually happened in Salem, and that if we all just argued long enough, someone could win the day.

The question of Tituba is a useful example for thinking through the different approaches taken by conservative historians, revisionist historians, and deconstructionists. In most early — and in many current — histories of the trials, Tituba, like Patient Zero, has been blamed for planting the seeds of the witch hunt in the minds of Abigail Williams and Betty Parris. Revisionist historians, who currently hold the most academic credibility in this matter, are more convinced by recent accounts which examine how both black and white magic were often used before the outbreak by Salem's white, Christian residents (the baking of the witch cake, suggested by a church member, is a fine example of this). But the question

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of whether or not Tituba is “to blame” for the witch hunt is not a question about Tituba, as much as it is a question about *what people have said about Tituba*. In particular, what *historians* have written about her. Far from being a semantic triviality, this question of shifting emphasis from original, historical subject to historical account cuts to the very core of how we think about the field of history itself. In her discussion of King Philip’s War, Jill Lepore explains the relationship of “wounds” to “words”: “The injuries and their interpretation cannot be separated” (x). Lepore’s brilliant study of this particular conflict presents the “facts” of King Philip’s War as a series of representations, and her painstakingly well-researched book looks like many traditional studies, except that it consistently attends to the subjectivity of the sources that it interprets, and never once attempts to tell the “true” story underneath those sources. So where does all of this leave a study of 1690s Salem? If Salem’s past is created, rather than revealed, through all representations of that past, then any history of Salem is, “in fact,” a study of the representation of Salem. Of course, “representation” is defined broadly here. It could include, among a multitude of possibilities, court documents, archeological artifacts, recent historical studies, and current tourist productions. Now, much of this is nothing new, even to the most traditional Colonial Society scholar. Historians have always relied on archeology, on primary documents, on scholarship by their predecessors and contemporaries. What *is* new is the suggestion that no historical mode has a more direct connection to The Past than another, and that familiar scholarly modes of inquiry do not conflict with less “academic” sources of historical information.

How can the Salem Witch Museum, a stunningly kitschy recreation of the witch hunt that uses life-size department-store mannequins to reenact, in tableaux, the events of 1692, possibly offer a serious-minded scholar information about what “really happened” back in the seventeenth century? If we think of history not as an actual event, but as a complex of self-representations and self-mystifications, then tourist productions become prime examples of “history.” Tourist productions are often representations of lost pasts at the same time as they attempt to mask any distance that separates themselves from those pasts. Tourism, like history, relies both on a distance from an “original” and on a self-denying mechanism which hides that distance. Consider Main Street U.S.A., Disney

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World's famous center avenue that recreates the facades of small town, turn-of-the-century shops. Main Street U.S.A. is worth visiting precisely because it is a *reproduction* of such a small town and because it is a *memory* of a time past.⁶ At the same time, it functions as "authentic" thanks to details like "actual reproduction" soda fountains and trolley cars. For a tourist site to be successful, it must embrace the deferral that sets it up as more interesting than its original subject, and it must embrace the immediacy that makes it seem as if it *is* its original subject.⁷

Other similarities between the structures of history and of tourism exist, as well. History is, as I discussed above, an interaction between a scholar, an original (lost) event, and a representation of that event. Tourism has a parallel structure, which is most notably delineated by Dean MacCannell.⁸ He describes how all tourist productions consist of a relationship between a tourist, a site, and a marker (41). The sites, like the lost past, are virtually irrelevant to many tourist productions. The fields of Gettysburg, for example, are totally indistinguishable from any other Pennsylvania pasturelands. Would these fields be notable without the accompanying plaques? Considering that nobody visits Danvers, Massachusetts, which, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, is the main site of the original "Salem" witch hunt, and that *Salem's* gift shops and museums are overrun with millions of tourists a year, it seems evident that markers, and not sites, are what matter. The markers act much the same way that historical records act, guiding us, as tourist-historians, toward an experience that we consider "authentic." Thus, authenticity is produced, both in history and in tourism, by a referent. The irony here, or course, is that authenticity is supposedly that which is without referent. The difference between an authentic colonial artifact and an inauthentic colonial artifact is generally understood to be a question of reference: the first refers to nothing but itself, while the second refers to an original that precedes itself. "Authenticity," however, is not elemental; it is instead a part of the same touristic and historical system that produces the illusion of primacy through a complicated reference to the past. And, like history and tourism, "authenticity" is connected to narrativity, as well. Richard Handler and William Saxton assert that "historians share with other moderns the notion that an authentic life is a storied or emplotted life" (250). The relationship between reference, the illusion of pri-

