# Phillis Wheatley’s Pleasures: Reading good feeling in Phillis Wheatley’s Poems and letters



*Phillis Wheatley.*

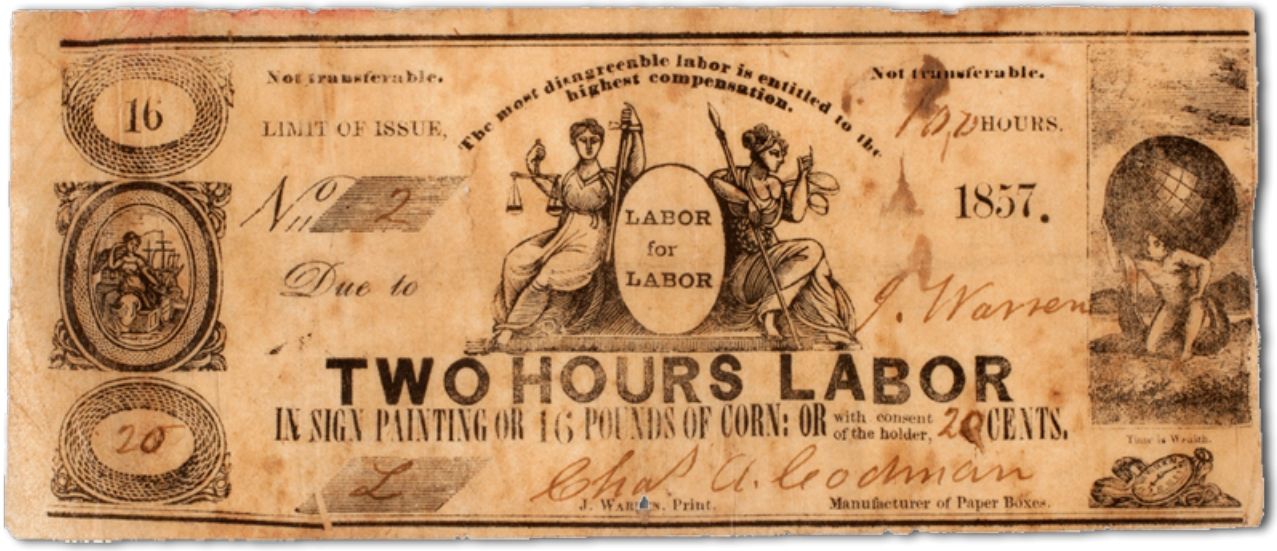
Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley
of Boston.

*Pendleton's Lithog.ʸ Boston.*

Wheatley does not write about race as a collective and embodied experience.

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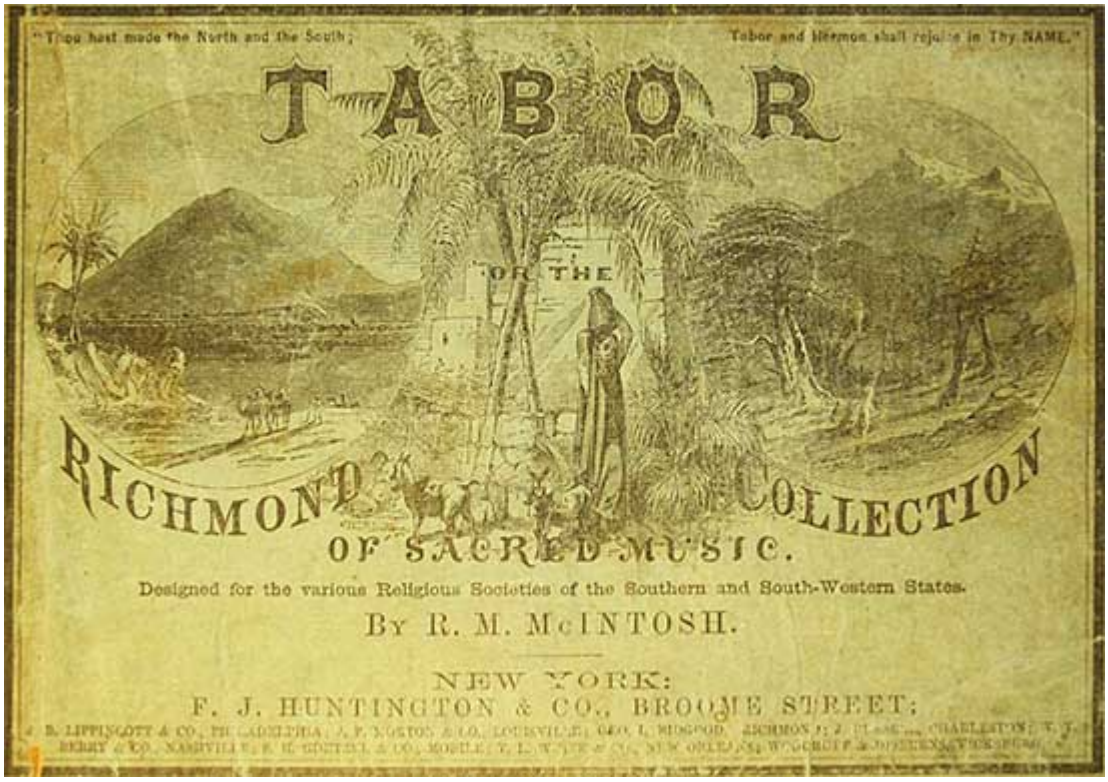
## Josiah Warren’s Labor Notes




