

“*Written in the Style of Antiquity*”:
*Pseudo-Biblicism and the Early American
Republic, 1770–1830*

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1. *And it came to pass in those days, that there was no King in all the land, even in all Columbia, but every one walked after the imagination of his own heart.*

2. *And the people said one to another, “We will choose from among our own numbers Elders to rule over us; even discreet men, out of all the land of Columbia from the borders of the Great Lakes, Northward, till thou comest to the plains of the South, which abounds with Oranges, Pomegranates and Figs.*

3. *“And let all the Elders meet together in the great city, even the city of Philadelphia, and make laws for us, for why should our goodly heritage be given up to strangers?”*

—“The 1st Book of the Chronicles of John”

THE text from which the first three verses are quoted above is a partisan Democratic tract published originally in the *Richmond Enquirer* and reprinted in the *South Carolina Investigator*, encouraging Americans during the early stages of the War of 1812 to support France (“Gallia”) in the hopes of bolstering President Madison’s war against Britain (“Albion”). Its language is recognizably biblical, while its content is clearly American, describing an early episode of the late Revolution. “The 1st Book of the Chronicles” went on to describe in 29 verses that covered two chapters how “John,” an American patriot elected through the ancient method of casting lots, represented the true interests of the republic (that is siding with the “Gallians” against the “Albionites”) before “the Elders assembled together, even in the city of Philadelphia.” By the end of the “book,” “the Elders

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heard the words that John had spoken, [and] said one to another, ‘What manner of man is this? For behold he speaketh the words of truth.’”¹ However eccentric such a rendition may seem to us today, numerous similar tracts were written in America after 1740 for over a century until the onset of the Civil War, peaking from approximately 1770 to 1830. This unique and overlooked American tradition of writing “in the style of antiquity” opens a window onto a lost early American world of biblical imagination.

The language of the King James Bible was as strange and foreign to late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Anglophones as it is to twenty-first-century English-speakers. The staccato rhythms confined in short and numbered verses, the repetitive use of phrases such as “and it came to pass,” and the use of verbs with suffixes such as “-eth,” had been long gone from the spoken language by the second half of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, generations of Americans reverted to that language and its accompanying structures and forms to discuss their difficulties and represent their achievements, past and present. Surprisingly, this was not a predominantly religious idiom as Providence was notably absent from those texts as an active agent.² Rather, American authors and commentators used this ontologically privileged language as a means to establish their claims for truth, as well as their authority and legitimacy in public discourse.

The distinct use of biblical language for a broad range of topics, notably political issues across the ideological spectrum, thus presents an ideal vantage point from which to appraise and better understand a unique mode of expression that coincided with the emergence of the modern United States.³ Acknowledging the nexus of biblical language and politics in early

¹“The 1st Book of the Chronicles of John,” *Investigator*, Oct. 30, 1812.

²Lester H. Cohen makes a similar argument about the role of Providence in the early histories of the American Revolution. Choen, *The Revolutionary Histories: Contemporary Narratives of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 15 and passim.

³The history of religious and political discourse in revolutionary America and the early republic has produced a rich and innovative scholarship. In examining the correlations and points of contact between the political and the religious, the secular and sacred, it is amply documented how early political discourse in America consisted of a “resilient intermixture of religious and republican vocabularies” that culminated in a novel American “Christian republicanism.” Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 54. Nevertheless, historians have ignored contemporary texts written in biblical idiom. For some of the important studies discussing the convergence of political and religious discourses in early America, see Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); James T. Kloppenberg, “The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse,” chapter 2 in *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21–37; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989).

America, or rather the discursive ability to mold the world into revered and well-known structures, provides an indication of the ways in which Americans attempted to understand their role in history in a fast changing world. Through commenting on their experiences in biblical language, Americans perpetuated old practices such as typological exegesis, and reaffirmed their national role as a second Israel. While the language of the Bible reiterated Americans' understanding of their collective mission, it also positioned politics as the new religion of the republic, a medium that sanctified the nation and constructed Americans' perception of chosenness. They were also applying a strict and genteel language in a world that still valued formal and refined forms of expression. Once the United States was overwhelmed by forces unleashed by the market revolution, plain democratic forms of expression repeatedly replaced "aristocratic" discursive modes. In the end, a formalistic language that invoked its authority from traditional sources could not withstand the democratic onslaught of stump speeches and plain talk.

I. BIBLICAL LANGUAGE AS HUMAN ART

The Protestant Reformation reinserted the Bible into the life of millions of believers by declaring *sola scriptura*, "by scripture alone." The implication was clear: believers should read and comprehend the Bible without external mediation of Church or priest. That in turn drove throughout the sixteenth century massive projects of biblical translation into vernacular languages, notably into German and English, from the original Hebrew and Greek. Translation into spoken languages allowed Protestants to take possession of the Bible and thus to become their own authority in light of the truths they revealed in scripture. One of the monumental outcomes of that drive was the translation known as the King James Bible (1611). The Bible, which was commissioned by King James I of England (1566–1625) who in 1604 set up a fifty-four-member committee working in six companies at Westminster, Cambridge, and Oxford, to produce a new translation of the scriptures, intended to eradicate mistakes and clarify misunderstandings (or rather inconvenient theological and political interpretations) stemming from earlier versions, particularly the popular Calvinistic Geneva Bible (1560).⁴ The

⁴Other post-Reformation translations included the Coverdale Bible (1535), the Matthews Bible (1537), the Great Bible (1539), and the Bishops' Bible (1568). For a longer discussion of the emergence of English translations of the Bible, see S. L. Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 3:141–74; and F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A History of Translations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 1–113.

translation was completed in 1611 and was to be the last and greatest of the official committee Bibles: the flow of early-modern biblical translations has ceased in England thereafter. The sixteenth-century impulse to articulate the Bible in the vernacular was thus followed by a period of stagnation in the field of biblical translation.⁵ Within this context of the textual stability, the King James Bible would become after 1700 universally acclaimed both in Britain and in America as the great Bible of English literature.⁶

If the vernacular Bible had bridged the gap between heaven and earth, it had also underscored the human side of the biblical text. Hence, as Christopher Hill noted, a Pandora’s box opened once the scriptures were translated into the vernacular and mass printed: the vernacular Bible could not but be seen, at least partly, as the product of human labor and art.⁷ Making use of biblical texts for contemporary needs was thus not necessarily seen as sacrilege in post-Reformation England, but as the continuation of a process which sixteenth-century translators had initiated. Consequently, England witnessed during the seventeenth century a spectacular flowering of biblical poetic writing, making the Bible for the first time not only a source of revealed truth but also a spring for poetic art.⁸ By the eighteenth century, authors such as Isaac Watts accommodated “Protestant Poetics” to the sensibilities of the Augustan age in works such as *Horae Lyricae* (1706) and *Psalms of David* (1719), which were printed numerous times over the next centuries in America.⁹ Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison and other lesser writers similarly produced immensely successful adaptations of biblical texts and narratives to contemporary poetic standards. Works written in this paraphrastic tradition, which abandoned the attempt to preserve the taste of the biblical verse, meter and rhyme, made a conscious attempt *not* to resemble the actual language of the Bible.¹⁰ Indeed, within this broad biblical literary culture, no

⁵Historian Jonathan Sheehan points out that this inactivity was not because the new translations were satisfying (they were), but mainly because existing translations were successful in stopping the radical process of religious renovation they had begun. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 16–25, 53.

⁶David Lawton, *Faith, Text and History: The Bible in English* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), 64. For the movement of Puritans from the Geneva to the King James translation, see also Harry S. Stout, “Word and Order in Colonial New England,” in *The Bible in America*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 19–38.

⁷Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1993), 17.

⁸Barbara K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), ix.

⁹Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 51, 148–49. Murray Roston sees the rising interest in Old Testament poetry during the eighteenth century as a move from rational neo-classical poetry to biblical romanticism. Roston, *Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), *passim*.

