You have bin at the Êle of Rue, 
and at Rochell, a poore people that lye nowe in the dust. 
—Edward Howes to John Winthrop Jr., March 26, 1633

Postscript—Salomons wisdome, 7 chap. 21 vers: And all such things as are 
either secret, or manifest: them I knowe. . . . 
. . . The fyre cannot destroye whats written in the Harte. 
—Edward Howes to John Winthrop Jr., January 22, 1627

My sonne give me thy heart. 
—John Winthrop’s “Experiencia” (1616–18)

Edward Howes’s 1633 letter from London recalled events that had occurred only six years before. John Winthrop Jr. (1606–76), who received the letter in Boston, had been “at the Êle of Rue, and at Rochell,” and the letter was a pointed reminder that Winthrop’s scientific friends throughout the Atlantic world would never forget this. Winthrop had experienced the most theatrical and resonant spectacle of absolute power, violent containment, and confessional genocide to occur in Europe during their lifetimes. Winthrop had emerged from this apocalyptic experience sanctified and alive, chosen by God to salvage fragments of the Reformation that still remained pure and hence
viable. His task: to reanimate and make them whole again in the New World, something that weighed heavily on the young man’s mind as he sailed away from 20,000 Huguenot co-religionists who, as Howes lamented, lay “nowe in the dust.”

Like many of his fellow alchemists, Howes was anxious to obfuscate his contributions to “the work” (to prevent interception by the vulgar), and he was clever at allegory and linguistic games. But his wordplay here was neither original nor new. After the fall of La Rochelle in 1628, virtually every Protestant in the rapidly expanding Atlantic world would hear or read the basic narrative of this event and understand the sad irony of “Île of Rue.” This painful new place-name entered popular discourse as both pun and lament for England’s failure under Charles I’s favorite, the duke of Buckingham, to gain a secure foothold on the Île de Ré, a strategic outer island guarding the entrance to the fortress of La Rochelle. The familiar narrative of this event cannot recapture the emotional nightmare that the fall of La Rochelle to the Counter-Reformation was for international Protestantism.¹

Nearly two decades of correspondence shrouded by metaphor and secret codes had passed between Howes and Winthrop. Transatlantic religious and military history was harnessed to news of the latest experiments from European and American laboratories, urgent orders for current scientific books and apparatus were made, and the quest for the philosopher’s stone was undertaken. A latitudinarian and moderate Calvinist, Howes reminded his “lovinge frind” and equally moderate colleague that even before Winthrop embarked to join his father’s exclusive social experiment in Boston, his place in both eschatological history and the universal, inclusive networks of international science had already been privileged by experience. Winthrop had seen far worse violence than was perpetrated by his father against heterodoxy in New England. For John Winthrop’s generation of natural philosophers, the fall of La Rochelle was one of those crucial events in history that adumbrated the end of the world. It was a kind of natural laboratory for adepts, where the chosen could see the future of man. Here was a prophetic instance that revealed the interior gestation of a long mental and material process of the history of final things that would culminate with a “great instauration” of primordial knowledge lost in the Fall.²

Much has been written about the life and career of Winthrop “the Younger,” most of it curious reflection on the life of his authoritarian father. Despite this venerable historiography, which reaches back to the extraordinary hagiographies published after his death in 1676, and while it is well known that Winthrop served one of Buckingham’s admirals as clerk aboard the Due Repulse (a command ship in Buckingham’s ill-fated armada that laid siege to the Île de Ré from July 17 until October 29, 1627), historians have not analyzed this episode closely. Natural-philosophical concerns, coinciding with fears for the security of international Protestantism generally—and the protection of the forthcoming New World experiment in particular—were behind
the younger Winthrop’s strenuous personal efforts to persuade his fearful and protective father to use valuable family contacts to find a place for his son as an observer with the expeditionary force. The famously secretive Winthrop’s decision to gain experience at the simultaneous sieges of the Île de Ré and La Rochelle was not prompted merely by a youthful thirst for adventure and travel, a character defect, most of his biographers allege, rooted in “indecisiveness” and lack of a firm sense of purpose and duty. Rather, the explanation for his peripatetic nature lies in private concerns and ambitions having to do with his international career as a Paracelsian physician, alchemist, natural philosopher, and would-be inventor of novel weapons to rearm a Protestant world in retreat. Winthrop linked these personal and scientific concerns—and his transatlantic experiences—less with the local problems that obsessed his absolutist father, who feared innovation, than with similarly innovative and clandestine strategies shared by heterodox Huguenot refugees from southwest France and their Protestant allies. Ultimately, these interests harnessed John Winthrop Jr. to the internationalist, permeable, free-floating, and geographically nonspecific culture of the Long Island Sound region.

