



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Laura A. Evans for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on May 9, 2012  
Title: American Identity at a Crossroads: Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*

Abstract approved:

---

Peter J. Betjemann

Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692) has traditionally been dismissed as a failed missive attempting to defend the controversial Salem Witch Trials. What is missing from this characterization is an analysis of the degree to which the text, written at a moment of crisis in Puritan culture, actually looks forward to the emergence of a democratic polity. By tracing the topical disarray and the instability of audience that *Wonders* presents, the beginnings of this shift—which culminate in the American Revolution eighty years later—becomes apparent. *Wonders* demonstrates the quiet emerging of a distinct American mindset amidst social and political upheaval in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Although Cotton Mather's book did fail to unite his community in 1692, the flexible metaphors he borrowed, shaped, and refined in *Wonders* helped to define the nation of America.

© Copyright by Laura A. Evans  
May 9, 2012  
All Rights Reserved

American Identity at a Crossroads:  
Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*

by  
Laura A. Evans

A THESIS

Submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Arts

Presented May 9, 2012  
Commencement June 2012

Master of Arts thesis of Laura A. Evans presented on May 9, 2012.

APPROVED:

---

Major Professor, representing English

---

Director of the School of Writing, Literature, and Film

---

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

---

Laura A. Evans, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses sincere appreciation for the encouragement and advice Dennis Bennett gave in the course of completing this thesis project. Thanks for believing in this project.

Also, Professors Peter Betjemann and Lisa Ede went above and beyond to support the completion of this project. Thank you for your time and your feedback along the way.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction/Preface .....	2
Chapter 1 Negotiating A Shifting Communal Identity .....	5
Historical Background .....	6
An Unsettled Puritan Period: the 1660's-1690's .....	10
Cotton Mather: the man .....	13
Critical Perspectives .....	18
Chapter 2 Mather: the American Janus .....	38
Mather's Audience(s) .....	40
A Tale of Two Title Pages .....	56
The Original Title Page Versus The Text .....	61
Topical Instability .....	64
Political Authority Re-established .....	66
<i>The Author's Defence</i> and Enchantments Encountered .....	66
The Emerging American Individualism Embodied in <i>Wonders</i> .....	80
Conclusion .....	86
Bibliography .....	88

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Side-by-side view of original title page versus actual published order of <i>Wonders of the Invisible World</i> .....	58
2. Correlation of original title page to published sections .....	59



American Identity at a Crossroads:  
Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*

American Identity at a Crossroads:  
Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*

"I have always assumed that U.S. culture is diverse and conflictual, and that Puritan origins, if I may still use the term, made up just one part of a much larger, fabricated, and imposed identity. The sticking point is history. I came to the conclusion that Puritan origins were significant not because I went looking for them, but because, to my amazement, I found so much evidence of them all around me, in every form of discourse."

*"A Model of Cultural Transvaluation: Puritanism, Modernity, and New World Rhetoric"*

Sacvan Bercovitch

Transatlantic Colloquium, March 1997

### Introduction

There is a sustained American typological identity that has maintained its cultural appeal and power for four hundred years. While it is frequently alluded to, rather than stated, one of the central metaphors of the American mythos is our position as a "city on a hill." America is characterized as the example for other nations to emulate. This identity has been called into question at various times by various groups—both within and outside the United States—but even now it dominates the arenas of public discourse such as politics, advertising, and evangelical religion, just to mention a few. From Abraham Lincoln to Barack Obama, from Jonathan Edwards to Jerry Falwell, successful American leaders at some point return to the mythic trope of America as the city on the hill, watched by all the world. The image of America as a city on a hill—a nation with a special, foreordained purpose which serves as an example for the entire world—is a staple of both political and religious rhetoric today.

That identity is now framed in terms of "American exceptionalism"—the idea that the United States of America is qualitatively different from all other nations—but it began

as an illustrative mission statement for a specific historical group: the exemplary “city on a hill” the Puritans sought to become in colonial Massachusetts. American identity and public discourse are inextricably tied up in ancient Biblical metaphors, as appropriated and redefined by the early colonial Puritans. As Sacvan Bercovitch put it, “Puritan origins were significant not because I went looking for them, but because, to my amazement, I found so much evidence of them all around me, in every form of discourse” (“A Model” 1). Whether we like it or not, the origins of our nation’s character are inextricably rooted in this very Puritan metaphorical identity. The equating of the Puritan trope with America began with 1<sup>st</sup> generation New England Puritan, and first governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop. When he gave his now famous lay sermon “On Christian Charity” aboard the *Arabella* in 1630 (en route to the wilderness “promise land” of New England), Winthrop succinctly laid out a new visionary identity for the Puritan immigrants. Taking his inspiration from the Old Testament Israelite exodus and the cryptic sayings of the New Testament Sermon on the Mount, Winthrop conflated the spiritual exodus of a special, called-out people with the light-bearing example expected in a Christian life. Winthrop’s vision became the foundational touchstone of the religious, social and political systems implemented first in Puritan New England and then in early America.

The city on a hill metaphor contained such power in the collective imagination of Puritan settlers that by the 1690’s it was an ingrained part of the spiritual-historical story of the Puritan plantation in the American wilderness. However, the version that emerged from the 1690’s was an altered and more malleable metaphor than the

theocratically-centered template of Winthrop's day. The tumultuous events of the 1660's through the early 1690's, which I will cover more in chapter one, nearly destroyed the Puritans' faith in their special destiny as a religious and political organization. More than any others, one family of intellectuals, the Mathers, helped to sustain that vision and eventually, as Cotton Mather reframed it, gave that vision the flexibility to become our national mythos.

This re-envisioning process of the city on the hill trope and the subsequent move towards a more humanistic and democratic version of America has been traced through the works of 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Puritan, Cotton Mather, most notably in *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) by Sacvan Bercovitch (1972) and in *The Christian Philosopher* (1721) by critics Babette Levy (1979) and Winton Solberg (1994). However, I am suggesting that the roots of that shift can be seen even earlier, in his controversial book *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692).

## Chapter 1: Negotiating A Shifting Communal Identity

By tracing the topical disarray and audience instability in Mather's *Wonders* and connecting his seemingly muddled purposes with the snarled political and social climate of 1688-92, we can see that he was grappling with a community identity crisis; he sought to define the changing community without dividing it. Recognizing that Cotton Mather utilizes the city on the hill metaphor as the underlying basis of his connection with his audience, Cotton Mather's uneven use of pronouns and his focus on a localized (New England) audience in *Wonders* both point to an emerging, though incomplete, shift in local identity from Englishmen to Americans. Furthermore, his rapid topical shifting demonstrates his struggle to negotiate the complicated communal climate.

In other words, Cotton Mather's book, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, reveals a pivotal moment in the history of American identity. In the midst of ongoing social, political and religious upheaval, Mather sought to positively redirect the communal response and shore up the crumbling Puritan Way. He was not trying to reinvent communal identity, but to re-establish it. Specifically, intent on the dual purposes of saving souls in his community and preserving the political power of the colonies, Mather utilizes rhetoric that seeks to defend the unified, hierarchical Puritan system, but instead paves the way for the pluralized individualism of the coming American Revolution and beyond. Mather's thoroughly Puritan rhetoric refined the unique identity that America has taken on as its defining quality as he tried to negotiate between the world of his fathers and the world of the future. In *The Wonders of the*

*Invisible World* we see Cotton Mather's first unsteady attempts to reconcile these two worldviews as he tries to reunite a divided community. *Wonders of the Invisible World* is a crucial text in tracing the development of a forward-looking national American identity.

### Historical Background

Although not the first colonists, nor the first Puritans, in North America, the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1629-30) was the most significant colonial presence in the 1600s. The first thing that set apart the Massachusetts Bay Colony from the other colonizers was the 1629 Cambridge Agreement. The Puritan board of the colony agreed to emigrate en masse to New England. This was the first board to operate and govern an English colony outside of England.

Sacvan Bercovitch describes the first generation colonial Puritan mentality in *The American Jeremiad*: “doubly protected by the national covenant [the charter] and the covenant of grace, they set out as a holy remnant to complete a predetermined historical design” (39). Particularly in the writings of John Cotton and Winthrop, the idea of American Puritans as an example community, encapsulated in the image of a secular/sacred city on a hill, is foregrounded. “Winthrop and Cotton,” says Bercovitch,

use both meanings of the term simultaneously; and that double meaning of their ‘city on a hill’ pervades their discourses. It recurs in their blessings and threats and in scriptural allusions that threat their arguments. When John Cotton speaks of America as ‘the ends of the earth’ he is referring not only to a specific locale, but also to Christ’s Second Coming. When he

tells the prospective immigrants that ‘God plants us when He gives us roote in Christ,’ he does so in order to fuse the concepts of civic and spiritual planting. Winthrop’s rhetoric serves the same purpose....Like Cotton, in short, Winthrop sets out a prophetic view that unites sacred and secular history. (40)

The Puritans saw themselves as God’s holy city in the wilderness. They were the “called out ones” of scripture, literally and figuratively leaving “the world” behind as they sought to follow God more closely. They were armed with faith, the word of God, and community-sustaining metaphors. This did not mean, however, that they were unprepared for secular success. Farmers brought seeds and tools for agriculture, blacksmiths brought the equipment to rebuild their forges, and artisans immediately began recreating their trades. The Puritans were going to plant God’s city—and they intended to harvest both physical and spiritual bounty in the wilderness.

But reality proved to be more recalcitrant than the ideal. The Puritans had begun this colony with fervor and hope in their “errand into the wilderness” to create a new and righteous “city on a hill,” or so Winthrop stated as the ship *Arbella* headed for the Americas. Although the stated purpose and rhetoric of the community had remained fairly steady through the next generation, there were many setbacks. This was no peaceful Eden, but the edge of darkness, held back only by the light of men’s efforts and prayers. The potential for a renewed Eden (or New Jerusalem, for both ideas were used almost interchangeably) was there—just around the corner, but as yet unattainable. Even with a government based on scripture and a community of believers (the legislative body was expanded in 1631 and 1634, but only free male church members were allowed to vote), the harshness and uncertainty of daily life eroded the zeal of the

faithful. Two brutal wars with local Native American tribes (1636-38 and 1675-76) and frequent skirmishes on the borderlands between these wars heightened people's fear of the unknown and of outsiders. Nor were the Indians their only perceived enemies. Religious foes abounded—offering heretical ideas or softening the truth with tolerance.

In fighting so tenaciously against all their enemies on every side (sin, the devil, natives, Catholics, Armenianism, Antinomianism, Enthusiasm, Universalism, Sadduceeism [those who denied the spirit world], Divine Right, and so on), Puritan intellectuals and divines were often blind to the implications of their own arguments as they defended specific doctrines. The tension between emphasizing an individual's personal reading and understanding of scripture versus the need for divines to teach and interpret scripture for the people led to a theocracy based on both the belief that the power of a government comes from the consent of the people and on a strong authoritarian tradition that deeply distrusted "the rabble." These implications made room for dissenters like Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, and for ideas leading to humanism, tolerance and democracy. The propagation of personal interpretations of the Bible led to the possibility of not just congregational choice but of denominational exodus on a previously unprecedented scale. The increasingly prosperous populace becomes less religious and more secular as they realized that personal choice could trump tradition and authority.

As trade began to flourish and civil government fluctuated, but increased, there seemed to be a "decay of piety" beginning perhaps in the late 1630's but clearly remarked upon



and frequently lamented in the 1660's through the late 1680's in American jeremiads (Silverman 57). People were looking to their own efforts more and to God's Providence less. Also, the fluid territorial boundaries of the New World began to erode the fixed boundaries of Old World ways. Perry Miller and Thomas Johnson describe the cultural climate as one in which "the character of the people underwent a change; they moved further into the frontier, they become more absorbed in business and profits than in religion and salvation" (*The Puritans* 17).

In addition, upsets in the English monarchical rule and in the royal governance of the colonies caused the basis of governmental authority to be publically questioned, not just by religious and political leaders, but by the common man. Charles I was beheaded by the English Parliament in 1649 and a Puritan parliament, headed by Oliver Cromwell, appeared to have God's blessing. Perhaps New England wasn't meant to be the shining city on the hill after all, some suggested, but merely the outpost of an English New-Israel. The non-separatist Puritans who had remained in England looked to be correct after all, in not physically removing themselves from the English nation. But New England Puritans were generally still enthusiastic and encouraged—God's restoration of all things was coming about in their generation, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

But in 1660, after Parliament forced the resignation of Lord Protector Richard Cromwell and instated Charles II as king of England, the theocratic-leaning Puritan government had failed. It was again up to New England to be the example nation, with the failure of Cromwell's government as an object lesson to be learned from. Then

came the 1662 Act of Uniformity (expelling or forcing the resignation of more than 2,000 Puritan pastors in England), a general decrease of religious tolerance, and increasing inroads by Anglicans and Roman Catholics into public offices and public policies in England. The blessings and advances of God's (reformed, Protestant) kingdom on the earth seemed to be faltering, and people's faith faltered with it.

### An Unsettled Puritan Period: the 1660's-1690's

By the 1660s and 1670s, many of the first generation Puritan founders had died. There was a general lack of baptisms in the second and third generations, in part due to the strict requirements of the Puritan conversion experience, but also due to a lack of urgency. The sense of physical vulnerability (to plagues, raids, crop losses, etc.) had not subsided, but the coinciding sense of spiritual vulnerability had waned for the average colonist.

Not so for the clergy (Silverman 55-6). The fear of failing to achieve their God-given "errand" to create the climate for the coming of the New Jerusalem led to hitherto unneeded considerations and compromises such as the Halfway Covenant of 1662 (allowing children of unbaptized or unconverted parents to be baptized and enter fully into the religious community). If declension could be replaced by renewal and regeneration, the ministers cried out, New Jerusalem would be a reality, not just a metaphor. But the community no longer saw themselves as Englishmen settled as an outpost for God in the wilderness—the city on the hill was a booming trading post and

the religious glow of the first generation had all but faded into community lore. The New England colonists were beginning to define themselves, rather than accepting the communal definitions.

Negative reactions to British colonial policies (especially, but not limited to, issues of taxation) led to a new emphasis on (colonial) American rights and responsibilities in opposition to monarchical rights and requirements. When Charles II revoked the Massachusetts Bay Colony Charter in 1684 after rumors of disloyalty and unrest, he instigated an oppositional attitude that would culminate in the loss of the American colonies. But no one knew that yet. The turning point for the Massachusetts colonists was when the royally appointed governor of the newly-created Dominion of New England, Sir Edmund Andros arrived (1686) and required that a Boston church be converted to an Anglican one, as well as imposing new taxes. He later claimed he was only seeking to bring New England into compliance with the extant laws of England, but he was widely disliked, especially in Massachusetts.