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macy, and narrativity produce tourism's ability to offer up the authentic history of a culture.⁹

Referentiality (a script), illusional primacy (the suspension of disbelief), and a story (a plot or tale): all the ingredients of traditional theater. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha discusses the theatricality of history: "The sign of history does not consist in an essence of the event itself, nor exclusively in the immediate consciousness of its agents and actors, but in its form as a spectacle, spectacle that signifies because of the distancing and displacement between the event and those who are its spectators" (243). A historical text is obviously not a perfect replication of the event that it describes. In fact, Bhabha suggests, the closer the replication of the representation to the original, the more distinctions between the two there must obviously be: "In order to be effective, mimicry must produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (86). In other words, if a living history performance, "primary" historical account, or scholarly historical analysis is to be considered "authentic," "true," or "real," it must in some way call attention to its own distance from its subject matter. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze theorizes that the modern world is a world of simulacra. "Physical or bare representations," he writes, "find their *raison d'être* in the more profound structures of a hidden repetition in which a differential is disguised and displaced" (xx). In the case of historical tourism, this differential includes space, time, and the baggage of the discipline of history. "A scar," explains Deleuze, "is the sign not of a past wound, but of the present fact of having been wounded" (77). These present facts are precisely what are obscured by the discipline of history, but they are also precisely what gives this discipline its own perspective and parameters.

Christopher Steiner explains this phenomenon in his article, "Authenticity, Repetition, and the Aesthetics of Seriality." Steiner argues that concepts of the authentic are produced tautologically: "Tourist art effectively produce[s] its own canon of authenticity — a self-referential discourse of cultural reality that generates an internal measure of truth value.... The copy becomes associated with the true and the original with the false" (95). Steiner is particularly concerned here with the way that African mask-makers display and sell their wares to tourists, setting out hundreds of identical masks along roadsides and in shops. Steiner suggests that this is

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not, as others have criticized, an indication of entrepreneurial naiveté, but is instead a savvy business maneuver. As the masks repeat each other, they produce “authenticity” in much the same way that a repeated historical story gains authenticity by being retold over a number of years. The mass-marketed masks then become the authentic masks, while individual masks made for ceremonial purposes become less desirable, less recognizable, and “inauthentic” to tourist eyes.

The tourist site (in addition to the souvenir) adds another dimension to this process of authentication. In the nineteenth century, many art museums, particularly in Europe, displayed *copies* of masterpieces rather than the masterpieces themselves. The copies were often considered more valuable because they embodied an educational purpose that the originals lacked (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 195). A copy of a Michelangelo sculpture, for example, not only offered all of the artistry of the original, it also offered a framework for thinking about the original, its qualities, and its production. Today’s Plimoth Plantation functions in a similar way. Despite its rhetoric, the assumption of its basic philosophy is not that visitors will experience what it was to live in 1627, but that they will experience what it is like to be alive today while *acting as if* they lived back then. This sounds obvious and trivial, but the educational component is impossible without this distinction. School children who visit the Plantation are not supposed to assimilate into the Pilgrim culture completely; instead, they are expected to draw parallels between themselves and the Pilgrims, ask questions of the interpreters based on their own modern subject positions, and correct historical “myths” that have been taught to them throughout their educations (such as that Pilgrims wore buckled shoes and high black hats). “Authenticity,” then, becomes not a pure state of past-ness, but a relationship between the past and the present that accompanies an educational component.