A close examination of Josiah Warren’s utopian form of currency.

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## Rigdon McCoy McIntosh and the Tabor




McIntosh championed the soprano-led ensemble, softer singing style, proper enunciation, and a more affected style of performance characteristic of both liturgical-based denominations such as Episcopalians, Catholics, and Lutherans, as well as members of polite society.

---

# A Bed Sheet in Beinecke



“I had seen lots of sheets like this in New England museums but I never expected to find one in a research library. I was tempted to unfold it to its full length just to see the reaction of the sober scholars seated at the polished tables around me.”

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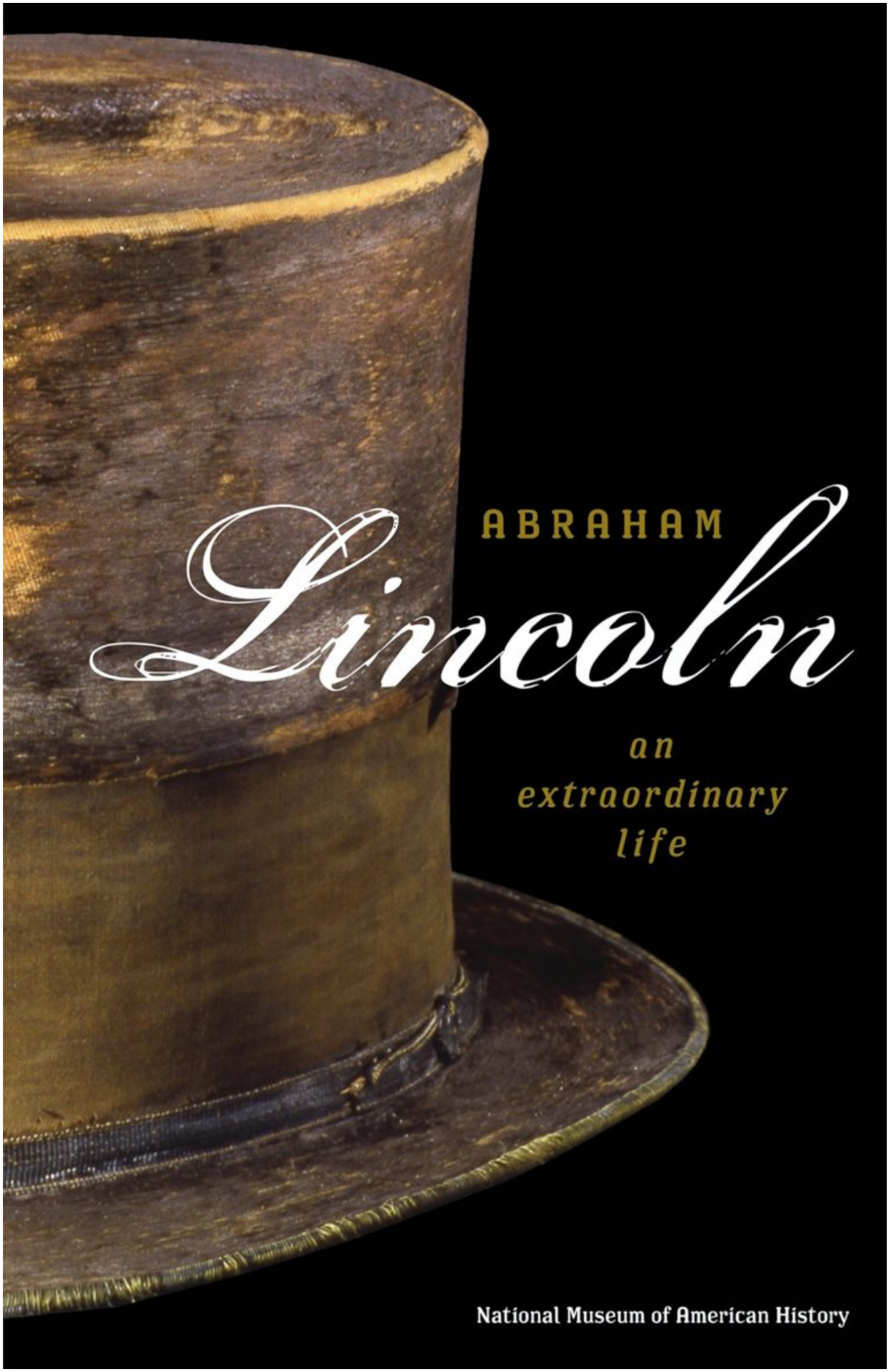
# Reading Distance



