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**SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY: ENVISIONING THE AMERICAN PAST IN
GEORGE HENRY BOUGHTON'S *PILGRIMS GOING TO CHURCH***

by

Amanda J. Glesmann

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Early American Culture.

Spring 2002

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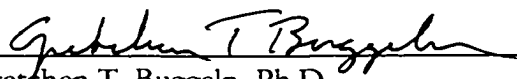
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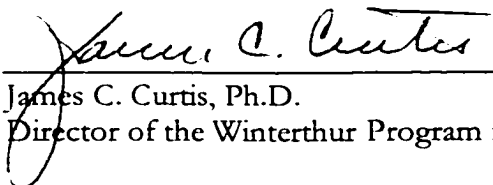
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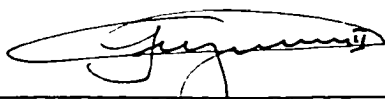
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ABSTRACT

Pilgrims Going to Church (1867) was the first and best-known painting of American colonial life by the Anglo-American artist George Henry Boughton (1834-1905). Today the painting is often associated with the Colonial Revival movement and the Centennial Exposition of 1876; this essay demonstrates that *Pilgrims Going to Church* carried a much broader, more complex and ambiguous range of connotations in the minds of nineteenth-century viewers. Consideration of the painting's relationship to popular genre and history paintings of the period and close reading of contemporary descriptions of *Pilgrims Going to Church* and other nineteenth-century works of art provides a context in which to understand the narrative and compositional openness that allowed the image to support a variety of meanings and interpretations over time.

The continued success of *Pilgrims Going to Church* is remarkable: The numerous other depictions of colonial history that proliferated throughout the nineteenth century have long since been forgotten; indeed, most of the genre and history paintings of the period—of any subject—are today dismissed as overly “sentimental” or melodramatic. By looking beyond modern interpretations of *Pilgrims Going to Church* to consider contemporary understandings of the painting and the shifting cultural conditions which shaped various readings of the image, this essay explores the causes behind the singular popularity and lasting appeal of Boughton's iconic representation of American colonial life and links the success of his vision of history to American attitudes about the past.

“And for the season it was winter, and they that know the winters of that cuntrie know them to be sharp and violent, and subjecte to cruell and feirce stormes, deangerous to travill to known places, much more to serch an unknown coast. Besids, what could they see but a hidious and desolate wildernes, full of beasts and willd men—and what multitudes thee might be of them they knew not...and the whole countrie, full of woods and thickets, represented a wilde and savage heiw.”

William Bradford, second governor of the Phymouth Colony, in “Of Phymouth Plantation,” 1647.¹

It is a familiar scene: a purposeful line of sturdy, virtuous figures treads a snowy path through the wilderness. Even without the presence of the minister second in the line of marchers, their serious expressions, modest, old-fashioned clothing and the prayer books and Bibles many of them carry would make their mission clear: these are The Puritan Forefathers on their wintry trek to church. A tightly assembled group of thirteen, paired two-by-two along their path, nearly spans the entire canvas. In the far right corner a fourteenth pilgrim, his left-side partially cropped at the edge of the composition, emerges from the background to make his way towards the procession.



Figure One: George Henry Boughton, *Pilgrims Going to Church*, 1867. 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Robert L. Stuart Collection, New York Public Library, on permanent loan
to the New-York Historical Society.

Rather than following the path of snowy footprints in the foreground, which curves slightly from the right to the left corner of the canvas, he approaches at an angle, making his way across the empty landscape behind the group. Leading the march are two men armed with muskets, each carrying a Bible in his opposite hand. Next comes the gray-bearded minister, dressed in black robes and a skull cap, his gloved hands clasping a Bible and prayer book to his chest. At his right is a woman dressed in brown. While the armed men leading the group appear to be engaged in conversation, the minister and his companion march in silence; he with a gaze slightly downcast towards the path before them, she looking into the distance ahead. Close behind them are a woman and a young girl, positioned nearly at the center of the canvas. Then comes an older couple, followed by a woman carrying an infant, a young boy, and a girl who presses her cloak to her face, staring agitatedly into the distance. At the rear of the group are two armed men who look out at the viewer, perhaps startled by some movement in the woods.

The story this painting tells is even more familiar than the image itself: the colonists of New England lived difficult—and often dangerous—lives. They were pious and brave, marching to church through a “hidious and desolate wilderness, ful of beasts and wilde men.” Today our familiarity with this tale of Pilgrim virtue and forbearance elides many of the other stories the image might tell. Completed in 1867, *Pilgrims Going to Church* (Fig. 1) was the first painting of colonial New England by the Anglo-American artist George Henry Boughton (1834–1905). While this scene of a courageous pilgrimage to church has become an icon that continues to be reproduced in books and magazines and has inspired a range of souvenirs from coffee mugs and placemats to postcards and refrigerator magnets, the artist himself has passed into relative obscurity. Also forgotten

are the original contexts in which the image was painted and exhibited, and the variety of meanings that it once held for nineteenth-century audiences. It became Boughton's best-known work, and did much to establish him as what one contemporary called "the interpreter and . . . illuminator of New England life in the seventeenth century."² While general familiarity with the Pilgrim story always shaped viewers' reactions to this painting, it once accommodated a far broader range of readings than it does today. The fact that our modern understanding of *Pilgrims Going to Church* smoothes over many of the tensions and ambiguities once found in the painting suggests our discomfort with the idea of ambiguity in the American past.

Despite the fact that *Pilgrims Going to Church* was exhibited in London and New York and reproduced in books and periodicals well before being shown at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, it is the painting's relationship to the Colonial Revival movement sparked by the Centennial Exposition that continues to shape our understanding of the image. Recent scholarship on Boughton and *Pilgrims Going to Church* persistently reads the painting as an icon of the Colonial Revival, and the image has frequently been linked to changes in the late nineteenth-century New England social and industrial landscape which gave rise to the romanticization of the colonial past.³ Although the cultural impact of the Centennial cannot be ignored, it should be noted that *Pilgrims Going to Church* was painted nine years earlier, and was already a popular image by the time of the Exhibition. Additionally, the painting—like many of Boughton's later colonial-themed works—was owned in New York by a

collector without direct ties to colonial New England or to the changing New England landscape which many Americans found so unsettling.

Contemporary reactions to *Pilgrims Going to Church* can tell us a great deal about nineteenth-century attitudes towards history and art, and about how we understand and want to envision American history today. What made this image appealing to New Yorkers in the late 1860's? Why, of the many images of colonial New England painted in the nineteenth century, was *Pilgrims Going to Church* so popular? How did George Henry Boughton, an expatriate painter living in London, create an image which has remained popular while most other genre and history paintings of the period have long since been dismissed as overly-sentimental and melodramatic? Why have the painting's Colonial Revival associations remained so compelling? It is only by looking beyond modern meanings of *Pilgrims Going to Church* to chart changes in contemporary understandings of the painting that we can understand the shifting cultural conditions which shaped various readings of the image. This essay will explore several of these possible readings and consider the causes behind the singular popularity and lasting success of Boughton's iconic representation of colonial American life.

Pilgrims Going to Church was painted and first exhibited in London, appearing at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1867 under the title "Early Puritans of New England Going to worship Armed, to protect themselves from Indians and Wild Beasts, etc." In early 1868 the painting was on view in New York City under the title "New England Pilgrims Going to Church in Winter" at art dealer Samuel P. Avery's Fifth Avenue

gallery.⁴ It was included in Avery's annual spring auction that April, where it was purchased by the prominent collector Robert L. Stuart, whose sugar refining operation was the largest in New York City.⁵ The next known exhibition of the painting was in 1870, when Stuart lent it to the second annual exhibition of the Yale School of Fine Arts, where it was one of two colonial-themed works (along with Robert W. Weir's *Embarkation of the Pilgrims*).⁶ *Pilgrims Going to Church* was not shown publicly again until it was included in the loan exhibition of American paintings at the Centennial, but the painting nevertheless remained in the public eye. Just a few weeks after being purchased by Stuart in April 1868, *Pilgrims Going to Church* was reproduced in *Harper's Weekly*. Photographed by Goupil and Co., the painting filled an entire page of the magazine and was accompanied by a brief descriptive caption.⁷ It quickly became Boughton's most visible work. It was frequently mentioned—and often illustrated—when Boughton was interviewed in magazines or included in books on contemporary artists and art collections, and it provided a context and point of comparison when Boughton's later colonial-themed paintings were discussed in print.

The fact that *Pilgrims Going to Church* remains such a familiar image today suggests that the general perception of Pilgrims in America has changed little since the late-nineteenth century. The cut, style, and material of the clothing worn by Boughton's Pilgrims is more appropriate for the nineteenth century than the seventeenth, and the weapons the men carry are not muskets, but nineteenth-century rifles. Perhaps more troubling is that the entire premise of the scene is in fact implausible: Puritan-Pilgrim

settlements were compact developments typically enclosed by a palisade for defense. Surrounding land was often cleared for farming, but there was no reason for a church-going party to pass through the forest: the meeting house was at the *center* of the community, so there would have been no need for a large group such as this one to travel a great distance together.⁸ And yet, *Pilgrims Going to Church* is a successful image. Then as now, viewers seem to have overlooked these historical inaccuracies and found something recognizable in Boughton's image of the Pilgrims.⁹

Pilgrims Going to Church was inspired by a passage from William Henry Bartlett's *The Pilgrim Fathers, or the Founders of New England in the Reign of James the First*, an illustrated history first published in London in 1853. Bartlett's account of the Pilgrims is familiar:

... [T]he few villages were almost isolated, being connected only by long miles of blind pathway through the woods; and helpless indeed was the position of that solitary settler who erected his rude hut in the midst of the acre or two of ground that he had cleared. ... The cavalcade proceeding to church, the marriage procession—if marriage could indeed be thought of in those frightful days—was often interrupted by the death shot from some invisible enemy.¹⁰

The danger and hardship Bartlett evokes was in keeping with established ideas about colonial history and follows the familiar track laid out by works such as William Bradford's widely-read account of Plymouth Plantation. Bartlett was already well-known for his picturesque travel books (such as *Pictures from Sicily*, *Jerusalem Revisited*, and *American Scenery*), and many of his sketches of landscapes and buildings were used to illustrate

histories by other authors (like Dr. James Taylor's *Pictorial History of Scotland*).¹¹ Billed as “an attractive history of a heroic immigration,” Bartlett's *Pilgrim Fathers* included twenty-eight engravings on steel and thirty-one woodcuts after Bartlett sketches.¹² The engravings in the second half of the book (including the appendix, from which Boughton's description of the Pilgrim march to church was taken) are, with one or two exceptions, empty landscapes. Many of the woodcuts in this section of the book depict household items or “memorials of early settlement” such as a fragment of Plymouth Rock, Edward Winslow's chair, and William Bradford's tombstone.¹³ The only representations of actual Pilgrims in the 1853 edition are an engraved portrait of Edward Winslow and a small woodcut of cartoon-like Pilgrims modeling typical “Pilgrim costume.”¹⁴ Boughton seems to have been the first—and perhaps the only—artist to illustrate the Pilgrims in Bartlett's *Pilgrim Fathers*.

In his Pilgrims Boughton found a popular, easily marketable subject. His unique treatment of colonial scenes in images like *Pilgrims Going to Church* was the basis of his long and successful career. As this essay will demonstrate, the meaning of *Pilgrims Going to Church* was not static, and the fact that it could support a number of various readings allowed the image to maintain lasting appeal. Yet why turn to Pilgrims at all? Boughton began his career as a landscape painter. One of his earliest known works, *Winter Twilight* (Fig. 2, 1858, his first painting purchased by Stuart), helped him make a name for himself during his early years in New York. After going to study painting in France, Boughton seems to have moved away from landscapes entirely. Having spent eighteen months in Paris studying figure painting with Edouard May, Boughton traveled to Ecoen, a village

eight miles north of the city, to study with Edouard Frere, a genre painter who specialized in sentimental images of children, peasants, and rural life.¹⁵ Ecoen was home to a well-established group of figure painters who, like Frere, focused on small-scale interior scenes.

In 1874, Boughton explained to M.D. Conway that his decision to turn to colonial subject matter in the late 1860s—beginning with *Pilgrims Going to Church*—had been influenced by the reviews of his early work, which insistently associated him with the style of his teacher Edouard Frere:

The first few small pictures which I had painted under Edouard Frere in rural France, and afterwards in London under the same pleasant but clinging influence, had always been praised, when noticed, by the kindly critics for just their Frere qualities. This was agreeable enough, but not quite satisfying. I got rather tired of the 'dividends' that I did not feel quite entitled to, so I left the pleasant track, and bethought me of the Puritans and the sad but picturesque episodes in which they played parts. To ensure a 'pilgrimage' into another range of subjects entirely, I chose a larger canvas, and planned a composition with a greater number of figures. The picture was painted in the depths of an English winter, and a sufficiently snowy one.¹⁶

In response to this persistent association of his work with Frere's, Boughton chose to paint something that would set him apart: he began with a larger canvas, created a multi-figured composition, and turned to the Pilgrim story as his subject. In painting a large, multi-figured group marching across a wild, somewhat threatening landscape, Boughton decisively distanced himself from this group. And yet even *Pilgrims Going to Church*, despite its scale and (for Boughton) uncommonly complex figural composition, did not escape the association with sentimentality common to all his work.



Figure Two: George Henry Boughton, *Winter Twilight Near Albany, New York*, 1858. 16 x 24 in. Robert L. Stuart Collection, New York Public Library, on permanent loan to the New-York Historical Society.

Pilgrims Going to Church marked a significant departure from Boughton's earlier work, and was representative of a new approach to history painting that was sweeping the art world in the late nineteenth century. Jochen Wierich, in his recent work on the rejection of grand-manner history painting in favor of more personal historical perspective (a shift he calls "the domestication of history") during this period, has argued that history painters turned to the conventions and narrative strategies of genre painting in order to make their work more appealing and accessible.¹⁷ The primary effect of this shift in historical representation was the increased combination of domestic and historical narratives. Drawing on Wendy Greenhouse's study of British history in American painting, Wierich argues that scenes of British history were popular "even if the audience was unfamiliar with a particular historical incident and its literary source," because such easily decodable images as "English Queens in distress" were accessible even to those with little or no historical knowledge.¹⁸ American history was less theatrical, and scenes of American history—while a staple of American history painting in the early nineteenth-century—remained less popular than other classes of painting, such as landscape and genre.

It took the appearance of historical genre paintings such as Boughton's *Pilgrims Going to Church*, and historical literature such as Longfellow's *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (which placed historical figures in an everyday context that viewers could relate to) before scenes from American history gained widespread popularity. Audiences connected with genre paintings because they illustrated familiar, everyday experiences, easily enriched by the viewer's personal memories and associations. It didn't hurt that *Pilgrims Going to Church* and Boughton's Longfellow-inspired works were associated with

popular literature of the period. Drawing historical narratives from sources with which were well-known to many viewers likewise allowed them to connect with a familiar story. *Pilgrims Going to Church* allowed this connection to be taken a step further. Because it did not document a specific historical event, it allowed viewers to engage associatively and imaginatively with the life of the Pilgrims described by Longfellow and painted by Boughton.

The preference for this new approach to history was shared by viewers and critics alike. In an article titled “Art in New York,” published in *The New York World* in 1868, a critic complained that artists who “plunge wildly into the historical muddles of a century past, and give us academically severe glimpses of the early days of the republic, are the very worst.” He continued by wishing that:

. . .there had been such an institution as a photograph in the days of Washington, so that one might have cheap, though honest glimpses of the plain, old fashioned folk of a period which has been dressed up by modern artists to an extent that may be best illustrated, perhaps, by the idea of a French poodle made up to look like a statesman by the aid of a bag-wig and lace cravat.¹⁹

The reviewer suggested that painters’ attempts to represent American history had simply “thrown ridicule on what was doubtless a very respectable past by investing it with airs and graces belonging exclusively to old world climes and times.” What this writer wanted was historical art that related to contemporary American life. However, there were clearly many Americans who did not share this point of view. Mark Thistlethwaite has established that the two decades before the Civil War saw the nation’s greatest production of history paintings—and of scenes from American history in particular.²⁰

For many viewers, the historical scenes painted and exhibited in America in the 1840s and “for several decades thereafter” were thought to elevate the moments they be superior examples of American art which could be referred to as proof that the United States had culturally come of age.²¹

These paintings do not seem to have attained widespread popularity, however, and a review of the art exhibition at the Metropolitan Fair, a benefit held in New York City in 1864 in support of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, suggests that by the mid-1860s Americans had begun to tire of the aggressive patriotism and dramatic bluster of “classic” grand manner history paintings such as Leutze’s *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851, Fig. 3):

We presume that a desire to have some striking picture with a subject that should appeal to our patriotism in the most conspicuous place in the gallery prompted the Art Committee to hang Leutze’s “Washington Crossing the Delaware” in the commanding position it occupies, covering, as it does, the entire north end of the room. On several grounds, we should have been glad to see it differently placed. We dislike, exceedingly, the spirit in which the subject is treated, the arrangement of the figures and the style of the painting, and we should rejoice if the popular verdict, on seeing the picture again, after its long seclusion, should prove that the day is passing away when a production so essentially commonplace, not to say vulgar, can be advocated to the rank of masterpiece.²²

The critic turns from a discussion of *Washington Crossing the Delaware* and Leutze’s other five pictures in the exhibition to consider Eastman Johnson, writing “how gracious is the contrast, as we turn from this work to the beautiful art of Eastman Johnson, thus far almost the only painter of the figure in America who shows both depth of feeling and skill in execution.” The critic seems almost giddy as he discusses Johnson’s painting of a young girl knitting: “How carefully and firmly painted! how delicately studied! how



Figure Three: Emmanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851. 149 x 255 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John S. Kennedy.

purely felt and enjoyed! One such conscientious painter as Mr. Johnson, we are happy in believing, will neutralize the evil influence of 20 men who care neither what they paint nor how.” Clearly, there are obvious differences between the two images: Johnson’s is a genre painting, while the Leutze work discussed is a grand manner history painting. Yet comparison of the two reviews is telling. What the critic objects to in Leutze’s work is not the historical subject but “the spirit in which the subject is treated, the arrangement of figures and the style of painting.” In short, the critic is against the conventions of grand manner history painting. Johnson’s work, on the other hand, has the sound of a typical genre scene, and apparently was treated in a spirit much more appropriate to the times. Jochen Wierich has noted that during the 1860s and 1870s history painting fell under fire from many prominent critics, who felt that “it did not speak to the needs of the wider public” and “failed to address popular sentiments which revolved around nation and home.” Both complaints seem to lie behind this negative view of Leutze’s work.²³

Wierich takes great pains to establish a contrast between Leutze and Eastman Johnson, whose work is characterized as central to the “domestication” of history painting in the nineteenth century. He argues that Boughton and Johnson had much in common, even though the latter did not paint strictly historical subjects. Wierich suggests that both painters “reduced pictorial narrative to a bare anecdotal minimum. Johnson was a painter of contemporary life, but he chose subject matter that portrayed a present that was on the verge of becoming the past.”²⁴ Such comments suggest a rather superficial reading of genre paintings. The assertion that these artists “reduced” narrative in their work to a “bare anecdotal minimum” partakes of the short-sighted

dismissiveness towards genre painting which was unfortunately all too common in Boughton's time and continues to undermine scholarship today.²⁵ Nevertheless, Wierich's observations about the appearance of Boughton's and Johnson's work in contemporary reviews are useful. He notes that, like Boughton's images of colonial history, Johnson's work addressed the concerns of contemporary society. The two artists were among the few Americans whose names were regularly included in reviews of private collections—even those favoring European art—in the years following the Civil War.²⁶ While Leutze and grand manner history painting, meanwhile, receded to the background, Boughton's—and Johnson's—history paintings were able to withstand competition from increasingly popular contemporary landscape painters. In the review of the Metropolitan Fair quoted above, the lengthiest commentary (aside from that full column devoted to Leutze) is given to the landscape painters Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Church. Much recent scholarship has been devoted to the complex themes and cultural concerns addressed in nineteenth-century American landscapes; Boughton's *Pilgrims Going to Church* supported a similarly complex array of meanings, yet it operated in an entirely different manner.²⁷ As we shall see, both viewers' basic familiarity with the Pilgrim story, and what I will refer to as the “open” interpretive possibilities the painting accommodates (enabled by the fact that *Pilgrims Going to Church* was not directly linked to a specific historical event) allowed what might appear as a stock, anecdotal image to both provoke and support a rich and provocative range of readings.