In April of 1689, in the midst of rumors from England about the Glorious Revolution (1688), some of the local leaders and ministers rebelled and forced Andros out of office. A tense and vocal crowd developed, some even calling for a revolution. The “Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants Boston and the Country Adjacent” was composed and read to the crowds, re-establishing local governance (retired governor Simon Bradstreet) and local rights, but denying the common man any part in that government. This was a bold move, which could have cost their Colony

much, especially since Increase Mather was already in England, representing the Massachusetts Bay Colony and seeking to renew their revoked charter with the new king. That new charter was eventually granted (1691), with changes (the most significant was that the right to vote was no longer predicated on church membership) and seemingly the political turmoil was laid to rest. But under the surface, the stirrings of change and revolution were not dead.

It was as Andros was recalled to England (1689) and Increase Mather negotiated colonial rights with Parliament and the King (1688-91), that the tensions and stresses of their changing world found a focal point in Salem, Massachusetts. Newly appointed royal governor Sir William Phips arrived in Massachusetts in May of 1692, along with Increase Mather and the new charter. Witchcraft accusations and preliminary trials had already been underway since February. Phips appointed an official court and between his arrival and May 1693, that court presided over the accusations and executions. Twenty people were executed (hanged or pressed to death) as accused witches, while hundreds more from Salem Village and the surrounding towns were jailed and examined. It is at this time that Increase Mather's son, Cotton Mather, writes *The Wonders of the Invisible World*.

By mid-1693, the fervor had died down and the recriminations were well underway. Communal identity was in flux. It wouldn't be until 1697 that the government formally apologized to the families of those accused and offered them remuneration. It took a decade or more before the community appeared to heal the breach the witch trials had

made, but then there were new problems—smallpox epidemics and wars and ever increasing taxes—that would eventually both divide and unite them more fully than ever before. Change was coming and the seeds had already been sown.

### Cotton Mather: the man

Into this world, with all its complications, Cotton Mather, third generation New England Puritan, was born (February 12, 1663) and raised. Before 1688, when Increase Mather left Cotton Mather in charge of his church while Increase sought to secure the new royal charter, Cotton Mather's conflicts appear to be mostly personal in nature—as he struggles with his own imperfect character and belief. Mather seems to maintain a homogenous worldview, though retaining his personal quirks. After about 1700, Mather is much more vocal about communal conflicts (excluding politics), but his views seem to reflect less contradiction and more accommodation to the emerging New World perspectives. In the late 1680's and the early 1690's Mather's struggle to maintain a unified worldview amidst constant change becomes apparent.

Although fairly well respected in his own right, the shadows of his father, Increase Mather, and his grandfathers, Richard Mather and John Cotton, had always perched over his shoulders in community perception and in his own mind, reinforcing his words with the weight of their reputations and authority, rather than his own. But in 1692 his father had just returned, after an absence of four years in England, from renegotiating the colony's lapsed charter and escorting the newly appointed royal governor to New

England. Although he was aware of the accusations of witchcraft that were rising, Increase was focused on how to stabilize the political community in Massachusetts while maintaining their religious values and rights. Thus it was to 29-year old Cotton Mather that much of the political and religious community turned as the threat of witchcraft and the devil's attention rose again on New England soil.

Cotton Mather's own previous success with rehabilitating the possessed Godwin children in 1688 (he published his account of the incident as "Late Memorable Providences, relating to witchcraft and possession" the same year) did much to recommend him as a key spokesman, as did his tireless personal prayer and fasting campaigns for Mercy Short (and later Margaret Rule) who was found to be likewise afflicted, but restored to the religious community through the efforts of Mather and his congregation. His reputation for piety and redemptive action was well established. In addition, as Kenneth Silverman emphasizes in *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (2001), Cotton Mather had been actively involved in the political maneuvering that ousted Andros as acting governor and installed retired governor Bradstreet until the new, Crown-appointed governor could be sent from England. Cotton Mather's influence in the political sphere was at a widely acknowledged high point in the community.

Cotton Mather was a central public figure at that time; his position as a well-known minister and author in Boston gave him a wide audience as people sought to negotiate their fears and failings amidst unrest on, seemingly, every front—political, territorial, social, and spiritual. Furthermore, Mather was a well-educated, persuasive speaker and

a prolific writer—able to quickly produce pamphlet or book-length works on demand. For instance, on June 15<sup>th</sup>, an anonymous document entitled “The Return of Several Ministers” outlining a policy of caution and tolerance in the trials (until the last sentence which stated “Nevertheless, We cannot but humbly recommend unto the Government, the speedy and vigorous Prosecution of [practitioners of witchcraft]”) was published (Mather “Return” 2). Later Cotton Mather admits, in the privacy of his diary, that he wrote this document, with the approval of his fellow ministers, one of which was his father.

It was with these qualifications to recommend him that Cotton Mather began to write *The Wonders of the Invisible World* that same summer of 1692. He sought to both calm the fears and fervency of the over-involved general public and to convince the same to trust in the validity and justice of the courts as they investigated accusations of witchcraft. New England, he was convinced, was going to overcome Satan’s attack and be an example to the rest of the world. By October of 1692, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* had been printed in Boston and was in the hands of the judges and governor. It was published in London in December of the same year (though it was printed with the copyright year 1693 in London). Although much material circulated about the witch trials in 1692 and for a decade following the trials, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* was the only officially sanctioned description and defense of the witch trials. Cotton Mather sought to make “right use of these disasters” to reunite the splintering community.

Ironically, it is for this book and the erroneous, but common assumption that he instigated or at least enflamed the witch hunt hysteria of 1692, that Cotton Mather is most well-known today. With a known publication list of over 300 books, sermons and religious tracts, witchcraft as a topic figures in only three of them (and only extensively in two). Mather was not a fire-breathing instigator (or at least, not just a fire-breathing instigator) but a sincere man who worked tirelessly for the people he served. Prior to 1692, it appeared that Cotton Mather was an up and coming young pastor—a bit of a character, but devoted to his community and his calling. His increasingly political actions of the late 1680s and early 1690s only further illustrated his zeal to protect the status of his community as a theocracy and a city apart from the fallen world. However, erroneous or not, after the publication of *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, even many members of his own community saw Mather as a part of the problem, rather than the solution during the witchcraft hysteria. This reaction marks his general withdrawal from the world of politics and his increasing focus on spiritual and scientific topics thereafter. He did not abandon his work or his calls for others to do good works, but his intellectual contributions no longer sought to uphold or change political realities. On the other hand, he did continue to struggle to articulate communal identity.

While no one disputes Cotton Mather's prominence in the historical timeline of American letters, he is primarily characterized as a Puritan of the Puritans—a “keeper of the Puritan conscience” as one biographer called him, a “Puritan priest” preserving religious orthodoxy, and an intellectual giant of his time. Fewer critics have a more



encompassing view of Cotton Mather as an intellectual forerunner and perhaps founder of the imaginative framework for the sustainable, “united” American identity.

Mather studies tend to fall into two categories, defining either his historical significance or his literary import. Biographers generally focus on his scholarship, his influence and his contradictory nature, in the context of his community, while literary critics typically focus on his use of typology and metaphor, his continuation of the jeremiad structure, his unusual stylistic choices, or the changes in his religious/rationalist philosophical standpoint in specific published works. All acknowledge his inconsistencies of character and of scholarship, even as they agree that his worldview was thoroughly Puritan—rooted in the absolute authority of the Bible and belief in the unity of knowledge.

Given the literate and introspective culture in which he grew up, it is not surprising that Cotton Mather’s position shifts are visible even as he struggles to reconcile and articulate those shifts himself. Let’s be very clear, however, about what Cotton Mather was not doing. Never, in his lifetime, did Mather become an advocate for democracy or humanism. He was a Puritan and he believed in the efficacy of the Puritan Way—combining spiritual and secular life into a united whole in which the community worked together to build up holy individuals in holy communion with God. However, over the course of his lifetime, his attitude toward specific Puritan policies or doctrines did relax and sometimes even reverse. For instance, Cotton Mather was one of the staunch supporters of the Halfway Covenant, even though his father never supported this policy.

He was also one of the first to publically preach in support of religious tolerance in 1687, when James II issued the Declaration of the Liberty of Conscience and then in 1689, when King William III and Queen Mary II proclaimed the Toleration Act in England (an opinion that got Roger Williams ousted from the colonies in 1636). Other actions later in his life (such as the support of vaccinating for smallpox) indicate his ongoing willingness to reconsider his viewpoints in light of the evidence. What Mather never did is reject his religious beliefs or his millennialist viewpoint, which formed the foundation of his vision of a reinvigorated, cohesive, and exemplary community.

From this purely theocratic worldview emerged a national identity that was able to transcend the beliefs that fomented it and unite a nation of dissenters, misfits and immigrants as Americans. It seems unlikely, even impossible. Yet the concept of American exceptionalism is now firmly planted in the story of this nation. The roots of our national identity—our view of ourselves as a model for the world, a city on the hill—unavoidably came from our Puritan past. But Winthrop merely contributed the metaphor—it was subsequent Puritan intellectuals, and, I'll argue, specifically Cotton Mather's writing, beginning with *Wonders of the Invisible World*, which pruned and shaped that idea into a New World American identity.

### Critical Perspectives

As yet, scholars have not specifically focused on *Wonders* in the discussion of a shift in Mather's sense of communal identity. Thus, of particular interest, for our purpose, is

understanding how Cotton Mather has been situated by twentieth century critics in the intellectual continuum from colonial British covenanted community to the (democratic) American pluralized individualism that identifies us today. Mather's writing constitutes a massive portion of early American intellectual history; however, his role in shaping American identity is obscured. Instead, most critics see Cotton Mather's purpose as one of unifying the Puritan ideal society with the reality of the New England colony; mainly he is characterized as a brilliant failure. If any general agreement can be suggested about a shift in Mather's perspective, it is that Mather is writing from a mitigated, more tolerant, perspective by the end of his life. However, not all the critics would even concede this.

If you were to visualize colonial American thought as a timeline onto which we could superimpose both Cotton Mather's literary output and the critical stance of various twentieth century scholars regarding Mather's role in the shaping of an American consciousness, Kenneth Silverman would be at one end, suggesting (though unable to verify his authorship) that Mather was actively shaping and participating in the development of an American identity as early as 1689, while Perry Miller would be at the other end, noting the prominence of Cotton Mather, but seeing in him only the Puritan mindset of his elders. Most scholars fall somewhere between these extremes. The earliest date previously suggested for an emerging American mindset that can be clearly tied to Cotton Mather is 1702 (*Magnalia Christi Americana*) by Sacvan Bercovitch in his essay "Cotton Mather." On the issue of Mather's role as a transitional

figure in American intellectual thought and national identity, many see a pivot point in his later work—somewhere between 1702 and just before his death in 1728.

Perry Miller recognized the importance of Cotton Mather's written contribution to Puritan letters, but doesn't seem to have thought much of the man, stating somewhat derisively in his introduction to *The Puritans* that "in *popular imagination*" Cotton Mather is "apt to figure ...as the arch-embodiment of the Puritan" (2, emphasis mine). Miller sees Cotton Mather as merely fighting a losing intellectual battle to continue the tradition of "an age when the unity of religion and politics was so axiomatic that very few men would even have grasped the idea that church and state could be distinct. For the Puritan mind it was not possible to segregate man's spiritual life from his communal life" (*Errand* 142). Miller did not see the stirrings of individualism and revolutionary thought in Puritan writings and felt that "There is nothing so idle as to praise the Puritans... [as] deliberate pioneers of religious liberty...still more idle to berate them because in America they persecuted dissenters" and, he reminds us, "To allow no dissent from the truth was exactly the reason they had come to America" (145). Keeping in mind the gradual loosening of the Puritan hold on politics, commerce, religious solidarity, and the individual lives of colonists, Miller declares "Puritanism, in the true sense of the word, was dead" (145) at the end of Increase Mather's life (just five years before Cotton Mather dies in 1728).

Miller further rejects any modern suggestion of revolutionary tendencies in Puritan thought by reminding us that, along with "a uniform church supported by civil

authority” the ideas “of rule by explicit law, of the derivation of the state from the consent of the people, were transported into the wilderness because they were the stock ideas of the time and place. What the New England Puritans added of their own was the unique fashion in which they combined them into one coherent and rounded theory” (148). He goes on to show how Winthrop’s characterization of the Puritan society as covenanted in an “errand into the wilderness” and as a “city on a hill” was the only difference (148) between colonial and mainland (European) Puritans.

However, Miller wants to disabuse the reader of any illusions that he saw littering the historical rhetoric. With an almost indignant tone he writes, “In the pages of liberal historians, and above all in the speeches of Fourth of July orators, the Puritans have been hymned as the pioneers of religious liberty, though nothing was ever farther from their designs; they have been hailed as the forerunners of democracy, though if they were, it was quite beside their intention” (*The Puritans* 5). Miller does acknowledge that “After the new charter of 1691...leaders of the colony made various efforts to accommodate the original conception of social purpose to the constitutional requirements of the document” (*Errand* 151). He saw the changes as imposed from the outside, not growing from within.

It is not until 1750 that Miller sees a “different gospel” being preached by minister Jonathan Mayhew when, as Miller summarizes his argument, “the power of the Puritan God—and therefore, naturally, that of an English king—is bound by terms of compact. New England’s errand into the wilderness—having set out from the federal theology—

had now developed into an assurance that God Himself would respect the laws we have agreed upon” (*Errand* 152). But, Miller is still hesitant to ascribe too much import to this sermon, explaining that “Mayhew’s boldness still dismayed most of his contemporaries...but it was only a matter of time before the community caught up with at least his political argument.” Finally, Miller calls Mayhew “the most obvious link between Puritan and revolutionary ideas” (152). So for Miller, Cotton Mather may have been the tail end of a fading tradition, but he was not even on the radar as a transitional figure. His is the most conservative view of Mather (and the Puritans) as early Americans, among critics. Miller is so busy defending the historical Puritan reality against modern revisionist historians that he overlooks the small changes that were occurring, whether intentional or not.

Less conservative, but still cautious is biographer Babette Levy. Viewing Mather through the lens of a wide selection of his writings, but particularly through his own diaries and correspondence, and the accounts of contemporaries (in their diaries and letters), she suggests that Mather was merely unaware of the changing landscape of his worldview. As she set the stage for discussing his writing, Levy painted a broadstrokes picture of Mather’s character and contribution: “At the same time that he was regretting the past [declension] he was forming or helping to form a very different New England: one of far more tolerance, of stronger ideals of service to God and man, of progress in science and so in the use of reason. This dichotomy of mind, seemingly unrecognized by himself, made life in many ways difficult for him” (16). Levy identifies a number of ideals in Cotton Mather’s writing that we, now, see as contradictory, but that Mather,

with his belief that all knowledge could be brought together to explain a God-maintained world, sought to reconcile or perhaps didn't even see as contradictory. Levy states, "in the forty-five years during which he preached and published so steadily, a natural development and shift in emphasis in his understanding of this precious truth is clearly recognizable; not only was he changing with the times, but ... he was influencing his times" (30). Cotton Mather was certainly aware that he was influencing the community—his diaries and his emphasis on publishing his work both demonstrate this—but, says Levy, his consciousness of how his changing understanding of the world affected the views of his community may have been subtle or unrealized.