In its intermingling of the national, the paternal, the feminine, and the global, this letter is perhaps not quite the warm epistle of friendship it purports to be.

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## The Lincoln We Hope For


ABRAHAM
Lincoln
an
extraordinary
life
National Museum of American History

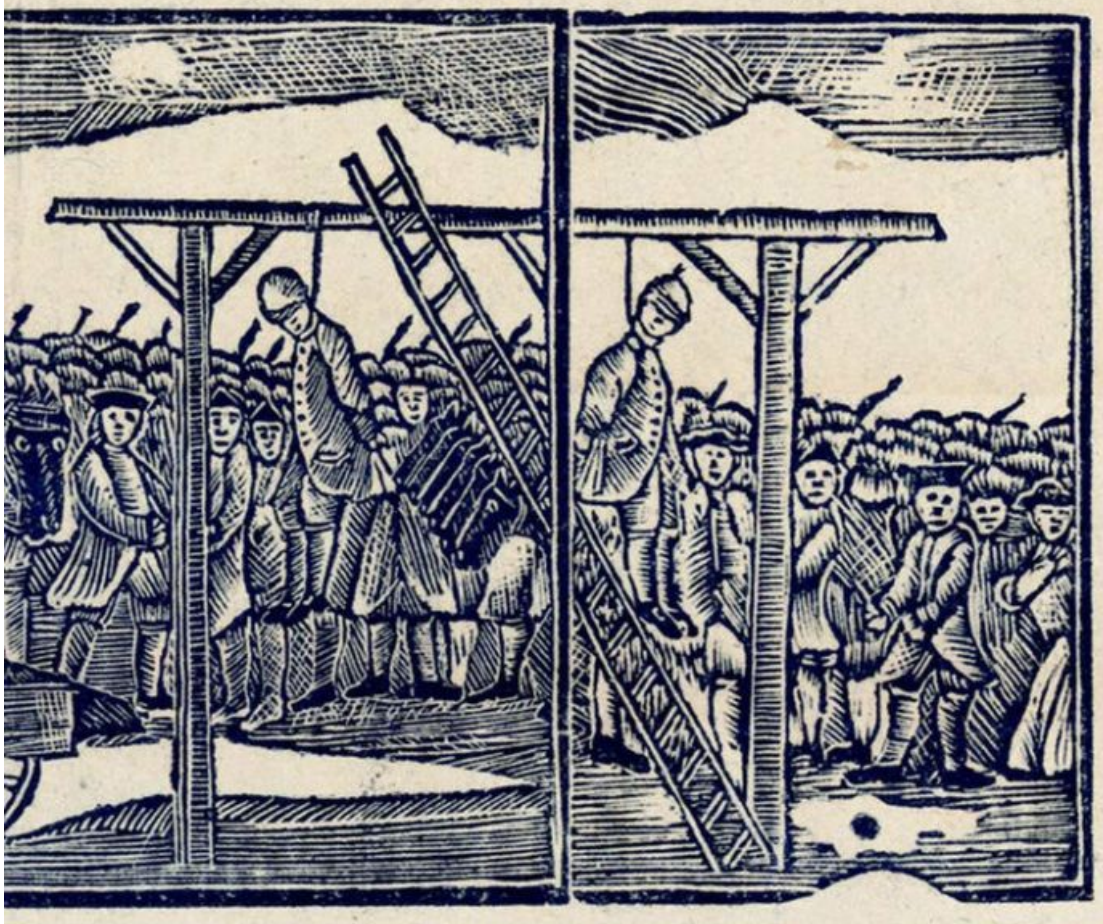
This is the Abraham Lincoln of America’s monuments.

