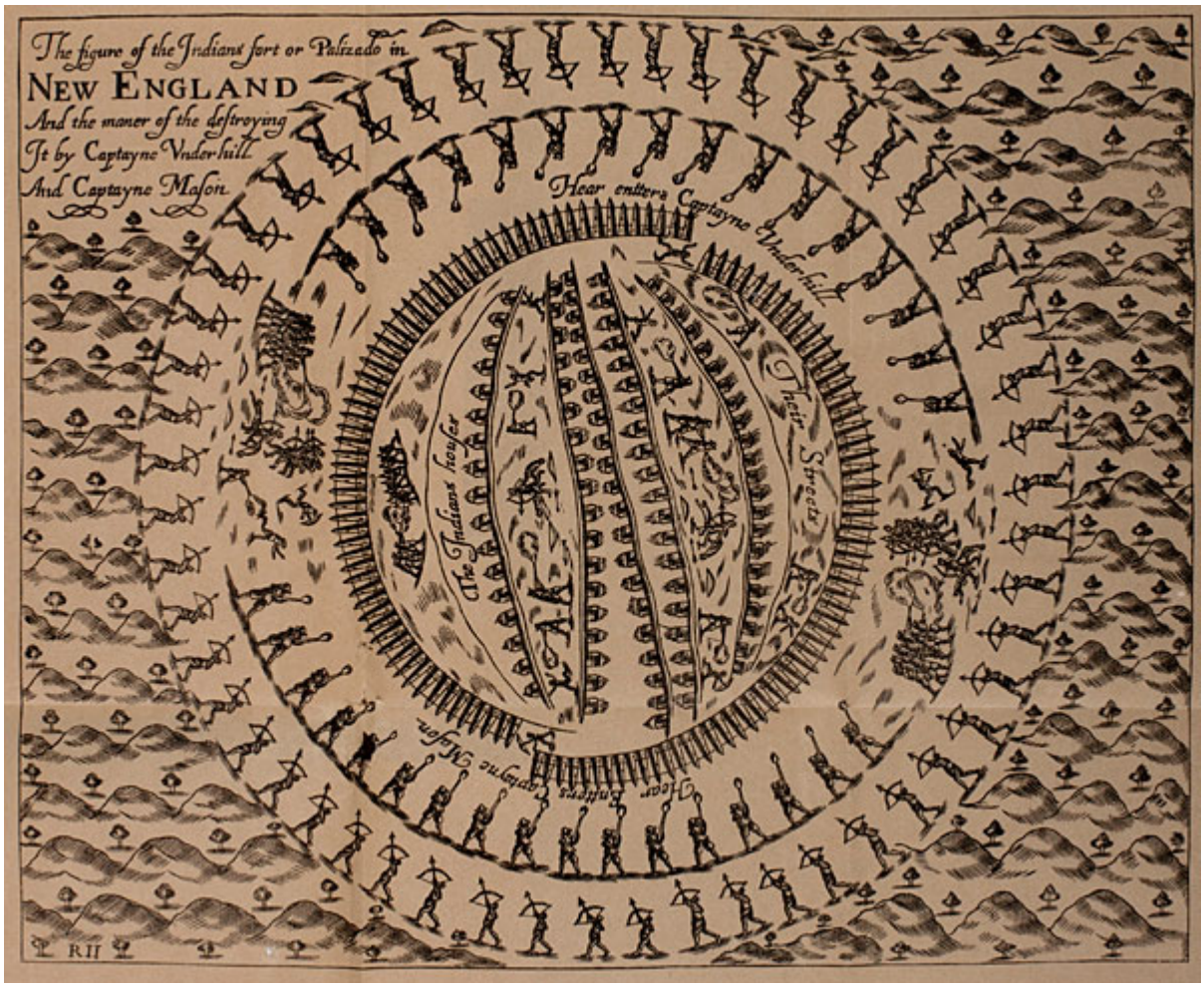
Unsettling



The book extrapolates from overwhelmingly catastrophic, unsettling details to examine larger questions.