*

*“Mr. Boughton’s paintings are remarkable for fidelity,
for grace, for tender sentiment, and for suggesting much
more than they tell plainly.”*

*Reprinted in the New York Tribune
June 12, 1869.²⁸*

Between 1867, when *Pilgrims Going to Church* was painted, and 1876, when it was featured at the Centennial, the painting was frequently reproduced in magazines and books, and became a popular representation of American colonial history. Before continuing with a discussion of the painting, it is worthwhile to explain what is meant by references to the “openness” of narrative in *Pilgrims Going to Church*, and to explore the cultural role that popular imagery may play. David Morgan’s recent work on religious imagery provides useful insights into the way images—and popular art in particular—can work to both shape and reinforce the viewer’s sense of reality. Morgan argues that “material things assert our identities and maintain them in the face of an ever-present flux of sensation and mental activity.”²⁹ Images in particular are a “unique category of material object. . . characterized by a special ability to mediate imaginary linguistic, intellectual, and material domains.”³⁰ This idea of mediation is crucial, and gives popular art its distinctive character. Imagery often appears at places of cultural “disjunction and contradiction”: while avant-garde images “tend to foment the rupture at

such sites,” popular images often “serve to mend or conceal them.” One of the most powerful tools a popular image can engage is familiarity of subject. As Morgan explains:

The cultural work that popular images perform is often a mediating one, serving to bolster one world against another, to police the boundaries of the familiar, or to suture gaps that appear as the fabric of the world wears thin. Popular images are often quotidian; tirelessly repeating what has always been known, as if the ritual act of repetition might transfigure a belief into a condition of nature.³¹

Lawrence Levine’s work on early twentieth-century films and photographs offers a similarly useful understanding of the cultural role of popular images. Levine argues that the cultural role of art is not limited to pushing boundaries—it can “just as legitimately stand near the center of common experience and give its audiences a sense of recognition and community.”³²

Both Levine and Morgan are proponents of the idea that the meaning of an image is generated in part by the viewer’s response to it; while these responses may vary, they are nonetheless unified by common understandings and associations which a related group of viewers are likely to bring to them.³³ Borrowing from literary theory, Levine demonstrates the utility of considering the relationship between images and their viewers, suggesting that “the process of popular culture” be understood “as a process of interaction between complex texts that harbor more than monolithic meanings and audiences who embody more than monolithic assemblages of compliant people.”³⁴

This is a useful context in which to understand *Pilgrims Going to Church* and the multiplicity of meanings accommodated in its familiar story. Like the “‘open’ texts” defined by literary theorist Umberto Eco, *Pilgrims Going to Church* functions in part *because* of the tension between the familiar, fixed meaning of the scene it represents and the

wide variety of interpretations which nevertheless remain open to the viewer within that clearly-defined narrative. As Eco notes, the 'open' text "wants the reader to make a series of interpretive choices which, though not infinite are, however, more than one."³⁵ Yet Eco likens the open text to a maze: while there are many possible directions to take in reading an open text, "you cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it." The only exit is to follow the path the text lays out: "An 'open' text, however open it may be, cannot afford whatever interpretation."³⁶

Pilgrims Going to Church offers viewers a range of interpretive possibilities, yet they all exist beneath the rubric of the greater Pilgrim story that the image unquestionably represents. Within that story, the many meanings that may be supported by the painting are a strength and add to its interest and appeal. By allowing viewers to make a series of interpretive choices that shape the meaning of the painting, the image—and the Pilgrim story it depicts—retains significance (though for changing reasons) even as time passes.

Let us return to Boughton's Pilgrims as they continue their snowy march, and examine the idea of openness more closely.

Perhaps due to the bright contrast of their clothing with that of the other marchers, the woman and young girl positioned nearly at the center of the canvas quickly draw the eye. What is most striking initially is the woman's dress: her ivory cloak, white kerchief, and white lace-trimmed apron contrast brightly with the grays, greens, and browns of the other pilgrims' clothing. The red ribbon tucked into the bible she carries in her right arm is the most vibrant spot of color in the composition. Although this detail

is difficult to see, it appears that her hairstyle may also distinguish her from the other marchers. In contrast to the simple, somewhat severe upswept hairstyles of the other women, a braided section of hair appears to have been pinned across the crown of her head, and wisps of hair visible below the edge of her kerchief suggest that beneath her cloak her hair may hang freely over her shoulders. The young girl at her side also attracts attention. Initially, it is her green dress—far brighter than the costume of any of the figures behind her—that holds the viewer's eye. What becomes most notable, however, is the line of her gaze: her head is turned sharply to the left, and looks into the forest at her side, her eyes cast back towards a spot in the trees she has just passed.

The next two Pilgrims are almost indistinct compared to the previous six in the group. They begin a line of four figures that are cast in shadow and significantly obscured from view by two trees in the foreground. Farthest from the viewer, towards the front of the shadowy group, is a helmeted man who carries a musket over his left shoulder. At his side stands the oldest woman in the procession. She wears a distinctive peaked hat like those worn by most of the men in the group, and her face is almost entirely shrouded in shadow. She stoops forward slightly, clutching a prayer book in her right hand. Nearly half of her body is concealed behind the tree-trunk which is positioned between her and the viewer. Two more women follow behind her; one carries an infant tightly wrapped in her cloak, the other—a much younger woman—carries a bible in one hand while clutching her cloak to her face with the other. The older of the two women is almost entirely gray in color. Her brightest feature is the baby she carries; its pink cheek and white cap seem to glow in contrast to her somber dress and expression. There is something uneasy about the way the younger woman behind her

clutches her bible in front of her and holds a cloaked hand to her mouth, tugging at the fabric. Like the woman in white, this young woman has a red ribbon tucked in her bible, yet here it is far less visible. Her head is slightly turned towards her right and she appears to be looking at the white-cloaked woman ahead of her. A thin tree trunk is painted directly between the young woman and the viewer; while it does not obscure her in the way that the larger tree conceals the eldest woman, it nonetheless deflects the viewer's attention.

Between the trees which block a clear view of both women stands a figure they have not concealed: a young boy wearing a brown jacket with bright brass buttons, and a brimless cap. He has the most graceful stance of any figure in the picture, standing tall with his feet lightly planted, one behind the other, and his arms—which hold a prayer book—crossed over his waist. His head is held high and he looks off into the distance, completely unaware of anyone around him and oblivious to whatever disturbance in the forest has attracted the attention of the young girl a few paces ahead of him.

At the rear of the group are two armed men who have turned almost completely to face the viewer. The younger of the two men stands nearest the foreground, and he puts out his right hand as though to alert the older man behind him to eminent danger. Both men carry muskets, and each has a bible as well; the elder man carries it in his hand while the younger man's book is strapped to his belt. Both men gaze out towards the viewer, and their attention seems to be directed to the same point in the forest that has captured the young girl's eye. While the girl looks serious, the young man seems startled. His older companion, on the other hand, wears an expression which is somehow both

wary and dispassionate. These three are the only members of the group who seem aware of anything beyond the parameters of their course through the forest.

We expect the Pilgrims to make it to church. We are aware of the threat of Indians, not to mention the animals of the forest, and it is reassuring to see that the Pilgrims are armed. But we expect them to make it to church. They apparently share this expectation. Most of the figures in the painting are unaware of any disturbance at all, and even the three who eye the forest do not seem to have identified any particular cause for alarm. None of the armed men have their muskets ready, and the Bibles in their hands would prevent most of them from responding quickly. Does any real threat exist in this painting? How dangerous would any viewer want the Pilgrims' iconic journey to church to be?

That the painting allows questions such as this to remain unanswered is likely part of its appeal. Unlike depictions of well-known events such as the Embarkation or the Landing, *Pilgrims Going to Church* is not confined by a set sequence of actions and outcomes. (Fig. 3, 4) Within the general confine of the Pilgrim story, the painting allows—and in fact impels—the viewer to make a series of interpretive choices. We can take our well-worn preconceptions about the Pilgrims and colonial life and project them onto the image in a range of ways. We can focus on the danger, the piety, and the virtue of the group, their diligence and perseverance in routinely making a hard trek to church through a snowy wilderness. The Pilgrims' actions in this scene are still in progress: they have not arrived at church, but perpetually march towards their destination. They will complete their journey only in the mind of the viewer, who is asked to interpret the details and conditions along the way.

Our interest in the Pilgrims' fate is heightened by our awareness of their story. Any figure painting tempts us to decipher the relationships between the people in it and determine what sort of narrative they are engaged in. *Pilgrims Going to Church* takes the iconic "Pilgrims" and represents them as thirteen everyday figures that we can understand as a suggestive assortment of distinctive types engaged in a complex interaction. The figures interact primarily through contrast, a relationship which may vary depending upon how the contrasting elements are compared. The opposition of two figures, while strongly suggestive of a specific relationship, nevertheless leaves room for—and in fact requires—the entrance of the viewer into the interpretation of the image. As we shall see, other contrasts, between suspense and sentimentality, viewer (perhaps concealed in the woods) and vulnerable Pilgrims, or past and present, further expand the rich interpretive possibilities present in *Pilgrims Going to Church*.

Pairing the marching Pilgrims in twos, an arrangement which encourages viewers to consider the figures in relationship to one another, is one of many ways in which the viewer is encouraged to consider oppositions and contrasts in the image. When reading the painting from left to right as one would read a story, an obvious comparison is immediately drawn between the armed men who lead the group and the minister, who, accompanied by a woman rather than a comrade-in-arms, does not carry a musket. Unlike the men ahead of him who appear to converse freely with each other, the minister is silent. He is an altogether less vital figure: older, grayer, and darker in his black cloak and silent, serious expression. His black skull cap—distinct from the

headgear of the other men—connects him with the singular helmeted man a few paces behind him, who likewise marches alongside a woman and shares the dark, serious cast of the minister. This visual link between the two men is important: In direct contrast to the musket-toting younger men at the head of the group, the minister might seem vulnerable, frail, and feminized. Yet there is nothing weak, feminine, or infirm about the helmeted man at the center of the march. Connecting the two men visually asserts the idea that the minister's spiritual power, though certainly different than the protection offered by the leaders of the group, need not be considered weak or ineffective (it is worth noting that the minister carries his Bible in his left hand, the side on which the helmeted man carries his gun).

A clear visual contrast is immediately suggested by the woman in white, whose clothing contrasts instantly with all of the more darkly clad figures around her. Further comparisons can be drawn against the women she stands closest to. The minister's companion, who appears to be of a similar age, literally recedes in the background beside him; she is no match for the woman in white with her fancier clothes, central compositional position, and warmer, more open expression. The contrast is even greater with the elderly woman a few steps behind who stands beside the helmeted guard; this is what the minister's companion is likely to become, and she is worlds away from the woman in white and the young girl whose hand she holds.

In spite of whatever emotional or familial connection the woman in white and the girl by her side may have, they are separated by age, experience, and interests, and might as well be part of separate processions: while the woman looks off in the distance, perhaps thinking of the future, the girl's attention is turned in another direction entirely,

towards a disturbance in the trees. In this she is remarkable; neither the boy nor the young woman behind her seem to have noticed whatever has attracted the attention of both the young girl and the men at the back of the group. The boy can be linked with the woman in white; with his brass buttons and her lace trim they wear the most highly ornamented clothing, and they each look off to an equally distant point in the space ahead. The boy has little in common with the younger man at the back of the group—instead, that man seems far more closely linked to the young girl. They look to a similar point in the woods, and they are both turned significantly towards the viewer. The image clearly places the Pilgrims in opposition to the viewer; positioned in the safe concealment of the woods beyond the bounds of the canvas, the viewer is in a privileged position, able to scrutinize the exposed Pilgrims. That we may be the Indians or wild beasts the Pilgrims fear, watching them calmly from a hiding place in the trees, heightens the sense of danger and suspense already present in most popular conceptions of colonial life. This suspense becomes the focus of much contemporary commentary and creates an animating tension with other, more sentimentalized readings of the painting which are frequently associated with Boughton's work.

Further contrasts are invited by the young woman with a cloaked hand to her mouth, who watches the woman in white, but stands next to the older woman carrying the infant. Her kerchief is a combination of their white and black head coverings, and she seems torn between the two figures. Like the older woman, she stands towards the rear of the group and wears a heavy gray cloak. Perhaps she is meant to be looking after the young boy, just as the old woman at her side cares for the infant. Yet she can't seem

to turn away from the woman in white, and they carry matching red ribbons in their Bibles. The eldest of the armed men at the rear of the march also has an uncertain position in the group. He is neither as youthful and vital as the armed figures at the head of the line—not to mention his young companion—nor as dark and solitary as the minister and his helmeted foil. Of all the men with muskets and peaked hats he appears to be the most experienced. He is not lost in conversation and unaware of possible dangers, nor is he quick to share in his companion's alarm over an unspecified disturbance in the forest.

The composition becomes less visible as the eye moves from left to right across the canvas. The first four figures travel through what seems to be the most open area of the scene; even the trees which might have obscured them (as they do the women farther back in the group) have been cleared, leaving only stumps behind. While on one level it may seem logical that the stumps surrounding the most powerful members of the group have been cleared, the idea that any trees had been cleared in the “wilderness” through which our Pilgrims travel wreaks havoc with our ideas about the hardships and perilous conditions of their daily life, and compromises the sense of danger in the scene—what type of wild beasts remain along a well-trod path through a partially cleared and controlled forest?

All of those details, particularly when taken in combination, hint at a range of interpretive possibilities: distinct and interesting personality types, tensions, relationships, and the intricacies of any group dynamic are all clearly present, and serve as potential points of entry for viewers' engagement in the image. The contrasts described, in addition to adding interest to the image, could easily relate to thematic oppositions such

as youth and experience, force and faith, or childhood and maturity. Taken as a whole, this distinct group of strikingly individual Pilgrim characters could also serve the more basic function of investing a staid history with warmth and human interest.

Familiarity with the Pilgrim story is not the only thing which draws the viewer into the painting. While the highly individualized character of each Pilgrim plays a large part in adding interest to their march through the woods, compositional choices are responsible for initially involving the viewer in the image. The very arrangement of the Pilgrims actively encourages interaction with the viewer. They are grouped close to the foreground in a line which seems to curve out towards the viewer at the center of the composition. Three of the Pilgrims enter the viewers' space even more fully by looking out at the world beyond the painting. This direct interaction is not invited by figures in other history paintings, whose attention is typically focused inwards towards their involvement in the historic event being recorded.

The complexity of the interaction between viewer and Pilgrims encouraged by *Pilgrims Going to Church* animates the composition of the painting. The placement of trees between the Pilgrims and the viewer serves as both a reminder of the dangers potentially hidden in the woods and as an impediment to the viewer's entry into the image. At the same time, the eye is drawn into the composition by the curving path made by the Pilgrims as they head towards their church in the background. The tensions created by the contrasts between these moments of inclusion and exclusion of the viewer further add to the tensions between piety and danger, virtue and fear, which animate popular understandings of the Pilgrim story.

How many of those interpretive possibilities would have been apparent to Boughton's contemporary audience? While it is unlikely that any one reading of the image would have incorporated *all* of the interpretive possibilities explored above, it should be remembered that nineteenth-century viewers were accustomed to "reading" images, and that paintings were frequently associated with texts. Consideration of the way the painting was written about over time suggests many of the diverse ways in which the image could be interpreted. A close look at the many dynamic contrasts and comparisons inherent in the composition also enriches our understanding of the painting's meaning, yet it does not lead to any one definitive reading of the work. Rather, the abundance of contrasts, ambiguities, and possible interpretations of the painting affirm the openness that remains within the well-known story it tells, and may help explain why it has remained a powerful image of colonial history from its completion in 1867 well into our own time.