¹⁰Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 51, 52.

genre prescribed the use of biblical language. On the contrary, what authors habitually did was strip a known biblical plot of its distinct textual dressing and represent it in Augustan linguistic fashion. Aside from the scriptures themselves, the language of the King James Bible was absent from English biblical culture until mid-eighteenth century.

It is surprising that an inspiring idiom such as the King James Bible's English, commonly singled out as a foundational influence on the development of the English language, has achieved its literary grace by accident, rather than design. Its distinctive antiquated language, its rhythms and cadences, which intentionally attempt to create a voice of divine wisdom and truth, were already becoming archaic in the standard English of the time it was being produced. The English used in that translation was associated with William Tyndale's (1484–1536) earlier and incomplete translation. Tyndale, the greatest of all English biblical translators and the foremost influence on the royal committee appointed by James I, used a language that was breaking down by the early seventeenth century. That language had become by then more of a metrical convenience than a spoken norm. Yet the King James Bible's translators intentionally retained the forms that were standard in Tyndale's translation because they had already come to signify liturgical decorum which represented the antiquity and dignity James and his committee wished to preserve. The king's translators were specifically forbidden to depart from the language used by earlier translations. Thus, the inbuilt conservatism of the translation process, reflecting the concerns of those who commissioned the new Bible, led directly—if unintentionally—to the retention of older ways of speaking in religious contexts by reproducing the English of nearly three generations earlier. Hence, the antiquated music and flow of the King James Bible does not sound archaic only to modern ears. That language was almost one hundred years older than the royal translation itself, and was already outdated and sounded distinct to contemporaries.¹¹

A palpable characteristic of the King James Bible was its use of “thee,” “thou,” “thy,” and “thine” where modern English would simply use “you,” “your,” and “yours.” Similarly, verbal endings such as “–eth” which pervade the King James Bible were already mostly replaced with “–s,” while the use of “thereof” was replaced by the possessive pronoun “its.”¹² That archaic language was the language eighteenth-century Americans encountered when they opened their Bibles, as the King James Bible became the most

¹¹Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language and a Culture* (New York: Anchor, 2001), 254, 265, 269; Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 223; Lawton, *Faith, Text and History*, 62, 80–81.

¹²McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 267, 273.

influential text in the Anglophone world.¹³ It conjured up visions of the sacred while signaling American readers to shift register from a colloquial cognitive mode of everyday speech to one of liturgical interpretation.¹⁴ It was also the language Anglophones, notably Americans after 1765, came across in scores of modern political newspaper articles, pamphlets and books published from the mid-eighteenth century onward.

II. THE ENGLISH ORIGINS OF THE PSEUDO-BIBLICAL TRADITION

Although the adoption of biblical language for non-religious purposes eventually became a distinct American intellectual expression, as in virtually every other cultural respect, colonial British North America followed and imitated, rather than led, the imperial metropole.¹⁵ The first known text of that kind was a published letter from Horace Walpole to Horace Mann dated July 14, 1742, thus out in the public sphere long after other biblical literary genres were well established. That early piece, titled *The First Chapter of the Book of Preferment*, contained two “lessons” that already demonstrated some of the basic contours that would distinguish that genre in the following century. Named as a quasi-biblical book, the “chapter” was divided into short numbered verses and used the form of a biblical narrative from its beginning: “Now it came to pass in the fifteenth Year of the Reign of G—ge the king,” thus locating readers temporally according to a monarch’s reign, just like the Bible. The piece itself was a critique of corruption and distribution of places in mid-eighteenth-century English politics. According to the author’s testimony, after *The Book of Preferment* was published it became “the original of a numberless quantity of the same kind, which were published upon all subjects for a year or two.”¹⁶ Walpole’s piece was published in America in at least two newspapers in New York and Pennsylvania.¹⁷ Another satiric biblical piece, titled “The French Gasconade

¹³According to Paul C. Gutjahr, the King James Bible would rein supreme in the United States for nearly two centuries; only in the early decades of the nineteenth century would this hegemony begin to erode. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777–1880* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 92.

¹⁴Mid-nineteenth-century arguments against revising the KJB revealed how many Americans saw Elizabethan English as the only appropriate language in which to enfold the holy words of scripture. Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 153.

¹⁵For colonial cultural dependency and imitation, see Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

¹⁶Horace Walpole cited in Carla Mulford, introduction to John Leacock, *The First Book of American Chronicles of the Times, 1774–1775*, ed. Carla Mulford (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 28.

¹⁷“The Lessons of the Day,” *New York Weekly Journal*, July 4, 1743; the piece was reprinted from the *Pennsylvanian American Weekly Mercury*.

defeated, and then swept out of Germany,” providing a humoristic rendition of European international politics, appeared in *The Boston Evening Post* later that year.¹⁸

The year 1744 witnessed the publication of the “most successful of English works” in America and represents a turning point in the history of American biblical-style writing.¹⁹ *The Chronicle of the Kings of England, Written in the Manner of the Ancient Jewish Historians*, which would eventually be published in America in at least seven editions during the following half century, represented a major step forward in the elaboration and sophistication of what was to become a vital tradition in American letters and consciousness. Said to be written by Nathan Ben Saddi, “a priest of the Jews,” and attributed to Robert Dodsley, the 1744 edition of *The Chronicle of the Kings* dressed British history in the recognizable biblical style, from the reign of William the Conqueror until Queen Elizabeth.²⁰ *The Chronicle* opened in a known biblical format: “Now it came to pass in the Year One thousand sixty and six, in the Month of September, on the eighth Day of the Month, that William of Normandy, surnamed the Bastard, landed in England, and pitched his Tent in a Field near the Town of Hastings.” The language, style, and grammar were biblical, the tone ironic, and the text abundant with anachronisms. The traits of a genre were established.

While the 1740s and 1750s saw the early publication of pieces written in the biblical style in America, these were usually reprints of English publications.²¹ They were not yet American, in content or in form. The first identifiable American piece in biblical style was produced two decades after the *Chronicle*, named *The fall of Samuel the Squomicutiti* (1763). It was a satiric parody, probably composed by Samuel Hopkins or someone from his party in Rhode Island. That piece was followed in 1766 by a short tract in *The Maryland Journal* titled, characteristically as it would turn out, *Chronicles*, which criticized the mismanagement and embezzlement involved in a local lottery project.²² Although those early 1760s pieces were still sporadic and different in significant respects from future similar texts, they still

¹⁸“The French Gasconade,” *Boston Evening Post*, Oct. 31, 1743.

¹⁹Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (1965; repr., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 23.

²⁰Later editions updated the original 1744 edition. There would be seven American editions of the *Chronicle* by 1800. Another pseudo-biblical account under the name of Ben-Saddi that narrated the arrest of William Smith for allowing a translation of an article from Benjamin Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette* to be published in a German newspaper appeared in 1758: *A Fragment of the Chronicles of Nathan Ben Saddi . . . now published in English* (Philadelphia: 1758).

²¹See, for example, “Israel Ben Ader (of the Tribe of Levi),” *The Chronicle of B—g, the Son of the Great B—g, that lived in the Reign of Queen Felicia; Containing an account of his might transactions against Gallisoniere . . . Written in the Eastern Style* (London: 1756; repr., Boston: 1757).