The story of the younger Winthrop’s journey to the Île de Ré in 1627 began after he left home in 1622 to attend Trinity College, Dublin, his first extended sojourn away from the family estate at Groton in East Anglia. On the face of it, the choice of Trinity was an unorthodox break with family tradition. Every other Winthrop male who attended university both before (and after) John Jr. did so at Trinity College, Cambridge. Yet there were good reasons for him to have decided for Ireland. By 1622, some Cambridge colleges required scholars to swear an oath to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, which many nonconforming Calvinists refused to do. Oaths were not a requirement at Trinity, Dublin, and hence it was considered a sort of refuge from growing ecclesiastical interference in England. At the same time, Dublin’s curriculum followed the Cambridge model (with theology as the central discipline), and it was cheaper. But above all, in 1622, Ireland was the first place of refuge envisaged by the group that would by 1629 become the senior Winthrop’s New England Company of Massachusetts Bay Colony. John Winthrop’s sister and brother-in-law, Lucy Winthrop Downing and her husband, the loyal family attorney Emmanuel Downing, had already moved to Ireland. Depression in the East Anglian woolen trade to the Netherlands forced the sale of family lands, and fears for the progress of the Reformation in England and on the Continent gave this project greater urgency. It made sense, therefore, that when John Winthrop Jr. prepared to leave home, he became part of this family advance team—an extension of his father’s eyes and ears—a role he filled later at the sieges of the Île de Ré and La Rochelle. By April 1623, the elder Winthrop was prepared to move, writing his son in an often quoted remark: “I wish oft God would open a waye to settle me in Ireland, if it might be for his glory.”
The elder Winthrop’s God neglected to “open a waye to settle” him in Ireland, however, and by late 1623, the Downings had returned permanently to London. The younger Winthrop then left Trinity College (against his father’s wishes) and followed them there. According to convention, this was a portent of “declension” for the father; “the first hint of trouble” in the young man’s personality, which slowed his future development as a public figure based on the old patriarch’s famously decisive example. John Winthrop Jr.’s problem, it would seem, “was a simple lack of staying power.”

His studies required persistence, but the young man lacked the capacity (or willingness) to persist. So pronounced was this form of immaturity that it was already in the way of becoming a character defect. Indeed, it would linger for years, until the generally remarkable career of John Winthrop, Jr., became uncomfortably littered with unfinished tasks and abandoned designs. It too often was the distant grass that grew greenest. . . . To be sure, he was quite devoid of ideas for his own future . . . young Winthrop remained, insofar as a career was concerned, quite without impulse.4

Even as a mature adult and leader of the Connecticut Colony, Winthrop “literally found it difficult to keep a single iron in the fire.”5