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# Legal Cultures of Early America

# WITCHES, WIFE BEATERS, & WHORES

## *Common Law & Common Folk in Early America*



ELAINE FORMAN CRANE

When Thomas Harris's ghost appeared to his childhood friend William Briggs across a field one March morning in 1792, he set in motion a chain of events that produced a lawsuit. It is easy to understand why Harris's spirit was unable to settle down for eternity. Harris had left four illegitimate children as a result of a long-time connection with a woman named Ann Goldsborough. Eager to provide for their future, Harris instructed his brother James to sell his land and to use the proceeds to support the children. James sold the land, but pocketed the earnings, and Harris's enraged ghost set to work to solve the problem. Six visits persuaded Briggs that this apparition was indeed the specter of his old friend, and Briggs in turn used the information the ghost provided to pressure the living to follow the wishes of the deceased. Like any good friend seeking to redress a grievance in a world saturated with legal knowledge and with relatively easy access to courts, he filed suit in Queen Anne's County, Maryland, in 1796-1797.



Some readers might chafe at the amount of speculation in this book, but Crane's stories are so inviting and her expertise so assured that it would be a disappointment if she did not try to tie some of the knots together for us.

Thomas Harris's ghost is just one of the many fascinating characters readers encounter in Elaine Forman Crane's newest book, *Witches, Wife Beaters, & Whores: Common Law and Common Folk in Early America*. This enthralling, deeply researched work demonstrates vividly that early Americans lived in a world saturated by the law. Crane is interested specifically in the "common folk" of her title; tavern keepers, merchants, a handful of witches, murdered and battered wives, an enslaved black man. To uncover how the law suffused their world, Crane employs the methodology of microhistory, an approach used with great success by historians seeking to discern the lives and mentalities of those often not able to speak for themselves. Crane has undertaken research in challenging sources. Even more impressively, she has taken snippets of information and woven them into engaging, moving, and occasionally riveting stories. Crane demonstrates through her painstakingly recreated life histories just how much "legal culture and the routine of daily life were knotted together in early America" (4).

Crane illustrates this thesis in six chapters that focus on different crimes in four distinct legal jurisdictions: the Dutch colony of New Netherland, the English colonies of Bermuda and Rhode Island, and the state of Maryland. Her first chapter examines slander cases in New Netherland, while her second chapter takes us to Bermuda, established as an English colony in the wake of the wreck of the Sea Venture in 1609. Bermuda experienced a witch hunt in the 1650s, and Crane analyzes the accusations launched against 12 people, five of whom were executed. Chapter three analyzes eight cases of family violence in eighteenth-century Rhode Island, in which four men were prosecuted for homicide in the deaths of their wives. Crane draws on trial depositions with great facility to illustrate the formal and informal legal solutions that friends and

neighbors deployed to protect women from violent husbands. Chapter four explores a case of rape brought before the Rhode Island court. The incident allegedly happened on December 23, 1742, when a woman named Comfort Dennis Taylor traveled between Portsmouth and Bristol on a ferry navigated by a slave named Cuff. This chapter is an absorbing read. With Crane's eloquent prose, her detective work, her judicious handling of problematic and contradictory evidence, and her willingness to speculate frankly about the case, this chapter would make ideal reading for an undergraduate methods class. Chapter five turns to the problem of debt, with a focus on the family of Samuel Banister, whose longstanding legal battles over debt payment in Rhode Island took a dramatic turn when he shot—and killed—a man accompanying the sheriff when he came to evict Banister in 1745. The final chapter takes up the story of Thomas Harris's ghost and the complex family connections Harris's case reveals.

Crane's chapters illustrate several important themes. First and foremost is the legal knowledge that these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North Americans and Bermudians possessed. For example, Samuel Banister knew just how to cope with repeated claims on his estate: he promised to repay and he delayed. This was the legal strategy his indebted father had also pursued. For the most part, Banister's stalling worked—until he lost his wits and shot someone. Likewise, Taylor knew how a woman who had been raped should act, and she comported herself accordingly: she screamed for help in order to demonstrate that she had resisted her attacker; she quickly reported the attack; and she had bruises to show from her ordeal. John Middleton, one of the confessed witches in Bermuda, was similarly skilled in knowing how to make his confession persuasive. A Scot, Middleton was likely even more familiar with witchcraft than his English-born neighbors, but all of the island's inhabitants demonstrated remarkable knowledge about witches, manifested in the many juries summoned to investigate the accused witches' bodies for telltale marks, or revealed in depositions in which neighbors attested to the evil deeds surely attributable to the witch in their midst.