Focusing on his intellectual contributions, Levy suggests that Mather's influence is most clearly seen in his efforts to understand science, while maintaining his faith: "Cotton Mather's growing scientific interest... affected both his preaching and his publications. Without his being conscious of the development, he thought of God more as the great Creator, less as the stern Father....In other words, with the years Cotton Mather's world became more and more a world of reason—reason, he would have quickly said, that was to be used to support faith" (36). Levy does not see Mather as a political influence or a definer of his times, but as a pastor doing all he can to maintain intellectual homogeneity in a fragmenting religious and political landscape. Levy's work, in this respect, is representative of the scholarship of the earlier part of the twentieth century (though her book was published posthumously in 1979). Mather, Levy suggests, affected the community's view of God, but not so much their view of themselves. This characterization of Mather as a pivotal influence is more in line with my view, but Levy

stops short of ascribing intentionality—she states the shift towards a separate American identity was “unrecognized” by Cotton Mather himself (16).

Several other scholars embrace the opinion that Cotton Mather held (and sought to reconcile) opposing ideas or that he moved from one, more religious, ideal to another, more secular, ideal, but that he did not see the intellectual shift in his own mindset. Most authors mention this in passing without even a footnote—demonstrating the general acceptance of this view of Mather. While demonstrably Mather was a formidable intellect, a conscientious theologian, and an emerging scientist in a world still mired in many Medieval beliefs, biographers tend to focus on Mather’s writing, as it fits in the Puritan-American intellectual tradition or as it reveals Mather’s contradictory personal character, and less on the social and political influence his writing had in his community at the time. Few highlight his political activism (or treat it as a sidenote, rather than one activity among many in an ambitious life). As Babette Levy emphasized repeatedly, she saw the seeds of intellectual change—that would eventually result in the pluralized American worldview—in Mather’s work, but she saw it as an invisible and gradual process, not recognizable in Mather’s lifetime. However, as I will demonstrate in chapter 2, a close reading of *Wonders of the Invisible World* reveals Mather’s intellectual struggle to define himself and his community in still murky but evolving national terms.

James W. Jones sees a much stronger, visible shift in Cotton Mather’s part in the “developing trends of American Puritanism at the turn of the century” (77). While



Jones, currently a professor of religion at Rutgers University, is not exclusively a Mather scholar, much of his early work is focused on the Puritan mindset and his chapter on Cotton Mather in *The Shattered Synthesis: New England Puritanism before the Great Awakening*, demonstrates how the intellectual split of the Great Awakening began earlier than the eighteenth century, where it is often traced. He indicates that “actually two divergent lines of development had been going on for almost a century” and that the Great Awakening “only made the controversy public” (ix-x). He further asserts that the “Puritanism that was reverently carried across the ocean in the bulky volumes of divinity was a balance of the objectivity of the head and the subjectivity of the heart, of divine predestination and human activity. That balance was lost in the course of the seventeenth century; it was never regained” and that led to “what has become, in the twentieth century, the clash of a humanistic, scientific culture against a mystical, religious counterculture [that] began in the pulpits of New England in the last half of the seventeenth century” (x). Jones sees Cotton Mather as one of those ministers revising mankind’s place in God’s history from the pulpit and the pen. Summarizing Mather’s importance, he explains that “Cotton Mather lived at a time of rapid change in the theological, as well as the ecclesiastical and political, condition of New England. Often regarded as a reactionary, in truth he was as much a harbinger of the new order as a guardian of the old one” (77).

For Jones, Mather’s contribution to the re-imaging of the American religious landscape centered on his “almost hereditary need to do battle with the supporters of ‘free-will.’ He chose to do so in the terms on which the battle would be fought, and finally lost”

(78): predestination. Ironically, for the man who spent the majority of his adult life seeking to reconcile all knowledge into one unified whole, focused on what he saw as heresy in the Armenians' doctrine, he defended too strongly and rather myopically the doctrine of predestination. His defense widened, rather than narrowing the theological gap. Seeking to maintain a righteous community in light of a doctrine that asserts humans can do nothing to assure their salvation, Mather taught his congregation to search themselves for a "disposition to perform good works" which, as Jones points out, led to a repeated assertion that "men are known by their fruits" (83). This, in turn, followed to its logical ends, "became secularized into a kind of moralism. True Christianity became synonymous with men of 'good character'.... This kind of moralism was evident throughout Mather's preaching" (83). In doing so, Mather created an either/or split in the religious thought of his day that helped usher in two intellectual movements: universalism (all will be reconciled to God through grace) and humanism—two diverse ideological concepts he explicitly opposed.

According to Jones, all this religious controversy coalesces into communal, secular effects because although for "Cotton the purpose of preaching was to bring men to Christ...his own stress seemed to fall on man's duty, his responsibility to God, family, and commonwealth" (85). In trying to keep his fragmenting community together, Cotton Mather was himself changing the old ways. "Forced by the unique status of the numerous halfway members to emphasize man's duty more and more, he came close to that kind of 'legal' preaching he condemned," says Jones, concluding that "It was this equation of religion with morality that finally triumphed over the orthodoxy Mather

tried so hard to defend. Cotton Mather, then was almost a mirror image of the turn of the century. In his emphasis on divine predestination and man's inability, he is a child of the seventeenth century. In his tendency toward moralism and the reduction of Christianity to duty, he is a harbinger of things to come" (87). Jones clearly sees Mather's writing as pivotal in defining the Puritan community (and not America at large), but he never clearly states a position on how aware Cotton Mather was of his own shifting ideology. His argument implies that it was a natural progression, and perhaps, therefore, an unwitting one. Jones leaves his argument there—and that is where I pick up the argument—demonstrating that the new order Jones describes begins to emerge in *Wonders*.

Jones situates these rhetorical moves as early as 1692, in Mather's sermon "The Midnight Cry"—the same controversial year Mather completed *The Wonders of the Invisible World*. Sacvan Bercovitch, too, sees "The Midnight Cry" and *Wonders* as indicators of a changing intellectual perspective ("Cotton Mather" 116, 108), but he sees them as forerunners to a brilliant and intentional schema that is only fully realized in Mather's *Magalia Christi Americana*, published in 1702 (147-48). Bercovitch's arguments compliment the one I make, but he references *Wonders* only fleetingly, preferring to focus on the longer, more cohesive *Magnalia* published ten years later.

Bercovitch is less cautious about suggesting Mather is self-aware in his intellectual struggle to accommodate all he knew and all he believed. According to Bercovitch's tripartite overview of Cotton Mather's literary impact (included in *Major Writers of*

*Early American Literature*), Mather's personal theological typology—purposefully identifying himself alternately as a Christ-figure and a endtime prophet like John the Baptist—is the bridge that allows him to resolve (imaginatively and metaphorically) the greater communal conflicts between an ideal Puritan society and the turn-of-the-century New England reality.

Bercovitch suggests that Cotton Mather was fully aware of (and struggled with) the changing ideological landscape and the dichotomies present in his own mind as he encountered those emerging scientific, religious and political ideas and sought to bring them into harmony with his personal, Puritan eschatology. For Bercovitch, Mather accomplished this as a rhetorical, literary move, more than a political one (“Mather is obliged to come to terms with his own times; he does so by transferring his emotional energy to the rhetoric that affirms his vision” [“Cotton Mather” 113]), but he delineates Mather's intentions to influence political outcomes (and his eventual failure to do so for various reasons) even as he brilliantly lays out Mather's cognitive framework:

The basis of this development [of a metaphorical epic in actual history] lies in the aesthetic formula through which, in the diaries, he resolved his identity crisis: the interchangeability, and mutually sustaining import, of the images of Christ and the Baptist.... At best, it is embodied in the most forceful political sermons of the age, worthy precursors of a national genre that culminates in Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* (1871).... In each case the strategy builds upon the same model. All the temptations or injuries recapitulate those of Christ (Satan “would *run* us over the most amazing precipice in the World”); every encounter assumes epic proportions...in every circumstance the lesson for the individual as for the community is that God's American remnant must “travel through the valley of Baca, that is of weeping, unto their everlasting happiness.” Together, these elements constitute a view of history which absorbs even the traditional doom-clauses of the federal covenant within a profoundly optimistic framework. (111-12)

This “profoundly optimistic framework” is, for Mather, a sacred, spiritual reality being worked out in human history. What was in Mather’s imagination born as a Puritan epic—God’s elect living out the last days—became, in the American imagination, a national epic that spawned Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism. In other words, what began for Mather as a personal struggle to understand his own identity in the midst of rapid change (which I address more fully in Chapter 2), morphed into a complex, but organized metaphorical framework for understanding the Puritan communal identity at large.

If his personal identification as a prophet and a Christ-figure are his rhetorical bridge between the ideal and the reality, between the sacred and the mundane, Bercovitch delineates Mather’s tendency to recast reality as metaphorical, “epic” histories as the vehicle moving Mather’s worldview from English Puritanism to American Puritanism and beyond (*The Puritan Origins of the American Self* 147). Re-characterizing real events in an ahistorical spiritual epic, Bercovitch shows, allows Cotton Mather to relinquish the “deep insecurity, not of purpose but of adjusting means to ends within a recalcitrant day-by-day reality” (“Cotton Mather” 115) that earlier Puritan writers struggled with. Mather’s confidence in his metaphorical-historical identification with the Messiah and other suffering prophets from scripture “explains the facility with which he shifts from one level to another, from prophecy to history, from texts on the saint’s wayfaring and warfaring to admonitions about details of behavior” (115). Bercovitch views Mather’s reliance on typology as the intellectual resolution to the

seeming uneasy dichotomies and willy-nilly topic shifts that stymie most readers of Mather.

This typological treatment of history and the recasting of reality as epic, with a prophet-savior (Cotton Mather) to guide the community shows most clearly in Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, according to Bercovitch, but he traces its first appearances in two works from 1692: *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (he cites Mather in calling it a "brief epic"—demonstrating Mather's awareness of his own controlling metaphors) and his sermon "A Midnight Cry." Bercovitch suggests, as I do, that *Wonders* is both a political document and an eschatological explanation: "Its purpose rests in its impassioned affirmation of the colonial cause. As it portrays the descent of Satan and his legions, all details of court procedure are subsumed in what becomes, like Milton's *Paradise Regained*, a 'brief epic' of eschatological tribulation" (108). Bercovitch, too, suggests that *Wonders* is more important because of the rhetorical moves he makes that define the community and all of history than because of its ostensible subject matter (witchcraft).

Bercovitch then traces Mather's line of thought in *Wonders*, demonstrating how Salem becomes a type for New England, as New England is a type of New Jerusalem—the ultimate city on a hill—telescoping all of Cotton Mather's chiliastic beliefs into literal history and creating an American mythos that eventually transcends the Puritans and becomes a part of American identity. As Bercovitch explains,

In the fires of diabolism, consuming alike the virtuous and the possessed, he sees the conflagration from which, phoenix-like, will arise a new heaven and a new earth. And he highlights the dialectic by blending the American wilderness and the wilderness of Christ's *agon*. This conjunction...links all aspects of his sermon-treatise-narrative, makes Salem a paradigm of New England, each of the bewitched a representative of the suffering community, every untoward act symbolic of the entire snare, and New England itself, summarily, an emblem of the invisible universal church. (109)

Bercovitch's focus here is on the literary quality of Mather's rhetoric and the unique unity of his worldview, but along the way, he provides much of the framework on which further arguments for Cotton Mather's place as a transitional figure in the formulation of the American identity and individualism can be hung: he is suggesting that Mather's penchant for metaphor and figural-type is not merely a "bait for the emotions" but the single unifying principle that knit together all the disparate beliefs he held. Bercovitch would agree with the assertion that Mather utilized the "city on the hill" metaphor as his touchstone to reconnect the fragmenting community in 1692. Bercovitch, too, sees Mather as shifting from an Old World perspective to something new and, as yet, ill-defined.

As he moves from the significance of *Wonders* towards what he sees as the greater significance of the *Magnalia*, Bercovitch pauses to demonstrate the power of Mather's controlling metaphors for himself and for New England in a message which Bercovitch describes as the "finest sermon-length illustration of these shifts of perspective, which blend (rhetorically) the functions of savior and seer...A Midnight Cry (1692)" noting that "each capitalized word [awakening, watchman, salvation] deliberately carries the many-layered implications noted above (temporal and atemporal, personal and

communal)” (116). Always, Mather is seeking to unify his vision of the world as it should be with the world as it is. Bercovitch suggests that Mather’s use of typology and controlling metaphors enables him to

recreate a dormant New England in his own likeness—through the dual image of righteous affliction and messianic mission—so as to preserve it against not only the crudity but the complexity of history. ...Most broadly it led him to develop a rhetorical form which continued to inspire the watchmen of God’s Country long after Puritanism gave way to new and alien modes of thought. (118)

Bercovitch then traces Mather’s influence through Thoreau, Whitman, Emerson and Fuller—demonstrating how flexible Mather’s metaphors became in the American mind.

For Bercovitch, Cotton Mather is hinting at an American identity in *Wonders* and “A Midnight Cry,” but fully illuminates that vision in *Magnalia*. Bercovitch explains how

The *Magnalia*, says Mather, describing as it does the colonial venture from its pristine origins to the last conflict with the Antichrist, is “an history to anticipate the state of the New Jerusalem.” As such it integrates the rhetoric of the New England jeremiad with the apocalyptic thrust of Protestant ecclesiastical history, and so attempts—what the *Aeneid* did for Rome—to establish an inviolable corporate identity for America. (138)

It is therefore in *Magnalia* that Bercovitch sees the kernel of Revolution and American expansionism, sees his influence on such diverse writers as Franklin, Edwards, Whitman, and Emerson, and demonstrates how Mather’s view of colonial New England’s ecclesiastical history becomes the myth of American identity.

While Bercovitch sees intentional myth-making and national identity-shaping in Cotton Mather’s literary use of typology and metaphor, Robert Middlekauff views the typology as leftovers from the beliefs of Cotton’s father, Increase Mather. Middlekauff asserts



that “Typology remained for him a rhetorical device, not an instrument to be used in the analysis of history” (211). Middlekauff rejects the view that Mather’s “rhetorical device[s]” are central and instead focuses on the growth and change of Cotton Mather’s understanding of New England’s place in the world, historically, through his involvement in secular politics and church policy-making. In fact, this is where Middlekauff sees Mather as an innovator and a reformer of the original Puritan vision. The effects of the Toleration Act (1689) and the new charter (1691) were noticeable—forcing Mather to consider a revised path for American Congregationalists.

According to Middlekauff,

In thinking about New England’s purposes, Cotton Mather did not prove to be a conservative, yearning only for the good old days of unchallenged Congregationalism. He recognized that the political circumstances created by the Revolutionary settlement voided the policy of intolerance which his father, following the lead of the founders, espoused. In time, as he came to believe that the unity in the essentials of religion did not lie in the forms of Church organization, he exploited the toleration that the Crown had forced on his country in 1691 to work out a fresh understanding of the meaning of New England. (213)

In other words, from Middlekauff’s perspective, Mather wrote and preached to “creatively” reconcile the Puritan worldview with the real world that was intruding on them so that their unique identity as a special people was preserved, nothing more. But Middlekauff is still explaining how Mather’s identity as an Englishman is shifting. He does not take the next step towards an American national identity, which Mather was negotiating as he wrote *Wonders*.