In fact, the opposite was true. Winthrop’s “character defect” was not a sign of “immaturity” that led to a lifetime of constant travel, “littered with unfinished tasks and abandoned designs.” Rather, it was indicative of movement and experiment that defined the well-considered career of a focused Paracelsian searching for signs of metaphysical unity in apparently unrelated places and practices. The choice of Trinity College, Dublin, was appropriate beyond the conventional reading. Trinity’s provost since 1609 was William Temple, a celebrated anti-scholastic and a proponent of the critical pedagogy of Palissy’s Huguenot colleague Pierre de la Ramée, or Petrus Ramus, which deeply influenced seventeenth-century Calvinist analytical theory. Temple’s natural-philosophical treatises made him one of Dublin’s Anglo-Irish elite. Temple later joined the circle of the universalist Invisible College, which centered around Trinity College, and included Benjamin Worsley and Robert Boyle. The clandestine Invisible College may be defined as a Neoplatonic and internationalist alchemical college with “invisible” members, all sharing a profound interest in Paracelsism and the practice of alchemy as instruments of social reform. In the context of the British-American response to the wars of religion and absolutism, this clearly meant “an enthusiasm for Baconian natural history [that is to say, experimentalism], and anti-authoritarianism, both in natural philosophy and medicine.”6 That the younger Winthrop found himself at William Temple’s Trinity College, Dublin should not be considered a mere coincidence. This circumstance was thus the subject of a query from Charles Webster:

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Within the Anglo-Irish group, the Invisible College would have found many patrons . . . in a position to provide encouragement and information. “Invisibility” would have been forced on the group by virtue of their unsettled fortunes and obligations outside London. While London provided a focus, it was necessary to maintain communications with Stalbridge, Ireland, Paris and various other locations on the continent and perhaps even New England. . . . John Winthrop, Jr., . . . so close in outlook to Worsley and Boyle, . . . would have made [an] invaluable member of the Invisible College. It is interesting in this context that Winthrop was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and that his father had been concerned with Irish plantations. . . . Although small in membership . . . the Invisible College was by no means unproductive. Through this agency Robert Boyle was launched into his scientific career. . . . He believed that Histories of Trade and Nature of the kind undertaken by his friends were as much a fertile basis for scientific inquiry as a means to promote economic innovation. . . . Support from politically active patrons of the Invisible College was probably important in securing Worsley’s appointment to civil service positions from which he could further his utopian schemes. . . . The investigations into chemistry, metallurgy, agriculture and surveying were to a large degree a reflection of the aspirations of a social group whose primary ambition was to re-establish profitable Irish plantations.7

This implies that the choice of Trinity College, Dublin, rather than Trinity College, Cambridge, was the younger Winthrop’s as much as his father’s. Both men may have had specific plans in mind for the younger Winthrop’s role in the colonization movement. Winthrop may have intended from the start to matriculate at Dublin to further his natural-philosophical training. Therefore, it is a mistake to assume that he began his alchemical studies in London with Howes upon his return from Dublin. It is just as likely that Winthrop began to read Paracelsus and his followers, as well as the currently popular Robert Fludd (whose earliest publications on the microcosm and macrocosm began in 1616), in Trinity’s library. This was the first important library Winthrop explored in a systematic way, and it undoubtedly influenced the beginning of his career as a bibliophile with a love of natural-philosophical texts. The younger Winthrop began to ask his father to send ever-larger sums of money for the first time during this period in Dublin, presumably in order to purchase alchemical books. Financial difficulties at home in Suffolk did not staunch the flow of funds; the elder Winthrop wrote his son in 1622, “I will shorten my selfe to enlarge you.”8

There was every reason for the younger Winthrop to be happy in Dublin, and the indications are that he was content and productive. His father acknowledged the promising conditions of an Irish education and hinted at hoped-for practical results to be directed toward the colonization project. In a letter dated August 6, 1622, the elder Winthrop wrote, “I am very gladd to heare that you like [it] so well in Ireland, if your profitinge in learning may be answerable it will mucche increase my comforte.”9
Yet after a year, without explanation, John returned home to England. Neither his father nor grandfather had completed their studies at Cambridge either, but his “abrupt” return home in 1623 may have been prompted by very real intellectual concerns. More than the failure of the Ireland project and a young man’s loneliness for the departed Downings (his surrogate family in Dublin) influenced his decision.

The Paracelsian dictum that university life and scholasticism were the dead letters of knowledge was in play here. In order to find wisdom, young men were instructed to leave the university and travel widely in Nature and exotic places, to learn from the lowly folk practitioner and simple artisans. Through manual philosophers, young alchemists gained practical experience. Winthrop the Younger’s exit from Trinity College had precedent in Paracelsus himself. It was harnessed to Winthrop’s conversion experience in Paracelsian natural philosophy. His mobility represented the first step along this young alchemist’s path to the Île de Ré and La Rochelle four years later.