Witnessing Historical Thinking: Teaching Students to Construct Historical Narratives



The advent of narrative history in the popular press makes engaging history students seem like a simple task. However, as teachers we are up against myriad competitors that shape our students' historical sense. From the History Channel, to *MythBusters*, to Disney's *Pocahontas*, students come to class with preconceived notions of what should constitute engaging approaches to history. And for most, analytic articles on Puritan theology or Native American animism will not do. Sam Wineburg, a Stanford professor of education and observer of history teachers, reminds us, "historical thinking, in its deepest forms, is

neither a natural process nor something that springs automatically from psychological development. Its achievement … actually goes against the grain of how we ordinarily think. … The odds of achieving mature historical understanding are stacked against us in a world in which Disney and MTV call the shots." Coaching students to develop these critical and analytical thinking skills is one facet of my teaching. Another is to engage my students' imaginations.

John Demos, emeritus professor of history at Yale, eloquently describes the importance of imagination: "Clio is a time traveler, and we, her acolytes, delight in following her on long and varied journeys of the mind. Words, pried loose from documents, carry us across the centuries. Our experience is as full and rewarding as our imagination allows it to be. And in these travels imagination is all." In my teaching, I find that narratives consistently awaken students' imaginations, enticing them to make the history they are expected to learn their own.

Yet "narrative history" is frequently discussed in opposition to "critical history" or "analytic history," the argument apparently being that narratives are somehow not suitable to the crafting of complex historical arguments. The core of teaching history at the secondary level, for many of us, is to teach students to read critically and write analytically—that is, to analyze texts and then make arguments about them. The focus is typically *not* on engaging students in the creation of narratives. The well-worn analogy between the historian and the detective remains popular today—indeed, the PBS show *History Detectives* perfectly encapsulates the connection, one that is repeated in countless lessons online and in print that lead students to identify and marshal evidence in order to support a thesis. As Peter Stearns asserts, history involves "An ability to form an argument, using data for a purpose, a capacity to glean data from primary sources…[and refine] some capacity for handling diverse interpretations and testing theories about change." Giving students a framework that lets them see the information they gather as evidence being collected in support of an argument helps them learn the larger skill of thinking analytically about data.

The historians' tasks of textual analysis and critical analytic writing can be taught in a variety of ways. I have found that, contrary to the opposition within the discipline between narrative and critical history, using narrative to teach these skills helps students connect the habits of thinking like a historian to their own lives, and actively engages them in the content I want them to learn. Wineburg writes, "[h]istory teaches us a way to make choices, to balance opinions, to tell stories, and to become uneasy—when necessary—about the stories we tell."

This essay reflects themes and ideas presented by Darcy R. Fryer in "Common School" (*Common-Place,* Volume 12, Number 2). Teaching Early America, as she presents it, provides numerous possibilities to incorporate new scholarship into the secondary school classroom. Here I will share a number of lessons and

assignments that I have used successfully to guide students to explore primary and secondary texts. The work engages students' historical imaginations *and* builds analytical and critical thinking skills—in short, these lessons teach students how to use historical narrative to make an argument.

I have been teaching early American history for more than twenty years. My primary assignment is to teach the first half of a two-year American history course. We focus on American history from the beginnings (Kennewick Man) through 1877, the end of Reconstruction. Our core text for the fall is Alan Taylor's *American Colonies*, which challenges students to see early America through the trifocal lens of environmental history, ethnographic study, and the interconnected networks of the Atlantic world. By explicitly teaching content through a range of media and having students see each medium as a potential model for historical interpretation, students are prepared to craft their own interpretations of history by using narrative.

To understand the clash of cultures in the encounter between Europeans and Native Americans, we watch Bruce Beresford's film version of Brian Moore's historical novel, *Black Robe*. The film is rich, clear, and engaging (although somewhat problematic in its portrayal of the Iroquois). Students analyze how the film's narrative makes an analytical point about history. For example, in the film's depiction of an Algonquin band delivering Father LaForgue (based loosely on the Jesuit missionary Noel Chabanel) to a Huron village, cultural misunderstandings ensnare both the Natives and the French. When LaForgue demonstrates the power of writing, some see it as sorcery—the capturing of the spirit. LaForgue encourages this Native interpretation because it imbues him with the special wisdom he believes himself to possess as a Christian, in the process making an argument about the nature of relations between Europeans and Native peoples. We discuss the film, and they read excerpts from *The Jesuit Relations*. Because the film models for them how to consider historical events through contesting lenses, they are able to write coherently (in an analytic essay assignment) about the clash of cultures.