²²“Chronicles,” *Maryland Journal*, May 5, 1766.

demonstrated that the biblical style was present in late colonial printed sphere. The next significant milestone in the life of the tradition of writing in the style of antiquity was passed with the advent of the American Revolution, in the pro-American satire *The Book of America* (1766) published in multiple American reprints.²³

III. A TRADITION AMERICANIZED: THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

The Revolution brought the tradition of writing in biblical style to the forefront of patriot polemics. Although still written in England, the pro-American *The Book of America* foresaw in many respects the distinct genre that was soon to develop in America: its theme was historical and American (it traced English history from the Seven Years War to the Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766), its language and form biblical, its tone anachronistic and ironic: the notorious British tax stamps (as “a stamp it is called unto this day”), for example, were written on lamb skins, the coin used in America was the Hebraic shekel, and mobs were the biblical evil-doers, “sons of Belial.” Nomenclature, as in all such texts of the following decades was thoroughly biblicalized: Georgians were “the Children of the land of George,” Virginians were “the children of the land of the Virgin,” and so forth. Even the most recognizable slogan of the Revolution, “no taxation without representation” was rephrased in biblical fashion: Americans demanded “that they should have their own Sanhedrim [the ancient council of seventy Jewish elders], in which they should be taxed.”

The revolutionary ferment of the early 1770s, the immediate years before the commencement of hostilities, witnessed further transformations in the biblically styled writings. The 1773 and 1774 editions of the *Chronicles of the kings of England*, for example, added to the pre-revolutionary editions an elaborate and reverential section describing the reign of the now deceased George II (the earlier editions had a brief entry about the then reigning monarch), as well as an entirely new chapter concerning the reigning monarch, George III, whose reign was not represented favorably as the other post-1688 monarchs’. It did seem to start off on the right foot as the king carried the war “against Lewis King of Gaul” to a most felicitous end as military victories were sealed with the Treaty of Paris of 1763 that practically ended the French presence in North America. Yet with the conclusion of the Seven Years War the king listened to his “Evil Counsellors,” who asked him in biblical fashion, “if we have found favor in

²³“The Book of America,” *Boston Gazette*, May 12, 1766; reprinted also in *New Hampshire Gazette*, May 22, 1766, and *Newport Mercury*, May 12, 1766. Additional chapters were published in the *Boston Gazette*, May 26, 1766, and *New Hampshire Gazette*, June 6, 1766.

thine Eyes, [to] let a Decree be passed, forbidding any American to take unto himself a Wife, or buy, or sell, or write, or read . . . unless he pay unto us for each Time a Piece of Silver."²⁴ The reverence shown to earlier monarchs was no longer to be found as the *Chronicles* took a blunt pro-America turn.

These and similar elaborate and extensive pieces (often consisting of dozens of verses and thousands of words) were reprinted across the colonies. They consisted of an Enlightenment era cultural product, written in a universally known and admired idiom. Rational, paced, and making minimal reference to God, they were not meant to provide providential historical explanations. Although this modern use of biblical idiom could have only risen in a society suffused with biblical language, it stood ambivalently in light of traditional pious sentiment. Surely, only a society that took its distance from biblical language, if not from the religious truths it revealed, could sustain, indeed embrace, such use of sacred language for the needs of the present.²⁵ The use of biblical language for secular purposes thus underscores that the Bible in late eighteenth-century America was no longer a self-legitimizing text that affirmed itself as God's Word. Although probably none of the writers penning texts in the biblical style intended to defame or detract from the Bible, that humans allowed themselves to write such texts reveals the degree to which the Bible had become a "document" open to criticism and scholarship.²⁶ While biblical authority was reassigned to the world of human beings during the Revolution, the pseudo-biblical genre illuminates the permissibility of the intellectual environment in which those texts were written.

One way to understand the extensive use of biblical form to convey modern political messages would be to emphasize the irony stemming from the frisson gained through invoking language still seen as quasi-sacred to describe contemporary reality. Indeed, beyond the mere boldness of using the biblical style for earthly purposes, some of the pseudo-biblical texts capitalized on the dissonance between form and content and functioned as outright parodies, often using the biblical style to disparage, mock, and deride political enemies. In such texts adversaries became anything from "Sons of Belial," to usurping biblical kings, and even vivid demonic "beast[s] . . . having a mouth, speaking blasphemous things, and also an head, but how many horns no one knoweth."²⁷ Such application of biblical language

²⁴*Chronicles of the Kings of England* [1773], 83.

²⁵From its beginning, this discourse was in no sense an exclusively New England affair. For an early southern example, published in reaction to the Stamp Act's repeal, see "A Prophecy from the East," *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), Supplement, Aug. 15, 1766.

²⁶Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 116.

²⁷For a Republican example, see "The First Book of the Kings," *Alexandria Expositor*, Feb. 21, 1803; for a Federalist example, see "Book of the Democrats," *American*, March 14, 1809; for the quote, see: "The Political Koran," *Federal Galaxy*, Sep. 15, 1798.

and form to the political realm was at least implicitly, and often outright, satirical.

The most popular writing in biblical style of the Revolutionary era was John Leacock's *The First Book of the American Chronicles of the Times*, which signified the complete Americanization of the genre; that work was also the epitome of the biblical parody. *The First Book* was published serially and reprinted in newspapers and later in several pamphlet editions, attesting to its immense popularity.²⁸ Leacock's *First Book*, consisting of six extensive chapters—far too extensive, rich, and complex to analyze here at length, was innovative in significant ways: it was the first long and full-blown exposition of American events by an American author in biblical style, and its richness and parodic nature provided, no doubt, a remarkably amusing read for contemporaries. Characters such as the Indian chief Occunneocogeeccocacacheecacheecadungo, or the British attempts to make “Bostonites” “bow down to the TEA CHEST, the God of the Heathen” as well as the camel—a biblical vehicle—loaded with cargoes of tobacco—the ultimate American crop, could not but have raised contemporary smiles.²⁹

The First Book consisted of a Whig narrative of the political events of 1773 and 1774 in biblical style. It made extensive use of biblical nomenclature: all in all it employed a set of characters of about one hundred *dramatis personae*, the majority of whom bore names such as Mordecai the Benjaminite for Benjamin Franklin, Thomas the Gageite for Thomas Gage the military commander of Boston, or plain biblical names such as Joshua, Ehud son of Gera, and Jedidiah the priest. Some of the names were widely used in contemporary discourse, such as Rehoboam for George III, alluding to the Hebrew monarch who was held responsible for the separation of Israel into two rival kingdoms. The imagery Leacock used was densely biblical and his idioms often Hebraic. For example, the four great beasts of Daniel's prophecy stood in *The First Book* for four hated imperial magistrates, Bute, Mansfield, Bernard and Hutchinson, while ships loaded with Indian tea were biblical “ships from Tarshish.” Leacock also repeatedly merged ancient and modern into the kind of anachronism that characterized the stylistic tradition of pseudo-biblical writing: repeating 2 Samuel 1:20, Leacock urged his American compatriots in the lamenting words of David the son of Jesse: “Tell it not in Gath, nor publish it in the streets of Askalon.”³⁰

In a laudable introductory essay to the modern edition of Leacock's *First Book*, literary historian Carla Mulford, beyond establishing Leacock's authorship, points out the ways in which that text was outstanding. In a

²⁸Mulford, introduction to *First Book of American Chronicles*, 11.

²⁹Leacock, *First Book*, 54.

³⁰Leacock, *First Book*, 58, 61, 54.

consistently anti-British attack on tyranny, militarism, Catholicism, Puritan millennialism, and extreme thought and action of all forms, Mulford demonstrates how many of the characters that are bestowed with biblical names are easily identifiable as contemporary Americans while the identities of other characters are not so easily established. Indeed, Mulford is likely the only modern scholar to notice a tradition of writing in biblical style in America.³¹ However, her understandable focus on Leacock's *First Book* obscures the fact that, as extraordinary as it was, it was only one, even if particularly elaborate, among scores of similar texts. Indeed, biblical-style writing neither peaked nor culminated with Leacock's *First Book*; that tradition thrived and evolved for at least half a century *after* the Revolution.