Moreover, the years 1622 and 1623 were formative ones in France and Britain for scientists who aspired to join the universal community of “invisibles.” The formal inception of the Invisible College may have been the 1640s, but the first real mention of “the invisibles” occurred in 1623, when Gabriel Naudé published his Instruction à la France sur la vérité de l’histoire des Frères de la Roze-Croix (Instruction to France About the Truth of the Story of the Rose-Cross Brothers), the apocalyptic context of which was the military triumph of the Counter-Reformation in Germany. Claims about the existence of the secret society of Rosicrucians had caused a sensation, which diffused to England in Naudé’s books, but also through the hugely influential work of Robert Fludd. Edward Howes and Winthrop were both passionately interested in Rosicrucianism and Robert Fludd, as indicated by their correspondence, and the wave of interest in the Rosicrucians extended to student laboratories in Dublin. An essential attribute of the “invisible ones,” Frances Yates explains, was their mobility, complemented by a chameleonlike aptitude for disguise. Naudé revealed that Rosicrucians sold their souls to the devil and “abjured Christianity,” not unlike Huguenots (and witches) as banefully represented:

In return they were promised the power to transport themselves wherever they wished, to have purses always full of money, to dwell in any country, attired in the dress of that country so that they were taken for native inhabitants, to have the gift of eloquence so they could draw all men to them, to be admired by the learned and sought out by the curious and recognized as wiser than the ancient prophets.10

With this in mind, the pattern of the younger Winthrop’s life when he returned to London in 1623 takes on a more specific logic and set of meanings, contradicting the notion he was “intellectually adrift and oppressed with ennui.”11 He was expected to take up the law, like his father and grandfather before him, and upon his arrival,
Emmanuel Downing, then attorney of the Court of Wards and Liveries, secured him a coveted place in the Inner Temple. Once again, however, he renounced an established institution of formal education: refusing to take up residence in the Inner Temple, he instead moved in either with the Downings or with Thomas and Priscilla Winthrop Fones, his uncle and aunt.

Aspects of the two households were particularly attractive to Winthrop at this early stage of his alchemic career. Edward Howes was Downing’s clerk. Howes was then also a young scholar at the Inner Temple and, like Winthrop, an aspiring natural philosopher with an aptitude in mathematics and a collection of alchemic books and laboratory equipment. This marked the beginning of the lifelong scientific friendship between the two. True to the Paracelsian credo of searching for knowledge among artisans and tradesmen, Winthrop devoted most of his time during this period to working with his uncle Thomas Fones, an apothecary. Whereas “ancient” physicians trivialized apothecaries and other “skillful” folk as mere technicians, Paracelsian physicians sought them out as unlearned possessors of natural secrets hidden to university professors, but available to adepts. Fones’s shop had a complete pharmacopoeia of chemical and herbal ingredients essential to the new homeopathic and chemical therapies, and his apothecary’s apparatus and expertise with fire, crucibles, and distillation were also basic to alchemical laboratory practice. By 1625, then, Winthrop’s natural-philosophical career was right on track.

On April 18, 1626, Winthrop’s younger brother Forth, the family member most readily conversant with John Winthrop Jr.’s scientific and bibliophilic interests, was sent to university—not to Trinity College, Dublin, but to Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Unfortunately, Forth died in 1630, when he was just twenty-one. However, surviving letters from Forth to John bracket the latter’s participation in the expedition to the Île de Ré. Although usually dense with alchemical metaphor and other obscure language, they are very revealing of John’s natural-philosophical tradition, training, and motivations during this period. Apparently, John had become so deeply involved with his laboratory practice at both the Downing (with Howes) and Fones households that he isolated himself and neglected to communicate with his brother. At the end of December 1626, Forth wrote a mild yet telling letter of rebuke from Cambridge, which acknowledged that he had no idea where his older brother was but hinted that he knew the secretive nature of John’s mysterious isolation, observing:

[Y]ou are occupied about serious affaires, and perhapps that is the reson I have not heard from you of soe longe time . . . I should have trobled you with my letters many times, but I knew not at which door to knock, one while hearinge you weare at London, in which you weare as hard to be found of me as in a Labyrinth, for I doe nether know where my uncle Downing kepeth, whom I would have wrot toe, nether did I remember the Sine of
my uncles Foneses house . . . my letters to you goinge came backe with a non est inventus [nowhere to be found].\

The learned Forth’s careful use of the key word “Labyrinth,” in conjunction with his intimations that John was “occupied about serious affairs” at the houses of their uncles Downing and Fones was perhaps a cryptic reference to book 3 of Paragranum and book 5 of Labyrinthus medicorum errantium, where Paracelsus “set out the full dimensions of this alchemical activity.” Owen Hannaway sheds light on the significance of these seminal texts for physicians in training such as John Winthrop Jr., whose passage through the labyrinth indoctrinated in the Paracelsian “theology of the priesthood of the laborer,” transforming natural materials to serve man and God (as would an apothecary):

The principal theme of these loci was that God had given to every product of nature a natural end which, in conformity with the anthropocentrism inherent in the macrocosm-microcosm doctrine, was defined in terms of man’s needs. In addition, God had assigned to man the task of transforming, by means of alchemy, the raw products of nature into a state appropriate for man’s utilization. Thus God had endowed man with crops, animals, minerals, and medicaments in all three realms of nature, but not necessarily in a condition to be immediately assimilated or utilized by man. Man had to garner them, segregate them, separate the pure from the impure, and bring them to perfection, usually employing fire at some stage. This was alchemy in its widest sense [emphasis added]; and it made an alchemist not only of the physician but also of the farmer, the miller, the baker, the stoker, the smelter, the smith—in short, of every craftsman who employed his skills in the preparation of nature’s products for man’s ends. This alchemy might involve more than one stage and more than one alchemist. To illustrate with Paracelsus’s own favorite example, the alchemical preparations of bread involved the alchemist-farmer, who cultivated the wheat; the alchemist-miller, who separated the grain from the chaff; the alchemist-baker, who produced the loaf of bread in his alchemical oven.

Hence, this labyrinth was both mental and physical; the process of alchemic purification involved an internal and external pilgrimage of discovery to locate and connect this hidden labyrinth of skilled artisans, in order that they might be “elevated to the status of an alchemist, [and] allotted a positive role in a great cosmic drama which was nothing less than the redemption of the world.”

The subject of the younger Winthrop’s desire to travel to exotic places was at the forefront of family discourse and action. On April 24, 1627, Joshua Downing (d. 1629), brother of Emmanuel and well situated as one of the commissioners of the Navy (and hence one of Buckingham’s protégés), wrote John Winthrop Sr.:
Concerning Mr. John Wenthrops inclinacion to the Sea, I will use my best endeavors for him; but I have no part in shipping that goes for Turkie, and the marchantes that are owners, doe commonly place their owne servauntes for pursers; but if he pleaseth, to goe alonge in those shippes as a passinger to see the countries; the chardegges of his dyett shall not be great, and I will comitt hym to the care of them, that wilbe tender over hym, so shall he have more libertie for hymselfe, and have all occasions to make the best observacions, for his owne good. But what if you send him, nowe out with this fleet with the Duke; the lord Harvey is Rear admyrall, and I thinck a well disposed gentleman; The Captain under hym is Captain Best; in whom I have some interest. If you shall please to thinck well of it, advise me speedily, and I will deale with Captain Best accordingly.

When the younger Winthrop considered a sea voyage, his first choice thus seems to have been to follow the route of many an aspiring alchemist in search of the philosopher’s stone and head for Constantinople. Seventeenth-century alchemical travel narratives tales conventionally depict young Europeans gaining sage advice from alchemists “from the east.” Arabic texts carried west in the wake of the Crusades were known to be the sources of much alchemical knowledge, as was Kabbala, a mystical Jewish doctrine that was thought to embody knowledge of hidden numerical codes that were the key to biblical secrets.