We also analyze an English woodcut depicting the Pequot War. Like *Black Robe*, this image requires students to reflect on perspective. Most of my students come to class with simplistic notions about Natives in this period, viewing them as disorganized but loosely allied against the Europeans, noble savages facing a technologically and bureaucratically superior adversary. The more careful observers in my classes notice that the image shows English troops, led by captains Underhill and Mason, attacking a Pequot walled village, aided by members of at least one Native tribe (who they learn included the Narragansett, keen rivals of the Pequot for access to wampum). The woodcut tells a dramatic and violent story of the unstable alliances that shaped seventeenth-century British North America, but it also constitutes a visual narrative that very quickly makes an analytic point about a history my students usually think they know.

To help students become more conscious of the complexity of historical events,

I have created a lesson called “Fateful Years: Seventeenth Century Crisis in North America.” In it, students are asked to develop their own narratives in order to better understand the notion of historical patterns. Their charge is to gather primary and secondary sources, and use them to tell the story of conflicting perspectives on the causes of the Pueblo Revolt, Bacon’s Rebellion, or King Philip’s War –all of which occurred within seven years of each other, but in vastly different parts of the North American continent, involving different players, and driven by entirely different causal forces. Students read their sources, determine key historical actors, actions, and chronologies. Then they dramatize the conflict in a simulation or “play” of sorts. They are assessed on their understanding of the different points of view and the coherence of their narratives, both in the simulation (and script) as well as in a reflection essay. Students remember this lesson, and genuinely enjoy it. In fact, they advocate for more student-crafted simulations as the year progresses.

The major research project for the fall semester is designed to encourage students to pull together all these new skills of historical thinking (point of view, continuity, change, chronology) and incorporate them in creating a piece of analytical history. Using the annual theme and framework of National History Day, students choose topics, generate “reporter” and “essential” questions, and take notes in a shared “Google doc” so that I am able to monitor their progress and give constructive feedback. National History Day (a bit of a misnomer) is a structured series of presentations where students share their work before judges and the public. I am not so much interested in the competition that History Day engenders, but in the process of creating a project. My students often use local archives, museums, and sophisticated online archives to find primary sources, and read current scholarship on their topic. For example, students in recent years have used materials in the Massachusetts Historical Society to create projects on the Essex Junto, Cotton Mather, and John Adams. Students have used the American Antiquarian Society for research on Noah Webster and John B. Gough and the temperance movement. One student traveled to Sheffield, Massachusetts, to interview scholars about Mum Bet (Elizabeth Freeman) and the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts. Another went to the Portland Historical Society in Maine to find a treasure trove of documents on the Maine Law of 1851. Together with current scholarship from JSTOR and books from interlibrary exchanges, my students are able to do real historical work, and they are excited to put those skills to use. Here is one example.

“The Figure of the Indians fort or Palizado in New England And the Maner of the destroying It by Captayn Underhill and Captayne Mason,” frontispiece, taken from News from America by Captain John Underhill, 1638; reproduced by David Harris Underhill, 1902. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

One student recently became interested in the story of the alliances between the Narragansett and the Puritans in the seventeenth century. As he read accounts of the Narragansett, he found himself asking questions about the causes of the destruction of the tribe in the so-called "Great Swamp Massacre" of December 1675. He knew he needed to do more than simply provide a narrative of the events. Eventually, he crafted a thesis about the diplomatic and racial (ethnic) causes of the massacre, and tied it to a long-term pattern of Native removal. For his project, he then wrote a script (using free storyboarding software called Celtx) and started filming. He travelled to South Kingston, Rhode Island, and trekked out into the woods to the actual site to get some shots, but the principal body of his film was a narrative driven by document analysis. To gild the lily, he wrote original music for the film and played it on his violin and guitar as the soundtrack. His film, "The Great Swamp Massacre," was 10 minutes long and a remarkable demonstration of his ability to think historically and present a complex view of a historical event. His film was shown at the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture conference in Boston that year—quite an achievement for a high school student!

