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The Octonaire in Thomas Smith's *Self-Portrait*

Peter Auger

ABSTRACT Thomas Smith's *Self-Portrait* (ca. 1680) is the earliest known self-portrait produced in New England and the only painting extant from this period identified with a specific artist. Smith is commonly assumed to have composed the eight-line poem "Why Why Should I the World Be Minding" that appears in the portrait. In fact, these verses are the English translator Josuah Sylvester's version of a French octonaire that was written by the Huguenot minister and author Simon Goulart and set to music by Paschal de L'Estocart in the early 1580s. This discovery casts fresh light on how the arrangement of elements in the portrait was consistent with the aesthetic values of early American Puritan culture that the painting is taken to embody. Specifically, it calls attention to how the poem functions like a "motto" (the word used when the English poem was first printed in Sylvester's *Devine Weekes, and Workes*) that illuminates the spiritual significance of the portrait's emblematic features. **KEYWORDS:** colonial American portraiture; poetry and visual art; Puritan aesthetics; motto; emblem

❧ **THOMAS SMITH'S SELF-PORTRAIT** (ca. 1680) is the earliest known self-portrait produced in the American colonies that are now the United States (fig. 1). The Worcester Art Museum, the painting's owner, calls it "the only seventeenth-century New England portrait by an identified artist."¹ The sitter is depicted angled toward his right, eyes looking left. He wears a dark coat with a patterned lace jabot. His chair has maroon upholstery with studs; above it, a curtain and tassel lend a sense of depth to the portrait. The top left corner depicts a naval encounter involving Dutch and English forces against an unidentified enemy, probably an allusion to Smith's maritime career.

1. Susan E. Strickler, in *Worcester Art Museum: Selected Works* (Worcester, Mass., 1994), 180; text available online at <http://www.worcesterart.org/collection/American/1948.19.html>, accessed October 2016. See also Jonathan L. Fairbanks, "Portrait Painting in Seventeenth-Century Boston: Its History, Methods, and Materials," in *New England Begins: The Seventeenth Century*, ed. Fairbanks and Robert F. Trent, 3 vols. (Boston, 1982), 3:413–79 at 474.

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Below the ships is a fortification flying two red flags, one of them with three white crescents, presumably indicating that the fortress belongs to an Islamic nation. Beneath this scene is a table, covered in more maroon fabric, with a skull upon which the sitter's right hand rests. Beneath the skull is a sheet of paper turned toward the viewer's right containing eight lines of verse that are usually transcribed as follows (fig. 2):

Why why should I the World be minding
 therein a World of Evils Finding.
 Then Farwell World: Farwell thy Jarres
 thy Joies thy Toies thy Wiles thy Warrs
 Truth Sounds Retreat: I am not sorye.
 The Eternall Drawes to him my heart
 By Faith (which can thy Force Subvert)
 To Crowne me (after Grace) with Glory.

TS. [initials in a monogram]²

Scholars have read the cipher “T S” at the bottom of the poem as probably or definitely indicating that Thomas Smith composed both the portrait and these verses.

Smith has been associated with a Major Thomas Smith, mentioned in the account book of the treasurer of Harvard College on June 2, 1680, as having been commissioned to produce a copy of a portrait of the Puritan theologian William Ames (1576–1633): “Colledge Dr to money pd Major Tho. Smith for drawing Dr Ames effigies p[e]r Order of Corporation. £4.4.”³ The attribution of the portrait to Thomas Smith is based on its provenance, which also offers weak support for claiming that “T S” wrote the poem. The Worcester Art Museum purchased the self-portrait in 1948 from the nearby American Antiquarian Society, where the portrait had hung in the librarian's office for many years. It had been brought there by Samuel Foster Haven, who was a former librarian at the society and Smith's great-great-grandson.⁴ During the eighteenth century, the portrait had been in the possession of Catherina Mears Dexter (1701–1797), Smith's granddaughter. Her son, Samuel Dexter, recorded in his commonplace book that (as well as retaining Smith's arms) his mother “has his portrait too, daubed by himself, with some lines in verse at the bottom, of his own composing, in the style of the day.”⁵ Dexter apparently took the old-fashioned style of the poem as

2. This is the text as transcribed in the museum's catalogue information for the portrait, accessed October 2016, http://www.worcesterart.org/collection/Early_American/Artists/smith/self/painting.html.

3. “November Meeting,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 6 (1862–63): 333–61 at 340.

4. R. W. G. Vail, “Report of the Librarian,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 43 (1933): 216–328 at 220–21. See also the museum's online catalogue information on provenance; and Louisa Dresser, *XVIIth Century Painting in New England* (Worcester, Mass., 1935), 134.

5. Samuel Dexter, “Samuel Dexter Commonplace-Book, 1763–1809,” MS Sbd-219/Microfilm P-201, 276–77, Massachusetts Historical Society. This reference was found by Jason D. LaFountain and is cited in the museum's online biography; see also O. P. Dexter, *Dexter Genealogy, 1642–1904* (New York, 1904), 37.