Dean MacCannell suggests that this is a kind of bogus authenticity, a ruse that tourists fail to penetrate; these duped tourists are in effect the quintessential fools, spoon-fed a facade while they think they are getting the whole, three-dimensional story. Erik Cohen disagrees with this characterization of the tourist. Cohen argues that tourists are aware at all times that history is “reconstructed” by these sites, but that the tourist definition of “authenticity” includes a performative aspect. In fact, Cohen asserts that

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things become authentic *over time*, which indicates that it is the repetition and rehearsal that create the authenticity of an object, event, or site. (379). Handler and Saxton similarly dismiss the traditional definition of authenticity, which they characterize as an isomorphism between a living history activity or event and that piece of the past it is meant to recreate (i.e., a perfect simulation). They suggest an alternative way to think about authenticity: “[It is] the privileged reality of individual experience; individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a ‘real’ world and with their ‘real’ selves” (242). Handler and Saxton argue that everyday modern life has an “unreal” quality, and that the narrative, emplotted versions of history served up by tourist sites offer the alienated modern (and, I would add, the alienated post-modern) visitor a means to experience themselves in an integrated, cohesive narrative context. Authenticity, then, is not just about seeing what “really happened back then,” but about experiencing one’s own identity as authentic, meaningful, and coherent.¹⁰ Dean MacCannell offers a useful example of the relationship of one’s own identity position to the question of authenticity. A woman in California lived at the foot of a locally famous mountain for years without knowing that “her” mountain was “that” mountain. From this, MacCannell deduces that “an authentic touristic experience involves not merely connecting a marker to a site, but a participation in a collective ritual, in connecting one’s own marker to a sight already marked by others” (137).

MacCannell also writes that “now it is often important to ‘act out’ reality and truth” (92). He gives as one example the fact that most supermarket ham is injected with chemicals to give it the pink color. Natural ham is grayish-white, but Americans think that the pink coloring makes ham more “ham-like.” In this sense, authenticity is a performance constructed to make real that which in its natural state has an unreal or insignificant quality (the gray ham may be natural, but it does not easily qualify as “ham,” nor does it easily signify “ham” to the supermarket consumer). Tourists, like supermarket patrons, are on a quest for the packaged version of reality, and good taste gets bizarrely attached to the ironically “authentic” yet performed object. MacCannell defines “taste” as “the knowledge needed to connect a souvenir to a referent” (150). Two actual souvenirs available in current-day Salem elucidate MacCannell’s theory. In a single gift shop, a visitor can purchase both a bag of “Authen-

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tic Dirt From Gallows Hill,” complete with a label that carries a graphic of a gnarled tree draped with a noose, and a sepia-toned framed photograph of the House of the Seven Gables. Most people would agree that the Gallows Hill Dirt does not reflect as good a taste as the photograph. But why? The dirt is accessible to virtually anyone, even those with no knowledge of the historical facts of the witch hunt. Anyone can see that the dirt comes from a hill where people were hanged, and that makes the dirt creepy and interesting.¹¹ But in order to value the photograph, consumers must be aware of the novel, *The House of the Seven Gables*, and know enough about it to connect it to Salem’s witch history. To purchase the photograph at a Salem gift shop would indicate a certain literary savvy, and perhaps some historical knowledge about the relationship of Nathaniel Hawthorne to his great-great grandfather, Judge Hathorne, the hanging judge of Salem. The line between good taste and bad taste, then, is clearly delineated and defined by the knowledge of the consumer.

But how stable is this line? Are there any ways in which the dirt and the photograph function in the same way? Though I will not argue that the good taste/bad taste opposition is a false dichotomy, the system that produces the idea of “taste” does ultimately collapse many of the distinctions between what is classy and what is tacky. In fact, the photograph would be absolutely un-valuable if it weren’t for the little packet of dirt. The tacky souvenirs generate the belief that “somewhere, only not here and now, perhaps just over there, there is a *genuine* society” (MacCannell 155). The only way the dirt can be recognized as a bad-taste item — as it is indeed recognized (perhaps most of all) by those who actually purchase it — is if it can be compared to a good-taste item. Similarly, the only way a souvenir can be coded as authentic or classy is if it is compared to something that is not. As Meyer Shapiro jokes, “Kitsch is chic spelled backwards” (Brown 9). This comment is wonderful not just for its catty humor, but for the perceptive way that it sets up the classy/trashy distinction as a simple opposition; the oppositional quality of the dichotomy demonstrates that one term can only exist meaningfully when it is set against its foil.

