

# THE SALEM BELLE: A TALE OF 1692

[ANONYMOUS]

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This little novel is, we are informed, the production of a young merchant<sup>1</sup> of this city, whose first attempt in the art of book-making it appears to be. It is disfigured by several strange anachronisms<sup>2</sup>, not the least remarkable of which, are the introduction of lightning conductors some twenty or thirty years prior to the birth of Franklin<sup>3</sup>, and of a Virginian negro slave<sup>4</sup>, who, nearly a century before the Declaration of American Independence, "professed to be a thorough democrat<sup>5</sup>, and insisted that all men

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<sup>1</sup> The "anonymous author" was later discovered by Richard Kopley, an associate English professor at Penn State, to be Ebenezer Wheelwright, a West Indies merchant who declared bankruptcy before his book was published. This is rumored to be the reason as to why he chose to publish the book anonymously. Years after the publication of the novel, Wheelwright admitted that he was the author of a handful of anonymously-published works, but he only named one, "Traditions of Palestine". ("Threads..."). The discovery of the author is further discussed in the Editor's Note.

<sup>2</sup> [anachronism] a thing belonging or appropriate to a period other than that in which it exists, especially a thing that is conspicuously old-fashioned.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States and organized the U.S's first lending library and volunteer fire department. He was also responsible for the first lightning conductors, investigated into electricity, mathematics, and mapmaking, and helped draft the Declaration of Independence and the U.S Constitution. Also, he aided in the negotiations for the 1783 Treaty of Paris, which was the marker for the end of the Revolutionary War. (Benjamin...).

<sup>4</sup> During the 1830s-1860s, abolitionists were working to end slavery and within the next twenty years the civil rights movements began.

<sup>5</sup> During the 1840s, the Democrats were strong advocates of expansion, as opposed to the Whigs (the opposing political party). The Democrats felt that Thomas Jefferson's vision of establishing agriculture in new territories to counterbalance industrialization would fix any of the nation's issues. On the other hand, the Whigs welcomed most change brought by industrialization and strong government policies, but they did not show strong support for the expansion of the country to new areas due to the extension of slavery that it would cause. (Faragher).

were born free and equal." These, however, do not probably mar the interest<sup>6</sup> of the book to the general reader.

The story is one of love, and is pleasingly told. The main interest turns upon the famous witchcraft delusion of 1692<sup>7</sup>, and the danger incurred by the heroine, who becomes involved in the persecution levelled [sic] at every one suspected of dealing in the black art, and is rescued by her lover, and carried off to Virginia, on the day previous to that appointed for her death on the scaffold.



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<sup>6</sup> While little information can be found about the book's popularity, it was used widely after its publication for people to use to learn more about the infamous Salem Witch Trials. This book, as well as many others, such as *Lois the Witch* (1859), *Witching Time* (serialized 1856-57), and *The Crucible* (1953) are important in providing historical context.

<sup>7</sup> Reference to The Salem Witch Trials. Beginning in January 1692, the daughter and niece of Reverend Samuel Parris of Salem Village, Massachusetts, became sick. William Griggs, the village's doctor, diagnosed the girl as having been bewitched. His diagnosis spiraled into the now infamous Salem Witch Trials, which were responsible for the deaths of nineteen men and women by hanging, as well as one man being crushed to death and seven others dying in prison. During the times of these trials, there was a strong belief in the devil. Also, a small pox epidemic in a neighboring area brought the threat of not only disease, but also attack by warring tribes. These stresses brought the side effects of suspicion among town folk. As people became sick and others' names were "cried out" by young girls in pain, people were thrown in jail to await their trial for witchcraft, punishable by death.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

*The Salem Belle: A Tale of 1692* was a tale written by a young merchant living in Boston, Massachusetts. As described above, it told the story of a woman accused of witchcraft during the Salem Witch Trials who is rescued the day before her scheduled death by her lover, a slave from Virginia. The tale was originally thought to be written by an anonymous author, but after some research done by Richard Kopley, an English associate professor at Penn State DuBois, the name of the author was revealed. Kopley, who had been reading the first issue of *The Pioneer*, and after his reading of the review of *The Salem Belle: A Tale of 1692*, chose to read the actual tale, ended up doing deeper research than he originally anticipated. After his reading, he felt that there were extreme parallels between *The Salem Belle: A Tale of 1692* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Intrigued and feeling that the similarities were too close to be coincidental, he decided to delve deeper into the story and *The Scarlet Letter*. Through his research, he came to the conclusion that Hawthorne "transformed elements from Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart'; Lowell's long-neglected poem, 'A Legend of Brittany'; and the anonymous novel, 'The Salem Belle'". Apparently, Kopley had known prior to his reading of the review that Hawthorne's wife "had already received the issue [The Pioneer], some seven years before he [Hawthorne] published 'The Scarlet Letter'". Looking at the similar traits between the books, Kopley realized that three passages from *The Salem Belle: A Tale of 1692* were transformed for *The Scarlet Letter* and that Hawthorne, while he may have lessened the emphasis on witchcraft in his novel, still kept the themes of concern with persecution, guilt, and atonement. Similarities stated by the article are as follows:

In "The Salem Belle," a spurned suitor accuses a woman of witchcraft, but she is rescued in the end. According to Kopley, three passages in the final third of "The Salem Belle" anticipate passages in the final third of "The Scarlet Letter." Both books feature a forest scene in which one character tries to bolster another and recommends escape; both describe an escape ship in a nearby harbor; and both include a confession at the scaffold -- by the false accuser in "The Salem Belle" and by Hester Prynne's minister lover, Arthur Dimmesdale, in "The Scarlet Letter."

Using this information, and his discovery that the publisher of *The Salem Belle: A Tale of 1692* was the same publisher of *The Scarlet Letter*, Kopley tracked down the novel of the author of the tale using markings made in one of the first editions of the book and correspondence letters of the book owner's family. The end result was Ebenezer Wheelwright, a West Indies merchant who declared bankruptcy, which is the suspected reason for why he chose to stay anonymous. Years after the publication of the novel, Wheelwright admitted that he was the author of many anonymously-published works, but the only one he admitted to writing was the *Traditions of Palestine*", which Kopley feels resembles *The Salem Belle*. ("Threads...").

The connections Kopley made while tracking down the author are significant. They revealed that the works of older materials were used to aid authors, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, in new ideas for books. As seen, the works were not just used to give historical context to big events like the Salem Witch Trials, but were also used to create inspiration for new works of literature. The inspiration, or what some people might see as plagiarizing, can

be compared to today in the way many ideas of past works of literature, music, and movies, have been used as inspiration or plagiarized, depending on one's views of the situation(s). For example, a copious amount of movies that have been released over the last few years have been remakes of stories already told or simply the same movie with different actors, such as "Fantastic Four", many the Disney fairytales, "Spiderman", "Superman", "Batman", and Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Movies have not been the only works remade - music has also been remade and one recent case can be seen in the lawsuit of Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams versus Marvin Gaye, in which Thicke and Williams lost the trial for infringement of what is being considered an entire genre of music created by Gaye. This brings into question: what is considered to be inspiration by a work and what is considered to be an infringement? Where does an writer's, actor's, or artist's work stop being their own creative twist and lead to overstepping a boundary? As it becomes easier to produce works of literature, music, and movies with the growing connections made with the internet and social media, it also becomes easier to overstep the ever-growing blurry line between creative inspiration and plagiarism.

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