Important as Leacock's *First Book* was, it was exceptional in significant ways: its length and complexity were unusual, and it featured comic moments few other texts could, or wished to, boast. With the urgent need to create a usable past in the wake of the Revolution, numerous pseudo-biblical texts did not present themselves as parodies, at least no more than the Bible itself. We moderns, much less immersed in the Bible than were early Americans, need to be reminded of the extent to which the Bible has its vehemently acerbic instances of irony and contempt, particularly toward wrong-doers.³² Americans did not inject the Bible with sarcasm, irony, and satire it was devoid of, but framed their political views within a biblical outlook that could accommodate their vitriolic and Manichean political culture.³³ Too much emphasis on the degradation and impiety present in the pseudo-biblical language might distort and obscure some of the significant cultural meaning that that language implied.

Although the liberal use of biblical language changed the meaning and stature of that language, it did not reflect a straightforward process of secularization, seen as an unambiguous transformation from a pious to a skeptical society, as might be inferred from seeing satire as the sole thrust behind such use.³⁴ Religion, historians have recently noted, was reconstructed and remade in the early modern period, not undone; presenting a strict dichotomy between the Bible and its traditional uses and the profane

³¹Mulford, introduction to *First Book of American Chronicles*, 28–30.

³²The story of Elijah mocking the prophets of the Baal (1 Kings 18), for example, is reminiscent of the mocking style of American pseudo-biblical texts.

³³For the spiteful political culture of the early republic, see Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).

³⁴The traditional views of secularization are best illustrated in the renowned work of Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680–1715: The Critical Years*, trans. J. Lewis May (1935; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 1990); and Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (1969; repr., New York: W. W. Norton, 1995).

application of its language to politics could be misleading.³⁵ More nuanced processes implying change in religious attitudes, not their demolition, were involved in the use of the biblical language for American ends.

IV. GRAVE PSEUDO-BIBLICISM IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

Many post-revolutionary texts that adopted a somber tone reflect novel pseudo-biblical sensibilities, rarely attempting to crack a biblical joke at a rival's expense. Such seriousness caused contemporaries to depict their political enemies in biblical fashion as “men who had not the fear of God before their eyes,” implying that at least in their own eyes they themselves, who used the Bible's language for secular purposes, were pious.³⁶ Significantly, others wished to *strengthen* Americans' attachment to the Bible by applying the language of the King James Bible to describe American history and politics. Gilbert Hunt, the author of one of the most elaborate and protracted texts in the pseudo-biblical tradition, stated that he “adopted for the model of his style the phraseology of the best of books,” namely the Bible, so that it will induce “the young pupil . . . to study the Holy Scriptures.”³⁷ Biblical renditions of American history could thus be seen as a method for drawing young Americans back into the scripture's sway. Recognizing that contemporaries did not think that the use of sacred language for earthly ends necessarily degraded or secularized that language demonstrates how such language did not (necessarily) lead to the abandonment of religion. Rather, such use incorporated the political into the religious, and brought the latter more intimately and through new modes into the lives of contemporaries.

Chapter 37th, published in Boston in 1782, represents the staid, counter-parodic end of the spectrum of the pseudo-biblical texts. The *Chapter's* first verse stated: “And it came to pass in the reign of George the king, who ruled over Albion, and whose empire extended to the uttermost parts of the earth,” and went on to versify the history of the Revolution in a no-nonsense biblical fashion. The *Chapter* concluded with an American hero singing in biblical fashion, “the song of triumph, saying others have slain their thousands, but I have slain my ten thousands.”³⁸ That and many similar texts depicted America, implicitly or explicitly, as a latter-day Israel, a chosen nation in the most

³⁵Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 220, 260; See also Dror Wahrman, “God and the Enlightenment,” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (October 2003): 1057–60; and Jonathan Sheehan, “Enlightenment, Religion and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay,” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (October 2003): 1061–80.

³⁶“Chronicles of the people of America, Chapter XCVII,” *Visitor*, Nov. 13, 1802.

³⁷Gilbert J. Hunt, *The Late War; Between the United States and Great Britain . . . Written in the Ancient-Historical Style* (New York, 1819), ix.

³⁸“Chapter 37th,” *Boston Evening Post*, Apr. 20, 1782.

earnest terms. The Bible, through the distinct usage of its language, forms, and style, no longer informed early Americans merely of the ancient history of a bygone Israelite society; nor was it solely a typological text that signified, foresaw, and corresponded the Bible to the happenings of American society. Through pseudo-biblicism the Bible became a living text, an ongoing scriptural venture which complemented and fortified notions of national chosenness and mission. This transformation occurred within a poisoned political culture which created “two parallel imagined communities,” namely the two political parties—the Federalists and the Republicans—that denied each other’s legitimacy.³⁹ This disposition, already manifested in the late 1780s, created a political culture governed by a grammar of combat, which entailed a “politics of anxious extremes.”⁴⁰ It fostered the intense employment and further construction of biblical politics, each side depicting the other as wrong-doing “Adamites” and “Jeffersonites.” However, transcending the partisan nature of the discourse, it further constructed the United States as a biblical nation. The pseudo-biblical language thus wove the Bible into American life and sanctified the young nation. American politics were transformed, in texts largely devoid of references to God, into the new religion of the republic.

After the Revolution, Americans continued to publish faux-biblical texts at such a rate that attempts to cover them all are futile as well as pointless. Nevertheless, the pinnacle in the history of the tradition of writing in biblical style, particularly in the earnest and non-satiric depictions of America as a latter-day Israel, was reached in 1793 with the publication of Richard Snowden’s *The American Revolution; Written in the Style of Ancient History*. Snowden’s history must have touched an intellectual nerve in fin-de-siècle America. The history, which carried two protracted volumes, was also published serially as dozens of separate chapters appeared in newspapers throughout 1794–1795 from Vermont in the north to South Carolina in the south.⁴¹ Additionally, Snowden’s history would spawn at least one intellectual sequel in the form of a similarly biblicized full-scale history of the War of 1812.⁴² Its popularity aside, there was nothing especially innovative, either in Snowden’s style and use of language, or in his retelling a history rather than commenting on present events.⁴³ His history is

³⁹Andrew W. Robertson, “‘Look on This Picture . . . and on This!’ Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States, 1787–1820,” *American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (October 2001): 1236–80, quote at 1267.

⁴⁰Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 10.

⁴¹Chapters of Richard Snowden’s history were also published in newspapers deep in the nineteenth century; see *The Middlesex Gazette*, December 9, 1819.

⁴²Mulford, introduction to *First Book of American Chronicles*, 11.

⁴³For similar and earlier employments of the biblical style, see “First Chapter of the Book of Remembrance,” *Daily Advertiser*, March 5, 1787, and “The xxxvii Chapter of the Second Book of the Chronicles,” *Berkshire Chronicle*, Oct. 9, 1788.

important in its being the first full-blown, thorough, earnest, and mature attempt to biblicalize the United States and its historical record. Its reverence for America’s revolutionary past was wholly sentimental and Whiggish. In other words, Snowden’s *The American Revolution* was a distinctly novel American cultural production.

As in the vast majority of writings in biblical style, Snowden did not provide his readers with a history of the Revolution driven by divine intervention in which Providence played a central role. The fact that Snowden wrote “in the style of ancient history,” which could have easily meant classical, not biblical, history, indicates that Snowden emphasized the historical aspect of the biblical narrative. Indeed, God is virtually absent from Snowden’s history, a curious fact if only because many other contemporary American historians of the Revolution—who were not committed to biblical style—could assign providence a more significant role than Snowden did.⁴⁴ According to the genre’s conventions, Snowden used relatively short and numbered verses throughout the history’s volumes. As in the other texts belonging to this tradition, the versed staccato was hardly the entire antique array. Snowden employed archaic English throughout, everywhere using constructions such as “spake” and “thou.” He antiquated his vocabulary, nouns, and narrative style, as well as the American nomenclature. For example, throughout his history Snowden replaced modern cities’ and nations’ names with ancient names. Hence, London became “Lud” (an ancient Hebrew city), while Ireland was alluded to as “Hibernia.” Even when the author preserved a non-biblical name, he attempted to provide it with an antique flavor, for instance, “that ancient river, the river Rhine.”⁴⁵ Following the example of earlier texts in the biblical style, Snowden particularly antiquitized American names. The town of Concord became “Concordia,” Virginia “the state of the Virgin,” and America the “Land of Columbia.” These and numerous other names, used consistently throughout Snowden’s protracted narrative, biblicalized the mental geography and imagined landscape of the American Revolution. As in the Bible, and contrary to modern identification which relied mostly on family names, the author identified historical actors almost solely by their first names. He reviewed, for example, the names of the Continental Army’s commanders (whom he called “captains,” as in biblical era armies, not generals as in modern forces): “And the names of the captains [of the Continental Army] were these, Artemas, Charles, Philip, Israel, Horatio, Seth, Richard, David, William, Joseph, John, . . .” referring to generals Ward, Schuyler, Putnam, Gates, and so forth. In the

⁴⁴For an examination of providence’s role in the revolutionary historian’s work, see Cohen, *Revolutionary Histories*, 23–127.

