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***Bold Hawthorne* and Rufus W. Griswold**

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Nathaniel Hawthorne's biographers usually devote at least one paragraph to Daniel Hathorne (1731-1796), Nathaniel Hawthorne's grandfather who is the subject of a ballad entitled "Bold Hawthorne."¹ First printed in *Graham's Magazine*, in October 1842, "Bold Hawthorne" has been anthologized ever since as an authentic naval ballad.² Hawthorne's biographers frequently refer to the poem as evidence of Hawthorne's family heritage, an ancestry of seamen and sea captains. Although his father was a sea captain, Hawthorne's grandfather gets much of the attention as a New England privateer during the early months of the American Revolution. Vernon Loggins, for example, in his *The Hawthornes* writes:

More perhaps than any other Salem Shipmaster, Captain Daniel Hathorne, forty-five years of age, set the pattern which the privateersmen were to follow. His glorious cruise during the latter half of 1776 on the *True American*, with ten guns and eighty men, was described in verse by his anonymous surgeon, a bad poet but an authentic reporter.³

Loggins has little reason to doubt the authenticity of "Bold Hawthorne," which he quotes in a version edited by Rufus W. Griswold — the most noted anthologist of American literature during the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁴ Evidence suggests that Griswold's version of "Bold Hawthorne" is historically inaccurate, and that Griswold's role in printing the ballad is less than objective and clearly unprofessional by today's standards.

Griswold's version, first appearing in *Graham's Magazine*, October 1842, is the primary text upon which all subsequent printings are based. This text has never been questioned as an authentic naval ballad, even by William McCarty who in 1842 slightly modified Griswold's text in his *Songs, Odes, and Other Poems on National Subjects, Compiled from Various Sources*.⁵ In introducing *Graham's* text, Griswold offers little help in establishing his version or its origin. He states only that the surgeon of Hathorne's ship composed the ballad. Regardless of the origin of his text, written or oral, Griswold must have had in hand at least general information about the cruise along with the specific details relative to Hathorne's encounters with two British vessels.

Most important, Griswold's version is clearly inconsistent with other accounts of Hawthorne's second encounter with a British vessel. Because no available text of the ballad predates Griswold's version, collating texts as one approach in determining the authenticity of Griswold's text is not possible. Griswold is known for his tampering with texts, and his editorial practices have frequently been scrutinized by scholars, especially by a legion of critics writing on Edgar Allan Poe.⁶ Poe himself on one occasion attacked Griswold as a poet,⁷ and one can assume that Griswold did experiment in verse and would have been aware of the intricacies of the ballad form. In 1843 Griswold even ventured to translate the works of the French poet Béranger. Griswold's talents, declares his biographer, were best suited, however, to "his work as an anthologist and promoter of works by others."⁸

First, as editor of *Graham's* in the fall of 1842, Griswold contributed an essay entitled "The Minstrelsy of the Revolution" under the heading of the "Editor's Table" in which he introduced "Bold Hawthorne" in these words:

From a large collection of naval ballads, we select the following, as one of the most curious of its class, and because, like several others in this collection, it has never before been printed. It was written by the surgeon of the "Fair American," and was familiar to the Massachusetts privateersmen during the last years of the Revolution. The "noble captain," we believe, was an ancestor of the inimitable author, NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, of Salem. (p. 227)

The "large collection of naval ballads" has not survived, and a text of "Bold Hawthorne" apparently is not at present available in either manuscript or in broadside form.⁹ The surgeon Griswold cites as the composer of the ballad cannot be identified, for no records of the personnel on Hawthorne's *True American* have been found. McCarty, who next printed the ballad in his 1842 edition of *Songs, Odes, and Other Poems on National Subjects*, states that his text of the poem, coming from R. W. Griswold's manuscript collection of "American History Ballads," "was several years ago taken down by C. A. Andrews, Esq., from the mouths of the surviving shipmates of Hawthorne[sic], who were accustomed to meet at the office of the Marine Insurance Company in Salem." (p. 250) McCarty no doubt alludes to the same ballad collection cited by Griswold in *Graham's*, and his text is more than likely based on Griswold's version.¹⁰ In a column entitled "Review of New Books," in *Graham's* for December 1842, pp. 341-42,

the following statement pertains to McCarty's text:

We perceive that Mr. McCarty has copied from our Magazine for October most of the pieces included in the article on "The Minstrelsy of the Revolution." We have many others not embraced in his volumes, of which we intend to present a few additional specimens to our readers, in connection, perhaps, with some of the most curious verses in the books he has given us. (p. 341)

In this same issue of *Graham's* is an announcement that Griswold had become editor,¹¹ thereby replacing Edgar Allan Poe, who had held the post since April 1841.