Deborah Root points out an even deeper problematic in the classy/trashy dichotomy. She writes, “Authenticity depends on a notion of the inauthentic, but this line is impossible to draw without using universalized — ie. market-driven — notions of what traditional looks like” (79).

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This is reminiscent of the African masks that Steiner discussed. If authenticity is produced by mass consumer culture, then an interesting paradox emerges, since mass consumer culture, as MacCannell argued, is also the Everyman who understands the dirt and mostly fails to desire the photograph. While “knowledge” (and lack thereof) is what sets the photograph above the dirt on the classy/trashy hierarchy, it is also what popularizes the dirt, ultimately making the dirt the recognized — therefore authentic — souvenir of Salem. This paradox became abundantly clear in a course I taught at Tufts University called “Performing History: Witches, Pilgrims, and Pop Culture.” The course considered many of the theoretical issues that this chapter has thus far discussed, and by the time the students took a field trip to Salem at the end of the semester, they were highly educated in both the history of the witch trials and the issues involved with historical tourism. It seemed they would be perfect candidates for “good taste” souvenirs (we had even read *The House of the Seven Gables*), and yet at the end of the day, as they showed me their loot, it was clear that there were no restrained sepia photographs in the collection. Most of them had packets of Gallows Hill dirt, and among their other treasures were Clairvoyant Witch Powder, Tarot Cards, Snow Globes, and ticket stubs from the Haunted Footsteps Ghost Tour and Boris Karloff’s Witch Mansion. What was going on here? The students’ knowledge of both Salem’s historical past and Salem’s tourist present had produced in them a desire to take home a piece of the real Salem, which to them was not about Danvers, Salem Town, or Cotton Mather, but about palm reading, wax museums, and crystals. It was the consumer market and not the primary historical texts they had studied which produced for my students a notion of what was “authentic” in Salem. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that “good taste objects are just what they ought to be [while] bad taste objects are so unreal as to be immediately recognized as made” (272). What she fails to note, however, is that, like the nineteenth-century art museums that featured copies of great masterpieces, the poor taste “made” objects are often admired as “authentic,” critically connected to the mass market, and essential to the duration of high art and education. This paradox — something being both tacky and authentic simultaneously — is at the core of what makes Salem function as a historical tourist site today. The dirt/photograph dichotomy fuels the entire town, not just its souvenir consumables. The two most

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notable tourist sites in contemporary Salem are the Salem Witch Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum. The first is the most visited museum in Salem, and it is considered by some to be a focus of “bad taste” commercialism. The Peabody Essex is a favorite among scholars and school groups, and is respected as the arbiter of “good taste” in town. The dichotomy that holds these two sites apart is also the very same system that assures their permanent dependence on each other.

In order to synthesize several of the issues raised thus far, we can pose this question: how are drag queens, Plimoth Plantation key chains, Gallows Hill dirt, and animatronic acts of torture related? “Camp” is one theoretical link that yokes many of these topics together. Susan Sontag defines “camp” as “a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization” (277). Sontag separates camp from the authentic, the natural, and the true, and aligns it with the artificial and the theatrical. The “lens of camp,” she says, “blocks out content” (281). Camp, like history and tourism, defines itself in terms of representations. But Sontag suggests that this is not the same thing as easily equating camp with bad taste: “Camp taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment. Camp doesn’t reverse things. It doesn’t argue that good is bad, or that bad is good. What it does is to offer art (and life) a different — a supplementary — set of standards” (286). She continues: “Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation — not judgment.... Camp is a tender feeling” (291–2). Though this is perhaps too much sentimentality for most of us, Sontag makes an interesting argument here: that camp, by focusing on the style and the surface, allows the content to go unmeasured. There is no room here for good and bad declarations, as camp advocates a new focus on the *experience of experiencing the performance at hand*. To experience a tourist site or a historical study or one’s own identity not as an absolute, but as an entertainment, is to achieve “camp” (or just to *be campy*), according to Sontag. Of course, if this theory is applied to all historical projects, touristic or otherwise, it’s questionable whether it would hold up. Are we, for example, to laugh and rollick our way through *Schindler’s List*? Can there be tragedy or education in this tender, nonjudgmental, entertaining version of life?