⁴⁵Snowden, *American Revolution*, 93.

absence of family names, Snowden frequently had to revert to footnotes to clarify to whom exactly he was referring, demonstrating once more that biblical style and simplicity were frequently not compatible. In line with the tradition within which he wrote, Snowden biblicalized institutions: Congress (as in numerous other texts) became “the great Sanhedrin”; smallpox was “the leprosy of uncleanness,” alluding to the Bible’s most cursed ailment; and rum was “the strong water of Barbados.” Snowden made extensive use of Hebraic idioms and figural language. Thus, Lord North’s counsel was “as the counsel of Achitophel in the days of David king of Israel,” Achitophel being the king’s advisor who counseled him against his own interest; American courtiers, “like the locusts of Egypt, they devoured every goodly thing.”⁴⁶

Like other writings in the pseudo-biblical style, Snowden often concluded chapters in the repeatedly used words and format of the biblical canon (favored also by other texts in the tradition of writing in ancient style): “and the rest of the acts of Dunmore, and all that he did . . . are they not written in the book of Ramsay the scribe?” Here David Ramsay, arguably the most contemporarily recognized of the Revolution’s historians, was himself portrayed as a biblical chronicler. Similarly, Snowden could conclude an episode: “and the rest of the Acts of the people of the [American] provinces, [and] how they warred . . . are they not written in the Second Book of the Chronicles of the wars of the king of Britain with the people of the provinces; and recorded by the Scribe of Columbia, in the books of the great Sanhedrim?”⁴⁷ This quote, typical of Snowden’s style, demonstrates the extent to which pseudo-biblicism enabled Americans to merge and sanctify the political realm—in Snowden’s case that of the American Revolution—through the use of historical anachronisms (a modern revolution “written in the Second Book of Chronicles”) and of ancient signifiers (an American “great Sanhedrim” and a historian filling the role of a “Scribe of Columbia”).

To complete the ancient vision Snowden articulated, he wrote as if he himself were actually writing for an ancient audience, devoid of knowledge of things modern. Since Snowden had committed himself to an ancient fantasy, like other writers in biblical style he found it necessary to reconcile eighteenth-century devices with a biblical narrative. Hence, he repeatedly described British warships as “armed with engines,” meaning guns, “as were not known in the days of old: fire and balls issued out of their mouths . . . they were inventions of Satan.” Continuing to be amazed by inventions already hundreds of years old by the late eighteenth century, Snowden described gunpowder as “black dust which they put into their engines . . . without it the

⁴⁶Snowden, *American Revolution*, 74, 225, 34, 13, 17.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 64, 226.

engines could do nothing.” To complete the estrangement from the present, Snowden referred to “those days” when alluding to the Revolution, as if he were actually discussing a distant and fundamentally altered reality. The list of Snowden’s stylistic measures, as in numerous other texts written in biblical style, is too elaborate to treat exhaustively. But the picture is clear: Americans, by the closing decade of the eighteenth century, could describe their experiences past and present as if they were occurring in a world of biblical heroes and villains, governed by a Manichean cosmology in which the division between good and bad was clear. Snowden, who as we shall now see had a patriotic-didactic objective in mind while writing his history, constructed the United States as a biblical nation, a second-Israel. Federal era America never seemed so biblical.

Snowden was among the only authors who reflected on their choice of biblical style, pointing out that his patriotic history targeted schoolchildren as its intended audience. “The style of ancient history was chosen” for narrating the Revolution, Snowden confessed, “both for its conciseness and simplicity, and therefore the most suitable to the capacities of young people.”⁴⁸ Snowden trusted his young readership would decipher his pseudo-biblical text because early Americans were conditioned from young age for reading biblical English. As historians of early American education noted, the Bible was a principal text for teaching reading and writing in eighteenth-century schools, and was still the common reading book in early nineteenth-century schools.⁴⁹ There is reason to doubt, however, whether readers, especially the young, read *The American Revolution* effortlessly as Snowden would have liked. Short biblical-like verses did tend to focus on action rather than on the psychology of heroes, and thus condensed complex plots. However, Snowden’s frequent use of notes to explain numerous cumbersome biblical descriptions of American objects, people, and events testifies that his biblicalizing necessitated clarification. The fact that young eighteenth-century readers were commonly presented with biblical stories stripped from their distinct language in order to “familiarize tender age,” or rendered biblical dramas “intended for young persons” in contemporary language attests that biblical language was *not* always perceived as the most simple communication form. Indeed, one of the most popular contemporary biblical texts for the young was *The Holy Bible Abridged*, intended to “give children such a taste of the writings of the holy penmen” in ordinary prose.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Snowden, *American Revolution*, iii.

⁴⁹Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 17; Clifton Johnson, *Old Time Schools and School-Books* (New York: Dover, 1963), 19; Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 113–42.

⁵⁰*The Holy Bible Abridged* (Boston, 1782), 5. See also Hannah Moore, *Sacred Dramas, chiefly intended for young persons: the subjects taken from the Bible* (1788).

Evidently, for the sake of “simplicity,” if not “conciseness,” young readers occasionally needed biblical language simplified, not American history biblicalized. Snowden’s extensive history written in biblical idiom must have built then, at least in part, not on readers’ training in biblical English but rather on the conditioning of American audiences in reading American texts written in biblical idiom.

Although the pseudo-biblical style was Americanized even before the Revolution ended, there is no escaping the fact that the predominant narrative style through which Americans chose to understand and communicate the nation’s founding era originated in Britain, employed Elizabethan age English, and was associated with a British monarch, James I.⁵¹ This collective choice had several causes, among them the cultural supremacy in America of the King James Bible, which was not sensitive to political changes, and the lack of real alternatives since American translations of the Bible would emerge only in the Jacksonian era. It also underscores the extent to which the Revolution was, in the words of the eminent historian Jack Greene, a “settler rebellion,” a rather conservative affair that could not untie many of the existing cultural bonds.⁵² Only when the democratic impulses of the antebellum era were unleashed would novel American idioms replace the pseudo-biblical style. In the intervening generations until then, the King James Bible’s language continued to occupy Americans’ mental spaces.

The tradition of writing in biblical style continued to flourish in the partisan battles of the early republic. Remnants of Anti-Federalism and manifestations of early Jeffersonian Republicanism surfaced soon after the federal government began to operate, and accused the members of the constitutional convention and “[John] Adams their Servant” for conspiring with “the Britannites” to the effect that “all the country round about, even from Dan unto Beersheba, should be subject unto one king, and unto one council.”⁵³ Republicans commonly critiqued Adams’s neutrality to the French Revolution (before it deteriorated into a bloodbath) in biblical-style writings, typically depicting Republicans as “Israel” while Federalists were represented as a spectrum of biblical evildoers, from Pharisees to Amalekites.⁵⁴ Federalists, by contrast,

⁵¹Classical pseudonyms were a comparable genre because they too originated in Britain, migrated to America, and gained their own cultural and generic independence during the Revolution. See Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Classical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 151–87.