Demos notes that "[i]t is … strangely jarring for us to see or touch some pieces—some physical chunk—of the panorama of the past. Confronted with artifacts (instead of verbal description), imagination goes limp, sensation intervenes…The effect [of artifacts] was immediate, and visceral, and acute anxiety. So here is the way it looked and was: no mere words could quite have conveyed the feeling." My students grapple with that distance and try to make sense of it for themselves.

Stéphane Lévesque argues that the goal of history teaching is to "devise a conception of history and identify procedural concepts of the discipline relevant to twenty-first-century students, to give students the means to a more critical and disciplinary study of the past," and to encourage students toward "disciplinary history" rather than "memory-history." But the divide between discipline and memory, between argument and narrative, need not be so absolute. By providing different models of historical inquiry, guiding students as they analyze primary and secondary sources toward a specific project, and then coaching students as they research and craft their own historical narratives (in films or websites, for example), we can help students use narrative to discover the power of historical thinking.

Further Reading

The best books to start to understand "historical thinking" are Samuel Wineburg's *Historical Thinking and other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Temple, 2001) and Stéphane Lévesque's *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto, 2008). Also see the website Historical Thinking Matters (historicalthinkingmatters.org), Peter Stearns, "Thinking Historically in the Classroom" (*Perspectives,* October 1995), and the collection edited by Donald A. Yerxa, *Recent Themes in Historical Thinking: Historians in Conversation* (South Carolina, 2008). The core fall text

for my class is Alan Taylor's *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (Penguin, 2002), although I have recently considered using Daniel K. Richter's *Before the Revolution: America's Ancient Pasts* (Cambridge, 2011), but have yet to switch. The Native image referred to in the article is "The Figure of the Indian Fort or Palizado in New England" (London, 1638). For more information on National History Day, see the analysis by Scott Scheuerell in *The History Teacher* 40:3, and their website (www.nhd.org).

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Charles L. Newhall is a history teacher at St. John's Preparatory School in Danvers, Massachusetts, and co-editor of the Common School column. His research focuses on the intellectual and cultural history of the early national republic.

Making Sense of the Beginning: Teaching Early America in the U.S. History Survey



While many aspects of early American life were bound by geography, many others transcended it.

Dancing the “Republican Two-Step” with Copyrights, Patents, and Corporations



The backlash against these American laws and their increasingly global reach raises a question: does this regime of intellectual property law represent something intrinsic about the United States—not just its economy, but its culture and society?

A Drunkard's Story: The market for suffering in antebellum America



How did a working-class drunkard with little formal education become a narrator of hard times to society at large?

Lessons in Diction and Deism



The Literary Paradises of Hurston and Bartram in a High School Curriculum

Early American literature is not commonly taught at the high school level. There are many reasons for this: diction is florid, page counts are high, novels are nonexistent, and a more painless nod to the colonial period is easily managed with a study of *The Scarlet Letter* or *The Crucible*. If the typical goal of high school literature classes is to inculcate a love of reading in students and to expose students to writing worth mimicking, then the most prudent course is to cleave to the latter half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During my years teaching some of the most popular curriculum standards, though, I have found that opportunities abound to incorporate earlier texts.*The Great Gatsby* cries out for excerpts from Ben Franklin's journals, and the references that Anne Petry makes to the Junto in her novel *The Street* do as well. Study of Ralph Ellison requires supplementary readings in the Transcendentalists to help unpack allusions to Emerson and the Golden Ball. Even one Brit Lit high school stand-by, *Jude the Obscure,* requires reference to an early American antecedent: Thomas Hardy's model for the Bible altered and improved by the iconoclastic Sue Brideshead was surely modeled on Thomas Jefferson's *Life of Jesus of Nazareth*.