In “Strategic Camp,” David Bergman argues that camp, particularly

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for gay men, has been a useful way for non-dominant subjects to live within dominant society. According to Bergman, camp, rather than opposing oppressive power structures, “finess[es] the whole issue of power” (107). Instead of attacking a hostile enemy, camp sends itself up, asserting its presence and celebrating “the life of a community beset by the morbid” (107). By way of an example, Bergman describes a drag queen in an AIDS charity dunking booth, calling out to passersby, “Which of you brutes is going to make my mascara run?” (107). As the tiara-sporting drag queen, in all of her Bakhtinian, carnivalesque grotesqueness, highlights her own delicacy and brutality, she undermines the very oppositions which sustain her identity (boy-girl, classical-grotesque, delicate-brutal). The “morbid” community Bergman describes is multi-layered: a gay community besieged by homophobia, a weak community plagued by AIDS, a transgendered community in a sexually dimorphic society. But this morbidity might easily translate into the category of history. As the past passes by, the drag queen becomes a symbol for all oppositional systems that both sustain and collapse as a result of her/his presence. Camp, then, can be a strategy that, though often entertaining, can also call attention to the fundamental paradoxes at the center of any identity-conferring operation. To return to Plimoth Plantation, where this chapter first began, we can appreciate Snow’s transvestites as walking symbols of how the campiness of historical tourism can be, as it seemed to be for Snow himself, pleasurable, disconcerting, morbid, and celebrational. Though Sontag fails to note this, it seems evident that camp (while focused on style, lacking in content, and truly tender) is both educational and tragic.

Embedded in these theoretical questions of performativity and authenticity, of history, and of tourism, are more specific and practical questions about how primary historical documents, subsequent narrative accounts of primary events, fiction about the past, and commercial or educational historical tourist productions can be approached and analyzed. The following chapters of this book will apply some of the concepts I have outlined thus far to the methodological and explicatory practices of academic scholars. Before we set foot in the Witch Museum or the Peabody Essex, I would like to examine in some depth the original trial documents from 1692. Chapter One, “‘You Seem to Act Witchcraft’: Theatricality and the Trial Transcripts,” investigates the theatricality of the original Salem

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events. I argue that the witchcraft trials, even at their genesis, were already performative, parodic, and theatrical. This is a markedly different argument than those launched by scholars such as Charles Upham from earlier days and Bernard Rosenthal from today; my goal is not to prove that the afflicted girls were lying, acting, or conspiring. Instead, I am interested in looking at the mechanisms that surrounded the testimony. How did the court of Oyer and Terminer resemble a theater? How did testimony reflect a de-naturalizing of the organic, spontaneous physical body? What are the possible parodic elements involved with the charges and defenses? This chapter suggests that the original, core events of the Salem trials, the events which have been marketed and packaged for today's consumer economy, were, in fact, already being performed even at their inceptions.

I begin Chapter One with a brief look at several mid-twentieth-century texts on the definition of historical research. In particular, I am interested in exploring the relationship of a historian to her/his primary source. What makes a document "primary"? How do scholars evaluate the credibility of a source? How do judicial records function in the historical search for truth? By considering texts by Thomas E. Felt and Homer Carey Hockett, I summarize the traditionalists' viewpoint on how sources can be used to find answers to the age-old question of "what happened?" But in this chapter, I am most interested in the ways in which the Salem "primary sources" contradict the methodologies set forth by Felt and Hockett. As I move from an ontological approach to a more performative approach, I redefine the very notion of what it means to work with "original" source materials. Chapter One then moves to an examination of these sources themselves, as I expand my questions about the transcripts' credibility to include questions about their subject matter as well. How do they describe witchcraft? How do they separate and/or blur the definitions of "God" and "the devil"? How does confession function in the transcripts? And, relatedly, how do these questions intersect with the categories of veracity, originality, and historiography?