⁵²Jack P. Greene, “The American Revolution,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (February 2000): 93–102.

⁵³“Paraphrase on the First Book of Samuel, Chap. VIII,” *New York Journal*, Jan. 13, 1791.

⁵⁴See, for example, “Moses,” “The last Chapter of the first Book of Samuel,” *Independent Gazetteer*, Sep. 17, 1791; and *Western Star*, May 24, 1796; for a text dealing with local, as opposed to national politics, see “The First Chapter of the First Book of Chronicles,” *Ostego Herald*, Apr. 20, 1797.

attacked Republicans for what they interpreted as their anarchic tendencies and Gallic leanings, or, in biblical language, for not being “a goodly people—fearing the lord and submitting to the Rulers placed over them.”⁵⁵ In the following decades both sides continued to endure biblical representations by their political enemies, who viewed their rivals as conspiring to subvert the people’s will. As relations with Britain worsened, eventually culminating in the War of 1812, the printed sphere witnessed a further deluge of biblical stylized texts.

The most impressive text among the numerous published during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, particularly those related to the War of 1812, was *The History of the Late War* (1819) by Gilbert J. Hunt. The only work comparable to Hunt’s history up to that point in its elaboration and richness was Snowden’s history (and to some extent Leacock’s Revolutionary era *Book of Chronicles*). As in Snowden’s case, a commentator pointed out that “the simplicity of the scriptural style” of Hunt’s history, “and the short verses or sentences are calculated to make an impression on the memory more than a regular narrative, told in the usual manner.” Probably in a conscious attempt to imitate Snowden’s composition and success, Hunt’s printers proposed to “consider it a valuable book for schools . . . calculated to give a knowledge of events to youths.” The history itself was, again, like Snowden’s, patriotic and Whiggish in its historical interpretation. Like Snowden’s history, as well as numerous earlier works, Hunt’s history was nationalistic and humorless, avoiding any attempt of satire or parody. *The History* further made use of the full range of the possibilities that the style of antiquity has demonstrated and developed during many decades by biblicalizing American annals. From addressing the “American Sanhedrim,” to referring to modern inventions such as cannons as “battering rams” that “cast forth bombs . . . weapons of destruction, which were not known in the days of Jehoshaphat,” Hunt provided the epitome of a biblical American history.⁵⁶

V. PSEUDO-BIBLICAL HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

American writers chose to make use of distinctive Elizabethan English for political ends because that language manipulated readers into conjuring up biblical visions only to contrast them with their American past and present.⁵⁷ However, we should see the uncanny portrayals of America in biblical

⁵⁵“First Chapter of Chronicles,” *Oriental Trumpet*, Oct 18, 1798; see also “Ancient Chronicles, Chap. XX,” *Windham Herald*, Oct. 9, 1800.

⁵⁶Hunt, *Late War*, 294–300. For the concept of the “Whig interpretation of history,” see Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931; repr., New York: Norton, 1965).

⁵⁷For the effect of KJB English on American readers, see Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 153.

language as going beyond authors' immediate intent, namely in the wider context of the young nation's attempts to come to terms with history and historical time. Even before independence, but especially after the creation of the United States, Americans began imagining themselves as reenacting Roman annals and recreating a Roman-like republic of virtue, as returning to the democratic simplicity of Anglo-Saxon freedom, or, alternatively, as latter-day Israelites led by a Washingtonian Moses to inherit the American Promised Land.⁵⁸ These historical discourses underscore the tensions which the American nation and its embryonic nationalism experienced with regard to their past (or lack thereof) and their place in history.⁵⁹ These tensions are particularly evident through the use of the pseudo-biblical style, which compelled Americans to discourse their history and present as occurring in a biblical time dimension.

These pseudo-biblical texts reflect a distinct historical consciousness, very different from common twenty-first-century historical temporal sensibilities. Tracts like the grand histories in biblical style by Snowden and Hunt, but also numerous other shorter texts, consisted of radical historical statements. By imposing the Bible and its intellectual and cultural landscapes on America, those texts placed the United States in a biblical timeframe, describing the new nation and its history as occurring in a distant, revered, and mythic dimension. These texts thus produced a constructive estrangement, rendering the present through biblical forms and structures, which, while well known and respected, were linguistically and temporally dissonant. By manipulating time and space pseudo-biblicism proved an effective medium for buttressing notions of chosenness and mission. The countless verses opening with the biblico-temporal statement, "And it came to pass," located readers in biblical time, while nomenclature and geography functioned similarly by turning, for example, Federalists into "Federalites" and New Yorkers into "Manhattanites," and repeatedly describing the expanse of America as stretching "from Dan even unto Beersheba."⁶⁰ Biblical narratives and modes of action further blended in partisan texts that battled over the legacy of the Revolution. Each party saw the other as sinning Israelites (or gentiles), describing their rivals as "gather[ing] themselves together," wishing for "more honor and reverence showed onto us under a king."⁶¹ This republicanization of the Bible, further evinced in representations such as the Congress as "the great Sanhedrim of America,"

⁵⁸For historical discourses in the Revolution, see Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience*.

⁵⁹Peter C. Messer, *Stories of Independence: Identity, Ideology and History in Eighteenth-Century America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005).

⁶⁰By referring to settlements in biblical Israel's far north and south the biblical author described the whole of the land. Americans gladly adopted that idiom.

⁶¹"Paraphrase of the First Book of Samuel, Chap. VIII," *New York Journal*, Jan. 13, 1791.

re-organized Americans' space of experiences and expanded their horizon of national expectations.⁶² By rendering biblical history as immanently relevant to America and constructing their experiences as a reenactment of a biblical script, contemporaries stretched conventional understandings of time and history.⁶³ Through such temporal modes, Americans, representing their nation as led by “George [Washington, who] reigned over all Israel . . . execut[ing] judgment and justice among all his people,” made sense of understanding the United States as a latter-day biblical society.⁶⁴ The rest of the acts of the young United States, to use the parlance of the day, were they not written in the cadences of the King James Bible, as a chapter of a biblical history that unfolded regularly in American prints.

If notions of America as second Israel were still tentative at the commencement of the Revolution, by the nineteenth century they were inseparable from the political discourse that would soon spawn Manifest Destiny. Narrating America through a quasi-sacred language deeply associated with ancient Israel conditioned contemporaries to think of an American mission in biblical terms. Americans who saw fit to draw on the most sacred of idioms to describe their past and present perpetuated and intensified the discourse of America as a chosen nation; unsurprisingly, many of the texts written in biblical language referred explicitly to America as “Israel” (and hence of their rivals as helplessly degenerate gentiles). By alluding to the past of God's chosen people through the use of the distinctive language in which that history was originally articulated, Americans attempted not to alter the received facts of that revered history but rather to invoke the authority and meaning that Old Testament history exerted and apply it to their present. The use of biblical language was thus not (only) a way to make the Bible relevant to America; it was an effective way to make America relevant to the Bible, to biblicalize America.

VI. PSEUDO-BIBLICISM AND OLD TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

Perry Miller pointed out decades ago that “the Old Testament is truly so omnipresent in the American culture of 1800 or 1820 that historians have as much difficulty taking cognizance of it as of the air the people breathed.”⁶⁵

⁶²*Western Star*, May 24, 1796. For “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation,” see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 267–88.

⁶³In doing so they went beyond the common Christian-typological understanding of time in which early biblical events signified and foresaw later modern-day occurrences. For typology in the Revolution, see Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores*, 87–89.

⁶⁴“The First Book of the Kings,” *Alexandria Expositor*, Feb. 21, 1803.

⁶⁵Perry Miller, “The Garden of Eden and the Deacon's Meadow,” *American Heritage* 7, no. 1 (December 1955): 54–61, 102.