Winthrop would indeed travel to the Mediterranean soon after his return from the Île de Ré, but the expedition to relieve the great fortress of La Rochelle was given priority, because the military experience it provided would be of use in his family’s projected colony in the New World. The elder John Winthrop had questions about the viability of a stone fortress on the American coast in the face of an attack by Counter-Reformation forces. John Winthrop Jr., on the other hand, would be able to pursue two aspects of his natural-philosophical craft in Buckingham’s service: fortress construction and the manufacture of new sorts of missiles and torpedoes to deliver gunpowder over great distances at sea. Bearing in mind that he subsequently became master of fortifications for the Massachusetts Bay Colony (his first official function), and considering his father’s statement of 1622 that “if your profiting in learning may be answerable it will muche increase my comforte,” it is logical to assume that the two men opted for La Rochelle for two basic reasons: first, to prepare the novice physician-alchemist for the task of supervising the design and construction of the new colony’s fortifications and arsenal as it prepared for the inevitable attack by the armies of the Antichrist; and second, to serve as the elder Winthrop’s eyewitness to international Protestantism’s penultimate line of defense in its “declining days.” God's wrath, the elder Winthrop felt sure, would turn toward England if La Rochelle succumbed.

In the event, this was precisely what happened. On June 27, 1627, John Winthrop Jr. shipped out from Portsmouth for the Bay of Biscay as purser on Rear Admiral
William Hervey’s flagship, the *Due Repulse*, an aging 40-gun warship built in 1596, which was deployed in the armada’s second division, under Captain Thomas Best, the friend and loyal client whom Joshua Downing had recommended. The young purser carried a letter from his father concerning the wisdom of minding one’s tongue and behavior with strangers and in any military action, mailed from London on June 6:

> My Good Sonne, I received your letter from Gravesend, and doe blesse God for your safe arrival there, but I heard not from you since, which I impute to the suddaine departure of your Captaine out of the Downes upon the Dukes cominge thither; but I hope to heare from you soone, for I longe to understande how you fare, and what entertainment you find with your Captaine, that accordingly I may be stirred up to prayer for you and to blesse God for his mercyes towards you. I know not what further advise to give you, than you have already received, and as your owne observation, upon occasion, shall direct you: onely be carefull to seeke the Lorde in the first place, and with all earnestnesse, as he who is onely able to keepe you in all perills and to give you favour in the sight of those, who may be instrumentes of your wellbeing: and account it a great pointe of wisdome to keep diligent watch over your selfe that you may neither be infected by the evill conversation of any that you may be forced to converse with, neither that your owne speeche or behavior be any just occasion to hurte or ensnare you. Be not rashe upon ostentation of valor, to adventure your selfe to unnecessarrye dangers, but if you be lawfully called, lett it appeare that you houlde your life for him, who gave it you, and will preserve it unto the furthest period of his owne holye decree, for you may be resolved, that while you keepe in your waye, all the cannons or enemyes in the worlde shall not be able to shorten your dayes one minute: for my parte, as a father who desires your wellbeing as much as mine owne, I cease not dayle to commende you to God, beseechinge him, to preserve prosper and blesse you, that I may receive you againe in peace, and have assurance of enjoying you in a better life, when your course heer shalbe finished.

Given the younger Winthrop’s penchant for dissimulation and secrecy in public life—including with his father—these Machiavellian words of advice from colonial America’s master of the frontal assault seem to adumbrate a future career of hidden behavior and silence under pressure. Was the elder Winthrop merely acknowledging aspects of his son’s behavior that would prove useful for survival during the siege (as well as in the harsh political and religious warfare in the New World)?

Evidence of Winthrop’s personal habits and comportment toward strangers aboard the *Due Repulse* is unavailable, except to say that his duties as purser were not taxing and that he had plenty of time for what correspondents called his “observations.” He attended faithfully to his duties as military observer and security advisor for his father’s transatlantic Calvinist community. Significantly, during the five months Winthrop spent at sea off the Île de Ré, he was closely associated with Abraham Kuffeler, a Para-
celsian physician-alchemist from Holland who joined the expedition as an explosives expert.21 Kuffler’s task was to develop a “torpedo” to disrupt the French fleet and burst through Richelieu’s blockade at the mouth of the old port.