To examine on these multiple levels the relationship of truth and fact to history and to the trials themselves has important political, as well as theoretical, repercussions. First of all, the Salem witch trials are often condemned for their fact-finding fanaticism; indeed, people were rewarded

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with freedom for *confessing* to witchcraft. The *unknown* was on trial much more than was witchcraft itself. The goals of the trials were to reveal the truth about that which had always been associated with deceit, duplicity, doubling, and invisibility. People lost their lives over their refusal to codify and make explicit the demons that haunted Salem under its surface. In this sense, Salem becomes a model of what happens when the figurative or abstract (like hearsay, spectral evidence, hunches, and hallucinations) is reified by the state. Those who refused to make the so-called “underworld” real were hanged for their insolence. Thus, it becomes important for scholars of Salem to question our own methodologies as we hunt for the truth of what happened in 1692. The trials themselves demonstrate poignantly just how strong society’s desire to eliminate doubt and shadow can be. In this chapter, I suggest that the trials themselves, through their performative aspect, de-stabilize the very ontology that they seek to instate, and that subsequent historical and entertainment-related tellings of the story of Salem participate in a layering effect which has, at its core, simply another script.

Chapter One also begins an examination of the subject of spectral evidence, an examination that continues throughout the book. In particular, I discuss the relationship of the physical body to the spectral body, as set forth in trial documents and surrounding texts. One of the central controversies back in 1692 concerned the question of whether or not spectral evidence should be allowed as legal and dependable proof of witchcraft. What is the relationship of the “real” Rebecca Nurse to the spectral Rebecca Nurse who flew through the air and caused mischief? Relatedly, how do the mysteriously appearing and disappearing witches’ teats function to both corporealize and simultaneously metaphorize the bodies at the center of the controversies? In *Conversing By Signs*, Robert Blair St. George suggests that implication functioned as a very real language in colonial America. I agree, but I am also interested in the way in which the very “real” bodies in colonial America functioned as metaphors, linguistic signs, and figures. What I hope to establish is the way in which the signifier and the sign, arbitrarily connected as they may be, become inseparable in the landscape of the trials, and how the real and the copy get productively confused. I say “productively” because I suggest that the displacement of priority and ontology by imitative play can demonstrate both

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the power of the non-dominant to alter the political arena through parody, and the very thinness and porousness of the line that divides the status quo from its own undoing. Though this chapter does not deny the very real tragedy that occurred at Salem, my goal here is not to mourn, nor is it to remember fallen heroes and heroines or condemn fanaticism. Instead, I argue that performance, parody, and play were all a part of Salem, and that they, in and of themselves, refuse to read Salem as a linear tragedy. This could, if it were my project, possibly give voice to a rising resistance in Salem amongst voiceless villagers such as slaves and young girls. More importantly, though, this argument should serve to demonstrate that the natural concept of “voice,” like the natural concept of “truth,” tends only to silence the subtext that, by definition, accompanies every text.

Chapter Two, “From Shards to Meanings: Historians Make Sense of the Trials,” deals with the most famous historical reports about the witch trials. Beginning with the first great reflection on the trials, Cotton Mather’s *Wonders of the Invisible World*, and ending with the late-twentieth-century studies of Boyer and Nissenbaum, I ask questions about how Salem’s narrative thread was created, revised, and sustained from 1692 to the present. *Wonders of the Invisible World* and Robert Calef’s ironically titled response, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, create a dialectic that has shaped Salem scholarship for more than three centuries. As Mather creates the picture of a Salem besieged by demonic sources from without, Calef counters that the demons exist within Salem, in the accusers rather than in the accused or in Satan. What I hope to demonstrate is that this inside-outside dialectic is actually not a choice between two competing ideological analyses of the trials, but is instead a fundamental necessity to any kind of historical scholarship. Mather’s intense paranoia about Salem’s tenuous battle for light in a dark continent reveals not just an externalization of his own anxieties about Salem’s own piety, but also a deeper suspicion of the boundary which supposedly divides right from wrong. Similarly, Calef’s response attempts to situate the evil force in the trials themselves, a familiar maneuver to modern readers of the “witch hunt.” But Calef, too, by calling Mather a “liar” (and worse!), demonstrates a vehement need to contain the wrongdoing of the trials to the body of one man, one panel of judges, one legal system. The Mather-Calef section of this

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chapter uses both texts to outline how Salem gets constituted as an abyss that must be marked and measured through the use of historical writing and scientific “proof.”