A second important theme is the role that growing literacy rates played in altering legal practice. While Banister's primary difficulty was his inability to pay his debts, the growing literacy of New England over the course of the eighteenth century made him more vulnerable to legal action. An earlier culture in which people trusted handshakes and memory had yielded to debts recorded in daybooks and a variety of paper records. Courts called for this book evidence when they adjudicated cases, and this paper trail proved damning to the likes of Banister. Literacy also played a key role in the saga of Harris's ghost. Thanks to their reading of the ghost stories that were so popular in the 1790s, Marylanders knew how ghosts were likely to comport themselves. By 1816, one could even read an article outlining the rules for ghosts' behavior.

A third important theme is the variations between colonial legal systems. Massachusetts, for example, passed a law in 1650 that ordered that neither wives nor husbands could strike each other—an unusual gender-neutral law on domestic violence. While Rhode Island had no such law, it did have another

legal deviation: in Rhode Island (but not elsewhere in New England) courts could rely on circumstantial evidence if there were no eyewitnesses. A second example concerns Rhode Island's laws about rape. Colonies did not have laws about attempted rape, so Taylor's accusation of Cuff fell into a grey area. But in the midst of her legal struggles to get redress in any forum, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law in August 1743 that pertained to attempted rape by a black man and that could have been prompted only, Crane argues, by Taylor's ordeal (137). The law made attempted rape by a black man punishable by branding, whipping, and transportation. This law, and others like it in colonial America, racialized laws about attempted rape by assuming that any advance by a black man toward a white woman would be unwanted, and thus the man was automatically guilty of rape (129). The Rhode Island law provides strong evidence for Crane's argument "that law was implemented from the bottom up" (8). In light of these (and many other) important legal variations, it might have been helpful for Crane to devote more time in her book to a discussion of her selection of these particular jurisdictions.

There are many admirable attributes of Crane's study. She draws together jurisdictions not normally considered in tandem, with her choice of New Netherland, Bermuda, Rhode Island, and Maryland. This analysis required her to straddle different legal regimes, including both civil law and common law. Her research is deep and extensive. She combed a variety of local sources, from tax codes to maps to town records to church registers, to identify people and to piece together their lives. She even drove through a snowstorm to find out if one could really hear someone scream across Narragansett Bay in late December.

Crane draws on this impressive documentary base to speculate, something that is essential given the snippets of information she unearthed. She ponders what really happened when Taylor accused Cuff of rape. She tries to understand why Bermuda was beset with a witch hunt in the 1650s, and tests possible links to events elsewhere—a sodomy case in New Haven in 1653, or the rise of the Quaker movement in the mid-1650s. She wonders what William Briggs had in mind when he ventriloquized the words of Harris's ghost in his deposition. She tries to get to the bottom of Harris's relationship with Ann Goldsborough, combing local records to identify this elusive woman, in order to find a way to characterize their relationship and to understand how this illicit relationship could endure through the births of four children. Some readers might chafe at the amount of speculation in this book, but Crane's stories are so inviting and her expertise so assured that it would be a disappointment if she did not try to tie some of the knots together for us. As she writes frankly, "speculation invites rebuttal" (202), and her honest appraisal of the problematic evidence allows readers to come to their own conclusions.

In the book's epilogue, Crane yokes the legal cultures she has described so vividly to the post-revolutionary United States. How, she asks, did these case studies foreshadow the later era? She posits that legal history can "offer a general interpretation of the American experience" (215). This conclusion seems apt in the respect that Anglo-Americans in the new United States, like their

colonial ancestors, were deeply immersed in legal culture and familiar with many different aspects of the law. But it is difficult to discern how to connect these four jurisdictions with later U.S. legal cultures. Crane asserts, for example, that the stories in her book "confirm a connection between law and intrinsic American values" (10). What does this claim of American values mean in the context of the multiple jurisdictions Crane examines? Bermuda seems especially oddly placed, since it is American only in the sense of being in the western hemisphere, but not in the meaning that I think Crane invokes in her epilogue of pertaining to the United States. The legal code of New Netherland, based on Dutch civil law, was transformed under later English rule, and the Dutch colony's connection to the legal behavior or values of the later United States is similarly unclear. And which Americans? Cuff, for example, sits oddly here. Crane writes that Cuff's values were "at odds with early American society" (15). It is difficult to tell, however, if it was his unique values or simply his plight that shaped his response—flight from further legal proceedings—to his legal predicament. Crane's admirable book is likely to inspire many other studies that will help answer some of these important questions. In the meantime, she has blazed a trail with her exemplary study, demonstrating that it is possible to bring the dead to life even without the aid of a ghost. Instead, Crane offers us an engaging and detailed analysis of how ordinary people understood and deployed the law in the most adverse circumstances, drawing us in with stories that are sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes funny, sometimes confounding, but always intriguing and absorbing.