Middlekauff does agree with Jones, Bercovitch, and (as we shall see) Silverman that at least one of the major turning points in Mather's thinking occurred as he participated in the removal of royal governor Andros (1689) through the 1690's. As early as 1692, Middlekauff quotes Mather's use of political language in his sermons, referring to "the Rights of Englishmen" and reminding us that

Mather's invocation of the rights of Englishmen and his espousal of toleration have been interpreted as signifying a momentous shift in the New England mind. This view holds that he and others now recognized the centrality of the State and that he almost, in spite of himself, testified to its prominence [through various publications and actions]. In these actions he has been pictured marching down the road toward secularization in lockstep with the merchants and the "moderates." (214)

But despite many phrases that seem to invoke the spirit of the next century (such as "A man has a Right unto his Life, his Estate, his Liberty, and his Family" [215]), Middlekauff believes that this assertion of a move toward secularization is a leap that should not be made—"Cotton Mather may have touched that road at several times in his life, but only to cross it while pursuing his own purposes" (214). This rings true to Mather's personality, for his focus was always on maintaining unity and preserving orthodoxy, even as he sought to wrestle reality into harmony with his worldview. Middlekauff is cautious about reading into Mather modern views of the historical march of American ideals and identity.

On the other hand, in accordance with nearly every Mather critic, Middlekauff foregrounds Cotton Mather's millennial expectations as the lens through which he is viewing actual history. He describes Mather's view succinctly: "In New England the task of the people in covenant with God was to preserve the Church until justice and

mercy arrived with the Second Coming of Christ. Cotton Mather retained his faith in this broad view of New England history until late in his life” (212). Middlekauff departs from other scholars in more strongly stating that Mather, himself, lost faith in the vision of New England as God’s territory by the end of his life (210, 213-216). Middlekauff explains his own shift in thinking as a result of his study of the three generations of Mathers (Richard, Increase, and Cotton), stating

Puritanism in New England changed in rather different ways than I had believed—that Puritan mission was defined more by the second generation in America than the first, that religious psychology and covenant preaching were more ‘affective’ than has been suspected and that they helped Puritan intellectuals use ‘reason’ and the new science in the development of a theory of religious experience and eschatology which were anything but accommodations to or rationalizations of the existing order of things early in the eighteenth century. There was, in fact, in the Mathers’ thought and feeling much that was creative... they succeeded at times in transcending the limits of the emerging culture of their time.... Cotton Mather went farther along this road than his father and grandfather (viii-ix).

Cotton Mather helped to define his church and his colony, in the context of the rapidly changing world. But, asserts Middlekauff, that is all he did. Thus, even though he views Mather as a creative reinventor of the Puritan mission, he does not see Cotton Mather as a visionary of the future America.

On the other end of the critical spectrum sits Kenneth Silverman, whose *life and times of Cotton Mather* is one of the most recent biographies of Mather. Silverman sees the seeds of the shift from theocracy and unity to democracy and individualism in Cotton Mather’s early political involvement with the ousting of the royal governor Andros, just after news of the Glorious Revolution reached New England. He asserts that Cotton

Mather was the most likely author (still unknown and debated) of the “Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston and the Country Adjacent,” read publicly on April 18, 1689 and explains how the “Declaration marks a secular drift in New England political thought from the theological and providential treatment of affairs to constitutional and legal ones, and from a communal conception of the rights belonging to God’s Chosen People to a conception of the rights of Englishmen” (70)—even suggesting it may have been a model for American revolutionary documents nearly one hundred years later. Silverman’s argument is fascinating, but predicated as it is on an unproven assumption of authorship, it remains merely speculative. Silverman doesn’t really see *Wonders* as politically significant in the same way, and he does not greatly focus on its historical import. Silverman’s focus is on the events of 1689.

While other contemporary accounts from Mather’s generation seem to agree that 29 year-old Cotton Mather was involved, some are more adamant about his leadership role in the removal of one governor and the establishment of another (retired governor Simon Bradstreet). Opponents wrote of Mather as “the young pope” and one royal colonial council member, Edward Randolph “wrote to London complaining that ‘young Mr. Mather’ and ‘others of the gang’ continued to promote anti-monarchical principles” (74)—Cotton Mather’s diaries are missing from this time period and he never outright takes credit for the writing of the document. However much involved Mather was, this highly political incident in Boston pushed him into wider public view, and gave him a taste for political action. Silverman points to the events of 1689 (which nearly became a revolution—some called for breaking away from England at that time)

as the pivot point in Mather's life, leading to his more tolerant, pluralistic views at the end of his ministerial and literary career. This is the earliest document that has been held up as demonstrating the eventual shift in communal thought, and while Silverman makes a strong case for Mather's involvement in its creation, ultimately "[a]ll that can confidently be said is that Cotton Mather enthusiastically approved of the Declaration" (70). Cotton Mather's next clear involvement in politics, outside the pulpit, came just three years later, when he published *Wonders of the Invisible World*. I assert it is in this book, known to be authored by Mather, that we can trace his first major intellectual struggle to bring Old World values and New World politics into accord by refashioning the colonial identity into a distinct and special American nation.

Mather's imaginative re-envisioning of America became its subtly controlling metaphor—the shining city, a New Jerusalem of the individual mind and soul, rather than the corporate body—that allowed American exceptionalism to flourish through the lens of a more secularized, but still sacred-mythic city on the hill. It is this lens, borrowed by Winthrop from the Sermon on the Mount to describe the particular mission of a particular people in the wilderness of colonial America, that Mather developed into a trope flexible enough to become the self-sustaining vision of America at large.

## Chapter 2 Mather: American Janus

I suggest this new thing—the identity of the New World America as separate from England and Europe—is first hinted at in Mather’s *Wonders*. I am not arguing that Mather intended to change the beliefs of his fathers or that he was forced to cede his beliefs to reality, but that as Cotton Mather defended his beliefs and argued against those he saw as heretical, his wide-ranging use of any available means of persuasion revealed new logical branches of thought that shaped a separate American identity and helped seed American individualism, even though he, himself, was not seeking change, but continuity. He achieved a different continuity than the one he sought. This is both his failure and his enduring success.

As he navigated through the pitfalls of a changing world and a communal identity crisis, his arguments lost continuity. Thus Cotton Mather’s *The Wonders of the Invisible World* appears internally inconsistent. Seeking to address multiple audiences and multiple issues, he moves back and forth between concern for the New England colony and his worries about the opinions of the British authorities. He shifts between a defense of the governance of God and a defense of the secular government. Along the way he attacks, head on, several of the divisive issues that were inflaming the community in an effort to redirect the growing secular pluralism and proto-democratic reaction to Puritan authority.

In brief, Mather is calling on the community to be righteous and support righteous government, more than he is explaining a devastating local event. Cotton Mather sought to narrow a spiritual gap opened by the devil and sin, and instead he widened the socio-political gap, giving the people a focal point for their reaction against rapid and terrifying change. Instead of uniting people *for* the Puritan way, his book united them *against* the Puritan authority structure he was supporting. Mather's book attempts and fails to resolve the philosophical strain emerging from the Puritan way. Therefore, Mather's 1692 book sits, Janus-like, astride the philosophical identity faultline of the Old World past and the New World future. Seeking to preserve the ways of the past, he paves the way for a different future.

Thus, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* displays not a forward momentum of intellectual change, nor even a gradual progression in thinking, but an uneven, sometimes confusing movement back and forth between different topics and audiences. These shifts, which I will now address, show Mather's personal struggle with the cognitive dissonance caused by the changing socio-political landscape of his community. *Wonders* may have begun as an explanation of the Witch Trials, along with a discourse and an exhortation on recognizing and avoiding the snares of the devil, but it became a political document, written at least in part to re-legitimize the authority of the clergy and the civil government while reuniting the community under the us-versus-them trope of the city on the hill he borrowed from Winthrop.

In the end, *Wonders* is a muddled compilation of incomplete ideological negotiations—the awkward beginning of a new, thoroughly American mindset. Mather’s struggle to unify the community is resolved philosophically in his recasting of American history as a grand story of redemption through a special people. This idea began with his forefathers and the blending of New England’s sacred and secular history into the trope of the city on the hill. Mather still saw that story ending with the return of Christ and the revealing of the elect, but his version is more enlightened, forward-looking, and more American than that of John Winthrop and John Cotton. Over time, Americans retained the idea of a special people redeeming the world through their example, but lost the millennial overtones. Cotton Mather’s work, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* reveals the conflicted beginnings of that process.

#### Mather’s Audience(s)

In the various essays, sermons, and narratives Cotton Mather included, different audiences are addressed for different purposes. The diffusing of audiences reveals some of the underlying communal controversies Mather was trying to mend. Based on his title page (see Figure 1), it appears Mather intended to write to and for the New England community enmeshed in the emotional turmoil of witchcraft accusations. “The Author’s Defence” and “Enchantments Encountered” (and, to a lesser degree, “A Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World”), however, are split between the several audiences apparently vying for Mather’s attention. In addition to his local (shifting) New England readership, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* addresses an audience of concerned



British leaders, as Mather perceived them, hearing about social and political unrest from the other side of an ocean, and, in general, a potentially critical, but interested worldwide readership.

This instability in audience is indicative not only of Mather's internal struggle to determine the primary readership of his work, but also of the external struggles in the community that Mather was seeking to reconcile. The Salem Witch Trials he was trying to explain were a product, in part, of emerging communal identity crises in New England.

Mather's intended audience ought to be clearly delineated in the "Author's Defence"—a summative document generally written just before publication. (We can determine that the "Defence" was not written any earlier than mid-October, since Mather makes reference to Lt. Governor Stoughton's letter in his Defence, which was not written until at least the 12<sup>th</sup> of October [Burr 206].) But Mather does not consistently address a single audience. Mather's pronouns and use of locale-specific examples in the "Author's Defence" demonstrate his shifting audience focal point and the corresponding identity shift that was emerging in his community.

Rather than providing a unified summary statement in the "Author's Defence," Mather specifically references one audience and implies several more. At first, Mather assumes a personal relationship with his readers. Mather does not address the reader or specify an audience, but instead begins in a familiar, conversational tone ("Tis, as I

remember...”), as if he were in the midst of a private chat, about a man who was tormented by spirits in return for praying for another man beset with evil spirits. Mather then expresses his expectation that he, too, will experience “no few or small Buffetings from Evil Spirits, for the Endeavors wherewith I am now going to encounter them.” The tone is that of a man who is speaking with acquaintances that have the ability to observe and affect the author’s life. The way he discusses behaviors in the colonies assumes the reader, too, is seeing “every Day” the “unaccountable Frowardness, Asperity, Untreatableness, and Inconsistency of many Persons.” Therefore his first implied audience is the local community who, with him, is experiencing these events firsthand or is at least hearing about them locally. As I trace the shifting of American identity in his text, this audience is of primary importance, because it is in the local community actions, and reactions, that an identity shift is taking place. Mather’s textual confusion reflects the uncertainty of his community, even as he seeks to relieve that tension.

Continuing in the “Author’s Defence,” Cotton Mather’s lament that “no abler hand” is writing about the witch trials, while a veiled criticism of his fellow ministers also suggests a local readership. Although Mather was an intelligent and influential member of the clergy, he was one of the youngest clergymen in Boston who had just taken over the leadership of the First (North) Boston Church from his father, Increase Mather. This would not matter to a broader audience, but Mather was always hyperaware of communal perceptions as he struggled to move out of the shadow of his famous father and grandfathers. Mather’s seemingly humble comment is an attempt to shore up his authority and forestall any criticisms of his undertaking. Cotton Mather sees himself as

stepping into the breach of information to restore the community and the communal reputation.

He is clearly aware of a broader and perhaps more elevated audience, however, in his reference to “send[ing] abroad a Book.” That “abroad” specifically means England is implied by his later reference to having “more, or however, more considerable Friends” in another country “a Thousand Leagues off” at which his book is “aimed.” The fact that Mather knew the book would be published in London, as well as in Boston, that same year backs up these assumptions about his intended audience(s). Mather was also aware that his book, accompanied by a letter from the governor on its trip to London, would be read by members of Parliament and maybe even the king. He makes brief reference to this potential audience while defending his choice to write about witchcraft, a “Theme [that] has sometimes been counted not unworthy the Pen, even of a King”. Mather’s secondary audience is the British authorities and (potentially) the Crown.

It is interesting to note that by including the full text of Stoughton’s letter of approval in his “Defence,” Mather is acknowledging the socio-political context of his work and the potential he has to influence the community on the behalf of the authorities. This is especially important to recognize in light of the fact that Mather met with local ministers, judges and politicians as he was collecting materials and writing his book. In fact, the book was approved by the judges hearing the witch trials even before it reached the Lieutenant Governor’s hands (Burr 206). Mather may have been writing for his pastoral community and to inform the authorities in England, but he was aware of and

heavily influenced by the political complexities of New England's political infrastructure as well. The local leadership constituted a different audience—or at least an audience with different concerns than those of the general community. His awareness of this audience, a group of people he sought to be a part of, is perhaps the biggest factor in the topical instability of his book. It is for this audience, even more so than for his church brethren, that Mather emphasizes the need for strong and righteous temporal (and Divine) leadership.

Finally, Mather appeals to “all the world”—stating “I only demand the *Justice*, that others *read* it, with the same Spring wherewith I *writ* it.” Cotton Mather is aware of—and even fearful of—the power of public opinion. Having written about an inflammatory topic that is already tearing the local community apart, he recognizes the potential for his own reputation to be battered. As history has since proven, he had good reason to be concerned. But for our purposes, the fact that he is addressing a worldwide audience demonstrates Cotton Mather's recognition that his book was no longer just an explanation and exhortation to a local readership, but the official version of the Salem Witch Trials and the state of New England that would be published for “all the world” to judge.

Overall, the first two sections of Mather's book, “The Author's Defence” and “Enchantments Encountered,” both show an intense awareness of a diverse readership, while “A Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World” indicates a shifting audience, but only briefly—an emerging American focus that the rest of the book does

not generally reflect. In the first three sections, Mather's attention to his various audiences appears in his topical shifts and his allusions to (or lack thereof) figures of authority, either in New England or in England. However, in "Enchantments Encountered," the shifting audiences are most clear in his inconsistent use of pronouns. We will address the audience shifts here, and address topical shifts thereafter.

Mather begins "Enchantments" by referring to New Englanders in the third person—"the People there"—as if he were not one of them. This seems to suggest that Mather's concept of his primary audience had originally been overseas, in England. This is consistent with an official request from the Lt. Governor for Mather to write an account of the witch trials (a "request" Mather mentions three times in the course of his book). This is contradictory to his title page (as we will see), however, which focuses entirely on the local community. Nevertheless, twenty people had already been executed in the colony; an explanation to Parliament and the King was required. In part, Mather was being asked to justify those deaths so the local authorities could secure their tenuous positions with the English Parliament and the King.