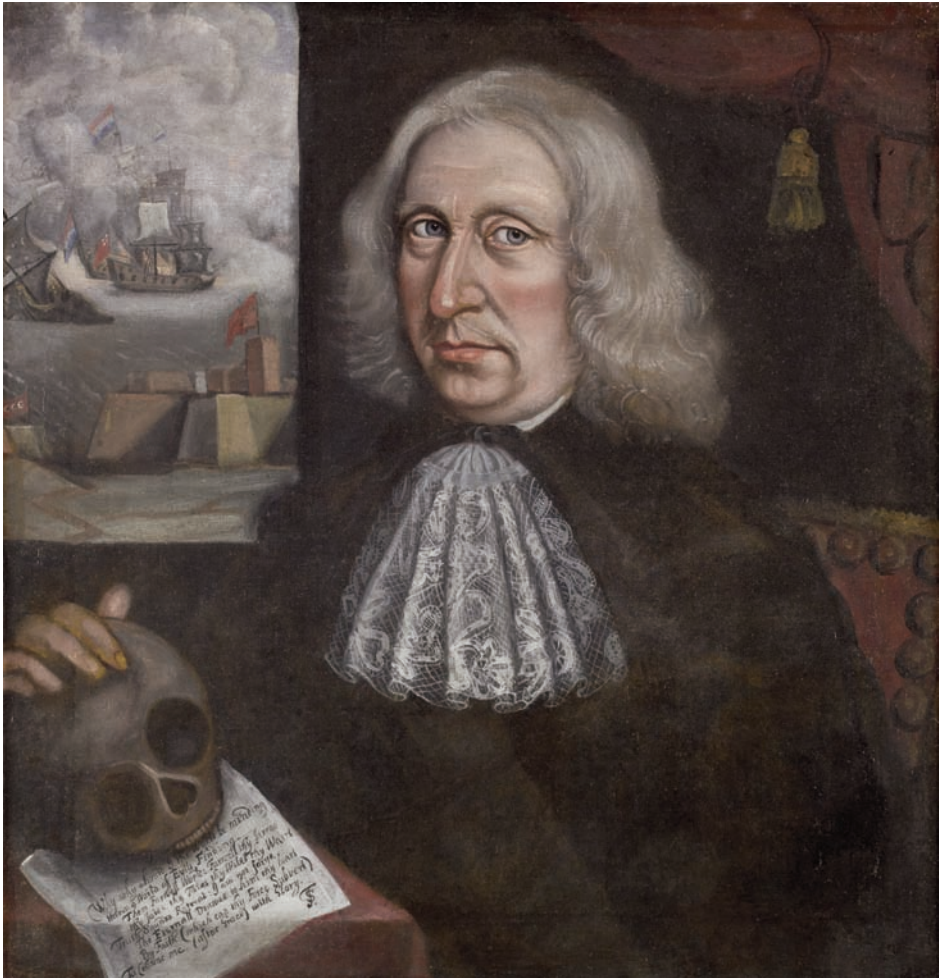


FIGURE 1. Thomas Smith, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1680. Worcester Art Museum (Mass.), Museum Purchase, 1948.19. Image © Worcester Art Museum.

proof that his great-grandfather had composed it. Like many critics who have viewed the painting since, Dexter made the reasonable, but false, assumption that the initials denoted not only the artist and sitter's identity but also Smith's authorship of what appears on the fictional piece of paper.⁶

Additional internal evidence to support Dexter's testimony that Smith wrote "Why Why Should I the World Be Minding" is the inscription "Tho S AET [?]" that appears to the left of the cipher under ultraviolet light.⁷ Sally Promey, one of the more recent critics to attribute the poem to Smith, takes this glimpse into an earlier state of the portrait as evidence that

the artist replaced the more usual identification of the sitter by name and age with his own monogram. The emendation highlights the painting's departure from expected "portrait" conventions; and, in a related strategy, it provided Smith with an opportunity to sign both painting and poem at once.⁸

The cipher "T S" is certainly a focus of attention in the portrait that unites its various elements around the sitter's identity. Its inclusion was probably a way for Smith to sign the painting in a way that blended subtly into other elements of the composition and preserved the sense of depth. The placement also makes it natural for any viewer to think that "T S" was meant to denote authorship of the poem as well—and, indeed, this may have been the intended effect.

Yet the poem in Thomas Smith's *Self-Portrait* is actually a translated sixteenth-century *octonaire*—that is, an eight-line Calvinist devotional lyric that expresses contempt for the world and its vanities. Its author was almost certainly the pastor and polymath Simon Goulart, and it was printed with Paschal de L'Estocart's musical setting in 1582. The version found in Smith's self-portrait is Josuah Sylvester's translation, which first appeared in a collected edition of his French translations and other works in London in 1621. The next two sections of this essay investigate the poem's transmission across three territories and over a century, beginning with manuscript evidence that the English poem was already known as a devotional lyric in New England and then identifying an error in how the poem is usually transcribed. Next, the essay considers Sylvester's translation in relation to the original French in order to provide a much firmer contextual basis for reading the significance of its inclusion in the painting. The final section assesses what difference the discovery of the poem's French source makes to our understanding of one of the most famous paintings produced in early New England.

6. For a literary historical analysis of the poem that assumes that Smith wrote it, see Max Cavitch, "Interiority and Artifact: Death and Self-Inscription in Thomas Smith's *Self-Portrait*," *Early American Literature* 37 (2002): 89–117 (e.g., 99).

7. Fairbanks, "Portrait Painting," 474.

8. Sally Promey, "Seeing the Self 'in frame': Early New England Material Practice and Puritan Piety," *Material Religion* 1 (2005): 10–46 at 36.

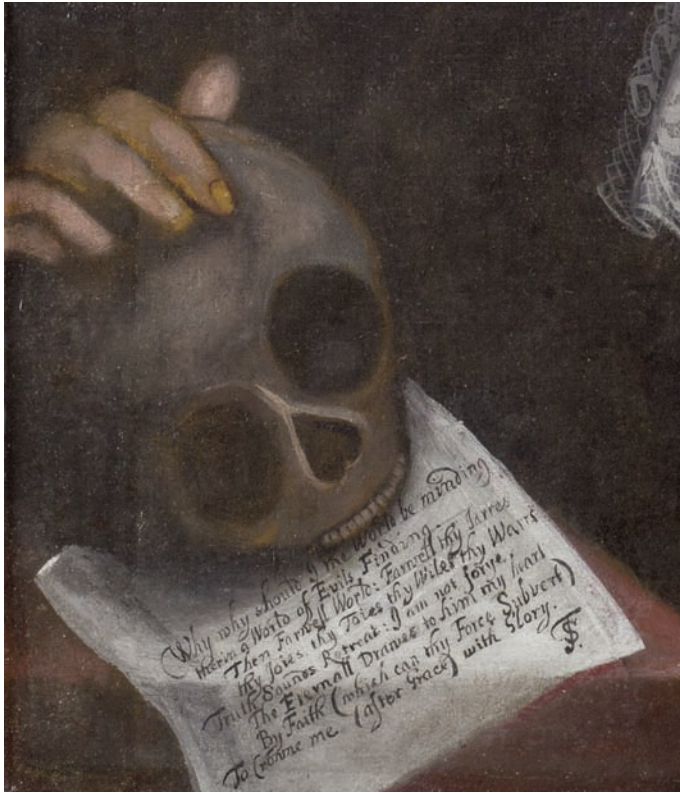


FIGURE 2. Detail of Thomas Smith, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1680. Worcester Art Museum (Mass.), Museum Purchase, 1948.19. Image © Worcester Art Museum.

☞ Josuah Sylvester's Motto

In order to gain some sense of the cultural and literary context within which the poem might have been read when the portrait was painted, it is worth beginning an excavation of the poem's sources by thinking about its appearance in a manuscript that can also be placed in New England in the 1680s: "Dayly Observations Both Divine & Morall" (HM 93, Huntington Library), a commonplace book completed by Thomas Grocer in 1657. Its title page has inscriptions reading, "Crescentius Matherus 1680," "Crescentii Matheri Liber 1682," and "Nathanaelis Matheri Liber 1683."⁹ Increase ("Crescentius") Mather had become teacher of North Church in Boston in 1664, and in the quarter century that followed, "he emerged as the foremost figure in American puritanism."¹⁰ His brother Nathaniel had been pastor of the New Row congregation in

9. See the entry in *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450–1700*, accessed October 2016, <http://www.celm-ms.org.uk/repositories/huntington-f.html>.

10. ODNB, s.v. "Mather, Increase (1639–1723)," by Francis J. Bremer, last modified 2004, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/18322.