That Griswold was responsible for the "Minstrelsy" collection in the October issue seems clear. Furthermore, McCarty knew of the collection only in *Graham's*, for there appears to be little reason to doubt his statement relative to the origin of his own printed version. Later, in a subsequent 1843 printing of the ballad appearing in Griswold's "Curiosities of American Literature" supplementing Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*,¹² Griswold could be deliberately misleading the reader when he says that "'Bold Hawthorne' has never been printed before" (p. 37), since both he and McCarty published the poem in 1842, assuming, of course, that Griswold had not submitted the complete text of "Curiosities..." to his publisher before he printed the ballad in *Graham's* in October 1842. In short, available evidence reveals that no original manuscript of "Bold Hawthorne" has been preserved, or authenticated, or even acknowledged except by Griswold, and the exact circumstances of its composition remain a mystery.

Having no original text of "Bold Hawthorne" in hand and no verifiable facts as to its composition do not, of course, disprove the authenticity of the poem as a naval ballad. McCarty's brief account of its composition, if verified, suggests the "folk" features of the ballad. Griswold, obviously, choosing not to be specific about the text of his printed version, says little about its composition except that it was composed by an unidentified surgeon. An examination of other accounts of the cruise of the *True American* strongly suggests that Griswold's version is in part not only inaccurate but also slanted to stress the heroic actions of Daniel Hathorne and his crew. The stanzas of the ballad in question (stanzas 8-11) concern Hathorne's second engagement with a British vessel which Griswold incorrectly terms a "scow."

Regardless of his source, an original text or whatever he may have used in preparing his text for *Graham's*, Griswold's version clearly makes a hero of Daniel Hathorne, the grandfather of Nathaniel Hawthorne, a rising author Griswold may have wished to bring to the reader's attention. Whatever Griswold had in mind, and it is possible that he had no reason other than to present an accurate text of a folk ballad, recorded by an anonymous surgeon, his version differs from two reliable reports on what occurred when the *True American* engaged a British packet in early fall of 1776. One account, dated 21 October 1776, is found in *The American Journal of Ambrose Serle, Secretary to Lord Howe*, 1776 in 1778, and reads as follows:

This Afternoon the Harriot Packet came in from England, after a Passage of 6 Weeks & 5 Days, and brought me long-expected Letters from my dearest Wife & other Friends. The Packet was attacked by a Rebel Privateer so near England as Long. 20^o, and lost her Captain and 5 men who were killed in the Engagement. About 9 or 10 were wounded. The Privateer, meeting with a stout Resistance, at last sheered off; and the Packet arrived without further molestation.¹³

A second report of the action between Hathorne and the packet comes from the Boston *Independent Chronicle* of 24 October 1776, and later reprinted word for word in the Boston *Gazette* of 28 October 1776:

Yesterday Capt. Daniel Hathorne arrived at Salem from a Cruise. On his Passage he met with an armed Packet, which he attacked. In the Engagement (which lasted two Hours) he lost three Men killed, and nine or ten wounded, himself slightly. Since which, he has taken and sent into Cape-Ann, a Prize Snow, with Oats, &c.

Ambrose Serle (1742-1812), whose journals convey the attitudes of a well-educated English civilian toward the Americans during the Revolutionary War, is noted for his reliability. In early 1776, he was appointed Solicitor and Clerk of the Reports for the (British) board of trade, and soon after this official appointment he came to America to serve Lord William Howe (1729-1814)¹⁴ as his private secretary.¹⁵ At the time he is describing the arrival of the *Harriot* packet on 21 October 1776, he was living in New York and contributing to the *New York Gazette*.