In "Section I" of "Enchantments Encountered," we see the most rapid and confusing shifts in audience focal point. Considering just the middle portion of "Section I,"

Mather shifts audiences six times in a single page of text:

English perspective
------------------------

That the World will do *New-England* a great piece of Injustice, if it acknowledge not a measure of Religion, Loyalty, Honesty, and Industry, in the People there, beyond what is to be found with any other People for the Number of them. When I did a few years ago, publish a Book, which mentioned a few memorable Witchcrafts,

Colonial perspective	committed <u>in this country</u> ; the excellent <i>Baxter</i> , graced the Second Edition of that Book with a kind Preface, wherein he sees cause to say, <i>If any are Scandalized, that New –England, a place of as serious Piety, as any I can hear of, under Heaven, should be troubled so much with Witches; I think, ‘tis no wonder: Where will the Devil show most Malice, but where he is hated, and hateth most: And I hope, the Country will still deserve and answer the Charity so expressed by that Reverend Man of God. Whosoever travels over this Wilderness will see it richly bespangled with Evangelical Churches....with whom yet the Names of Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or Antipædobaptist, are swallowed up in that of Christian;...And a famous Person returning hence, could in a Sermon before Parliament, profess, I have now been seven Years in a Country, where I never Saw one Man drunk, or heard one Oath sworn, or beheld one Beggar in the Streets all the while. Such great Persons as Budæus, and others, who mistook Sir Thomas Moor’s UTOPIA, for a Country really existent, and stirre’d up some Divines charitably to undertake a Voyage thither, might now have certainly found a Truth in their Mistake; New—England was a true Utopia. But, alas, the Children and Servants of those old Planters must needs afford many, degenerate Plants, and there is now risen up a Number of People, otherwise inclined that our Joshua’s, and the Elders that out-liv’d them.</i>
English perspective	
Colonial perspective	
English perspective	
Colonial perspective	

Having begun “Enchantments Encountered” with the perspective of a loyal Englishmen reporting “home” to England from abroad, halfway through the long introductory paragraph Mather switches his tone and briefly addresses the audience as “we” and “our.” He quickly bounces back to an outsider’s viewpoint and tone, quoting a British minister’s sermon to Parliament as if he were there in England rather than in America and then just as quickly returns to the use of “we” and “our” as he laments the current troubles faced by New Englanders.

Then he gets even more personal, towards the end of “Section II,” in a kind of aside (“at least *I* know not”)—a rhetorical move he utilizes for the rest of the essay as he moves back and forth between the communal “we” and the personal “I,” not returning to the

more distant “English” perspective for the rest of the essay. The shifts in audience are rapid and frequent. Not only does Mather address two distinct audiences, but he personally identifies with first one audience, and then the other. There is no clear signaling of these switches, nor any clear rhetorical purpose for the inconsistency. “Section IV” transitions smoothly from a brief description of the Salem witchcraft troubles to an assertion that this is not “all the Plot which the Devil is managing.” Other community members are beginning to loudly suggest this in private, in public debates, and increasingly in print. However while other people are suggesting the devil’s true plot (very few seem to believe the devil is not involved) is to turn the community against itself and thereby destroy them, Mather suggests instead that the devil’s real target is “that Happy Settlement of Government, wherewith Almighty God has graciously enclined Their Majesties to favour us.”

Here Mather’s split focus on diverse audiences becomes more pronounced and problematic. It is tenuous to call the current colonial government, newly legitimized by a renewed charter and less independent than their former charter, a “Happy Settlement,” since it has been anything but. Clearly Mather writes to reassure the English crown of the stability of the colony more than he believes he can convince his community that their government is happy and settled. Mather’s split focus on his various audiences moves his focus from communal restoration and explanation to a much more politically motivated emphasis on strong, stable government. Mather seeks to further restore authority to the appropriate realms, with God granting authority to “Their Majesties” and so on in a proper chain of authority.

Having helped to overthrow royally appointed Governor Andros in 1689, Mather's appeals to his community to respect the current royally appointed governor and the judiciary system probably had less weight. Granted, Mather helped to oust the administration that had been imposed by a now deposed king, but where Mather saw issues of legitimacy, his audience may only have seen hypocrisy. Mather was willing to support the community's call for the overthrow of a government when he thought it was necessary, but it appears he wasn't willing to listen to those same crowds when his friends were in power.

Mather continues to portray the New England government in this same deferential tone. He describes the governor, lieutenant governor, and "Councillours" (judges) using terms such as "loyal" and "eminent" and describes their actions in terms of "fidelity," "service," and being "admirably accomplished." This fawning praise of the much beleaguered Massachusetts government may have been aimed more at reassuring the potential royal audience than at his fellow community members, but his tone and emphasis imply that the New England audience needs reminding of who has the authority (not the general populace who are questioning the proceedings of the courts). In emphasizing the legitimacy and authority of the judges and rulers overseeing the unpopular witch trials, Mather failed to heal the breach between that local Puritan leadership and the increasingly independent citizenry.

Thus Mather, in "Enchantments Encountered," represents the identity struggle emerging between the colony's Old World past and its New World future. Not only did Mather



move between an intimate, personal identification with the community and personal support of the local leadership, but he also vacillated between conflicting national loyalties: British and colonial American. Particularly, these shifts in Mather's identification between a distinctly British perspective and a distinctly colonial perspective hint at the struggle to define the communal identity and Mather's personal struggle to define his own loyalties. Are they primarily British subjects or are they primarily a people apart, in America? He even calls the colonies an "*American* Desart" once in his recitation of the faith of the first generation Puritans, but then staunchly returns to the loyal (British) colonist perspective immediately thereafter. The colonial Puritans had been emphasizing their separation from other nations for two generations already, as that example city on the hill, yet they had staunchly continued to refer to themselves as Englishmen. Still, Mather, at this point, continues to call himself an Englishman.

But there are textual moments where he is distinctly a New Englander—even an American—separate from English rule. It is in his first sermon section, "A Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World," that this separation Mather has been hinting at and struggling with first becomes visible. This is the first indication of the trend other scholars have traced in his later writings.

While the "Author's Defence" indicates split audiences and the essay, "Enchantments Encountered," displays confused loyalties as Mather addresses those divergent audiences, the first sermon, "A Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World"

actually hints at an incomplete shifting of loyalties towards a distinctly American identity. Although “A Discourse” was first given from the pulpit (“UTTERED (IN PART) ON AUG. 4, 1692”), Mather edited portions and added to the sermon before including it in his book. His phrasing in his introduction, “I have now **Published** a most awful and solemn Warning for our selves at this day” indicates he recognized that this sermon would be read by a broader audience than his North Boston congregation (emphasis mine). However, he is still addressing “our selves”—not a general readership, but a local colonial audience. There are no other hints in “A Discourse” that Mather might be aware of a changing audience until the last (Third) “Conjecture” at the end of this lengthy sermon/essay. This final section of “A Discourse” is crucial to understanding how Mather represents the reforming of colonial identity into that of a separate American identity.

The “Third Conjecture” abruptly shifts from how the devil may be behind all the physical tribulations the colonists are experiencing (wars, crop failures, disease, political enemies, fires, earthquakes—it does sound like an apocalyptic list) to four “probable prognostications” that focus on “*America’s* Fate.” Although making the distinction, he still entwines the fates of both nations, suggesting that “as it fares with *Old England*, so it will be most likely to fare with *New-England*.” Having used the term New England so far throughout, and having avoided (in this sermon) all mention of colonial America, monarchy or British rule, Mather essentially prophesies about the future of the colonies in terms of a distinct America—using the national term “America” five times in three paragraphs.

He is very clear, too, in distinguishing between the colonies of New England, and the greater continent of America, stating: “*America’s* Fate surely must at the long run include *New –Englands* in it.” Mather specifically separates the colonial identity from that of England by referring to the colonies as the “poor *American* daughter” of England, then rushing to reconnect the fate of both, asserting “as long as God shall bless the English Nation, with Rulers that shall encourage *Piety, Honesty, Industry*, in their Subjects, and that shall cast a Benign Aspect upon the Interests of our Glorious Gospel, *Abroad* as well as at *Home*, so long, *New-England* will at least keep its head above water.” Yet even as Mather connects New England’s spiritual fate to that of England’s, he is doing so in terms of “we” (New England/America) and then shifting to “home” (England) and “Abroad” (New England). His pronouns continue to reveal the emerging identity crisis that will culminate in a revolution.

Not only is Mather adding an English audience at the end of his New England-focused sermon, but he reveals his own conflicted identity as both an Englishman and an American. Here is the pivotal textual shift in Mather’s awareness of himself and his community that resolves itself only in his later writings when he will finally characterize himself as an American. Still, this shift only occurs (abruptly) in the last five paragraphs of a lengthy sermon. This brief section is the clearest evidence that Mather’s mindset (and the mindset of his local readership) is becoming disconnected from their historical English identity.

Having made a bold step in the direction of American identity (especially considering Mather's awareness of his potential British audience), Mather narrows his focus for the remainder of his book, generally addressing either his congregants or the general New England community for the rest of his book.

Still considering Mather's audiences, the sermon portions of *Wonders* most closely follow Mather's original concept for his book and are the most internally consistent. "A Discourse on Wonders," "A Necessary and Hortatory Address," and "The Devil Discovered" deal with defining the devil's attack on the New England elect as well as explaining how to protect their individual salvation and maintain communal unity. These three sermons are focused on the New England Puritan audience as Mather insists in "A Discourse on Wonders" that "Reformation is at this time our only Preservation." He is calling the community of believers to regeneration. As we saw, "A Discourse" veers into an American identity, but only briefly.

In all three sermons, Mather's pronoun usage still reflects a personal relationship with his audience. Mather utilizes "I," "we," "us," and "our" throughout his address in all three sermons, stating "We are continually surrounded with swarms of those Devils" (from "A Discourse") so "Let us make a good and right use of the prodigious *descent* which the *Devil* in *Great Wrath* is at this day making upon our Land" (from "A Necessary and Hortatory Address") and also "for us to guard against the *Wiles* of the *Wicked One*, is one of the greatest cares, with which our God ha's charged us" (from "The Devil Discovered"). In all three sermons, Mather engages his audience in an "us

versus them” rhetorical situation (a common Puritan rhetorical move) where the Puritan community is the persecuted “us” and “them” is the persecuting devil (or, sometimes, the slandering outside world). This reinforces his connection to the audience, and also reminds the community of their position as the city on the hill—they must not fail because the world is watching their example of Christian living.

Still focused on the spiritual, “A Necessary and Hortatory Address To A Country Now Extraordinarily Alarum’d” yet reveals more awareness of the community’s need for answers to their physical, temporal concerns. Unlike the other two sermons, which show a marked absence of communal conflict indicators, signs of public unrest arise in “A Necessary and Hortatory Address.” Also he begins to show an increased awareness of the potential for a wider New England readership. Even the title indicates a broadening of the audience from congregation to the country at large—addressing “A Country.” This may not be as significant as it appears, since Cotton Mather delivered this sermon on a day of communal fasting (“We are engaged in a Fast this day”) to learn God’s will about the ongoing trials, but this does indicate a shift to a wider public forum than his local congregation. If it is intentional, it is one more emerging hint of an American mindset, in the midst of colonial unrest. Still, Mather’s assertions and advice are surrounded by phrases such as “Let us” and “I may tell you.” By including himself as a member of the community he addresses, he maintains a tighter local focus.

In “The Devil Discovered,” Mather returns his focus to the spiritual condition of the local community—the original purpose of his book (as I will prove shortly, from his

title page). Guiding the people to avoid the devil's temptations is the sole focus of "how to spend one Hour in Raising a most Effectual and Profitable *Breast-work*, against the inroads of this Enemy." There is no indication of a split audience or even an awareness of any audience beyond his community. Since "The Devil Discovered" is basically a sermon transcript, it makes sense that the audience remains narrowly localized. The remainder of the book, after "The Devil Discovered," is material copied from other sources.

Mather added the short sections "In Sweedenland," "Matter Omitted in the Trials", "A Further Account of the Tryals" by Deodat Lawson, "Remarks of Things More Than Ordinary About the Afflicted Persons" recorded from a conversation with Edward Putnam (Ann Putnam's father) and "Remarks Concerning the Accused," as well as the last sermon, "The Devil Discovered," after submitting his manuscript to the judges and the lieutenant governor in October. However, other than the short paragraph "Matter Omitted in the Trials"—which is more of a puff for his father's book *Cases of Conscience* than anything else—the material all appears to be from events earlier in the year. The audience is rarely addressed in these sections, as Mather utilizes a more distant tone, occasionally addressing the "Reader" specifically, but generally maintaining a third person point of view. These sections function more as appendices to the core of sermons and essays that form Mather's book.

In summary, "The Author's Defence" (published at the beginning of *The Wonders of the Invisible World* after the first edition in Boston and certainly written last) shifts back

and forth awkwardly between various audiences. “Enchantments Encountered” is little better. Then “A Discourse on the Wonders” only shifts once (though significantly), while “A Necessary and Hortatory Address” merely suggests a broader communal audience. The “Tryal transcripts, “Matchless Curiosities,” and other “related” witchcraft narratives (including “In Sweedenland”) have little commentary, primarily having been transcribed verbatim. As I mentioned, “The Devil Discovered” appears to have no general or split readership in view at all. There are some significant hints in his text that Mather’s understanding of the community was becoming more markedly American and less English, but the unevenness of his addresses to various audiences suggests he is still struggling to reconcile his loyalties. Philosophically, Mather clings to the unifying principle of a God-centered world and a community whose purpose continues to be that of an exemplary city on the hill, albeit politically as well as religiously.

Just as Mather’s target audience was sometimes hard to pin down, his topical focus is very uneven. In fact, this may be his larger problem in the text, since his tendency to write in topical loops (circling back to an idea multiple times), to digress on tangential topics, and to expound at length on seemingly minor points occurs in all his essays and sermons, even those that are generally topically focused and have a single audience. Having established the fact that Mather struggled to settle on a his primary audience—swinging between reassuring English heads of state, supporting local civil and religious authorities, and providing a voice of reason to his congregation and community, as well as shifting from an English perspective to an American (or at least a New English) one—we see that he also struggles organizationally to stay on point. Because he is

aware of the many facets of the witch trials controversy and of the communal identity crisis, he tries to address them all. This limits the success of his arguments, even when they are logical and well-reasoned. Mather's text simply moves in too many directions at once. His personal struggle to navigate through the conflicting ideals of his generation affected his text and reflected the struggling, changing community.

### A Tale of Two Title Pages

These very embryonic beginnings of the shift from theocratic hierarchy to a proto-democracy and from loyal colonial Englishman to American in his book are not always obvious and sometimes need contextual explanations to become clear. While the shifting audiences were fairly easy to trace, the importance of Mather's topical digressions as evidence for a changing Puritan worldview is less clear. More than the surface topic of narrating the Witch Trials, the central context of Mather's text is the ongoing political maneuvering of the Massachusetts Bay Colony Puritans to maintain religious autonomy and homogeny in the face of a community seeking more personal autonomy; the text is split by these factors into topical disarray.