It is worth exploring the narrative and compositional strategies of a few more conventional history paintings as a point of contrast. While this point could be made almost at random with any of a number of nineteenth-century historical images, Robert W. Weir's *Embarkation of the Pilgrims* (1857, Fig. 4) is a particularly fine example. As noted earlier, Weir's *Embarkation* was, along with *Pilgrims Going to Church*, one of two colonial-themed paintings included in the second annual exhibition at the Yale School of Fine Arts in 1870. *Embarkation* was accompanied by the lengthiest description given to any work in the exhibition, and was directly associated with a literary source—"Morton's New England Memorial"—meant to establish the veracity of the scene. The Pilgrims are characterized as "part of the Congregation of Mr. John Robinson, who, having been



Figure Four: Robert Walter Weir, *The Embarkation of the Pilgrims at Delft Haven, Holland, July 22, 1620*, oil on canvas, 1857. 48 x 71 1/2 in. Sotheby Parke Bernet, Inc., New York.

driven from England, remained in Holland for eleven years, and are now gathered upon the deck of the Speedwell, at the moment of Embarkation for America.”³⁷ The Pilgrims are posed in a range of theatrical postures as they kneel in prayer. The painting appears to take its cue from earlier devotional imagery, linking the scene with a long tradition of formal, highly-structured religious art rather than animating the Pilgrims with the accessible, human quality of characters engaged in simple and familiar daily activities. Even without the use of Morton’s history, it is likely that several of the Pilgrims would have been identifiable to contemporary audiences. As an actual historical event, the scene had a set—and well-known—progression and conclusion, leaving little interpretive freedom for viewers.

Leutze’s *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851), though it draws its inspiration from Revolutionary War history, nevertheless has a great deal in common with Weir’s *Embarkation*. Both images were popular features at exhibitions in the 1860s. Leutze’s *Washington* was the first entry in the catalogue of the Metropolitan Fair, and a full two pages were devoted to its description. Once again we see a range of theatrical, dramatically posed figures, in this case working busily to cross a river while the heroic figure of Leutze’s General Washington stands in a classically-inspired pose near the prow of his boat, contemplating the landing ahead with dignity and resolve while a monumental American flag billows in the wind behind him. If the historic associations and grand poses of the figures were not enough to dictate the meaning of the work, the theatrical lighting—which seems to illuminate Washington from above—definitively completes the characterization of this image as a scene of heroism and valor.

The image proposes one dramatic, highly structured, bombastic representation of Washington's military campaign. The painting was celebrated when it first appeared in 1851, but by the time of the Metropolitan Fair in 1864, it was no longer considered a "masterpiece." Instead, critics found it "essentially commonplace" and complained about the "spirit in which the subject is treated, the arrangement of the figures and the style of the painting."³⁸ Lest it seem that Weir's and Leutze's work, both painted in the 1850s, are simply relics of an earlier tradition of history painting, consider Boughton's *The March of Miles Standish* (1872, Fig. 5) and *The First Sabbath in New England* (1869, Fig. 6). Both images share the traditional theatrical, highly-structured elements of grand manner history paintings. *Pilgrims Going to Church* is exceptional even among Boughton's other work, and this may in part account for its lasting popularity. Rather than being tied to one specific story of the colonial past, the painting operates as a remarkably open image within the framework of general Pilgrim-Puritan history.

The number of title changes the painting has undergone offers a useful illustration of this point. The paper label bearing the inscription from Bartlett's *Pilgrim Fathers*—which was attached to a wood panel on the back of the canvas before it was relined—suggests that the painting was titled "Early Puritans of New England going to Church—armed to protect themselves from Indians and wild beasts." This is the title under which the painting appeared at the Royal Academy in 1867. However, a letter embossed with the artist's monogram which was originally pasted on a panel used as protective backing suggests that this title originally included the prefix "Sunday in the old Colony," an addition which may have been meant to link the painting with the many Sunday morning church-going scenes popular in the nineteenth-century. When the



Figure Five: George Henry Boughton, *The March of Miles Standish*, 1872. Unlocated.
Published in the *Art Journal*, New York, 1872. Reprinted in Josefine Leistra,
George Henry Boughton: God Speed!: pilgrims op weg naar Canterbury (Amsterdam:
Vincent Van Gogh Museum, 1987.)



Figure Six: George Henry Boughton, *The First Sabbath in New England*, 1869. 30 x 40 in.
Sheffield City Art Galleries, Sheffield, England.

painting appeared in New York, John Douglas Woodward, who saw it at Samuel Avery's Fifth Avenue gallery, referred to in a letter it as "Pilgrims Going to Church by Boughton."³⁹ The reproduction of the painting in *Harper's Weekly* the following month was titled "New England Puritans Going to Church"; the same title given to the painting when it was shown at the Yale School of Fine Arts in 1870.⁴⁰ By the Centennial Exposition, the painting had been re-titled "Pilgrims' Sunday Morning," although it was described in a guidebook as a scene "from the history of the Puritans in New England." When the painting was discussed as a highlight of Robert L. Stuart's collection in *Art Treasures in America* three years later, it was referred to as "New England Pilgrims Going to Church," the title it has (more or less) retained since that time.⁴¹

Despite clear variations, these changes in title at least retained some relation to the painting's subject—all of them include a reference to churchgoing. Not all of Boughton's paintings of colonial life fared as well. In 1902 Boughton was questioned about the exact title of "The Pilgrims First Sabbath in New England" (1869, Fig. 6)—which had been incorrectly called "The Landing of the Pilgrims in New England" by the Sheffield Gallery—and asked to explain his intentions when he painted the picture. In a reply full of indignant underlining he wrote: "My real subject was described at the time it was first exhibited as 'The Pilgrims First Sabbath in New England,' and I don't understand how it came to be changed to 'The Landing'." As for his source, Boughton offers the ambiguous explanation "my incident I found in one of the Puritan-Pilgrim documents. I don't remember now which one. It describes how a scouting party set out—armed—along the desolate coast to find a suitable spot for their desired settlement.

(This was before the landing of the entire company.)”⁴² Boughton was clearly frustrated to have his painting of a Sunday service held by Pilgrim scouts mistaken for an image of the Landing, which in fact happened after the prayerful gathering he painted. He is not concerned that viewers were unable to identify the exact written source of the image, admitting that even he cannot remember which of the “Pilgrim-Puritan documents” it was drawn from. Although Boughton expected viewers to use a general knowledge of American colonial history to understand his Pilgrim paintings, he does not seem to have been terribly specific about the interpretations applied to his paintings so long as they were kept within the correct historical framework. It was the larger event—with its many meanings any associations—which was important to the artist, not any particular text or version of the story. This would likely have been particularly true in the case of *Pilgrims Going Church*, which had an even less precise historical source.

*

*A painter of sentiment, simple, true, unforced,
never betrayed into sentimentality, never morbid
or unreal, but a painter of sentiment because he is
a man of fine and responsive organization, of a
gentle and tender nature, is one of the rarest of
men.*

—from “George Boughton.” Appleton’s, 1870.⁴³

Before considering reviews of Boughton's colonial-themed paintings, it is worth discussing the critical approach generally taken towards his work. The most striking element of contemporary discussions of Boughton's paintings is a marked emphasis on their story-telling capacity. While it is true that many of his subjects were drawn from popular literature, it would seem that the familiarity most Americans had with these subjects would eliminate the need for reviewers to identify them at length. Instead, there appears to have been something about the paintings which compelled critics not only to identify the narrative represented in each work but to celebrate its "expression" in their reviews, often at the expense of typical critical considerations such as composition, proportion, drawing, and color. Reviews which demonstrate these expository tendencies can be selected almost at random from the body of known Boughton criticism. One typical example is the following review of the Brooklyn Art Association Exhibition in November, 1871:

Boughton has a charming picture, no. 197, called Summer, full of a sweet and lazy sultriness. A lady is lying on a grassy slope among bright red flowers; she shades her face with a light umbrella, and looks at a child toddling in the distance. When we differ from Mr. Boughton we do it with reserve, but we think he put in more of those red flowers than he intended at first. They give an inflamed look to the base of the picture. There are one or two things by a new artist, E.H. Blashfield, who is very happy in studies of medieval costume and habits. There is a winning little composition of his—an Italian page showing some finery to two pretty maids—which is very happily conceived and well-handled. No. 59, Morning in the Hartz Mountains, by Kruseman van Elten, is a pleasant picture, a little too much "licked." Sountag, Ernest Parson, and Wordsworth Thompson have noticeable landscapes. The Summer Morning of Mr. H.A. Loop we have already referred to with commendation. No. 146. "Spring," by M.J. Heade, is a good specimen of his velvety touch.⁴⁴

Of the five pictures mentioned by title, Boughton's *Summer* not only receives the most lengthy commentary but also inspires the most description and attention to "expression," or the atmosphere and feeling it evokes. The scene depicted in *Summer* is recounted in relatively great detail and the painting is said to evoke "a sweet and lazy sultriness." While it could be suggested that this level of detail is necessary in an un-illustrated review, the fact remains that Boughton's work receives a disproportionate amount of discussion. The subjects of "landscapes" and *Morning in the Hartz Mountains* may be fairly self-explanatory, but *Spring* offers no better sense of its subject than does Boughton's *Summer*. Consideration of one final canvas from the same review perhaps marks the distinctive characteristics of the treatment of Boughton's work more clearly:

Mr. Hatch has kindly sent several delicious German pictures; one, the Bath Haus at Rothemberg, No. 141, is one of the most exquisite bits of light and shade we have recently seen. A minstrel is lounging on the step of the open door, and within the portico a flood of light pours through the inner door with the effect of a positive illumination. It is a thoroughly refined and graceful work—one you would be always glad to see in your house.⁴⁵

This review is nearly equal in length to the discussion of Boughton's painting, yet while some discussion of the scene depicted in the painting is included in this passage, it is done in service of describing the use of light in the work. The reviewer gives a strong sense of the atmosphere captured in the painting, but not of the details of the scene depicted, nor of the season or mood it evokes. The emphasis on story and mood—rather than composition and technique—is typical in discussions of Boughton's work and distinguishes them from reviews of many other artists.

Titles such as “Pilgrims Going to Church” and “The First Sabbath in New England” arguably provide an even better sense of their subjects than do titles such as “Morning in the Hartz Mountains” or the description “very happy studies in medieval costume and habits.” Yet the familiarity of subjects drawn from colonial history did not prevent critics from providing lengthy descriptions of the activities depicted in colonial-themed paintings. Close reading of contemporary reviews which discuss the Pilgrim-themed works may provide insight into the popularity of *Pilgrims Going to Church*. A good starting point is the caption which accompanied the painting in *Harper’s Weekly*. It contrasts usefully with the pattern evident in subsequent discussions of Boughton’s work and his colonial-themed paintings in particular. After explaining the provenance of the painting, the caption offers the following commentary:

The scene depicted by the artist had been graphically described in Bartlett’s “History of the Pilgrim Fathers,” an extract from which originally suggested the painting; but all historians unite in representing that the religious services of the early Puritans were conducted under such circumstances of danger as are indicated in the painting. The procession to church was invariably headed and guarded in those days by armed men, and while the majority of the congregation worshipped with their arms at their sides, others stood as sentinels around the church.⁴⁶

As comparison with the review of *Summer* quoted above suggests, this passage is unique among contemporary discussions of Boughton’s work, which typically include a remarkably lengthy description of each painting, and frequent references to sentiment, expression, and the narrative qualities evident in each composition. In this case, the painting is not described so much as supported by a vague citation of “all historians,” who are said to “unite in representing” that Boughton has accurately portrayed the religious services of the Puritans. Expression and sentiment are not mentioned, and

rather than tracking the narrative qualities of the image, this passage is more concerned with asserting the accuracy of the scene depicted. On the other hand, the historical reality the caption asserts—in which the noble Pilgrim Fathers risked great danger in order to get to church—provides a sentimentalized (or at least idealized) vision of the national past that may have been meant to stir or inspire *Harper's* readers, a tendency which only intensified in later reviews.

A lengthy review of another of Boughton's Pilgrim-themed paintings, which appeared in the *New York Daily Tribune* the following year, is more representative of this typical sentimentalizing commentary on Boughton's work. The review, titled "Boughton's First Sabbath in America," is accompanied by a paragraph on the artist which has been "clipped from an English magazine." The reviewer notes that *Pilgrims Going to Church* (he calls it "Pilgrims Going to Meeting") was "on exhibition in this city winter before last and has since been photographed," and he asserts that "Mr. Boughton's paintings are remarkable for their tender sentiment, and for suggesting much more than they tell plainly." This proclaimed suggestive power of the paintings does not stop the author from going on to elucidate the narrative suggested by one of Boughton's paintings in particular ("The Last of the Mayflower"). This is a trend in all discussions of Boughton's work. Critics acknowledge the expressive power of his paintings, and his skill at conveying a detailed and touching narrative.⁴⁷ They then go on to describe that narrative with a noticeably greater degree of attention than they afford to descriptions of other works discussed in the reviews.

In the case of Boughton's *Return of the Mayflower* and *The First Sabbath in New England*, the narrative depicted is historical. Yet reviews of both paintings hint at the

ways in which they differ from most history paintings. The reviewer of *The First Sabbath in New England* explains that the painting conveys a strong sense of the “conscience,” and “integrity” of the Pilgrims, “without any intrusion of the moral of the scene.”

Boughton’s Pilgrims do not preach; the work was “painted with a serious purpose, the picture makes a serious impression, but even those who are quite indifferent to the character of these men and the part they played in history, may enjoy the artistic merits of this excellently painted work.” Boughton’s *Return of the Mayflower*, reviewed in the *New York Tribune* two years later, similarly impressed the reviewer with the strength, clarity, and lack of moralizing in the story it tells: “Here there is no confusion, no vacillation of purpose, no huddling of details. The perfectly drawn and poised group in the foreground, the young man and woman gazing after the white sails that go flying down the horizon, tell their own story with no need of an interpreter.” That the painting is thought to tell its own story is significant, and is an assessment echoed in other discussions of Boughton’s work. The reviewer concludes that Boughton has created “a picture of the thought of an epoch as vivid as any chapter of Bancroft or Motley, while it is more truthful than a photograph and more ideal than a poem.”⁴⁸

How can a painting be “more truthful than a photograph and more ideal than a poem”? How did Boughton’s art “suggest much more than it tells plainly”?

Contemporary assessments of Boughton’s work appear to indicate that “tender sentiment”—which Boughton was thought to skillfully express in his paintings—is part of the answer. The assertion that Boughton’s work is “more truthful than a photograph” is particularly significant given the rise in photography that occurred in the

1860s. By 1867, when *Pilgrims Going to Church* was painted, photography had begun to pose a serious challenge to history painting as the medium of historical record. In arguing that Boughton had captured “the thought of an epoch” more truthfully than a photograph could, the viewer asserted history painting as the more expressive mode of representation, best able to capture the atmosphere and emotional tenor of historical events.⁴⁹ Reviews of Boughton’s work make it clear that the sentimentality in his history paintings was largely responsible for their expressive power.

Nearly as often as Boughton was singled out for his Pilgrim and Puritan subjects, he was described as a talented painter of sentiment. In 1867 Henry Tuckerman said of Boughton in his *Book of the Artists*: “no one of our artists has exhibited such genuine pathos and pure latent sentiment upon canvas; some of his small pictures are gems of their kind, they tell a touching story so naively. . . .” This idea of the artist was echoed in stronger terms in *The Art Amateur* a decade later by a reviewer who wrote: “sentiment—some might call it sentimentality—is the permanent and distinguishing quality of the artist’s work.”⁵⁰ Often, Boughton’s treatment of sentiment was discussed in concert with his colonial subjects. In *Representative Works of Contemporary American Artists*, Alfred Trumble wrote: “[Boughton’s] earliest successes in London were made with pictures of Puritan life in New England whose historical accuracy and subtle human spirit were immediately recognized. . . . The secret of his success may be found in the genuine pathos and unconventional sentiment which render his works direct appeals to the heart as well as the eye. . . .”⁵¹ Boughton’s ability to appeal to the heart with his paintings of colonial subjects was apparently not a common skill. Alfred Baldry, who authored a monograph on Boughton in 1905, explained that, in the 1860s and 1870s when the artist’s career

began to develop, “sentiment, as opposed to sentimentality, was at that time little understood by the artists of this country, and it can well be imagined that the delicate poetry of Mr. Boughton’s work was something of a revelation.” Baldry suggests that Boughton’s fresh treatment of a familiar subject matter was unexpected as well: “he had undoubtedly found a mine of admirable material which hardly anyone else was capable of working, because there was then hardly anyone else with his true sense of poetry and correct perception of the possibilities of a simple but suggestive subject.”⁵²

Boughton’s work was clearly influenced by literary trends of the period, as well as by popular history painting and the sentimentality that affected many aspects of nineteenth-century American culture. The period from 1830 to 1850 saw a dramatic increase in the popularity of biographies and historical fiction, and historians began to adopt a more “graphic” approach to writing history; both in fiction and in more scholarly historical works. In his work on William Cullen Bryant, Washington Irving, and James Fenimore Cooper, Donald Ringe has identified a “recurring strain of the pictorial, a stress on images of sight, and a deep concern with the need for close and accurate observation of the physical world in order to discern its meaning.”⁵³ These trends in fiction had a dramatic impact on historians of the period, as they increasingly turned to the conventions of romantic fiction as a means of endowing the past with what David Levin has called “artistic order and contemporary moral significance.”⁵⁴

Most recent scholarship on sentiment in America has focused on nineteenth-century literature; in some sense it is not surprising that Boughton, a sentimental painter, is so often linked with literature and, especially, poetry. The rise of historical

writing—and of romantic histories in particular—in the nineteenth century conditioned audiences to expect that history be packaged as entertaining, compelling narratives.⁵⁵ In many cases, history was made more engaging for readers by connecting it with their daily lives. Nineteenth-century women writers were the first to intertwine domestic and historical narratives; by mid-century the trend had become increasingly widespread. As Wendy Greenhouse has demonstrated, by the 1850s history was consistently “scaled down to the level of personal actions, while momentous historical developments were projected from individual personalities.”⁵⁶

In turning away from the grand-manner stylistic conventions and standard subject matter which had dominated history painting, and to experiment with fresh approaches to depicting historical figures and events, artists followed the example set by popular literature.⁵⁷ In some cases, they were extremely direct about the connections between their work and contemporary historical writing, taking their subjects from historical texts and identifying their sources in exhibition catalogues, perhaps, as Wendy Greenhouse has suggested, in an “effort to interest viewers already familiar with the written versions of the same subjects.”⁵⁸ This explicit connection of a painting with a literary work would likely have strongly influenced the viewer’s interpretation of the scene presented.