But none of the pairings I list above complement each other as well as the works of two Florida writers, one of the eighteenth and one of the twentieth

century: William Bartram's *Travels* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. To begin with, the biographies of these two writers make for a fascinating comparison. Both approach their highly poetic and philosophical depictions of Florida with concrete backgrounds in the sciences: Hurston with her anthropology background and Bartram with his familial background in botany and naturalism. Both were single minded and wary of aligning themselves with grander political projects: Hurston was famously rebuffed by contemporary novelists like Richard Wright for refusing to take up the race issue, while Bartram turned down Jefferson's invitation to join the Lewis and Clark expedition. Both were avid travelers, explorers, writers, gardeners, thinkers, and Florida enthusiasts.

> Both authors write about nature as a lens to think metaphysically about human life. In other words, both Bartram and Hurston appear to be "watching God" through nature.

As a student of anthropology under Franz Boas and a lover of her home state of Florida, Hurston probably read Bartram's *Travels*. Although no direct reference to these early American travelogues appears in her writing, she was certainly conscious of the tradition. In her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, Hurston tells an anecdote she frames as the turning point of her education, when a teacher recited for the class the poem "Kubla Khan." Her affection for that teacher, the drama of the reading, and the stunning imagery of the poem cemented her love of learning. This is the only specific reference that Hurston makes to the curriculum of her formal schooling, and one can only wonder if she recognized her native state of Florida in the imagery of the poem. The fact that Coleridge, in writing "Kubla Khan" (among other poems) took inspiration from Bartram's travels down the St. John's River is well documented in the poet's notebooks.

Since Hurston was an innovator in bringing Southern black dialect into her fictional dialogue, diction is a natural focal point for literary study of her works. The same holds true for the study of William Bartram, not because of regional idiom so much as the pure foreignness of elevated eighteenth-century writing to the ears of contemporary adolescents. Look at how these two descriptive passages, because of their similar attitudes toward a storm, throw one another's language nicely into relief. Hurston writes:

Ten feet higher and as far as they could see the muttering wall advanced before the braced-up waters like a roadcrusher on a cosmic scale. The monstropolous beast had left his bed. The two hundred miles an hour wind had loosed its chains. He seized hold of his dikes and ran forward until he met the quarters; uprooted them like grass and rushed on after his supposed to be conquerors, rolling the dikes, rolling the houses, rolling the people in houses along with other timbers. The sea was walking the earth with a heavy heel.


“Mico Chlucco the Long Warior or King of the Siminoles,” frontispiece from Travels through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida … William Bartram (Philadelphia, 1791). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

“Portrait of William Bartram,” engraved by T.B. Welch from an original painting by C.W. Peale, date unknown. Courtesy of the Portrait and Print Collection, the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Bartram uses many of the same devices in his description:

But yet, how awfully great and sublime the majestic scene eastward! the solemn sound of the beating surf strikes our ears; the dashing liquid of yon liquid mountains, like mighty giants, in vain assail the skies; they are beaten back, and fall prostrate upon the shores of the trembling island.

Although the styles of these two writers are drastically different, the techniques they use—personification, sensory imagery, hyperbole—and their goals are surprisingly similar. The two texts are replete with passages that might be juxtaposed for close study of language.

Excerpts from Bartram are also useful in contextualizing many of Hurston’s themes. One of the central symbols in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a bee pollinating a pear tree, echoes Bartram’s philosophical musings about mosquitoes, or swamp ephemera, “inimitably bedecked in their new nuptial robes.” When Bartram steps back to compare the very short period for which these insects leave their muddy homes of their lowly grub stage and live as flying insects to the ephemeral nature of human happiness, we also see an opportune comparison to Hurston’s philosophy of happiness. When her character Janie speaks to her lover, Teacake, about the hard times they are suffering, she says “If you kin see the light at daybreak, you don’t keer if you die at dusk. It’s so many people never seen de light at all. Ah was fumblin’ around and God opened de door.” Both authors write about nature as a lens to think metaphysically about human life. In other words, both Bartram and Hurston appear to be “watching God” through nature.