The next textual clue we must follow to understand the split purposes of Mather's book is the title page. *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, as it was published in October 1692 (Boston) and December/January 1693 (London), was not exactly the book that Cotton Mather had intended for it to be. Due to the rapid publication and Mather's limitations in materials, as well as his lack of firsthand knowledge of the Trials, he was

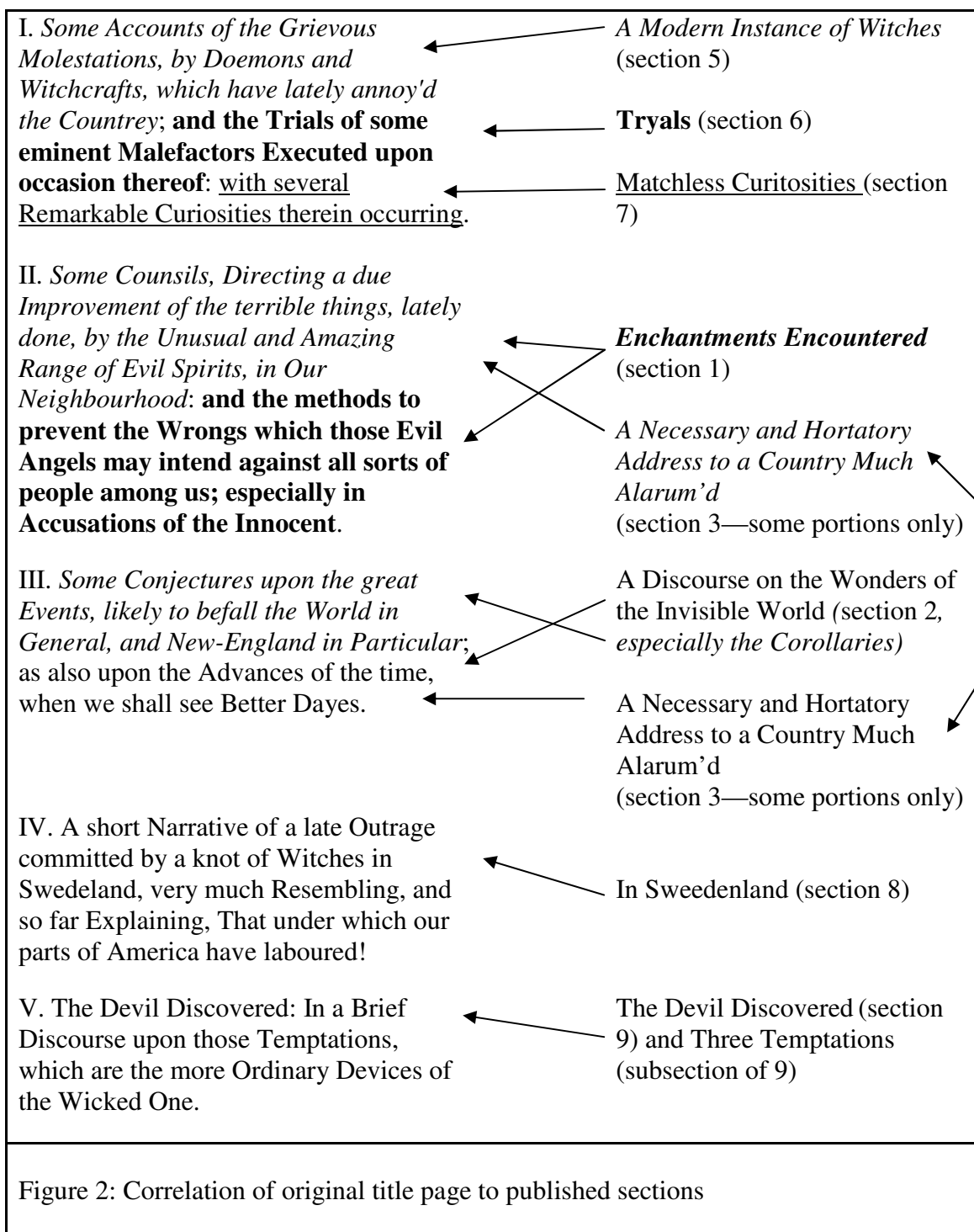


writing under less than ideal conditions. Fortunately, the title page of the book as Cotton Mather originally conceived it was preserved and printed with his book. There is no copy, manuscript or otherwise, that reflects the order and content as it is listed in Cotton Mather's title page (see Figure 1).

Comparing the actual (published) section titles and order of *The Wonders of the Invisible World* with the preceding title page, it becomes glaringly apparent that they don't match up (see Figure 2). There are sections that appear to overlap or to represent portions of the original title page order, but there are significant differences. The shifting of Mather's audiences, which I have already traced, accounts for some of the changes. However, the changes also reflect the disorganization and unfocused nature of Mather's discourse which will be the focus of the remainder of this paper. His topical disarray is another indicator of the failure of his intent to reunite the community and suggests that his inability to do so was because of the shifting of both his own identity and the general communal withdrawal from the Old World model colonial Puritanism began under.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Title page</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE WONDERS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD</b></p> <p>The Wonders of the Invisible World. Observations As well Historical as Theological, upon the Nature, the Number, and the Operations of the Devils. Accompany'd with</p> <p>I. Some Accounts of the Grievous Molestations, by Doemons and Witchcrafts, which have lately annoy'd the Countrey; and the Trials of some eminent Malefactors Executed upon occasion thereof: with several Remarkable Curiosities therein occurring.</p> <p>II. Some Counsils, Directing a due Improvement of the terrible things, lately done, by the Unusual and Amazing Range of Evil Spirits, in Our Neighbourhood: and the methods to prevent the Wrongs which those Evil Angels may intend against all sorts of people among us; especially in Accusations of the Innocent.</p> <p>III. Some Conjectures upon the great Events, likely to befall the World in General, and New- England in Particular; as also upon the Advances of the time, when we shall see Better Dayes.</p> <p>IV. A short Narrative of a late Outrage committed by a knot of Witches in Swedeland, very much Resembling, and so far Explaining, That under which our parts of America have laboured!</p> <p>V. The Devil Discovered: In a Brief Discourse upon those Temptations, which are the more Ordinary Devices of the Wicked One.</p> <p>By Cotton Mather. Boston, Printed, by Benjamin Harris for Sam. Phillips 1693. Published by the Special Command of His Excellency, the Governour of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England.</p>	<p>The book, as published in 1692, had the following order:</p> <p><b>Original Title page</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>[included but not accurate]</i></span> Enchantments Encountered <span style="float: right;"><i>[essay]</i></span> A Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World <span style="float: right;"><i>[revised sermon]</i></span></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Abstracts A Necessary and Hortatory Address to a Country Much Alarum'd <span style="float: right;"><i>[sermon]</i></span> A Gentleman of Boston <span style="float: right;"><i>[Apparition story]</i></span> A Modern Instance of Witches <span style="float: right;"><i>[Summary of Rev. Hale's 1682 account]</i></span> Tryals <span style="float: right;"><i>[Five cases from the Salem Witch Trials]</i></span> Matchless Curitosities <span style="float: right;"><i>[Lessons from the witchcraft outbreak]</i></span> In Sweedenland <span style="float: right;"><i>[Summary of earlier witchcraft incident]</i></span> The Devil Discovered <span style="float: right;"><i>[sermon]</i></span></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Three Temptations A Further Account of the Tryals <span style="float: right;"><i>[by Deodat Lawson]</i></span> An Anonymous Letter to London <span style="float: right;"><i>[regarding the Salem Witch Trials]</i></span> Author's Defence <span style="float: right;"><i>[Mather's letter to his readers]</i></span></p>
<p>Figure 1: Side-by-side view of original title page versus actual published order of <i>Wonders of the Invisible World</i></p>	

Based on the actual content of Mather's book, the most likely match up of his title page to his actual book sections would be:



Notice, in Figure 2, that some sections overlap (and there is actually some topical overlap for the intended sections II and III in each of sections 1 (“Enchantments”), 2 (“A Discourse”), 3 (“A Necessary and Hortatory Address”), and 9 (“The Devil Discovered”). On the other hand, there are several sections that do not seem to be a part of Mather’s original vision at all (“A Gentleman of Boston,” “A Further Account of the Tryals,” and “An Anonymous Letter to London”). It was his habit to add material from other projects or writers to his current writing if it seemed relevant to him at the time. This appears to have been the case in *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, a fact that contributed to the disjointed nature of the published book.

The original (unpublished) ordering represented by Mather’s title page is focused and functional for his intended purpose. The topics blend, one into the next, with a single thesis: how to understand the bad things that are happening in light of a good God and what to do about it. Mather is interpreting current events through the lens of a unified world, controlled by God and formed for the good of God’s people. The organization and content of his title page is consistent with the Old World Puritan communal worldview. His purpose is to guide the community at large in their response to the witchcraft accusations and trials. But Mather did not publish this version. Looking at how the title page compares to the actual text reveals some of the philosophical identity shifts taking place, as well as how much the political realities of Mather’s New England affected his intentions and his text.

### The Original Title Page Versus the Text

For the sake of clarity, I will follow the order of the original title page here, making comparisons to the actual text when it is pertinent to the emerging philosophical shifts.

First comes the full title: *The Wonders of the Invisible World. Observations As well Historical as Theological, upon the Nature, the Number, and the Operations of the Devils*. Mather frames his book as a semi-scientific record of his observations about the Devil. Clearly he sees himself intellectually as a rational, scientific-minded outsider, even though he has been involved in the events he is delineating. The reiterating of court records and firsthand accounts, like those of Deodat Lawson, give Mather's work the authority of a historical document, rather than the potentially emotion-laden accounts of a participant. Through the title, he appears to be purposefully distancing himself from the actual decisions surrounding the witch trials. He furthers this impression of a distant, but authoritative presenter by calling the observations "historical" and "theological" and ends his title with a reference to the real cause of all these "wonders": the devil. As a minister first, foremost, and always, Mather's concern is for the spiritual understanding and well-being of his people. His full title indicates his initial purpose.

The first section, in Mather's originally intended order, would have included "Some Accounts of the Grievous Molestations, by Doemons and Witchcrafts, which have lately annoy'd the Countrey; and the Trials of some eminent Malefactors Executed upon

occasion thereof: with several Remarkable Curiosities therein occurring.” However in “Enchantments Encountered,” the essay with which Mather’s printed book begins, only includes “some accounts” of witchcraft and briefly mentions “the trials,” as can be seen from the comparisons in Figure 1. In other words, the material intended for this section was scattered throughout the final document (and as a result it feels fragmented, rather than cohesive). Much like the community, which was cracking under the pressure of social and political distress, Cotton Mather’s discourse reflects that pressure. His book is topically disorganized—introducing a topic, veering off on a tangent, returning to the idea, concluding, and then (often) returning again to the same idea in another section. There is a distinct lack of methodical organization, overall (in each section) and especially within specific subsections.

The second (II) and third (III) sections in the title page were to represent “some counsils” and “some conjectures” on how to react to the current events and what to anticipate in the near future, as a Christian community. Again, Mather’s concern and focus were on how to frame the negative events in such a way that his congregants, and the community at large, see them as a motivation to increase zeal and right living, rather than cause for emotional and social instability. Mather wanted to calm and reinvigorate people—while defending New England as a whole against the charge of extraordinary wickedness that the witchcraft may have appeared to invite from England and other European nations. His defense is arranged in two parts: 1) the devil targets those who are more godly, not less, since he is more offended by good (sections II and V of his

intended organization) and 2) New England is not the only nation or people affected by witchcraft (section IV, the Swedish witchcraft example).

The published document represents a significant shift in emphasis. This change in order, on the surface, appears to be a function of too little time and limited access to materials, as Burr delineates in his book (206). It does not appear that Mather meant to alter his intended audience or his topics. But the published book is scattered. This disorganization reveals a communal paradigm shift occurring at that precise historical moment—they were becoming independent. They were becoming Americans. *Wonders* displays this identity shift as Mather tries (and fails) to reunite country and colony.

To sum up, based on his original title page, it appears Mather planned a book focused on detailing the events of 1692 as an object lesson in the wiles of the devil, the plan of God, and how New England could use these trials as a stepping stone to the final regeneration of their faith before the literal return of Christ. The intended purpose was the return of his congregation to their “first love” of God, an intent preserved, as we will see, in “Enchantments Encountered.” In part, Mather’s entire book stays true to this aim. The fact that the Lieutenant-Governor and Governor requested this account and approved it was at first merely an added impetus and a sign of communal approbation for the work he was already doing as a prominent Boston minister.

However, as I will demonstrate (especially in the “Author’s Defence” and “Enchantments Encountered”), the combined pressures of the official governmental

request for a defense of the trials, the feelings of governmental instability following a newly accepted but revised royal charter, shifting communal values, and the escalating emotional responses of the community to ministerial (including Mather's) involvement in the witchcraft proceedings diffused his single intention into a multi-purposed and disorganized text. Intending to help the community fight the devil's attack, Mather's focus vacillates between exposing the tactics of the devil, combating the infighting in the community, supporting the legitimacy of the local government and judiciary system, and defending the reputation of New England, as a whole, to the English crown and the world. Along the way, the seeds of American individualism peek out in little comments and asides. Some of Mather's sections, such as his sermon "The Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World," are internally consistent, topic-wise, and provide only a very few hints of the shifting perspectives Mather was seeking to reconcile, while others, such as "Enchantments Encountered," are disfigured by shifts in audience and topical disarray. This disorganization is an indicator of the pressures of the changing communal worldview Mather was seeking to bring back into accord with the Puritan way. He failed to unify the community, just as he failed to unify his own narrative.

### Topical Instability

If Mather struggled to maintain a consistent audience focal point, he struggled even more to create a cohesive argument throughout his text. In *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, the "Author's Defence" begins abruptly, and moves quickly from point to point, sometimes circling back to a prior point, with a serious lack of organization. The first



body chapter of his book, “Enchantments Encountered,” continues this trend.

Thereafter, Mather’s style and topical arrangement settle back into the more traditional jeremiadic style of his contemporaries, although, taken as a whole, the sections are still disjointed and/or circular. Ostensibly, each section represents a part of Mather’s apologia for the ongoing witch trials, but in reality the topics veer (logically) into the general tactics of the devil and (not so logically) into a prolonged defense of Mather’s own character and authority. Mather appears at cross-purposes with his own text. “The Author’s Defence” and “Enchantments Encountered” most plainly reveal the intellectual struggle Mather underwent to reconcile the evolving communal identity with the original Puritan purpose. These two sections show a considerable lack of topical unity. Thus it is from the “Defence” and “Enchantments” that the bulk of my argument about Mather’s philosophical struggle to redefine and unify the communal identity derives, while the rising American individualism is only hinted at in the “Defence” and “Enchantments” but more clearly emergent in “A Discourse” and “The Devil Discovered.”