The link between historical writing and history painting was evident even before the shift to a more personal, individual approach to history came about. The grandly epic terms of Bancroft’s *History*, for example, have much in common with the patriotic bluster of such works as Leutze’s *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Nevertheless, the union of history and the visual arts reached its greatest popularity in the form of mid-

century historical fiction and poetry and the illustrations they inspired. George Calcott has observed that while 36% of the 248 best-selling books in the United States from 1800 to 1860 were histories, the percentage of traditional histories considered best-sellers between 1860 and 1899 dropped to 15%.⁵⁹ Despite this decline, Longfellow's Pilgrim pastoral *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, which became the inspiration for many of Boughton's paintings, sold more than 15,000 copies on its first day of publication in Boston and London.⁶⁰ It was not that Americans were less interested in history after 1850, but that they were less interested in conventional representations of it. Longfellow and Boughton's pilgrims offered the new take on the colonial past that Americans were seeking.

Sentimentality helped Boughton envision an image of the American past that would appeal to his nineteenth-century viewers. Winifred Herget has defined the sentimental text as "a rhetorical construct whose aim is to effect the reader. . .by means of pathos."⁶¹ A similar argument can be made for the sentimental painting. Lesley Carol Wright, in her work on American genre painting, has offered the following explanation of sentiment in nineteenth-century art:

Sentiment is crucial for understanding post-Civil War genre painting; in genre, sentiment is the core of the aesthetic system. Fundamentally, the sentimental aesthetic system is a form of mythmaking (the transformation of actual events into universal truths) which uses emotion to communicate meaning between the artist and his audience. . . .In sentimental strategies, genre painting is related to a variety of novels, poems, and stories, as published individually or in magazines, by both men and women.⁶²

It is no accident that the sentimental aesthetic system is at the heart of genre paintings, which are focused on scenes of daily life. Wright has demonstrated that in genre works,

sentiment was used to encourage viewers to draw on themselves as “the point of reference in learning morality, not on abstract concepts and intellectual concepts.” In order to make “the sentimental connection,” however, a painting had to make direct reference to familiar settings and activities from daily life.⁶³

Herget’s work has likewise demonstrated the connection with the familiar which is required for successful sentimental art. Because “the sentimental text as a rhetorical construct relies on a storehouse of common assumptions,” familiar subjects are a “necessary precondition for any rhetorical act. It is for that reason that clichés and stereotypes play such an important role and that commonplace experiences are referred to in sentimental literature. The mnemonic is thus part of the structure of feeling.”⁶⁴ Herget is careful to note that the necessary familiarity of sentimental subjects does not prevent an author from challenging certain attitudes and predispositions and enlarging the sympathies of the audience, and indeed recent scholarship has noted how subversive much sentimental literature could be in the nineteenth-century.⁶⁵

It is the connection between sentiment and familiar subjects, however, which has the most bearing on our understanding of Boughton’s *Pilgrims*. As the contemporary discussions of sentiment in Boughton’s work quoted above indicate, his combination of sentiment and colonial subjects was particularly effective. In *Pilgrims Going to Church*, Boughton captures a scene from daily life—a walk through the woods to church—which, in contrast to many of the subjects of other Pilgrim-themed paintings (such as the Embarkation or the Landing of the Pilgrims, or the signing of the Mayflower Compact) would have been within the frame of reference of contemporary viewers. Whether viewers identified with the painting because they were familiar with its textual source or

because they could relate to the relatively universal activity of going to church, the fact remained that Boughton's work allowed them the opportunity to connect with the Pilgrims in the painting in the way that many other paintings of historical subjects did not.

The use of sentiment in genre painting enabled viewers to draw on their own experiences to learn moral lessons, making sentimental historical genre paintings far more applicable to the life and times of viewers than grand manner compositions. The impulse to draw guidance and comfort from the lives and times of their forbears through a new, more personal and sentimentalized view of history is understandable at a time of national strain and conflict such as the 1850s and 1860s. As sectionalism threatened the Union and urbanization transformed traditional patterns of life, Americans were understandably eager for a reassuring vision of the past that might offer hope for the future. While industrialism altered the economy and changed the landscape of American cities, and immigration contributed startling diversity to urban populations, Boughton's Pilgrims marched steadily forward. In the midst of Reconstruction following the war between the states, they were an ideal, cohesive community. In the face of unprecedented immigration, they stood proud as America's first immigrants, pious and honorable on their difficult march to church. Absent were all traces of urbanization: the Pilgrims moved through a snowy rural landscape, marked only by the clearing of trees and the construction of a church house. In the spirit of nineteenth-century Revivalism, the Pilgrims' greatest protection was their faith. While a few of them carry muskets, their true defense lies in the Bibles they carry, making the lesson of their faith and virtue one of the most powerful stories the image holds.⁶⁶ Each of these meanings was a part

of the daily experience of nineteenth-century viewers, and would likely have shaped their interpretation of *Pilgrims Going to Church*. The sentimental nature of the image, rather than closing off interpretive possibilities, allowed viewers to find in the painting both a comforting vision of the past and reassuring lessons about their own world.

An article on Boughton which was published in *Appleton's* in 1870 offers an interesting take on the sentiment in his work. While proclaiming that “no living painter is more charmingly a painter of sentiment than Mr. George Boughton,” the author notes that “he has just fallen short of *power* in his pictures of sentiment—power such as we find in Burns’ songs.” Boughton’s work lacks the “richer and more impetuous organization” of Robert Burns’ poems, and is without Tennyson’s “sense of rare and curious and elaborate beauty.” But his work is nevertheless valued because his pictures “have a purpose, often a story; and they never expressed anything too strong or strange for the somewhat timid taste of distrustful American art lovers.” In asserting that Boughton’s sentiment falls short of the work of Tennyson and Burns, the author does not intend to suggest that Boughton is not poetic. On the contrary, he insists that:

. . . the distinction that we *must* make for George Boughton, that is, he is a *poet*. Boughton is a poet-painter—not a mediocre painter who writes verses, nor a good painter who writes bad verses; but an artist who has the poetic sense, who is never vulgar nor incongruous, but one who has a fine perception of the fitness of things, and is truly human. Boughton never paints under the idea of art for art, but of art as a means for expressing human sympathies.⁶⁷

However, as a poet-painter, Boughton’s province is familiar “human sympathies,” not the extremes of organization and beauty in Burns and Tennyson. The story that Boughton created in his work may not transport his viewers, but it is poetic, and appropriate, and human. Perhaps “interpreter” and “illuminator” are better terms than

“poet;” as Baldry concluded in 1905: Boughton “can tell a story delightfully, with inimitable humor and vivacity, and with a quaint appreciation of character that is most persuasive; he can sum up, with witty brevity, all the essential points of an effective anecdote.”⁶⁸

It is this distinction that marks *Pilgrims Going to Church* as popular art. Rather than pushing boundaries as high art such as Burns’s and Tennyson’s poetry—or the avant-garde paintings David Morgan discusses—do, Boughton’s work captures the reassuring familiarity that allows viewers to recognize and engage with the stories he tell. Sidney Colvin, who described Boughton in 1871 as a representative of “modern popular art in its very best phase,” explained that the appeal of Boughton’s work lay in his ability to capture “life and nature as they are about us, or once were; not in their most moving, highly-pitched, or poetical manifestations, which are the property of great imaginative talents, but in their ordinarily pleasurable or interesting manifestations of every day.”⁶⁹

Other critics seemed to agree that Boughton, an artist who enjoyed what Frederick White called “distinctive supremacy in one line of expression,” was a competent painter, but not an artist of “great imaginative talents.” In 1882 White complained of the over-idealized quality of Boughton’s Puritan women. While he praised Boughton for his “perfect appreciation of the beautiful” and declared that he had the ability to give “a poetic and sentimental grace to his creations,” White concluded that the artist’s *Pilgrims* were “so idealized as to be utterly unlike the sturdy followers of Miles Standish.”⁷⁰ They had moved away from the expected representation of *Pilgrims*, and despite their “flawless perfection” they lacked “the subtle power born of sincerity,

which is the artist's inspiration." The series of Puritan women such as Priscilla, Evangeline, and Rose Standish that Boughton painted throughout the 1870s and '80s were not just idealized—they were nearly indistinguishable from one another. A writer for the *Art Amateur* complained in 1881: "we would almost as soon hang a picture and its replica as any two of Mr. Boughton's Puritan maidens."⁷¹ These reviews, like much commentary on popular art, take a dim view of the "artistic" qualities of Boughton's work. Yet the popular appeal of Boughton's Pilgrim paintings is understandable. There was more to the success of *Pilgrims Going to Church* than the simple fact that colonial life was of great interest to many Americans in the late nineteenth century. Boughton's work did not automatically charm and fascinate his viewers; it gained these qualities through the treatment of his subjects.

The cultural proximity of Puritanism to nineteenth-century New England society made it a particularly complicated subject for writers and artists alike. The distinction between Pilgrims and Puritans was frequently blurred or even ignored in the nineteenth century; it is worth noting that the Pilgrims, who founded the Plymouth Colony in 1620, differed in theology, politics, and temperament from the Puritans, who founded a colony at Massachusetts Bay ten years later. The two groups were joined governmentally when the Puritans subsumed Plymouth Colony in 1691, but a sense of their differences and distinctive histories persisted into the nineteenth century.⁷² Nevertheless, the tendency to overlook their significant historical differences and blend the Pilgrims and Puritans into one symbol dates back at least to the Plymouth Bicentennial of 1820, if not earlier.⁷³

In many respects, Puritanism left a stronger imprint on the national imagination.

Michael Kammen has suggested that the Pilgrims were at a disadvantage to their Puritan counterparts in that, unlike the Puritans, they did not “leave behind an abundant ‘paper trail’ or sermons, journals, correspondence, and records.” Furthermore, Kammen notes that the Pilgrims were less ideological than the Puritans, and points out that once they were settled in New England they were “not especially dogmatic or theologically innovative.” While the Puritans have remained a controversial subject, the Pilgrims, who did little—aside from their initial pilgrimage—to hold our attention, have by and large received less notice.⁷⁴

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s work may be among the best known written accounts of the Puritans, and it has certainly provoked scrutiny of the Founding Fathers’ shadow side. In his study of Hawthorne’s New England works, Michael Davitt Bell suggests that the Puritans’ role as “revolutionaries” who “began the struggle for American liberty by defying tyrant-ridden England and establishing democracy in New England” made them ideal characters in romantic American history; Puritan migration could be seen as an early type of American Revolution.⁷⁵ Yet as Bell points out, the Puritans did not come to America in search of individual freedom, but rather to institute the worship of God in their particular way, a way which—to their minds—was sanctioned by the Bible but not by the Church of England. They were not opposed to the union of church and state, but to the union of the state with the wrong church.⁷⁶ Bell concludes that “what seems primarily to have interested the historical romancers about New England Puritanism was its violations of the principles of American liberty.”⁷⁷ It was this tension between the

idea of the Puritans as advocates of liberty and their actual denial of it which animated many nineteenth-century histories of New England.

Pilgrim history, on the other hand, lacked many of the problematic details that surrounded the actions and ideology of the Puritans. Although Hawthorne provided the nation with troubling accounts of the oppression and conflict plaguing the Puritans and their descendants, Longfellow, in his *Courtship of Miles Standish*, created a pleasant love story starring their innocent Pilgrim counterparts. It should be remembered that Longfellow was a descendant of one of the principal figures in his Pilgrim tale; like Hawthorne, he was certainly aware of the dark side of Pilgrim-Puritan lore. Two of his less popular colonial-themed works, “John Endicott” and “Giles Corey of Salem Farms” (both published in 1868 as part of his *New England Tragedies*), demonstrate that he *was* aware of the Puritan persecution of Quakers and the ruthless witch trials in Salem, yet *The Courtship of Miles Standish*—like his equally rosy histories *Evangeline* (1847), *Hiawatha* (1855), and *The Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863)—suggest that the sunny tone of his Pilgrim romance was no accident.⁷⁸ David Lowenthal has argued that in the years following the Civil War, Americans became increasingly less reverential of the founding fathers. Having heroically succeeded in preserving the Union, late nineteenth-century Americans began to see themselves as equals to their forebears, and began to feel entitled to criticize them.⁷⁹ It is clear that criticism—or at least notice—of the inconsistencies and conflicts surrounding the Puritan forefathers began well before the war. The idea that Americans were less reverential of their forefathers after the war—and perhaps as early as the 1850s, when the first of Hawthorne’s and Longfellow’s colonial-themed works were

published—may in part explain the increasing preference for images of historical figures and events framed in the familiar terms of everyday activities and occurrences.

The interpretive possibilities present in traditional history painting were too limited to allow for such ambivalent and familiar portrayals of the forefathers. Wendy Greenhouse has argued that the ambiguous image of the Puritans as both oppressors and advocates for liberty was more easily navigated in historical writing than in visual imagery. She observes that history painters “tactfully avoided controversy” by reinforcing a standard conception of the Pilgrim Fathers as persecuted seekers of religious freedom.⁸⁰ Until the late 1860’s, the most popular Pilgrim subject for history painting was the Landing. Greenhouse includes images of the Landing among a series of landmark departures, discoveries, landings, and arrivals which—to use her term—engage the theme of “original moment,” one of the most common preoccupations of antebellum history painters.⁸¹ Such scenes focused on the beginnings of the nation, offering an enticing promise of greatness to come.

In contrast, both Boughton and Longfellow chose to present the Pilgrims as accessible, human characters engaged in everyday concerns and activities. *Pilgrims Going to Church* depicts a band of ordinary Pilgrims on their way to meeting; *The Courtship of Miles Standish* humanizes the Pilgrims by involving them in a romance not unlike that found in popular sentimental novels of the period. It is interesting that both artist and author could be considered to have personal connections with the Pilgrims. While Boughton likened his childhood journey from England to America to “the pilgrimage of the early settlers of New England,” Longfellow was a descendant of John Alden, a key

figure in *The Courtship of Miles Standish* who, after making an effort to propose to Priscilla on behalf of his friend Miles Standish, ends up marrying her himself.⁸² This direct connection with the main characters in his story may have given his work credibility with readers and added to their influence in the poet. It would be reasonable to expect that Longfellow, as a New Englander and Pilgrim descendant, was aware of the long-standing oratorical tradition which stressed adversity, the wintry landing, and the early years of suffering and death at the Pilgrim camp. Yet Longfellow chose to displace this tradition of hardship and distress, crafting instead what John Seelye has called a “largely domestic image, not a wretched group of Pilgrims huddled together against the cold and sharing a last few grains of parched corn, but a healthy couple finding love in an American Eden.”⁸³

Pilgrims Going to Church, Boughton’s first representation of the Pilgrim Fathers, clearly owed a debt to this new vision of history. Yet the painting was open enough to accommodate the range of readings inspired by nineteenth-century Americans’ ambivalence about their Pilgrim-Puritan heritage and the present state of their nation. While it *could* be—and often was—read as a charming, sentimental scene, or as a conventional picture of the persecuted Puritans, it is clear that the painting—though representing a very specific story—was not limited to just one meaning. It should be remembered that it was the Puritans who were immortalized in the works of Hawthorne, and, as the original title suggests, in Boughton’s painting. Yet Boughton’s work quickly lost its Puritanism, and came to be referred to as the less-controversial “*Pilgrims Going to Church*.” Unlike the restricted interpretations of the colonists presented by traditional

history paintings, the interpretive possibilities present in *Pilgrims Going to Church* served a variety of concerns shared by Americans in the years following the Civil War.

The open narrative of *Pilgrims Going to Church* does not undermine its strength. The interpretive possibilities suggested by the painting exist within the sturdy, familiar narrative structure necessary in any successful history painting. Patricia Burnham and Lucretia Hoover Giese have identified narrativity—along with historicity and didactic intent—as one of the three essential components of history painting. Burnham and Giese explain that narrativity in history painting turns on three principal factors: “the notion of story, the phenomenon of time passing, and what [they call] a sense of causality.”⁸⁴ When a history painting is tied directly to a historical text, the connection with narrativity is of course even stronger. In any representation of history—whether visual or literary—the value attached to narrative arises from what Hayden White has explained as “a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary.”⁸⁵ The ability to create an idealized version of national events would likely have been particularly appealing in the years during and after the Civil War.⁸⁶

The secret of his success may be found in the genuine pathos and unaffected and unconventional sentiment which render the works direct appeals to the heart as well as the eye, fulfilling the double conditions demanded for success with the wide world of humanity and the narrow one of criticism.

Alfred Trumble, "George Henry Boughton." In Representative Works of Contemporary American Artists, 1887.⁸⁷

Caroline Arscott's discussion of the variety of venues in which nineteenth-century paintings were seen is a useful starting point in thinking about the range of responses viewers may have had to *Pilgrims Going to Church*.

A picture is not seen just by the individual who purchased it but by many people, in a variety of contexts. Its ideological import would vary according to the viewer and the situation in which the picture was viewed. In the space of twelve months a picture could be moved from an artist's studio, to an academy exhibition, to a dealer's showroom, to a private house, and then back to an exhibition hall as part of a loan exhibition. Within a private house it could be hung in a gallery specially for paintings, in a public reception room, or in a private apartment. It could be kept in a male preserve within the house or in an area primarily for public use. Any change in location could effect the way in which the picture was viewed. The passing of time could also fundamentally alter the way in which the picture was understood.⁸⁸

Boughton's work passed through each of the public venues Arscott describes, usually after undergoing the further ordeal of an Atlantic crossing. One additional context in which viewers came in contact with paintings in the nineteenth century—and one which is particularly important to the understanding of Boughton's work—was in printed form. Art journals and general interest magazines frequently reproduced paintings as woodcuts

or process engravings, either as illustrations to an article or a review of an exhibition or sale, or as features of their own, accompanied by a caption which discussed the image and provided information about the artist's career. For many nineteenth-century Americans, these reproductions were the closest they came to seeing actual paintings. Surely seeing reproductions that had been integrated with a text was a different experience than viewing an actual painting; for one thing, it would have encouraged viewers to read *about* a painting rather than simply reading the image itself. But texts were a large part of seeing paintings in person as well. Descriptive catalogues were often available to guide viewers through exhibitions, and reviews were typically written as though the reader were walking with the critic through the exhibition, listening to an often lengthy commentary on the paintings which happened to catch that critic's eye. Paintings with literary sources—whether poetry or histories—were usually accompanied by excerpts of the passages which inspired them when they appeared in both catalogues and reviews. Reading was a nearly inescapable part of relating to nineteenth-century paintings, and the connection between reading and seeing was only strengthened when a painting's subject was drawn from literature: when the source was a well-known work—as was usually the case—viewers' familiarity with the story provided them with an immediate and well-defined context in which to think about the image.