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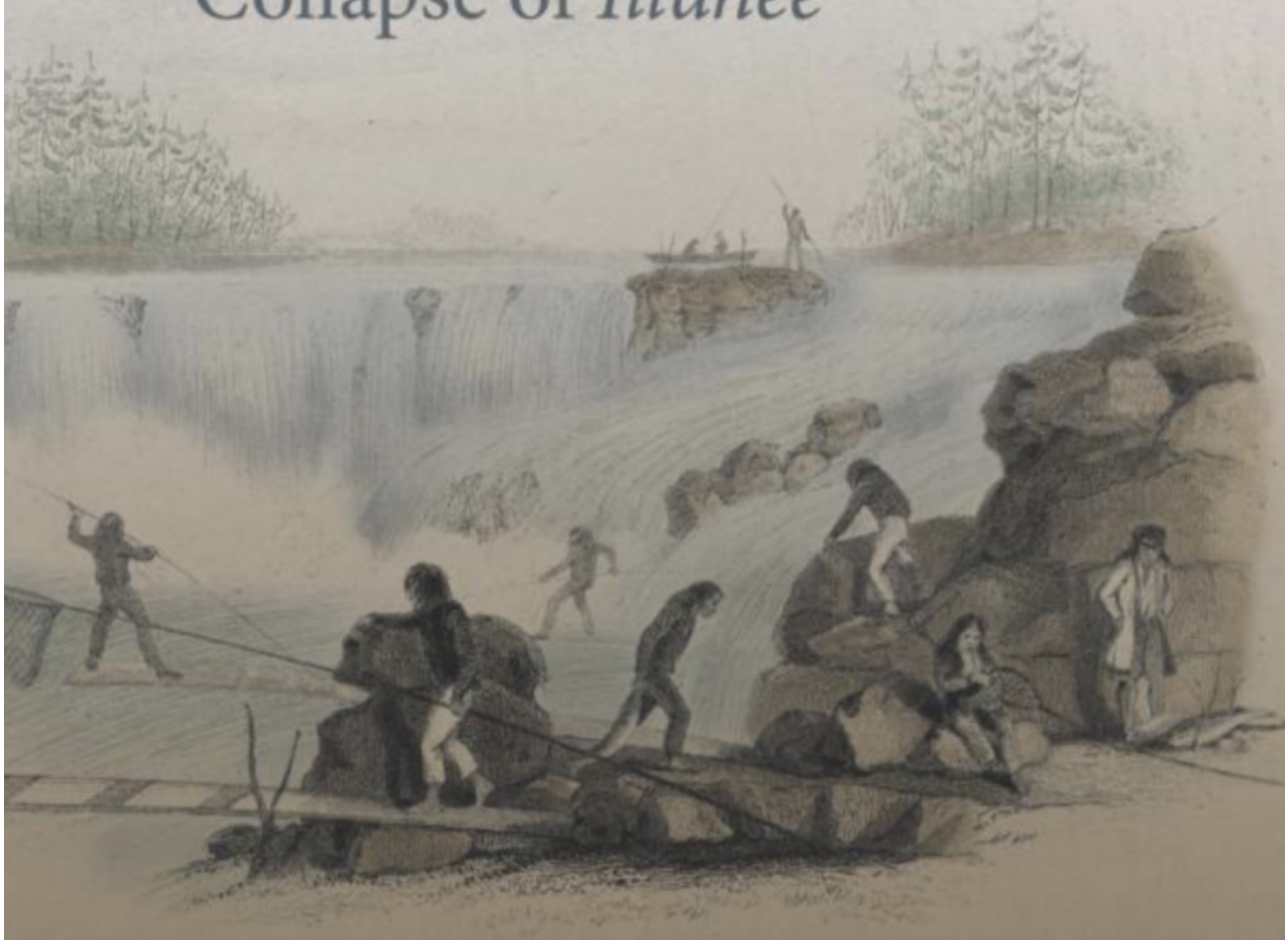
Alison Games is the Dorothy M. Brown Distinguished Professor of History at Georgetown University. Her most recent book is *Witchcraft in Early North America* (2010).

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# Reappraising Western History through Empire

GRAY H. WHALEY

# Oregon and the Collapse of *Illahee*



U.S. EMPIRE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN INDIGENOUS WORLD, 1792–1859

Indians looked on landless and drifting sailors, existing outside of the kin relations that defined Illahee, with suspicion. Yet through prostitution, intermarriage, working together, and trade, the fragments of a colonial society were formed that did not privilege the American vision of Oregon.