Animal motifs are another important element of study in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and students generally are interested in examining and discussing the novel’s menagerie. In one passage depicting an incipient hurricane, animals have lost their fear of people and of each other under the threat of the natural disaster’s “common danger.” Hurston depicts this temporarily peaceable kingdom when she writes that “A baby rabbit, terror ridden, squirmed through a hole in the floor and squatted there in the shadows against the wall, seeming to know that nobody wanted its flesh at such a time.” She concludes that “Common danger made common friends. Nothing sought a conquest over the other.” Bartram likewise devotes some of his most beautiful passages to the

transcendence of the fleeting peace of the wilderness. Coming upon a “chrystal fountain” or a spring, he observes that the clear waters and resulting unobstructed vision causes loss of predatory instinct among the animals:

Yet when those different tribes of fish are in the transparent channel, their nature seems absolutely changed; for here is neither desire to destroy nor persecute, but all seems peace and friendship. Do they agree on a truce, a suspension of hostilities? or by some secret divine influence, is desire taken away? or are they otherwise rendered incapable of pursuing each other to destruction?

Both authors seek from nature these moments of extreme unity that link them both to the deist tradition of belief. While Bartram frequently detects his “supreme protector” in the natural dangers that bypass him peacefully, Hurston seeks God in the inscrutability of the elements that surround her. In her autobiography she writes, “The ever-sleepless sea in its bed, crying out ‘how long?’ to Time; million-formed and never motionless flame; the contemplation of these two aspects alone, affords … sufficient food for ten spans of … expected lifetime.”

To juxtapose the work of these two authors pedagogically is to enrich both of their legacies. Hurston was a writer who railed against the politicization of her work and the demands on her to be a “race writer.” This universality of themes that she insisted upon and her pure enthusiasm for the land shine especially when studied in the context of early America, its deists and naturalists. Bartram, too, is burnished: from the obscure place of a long-winded botanist he becomes more easily recognizable as the sensitive observer, recorder, and thinker he truly was. It is an interesting exercise to look with students across generations to see their fruit trees, their magnolias, wild beasts and beasts of burden, their Seminoles, their insects and their hurricanes both startlingly lucid.

“A Map of the Coast of East Florida from the River St. John Southward near to Cape Canaveral,” between page xxxiv and page one of Chapter One from Travels through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida … William Bartram (Philadelphia, 1791). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Further Reading

Hurston’s biography *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942) contains reflection about the author’s education, early life in Florida, spirituality, and many other interesting strands that justify a reading together with Bartram.
Although *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Hurston’s masterpiece, is the

most appropriate choice for the high school literature classroom, Hurston also writes about Florida in some of her other works. In *Mules and Men* (1935), she records the folktales of the region. She also worked on the *WPA Guide to Florida* (1939), and her contributions are not those of a typical guidebook: rather than tourist sites, she describes sites of old folklore, places of sacred significance to the African American and Native American communities.

For more on Bartram's wide ranging influence see N. Bryllion Fagin's *William Bartram: Interpreter of the American Landscape* (1933). This text includes some biographical background on Bartram, as well as close textual study of his style. Among the most interesting observations about Bartram's writing is the shifting diction that Fagin attributes to his lack of formal education. Although Bartram was certainly tutored in botany and the Linnaean system by his famous father, the remainder of young Bartram's education resulted from self-directed reading.

Sadly, no searchable e-book of Bartram's *Travels*, or *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws. Containing an Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of Those Regions; Together with Observations on the Manners of the Indians* (1792), exists, only facsimile editions, so the hunt for passages that complement those found in Hurston must be done the old-fashioned way.

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Abigail Walthausen is a writer and a teacher at Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School in Brooklyn, New York.