Contemporaries' views certainly confirm the pervasiveness of the Old Testament in the early nineteenth century. Harriet Beecher Stowe averred that early Americans "spoke of Zion and Jerusalem, of the God of Israel, the God of Jacob, as much as if my grandfather had been a veritable Jew; and except for the closing phrase, 'for the sake of thy Son, our Saviour,' might all have been uttered in Palestine by a well-trained Jew in the time of [King] David." Similarly, Henry Adams wrote in the opening pages of *The Education* that to be born to an elite family in contemporary Boston was similar to being "born in Jerusalem under the shadow of the Temple and circumcised in the Synagogue by his uncle the high priest, under the name of Israel Cohen."⁶⁶ Herman Melville concluded that America was "the Israel of our time."⁶⁷ The fact that the language of the King James Bible was applied abundantly and consistently in texts narrating American accounts and histories, a genre which I have dubbed pseudo-biblicism, further demonstrates what these great writers knew from experiencing early America intimately: their contemporaries were not merely biblically oriented, their biblicism was profoundly focused on the Old Testament. This strong predilection for the Old rather than the New Testament is evident when one surveys extant pseudo-biblical texts, a sizable corpus written during more than a century (ca. 1740–1850); while each and every one of those texts echoes and resonates with Old Testament narratives and protagonists, it is hard to find even a single reference to Christ (not to mention other New Testament characters or episodes).

Since its early days Christianity has had a long and complex relationship with the Hebrew Bible, starting with debates between Peter and Matthew, on the one hand, and Paul, on the other, regarding the place of Hebrew law in the Christian order. Although that history cannot be retold here, it is worth noting that once reformed Christianity, particularly its Calvinist form, reinstated the Old Testament to a central place within Christianity, it reopened the issues of national chosenness and election.⁶⁸ The Puritans, who brought with them to the New World the "chosen people" doctrine, viewed themselves as the successors to the Children of Israel and the bearers of a renewed covenant with God.⁶⁹ Consequently, historians have frequently noted the particular importance of the Old Testament for Puritans (residing in both Old and New England).⁷⁰ They have also recognized that "although

⁶⁶Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: BN Publishing, 2008), 13.

⁶⁷Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* (1850), chap. 36, "Flogging not Necessary."

⁶⁸Gordon Schochet, "Hebraic Roots, Calvinist Plantings, American Branches," *Hebraic Political Studies* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 99–103, quote at 101.

⁶⁹See in this context Glenn A. Moot, "Response: The Complications and Contributions of Early American Hebraism," *Hebraic Political Studies* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2009), 157–68.

⁷⁰See, for example, Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Puritanism had collapsed as a total way of life by the eighteenth century, it continued to exert a powerful influence on the public life of the new United States.”⁷¹ A lasting intellectual legacy of Puritanism in America, well into the national period, was the central and enduring role of the Old Testament in public life, particularly in forming what Sacvan Bercovitch had called the “American Self.”⁷²

The extent of Puritanism’s biblical influence is apparent once we realize that by the Revolution the whole of the nascent American people—not merely the formerly Puritan political communities—could be seen as a “parallel people,” the New Israel. During the Revolution the use of the Bible in political polemics increased exponentially. Remarkably, while American patriots used the Old Testament liberally, only pacifists or Loyalists made references to the New Testament.⁷³ Numerous sermons, speeches, and newspaper articles and letters represented American history as a reenactment of the Exodus and the pre-monarchist era of the “Jewish Republic.”⁷⁴ The very title of Nicholas Street’s sermon, *The American States Acting Over the Part of the Children of Israel in the Wilderness and Thereby Impeding their Entrance into Canaan’s Rest* (1777), demonstrates the importance of the Old Testament for the intellectual construction of the Revolution and the nation it generated. Even two of the least religious of the founders, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, proposed images taken from the Old Testament for the Great Seal of the United States.⁷⁵ When the Revolution was over, Americans continued to exert their biblical imagination, which was grandly manifested in the first American epic, Timothy Dwight’s *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785). That epic in eleven books was an elaborate allegory which the

⁷¹Mark A. Noll, “The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776–1865,” in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39–58, quote at 45. For the enormous influence of New England on the cultural and intellectual development of the United States, see Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700–1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

⁷²Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975).

⁷³Noll, “United States as a Biblical Nation,” 45.

⁷⁴For recent scholarship on the Bible’s influence on the American Revolution, see Nathan Perlmutter, “‘The Divine Right of Republics’: Hebraic Republicanism and the Debate over Kingless Government in Revolutionary America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (July 2009), 535–64; and Eran Shalev, “‘A Perfect Republic’: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775–1788,” *The New England Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (June 2009): 235–63. The classic study of the Bible as a revolutionary text, including in America, is Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

⁷⁵Franklin proposed the image of the Egyptian army drowning in the Red Sea while Jefferson proposed the Pillar of Fire leading the Children of Israel in the desert. John F. Berens, *Providence and Patriotism in Early America, 1640–1815* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 107.

author dedicated to the retired General George Washington, who was now America's Moses and its Joshua as well. So widespread was the use of the Old Testament in the years following the founding, when "the cadences of the Authorized Version informed the writing of the elite and the speech of the humble," that a leading historian of American Christianity did not hesitate to call the contemporary United States a "biblical nation."⁷⁶ Hence, while the pseudo-biblicism this essay has traced may have originated in England, it could prosper, thrive, and gain a life of its own in post-revolutionary America, where the public discourse was heavily inclined toward the Old Testament to begin with.⁷⁷

The mobilization of the Old Testament for political ends reflects, and may be attributed to, the political nature of the Hebrew Bible, as well as to the inaptness of the New Testament for explicitly political purposes. But Americans' recourse to the Hebrew scriptures also demonstrates their eagerness to understand themselves as latter-day Israelites. In the process, while never denying the historicity of the original, ancient, and biblical Israel, they subordinated that history, as well as the unique language through which it was conveyed, to their national mission. It is thus fair to say that the robustness of pseudo-biblicism—the mobilization of the narratives and literary arsenal of the Authorized Version's Old Testament in public discourse—points to remarkable levels of biblical fluency in the general population (or at least among the vast and ever-expanding community of early American newspaper readers); otherwise such language would have been ineffective as a mode of political communication—indeed, unintelligible altogether. The many writers and newspaper editors in the early republic who published the numerous "Chronicles" and "Chapters" knew what Perry Miller reminded us of long ago, namely that the Old Testament was truly omnipresent in early America, and that Old Testament narratives and images had become, in the words of Mark Noll, "the common coinage for the realm."⁷⁸ By elaborating the meaning of their national community and its role in history through pseudo-biblicism, Americans of the early republic—a Christian people if there ever was one—certainly earned their reputation as a biblical nation.

⁷⁶Noll, "United States as a Biblical Nation," 39.

⁷⁷American Christians were unique not only in the extent to which they employed the Old Testament for political ends, but also by doing so more than a century after such use has run its course in Europe. American biblicism was thus "exceptional" both in its intensity and its lasting effects, as well as in blooming so late. Shalev, "A Perfect Republic," 235–45. For European political Hebraism, see and Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), and Fania Oz-Salzberger, "The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism," *Hebraic Political Studies* 1, no. 5 (Fall 2006): 568–92.

⁷⁸Noll, "United States as a Biblical Nation," 45.