Dublin since 1671, and it is possible that the book traveled to Ireland in 1682 or 1683 (the two brothers are known to have been exchanging manuscripts).¹¹ Little is known about the work's compiler, Thomas Grocer, though another commonplace book assigned to him and also dated 1657 survives at the Folger Shakespeare Library.¹² Arthur Marotti writes that "Dayly Observations" is

a decidedly middle-class florilegium full of proverbial wisdom and pithy sayings, the bourgeois counterpart of the poetical anthologies of the upper classes, with some contents, such as Herrick's poems (pp. 4–27) lifted from the elite tradition. . . . The compiler's tastes reflect the religious, moral, and utilitarian biases of his class.¹³

The first thirty folios of the manuscript contain almost ninety of Herrick's lyrics, followed by poems by authors including George Herbert, John Godolphin, Edward May, and Phineas Fletcher.¹⁴

"Why Why Should I the World Be Minding" (fig. 3) is the fortieth and final numbered poem in a sequence of quotations on pages 129 to 149 taken from one of the most highly esteemed works of vernacular divine poetry in seventeenth-century England: *Devine Weekes, and Workes* (first printed in 1605), which contains the collected translations and original poems of Josuah Sylvester (1562/3–1618). Grocer does not quote from the English translations of Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas's poetry, which make up the bulk of Sylvester's *Devine Weekes* and for which the translator is best known. Instead, he draws on translations from other French poets, and also quotes from original poems by Sylvester (an elegy to Henry Parvis [p. 140] and "Graces All Together" [pp. 138–40]) that only appear in the final two seventeenth-century editions of *Devine Weekes*, which were printed in 1633 and 1641.¹⁵ Anne Bradstreet's *Several Poems*, printed in Boston in 1678 (based on an earlier 1650 edition printed in London), offers an indication that Sylvester's translations were still held in high esteem in New England at the time that the Smith portrait was produced: Bradstreet undoubtedly read Du Bartas's poetry in *Devine Weekes* and mentions Sylvester by name in her elegy to Sir Philip Sidney.¹⁶ Although the reputations of Du Bartas and Sylvester would plummet after 1700 on both sides of the Atlantic, it is nonetheless likely that literate early viewers of the self-portrait would at least have heard of *Devine Weekes, and Workes*. Their knowledge of Sylvester's varied French sources would not have been

11. R. L. Greaves, *God's Other Children* (Stanford, Calif., 1997), 254, 258.

12. "A Banquet of Sweetmeats" (1657), Folger MS V.a.178.

13. Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London, 1995), 43–44.

14. For a fuller list of the contents (though some poems from *Devine Weekes*, including "Why, Why," are omitted), see the entry in the Union First Line Index of English Verse, accessed October 2016, http://firstlines.folger.edu/search.php?val1=HM93&sort=fol&lib_hunt=Y#results.

15. *Devine Weekes, and Workes* (London, 1641), 3I5r and 3K3v–3K4r.

16. *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Jeannine Hensley (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1967; repr. 2005), 191 (line 74).

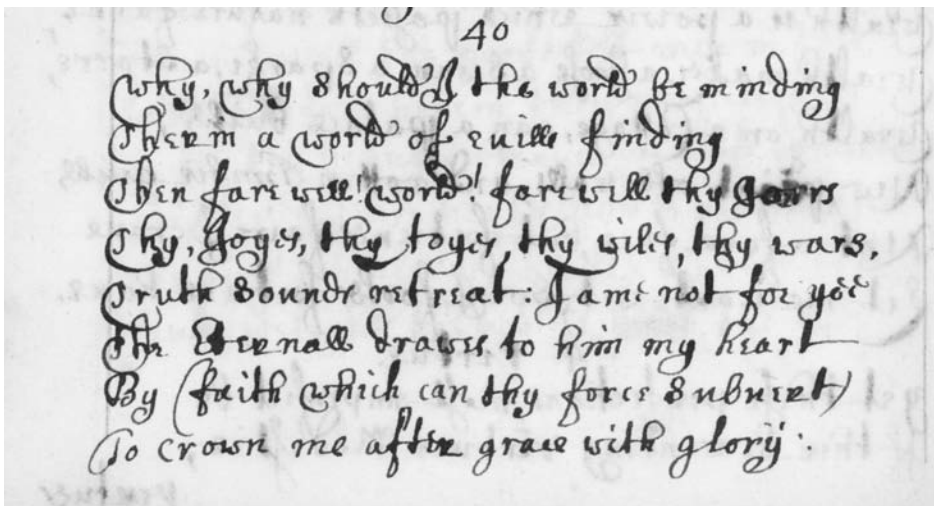


FIGURE 3. Detail of Thomas Grocer, “Dayly Observations” (1657), HM 93, p. 140. Huntington Library.

much better than that of Grocer, though, who conflates “Du Bartas” with the rest of Sylvester’s translations when concluding his extracts from *Devine Weekes* with the exhortation to “vide rest in Du bartas.” *Devine Weekes* may have already felt very traditional by the 1680s, but even so, Mather’s possession of Grocer’s “Dayly Observations” suggests that the poems still possessed devotional and literary value, as does the inclusion of one of Sylvester’s translations in Smith’s *Self-Portrait*.

All of Grocer’s quotations from *Devine Weekes* are in English only, even when the printed volume provides the French original alongside the translation. The attraction of these poems was evidently that they were succinct and pious meditations on traditional themes like vanity, mortality, and virtue. Grocer’s substitution of “thy” for “our” in the line “Few are our days, with many Dolours filld” from Sylvester’s “Honor’s Farewell” exemplifies the compiler’s desire to relate his selections to his and his readers’ lived experience.¹⁷ The first twenty-three of the forty numbered quotations from *Devine Weekes* that Grocer includes in his commonplace book are quatrains taken from Sylvester’s translations of Guy de Faur, Seigneur de Pibrac’s *Quatrains*, and Pierre Matthieu’s *Memorials of Mortality*. The remaining quotations include the final stanza from *Simile non est idem: Seeming Is Not the Same*, which may be an original poem by Sylvester (p. 134); most of the translation “Automachia: or the Selfe-Civil-War” from George Goodwin’s Latin original (pp. 141–46); and a long extract from “The New Hirusalem” (pp. 146–49), introduced in *Devine Weekes* as a hymn written by Saint Augustine.

Immediately after the thirty-ninth quotation, which is the first five lines of Sylvester’s elegy to Henry Parvis, is found the final numbered verse in Grocer’s selection from *Devine Weekes*:

17. *Devine Weekes* (1641), 3E6r; Grocer, “Dayly Observations,” HM 93, p. 135, Huntington Library.

40

Why, Why should I the world be minding
 Therin a World of euills finding
 Then fare well! World! fare well thy Iarrs
 Thy, Ioyes, thy toyes, thy wiles, thy wars.
 Truth sounds retreat: I ame not for yee
 The Eternall drawes to him my heart
 By (faith which can thy force subuert)
 To crown me after grace with glory.