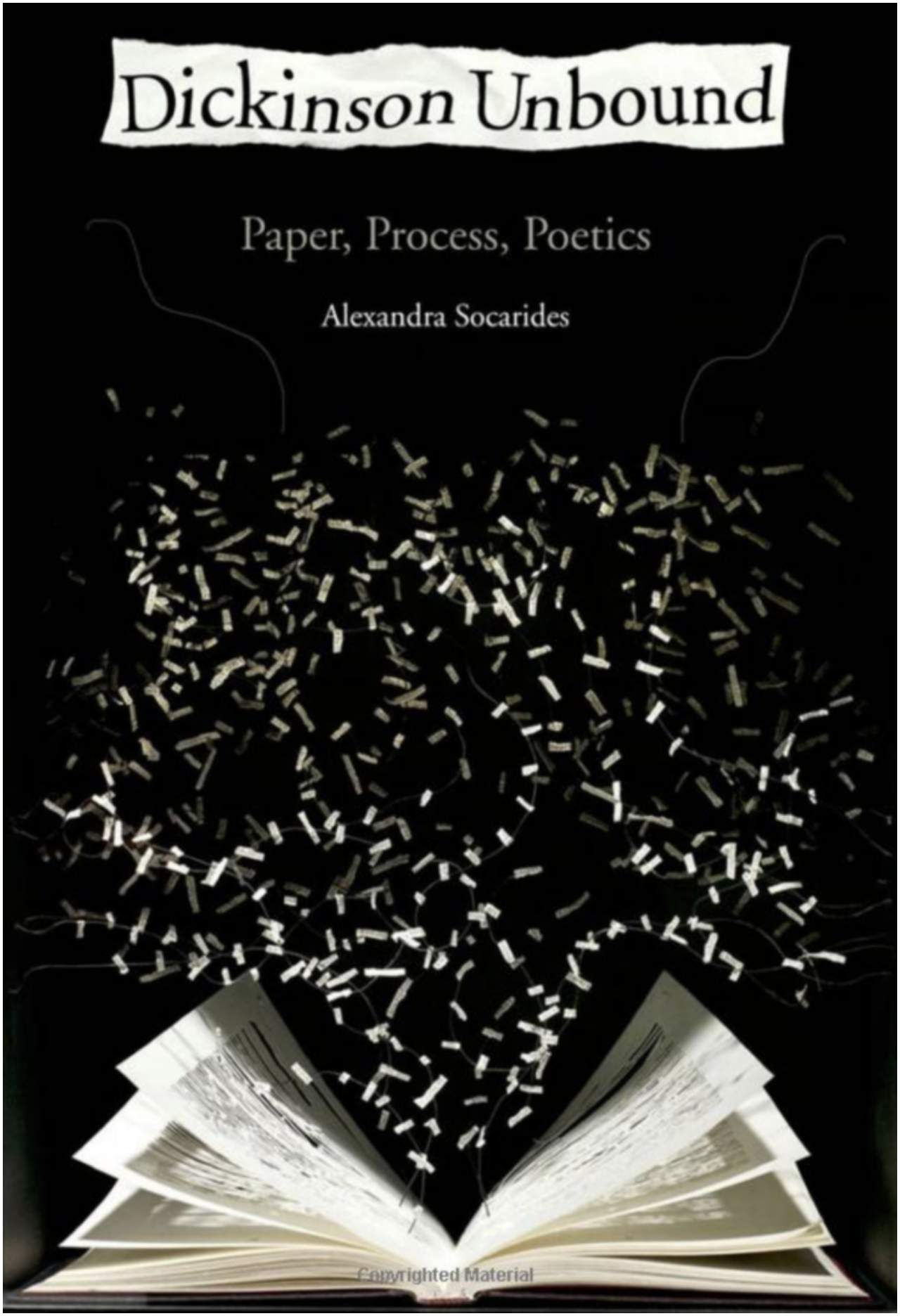
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## Between the Sheets

# Dickinson Unbound

## Paper, Process, Poetics

Alexandra Socarides



Copyrighted Material

Dickinson did not regard the book as a meaningful unit of analysis for her work, but too often, her editors and critics have.

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# Thresholds of Finding and Becoming



History and the Found Poem

## Debt

We may never know the mystery of sleep.
We don’t want to become machines.

But we let our vagabond thoughts run riot,
not like hurricane but like breakfast table,
spread with honey and cereal. And then: falling
over the dog, kicking the ribs out
of the heirloom chair. Somewhere
between the end of the table and half-past

nine, the stock-market crashes. We watch and can’t

believe we are watching. And then: hot flannels
to the face, brocade of poppy-heads. *Forget,*

*forget*—bag of ground pepper dipped in whiskey
and placed in the ear.