In discussing the original title page, I’ve already begun to establish that Mather’s intention was to provide pastoral guidance to his community, regardless of the political pressure he endured. However, Cotton Mather was still struggling, personally, to make sense of the constantly moving political spheres of influence, as well as an increasing blurring of national identity. He sought to protect Puritan values and his own sense of just authority. Within the “Author’s Defence”—a letter to the reader much like a modern preface—Mather’s concerns and his shifting subject matter fall into three

categories: personal, pastoral, and political. Mather moves back and forth quickly between the personal (he will be harassed by evil spirits and evil-speaking men for writing on this topic) and the communal (people have been talking too much without sense; they need to put these experiences to good use), and the spiritual (“prodigious” things are happening). The same categories emerge in “Enchantments.” “A Discourse” acknowledges the political context briefly, as I showed, when Mather connected New England’s fate to that of her “mother,” England, but it is primarily focused on pastoral concerns. “The Devil Discovered,” too, is almost entirely pastoral in focus. Having already acknowledged Mather’s well-known concern for his pastorate, I will focus on the influence of his desire to legitimize political authority on his text, and then address his personal concerns and the hints of a concurrent emerging individualism in his community. The shifts in audience I have already addressed exacerbated these shifts in subject matter and perspective, but the textual moves themselves are also significant.

### Political Authority Re-established

#### *The Author’s Defence and Enchantments Encountered*

As I previously stated, despite the topical disarray, the arguments that emerge from the “Defence” (and “Enchantments Encountered”) increasingly emphasize submission to God as received via pastoral and political authority, rather than soothing communal conflicts or mitigating the effects of the trials. History shows us this exhortation to submit was rejected by an increasingly independent-minded citizenry. In 1689, with the overthrow of royally-appointed Governor Andros, it appeared Mather’s voice had been

(cautiously) that of the people, but his distrust of the general populace's ability to govern themselves causes him to alienate himself from the same community just three years later.

Within the "Author's Defence," we can see Mather's reluctance to acknowledge the legitimate voice and power of the people. He casts the communal disputes over the validity of the witch trials in a very negative light. In fact, Mather compares the antics of the evil spirits to the wagging tongues of the general populace "set on fire of Hell" as they express their opinions of the current witchcraft episode. He is writing in part, to restore reason and clarity to the discussion if "the Body of this People, are yet in such a Temper, as to be capable of applying their Thoughts" and to guide them to "make a Right Use of the stupendous and prodigious Things that are happening among us." But, Mather's deep distrust of murmuring crowds—first displayed in his actions surrounding the 1689 Andros affair—still comes through. His suggestion that the people may not be "capable of applying their Thoughts" rationally implies that they shouldn't decide for themselves, but should look to the leadership for guidance. Mather is no fan of democracy. He believes that legitimate authority must be maintained. Here, in the "Defence," Mather implies that the people must surrender their individual opinions to a communal consensus—to "engage [their] Minds...in such holy, pious, fruitful Improvements, as God would have to be made of his amazing Dispensations now upon us"—a God-ordained order, as explained by the ministry. This very clearly Puritan mindset is a part of Mather's worldview.

Although he seems genuine in his desire to help the community overcome the division caused by the witchcraft accusations and trials, Mather is still more concerned with questions of submission to authority than with reconciling the community, regardless of their viewpoint.

His struggle to reconcile the changing communal identity first emerges in Mather's essay, "Enchantments Encountered." Here too, Mather chooses to shore up the political authorities, as the way back to communal unity, rather than to acknowledge the potential for leaders to make mistakes and guide the community into reconciliation.

The first full section of Mather's book, "Enchantments Encountered" is an essay, and is structurally different from the sermons which follow it. Although it is still based on a scriptural passage, "Enchantments" is the least organized and least focused of all the sections of Mather's book. Whereas Mather's title-bearing sermon "Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World" begins with a traditional scriptural text introduction, "Enchantments Encountered" does not begin in the plain style, with a Biblical text, but with a multitude of references: a quoted sermon from 1637, a short praise of New England's character, a citation from the editor's preface of Mather's own book on the bewitched Godwin children, and further approbation of the multitude of churches and devout congregants where "there is no Land in the Universe more free from the debauching , and the debasing Vices of Ungodliness" yet "we are miserably degenerated from the first Love of our Predecessors." By this point he is settling loosely into the pattern of a jeremiad; he seeks to build up the strengths and good points of the

community prior to cataloging their shortcomings using a cultivation metaphor (the first generation “planted,” and many souls are “ripe for Heaven” but the present generation has “degenerate Plants”). While he is using religious language and describing a religious community of believers, Mather’s examples suggest that he is really more concerned with repairing reputations and legitimizing authority (his own and the colony’s in both cases).

Mather’s summative remarks in his introduction indicate that this “Errand of our Fathers into these Ends of the Earth” has been delayed (left unrealized) for too long and thus the devil’s witchcraft has emerged as a “Rebuke of Heaven.” This allusion to one of the most well-known jeremiads, Winthrop’s sermon “Errand into the Wilderness,” is an intentional move by Mather to reestablish a communal norm. Winthrop was a master of the metaphor and his sermons resonated with the first generation Puritans so much that his equating of the colony with the image of a city on a hill and as the “New Israel of God” were foundational to the sacred-secular history of the colony.

It should be noted that, unlike much of his other writing, Mather makes only vague scriptural references (“the first love,” “Joshua’s,” “Multitudes growing ripe,” “a chosen Generation,” etc.) until his call to action at the end of the paragraph, when he demands that the community make “right use of our Disasters: If we do not, *Remember whence we are fallen, and repent, and do the first Works*” (from Revelation 2:5, the letter to the church at Ephesus). Mather seems more intent on renewing the historical tropes set in place by Winthrop and placing himself within the authority that pattern represents,

rather than adhering to a consistent organizational pattern. However, his introduction is still grounded in a specific Biblical text. Although he did not specifically reference the entire passage, the tenor of the letter to the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) clearly informs Mather's rhetorical stance in this passage. This becomes obvious with his concluding quote, but he alludes to the scripture multiple times as he reviews how the founding colonial fathers could not bear the evils of their European contemporaries and so labored in "voluntary Exile." Now the next generation is failing to live up to the same standard, but God is giving them a chance to rectify their mistake (like the Ephesians).

All of this set up is to help reinstate a "right use of our Disasters," which was Mather's first stated purpose in his *Author's Defence*, and to explain the causes of "our Afflictions." And that "right use?"—to renew the communal commitment to God and country as a Christian nation. Mather transitions to a recital of the religious history of New England in "Section II," again a traditional element of the first section of an external covenant jeremiad: first a "proposition that people are pursued for their sins" and "a recital of afflictions and review of history" (Campbell 1).

Because it is a review of ecclesiastical history, "Section II" switches gears a bit. Mather's tone was more matter-of-fact in his introduction, whereas "Section II" evokes a sense of spiritual urgency. Mather makes clearer references to the Puritans as analogous to the Ephesian church, mixing the previous cultivation metaphor and a vast number of Biblical quotations—primarily from the book of Revelations. Borrowing

phrases from Revelations emphasizes Mather's "end of days" perspective and adds urgency to his message. The implication is that if the community does not respond appropriately to the devil's attacks and with all haste, they will suffer the wrath of God, rather than the rewards of Heaven, sooner rather than later. Certainly, the fact that the seventeenth century was coming to a close had an impact on Mather's own sense of urgency, along with the prevalent Puritan belief the end of the age of man was imminent. Mather is using emotional appeals to bring the community back to a unified worldview under proper, God-ordained authority.

This urgent tone continues, and even heightens as Mather moves from a general overview of the community's planting in the "Wilderness" to a review of specific instances of the "Devil... now making one Attempt more upon us." New England's trials are the work of the devil in response to the Christian forays in to the "Devil's territories" (the Americas). Mather even suggests that the Puritans are advancing the return of Jesus Christ by their actions. "The Devil thus Irritated" (by their presence and actions) "immediately try'd all sorts of methods to overturn this poor Plantation."

Halfway through "Section II" is the next point at which Mather switches his tone. He progresses from vague references to "troubles" and then general "witchcraft" to more specific but matter-of-fact, brief summaries of the recent "examinations & trials of accused witches." He mentions that "Twenty have Confessed," but then moves (in a rather convoluted sentence of 98 words) into a logical argument for accepting the evidence of the trials based on the close agreement, in detail and through other

observations, of the various witch confessions, over time. Rejecting the possibility that the devil can influence or control all people, righteous and unrighteous alike, Mather instead asserts that “by these Confessions ‘tis Agreed, that the Devil has made a dreadful Knot of Witches in the Country.” This “close agreement” of confessions is Mather’s main proof that the witchcraft in New England is real and not merely hysteria or superstition. Again, he is implying but not stating that the witchcraft problem is large, but has specific parameters and can be contained. He ends “Section II” abruptly, restating the devil’s purpose to root out “the Christian Religion from this Country,” with no further commentary. “Section II,” by itself, is consistent with his original purpose and conforms to the themes he explores in the three sermons he includes in his book. However, Mather did not stop here.

“Section III” begins by dealing with the potential for “Scandal” to be attached to New Englanders because of the accusations of witchcraft (circling back to one of the themes from “Section I,” the introduction to his essay). Mather’s topical center shifts (and remember, his audience shifts back and forth from his local community to England and general outsiders here as well) to a more general defense of New England:

Doubtless, the Thoughts of many will receive a great Scandal against *New-England*, from the Number of Persons that have been Accused, or Suspected, for *Witchcraft*, in the Country: But it were easie to offer many things, that may Answer and Abate the Scandal....here in *A Land of Uprightness*: Transgressors may more quickly here than elsewhere become a Prey to the Vengeance of Him, *Who has Eyes like a Flame of Fire*, and *who walks in the midst of the Golden Candlesticks*.

God, suggests Mather, allowed the affliction of His people, through the devil, for their greater good.



Nor does he want people to think New England alone is beset by the devils attentions (“Accordingly, the Kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark, Scotland, yea and England itself, as well as the Province of New England, have had their Storms of Witchcrafts breaking upon them”) but as New England is the righteous “Prodigy” of God, they have greater trials than the more lax nations of Europe. His examples of other instances of witchcraft are included as a kind of “tu quoque” attack on potential critics of New England.

This repositioning of trials and controversy as proof of God’s love and concern, rather than proof of wickedness, was one of the cornerstones of American Puritan secular /sacred history. They are still the city on the hill that Winthrop described in 1631. It also serves to reinforce the chain of authority, with God as the head. Mather jumps from this litany of witchcraft outbreaks back to the spectral evidence issue he brushed aside in “Section I” without a transition, stating “it is to be hoped” that there will be found some “who are innocent”—and that convicted witches have already confessed that some specters are representations of innocent people.

Mather finally, briefly, addresses this central “hot” topic of the witch trials—spectral evidence—but he doesn’t sound too concerned about false spectral evidence, as is the community. Instead he explains that “The Witches have not only intimated, but some of them acknowledged, That they have plotted the Representations of Innocent Persons, to cover themselves and shelter themselves in their Witchcrafts.” His focus is on rooting out the devil’s converts, rather than on (it is implied) peripheral arguments over evidence. On the other hand, he does quote from the recently published “Return of

Several Ministers” (a document he later admits to authoring, in the privacy of his Diary) that devils may represent innocent people but it is “*Rare and Extraordinary; especially when such matters come before Civil Judicature.*” The judges will know the difference between the innocent and the guilty, Mather reasserts.

Cleverly Mather reestablishes (again!) not only his own authority, since the government accepted “The Return” as official policy, but also suggests that the judges and the religious-based civil court system are generally free from mistakes regarding proofs of witchcraft. Mather categorizes the opinions in “The Return” as “expressed with so much Caution and [right] Judgment” by men who are “Eminently Cautious and Judicious.” At the same time, Mather is suggesting he is objective in his opinions, by distancing himself from “The Return” as if he were just one of many “very Pious and Learned” ministers who agreed on this subject. Mather’s logic here is tantamount to an assertion that those in authority (rightful, God-bestowed authority) determine truth for the entire community.

Mather does not excuse or justify the courts yet, but his support of their authority implies approbation. Mentioning “The Return,” which also was published in “cautious” support of the courts in their prosecution of witches furthers the reader’s sense that Mather is justifying the judges’ actions. This was in direct opposition to the prevailing attitudes of the community by this point (the summer of 1692)—and even the beliefs of some ministers, who were persecuted or fined by the courts for stating their opposition to the trials or to the use of spectral evidence in the trials. Again, Mather is so focused

on “countermining the whole plot of the devil” and ensuring they don’t “suffer a witch to live” that he doesn’t see the powerful tide of opinion moving away from his position in support of prosecuting witchcraft. What started as communal concern over the court’s apparent naïveté in accepting “proofs” of witchcraft was rapidly becoming a proof of the fallibility of the entire Puritan way. Distrust of authority and pluralism were rapidly taking hold. Mather seems to sense this, but misjudges his local audience’s foundational assumptions. He is reassuring them that the authorities know what is best, while many in the community have already decided that the civil and religious authorities are just as clueless as any common man, and perhaps more so. Mather sought to abrogate this trend but instead he aggravated it.

Mather further alienates his local audience by asking:

Who can certainly say, what other Degrees or Methods of sinning, besides that of a *Diabolical Compact*, may give the Devils advantage to act in the Shape of them that have miscarried? Besides what may happen for a while, to try the *Patience* of the Vertuous. May not some that have been ready upon feeble grounds uncharitably to Censure and Reproach other people, be punished for it by *Spectres* for a while exposing them to Censure and Reproach?

After clearly stating that innocent people will be represented by specters only rarely and in extreme cases, in the same paragraph, he has the temerity to suggest that those “innocents” aren’t so innocent or “Vertuous” as they appear, perhaps being too quick to speak or think “uncharitably” of their neighbors and so God might be testing them or punishing them for their lack of Christian love (an allusion back to Revelation 2 and to I Cor. 13, which he more explicitly covers in “Section V”). This undoes all the good done by his prudent words about spectral evidence in “Section I” and earlier in “Section III.”

If Mather had maintained his cautionary tone, he may have indeed calmed the verbal storm of negative opinion stirred up by the trials, but his double-minded approach to spectral evidence instead increased the furor.

And he isn't done yet—moving next to explain how fortunetellers are a sort of minor witch whom the devil doesn't possess, but influences, and that the devil gives his followers foreknowledge so that they can predict events, before stopping himself with the caution that 'lest I should by Naming [sorceries], *Teach* them." Mather offers only one way out for these various "Impenitent" witches—"a deep and long *Repentance*." That they may be mistaken in accusing these people of witchcraft never enters into Mather's argument. He ends this section with a wish that New England will not be found "so stock'd with *Rattle Snakes*, as was imagined."

Next, having paused to obsequiously defend the government and the courts (as I showed earlier), Mather transitions to a broader theme, stating that the devil "is "exceedingly *Envy'd* unto us" and therefore he has sought to overthrow the colony, but "that which most of all Threatens us, in our present Circumstances, is the *Misunderstanding*, and so the *Animosity*, whereinto the *Witchcraft* now Raging, has Enchanted us." The REAL threat is not witchcraft, says Mather, but the bad feelings witchcraft accusations have stirred up "like a troubled sea" between good people and thus "by our Quarrels we spoil our Prayers" for deliverance and peace. He accuses the community of being so caught up in secular concerns that they are losing their spiritual focus—the very thing the devil wants.