Without question, the *Harriot* packet Serle mentions is the ship engaged by Daniel Hathorne's *True American*. William James Mor-

gan, Head of the Historical Research Branch, Department of Navy, Washington, D. C., in a letter to me dated 24 February 1978, concludes that based on coincidence of timing and circumstance, Hathorne's *True American* did engage the packet *Harriot* as described by Serle. Morgan is careful to point out that Serle places the engagement 420 miles from Hathorne's first sighting of the "scow" mentioned in Griswold's version of the ballad, and that Serle does not identify the "Rebel Privateer." Serle, nevertheless, is consistent with one contemporary newspaper account printed in the Boston *Independent Chronicle* which is later repeated in the Boston *Gazette*; and although he does not identify the American privateer, Serle could be generally accurate in locating the action.

It is not surprising that Serle's account and Griswold's ballad would differ in many respects, but these differences are certainly not minor. Among other matters, obvious discrepancies exist between Griswold's version and Serle's account concerning the provocation and the conclusion of the engagement. Griswold emphasizes the brave and successful exploits of an American privateer fighting for its life; whereas Serle describes the confrontation between the ships as an ineffective molestation of a British packet begun by a Rebel privateer, the latter of which was forced to withdraw after meeting stiff resistance.

According to Griswold's ballad, Hathorne's ship gave chase, but was forced to fight in order to defend itself:

Our captain did inspect her, with glasses, and he said —
 "My boys, she means to fight us, but be you not afraid;
 All hands now beat to quarters, see everything is clear,
 We'll give her a broadside, my boys, as soon as she comes
 near."

She was prepared with nettings, and had her men secured,
 She bore directly for us, and put us close on board;
 When cannon roar'd like thunder, and muskets fired amain,
 But soon we were alongside and grappled to her chain.

In contrast, Serle states that the Rebel Privateer instigated the action. Consistent with Serle, the Boston *Independent Chronicle* reports that Hawthorne attacked the "armed Packet."

Second, Griswold's ballad, in describing the action between the *True American* and the "British scow," declares that the British ship

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“quickly bore away”:

And now the scene it alter'd, the cannon ceased to roar,
 We fought with swords and boarding-pikes one glass or
 something more.
 Till British pride and glory no longer dared to stay,
 But cut the Yankee grapplings, and quickly bore away.

In an opposite vein, Serle bluntly reports that “The Privateer” withdrew after meeting “stout” resistance and thereafter ceased to molest the homebound packet. The Boston *Independent Chronicle* makes no comment as to who was the first to withdraw from the action. Neither Serle nor the Boston *Independent Chronicle* hints bravery on the part of Daniel Hathorne or his crew. Apparently, Griswold’s ballad is the sole account of the heroic *True American* pitted against a British Armed packet.

In conclusion, Griswold’s version of “Bold Hawthorne” first appearing in *Graham’s Magazine* in October 1842, is very likely the primary text upon which all subsequent texts of the ballad are based. Comparing his text with other editions of the poem shows only minor differences in wording and punctuation. Griswold’s text of the ballad — differing from other reportings of the incident involving Daniel Hathorne’s schooner and a British packet, notably *The American Journal of Ambrose Serle* and the Boston *Independent Chronicle* — not only could be inaccurate, but may be in part a literary ballad composed by Griswold himself. Griswold’s readers would have little reason to doubt the authenticity of his text, especially in 1842 at a time when patriotic lyrics of the American Revolutionary War made good reading for a mass reading public already aware of its distinct national heritage.

NOTES

¹ “Bold Hatwhorne,” *Graham’s Magazine*, 21 (1842), 227. Alternate titles are “Bold Hathorne” and “The Cruise of the *Fair American*.” Nathaniel Hawthorne added the “w” to the spelling of his family name; see Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York, 1970), p. 1. The actual name of Daniel Hathorne’s ship was the *True American*, a “privateer” and schooner (later re-rigged as a brig) commanded by Hathorne from August 5 to December 3, 1776. See *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, 6:57, ed. William James Morgan (Washington, D. C., 1972), and the *Massachusetts State Archives*, 166:22. I am much indebted to William James Morgan, Head, Historical Research Branch of the Naval Historical Center, Department of Navy, and Captain Ward W. Lasley, U. S. N., for their aid in

gathering facts relating to Hawthorne's command of the *True American*.