(HM 93, p. 140)

Grocer's transcription contains a few discrepancies from the printed text of the poem in the three folio editions of *Devine Weekes* (1621, 1633, and 1641). These muddy the sense a little, particularly when the opening parenthesis is misplaced in the penultimate line. In *Devine Weekes* the poem is the fourteenth in a section called *Mottoes*:

Why, why should I the World be minding,
 Therein a World of evils finding ?
 Then farewel World : farewel thy Jars,
 Thy joyes, thy toyes thy wiles, thy wars.
 Truth sounds Retrait : I am not for-ye.
 Th'Eternall drawes to him my heart
 By faith (which can thy force subvert)
 To crown mee (after Grace) with Glory.

(Devine Weekes [1641], 3G1v)

Two minor variants in the 1641 edition that are also found in Grocer's text (the 1633 edition reads "for-ye" in line 5 and "draws" in line 6) make it probable that he was using this final edition.¹⁸ Grocer has already quoted once from the *Mottoes* in his thirty-first extract (p. 137), which is the fourth motto from the sequence. That poem begins: "Goe, silly Worm, drudge, trudge and travell, / Despising Pain" (*Devine Weekes*, 3G1r).

Although "Dayly Observations" provides a guide to how people like the Mathers might have encountered and thought about such a poem, there is nothing to suggest that Smith found this poem in Grocer's florilegium. Whereas Grocer was probably using the last edition of *Devine Weekes*, the orthography of Smith's quotation of the poem is closer to the poem's initial printing in 1621 (fig. 4):

18. *Devine Weekes* (1633), 3G1v. These observations are based on the copies that can be viewed on Early English Books Online, i.e., the copy of the 1641 edition held at the Newberry Library and the 1633 text at the University of Minnesota. Alexander Grosart produced the only modern edition of Sylvester's translation of this poem but did not provide details of variants or stop-press corrections within editions, which would be needed to identify Grocer's transcription securely with the 1641 edition; see *Joshuah Sylvester: The Complete Works*, ed. Alexander Grosart, 2 vols. (1880; repr. Hildesheim, 1969), 2:303.

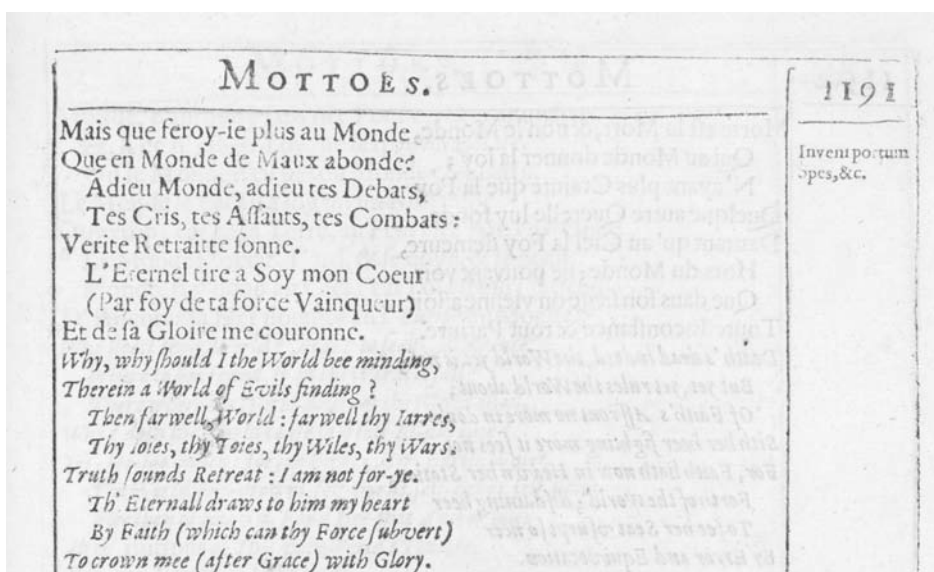


FIGURE 4. Detail of *Devine Weekes and Workes*, trans. Josuah Sylvester (London, 1621), sig. 5K2r. Huntington Library, 69241.

Why, why should I the World bee minding,
 Therein a World of Evils finding?
 Then farwell, World: farwell thy Iarres,
 Thy Ioies, thy Toies, thy Wiles, thy Wars.
 Truth sounds Retreat: I am not for-ye.
 Th'Eternall draws to him my heart
 By Faith (which can thy Force subvert)
 To crown mee (after Grace) with Glory.

(*Devine Weekes* [1621], sig. 5K2r)

The majuscule *E* in “Evils,” *re* in “Iarres,” and medial *is* in “Ioies” and “Toies” are all readings that appear only in the 1621 text and the portrait. Minor discrepancies in orthography and punctuation aside (and the question mark lost in line 2 of the portrait’s version), the major difference between the 1621 text and the usual transcription of portrait’s poem is that *Devine Weekes* gives the reading “I am not for-ye” instead of “I am not sorye,” this latter reading (spelt with minuscule or majuscule *s*) being found in all but two modern transcriptions of the poem that I have consulted.¹⁹

With the poem’s source in mind, however, it is clear that the portrait also reads, “I am not forye.” The first letter of the final word in line five is an *f* that closely resembles

19. “I am not forye” is the reading given in Virgil Barker, *American Painting* (New York, 1950), 46 (with italicized *f*); and William H. Gerdtz and Russell Burke, *American Still-Life Painting* (New York, 1971), 20; all other works cited in this essay share the reading “sorye” or “sorry.”

the *f* in “after” in the final line, and not an *s* like the initial round *s* of “should” in the opening line. The letterform has a small horizontal stroke confirming that the letter is an *f* rather than a long *s*. This still leaves “forye,” not “for-ye” or “for ye,” as there is no discernible word division between the *r* and *y*. “Forye” was arguably appropriate, however, since it places a weaker stress on “ye” so that “forye” has the same rhythm as “glory.” In context, this reading is preferable to the unapologetic defiance of “I am not sorye.” The phrase “I am not for ye,” with “ye” probably referring singly to “the World” (though it could refer to the five items listed in lines 3 and 4), is either the words of the retreat that Truth sounds or the speaker’s reflection on the previous five lines. It fits well at this transitional point of the poem as the speaker turns aside from the world’s struggles and looks toward the eternal realm.

Knowing the poem’s source clears up another minor textual issue by confirming that “Toies” is indeed the artist’s intended reading in line four. Doubt might arise, as Fairbanks reports, because the phrase “thy Toies thy wiles thy” shows evidence of restoration in the portrait (and, in addition, “toiles” might seem a stronger reading).²⁰ With these points in mind, here is a fresh transcription of Sylvester’s motto as found in Smith’s *Self-Portrait*:

Why why should I the World be minding
 therein a World of Evils Finding.
 Then Farwell World: Farwell thy Iarres
 thy Ioies thy Toies thy Wiles thy Warrs
 Truth Sounds Retreat: I am not forye.
 The Eternall Drawes to him my heart
 By Faith (which can thy Force Subvert)
 To Crowne me (after Grace) with Glory.