The following contemporary reviews of *Pilgrims Going to Church* expand our sense of the interpretive possibilities supported by the painting by offering a sampling of the range of interpretations perceived in the nineteenth century. It is worth considering the passage from Bartlett's *Pilgrim Fathers*, which was affixed to the back of the canvas:

...[T]he few villages were almost isolated, being connected only by long miles of blind pathway through the woods; and helpless indeed was the position of that solitary settler who erected his rude hut in the midst of the acre or two of ground that he had cleared. . . . The cavalcade proceeding to church, the marriage procession—if marriage could be thought of in those frightful days—was often interrupted by the death shot from some invisible enemy.⁸⁹

Although the reference to a marriage procession was dutifully included in this inscription, David Huntington, in his catalogue entry on the painting written in 1983, is the only commentator to have described the group as such.⁹⁰ Although it is possible to see the woman at the center of the composition—who in her white hood and cape, and finely finished lace-trimmed apron contrasts brightly with the dark costume of the other Pilgrims—as a bride, this does not seem to have been the dominant reading the image received. The caption in *Harper's Weekly*—the first and only contemporary commentary devoted solely to *Pilgrims Going to Church*—refers to the scene simply as a “procession to church,” and uses this as a starting point for the observation that “the religious services of the early Pilgrims were conducted under. . .circumstances of danger.”⁹¹ The next time the painting was described at length was in 1876, when it was included in guidebooks to the fine arts gallery at the Centennial Exposition such as Edward Strahan's *Illustrated Catalogue: The Masterpieces of the Centennial Exhibition, 1876, The Art Gallery*⁹²:

Our selection . . .represents a train of wayfarers passing with solemn caution through a snowy landscape, the men armed to the teeth, except the venerable pastor, whose defense are the holy book he carries and the good angel who walks by his side in the person of a lovely daughter. . . .Each figure in the picture is seen against the snow—a sombre silhouette. Fathers, mothers, and innocent children proceed with serious,

God-fearing expression through the desolate landscape. . . . It is strange and touching to watch these earnest men, in their peaked hats and leather jerkins, each with a Bible in his belt and a musket on his shoulder.⁹³

The emphasis here is on the Pilgrim family—the pastor and his angelic daughter, the “fathers, mothers, and innocent children” who move together through a desolate, snowy landscape. It is a “touching” scene, full of the sentiment for which Boughton’s work had become known.

When Strahan described the painting three years later in a discussion of Robert L. Stuart’s collection in his *Art Treasures of America*, a large volume featuring the “choicest works of art in the public and private collections of North America,” he offered yet another reading of the image:

[The] suspense of apprehension, this unsuspected presence of the invisible enemy, is the master-motive of Mr. Boughton’s picture. What stranger, quainter, greater types have ever been introduced into art than the van and rear of escort here—men with gun in one hand and prayer-book in the other; in their noses the whining psalm of the Puritan, in their hearts the exterminating cruelty of Cortez! Thus they trudge through the snow, in their limitations as in their virtues true sons of England, protecting the minister’s family on their way to the village. Just behind the vanguard plods the preacher, his patient and prolific wife on his arm, beside whom walks for a guard an ironsides in a steel helmet. The idea that this muffled scene—a scene without the noise of a footfall or the whisper of a word—may instantly undergo a transformation into war whoops and mutual butchery, gives a fearful fascination to the painting.⁹⁴

While in Strahan’s 1876 description the image was “strange and touching,” the strangeness here has taken the form of “fearful fascination.” Moreover, Strahan’s understanding of the Pilgrims also appears to have become increasingly problematized. The focus is no longer on the “fathers, mothers, and innocent children,” but on the

armed men who, “with a gun in one hand and a prayer-book in the other,” have become walking contradictions; “in their noses the whining psalm of the Puritan, in their hearts the exterminating cruelty of Cortez,” the explorer who decimated the Aztec civilization. Strahan suggests that both aspects (what he calls their “limitations” and their “virtues”) mark them as “true sons of England.” The figures Strahan identified in the Centennial guidebook as a minister and his angelic daughter are now described as a minister and his “patient but prolific wife.” The figures behind them—with the exception of the armed men (now identified as “guards”) and a woman described as a nurse—are thought to be the preacher’s family. Most striking is the change in Strahan’s impression of the “master-motive” of the painting. In 1876, it was “strange and touching to watch these earnest men;” in 1879 the fact that Boughton had captured a moment of calm which might in an instant “undergo a transformation into war whoops and mutual butchery,” lent an exciting tension to the image.⁹⁵

Edward Strahan was a pseudonym for Earl Shinn, a well-known nineteenth-century art critic who, like Boughton, was a member of the Tile Club, a small, exclusive group of artists and writers living in New York City who met informally to discuss the arts and—at most meetings—to paint decorative tiles. The group, which was founded in 1877, had been greatly influenced by the refined sense of design in the handcrafted decorative objects and paintings introduced by European countries at the Centennial, and they hoped to promote a taste for this design aesthetic in America.⁹⁶ Shinn was among the original twelve “charter members” of the group, as was Edwin Austin Abbey, a friend of Boughton’s who arranged to have him inducted as an honorary member of the club when he visited New York in 1881. Boughton, who had lived in London since

1861, never attended a single meeting.⁹⁷ He and Shinn were clearly not close friends, but their connection through the Tile Club—indirect though it may have been—suggests that the two were aware of each other and the position each held in the art world. In order to cultivate an air of mystery and add a touch of humor to the group, each member was known by a sobriquet which was assigned based on some aspect of his appearance, personality, or name. Abbey, for example, was known as “Chestnut” for his propensity to tell old stories. Shinn went by “Bone,” as in the shin of one’s leg. Significantly, Boughton was called “The Puritan.”⁹⁸ Shinn may not have met Boughton until 1881, but it is quite likely that he had heard about him from fellow Tile Club members and especially Abbey who, armed with letters of introduction from mutual American friends, presented himself to Boughton in London in December, 1878. Abbey spent the next few months under his guidance, circulating the social and cultural circles of London and meeting members of Boughton’s set such as James McNeil Whistler, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and Robert Browning.⁹⁹

It is impossible to know whether or not Shinn—through his relationship with Abbey and his involvement in the Tile Club—may have had special insight on Boughton’s work, yet numerous comments made by Shinn in his 1879 discussion of Boughton suggest an awareness of the artist’s life and working practices. He notes that Boughton remains connected with America; he “keeps up his connection with early friends, subscribes to old-established beneficial societies, and in every way evinces his republican sympathies.” More than ten years before any published discussion of Boughton’s studio appeared, Shinn refers to the artist’s “sumptuous atelier at Grove

Lodge.” Most significant in the following passage, however, are his comments about Boughton’s interest in reading and literature:

It is easy to see from this [*Pilgrims Going to Church*] as well as any other picture by the artist, that Mr. Boughton has been a reading man. The literary knowledge and development are obvious in the mind that has stamped so true a Puritan character on these unworldly faces. No picture leaves the sumptuous atelier at Grove Lodge without bearing this piquantly mixed impression, as if the gifted artist had somehow been changed at birth with a book worm.¹⁰⁰

The observation that Boughton’s work bears the “mixed impression” of story and painting is telling. To Shinn’s eye, the artist has taken “unworldly” figures from literature and imbued them with a “true” Puritan character; he has brought the Puritans of literature to life.

The idea of Boughton as a storyteller and illustrator of history was nothing new; Shinn reinforced this conception of the artist by declaring that “a peculiar elegance, delicacy, and distinction of style give this painting a perfectly unique place among those who have illustrated American subjects.” Boughton was once a “poet-painter,” best known for the charming sentiment in his work. Story, a large part of any interpretation of *Pilgrims*, had a continuing presence in discussions of the painting as the century progressed. Yet in the late 1870s the image charmed and fascinated not through its sentiment but as the result of what were now perceived as its many contradictions: its liminal position between peace and piety and “war whoops and mutual butchery” held the viewer’s interest, while his eye was charmed by the unusually complex depiction of the Puritans, who, unlike the many of their kind in art and literature before them, had moved beyond their canon and come to life. The painting itself did not change; it was simply seen through a different set of frames.

Although Shinn was an influential and prolific nineteenth-century critic, his shifting readings of *Pilgrims Going to Church* cannot be considered broadly representative of public opinion. Without numerous other known examples of reviews of Boughton's work, it is difficult to get an accurate sense of how representative Shinn's impressions may have been. Nevertheless, while Shinn may not have spoken for every member of the public or every member of the artistic community, the fact that even one critic published such a variety of readings of Boughton's work *is* significant, and suggests that popular understanding of *Pilgrims Going to Church* was far more open in the years after the painting was first exhibited than it is today.¹⁰¹

Pilgrims Going to Church was Boughton's first painting of colonial history, but he went on to produce many works on that theme, often drawing his subjects from popular literature. Boughton's first Longfellow-inspired painting, *The March of Miles Standish*, was painted in 1869. It was followed by a steady production of other Pilgrim-themed works—many of them also based on Longfellow's poetry—until the mid-1870's, at which point Boughton limited his use of colonial subjects to smaller, single-figure paintings of women (often from colonial history) such as Priscilla Mullins (1879), Hester Prynne (1889), Rose Standish (1881) and Evangeline (1880, Figs. 7-10). Aside from the occasional discussion of Boughton's use of color, reviews of his work (including *Pilgrims Going to Church*) typically avoided consideration of his painting style. Instead, critics focused on the narrative represented in each image and the general characteristics of Boughton's work. By the late nineteenth-century, the artist was well-established as both



Figure Seven: George Henry Boughton, *Priscilla*, 1879. 24 x 16 in. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc., New York.



Figure Eight: George Henry Boughton, *Hester Prynne*, 1881. 17 ½ x 11 ½ in. Raydon Gallery, New York.



Figure Nine: George Henry Boughton, *Rose Standish*, 1881. 51 x 27 in. Turak Gallery, Philadelphia.



Figure Ten: George Henry Boughton, *Evangeline*, 1880. Unlocated. Published in the *Art Journal*, New York, 1880.

an “interpreter” and an “illuminator” of colonial life. It is worth considering what this consistent association between Boughton’s work and illustrating may have implied to nineteenth-century audiences.

“Flatish effect” and the “pale schemes of color” were referred to in many of Boughton’s early reviews, and David Huntington has argued that both features were influenced by Boughton’s involvement in the Aesthetic Movement and his friendship with James McNeil Whistler.¹⁰² The assertion that the figures in *Pilgrims Going to Church* appear “flat” seems unfair, and this adjective was not frequently applied to the painting by viewers. Nevertheless, it is true that Boughton’s figures have a less three-dimensional, sculptural quality than those by other artists, and are in fact quite stylistically similar to the smooth and refined design sense associated with Aestheticism.

Edward Strahan’s description of the painting in 1879 suggests that while this effect was not as objectionable as it would become in Boughton’s later, single-figure compositions of Puritan maidens, it was nevertheless noticed by viewers: “Relieved against the snow, like niello figures set in silver, the Pilgrims in their peaked hats proceed to a church of the wilderness, grim and God-fearing. . . .” Both “relief” and “niello” (a black metallic substance used for filling engraved metal designs) suggest a linear, distilled image related to the engraving techniques used in illustration and ornamental work.¹⁰³ Yet *Pilgrims Going to Church*, unlike Boughton’s Puritan maidens, was not seen as an overly-essentialized illustration, the flatness of which implied a lack of both physical and conceptual dimension.

In 1891 Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer complained of the impact Boughton’s late style of painting had had on the arts:

They have been widely imitated since, in their semi-modern, semi-idyllic character, in their rather pale schemes of color and their flattish effect, imitated on other canvases, on Christmas cards, and in children's books, until Mr. Boughton may well have been reminded of Mr. Tennyson's rare flower which so scattered its seeds abroad that it came to be called a weed.¹⁰⁴

Tellingly, Van Rensselaer links Boughton's work with graphics on mass-produced greeting cards and the printed illustrations found in children's books. Yet the appearance of Boughton's work had not fundamentally changed: while the small compositions and the focus on idealized female figures increased towards the end of his career, the style of his painting remained as it had been.

It is likely that references to Boughton as an "illustrator" had less to do with the style of his work than with the manner in which it was typically contextualized. Over the course of his career, Boughton frequently took on illustrating projects. The Grolier Club in New York City repeatedly commissioned him to illustrate the elaborate special editions of various books which they published for their membership, and individual members often contracted Boughton to extra-illustrate other publications and to produce drawings for books issued for private circulation among friends.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the artist provided illustrations for widely circulated editions of Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker History of New York* and *Rip Van Winkle*, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* which appeared in the 1880s. In 1892, Boughton's drawings for *Rip Van Winkle* were exhibited in New York. His illustrating—in both his paintings and his graphic work—*was* an art: he was consistently able to identify the moment of a story which had the most expressive potential and bring it to life.¹⁰⁶ Boughton's *Sketching Rambles in Holland*, a series of illustrated travel essays which he produced with Edwin

Austin Abbey that were published serially in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1883 and in book form in 1885, further influenced Boughton's public identity as an illustrator. The fact that many of his subjects were drawn from well-known literary sources reinforced this impression; contemporary articles and reviews suggest that Boughton's use of Longfellow's popular *Courtship of Miles Standish* as inspiration for several of his colonial-themed paintings strongly influenced the manner in which viewers interpreted his work.

Perhaps most important was the fact that although Boughton's paintings were frequently exhibited in New York, most people came in contact with them in print, either through descriptions in reviews or as engravings or photographs in art periodicals and at galleries such as Goupil's, who specialized in reproductions of popular works. Boughton occasionally created images especially for engraving (such as "The Judgment of Wouter Van Twiller," which was published in *The Art Journal* in 1878), but it was most common for periodicals to feature reproductions of his well-known paintings—often several years after they were first exhibited. ("Hester Prynne and Pearl," for example, was painted in the early 1860s, and reproduced in *The Art Journal* in 1877.) These reproductions were typically accompanied by a long, detailed description of the scene depicted, and a few comments which related it to the artist's other work. This would have accustomed audiences to associating all of Boughton's work—not simply the illustrations—with a story or text.

As we have seen, the idea of Boughton as "illustrator" need not have limited the range of possible readings supported by his work; even an illustration is only as restricted

as the viewer's understanding of the story it illustrates. This is useful to consider when thinking about the association between *Pilgrims Going to Church* and the Colonial Revival—the powerful story to which most modern readings of the painting are restricted. It is clear that the painting's inclusion in the Centennial Exhibition generated commentary and stimulated interest in the image: after appearing at the Centennial in 1876 it continued to be regularly reproduced in magazines, books, and prints over the next fifty years.¹⁰⁷ Yet the specific concerns associated with revivalist interest in the colonial past were distinct from the social and cultural currents in New York (where the image was owned) and England (where it was painted) nine years earlier. What is remarkable about *Pilgrims Going to Church* is not that it foreshadowed a later, post-Centennial craze for idyllic images of the past but that it was capable of supporting this reading as well as addressing the different tensions and concerns which occupied the public at the time it was painted and first exhibited. Like Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, which was identified as a key American image and prominently displayed at the Metropolitan Fair, *Pilgrims Going to Church* was considered a painting of national importance, worthy of being one of two colonial-themed paintings included at the Centennial Loan Exhibition. But unlike Leutze's treatment of history, which came to seem out of date by the time it appeared at the Metropolitan Fair, Boughton's representation of the Pilgrims still held a fascination for viewers nine years after it first appeared, and if anything its appeal had increased.