Old School: Glenn Roberts restores Carolina grains



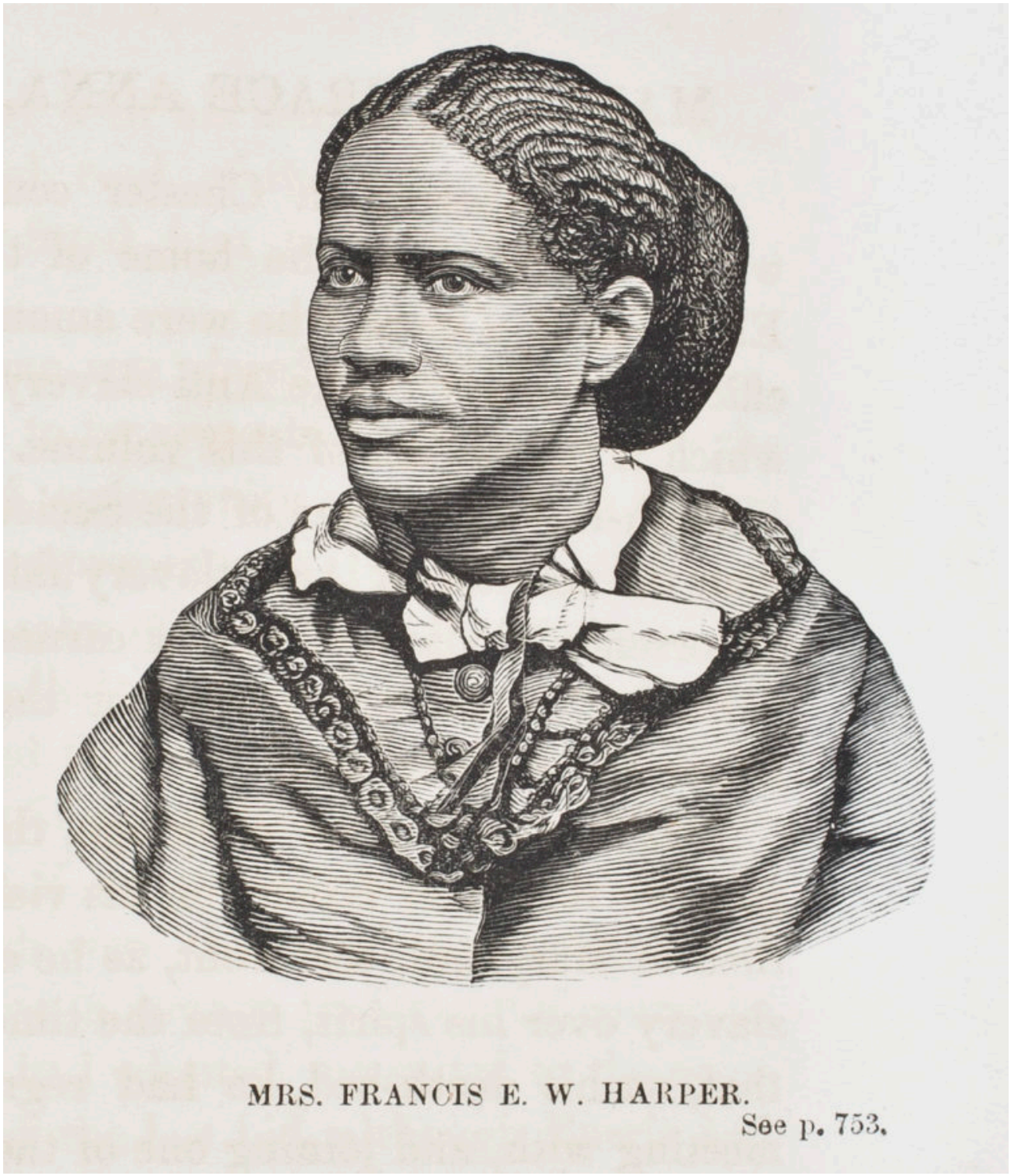
I set out to make something totally arcane relevant.

Secrecy and Manhood



The secrecy of brotherhood made brothers; men achieved their highest emotional possibility in republican secrecy.

Leaves, Trees, and Forests: Frances Ellen Watkins's Forest Leaves and Recovery



American literature, culture, and ideals stand wounded because America has regularly asserted that some lives and literatures—especially Black lives and literatures—matter less than others.

On High: A Child’s Chair and Mather Family Legacy



If Mather’s portrait inspires reverence, another object associated with him helps bring him down a bit from his lofty position: his childhood highchair