TS.

The first letter of the cipher “T S” is the same as other majuscule *T*s in the words “Toies,” “Truth,” and “To”—it is definitely not a *J* for Josuah, despite the short tail on the letterform’s stem. Although the portrait contains no indication that the poem is taken from Sylvester’s *Devine Weekes*, early viewers of the painting could still have known that the poem was written by Josuah Sylvester or might have guessed from the poem’s slightly archaic style (which Samuel Dexter detected) that the poem was not original to Smith.

Simon Goulart’s and Paschal de L’Estocart’s Octonaire

Even viewers who recognized Smith’s direct source would have had virtually no chance of identifying the author of the original French poem that Sylvester was translating. Smith must have known that it was a translation, though, since the French text

20. Fairbanks, “Portrait Painting,” 474. “Toiles” is proposed as an alternative in Lillian B. Miller, “The Puritan Portrait: Its Function in Old and New England,” in *Seventeenth-Century New England*, ed. David D. Hall and Philip Chadwick Foster Smith (Boston, 1984), 153–84 at 179.

is provided immediately above Sylvester's translation in all three editions of *Devine Weekes* in which it appears:

Mais que feroy-ie plus au Monde
 Que en Monde de Maux abonde?
 Adieu Monde, adieu tes Debats,
 Tes Cris, tes Assauts, tes Combats :
 Verite Retraite sonne.
 L'Eternel tire a Soy mon Coeur
 (Par foy de ta force Vainqueur)
 Et de sa Gloire me couronne.

(*Devine Weekes* [1621], sig. 5K2r)

The poem can be translated: "But what more shall I do in the world since the world abounds in evil? Goodbye world, goodbye your strifes, your clamours, your assaults, your battles: Truth sounds the retreat. The Eternal pulls my heart to Him (by Faith, who conquers your force) and crowns me in his glory." Sylvester has supplied "Ioies and Toies" to the poem's catalogue of noisy military actions to describe the speaker's total resignation from life's passing pleasures as well as its troubles. "I am not foye" is revealed as an addition to the French poem, which explains why the half line sounds so awkward. The firm break in the fifth line of the French creates a stronger contrast between the world that the speaker leaves behind and the eternal realm to which he aspires. More powerfully than the English "Force" does, the single word "Vainqueur" turns the militaristic imagery of the first section to describe spiritual ends.

Not even Sylvester seems to have known who wrote the verses. The one clue to the original French author given in *Devine Weekes* is in Sylvester's "Appendix" (1621, sig. 5K4r) to the *Mottoes*. This twenty-four-line verse gives enough hints that these poems are "sacred Songs" (line 6, also 11 and 16) to think that a reader could have known that these were devotional lyrics meant to promote virtue in the reader or listener. In line 10, Sylvester implies that "Paschal and Pibrac" wrote these poems:

Surcease thy Musick, lay aside thy Muses:
Paschal and Pibrac, yon have toild too-long:
 Seeing that Vertue serves but for a Song
 To this vain World, that on all Mischief muses.

This passage suggests that Sylvester has the mistaken idea that Pibrac, whose *Quatrains* appear earlier in *Devine Weekes*, was involved in the composition. This confusion may have arisen since "Paschal," who is the composer Paschal de L'Estocart (1539?–after 1584), did indeed set Pibrac's poetry to music.²¹ L'Estocart was born in

21. *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "L'Estocart, Paschal de," by Marc Honegger, accessed October 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16487>; Laurent Guillo, *Les éditions musicales de la renaissance lyonnaise* (Paris, 1991), 102–3 and 457–58.

Picardy and is known to have spent time in Lyon. He also made several visits to Italy and had connections with the community of French Protestant refugees in Geneva, including the polymathic minister, theologian, commentator, and poet Simon Goulart. It was probably through Goulart's intervention that L'Estocart's works were printed in Geneva by the French refugee printer Jean de Laon between 1581 and 1583.²² As well as *Cent vingt et six quatrains du sieur de Pibrac* (1582), L'Estocart produced musical settings of the Psalms and other sacred songs.

L'Estocart also prepared two books of octonaires set to music. The name *octonaire* (rather than *huitain*) may allude to the structure of Psalm 119, which Calvin had called the "pseume octonaire."²³ The poems were best known in late sixteenth-century France through L'Estocart's and Claude Le Jeune's musical settings.²⁴ As well as being enhanced by music, octonaires were sometimes paired with engravings. Florence Mauger notes the kinship between octonaires and emblems in their subject matter and didactic purpose: octonaires are "like a mosaic where sacred and profane motifs mingle, following the example of the eclecticism found in emblem collections" (translation mine).²⁵ The best-known exponent of octonaires was Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, whose octonaires were his "masterpiece," according to Sara Barker: they "tapped into a stream of thought within the Calvinist consciousness" and "in their subject matter and musical application . . . fulfilled the same role as the Psalms."²⁶ Sylvester's English translation of Chandieu's *Octonaires* appears as *Spectacles* in *Devine Weekes* (again with no attribution to the author, though the original French versions are supplied), which is found in *Devine Weekes* immediately before *Mottoes*. Grocer quotes five of Sylvester's *Spectacles* in his "Dayly Observations" (pp. 135–37).

L'Estocart's settings of Chandieu are contained in the first book of his *Octonaires*, but it is his *Second livre des octonaires de la vanité du monde, mis en musique a trois, quatre, cinq et six parties, par Paschal de L'Estocart* (Lyon, 1582) that contains the source for Sylvester's *Mottoes*.²⁷ How Sylvester came into possession of these songs is unclear. They were not collected in the anthology *Cantiques de sieur de Maisonfleur* (1580), which contains a group of French texts that Sylvester translated, including Pibrac's *Quatrains*, Chandieu's *Octonaires*, and Pierre Duval's *Psaume de la puissance*. Though Chandieu's *Octonaires* survive in several manuscript copies, L'Estocart's *Second livre* is

22. E. Droz, "Jean de Sponde et Pascal de L'Estocart," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 13 (1951): 312–26 at 326; Paschal de L'Estocart, *Second livre des octonaires de la vanité du monde*, *Monuments de la musique française au temps de la renaissance* 11, ed. Jacques Chailley and Marc Honegger (Paris, 1958), ii.

23. *Octonaires sur la vanité et inconstance du monde*, ed. Françoise Bonali-Fiquet (Geneva, 1979), 28.

24. Joseph Du Chesne, *La Morocosmie*, ed. Lucile Gibert (Geneva, 2009), 40–42.

25. "comme une mosaïque où se mêlent les motifs sacrés et profanes, à l'instar de l'éclectisme que l'on observe dans les recueils d'emblèmes." Florence Mauger, "Antoine de Chandieu et Etienne Delaune: Les *Octonaires sur la vanité et inconstance du monde*. Un recueil d'emblèmes?," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 58 (1996): 611–29 at 612.