The Centennial Exposition is commonly linked with the late-nineteenth-century revival of interest in New England colonial history and life, and it is assumed that the

Colonial Revival movement included a strong interest in images of colonial New England. In fact, visual representations of Pilgrim-Puritan history were the least common manifestation of the revivalist impulse. It should not be forgotten that the Colonial Revival—particularly as represented at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition—was about a way of life. The colonial kitchen was among the most popular of the American displays, and it was colonial furniture and other objects—not Pilgrim paintings—which were most avidly sought after in the wake of the exposition. This interest in the everyday Pilgrim is related to Colonial Revivalists' fascination with the colonial way of life, but it is worth noting that this interest developed well before the Centennial. The colonial kitchen, a highlight of the 1876 exposition, was remarkably similar to historical displays—many featuring kitchens—that were part of the Sanitary Fairs held across the country in the 1860s.¹⁰⁸

The Centennial did not introduce the craze for the colonial past; it reflected and responded to it. It was not that American history became more popular in that wake of the Centennial, but that history became a larger part of everyday life. With increasing frequency, artists began to present historical scenes in a more accessible manner that enabled viewers to relate historical events and figures to their daily lives, and interest in genealogy and local history rose sharply. The activities of the many England Societies formed in the early nineteenth century suggest one way in which national, colonial history became localized. The first was founded in New York in 1805, but others followed in a range of such diverse locations as Charleston (1819), Cincinnati (1845), San Francisco (1852), and Philadelphia (1880).¹⁰⁹ Even the founding of the Pilgrim Society in 1820 on the bicentennial of the Pilgrims' landing is not solely responsible for the

popularity of colonial imagery. An engraving of the Landing of the Pilgrims was used for Chinese reverse paintings on glass that were being imported from China to Boston as early as 1810.¹¹⁰ Interest in Pilgrim-Puritan imagery in the years following the Civil War was nothing new. What had changed were the associations and meanings viewers assigned to such images.¹¹¹

It is clear that the Colonial Revival movement rejected theatrical, melodramatic representations of history. What did it embrace? Proponents of the Colonial Revival were drawn together by a shared longing for a romantically idealized past, a time in which morals were purer, the world was simpler, family life was more harmonious, and objects were better crafted.¹¹² While the range of scholars who have studied the Colonial Revival have engaged with the idea of opposition to immigration and anti-urban sentiments to varying degrees, nearly all studies of the movement agree that modernization was a primary factor in igniting nostalgia for the colonial past.¹¹³ Alan Axelrod has noted that “colonial” was used well into the twentieth century to refer to any period before about 1840. As Axelrod points out, this is the period prior to the onset of Victorianism, which in this country coincided with modernization. Axelrod suggests that “colonial” is a “code word” not just for anti-urban but for anti-modern, or anti-Victorian.¹¹⁴

In *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, a recent exhibition catalogue edited by William Truettner and Roger Stein which represents some of the best recent scholarship on the Colonial Revival, this anti-modern reading is invested with particular regional significance. While Stein and Truettner concur that the most common goal of images of “Old New England” is to offer idealized versions of the past as attractive,

morally sound alternatives to the present, they situate these images in the context of the new social and industrial landscape of New England in the decades following the Civil War. The project is national only in the sense that it explores the process by which New England's unique regional identity was "transformed visually into a compelling national language."¹¹⁵ While Stein argues that images of New England offer a message about "older ideas and values" to the nation at large, he identifies a "pictorial emphasis on a pre-industrial rurality and a vacationers' haven" that inextricably links images of Old New England and the physical, cultural, and economic conditions of the region itself in our understanding of colonial revival imagery.¹¹⁶

The story of *Pilgrims Going to Church* suggests that the lessons of colonial life in New England could carry a much broader meaning and appeal. It is worth considering that the image was painted by an Anglo-American artist who may never have been to New England and based on a text written by a British author for a primarily British audience. *Pilgrims Going to Church* was painted and first exhibited in London before being purchased by Robert L. Stuart, a Scotch-Presbyterian sugar refiner whose parents emigrated to New York. Like Boughton, Stuart was not directly tied to New England and may never have visited the region; the social changes and industrialization there would have had little impact on him, and it is unlikely that what Stein calls "New England's claim to moral dominance and national leadership"—an admittedly important factor in some Americans' appreciation of the painting—would have impressed him much.¹¹⁷

*

“I began near Norwich,’ said Mr. Boughton, with another smile, ‘but I remember nothing of my life there, for I was only two when I was taken to America with my people, who went ‘with bag and baggage, scrip and scrippage.’ Not only my own folk, but a number of others we knew went too, so it was almost like the pilgrimage of the early settlers of New England.”

George Henry Boughton to Rudolph de Cordova in The Strand Magazine, July 1900.¹¹⁸

By the end of the nineteenth century George Henry Boughton had come to be closely linked with the paintings of colonial American subjects that were the basis of his reputation. In 1894 Clarence Cook noted that Boughton “is known in this country chiefly by engravings from his pictures illustrating scenes in the history of the Puritans in America: The March of Miles Standish, The Departure of the Mayflower, and Pilgrims Going to Church.”¹¹⁹ A few years later, in an article for *New England Magazine*, William Elliot Griffis proclaimed that “George Henry Boughton’s works have made for their author a name and a place in American homes as that of the painter of early New England life and, especially, of the more lovely side of the Pilgrims and the Puritans.”¹²⁰ By the final decades of the nineteenth century, Boughton’s life and work were frequently written about in periodicals, and the personal association of the artist with his Pilgrim

and Puritan subjects became increasingly common. Griffis suggested that Boughton was “much better equipped” to deal with colonial American subjects than were “any of his predecessors,” because after having been born in England, raised in America, and gone to live and work in London at the age of twenty-seven, the painter (who made several working trips to the Netherlands in the 1880s) had in effect “thoroughly studied the Pilgrims’ three homes, England, Holland, and America.”¹²¹

Not all critics considered the strength of Boughton’s work to be the result of his direct experience of the settings he painted. Henry James noted “the country that Mr. Boughton left behind him in his youth is no longer there. . . .In imagination, however, [he] has several times taken his way back; he has painted with conspicuous charm and success various episodes of the early Puritan story.”¹²² James suggested that the success of Boughton’s work was not due entirely to his memories of America but to the fact that “he has been perceptibly an inventor, calling into being certain types of face and dress, certain tones and associations of color...which people are hungry for when they acquire ‘a Boughton,’ and which they can obtain on no other terms.”¹²³ Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century the characteristics of “a Boughton”—and the very character of the artist himself—were firmly established in the public mind; Boughton had become not only a painter of Pilgrims but also a Pilgrim-painter.

As nearly every nineteenth-century critic has noted, Boughton’s paintings—at their best—tell stories. His subjects were far from unique; many artists in the nineteenth century (and earlier) painted colonial history, and even more shared Boughton’s taste for French peasants and the people of Dutch fishing villages. Nevertheless, it is Boughton’s work that endured. *Pilgrims Going to Church* remains perhaps the best-known image of

colonial New England, never having fallen from public attention and acclaim. In this way it is unique even among Boughton's other paintings, which in many cases came to be considered repetitive, idealized, dated, or cloyingly sweet. While the fact that the complex composition of *Pilgrims Going to Church* outlasted the appeal of the essentialized images of Puritan women which Boughton produced in the 1880s is not much of a surprise, it is telling that *Pilgrims Going to Church* has also superseded Boughton's other colonial-themed works, including the multi-figure compositions based on Longfellow such as *The First Sabbath in New England* and *The March of Miles Standish*. As argued earlier, this is due in large part to the interpretive openness of the painting. Aside from the fact that its source was not nearly as well-known as Longfellow's poetry, *Pilgrims Going to Church* is only tenuously allied with a text: the passage from Bartlett which inspired it is not particularly descriptive, and the artist has given his imagination free reign in recreating the event it describes.

The narrative of the painting is powered not by a specific, well-known story but by a more general reliance on the viewer's basic familiarity with—and preconceptions about—colonial life. It does not represent an event with famous causes and consequences, and can therefore be open to numerous interpretations within the general framework of the Pilgrim story. The series of visual contrasts and comparisons invited by the painting further support the ambiguity of its meaning. Although contrast provides tightly centered loci of meaning within the composition, contrast by its very nature implies two—or more—divergent possibilities, leaving a number of openings in the narrative which the viewer is free to fill with his own associations. The sentimentality of the image, in tension with the sense of danger and suspense created by

the Pilgrims' vulnerability to the viewer's gaze, provide further instances at which the viewer is asked to participate in the creation of meaning in the image. It is this relative openness of narrative which accounted for much of the interest in *Pilgrims Going to Church* in the nineteenth century. Popular understanding of the painting today has become relatively flat and restricted. Boughton as sentimental artist and *Pilgrims Going to Church* as Colonial Revival icon are simply two of many meanings that were available to viewers in the nineteenth century, yet today they alone are factors in most interpretations of the painting.

A key aspect of Colonial Revival spirit was nostalgia for a simpler, more pleasant past. The "sentiment" so often remarked upon in Boughton's work throughout his career was frequently linked with a nostalgic ideal of "the good old times" which many critics found in his paintings of French and Dutch peasants and in his colonial scenes. As his contemporary Cosmo Monkhouse observed, Boughton's line

... is the expression of a sentiment very characteristic of the age in which he lives. It may be called "idyllic," as that term is now used, and its source of pleasure is a sympathy with the out-door lives of ordinary persons, in states of society different from our own. This feeling, acting in the field of reality, gives interest [to his pictures]... Acting on the imagination it conjures up scenes of "the good old times." Heavier wagons lumber more slowly along rougher lanes, the spinning-wheel sings at the door, the houses are more picturesque, the costumes strange, but human nature and "the country" are unchanged.¹²⁴

By the early 1880s when this passage was written, Boughton's work was thought to address a widely felt interest in a simpler way of life, acting as a poignant reminder of an

age felt to be irretrievably in the past. Perhaps the strongest connection between Colonial Revival nostalgia and the sentiment in Boughton's painting was that both relied on this connection with a romanticized everyday life of long ago. Although Centennial exhibits were focused on daily life in the colonies, Boughton captured an image of everyday colonists on their way to church. In a sense, the painting allowed viewers to enter into its narrative in the way that reenactments and pageants allowed nineteenth-century Americans to enter into the rituals and daily activities of their ancestors.¹²⁵

The efficacy of a sentimentalized vision of the past has been amply demonstrated, and its appeal is understandable. Winifred Herget has explained that one aspect of the effectiveness of sentimentality is "the compensation it provides for deficits the reader [or, in Boughton's case, viewer] experiences in life. Lack of feeling, tenderness, harmony, and union can be compensated for by the sentimental text."¹²⁶ Sentimentalized images of the past could provide comfort to viewers traumatized by the recent war or distressed by the rapid pace of industrialization and immigration, and offer a reassuring contrast to the startling changes in the urban landscape which only accelerated as the nineteenth century drew to a close. As recent scholarship on the use of sentimental texts by reform-minded groups has shown, sentiment could also be used to create a frequently missing sense of community: by appealing to common values and conditioned responses, sentimental works encouraged readers to see themselves as part of a "pathetic community" who shared an emotional and moral connection.¹²⁷ The use of songs and ballads for purposes of reinforcing nationalistic feeling has been critically examined by Ciaran Benson, whose psychological studies have shown that common,

sentimental “habits of feeling” can be (and have been) “harnessed to songs and images for the purposes of control as well as for purposes of solidarity.”¹²⁸

Boughton’s sentimentalized representations of the colonial past struck a chord with Americans who were caught up in the Colonial Revival spirit, and it continues to convey a pleasing, unifying vision of the past to many Americans today. The emphasis on sentimentality that came to dominate nineteenth-century commentary on Boughton’s work has continued to shape our understanding of his best-known painting.

Revivalizing nostalgia and the charming sentimentality so frequently associated with Boughton’s work flatten many of the divergent meanings which once lent interest to the image. The closing off of other interpretations of the painting did not happen all at once, and despite the apparent strength of this colonial revival association, it is certainly possible that some viewers have continued to find other meanings in the image. But it is clear that the multiplicity of meanings once evident in contemporary discussions of the painting quickly gave way to the more restricted understanding of the image that is in keeping with the current popular understanding of it as a Colonial Revival icon.

What does this reading of *Pilgrims Going to Church* say about our relationship with the American past? Is it more than historical distance that compels us to smooth over the other interpretive possibilities once found in the forefathers’ perilous march through the wilderness? Are we uncomfortable with the idea of ambiguity in national history? *Pilgrims Going to Church* alone cannot answer these questions, yet the evolution of the popular understanding of this famous painting is suggestive. It always existed within the framework of the familiar Pilgrim story, and Boughton himself clearly went to great lengths to situate it there. But while that story once accommodated a range of

interpretive possibilities, it now seems to subsume them. The image itself is not the cause: the poet-painter's illustration of the Pilgrim past is only as expansive as we will allow our understanding of the story to be.



Figure Eleven: Camille Piton, *George H. Boughton*, 1882. Printed in the *Art Amateur*, New York.

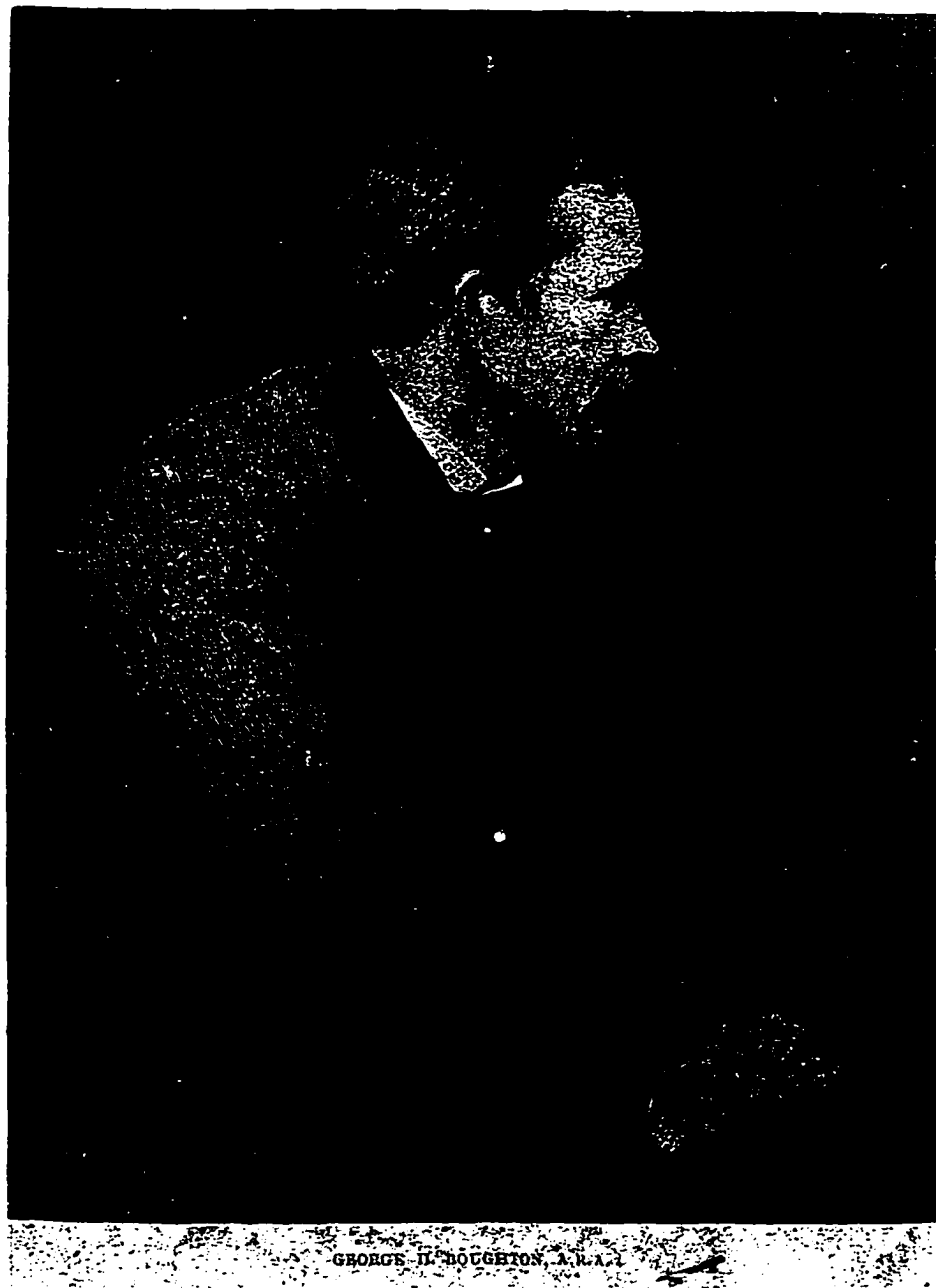


Figure Twelve: *George H. Boughton, A.R.A.*, c.1880. Artist's File, New York Public Library, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs.



Figure Thirteen: Ralph Robinson, *Portrait of George Henry Boughton*, 1891, National Portrait Gallery, London.

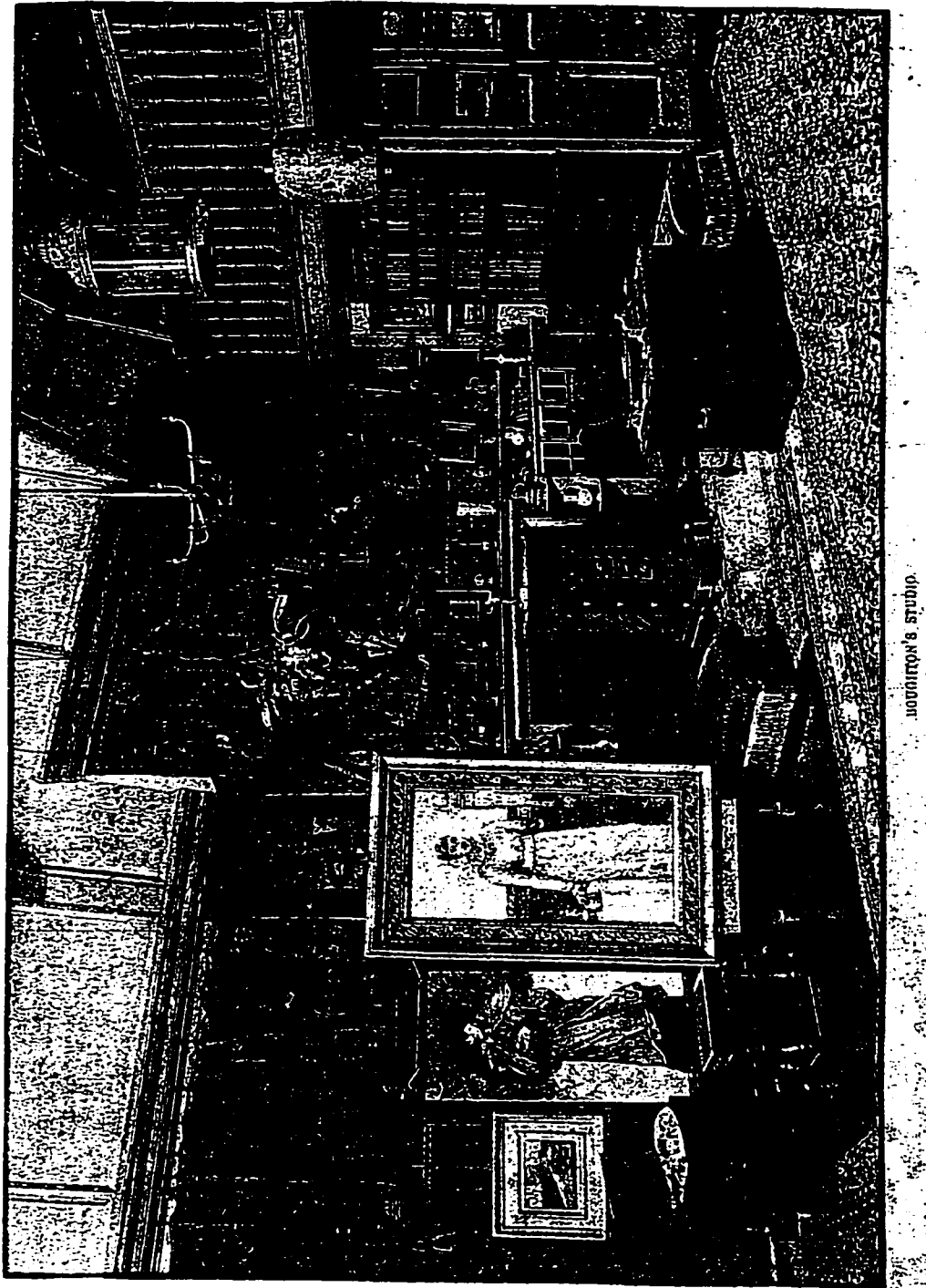


Figure Fourteen: "Boughton's Studio," *The Century Magazine* (August 1880).