² William McCarty ed., *Songs, Odes, and Other Poems, on National Subjects*. Part Second — Naval (Philadelphia, 1842), pp. 250-54; Evert A. and George L. Duyckinck eds., *Cyclopaedia of American Literature*, 2 vol. (Philadelphia, 1875), pp. 70-71; Burton Egbert Stevenson. ed., *Poems of American's History* (Boston 1908), pp. 219-20; Percy H. Boynton ed., *American Poetry* (New York, 1919), pp. 70-71; Fred Lewis Pattee ed., *Century Readings for a Course in American Literature*. rev. ed. (New York, 1925), pp. 76-77; Frederick C. Prescott and Gerald D. Sanders. eds., *An Introduction to American Poetry* (New York, 1934), pp. 31-32; and Robert W. Nesser ed., *American Naval Songs and Ballads* (New Haven, 1938), pp. 9-12.

³ Vernon Loggins, *The Hawthornes* (New York, 1951), p. 176.

⁴ Griswold cites himself as author of the article "The Minstrelsy of the Revolution" which includes "Bold Hawthorne" in the October 1842 issue of *Graham's Magazine*. See Griswold's letter to James T. Fields, 7 September 1842, in Griswold's *Passages from the Correspondence and Other Papers of Rufus W. Griswold* (Cambridge, Mass. 1898), pp. 120-21. Apparently, at the time he wrote Fields Griswold was planning a sequel to "The Minstrelsy." He requested that Fields ask "Ditson" (possibly Oliver Ditson, Boston music publisher from 1835 till 1888) for more ballads. My thanks to James Lawton of the Boston Public Library for his aid in identifying Ditson.

⁵ McCarty, pp. 250-54. The textual variations between Griswold's version and McCarty's text are largely word choices that have little effect upon the rhythm and content of the poem. For example, line 2, stanza 3 of Griswold's text reads: "Of all your conq'ring armies, your matchless strength at sea[.]" In McCarty, we find in lines 3-4 of stanza 3: "By land thy conquering armies, / Thy matchless strength at sea." According to Morgan, McCarty is quite accurate in referring to the second British ship encountered by the *True American* as a "snow" (line 6, stanza 8); Griswold's reference to "scow" (line 3, stanza 8) is incorrect or perhaps a printing error. McCarty's stanzas, unlike Griswold's, are presented in the short-line form that will be selected by subsequent editors.

⁶ Notably Arthur H. Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe* (New York, 1941), especially pp. 444-50.

⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison, (New York, 1902), 11:225.

⁸ Joy Bayless, *Rufus Wilmot Griswold: Poe's Literary Executor* (Nashville, Tenn., 1943), p. 78.

⁹ The letters I have received from a variety of library depositories, including the Boston Public Library and the American Antiquarian Society, report no manuscript or broadside printing of "Bold Hawthorne" in their collections. I thank Professor Kent Ljungquist of Worcester Polytechnic Institute for his aid in my unsuccessful search for a manuscript copy of the ballad.

¹⁰ The *Salem Directory* (1842), p. 3, lists a C. A. Andrew (not a C. A. Andrews as

identified by McCarty) living in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1842, although I can find no connection between Andrew and "Bold Hawthorne."

¹¹ *Graham's Magazine*, 21 (1842), 344.

¹² I. C. D'Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, and *The Literary Character Illustrated*. With *Curiosities of American Literature* by Rufus W. Griswold (New York, 1890), p. 37. The 1890 text of the ballad and the 1843 version are identical.

¹³ Ambrose Serle, *The American Journal of Ambrose Serle, Secretary to Lord Howe, 1776-1778*, ed. Edward H. Tatum, Jr. (San Marino, Cal., 1940), p. 127.

¹⁴ Howe served as commander of the British army forces in America from October 1775 to May 1778.

¹⁵ Tatum, "Introduction," *The American Journal of Ambrose Serle*, p. xii.