This is the central place where Mather addresses the heart of the communal conflict in his book. He has been dancing around this subject so far, mentioning the issue of spectral evidence, then dropping it, suggesting that the community needs to work on interpersonal relationships without explaining why, supporting the judges without specifics and so on. For Mather to achieve his purposes, this should be the key argument that leads to both the exoneration of the leadership and the reconciliation of the community—but it only succeeds in the first purpose, miserably failing in the second.

Now he says there are “lamentably” sides in “this debate” and on both sides are noble, well-intentioned men of good conscience. He is very careful to even-handedly praise both “parties,” while clearly delineating that it is the issue of spectral evidence used to convict witches that is the central concern. The tone is wonderfully conciliatory as he explains the reasonable concerns of each side—one most concerned with rooting out evil from amongst the elect, the other more concerned with not condemning any innocent person, even if it means some guilty slip through the fingers of the justice system. Mather suggests that there are faults on both sides, but the whole community can help one another to avoid the devil’s snares by being peaceable. This is another one of those points where, if he had just stopped there, peace may have been restored. But Mather cannot seem to help himself. He jumps back from this goodwill and unity to defending the judges against any censure. “I will only say thus much of them, That such of them as I have the Honour of a Personal Acquaintance with, are Men of an excellent Spirit” says Mather, adding that any mistakes have been only those of “well-meaning

Ignorance” (!). This defense may have seemed enough for Mather, but his uncritical support of the judges, even as he acknowledges they may have erred in ignorance, did not settle well with his audience. The very complaint rising from the public debates was that there was too much action or assumption from too little knowledge, yet here is Mather, defending those questionable actions that led to death sentences for community members. In the end, Mather sees the need for peace, but he seeks to achieve that peace by upholding the legitimacy of authority over personal responsibility or the possibility of error. Even so, Mather ends “Section V” with a plea that “*the Peace of God may Rule in our Hearts.*” Unfortunately, his shifting viewpoint (one of his sharpest critics called his perspective “ambidextrous”) unsettled the minds of his readership, rather than putting them at rest.

“Section VI” functions as a summary and call to action for Enchantments Encountered. Mather offers two major pieces of advice to his community. First, he calls on them to unite in efforts to relieve their neighbors of the suffering brought on by witchcraft (whether they are possessed, tormented, losing family or property, or simply experiencing emotional upheaval). This circles back to his pastoral concern for the community and for the restoration of peace. He may have been thinking of his “scientific” approach to curing the afflicted, as he had done with the Godwin girl and (shortly after writing this book) with Mercy Short—prayer, fasting, catechisms and guided repentance. However, the audience sees Mather supporting the continuance of the trials in this “effort to relieve” people.

This negative impression is only strengthened by his second piece of advice—that the community “unite in such Methods for this deliverance [from true witches] as may be unquestionably safe.” This seems innocuous enough. The community was not (for the most part) questioning the existence of witches, merely the methods of identifying them. However, Mather undoes all the potential good by further stating “It is a safe Principle, that when God Almighty permits any Spirits from the unseen regions, to visit us with Surprising Informations, there is then something to be enquired after... it is a sufficient occasion for Magistrates to make a particular Enquiry.” Mather has essentially condoned the use of spectral evidence, though he sought to caution against it in sections II and III. He goes on to make the confusing suggestion that innocent representation is a plot of the witches to stop the continued persecution of witches. He concludes this section vacillating between the opinion that the judges must act decisively and the judges must forbear. He is standing up for tradition and authority, but it fails to even make sense.

This essay is Mather’s least coherent, least logical argument within his book. In seeking to reconcile two “sides” he only vindicates the judges. In calling for peace, he fans the flames of the controversy. In asking people to love one another, he yet demands an unrelenting prosecution of the witches among them. In reaching out to diverse audiences, he sounds overly subservient and obsequious on the one hand, but callous and harsh on the other. Instead of becoming a mediating savior for his community, unwittingly Mather set himself up to become the scapegoat.

Mather titled his essay “Enchantments Encountered,” but perhaps it should have been called “Authorities Encountered,” for the devil and his antics play a subsidiary role to Mather’s desire to shore up civil and religious authority. He sees strong (Christian) local government as the answer to renewing the community position as the righteous example nation to all other nations. Because of his seemingly contradictory, over-conciliatory stances, many New Englanders rejected the premises of *Wonders*.

### The Emerging American Individualism Embodied in *Wonders*

Split between restoring community and restoring authority, defending the Puritan way and defending his own person, Mather lost sight of his audience. In the midst of a topically scattered narrative, Mather’s arguments opened the way for individuals to define themselves as separate (and increasingly secular). The colonists no longer wanted to have someone else decide their fate—not a far away king, nor a local theocracy, and certainly not an individual pastor.

For all his public-mindedness and promotion of communal unity, Mather seems clueless about how self-focused he appears in his text. He frequently references his concerns about his personal reputation (and authority). This personal focus is the most obvious aspect of an emerging individualism, but it is not evidence enough on its own. What appears in tandem, very subtly, is Mather’s reframing of communal calls to action as calls to individual action.



But first, let's look at Mather's personal focus. In the Defence, these concerns take two forms: 1) that he might attract the unwanted attentions of evil spirits himself, by publicly denouncing the devil and witchcraft; and 2) that his character and intentions are being maligned by uninformed, unnamed persons. His second concern is the more pressing, as he mentions evil tongues and slander specifically in the first paragraph and again in his conclusion, and alludes to it several other times. He suggests "he who becomes an Author at such a time, had need be *fenced with Iron, and the Staff of a Spear*." Then at the closing of his letter, after stating that "most of the Ministers of God in these Colonies" will agree with his words, he bemoans that his book will not undo the undeserved harm to his reputation "nor can amends be well made me, for the wrong done me, by other sorts of *Representations*." His personal reputation as an authority and as a minister of God was of paramount concern to Mather. This demonstrates his personal stake in reestablishing the legitimacy and authority of the clergy and the government to his community.

The contradictory nature of his personal position is also evidenced by his other personal comments, sprinkled throughout this short preface bemoaning the fact that he has "more considerable Friends" in England than in his own country (though he's never set foot there), that others in New England had propagated "false reports" and "other sorts of [untruthful] Representations" of his opinions, which he now has to rectify, as well as suggesting that there "may be [only a] few who love the Writer of this Book." Mather purports to be concerned with the ill-informed minds of the people, but he is also clearly very concerned with the damage his own reputation had suffered through the

unregulated discussions on the manner in which the witchcraft was being dealt with in the courts and amongst the ministry. This very personal focus undermines his defense of the government and the ministers advising it. Mather is perhaps as concerned with his own authority as he is with the legitimacy of the civil government.

Finally, Mather includes a personal appeal, that the reader believe that with “a *Spirit of Love*, is the Book now before us written” and he only demands “the *Justice*, that others *read* it, with the same Spirit wherewith I *writ* it.” Fearing prejudice and judgment already, Mather implies that he intended to be evenhanded and asks the reader to be unbiased as they read his book.

Ironically, by defending himself so vigorously and repetitively, Mather elevates the importance of the individual within the community, rather than emphasizing the unity of the covenanted people. This is one of the first indicators of Mather’s inner struggle to navigate the changing communal character that was moving from an authoritative, unified Puritan viewpoint to an individualistic and democratic marketplace of ideas. But his emphasis on his own personal opinion (which he sees as the voice of pastoral authority) and concern for his personal reputation undermines his defense of authority. In other words, his argument FOR authority appears to his audience the very reason to IGNORE authority. Already, Mather is undermining his own purpose as he struggles to negotiate the oppositional philosophies colliding in his community. Mather seems to find himself on both sides of the philosophical divide.

Mather's intellectual focus may have been influenced by the attitudes and actions of the community—further demonstrating the growing voice of a people no longer willing to unilaterally submit to authority and no longer convinced that a single voice can represent their individual beliefs, but this is unclear in his 1692 text. What can be seen is that Mather feels the pressure to reconnect his community with the Puritan worldview they are beginning to reject and he does so in a surprising manner. The Trials have widened the breach between local Puritan leadership and the general populace.

This breach should have been repaired in “Enchantments Encountered,” but as I already demonstrated, his desire to re-establish the authority of the colonial leadership undermined that intention. “Enchantments” also reveals Mather's more intense focus on the power of the individual to affect change. The devil's plot and the trials of witchcraft aren't just a general problem. Mather suggests that in writing this book he is attempting to draw off the devil's attention from the community and onto himself (this echoes of his fears from the “Author's Defence”).

Instead of a traditional call to action, Mather ends “Section IV” of “Enchantments” with the odd statement that he would be willing to be “thrown overboard” if it “were needful to allay the *Storm*, I should think Dying, a Trifle to be undergone, for so great a Blessedness.” Mather is suggesting that through his book and the probable persecution it will draw (remember his multiple references to this in his “Author's Defence”) may enable him, Jonah-like, to be thrown overboard and thus be the savior of New England, though at the cost of his life (whether it is a physical, social or political death, he leaves

unclear). This very dramatic and personal self-sacrificing sentence concludes “Section IV.” While this section harkens back to Mather’s intention to restore the community to its first generation zeal, he is acknowledging through his examples that this community is more apt to respond to personal sacrifice and individual action than the generation Winthrop originally inspired.

As he moves to the “Section V,” that change is even more obvious—this is not a community of believers, but a community of individual souls who must decide, independent of one another, to rejoin the spiritual community for the greater good. There is an increased sense of personal choice that was not present in the first generation Puritan sermons. Still addressing the devil’s attack, in general, Mather appeals to each individual within the community to “maintain an holy Jealousie over his Soul at this time” so the devil doesn’t make them his (unwitting) instruments. Mather is focused on New Englanders as individuals who can and must act in such a manner that the devil can be defeated. In an extended metaphorical reading of the “love chapter,” I Corinthians 13, Mather calls on individuals to show love towards one another lest they cause “our Body Politick to be burned.” In this interesting rendition of verse 3 in I Corinthians 13, Mather adds the word “Politick” to the scripture in an attempt to reconnect individuals to the Body of believers—the community. The original scripture implies one’s body is burned as a self-sacrifice for the good of others. Thus Mather is circling back to his personal sacrificial offer from “Section IV,” and now calling on the community to offer themselves up in a similar sacrifice—though not in vain (out of love, not out of any other motivation). But Mather is still demanding individual action

as the only recourse to a reunited community. He's moving away from an exhortation to unified communal action even as he calls for communal restoration. He's seeking individual heroes and setting himself up as one, as well.

This is a democratic ideal that would bolster the American Revolution eighty years later—the idea that individuals must rise up and sacrifice to save the people as a whole. This is one of those quiet moments---easily missed in the surfeit of words (all of Mather's sermons are long) where individualism is beginning to peek out of the Puritan past. The rest of "Enchantments Encountered" returns to a more unified community viewpoint, focusing on the pastoral concerns of how to avoid the devil's snares and ensure God's favor that constitute the topic for the remainder of the sermons in his text.

## Conclusion

Grappling with the implications to his society of the Toleration Act and the new, more secular colonial charter, not to mention the apparent attack of the devil on their community, Cotton Mather sought to integrate new ideas without relinquishing the old in the early 1690s. In addition, even as he promoted conformity under a Puritan government, he'd already seen the benefit of individuals rising up to voice their opinions and change policies (even governments) for the better during the uprising of 1689.

Mather found himself standing on both sides of an intellectual faultline; he championed the unified theocracy of the past yet he was helping to create the pluralized identity of the future. In bridging this gap Mather's book, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, both fails and succeeds in its purposes.

Bercovitch best explains the importance of Mather's work, situating him in his own time and in the stream of American letters, stating

Cotton Mather's *significance consists ... in his resolution of a profoundly cultural dilemma* in a way that was dictated by his cultural allegiances and by the dilemma itself. As it turned out, *this was also the way Puritanism came most fully to be absorbed in the national consciousness; as image and metaphor, as mythico-historiography, and, paradigmatically, as the dream of an ideal personal-corporate identity which perpetuates itself—in different forms corresponding to the vocabularies of different cultural moments...* Out of his failure and his faith he wrought a number of works which have prospered, in the realm of the American imagination, better than he expected or believed. ("Cotton Mather" 147-48, emphasis mine)

Ironically, Mather's communal descendants ultimately achieved the unity he sought because he paved the way for plurality, because he helped solidify governmental authority through typology even as Puritan power waned, and because he appealed to the individual rather than the community, allowing for many to become one. Mather's failure in his own time was due to the rapid socio-political changes he could not control. He attempted to heal the communal stresses and he only exacerbated them. Cotton Mather's conflicting pronoun usage in *Wonders* displayed the way he was grappling with the identity crisis that was overtaking the entire colony. His awkward shifting emphasis on the importance of authority versus the importance of the individual revealed his struggle to unite people while acknowledging the socio-political realities of his community. *Wonders*, as a book, failed in its purposes. But as Bercovitch put it, "in the realm of the American imagination, [he succeeded] better than he expected or believed" (148).

The contradictions and implications exposed in *Wonders of the Invisible World* foreshadowed the changes in American thought that would move us from fighting devils to fighting ideas—still unified by a Puritan metaphor of a "special" nation watched by the world—the eternal "city on the hill." *Wonders of the Invisible World* is not merely one man's misguided attempt to control the way the community reacted. It is the signpost of a new world.

## Bibliography

- Bercovitch, Sacvan. "A Model of Cultural Transvaluation: Puritanism, Modernity, and New World Rhetoric." *Transatlantic Colloquium*, March 1997. Web. 10 August 2010.
- . *The American Jeremiad*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978. Print.
- . "Cotton Mather." Ed. Everett Emerson. *Major Writers of Early American Literature*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1972. Print.
- . *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Print.
- Burr, George Lincoln. *Narratives of the Witchcraft cases: 1648-1706. Electronic Text Center*. University of Virginia Library. Web. 6 June 2010.
- Campbell, Donna M. "Forms of Puritan Rhetoric: The Jeremiad and the Conversion Narrative." *Literary Movements*. 24 February 2009. Web. 30 June 2010.
- "Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston and the Country Adjacent." 18 April 1689. *Electronic Text Center*. University of Virginia Library. Web. 14 April 2012.
- Jones, James W. *The Shattered Synthesis: New England Puritanism before the Great Awakening*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973. Print.
- Levy, Babette . *Cotton Mather*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979. Print.
- Mather, Cotton. *The Christian Philosopher*. Ed. Winton Solberg. Illinois: Univ of Illinois Press, 1994. Print.
- . *On Witchcraft: Wonders of the Invisible World*. New York: Dorset Press, 1991. Print.
- . "The Return of Several Ministers consulted by his Excellency, and the Honourable Council, upon the present Witchcrafts in Salem Village." 15 June 1692. *The Andros tracts: being a collection of pamphlets and official papers, Volume 1*. Ed. William Henry Whitmore. Boston, Mass: Prince Society, 1868. Web. 14 April 2012.
- Middlekauff, Robert. *The Mathers: Three generations of Puritan intellectuals*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1971. Print.



Miller, Perry and Thomas H. Johnson, eds. *The Puritans, Vol. 1 and 2*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963. Print.

Miller, Perry. *Errand into the Wilderness*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984. Print.

Silverman, Kenneth. *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984. Print.