LIFE AND CAREER OF GEORGE HENRY BOUGHTON (1834-1905)

1833 Born on 4 December at a village near Norwich, England. His father was a farmer.

1839 Boughton's family emigrates to Albany, New York with the intention of farming. (Boughton was five years old, but in nineteenth-century accounts where this is mentioned it is said that he was two years old).

Boughton's parents die shortly after the family arrives. He is raised by his older brother, David, a hatter and furrier in Albany.

Boughton begins an independent study of art at an early age. He learns to draw by copying illustrations from the *Art Journal*. His artistic impulse is encouraged by the local physician, the owner of an art supply store, Mr. Gould, and the local picture-frame maker, Mr. Annesley.

Boughton attends the District School in Albany, and later begins classes at the Commercial Academy in preparation for a mercantile career. Some of his sketches are published in *Harper's* and *Yankee Notions*.

1851 (age 18). Boughton admitted as an instructor at the Female Academy in Albany.

1852 (age 19). Boughton listed as a landscape painter in Albany. He continues to reside in Albany until 1858.

Sometime in the early 1850s, Boughton sends a series of illustrations of Shakespeare to a publishing house in New York. The proposal to issue them was declined, but Boughton was encouraged to continue his artistic pursuits.

1853 Sells a painting ("The Wayfarer") to the American Art Union for \$50. Uses the proceeds from the sale to establish a studio in Albany. Exhibits at the National Academy of Design.

1856 Travels to Europe. Spends a few months in London, then embarks on a sketching tour through the English Lake District, Scotland, and Ireland. Returns to Albany with many sketches and studies

1856-76

Boughton exhibits at the National Academy of Design.

- 1858** Art dealer Samuel P. Avery visits Albany and sees Boughton's work. He asks Boughton to paint some landscapes for him, and begins to sell Boughton's work in New York City. Avery sold the first of these Boughton landscapes in Brooklyn for \$30 each.

Winter Twilight shown at the National Academy of Design. Robert L. Stuart purchases the picture and becomes one of Boughton's patrons.

1859-1860

Moves to New York City and takes a studio in the Tenth Street Studio Building. Becomes an Honorary Member, Professional, of the National Academy of Design.

Paints *The Haunted Lake* for the Ranney Sale (a benefit for the family of the recently deceased Tenth Street Studio occupant's family). The painting is purchased by August Belmont for "several hundred dollars." (elsewhere the price is quantified as "more than four-hundred dollars.")

- 1860** Leaves the United States in June to study figure painting in Paris. The trip may have been financed by one of Boughton's "millionaire friends" in New York, on the condition that the artist complete some paintings for him while abroad.

Studies with Edouard May while in Paris.

- 1861** Eighteen months after arriving in Paris, Boughton leaves the city and travels to Ecoen to study with Edouard Frere.

- 1862** Begins the return trip to New York via London. Decides to remain in London, sells his steamer ticket, and opens a studio at 23 Newman Street.

- 1863** First showing at the Royal Academy.

- 1866** Address recorded as 23 Russell Street, Fitzroy Square.

- 1867** Address recorded as 8 Denbigh Rd., Bayswater.

- 1868** Address recorded as 16 Denbigh Rd, Bayswater.

- 1869** Address recorded as Grove Lodge, The Mall, Kensington.

- 1871** Elected to the National Academy of Design.

- 1876** Boughton wins a bronze medal at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia.

- 1878** Address recorded as West House, Campden Hill, Kensington.
- 1879** Elected an associate of the Royal Academy of Design.
- 1880** Travels to Holland during the winter with Edwin Austin Abbey. Shows some of the Dutch paintings produced on this trip at the Royal Academy's spring exhibition in 1881.
- 1881** Returns to Holland over the summer.
- 1882** *The Widow's Acre* wins the Hayward Gold Medal at the British Institute.
- 1883** The first installments of Boughton and Abbey's series "Artist Strolls in Holland" published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.
- 1885** Three additional installments of "Artist Strolls in Holland" are published in *Harper's*, and the collected essays are published in book form later that year.
- 1896** Elected an academician at the Royal Academy of Design.
- 1904** The Christmas edition of the *Art Journal* focuses on Boughton's life and work. This remains the most comprehensive discussion of Boughton to date.
- 1905** January 19. Boughton dies from heart failure while at work in his studio.

ENDNOTES

1. There have been several publications of William Bradford's "Of Plymouth Plantation." For the version cited above, see William Bradford, "History of Plymouth Plantation," in *Settlements to Society, 1607-1885*, edited by Jack P. Greene, (New York: Norton and Co., 1975), 59. See also William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (New York: The Modern Library, distributed by Random House, 1981), 70. For an interesting discussion of the influence of Bradford's account, see Ann Uhry Abrams, *The Pilgrims and Pocahontas: Rival Myths of American Origin* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1999), 23-28.

2. William Eliot Griffis, "George H. Boughton, The Painter of New England Puritanism," *New England Magazine* n.s. 15 (December 1896): 493.

3. There is no monograph on Boughton's work. Most writings on Boughton published since the nineteenth century are found in exhibition catalogues. For a general introduction to Boughton's career see entries in Richard J. Koke, compiler, *American Landscape and Genre Paintings in the New-York Historical Society*, Vol. 1. (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1982), 86-7; and Susan E. Strickler, *American Paintings* (Toledo: The Toledo Museum of Art, 1979), 26. For more extensive discussion of Boughton's work in relation to the Colonial Revival, see David Huntington and Kathleen Pyne, *The Quest for Unity: American Art Between Worlds Fairs 1876-1893* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1983), especially the entry on Boughton, 49-51; and William H. Truettner and Roger B. Stein, *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), Chapters One and Two by Stein, and especially 45-47.

4. *Pilgrims Going to Church* was one of four paintings featured in an advertisement for the opening of the spring exhibition at Avery's Fifth Avenue gallery in February, 1868 (along with Gerome's *Death of Caesar*, Meissonier's *The Reader*, and Delaroche's *A Nymph in the Fountain*). The painting was billed as "New England Pilgrims Going to Church in Winter—by George H. Boughton/ From the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1867." A letter from A. Goupil of Goupil & Cie., Paris, written to Avery on 17 January, 1868, suggests that the exhibition was keenly watched by the art world. Goupil writes: "I was informed by Knoedler that business were very dull for some time, but he and yourself hope that they will improve shortly. I suppose that the opening of your exhibition shall stimulate the [?], for you have collected a very fine selection of fine paintings and if you do not succeed it should be disgusting for all of us." (Knoedler is Michel Knoedler, a prominent New York art dealer.) For both the advertisement and the letter, see the Samuel P. Avery Papers, Archives of American Art, Reel NMM27.

5. Robert L. Stuart (1806-1882) was well-known as a collector and philanthropist in New York City. Like many newly wealthy industrialists, Stuart's early collecting was focused on both American and European works; in later years he seems to have been most interested in European painting and the work of American artists who had been trained in Europe. Stuart and his collecting have been discussed by Lesley Carol Wright,

John Davis, and Paul Sternberger, who is currently writing an article on Stuart's collecting interests. Wright, in particular, has demonstrated the role which collecting—and the display of art—could play in shaping a collector's public identity. Stuart is known to have strongly identified with his Presbyterian faith. his 15,000 volume library, which was considered among the most valuable in New York at the time of his death in 1882, included a large assortment of religious texts, and throughout his life Presbyterian causes were the focus of his philanthropic efforts. Wright identifies paintings of children (particularly those in learning situations), "romantic subjects involving pensive young women or the vicissitudes of love between couples," and images of the working world as focuses of Stuart's collecting. She notes that Stuart had an unusual number of religious-themed paintings (she does not count *Pilgrims Going to Church* among them) for an American collection, but she does not consider them a dominant focus of the collection and notes that they were infrequently seen. Stuart owned three paintings by Boughton, but *Pilgrims Going to Church* was the only one with a colonial theme. (The others were *Winter Twilight Near Albany*, Fig. 2, 1857, one of Boughton's earliest and most critically successful works, and a small watercolor entitled *Normandy Girl* which Boughton purchased in 1861.) *Pilgrims* was the last painting by Boughton that Stuart added to his collection, and it was arguably one of the most famous he owned. His collection was mentioned in several published discussions of the painting such as George Sheldon's *Hours with Art and Artists* (1880), and Edward Strahan's *Masterpieces of the Centennial* (1876) and *Art Treasures of America* (1879). See Lesley Carol Wright, "Men Making Meaning in Nineteenth-Century American Genre Painting," (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1993); John Davis, "Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* and Urban Slavery in Washington, D.C.," *Art Bulletin* LXXX (March 1998): 67-92. Paul Sternberger presented a paper on Stuart and his collection at the College Art Association Conference in 2000. He is currently revising that paper into an article. Catalogues of Stuart's painting collection and library are available at the New York Public Library.

6. *Second Annual Exhibition of the Yale School of the Fine Arts*. (New Haven, Conn.: Tuttle, Morehouse, and Taylor, 1870). See Entry 20, "New England Pilgrims Going to Church," and entry 13, "The Embarkation of the Pilgrims." The *Embarkation* was accompanied by a paragraph describing the painting and a quote from "Morton's New England Memorial."

7. "Boughton's Puritans," *Harper's Weekly* (25 April, 1868): 265.

8. See John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth* (London, Oxford University Press, 1970). Ann Uhry Abrams has argued that the clothing on Boughton's *Pilgrims* was recognizable to viewers because it was in keeping with conventions of representation that had been developing since the 1850s. Abrams, *The Pilgrims and Pocahontas*, 255.

9. It seems that Boughton's vision of American colonial history appealed to audiences in both England and America. A half-sized replica of *Pilgrims Going to Church*, completed in 1872, remained in British hands until 1957, but the original was purchased in New York City within a year of its completion and has remained there ever since. For

discussion of the replica, now owned by the Toledo Museum of Art, see Strickler, *American Paintings*, 26.

10. William Henry Bartlett, *The Pilgrim Fathers* (London: Virtue and Co., 1853), 236-7.

11. Alexander M. Ross, *William Henry Bartlett: Artist, Author, Traveller* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1973): 70-71.

12. Ibid., 72, 71.

13. Ross, 72; Bartlett, 170, 200, 172.

14. Bartlett, 195, 211.

15. See the appendix for a chronology of Boughton's life and career. For information about Boughton's studies in France, see Sara Caldwell Junkin, "The Europeanization of Henry Bacon (1839-1912), American Expatriate Painter" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1986), 83-85. Dr. Junkin's work on Bacon has also led her to research Boughton's career. She is currently exploring the relationship between Boughton's sentimental paintings and what she calls Frere's "sympathetic" genre painting. Dr. Junkin graciously provided me with a copy of a talk she gave on this subject in 1999 in which she discusses Boughton and *Pilgrims Going to Church*; she is currently developing this talk into an article.

16. M.D. Conway, "The Fine Arts from Abroad," *Boston Daily Globe*, 18 April, 1874, 4. This excerpt was reprinted from Conway's article in Alfred L. Baldry, "G. H. Boughton, His Life and Work," *Art Journal* (December 1904): 8.

17. Jochen Wierich, "The Domestication of History in American Art: 1848-1876" (Ph. D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1998), 21.

18. Ibid., 60-61.

19. "Art in New York," *New York World* (2 January, 1868), 2.

20. Mark Thistlethwaite, "A Fall from Grace: The Critical Reception of History Painting, 1875-1925," in *Picturing History: American Painting 1770-1930*, edited by William S. Ayres (New York: Rizzoli International, 1993), 47.

21. Ibid.

22. "The Exhibition of Pictures at the Metropolitan Fair," *New York Daily Tribune* (2 January, 1868), 2.

23. Wierich, 113.

24. Wierich, 111.

25. For a sampling of the rich details and complexities scholars have identified in Eastman Johnson's work, see *Eastman Johnson Painting America*, edited by Teresa A. Carbone and Patricia Hills (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art in association with Rizzoli International Publications, 1999), and John Davis, "Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* and Urban Slavery in Washington D.C.," *Art Bulletin* LXXX (March 1998): 67-92. Robert L. Stuart also collected several paintings by Eastman Johnson.

26. Wierich, 111.

27. For discussion of the symbolic power of American landscape paintings, see John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Angela Miller, *Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); or Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

28. Clarence Cook, "Fine Arts: Boughton's First Sabbath in America," *New York Daily Tribune* (12 June, 1869), 5.

29. David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 5.

30. Morgan, 8.

31. Morgan, 9-10.

32. Lawrence W. Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," *The American Historical Review* 97 (December 1992): 1375-1376.

33. Levine, 1380.

34. Levine, 1381. Levine offers a useful example of this in his analysis of Gordon Parks's carefully-posed, deeply affecting portrait of Ella Watson, a charwoman who cleaned federal offices in Washington D.C. in the 1930s. Levine argues that "the popularity of Parks's portrait (and Grant Wood's *American Gothic*) may well be linked not only to aesthetic virtues but also to the scope audiences were given to project their own world view into the process of unraveling its meaning. . . . [T]he fact that Parks's later photos of Watson were less polemical should not blind us to the possibility that they may also have been less open to interpretation." Levine, 1388.

35. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1979), 4.

36. Eco, 9. It is useful to consider Eco's definition of a "closed" text: "Those texts that obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical readers (be they children, soap-opera addicts, doctors, law-abiding citizens, swingers, Presbyterians, farmers, middle-class women, effete snobs, scuba divers, or any other imaginable sociopsychological category) are in fact open to any possible 'aberrant' decoding. A text so immoderately 'open' to every possible interpretation will be called a 'closed' one." Eco, 8.

37. *Second Annual Exhibition of the Yale School of the Fine Arts*, entry 13, 3. This oil-on-canvas version of Weir's *Embarkation* was adapted by the artist from a mural he painted for the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. (1837-1843). See Abrams for a discussion of how Weir's *Embarkation* was selected for the Capitol rotunda, *The Pilgrims and Pocahontas*, 146-152.

38. "Pictures at the Metropolitan Fair," 12.

39. Letter from John Douglas Woodward to Edward Valentine, 11 March, 1868, Edward Valentine Papers, Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia.

40. "Boughton's Puritans," 265; Yale Catalogue, 1870.

41. Edward Strahan, "The Collection of Mr. Robert L. Stuart," in *Art Treasures in America* (Philadelphia: George Barrie, Publisher, 1879): 117-124.

42. Letter from George Henry Boughton to Mr. Cooper, 24 September, 1902. Archives of the History of Art, Getty Center, Los Angeles, California. It is unclear whether or not Boughton closely followed reviews and publication of his paintings; this is the only known discussion of his thoughts about the reception and description of his work. A letter written to his friend Erastus Dow Palmer in 1874 suggests that although Boughton lived in England, he kept up with contemporary criticism with the help of Samuel P. Avery. Displeased by a review of Palmer's statue of Chancellor Robert R. Livingston (1874, Court of Appeals, Albany, New York), he wrote: "Avery sent me a 'tribune' with a 'Notice' of your Livingstone in it—didn't you feel edified after it?—Condensed it seemed to read—'So, you've been at it again!!'—Livingstone?—what do you know Livingstone?—take that (a kick in a tender spot) don't bawl!—there's a penny! now go away and mind what you're about—If you would only mind what I say—and ask me when you intend to do something—you might get on.—There's another penny. Now don't do it anymore—be off.' It makes me wild—such criticism. You deserve better of your country." Letter from George Henry Boughton to Erastus Dow Palmer, 27 August, 1874, Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art. On a sunnier note, Boughton's old friend Charles Calverly recalled Boughton's pleasure in being featured in the December, 1905 *Art Journal* (New York and London).

Boughton sent Calverly a copy of the journal, along with a letter which said: "I remember as a small boy at school in Albany I used to save up my pennies to by the 'Art Journal', and I used to put on my best clothes and wash my hands very clean when I went to Little's book store to get it. Little did I dream (or W.C. Little, either) that I should ever get a big number of it all to myself." Letter from George H. Boughton to Charles Calverly, 4 January, 1905, quoted in Charles Calverly, "Recollections of George H. Boughton," undated typescript, McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art. The 1905 *Art Journal*, which was devoted exclusively to Boughton's life and work, remains the most extensive discussion of the artist.

43. "George Boughton," *Appleton's* 3 (1 January, 1870): 11-13.

44. The location of *Summer* is unknown. "Fine Arts: Opening of the Brooklyn Art Association," *New York Daily Tribune* (28 November, 1871), 5.

45. Ibid.

46. "Boughton's Puritans," 265.

47. Cook, "Boughton's First Sabbath in America," 5.

48. Clarence Cook, "Boughton's Return of the Mayflower," *New York Daily Tribune* (31 March, 1871), 5.

49. This debate over the relative merits of painting and photography in the nineteenth-century is an interesting one. Many scholars have noted the use of photography during the Civil War and contrasted the proliferation of photographs to the relative paucity of paintings of the war in the years during and immediately following the conflict. On the limitations of early photography as a means of recording historic events, see Lucretia Hoover Giese, "'Harvesting' the Civil War: Art in Wartime New York," in Patricia Burnham and Lucretia Hoover Giese, eds., *Redefining American History Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 73-4. For another perspective, see Mark Thistlethwaite, "A Fall From Grace: The Critical Reception of History Painting, 1875-1925," in Ayres, *Picturing History*, 177-97. Thistlethwaite offers an interesting discussion of Winslow Homer's *Prisoners From the Front* (1866), a painting which he argues was popular in part because it borrowed heavily from conventions of photographic representation. He explains that the image "features neither the chaos nor drama of conflict but the still informality that imbues a photograph," and offers "a rather open-ended narrative and meaning that differs from the didacticism or moralizing typically associated with history painting." Significantly, Thistlethwaite notes that in the case of *Prisoners From the Front*, "the viewer assumes an active role in constructing meaning rather than receiving the more obvious narrative of a typical history painting." Given this relatively greater control over the interaction between spectator and art object that photography allowed, it is not surprising that photographs were more popular than paintings when it came to disturbing wartime imagery. As Thistlethwaite explains: "the

viewer had control over photography; an individual dominates a photograph physically and chooses whether or not to examine its image more closely and for what length of time. By contrast, a history painting...dominates the viewer, assaulting the senses and memory.” (182) It is no wonder that viewers preferred the smaller format of photographs, which “essentially domesticated and allowed a measure of control over the horrors and tragedies of war.” *Pilgrims Going to Church* is interesting in that it seems to combine photographic conventions with aspects of traditional history painting. While it is large in scale and depicts the complex interaction of several figures, the painting shares the “rather open-ended narrative and meaning” which Thistlethwaite identifies with photography. The interaction between spectator and image that such openness requires of the viewer is typical of modernism’s relationship between audience and work of art, and David Huntington has argued that the modernism of *Pilgrims Going to Church* is further seen in its focus on everyday subject matter. Nevertheless, contemporary viewers seem to have contrasted Boughton’s painted history with photographic representations rather than noting similarities between the two modes.