26. Sara Barker, *Protestantism, Poetry and Protest* (Farnham, U.K., 2009), 225, 231, 234.

27. A digitized copy of all four parts (for superius, contratenor, tenor, and bassus) is available from the Bavarian State Library, accessed October 2016, <http://stimmuecher.digitale-sammlungen.de/view?id=bsb00089920>.

not known elsewhere in manuscript or print.²⁸ Either Sylvester was working directly from an imported partbook, perhaps one that the Huguenot community in London had been using, or he had access to a text not known today. Given that they were apparently never printed during Sylvester's lifetime, the *Mottoes* testify to Sylvester's diligence in finding and translating Protestant verse. The chances that Smith or anyone else in New England had access to a French edition of L'Estocart's *Second livre* or the original poems that they contain are remote.

The five-part octonaire "Mais que fero-y-ie plus au monde" is the twelfth of twenty-four octonaires in L'Estocart's *Second livre*. Jacques Chailley and Marc Honegger edited the collection in the mid-twentieth century. As Honegger writes, L'Estocart was "an essentially Huguenot composer, and his music has a strength and austerity that well accords with this."²⁹ These qualities are audible in the recording of nineteen of L'Estocart's settings of the *Octonaires* (including "Mais que fero-y-ie plus au monde") by Ensemble Clément Janequin, directed by Dominique Visse, in 1983.³⁰ L'Estocart's musical dramatization of "Mais que fero-y-ie plus au monde" predominantly assigns one note to each syllable and portrays an emotional progression from the isolation of the opening line, when each part shares the same melody, to the tumult of the cries and clamoring that is halted by Truth (as "sonne" is made to mimic the retreat's sound), and the singers' contemplation of God's presence with embellishments on the words *soy* and *gloire*. The only significant variant in the partbooks from the transcription in *Devine Weekes* is an improvement: the earlier text includes "la" before "retraite" to produce the line "Verite la retraite sonne" ("Truth sounds the retreat").

L'Estocart's modern editors identify Goulart as the author of "Mais que fero-y-ie plus au monde." Goulart's association with the *Second livre* is apparent from a huitain by S. G. S. (Simon Goulart Senlisien) celebrating L'Estocart's talents that appears immediately after the preface. A letter from L'Estocart to the Count of Marck in the *Second livre* notes that the first twelve octonaires (of which this poem is the twelfth) were written by one of the composer's best friends ("un de mes meilleurs amis"), who had encouraged him to pursue his godly vocation and had expressed the wish that his verses be set to music. Goulart is believed to be this friend because three of this first dozen octonaires would be attributed to him when found in the "Treize octonaires de la vanité du monde, par S. G. S." that were later appended to the first edition of Pierre Poupou's *La muse chrestienne* (1585).³¹ Chailley and Honegger accordingly attribute all

28. François Rouget, "Sur une version inédite partielle des *Octonaires* d'Antoine de la Roche-Chandieu," *French Studies Bulletin* 29 (2008): 10–14.

29. *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "L'Estocart, Paschal de."

30. Ensemble Clément Janequin, with Dominique Visse, *Paschal de L'Estocart, Octonaires de la vanité du monde*, Harmonia Mundi HMA1951110, 1983, 33½ rpm.

31. In addition to *Second livre des octonaires*, ed. Chailley and Honegger, Goulart is named as author of the first twelve octonaires in *Octonaires*, ed. Bonali-Fiquet, 15–16; *La Morocosmie*, ed. Gibert, 40n124 and 41n131; and Olivier Pot, "Numero, ordine et pondere, Les imitations chrestiennes: Manifeste d'une école poétique réformée?" in *Simon Goulart, un pasteur aux intérêts vastes comme le monde*, ed. Pot (Geneva, 2013), 345–416 at 389; on Goulart's appearance in the first edition only of Poupou's *La muse chrestienne*, see Anne Mantero's edition (Paris, 1997), li.

twelve to Goulart, as have several subsequent critics. (The second dozen octonaires were written by Joseph Du Chesne, who also had links to Lyon and Geneva.)³²

Thomas Smith's Motto

So how, finally, does the knowledge that “Why Why Should I the World Be Minding” is a French octonaire translated by Josuah Sylvester change how we view the Smith *Self-Portrait*? First of all, we have evidence that Smith is more likely to have thought of the poem he chose as a “motto” than as an “elegy,” “octonaire,” or any other kind of lyric. Describing the poem as a “motto” is a little awkward given that the term is usually used to refer to a short sentence or phrase in an emblematic composition, whereas in modern usage “epigram” would be more appropriate for an eight-line poem that accompanies an emblem. Yet *Mottoes* is the title that Sylvester gave to these poems, and it was probably his invention; he likewise renamed Chandieu’s *Octonaires* as *Spectacles*, a title accompanied by an image of a pair of spectacles with emblematic inscriptions and an epigrammatic couplet beneath. Almost half of Sylvester’s *Mottoes* are themselves given Latin mottos: ten of the twenty-two *Mottoes* are introduced with short Latin phrases in marginal notes that are not found in the French partbooks. “Why Why Should I the World Be Minding” has gained the motto “Inveni portum Spei, &c” (“I found the gate of hope, etc.”). “Spei” is the 1633 and 1641 reading; the 1621 text reads “Spes,” which may be ungrammatical taken in isolation but is closer to the original epigram, which Robert Burton also happened to quote in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, printed in 1621:

Inveni portum spes & fortuna valete,
 Nil mihi vobiscum, ludite nunc alios.
 Mine hauen’s found, fortune and hope adue,
 Mock others now for I haue done with you.³³

The Latin epigram is Janus Pannonius’s translation of a couplet from the Greek Anthology, which reappeared in many places, including Thomas More’s *Epigrams*.³⁴ The epigram in both its short and long forms is a fitting title for “Why Why Should I the World Be Minding” in that it draws a connection between Protestant piety and humanist learning. While this and the other Latin epigrams may also be mottos, the title word “Mottoes” (which also appears in the running heads) nonetheless primarily designates the French and English poems. So *motto* is the term that Smith is most likely to have used to describe the poem. The word was still only about a century old in English when the portrait was created and primarily denoted a saying or phrase used on an emblematical design.³⁵

32. *Second livre des octonaires*, ed. Chailley and Honegger, vii; *La morocosmie*, ed. Gibert, 41.

33. Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1621), 2D3v.

34. See V.H.I.L.I.C.I.V, “Inveni portum,” *Notes and Queries* 9 (1908): 324–25; S. W. Singer, “Inveni portum,” *Notes and Queries* 5 (1852): 64; and numerous other contributions to the journal on the topic.

35. *OED*, s.v. motto, n. 1.