From there, I proceed to Charles Upham, whose 1867 account of the trials has influenced more historians and fiction writers than any other Salem history. Upham provides the ancestry for later novels and tourist sites that retell the witch trials story as a ghost story, for Upham treats his history like a walking dead man, a body that can be ghoulishly brought back to life — at least to a certain extent — by the Frankensteinian historian. Upham seeks to reify and stabilize the fluctuatingly dialectical historiographical model of Salem created by Mather and Calef, and he quite literally corporealizes Salem’s past into a narrative corpse. More than a century later, Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum wrote a rebuttal to Upham, beginning their own *Salem Possessed* with a critique of Upham’s “flawed” narrative. Boyer and Nissenbaum work to contextualize the trials, placing them squarely into a landscape fraught with sociological, political, and economic tensions. But they also double Salem’s context, constantly calling attention to the ways in which it intersects with their own historical moment. They, like the Salemites they describe, enter into a bitter internal war with themselves, wanting on the one side to explain the Salem events purely with demographical facts, and wanting on the other side to offer their own impressions and analyses of what happened. As we will see with some of the fiction we will consider below, Boyer and Nissenbaum establish a kind of “crystal ball effect,” which takes the events of Salem and treats them as a set of currently unfolding events — events that, though they have yet to “happen,” are already foretold by the authors.

Chapter Two also explores popular yet peripheral theories set forth throughout the years about Salem, in particular Chadwick Hansen’s claim that some of the witches were actually guilty of practicing witchcraft, and Linnda R. Caporael’s scientific hypothesis that ergot poisoning was to blame for the behavior of the afflicted. In addition to tracing out how these varied historical readings play out, I am also interested in how and why these histories have entered into the collective imagination, how and why they have become so popular and so powerful. Chapter Three, “Fiction and the Real: Novelists Rewrite Salem,” is, in many ways, proof of just how influential these historians have been. Nearly all of the fiction

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writers I discuss worked from the historical accounts written by the authors from Chapter Two. From Hawthorne's antagonistic personal relationship with Charles Upham to Robin Cook's obsession with Caporalet's ergot hypothesis, fiction and history have more in common than not where Salem is concerned.

In Chapter Three, I examine five popular fictional accounts of the Salem events, and consider how they resuscitate Salem's past. In John Neal's *Rachel Dyer*, the first novel about the Salem events, Neal's characters struggle with the question of how to tell fact from fiction in the courtroom, just as Neal himself struggles with the question of how to blend historical accuracy with a storyteller's flair for evoking emotional authenticity. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Nathaniel Hawthorne plays with the dividing line between the romantic and the real, as he raises ghosts that he claims don't matter, but who, in fact, end up floating off with the story. Marion L. Starkey's novel *The Visionary Girls*, like Arthur Miller's play, blends "true" events with fictitious events; as she explains "what happened," she creates the very past that she purports to "expose." This is, interestingly, the same role that Tituba plays in her novel: a fortune-teller who can predict the future, a future that unfolded long ago. Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, is more self-consciously ironic than *The Crucible*, but like Starkey, Condé explicitly aims to use fiction to get at a deeper truth than history has been able to provide. Focusing on the character of Tituba, Condé empowers the slave woman while at the same time she challenges both the apocryphal versions of Tituba's role in the trials and the notion that fiction itself should conform to the rules of history, temporality, and political correctness. Chapter Three ends with a discussion of Robin Cook's recent bestseller *Acceptable Risk*, which, in a tour de force of over-the-top emplotment, links the use of primary source documents to the production of re-engineered ergot mold, a mold that functions in the novel as a kind of Prozac-gone-dead-wrong. Cook tries to celebrate the uses of history and science, but his novel keeps churning up horror. The library, the lab, the museum: all become spaces where mysteries solved are grotesque disasters.