VII. THE DECLINE OF PSEUDO-BIBLICISM

It would be excessive to list the numerous “Chronicles,” “Chapters,” and manifold other pieces written in ancient style constantly appearing in newspapers. Many were published in the years and decades following the War of 1812, some more comic while others sentimental, some discussing local issues while others questions of national concern, some were brief and others long-winded. Those texts kept circulating and were printed and reprinted across the nation. One cannot escape the feeling, however, that after the 1820s, a point in time when “a shift from Old Testament to New Testament dominance” may have been noticeable in the United States, the almost century-old genre of public writing in the style of antiquity began to lose its vigor.⁷⁹ Certainly impressive texts were still written after that date in antique style, such as the quasi-biblical tracts participating in the Bank War of the 1830s.⁸⁰ Even during the 1840s, texts like the elaborate *Chapter from the Whig Chronicles* provided an extended Democratic survey of the history of American Federalists-turned-Whigs from the Revolution to Henry Clay, concluding with the biblical form so popular among writers in the genre: “Now the rest of the acts of the Whigs, and the many wicked things which they did, and the sore defeats with which they were discomfited, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the Whigs of the North Country . . . ?”⁸¹ In the years after 1830, however, pieces written in the style of antiquity become notably sparse and sporadic; after 1850 there was hardly any to be found.⁸²

Although changes in aesthetic preferences and cultural tastes are hard to pinpoint, clearly something significant occurred in the relationship between the American people and biblical language after the 1820s. Parallel changes are visible in other cultural realms, such as the decline of republican (and aristocratic) Rome as a model in public discourse, and its replacement by democratic Athens in the Jacksonian era.⁸³ Significantly, calls to reform the King James Bible’s anachronistic language were first heard in America in

⁷⁹Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-Day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6n9. See also Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 2; Timothy L. Smith, “The Book of Mormon in a Biblical Culture,” *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 3–21; and Donald M. Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1978).

⁸⁰For example, “The First Book of Chronicles,” *Rhode Island Republican*, March 18, 1835; “Chronicles of the Times,” *New-Bedford Mercury*, March 11, 1836.

⁸¹“Chapter from the Whig Chronicles,” *New Hampshire Patriot*, Apr. 20, 1840.

⁸²The latest texts I was able to locate were “First Chronicles,” *The Pittsfield Sun*, February 2, 1854; and A. E. Frankland, “Kronikals of the Times,” *American Jewish Archives* 9, no. 2 (October 1957): 102 (originally published in Memphis in 1862).

⁸³Carl J. Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 41–82.

those same years.⁸⁴ As the United States emerged as a modern, commercial, industrial mass-democracy during the first decades of the nineteenth century, its earlier genteel and enlightened ethos was quickly fading. Although mono-causal explanations hardly serve for transformations in cultural tastes and intellectual sensibilities, it would not be farfetched to speculate that the slow but steady decline in the pseudo-biblical style was due to powerful cultural currents at work in the United States by the early decades of the nineteenth century. Dominant among those forces was the surging democratic populism of the Jacksonian era.

The cultural ethos of the founding era was neoclassical, one that valued formal, refined, and enlightened language and had deep contempt for democracy.⁸⁵ Accordingly, eighteenth-century language separated the realms of the refined and the vulgar, the few and the many: the neoclassical and genteel rhetoric implied a social order in which those who ruled were eloquent while those who did not were crude and pitiful. The archaic and arcane language of the biblical style complemented such public tastes by implying a matching ideal of social authority. But once the democratic and liberal forces of the sprawling young nation were unleashed, the move from baroque idioms such as the pseudo-biblical style to a more democratic, inclusive, and unpretentious discourse was just a matter of time.⁸⁶ Democratic language, defined in the words of the historian Kenneth Cmiel as “plain, unadorned, declarative prose,” was averse to the ostentatiously authoritative and aloof biblical style.⁸⁷ Indeed, the aggressive, masculine nineteenth-century Jacksonian plain speaking challenged neoclassical sensibilities head on. The new currents that encouraged informal speech, slang dialect, and familiarity all contributed to a linguistic egalitarianism that the ornate pseudo-biblical writing could not accommodate. The genteel sensibilities that the biblical style catered to and elaborated were deemed “polite” and “corrupt” in the age of manly democracy. Among the other transformations in American society during the market revolution and the Jacksonian era, it became much less tolerant toward “aristocratic” manifestations in general, refined modes of expression in particular. The authoritativeness, rationality, balance, and aloofness of the biblical style,

⁸⁴Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Morrow, 1990), 97.

⁸⁵For language in late eighteenth-century America, see John Howe, *Language and Political Meaning in Revolutionary America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004). Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 20–54.

⁸⁶These socio-economic forces, commonly incorporated under the heading of “the market revolution,” are explored in Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), and Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

⁸⁷Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 13.

characteristics at least partially responsible for its eighteenth-century success, facilitated its eventual fall from grace in an age of antebellum romanticism and popular democracy.⁸⁸

The reformed Protestant heritage, a neoclassical political culture, and a mature culture of print facilitated the rise of this unique mode of representing American contemporaneity. The tradition of writing “in the style of antiquity,” the product of an age still suffused with the Bible yet already enlightened as to the liberal use of that book’s language, offers a vantage point for better understanding a lost political, cultural, and intellectual early American world of biblical imagination. The appeal to biblical language helped to make sense of a fast-changing world and of novel American democratic ways. The extensive use of that idiom demonstrates how, by invoking a privileged language, Americans imagined and reclaimed social and political power in a world that experienced the diminishing influence of traditional sources of authority in the decades following the creation of the republic.⁸⁹ Although the use of the Bible’s language for non-religious ends would not have been possible before the eighteenth century when novel attitudes eased restraints for applying scripture to non-religious arenas, it would be wrong to see the flourish in pseudo-biblical writing as part of a straightforward process of secularization in America: the story of its use is *not* the story of the diminishing religious sentiment but of a transformation and reconstruction of beliefs and understandings of America’s meaning and collective identity.

The usefulness of a refined language such as Elizabethan English diminished once the United States embraced the ethos of popular democracy. It became evident that the formal biblical language belonged more to the eighteenth century than to antebellum America, and more to an age of genteel politics of prudent gentlemen than to the public discourse of democracy and evangelism. Only a text in biblical style that adapted to, and embodied the deep cultural transformations of the Jacksonian era could thrive in a world of democratic coarseness, of mass revivals, and of relentless industrialization.

⁸⁸Other factors contributed to the decline in the use of the pseudo-biblical style. Paul Gutjahr has noted that the undisputed dominance that the Bible enjoyed both in American print culture and as a pedagogical tool began to slip in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 3, 119. Additionally, a modern historicist outlook, which understood the past as fundamentally different and alienated from the altered present, began to gain credence as the nineteenth century progressed. Henceforth the appeal of pseudo-biblical language to the new historicist sensibilities diminished. For the complex evolution of historical consciousness in the nineteenth century, see Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁸⁹For major studies that trace different dimension of the erosion of traditional authority in the early republic, see Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of the American Democracy* (New York: Norton, 2005); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution* (New York: Oxford, 1994); and Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

The tradition of writing in biblical style paved the way for the Book of Mormon by conditioning Americans to reading American texts, and texts about America, in biblical language. Yet the Book of Mormon, an American narrative told in the English of the King James Bible, has thrived long after Americans abandoned the practice of recounting their affairs in biblical language.⁹⁰ It has thus been able to survive and flourish for almost two centuries, not because, but in spite of the literary ecology of the mid-nineteenth century and after.⁹¹ The Book of Mormon became a testament to a widespread cultural practice of writing in biblical English that could not accommodate to the monumental transformations America endured in the first half of nineteenth century.

⁹⁰Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 14; see also Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 151–66. Indeed, if a sympathetic reader of the BOM, such as the practicing Mormon historian Richard Bushman, may believe that the Book “thinks like the Bible,” others pointed out it seemed to contemporaries “a clumsy parody of the King James Bible. Every verb ended in *-eth*, and every other sentence began, ‘And it came to pass.’” Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 99n63, 107; Walter A. McDougall, *Throes of Democracy: The American Civil War Era, 1829–1877* (New York: Harper, 2008), 182.

⁹¹For the Book of Mormon as accommodating Jacksonian sensibilities, see Hatch, *Democratization*, 116, 120; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 42; and Gordon S. Wood, “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,” in *Religion in American History: A Reader*, ed. Jon Butler and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 180–96.