Motto chimes with the octonaire's generic relation to emblems, providing support for the numerous critical readings that have drawn attention to the portrait's emblematic characteristics.³⁶ Lillian B. Miller, for example, finds that "the idea expressed by the commentary [i.e., the poem] expands, interprets, and complicates the meaning of the visual image, turning what may at first appear to be a straightforward painting into an allegory, or extended metaphor."³⁷ Roger Stein compares the "emblemized" seascape that stands "for experience in the outside world more generally" in Smith's portrait with the similar scene shown in the portrait *Major Thomas Savage*, which is attributed to Smith based on such stylistic similarities.³⁸ For Stein, "the poem is the central organizing element, the key to the picture—to its design, to the relationship of its parts to one another, and to its meaning both as an individual work and as an artefact within its larger culture."³⁹ The authors of a documentary history of American art find that the portrait "is quite representative of the Puritan worldview, disposed to credit words with more emblematic power than images."⁴⁰ Tracing the poem's origins reinforces our sense that an early viewer might have looked for emblematic significance in the portrait.

More than this, Smith's choice of motto—indeed, the very fact that he selected a poem called a "motto"—suggests a creative concern to find a meaningful combination of objects and text that would make the painting succeed both as portrait and spiritual reflection. The motto brings the elements of the portrait around the sitter into a new relationship with each other, illuminating the portrait's spiritual meaning without aggressively enforcing a moralizing reading of each aspect. An octonaire made a good choice for several reasons. As poems about the vanity of the world and the imminence of death, octonaires were an ideal counterpart for a memento mori image like the skull.⁴¹ Eight lines was a good length to provide a text that was proportionate to the rest of the portrait. *Devine Weekes* was a trustworthy resource for vernacular divine poetry, one that was still popular in the 1680s, though Smith's choice may have been deliberately obscure to disguise his source. If the meditation did call to mind earlier devotional verse or *Devine Weekes* precisely, it would have contributed to the impression that its sentiments were traditional, pious, and sincere.

"Why Why Should I the World Be Minding" had specific advantages that made it suitable for inclusion in the self-portrait. Several octonaires, such as the vituperative poem beginning "What's the Wisdom of Mankinde?," adopt a tone of voice simply not in keeping with the sitter's sober pose. The poem's cluster of military imagery resonates

36. For other readings that discuss the portrait as an emblem, see, e.g., William A. Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture* (Cambridge, 2004), 288; and Joseph Allard, "The Painted Sermon: The Self-Portrait of Thomas Smith," *Journal of American Studies* 10 (1976): 341–48 at 345.

37. Miller, "The Puritan Portrait," 179.

38. Roger B. Stein, *Seascape and the American Imagination* (New York, 1975), 9.

39. Roger B. Stein, "Thomas Smith's Self-Portrait: Image/Text as Artifact," *Art Journal* 44 (1984): 316–27 at 317.

40. Sarah Burns and John Davis, *American Art to 1900* (Berkeley, Calif., 2009), 14.

41. Terence Cave, *Devotional Poetry in France, c. 1570–1613* (Cambridge, 1969), 146–47.

with the maritime warfare depicted in the portrait as well as evoking the struggles of spiritual life. Smith wisely avoided an octonaire that appeared in the same opening in *Devine Weekes* as the one he did choose; that one contained naval imagery that would have corresponded too exactly with the portrait: “This world is a Galley freighted / With mis-haps (or Haps mis-treated) / Sliding on a sea of Care. / Tears and Fears her Sailers are” ([1621], sig. 5K1v). Many other octonaires in Sylvester’s collection contain imagery or use rhetorical devices that are too unusual, violent, or otherwise inappropriately striking to cohere with the portrait, like images of a child blowing up a bubble (5K1r), a pit of terror (5K4r), and many-headed monsters (5I5r).

Both because the poem is a motto and a quotation, we can be certain that the painter knew that it had both personal and general applications that might inspire viewers to meditate on their mortality. The first-person pronoun at the beginning and initials at the conclusion lock our attention onto the sitter’s perspective as he is shown meditating on his life while protecting the text’s broader relevance. Jeffrey Hammond, commenting on the American elegy, reminds us that the New England cultural milieu was one in which the “personal voice” was only valuable in so far as it could testify to our common spiritual condition:

Speaking for the ages and beyond, the elegy, like most Puritan poems, was neither written nor read as a vehicle for what we would call “personal” expression. New Englanders devalued that mode of speaking and writing because they devalued the mere self, one’s particularity as a fallen individual. The unique, personal voice traditionally valued by literary critics was something that Puritans sought to confess in order to transcend.⁴²

These principles increased the incentive for painters to express themselves using familiar elements like the skull. The European tradition of the *memento mori* is recalled strongly in the portrait in the stylized depiction of the skull with its unrealistically circular frontal bone and eye sockets. Skulls were also familiar in early American culture, both from other portraits (especially *Dr. John Clark* [1664], which depicts a physician trepanning a skull) and from similar images of skulls, sometimes with accompanying epitaphs, on funerary monuments. Dickran and Ann Tashjian argue that oil portraits “were but another means of fulfilling the Puritan need for commemoration” and suggest a possible source for the skull when they compare the painting’s “traditional spiritual emblems” to those found on New England gravestones.⁴³ This element is in contrast to the generally European character of the rest of the portrait (under the influence of seventeenth-century portraitists like Anthony Van Dyck and Peter Lely).⁴⁴ While the skull may have an American source, the poem is an earlier

42. Jeffrey Hammond, *The American Puritan Elegy* (Cambridge, 2000), 58–59.

43. Dickran and Ann Tashjian, *Memorials for Children of Change* (Middletown, Conn., 1974), 108–9. See also Wayne Craven, *Colonial American Portraiture* (Cambridge, 1986), 65–67; and Louisa Dresser, “Portraits in Boston, 1630–1720,” *Archives of American Art* 6, nos. 3–4 (1966): 1–34 at 13.

44. Smith’s use of European conventions is discussed, e.g., in Ann Lee Morgan, *The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists* (Oxford, 2007), 451, but cf. Walter Liedtke: “There is no need to

artifact from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European culture that is carefully coordinated with the other elements in Smith's *Self-Portrait*.