Chapter Four, "A Dramatic Tale: Salem on Stage and Screen," extends the fiction discussion into a more self-consciously performative arena. The performativity that inhered even in the trial transcripts becomes more

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deliberate in the plays, films, and television shows that treat the Salem story. To begin, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's play about Giles Corey being pressed to death mixes concrete political critique with angry, testifying specters; like Hawthorne, Longfellow focuses on the realm of the "real," but the play's definition of the "real"—that it can be stabbed with a stick!—falls short of its own mark again and again. Arthur Miller's popular play *The Crucible* uses a "non-fiction" running commentary to situate the play's events in history, but Miller continually uses the commentary to establish "fictional truths," things that never happened in 1692, but which become "real" in Miller's new definition of the term. Miller uses confession and nakedness to indicate purity and veracity, but over and over again, the play suggests that no confession can ever really be un-ironic. Two earlier films from Hollywood's golden age, 1937's *Maid of Salem* and 1942's *I Married a Witch*, focus on the relationship between patriarchy and witchcraft, and how female power gets contained and deployed through charges and acts of witchcraft. As Abigail Williams does in Miller's play, the figure of the "real" witch gets productively confused, as female sexuality and failed female domesticity challenge the status quo. Finally, the chapter examines two recent television shows where characters participate in recreated versions of the witch trials. In both *Bewitched* and in *Sabrina, The Teen-Aged Witch*, the real witches escape persecution, but must speak up to defend their loved ones who are wrongfully accused. The two episodes under analysis here reveal how the mock trial functions to define—ironically—the category of a "real" witch.

From *Sabrina* and *Samantha*, it is a short jump to Chapter Five, "Selling the Story: From Salem Village to Witch City," which focuses on the twentieth-century tourist market that surrounds Salem. After a brief history of Salem's economic shifts from a port-mercantile Massachusetts capital to a New England tourist highlight, I consider in depth the difference between "high" and "low" tourist productions. What are the differences in economic and educational motivation between the Peabody Essex Museum and the Witch Dungeons? How do Boris Karloff's Witch Mansion and the Witch Museum work in relationship to the memorial and graveyard sites? Drawing on scholarship by Dean MacCannell, Erik Cohen, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and others, I deconstruct the ideologies involved with Salem's tourist market, and consider the (false) dichotomy

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that separates education from entertainment. The first section focuses on “low” tourist sites (Wax Museum/Witch Village, Witch Museum, Dracula’s Castle, Dungeons, shops), and the second on “high” sites (Peabody Essex Museum, monuments, Tercentenary events). I consider the specific criteria for categorizing sites as “low” or “high,” and deconstruct the division between the tacky and the tasteful. The goal here is not to celebrate the authenticity of Dracula’s Castle, nor to condemn the Peabody Essex for its sensationalism; instead, I aim to consider practically the theory I have outlined above about how authenticity gets produced against a definition of the “inauthentic,” and how the performative permeates even the most patently “true” Salem productions. This chapter deals with specific tourist sites, and the way that camp, kitsch, commercialism, and entertainment function with and against education, commemoration, and moral lessons.

In addition, this chapter investigates how *packaging* impacts the tourist’s understanding of American history, and how such packaging changes the very definition of history itself. Are there any problems associated with the selling of Gallows Hill dirt, for example? Are there any real ways that this “dirt-as-past” corrupts society, or is the “corruption” always already a part of any historical inquiry? How does “dirt-as-past” function in relation to the Peabody Essex Museum, and its cases of primary source documents? In one documentary film about Salem, Arthur Miller’s reaction when he is shown the package of Gallows Hill dirt was a sad shake of his head.¹² What does it mean for the author of the fictitious play that has so defined popular understandings of the trials to judge so harshly the commercialized work of the Witch Museum? What, precisely, are the differences between these cultural productions, and how are they all related to American mythology, authenticity, and 1692? This chapter addresses these questions, emphasizing the way that performance connects apparently disparate tourist/art forms.

It is a somewhat hypocritical maneuver to turn now to the “primary sources.” Why begin with the actual trial transcripts if I have just claimed that chronology is highly suspect, that primacy is an illusion created through repetition? One reason I would like to begin this project’s explanations with the “original” documents is to inquire whether or not they, on their own, have any “original” qualities. If an origin can only exist after

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it has been passed — and thereby self-produced by the ironic loss of itself— then what will we find in original documents if we examine them without reference to what followed them? It is, of course, an impossible practicality to abandon our own modern minds as we investigate the past; but if we begin with the “primary sources,” we can see just what Salem had to say about itself before it became “original.”