50. “Boughton Pictures,” *Art Amateur* (19 November, 1888): 126.

51. Alfred Trumble, *Representative Works of Contemporary American Artists* (Reprint 1887, New York: Garland Publishers, 1978), n.p.

52. Baldry, 7.

53. Wendy Greenhouse, “The American Portrayal of Tudor and Stuart History, 1815-1865” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1989), 31; Donald A. Ringe, *The Pictorial Mode: Space and Time in the Art of Bryant, Irving, and Cooper* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1971), 1.

54. David Levin, *History as Romantic Art: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1959), 229.

55. Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 283.

56. Greenhouse, “American Portrayal of Tudor and Stuart History,” 29.

57. Wendy Greenhouse, “The Landing of the Fathers: Representing the National Past,” in Ayres, ed. *Picturing History*, 57.

58. *Ibid.*, 59.

59. George H. Calcott, *History in the United States, 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 31-2.

60. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 84.

61. Winifred Herget, "Towards a Rhetoric of Sentimentality," in *Sentimentality in Popular Literature and Culture*, edited by Winifred Herget (Tubingen, Germany: Gunter Naar Verlag Tubingen, 1991), 4.

62. Lesley Carol Wright, "Men Making Meaning in Nineteenth-Century American Genre Painting" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1993), 26.

63. Ibid.

64. Herget, 7-8.

65. For a good overview of recent scholarship on sentimentality, see Shirley Samuels, ed. *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

66. Whether or not contemporary viewers considered *Pilgrims Going to Church* to be a religious painting remains unclear. There are no known nineteenth-century accounts which identify the painting as an explicitly religious image. Instead, it appears to have been most frequently considered as a history painting. Nevertheless, the caption published with the image in *Harper's* (see note 46, page ?? of text), with its assertion that "all historians unite in representing that the religious services of the early Puritans were conducted under such circumstances of danger as are indicated in the painting," may be read as an incitement to nineteenth-century readers—who would experience far less danger on their way to church—to regularly attend religious services. Furthermore, Roger Stein has suggested that the painting's title at the Centennial Exposition ("Pilgrims' Sunday Morning") "narrowed the distance between seventeenth-century New England and Sunday morning images of rural New England" painted by nineteenth-century artists, and encouraged viewers to relate their own church-going practices to the image. See Stein, "Gilded Age Pilgrims," 46. However, in her analysis of Robert L. Stuart's collecting practices, Lesley Carol Wright does not include *Pilgrims Going to Church* as one of Stuart's "religious-themed" paintings. See Wright, "Men Making Meaning in Nineteenth-Century American Genre Painting," 153-155.

67. "George Boughton," *Appleton's*, 11-13.

68. Baldry, 9.

69. Sidney Colvin, "English Painters in the Present Day: George H. Boughton," *Portfolio* 2 (1871): 68.

70. Frederick W. White, "George H. Boughton," *Art Amateur* 7 (1882): 49.

71. *Art Amateur* 5 (1881): 92.
72. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 207.
73. Ibid., 64.
74. Ibid., 64-5.
75. Michael Davitt Bell, *Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 9.
76. Ibid., 11.
77. Ibid., 34.
78. For a good overview of Longfellow's work see John Seelye, *Memory's Nation: The Place of Plymouth Rock* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 378-384.
79. David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 120-121.
80. Greenhouse, "American Portrayal of Tudor and Stuart History," 75.
81. Greenhouse, "The Landing of the Fathers," 50. Ann Uhry Abrams also discusses the relation between nineteenth-century thinking about American colonial history and representations of the Landing. See Abrams, *The Pilgrims and Pocahontas*, especially 73-108 and 181-192. For another perspective see Jeremy Bangs on the development of pictorial conventions for representing Pilgrim history, Jeremy Dupertius Bangs, "Commemorating New England's First Families: The Triumph of the Pilgrims," in Peter Benes and D. Brenton Simons, eds., *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England* (Boston: New England Historical and Genealogical Society, distributed by Northeastern University Press, 2002), 222-244.
82. Seelye, 378.
83. Ibid.
84. Patricia Burnham and Lucretia Hoover Giese, *Redefining American History Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6.
85. Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity," in *On Narrative*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 1-23. For an alternative

perspective on narrative in art, see Nelson Goodman "Twisted Tales; or Story, Study, and Symphony," also in Mitchell, 99-116.

86. Recent scholarship on nineteenth-century history painting has charted a range of ways in which artists responded to the American Civil War. Mark Thistlethwaite has demonstrated the psychological aspects of the war that made it less appealing as an artistic subject than earlier conflicts (such as the Revolutionary War) had been. See Mark Thistlethwaite, "A Fall from Grace: The Critical Reception of History Painting, 1875-1925," in Ayres, *Picturing History*, 177-197. Lucretia Hoover Giese has carried this argument a step further and addressed the practical difficulties in capturing the facets of a "new" kind of warfare that included economic strangulation, destruction of industry, and international isolation alongside more traditional military strategies. See Lucretia Hoover Giese, "'Harvesting' the Civil War: Art in Wartime New York," in Patricia Burnham and Lucretia Hoover Giese, eds., *Redefining American History Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 64-81. On a related note, Christine Bell has demonstrated that while the works submitted to national and international exhibitions prior to the 1880s typically avoided depicting the Civil War battlefield, popular art aimed at Northern households during the 1860s (such as prints, many genre paintings, and John Rogers's sculptural groups) directly addressed many aspects of the conflict and served an important ideological role. Christine Anne Bell, "A Family Conflict: Visual Imagery of the 'Homefront' and the War Between the States, 1860-1866" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1996).

87. Trumble, n.p.

88. Caroline Arscott, "Employer, Husband, Spectator: Thomas Fairbairn's Commission of *The Awakening Conscience*," in *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power, and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class*, edited by Janet Wolff and John Seed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 160.

89. Bartlett, 236-7.

90. David Huntington, "George Henry Boughton," entry number three in David Huntington and Kathleen Pyne, eds., *The Quest for Unity: American Art Between Worlds' Fairs 1876-1893* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1983), 50.

91. "Boughton's Puritans," 265.

92. For a few modern perspectives on the cultural meaning of the art exhibition at the Centennial Exposition, see David Huntington and Kathleen Pyne, *The Quest for Unity*, and Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture 1876-1886* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988). Consideration of the politics behind the selection of *Pilgrims Going to Church* for inclusion at the Centennial Exposition would be a fruitful avenue for research. It is interesting to consider that the committee responsible for selecting the paintings that would represent America at the

Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867 was chaired by William J. Hoppin, a noted lawyer and writer on art-related subjects. He was assisted by the art dealers Samuel P. Avery and Michel Knoedler, and the critic Henry T. Tuckerman. Other committee members included John Taylor Johnston, the railroad magnate who would become president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the prominent New York collectors Marshall Owen Roberts (the owner of Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* and Weir's *Embarkation of the Pilgrims*), Robert M. Olyphant (who was profiled as a prominent collector in Strahan's *Art Treasures of America*), and Robert L. Stuart (owner of *Pilgrims Going to Church*). All but two of the fifteen committee members were New Yorkers, and many of the collectors involved frequently purchased art through Avery and Knoedler. Roberts had also served on the committee responsible for the fine art exhibition at the Metropolitan Fair in 1864 (this may in part explain the prominent placement of *Washington Crossing the Delaware*), at which he was one of the largest lenders. Stuart and Olyphant also each lent several paintings to the Metropolitan Fair exhibition. See "Catalogue of the Art Exhibition at the Metropolitan Fair, in aid of the U.S. Sanitary Commission," and Carol Troyen, "Innocents Abroad: American Painters at the 1867 Exposition Universelle, Paris." *American Art Journal* (Autumn 1984): 3-29.

93. Edward Strahan, *Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exposition, Illustrated*, Vol. 1, Fine Art (Philadelphia: Gebbie and Barrie, Publishers, 1876-8), 219-21. An excerpt of this discussion of *Pilgrims Going to Church* is briefly noted in Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture 1876-86*, 59-60. Strahan's *Art Treasures* was one of several large, illustrated volumes on contemporary American painting that appeared during the nineteenth century in which collectors and their finest pieces were described in great detail. Nineteenth-century articles and exhibition catalogues also suggest that many Americans were interested in the identity and collecting interests of prominent collectors. While the date of a work was rarely included in catalogue entries and exhibition reviews, the name of the owner was nearly always provided. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, periodicals such as the *Art Amateur*, *Art Journal*, and the general interest magazine *Lippincott's* included detailed coverage of collectors, recent acquisitions, and the sale and dispersal of collections; the 1880s saw the establishment of a semi-monthly publication called *The Collector*. A writer describing the sale of Albert Spencer's collection in 1879 complained that buyers at collection sales had recently begun concealing their identities, with the result that "the readers of the next day's paper got little veracious information about [the sale] over their coffee and toast." Neil Harris has demonstrated that by late century attention on the collectors themselves had only intensified, causing the individuals who collected art to be frequently considered by writers in both factual articles and fictional pieces. See "The Sale of the Season," *Art Amateur* 12 (1885): 120-22; and Neil Harris, "Collective Possessions: J. Pierpont Morgan and the American Imagination," In Harris, ed. *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990): 1-35.

94. Strahan, *Art Treasures*, 118.

95. The new interpretation of the painting is particularly striking given the remarkable similarities in the overall structure and wording of Strahan's two discussions of *Pilgrims Going to Church*. While in 1876 Strahan begins "Mr. George H. Boughton, like Leslie and Benjamin West, is a gift of America to England; he has developed, without seriously changing it, the style he formed in this country, and is now pleasing with the results of American art lessons the most cultured classes of the Old World," his 1879 description begins: "Like West and Leslie, Boughton is an art-gift of America to England. His style, learned in this country, has never been changed; his *motivi*, taken from this nation's history, have made English eyes weep and soften with the pathos of American incidents." In 1876 a biographical sketch of Boughton comes before a discussion of the painting and in 1879 it comes afterwards, but the content and organization of the information included is extremely similar, as is the wording used in both passages to characterize Boughton as a "literary" artist.

96. Ronald G. Pisano, *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 11-15.

97. Ibid., 103.

98. Ibid.

99. Marc Alfred Simpson, "Reconstructing the Golden Age: American Artists in Broadway, Worcestershire, 1885-1889" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1993), 55-56.

100. Strahan, *Art Treasures*, 117-118.

101. Caroline Arscott provides a nuanced picture of the interaction between dealers, critics, artists, and patrons in Arscott, "Employer, Husband, Spectator," 159-190. A letter written by art critic Clarence Cook to Samuel P. Avery in 1862 suggests that on at least one occasion, Avery attempted to solicit favorable criticism for the artists he represented. Cook declined, explaining: "I am very sorry that I cannot do such a little thing as to comply with your request, but, having given Rhinehart's work as careful study as my time would permit, I cannot see that what he has thus far done—judging only by the one marble, and the photographs you sent me—is of such striking merit, or positive promise as to demand special notice on the part of the public, or the critics." Letter from Clarence Cook to Samuel Avery, Samuel P. Avery Papers, Archives of American Art, Reel NMM27.

102. Huntington, "George Henry Boughton," in Huntington and Pyne, *The Quest for Unity*, 50.

103. Strahan, *Art Treasures*, 117.

104. Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, "George H. Boughton," *Century Magazine* XXI (November 1891): 157.

105. Baldry, 23-4.

106. Boughton's illustrations for *Rip Van Winkle* are discussed in "Afternoons in Studios," *Studio*, 134-6.

107. For discussion of Boughton in relation to the Colonial Revival, see Roger B. Stein, "Gilded Age Pilgrims," in Stein and Truettner, *Picturing Old New England*, 43-77; Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*, 59-61; Abrams, *Pilgrims and Pocahontas*, 252-259; and Huntington, in Huntington and Pyne, *The Quest for Unity*, 49-51.

108. Christopher Monkhouse, "The Spinning Wheel as Artifact, Symbol, and Source of Design," in *Victorian Furniture: Essays from a Victorian Society Autumn Symposium*, edited by Kenneth L. Ames (Published as *Nineteenth Century* 8 nos. 3-4, 1982): 1571.

109. Wesley Frank Craven, *The Legend of the Founding Fathers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 109.

110. Carl L. Crossman and Charles R. Strickland, "Early Depictions of the Landing of the Pilgrims," *Antiques* (November 1970): 776-81.

111. The rise in popularity of a more accessible national history coincided with a marked decline in traditional history painting as the end of the century approached. Only about twenty out of approximately six-hundred paintings in the art department at the Centennial Exposition were focused on American history. Despite the fact that this was the largest number of American historical paintings to be seen in a single exhibition in fifteen years, critics devoted the bulk of their attention to landscape painting, and the exhibition did little to revive an interest in historical subjects. In the years following the Centennial the number of history paintings which appeared in annual exhibitions of American art at home and abroad was relatively small: history paintings generally made up no more than 1% of the total number of works exhibited in any given annual show at the National Academy of Design and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. See Mark Thistlethwaite, "A Fall from Grace," in Ayres, ed. *Picturing History*, 177, 182.

112. Caitlin McQuade, "The Depiction of Social Space in *Childish Thoughts*: a Material Cultural Analysis of a Painting," (Master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1991), 42.

113. See, for example, William B. Rhoads, *The Colonial Revival* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1977). Sarah Burns's study of American pastoral imagery expands our understanding of anti-modern sentiment and nostalgia in the nineteenth century. Burns argues that "apprehensions" about changes in society—and immigration in particular—formed the subtext of nostalgic symbolism in the years following the Civil

War: "Under the heavy layers of sentiment that sweetened and gilded those reminders of the past there lurked a thin but resilient thread of xenophobic nationalism centering on the belief in Anglo-Saxon hegemony in American as an idea natural, traditional, necessary, and divinely ordained." Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 273. Harvey Green has related this "apprehension" and anti-immigrant feeling to the Colonial Revival, a movement he characterizes as "an ideological synthesis" of popular scientific and social theories formulated as a response to economic, cultural, and demographic changes in the late nineteenth century. Green suggests that the Colonial Revival was particularly anti-urban, and describes the ways in which the logic of Darwinism was used to assert the primacy of the Pilgrims ("old Americans of sturdy yeoman stock") as a means of neutralizing the threat of immigrants who were increasingly drawn to American cities in search of the employment opportunities offered by the expanding industrial economy. See Green, "Popular Science and Political Thought Converge: Colonial Survival Becomes Colonial Revival, 1830-1910," *Journal of American Culture* 6 (Winter 1983): 3-24.

114. Alan Axelrod, in *The Colonial Revival in America*, edited by Axelrod (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. for the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1985), 11-12. T.J. Jackson Lears has explored other manifestations of the strong anti-modernism sentiment that developed in the nineteenth century. See T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

115. Treuttner and Stein, xii.

116. See Stein, "Gilded Age Pilgrims," 43, and Stein and Truettner, *Picturing Old New England*, Chapters 1-2. For a more in depth discussion of New England tourism in the nineteenth century see Sarah L. Giffen and Kevin D. Murphy, eds., *A Noble and Dignified Stream: The Piscataqua Region in the Colonial Revival, 1860-1930* (York, Me.: Old York Historical Society, 1992); and Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995) and "Accidental Tourists: Visitors to the Mount Mansfield Summit House in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Vermont History* 75 (Summer-Fall 1997): 117-130.

117. Stein, "Gilded Age Pilgrims," 43. It is interesting to consider who owned Boughton's other colonial-themed paintings. This group included: railroad executive and first president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art John Taylor Johnston (1820-1893), who, like Stuart, was first generation Scottish-American; banker, philanthropist, and railroad financier George Ingraham Seney (1826-1893); manufacturer and bibliophile Robert Hoe (1839-1909); steamship magnate Marshall Owen Roberts (1814-1880), son of Welsh immigrants; merchant and railroad president William Thompson Walters (1820-1894), whose parents were of Scotch-Irish descent; dry goods merchant Charles Stewart Smith (1832-1909); Presbyterian philanthropist and real estate and railroad magnate Henry Gurdon Marquand (1819-1902); railroad president and merchant Robert Morrison Olyphant (1824-1918); and civil engineer and teacher Fairman Rogers (1833-

1900). With the exception of Rogers and Walters, who resided in Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania, respectively, all of the collectors listed above lived and worked in New York City. None of them appear to have had personal connections to New England.

118. Rudolph de Cordova, "Mr. George Henry Boughton," *The Strand Magazine* XX (July 1900): 4.

119. Clarence Cook, "An English American Artist," *The Quarterly Illustrator* 2 (1894): 106-110.

120. Griffis, 495.

121. Ibid., 498.

122. Henry James, "Our Artists in Europe," *Harper's Monthly* 79 (June 1889): 61.

123. Ibid.

124. Cosmo Monkhouse, "Some English Artists and Their Studios," *Century Magazine* 24 (August 1882): 561.

125. David Glassberg has shown that nineteenth-century pageants were typically centered around domestic events. In 1910, the Old Deerfield Historical Pageant included a procession to church which was likely modeled after Boughton's *Pilgrims Going to Church*. See Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 124-117.

126. Herget, 9.

127. Ibid.

128. Ciaran Benson, "A Psychological Perspective on Art and Irish National Identity," *The Irish Journal of Psychology* 15 (1994): 327.

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