We never want to hear what people are saying. We never
know exactly what is needed. *Blister Compound, Opium Powder,*

*Lint.* Baths or Fomentations; Forcepts or Pins.

If you swallow a bee, if your throat is stung inside—
you are not necessarily closer to the mystery, your own dying.

Tonight I will place a key over your bee-sting
and force the poison out. You are very lucky. I don't
even know you, but still you owe me nothing.

# Excuse

I had rejected every soft-handed suitor, but then
one night: you with your mitts and sandpaper.

In the morning my mother found the salmon you left on the beach.
Then the seal, the basket of scallops. Like this each night for weeks.

She was anxious to meet you. We had become rich.
She rose early to greet you but saw only a bear lurching

out of the waves. We were discovered. You carried two whales
in your paws and dropped them. You turned into a rock.

A supernatural being of the sea, that's what I tell people now
when they ask me about my black veil, my net and stockings.

You can still see the spot where he dropped the whales, I say,
you can still see the rock. It's become a national landmark.

# Flower of the Standard Talking Machine

I've got the time, I've got the place, but it's hard to find the Girl.
Any little Girl that's a nice little Girl is the right little Girl for me.

Ain't you coming out tonight? If He comes in, I'm going Out.
A Bushel of Kisses. Wedding Bells. Battle Hymn of the Republic.

I'm afraid to come Home in the Dark. I heard the voice of Jesus say.

All that I ask of You is Love. Then we'll all go Home.

By the light of the Silvery Moon. Beautiful Isle of Somewhere.
Come where My Love lies Dreaming. In the Gloaming.

Where is my Wandering Boy Tonight? Abide with me.
Has anybody here seen Kelly? Don't let me Go. Bye-bye, Dearie.

Barnyard Serenade. When you Marry a Girl for Looks. America.

# Triangle Sideshow

## *—with John Dillon*

*Barker:*

Love in all Shapes! Visit my gallery
of Portraits. Wolf in Sheep's clothing or
the Biter (finally) Gets Bitten. Love's
labor lost. Love's many machinations.

Love's lenten lucubrations. Love's tentative
Lubrications. False alarm—or No One
there. Love in a labyrinth; the adventures
of My Day. A reminiscence of by-gone-times past

ten o'clock on a Cloudy Night. Travelers, notice
the Nag's Head on the heath. Step up and meet
the Ventriloquist, a man in the Wrong Box.

*Dummy:*

I believe in America,
the voice thrown from the stage.

*I will never betray you.*
Eventually he told me

how an egg is filled. How feathers
are hollow, the particular service
of the eyelid. What gives

blood its motion, our fine, beautiful
eyes, our limbs arranged in a great order

like fingers of a hand kissed
in greeting. Dangling, eyes

roll to ceiling. See how

we are always evolving?

*Has the soul any passion?*
*Are the soul and body connected?*

The men from the Sideshow saying,
*don’t ever talk to anyone*
*outside family.*

The men in shark-skin
patting their brows, folding their teeth
in kerchiefs and staggering
into the next room.

*Ventriloquist:*

When you hold your breath for a longer
or shorter time—a body of midnight

outside of the city, a single tone
of quickness on slowness that can’t
be measured. Like taking one’s self

away, like being away from a place.

I would hang a cow-bell around
his neck like a trophy. My voice
sliding up or down in pitch on a word.

*I am your gentlest one.*

# The Evolution of Rape Law

Knowing that at any moment she could turn
into a witch, they sit the girl in the corner by the fire.

They place a wooden cross in her mouth, cakes of salt, soap.
They place a coin over each doorway.

She says nothing. When they divide up her father’s things
to pay for the scandal—his lathe, his axe, his pewter

bowls—she holds her mouth half-closed like a lock
that waits, a jagged outline, lizard or turtle, silhouette opening.

Either she’ll lose her name or a neighbor will hang.
It is known that she has been with a man, in a brake or bush,

out in the land. They say she can change into a partridge or
deer, and that the night she appeared in a field

a man followed her. It’s true when she moves, she makes
a shifting sound, and sand fills her shoes, filtering

onto the floor beneath her skirt where she sits still
as an hourglass. To try her case, they shave a bull’s tail,

grease it, and thread it through her door-clate. She places
both feet on the threshold. If she holds the bull by the tail,

she can save her honor. If not, she will keep the grease
that clings to her hands. Her face shiny now, like

warm meat. Years later she will still roll grease
from her arms. Truth will become the wolf that lurks

in snowfields of her eyes as she sits by windows and beyond
the invention of glass. Her thoughts crashed into again like birds.