The innovative technique of quoting a devotional lyric has no precedent in other surviving American portraits from this period. None of the other portraits associated with Smith on stylistic grounds—*Captain George Curwin* (ca. 1675), *Major Thomas Savage* (1679), *Captain Richard Patteshall* (ca. 1679), *Mrs. Patteshall and Child* (ca. 1679), and *An Unknown Gentleman* (probably Elisha Hutchinson, ca. 1680)—contain similar inscriptions, nor, for that matter, do any other portraits made in America from this period.⁴⁵ One of the few contemporaneous portraits with a North American sitter that does depict ink on paper is Jan Van Der Spriett's portrait of *Reverend Increase Mather* (1688), in which Mather is shown reading the Book of Ecclesiastes; however, little of the text in the open books shown is legible.⁴⁶ Similarly illegible is the text in the portrait of John Cotton.⁴⁷ Fairbanks compares the verses in Smith's painting to those found in an earlier English portrait of Captain Adams (1626), which are believed to be biographical, since they contain specific references to Adams's career in the West Indies, Virginia, France, and Spain, and which, Fairbanks argues, are fundamentally different in kind from the verses in the Smith self-portrait.⁴⁸

Despite the element of originality in its inclusion, the poem channels any attempt at self-expression into a conventional acknowledgment of the vanity of the world and life's transience. Max Cavitch's description of the poem as a "self-elegy" that serves "as part of yet another memorial" to Smith within the portrait now requires revision; any self-memorializing element is a secondary concern that serves to enliven the eschatological reflections that the portrait and its poem provoke.⁴⁹ Jason D. LaFountain reminds us that "Puritans lived in a culture in which 'how will I be saved?' not 'who am I?' was the organizing question."⁵⁰ Our knowledge that the poem is not original to Smith reinforces our sense that "how will I be saved?" is the organizing question in Smith's *Self-Portrait*, too, though the painting does draw in the viewer with its apparent autobiographical interest. Aware that three centuries of critics were able to forget that Smith did not write the poem himself, we can now appreciate how amazingly successful the portrait was in recycling this century-old poem in such a way that

press on further eastward than Norfolk or Suffolk to find sources for these various examples of early American portraiture [including Smith's *Self-Portrait*], although they remind one of conservative Dutch portraits in a more general and perhaps more significant way." Liedtke, "Dutch Paintings in America: The Collectors and Their Ideals," in *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, ed. Ben Broos (The Hague, 1990), 14–59 at 20.

45. See also the museum's online biography and Fairbanks, "Portrait Painting," 419–20, 438–40, 468–73.

46. Fairbanks, "Portrait Painting," 415.

47. The portrait is owned by the Connecticut Historical Society, and I am grateful to the journal's anonymous reader for bringing it to my attention. For a reproduction, see Michael G. Hall, *The Last American Puritan* (Middletown, Conn., 1988), 19.

48. Fairbanks, "Portrait Painting," 420. Lillian B. Miller compares the portrait with an earlier sixteenth-century English painting, *Robert Jannys, Mayor of Norwich, 1517 and 1524*, that has two lines of verse at the bottom edge; see "The Puritan Portrait," 164, 179.

49. Cavitch, "Interiority and Artifact," 99–100.

50. Jason D. LaFountain, "The Puritan Art World" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013), 34.

it seems as though its sitter had come up with this pious expression of Puritan world-weariness himself.

While the earliest viewers of Smith's *Self-Portrait* would not have known the full history of the poem, they could have known, or at least suspected, that the words were not Smith's own. Even if they did not recognize that the poem was already six decades old in English (and even older in the original French), they would perhaps have been less likely to assume that Smith composed it than later viewers have been. They would certainly have been alert to the poem's broader application to a shared experience of life. As the poem's reader realizes that the "I" is not just speaking about Smith's specific biography, attention shifts to its congruence with the other emblematic elements on the left side of the portrait. The first five lines of the octonaire, which originally evoked the horrors of the French Wars of Religion, have become a reflection on Smith's career as colonizer and Christian. The "Iarres" and "Warrs" of the poem draw our attention to the fire and billowing smoke on the Dutch and English vessel in the top left corner, and also resonate with the spiritual travails of a Christian life. "World of Evils" may well have called to mind the violence and bloodshed seen in New England at this time. King Philip's War (1675–78) was a "brutal, vicious and violent" conflict that saw English colonists fighting the indigenous population of present-day New England; the casualty rate, particularly among the natives, had been high.⁵¹ Then the half-line "I am not forye" directs attention downward from window to the skull. The curtain, the grayness of the sitter's forehead, and the heavy shadows in the folds of his skin are a visual accompaniment to the speaker's recollection of his mortality in the motto's closing lines.

The secure identification of the self-portrait to a named individual has always been an important part of the portrait's scholarly and popular appeal, as Fairbanks noted.⁵² This biographical interest has disposed critics to imagine that the verses were an original composition in which the artist expresses his personal spiritual convictions. The discovery of the poem's source discredits the testimony of Samuel Dexter (who wrote that the poem was of Smith's "own composing"), and so reminds us that we do not know for sure that the portrait was painted by or depicts Captain Thomas Smith. The portrait will continue to invite interpretations that encourage viewers to identify with the sitter. Yet the poem's context invalidates readings that, forgetting the proximity of English and colonial Puritanism, find it to be purely autobiographical. Nor can the poem happily be read as an early expression of American isolationism that articulates "the longing of early colonists to escape the worldly intrigue of Europe to lead a more spiritual existence in the New World."⁵³

Instead, we should evaluate how the artist's values emerge through the skillful juxtaposition of different elements in his portrait within what Promey calls "a visual universe less sensitive to the rhetoric of originality than to the vocabulary of reitera-

51. James D. Drake, *King Philip's War* (Amherst, Mass., 1999), 2 and 168. See also Jill Lepore, *The Name of War* (New York, 1998), 168–69.

52. Fairbanks, "Portrait Painting," 419–20.

53. Anne-Marie Slaughter, *The Idea That Is America* (New York, 2007), 229, quoting the poem from *America in Poetry*, ed. Charles Sullivan (New York, 1992), 14.

tion.”⁵⁴ Repeating and rearranging elements—a process that, as Promey also observes, sometimes required a “fluid relationship” between image and text—allowed artists and writers to present familiar divine truths in arresting new ways.⁵⁵ Such techniques show how the traditions and expectations of American and European Protestant devotional culture shaped how the portrait was designed. More broadly, the case study offered in this essay supports Jason D. LaFountain’s argument that greater attention needs to be paid to intercultural and multilingual traces in American art history in order to understand more about cultural links such as those between New England Puritans and French Calvinists.⁵⁶ Learning more about such continuity would inform our sense of whether the European elements in a painting like Smith’s *Self-Portrait* might have been surprising to its early viewers.

As well as contributing to how we read Smith’s *Self-Portrait*, recovering the poem’s transmission history gives us a unique example of how a single devotional lyric passed within a century from France to England to New England, and from music to print to paint. Perhaps we are being insensitive to the nature of early American Puritan culture if we call too much attention to the question of the recycled poem’s authorship instead of concentrating on its spiritual application to sitter and viewer alike. Viewers today may still, nevertheless, wonder whether Smith was claiming authorship of this obscure poem by placing his monogram directly beneath it. The poem, placed so close to the initials “T S,” is extremely well matched with the moralizing function that it performs and blends so well into the portrait that you might easily think that Smith had written it himself. This illusion is precisely what makes the quoted octonaire so poignant.

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54. Promey, “Seeing the Self,” 13.

55. *Ibid.*, 38.

56. Jason D. LaFountain, “Monolingualism, Multilingualism, and the Study of American Art,” in *A Companion to American Art*, ed. John Davis, Jennifer A. Greenhill, and Jason D. LaFountain (Hoboken, N.J., 2015), 336–55 at 337, 344–45.