The Kuffeler family was famous for technological innovation in northern Europe’s artisanal community long before the potential of Abraham’s torpedo drew Buckingham’s attention. The alchemist and inventor Johann Sibertus Kuffeler, Abraham’s brother, was, of the two, most responsible for building the torpedo used at La Rochelle, although Abraham went on the expedition alone. J. S. Kuffeler was initially known for innovations in dyeing techniques pioneered by his father-in-law, the natural philosopher Cornelius Drebbel (d. 1607).22 Following Paracelsus’s credo, Drebbel engaged in dialogue with local tradesmen and devoted his life to returning the favor by coming up with artisanal innovations. The idea for the La Rochelle torpedo probably originated with Drebbel, who had experimented extensively with submarines and torpedoes and other “fireworks” and “pyrotechnics.” The Kuffeler torpedo was partially successful in 1628. The aim was true, but observers saw the timing mechanism ignite the explosives before the torpedo rammed into its target.

The Kuffeler brothers resettled in England in 1628, where they continued to perfect the weapon, apparently with some success. In 1653, J. S. Kuffeler claimed to have “perfected a dreadful Engine for the speedie and effectuall destroying of Shipping in a Moment.” He presented plans for deployment to the Council of State. Samuel Hartlib warned of dire consequences if the new weapon fell into the hands of enemies of religion, however. Pressing Cromwell to secure English control, Hartlib projected “the dreadful effect of this invention to be such as would enable any one nation that would be first master of it, to give the law to other nations.”23 Cromwell witnessed the spectacle of a full trial of the torpedo at Deptford in August 1658. It performed “exceedingly beyond expectation and did a far greater execution than what the petitioner had promised.” Cromwell offered the Kuffelers his patronage, but he died shortly thereafter, and interest in torpedoes faded with the Restoration. Meanwhile, J. S. Kuffeler had his hand blown off while installing a torpedo, underscoring the dangers of using them. Samuel Pepys felt Kuffeler’s torpedoes were too unsafe, and naval gunners dreaded igniting the unstable time fuse before the torpedo was launched.24

In 1628, however, the threat of impending apocalypse overrode such considerations, and Winthrop hoped that the La Rochelle expedition would provide opportunities for testing torpedoes capable of reversing the fortunes of international Protestantism. He not only remained committed to experimentation on the Kuffeler brothers’ project long after the siege but corresponded with the Kuffeler family all his life and visited them in Holland.

However, Winthrop’s best natural-philosophical opportunities at the Île de Ré, where he had a clear view of maneuvers at La Rochelle just to the east, were in obser-
vations of fortress construction and defense against mass assault. A letter survives from the *Due Repulse* reporting the younger Winthrop’s military analysis of the dual sieges of the Île de Ré and La Rochelle. Written to his father and dated September 1627 (a month before the English defeat at the Île de Ré and before the tide turned against La Rochelle), the letter remains an acute, prescient account that expertly balanced the strengths against the weaknesses—and prospects for survival—of both fortresses:

Sir... I wrote unto you the last opportunity which I found by two severall messengers, whether they came to your handes I know not; but yet I doubt not but that you have had so full Intelligence of our proceedings till that tyme that it should be needlesse to write anything thereof. As touching our affairs how you shall understand now thereof, Our army lieth still the most part at St. martins some few Garrisons in other partes of the Iland. The Cittadell [at Saint-Martin-de-Ré] is now Intrenched Round, our trenches come in some places within a stones quoite of the Enemies the centinels on both sides continually playing with their small shotte watching as narrowly as the fouler after a bird how they may come at a shotte the great Ordinance on both sides shoot not so often as they did at first: every day there come some running out of the Castle who bring diverse and uncertaine reportes what they thinke of the tyme it can holde out, but it is thought they had yeilded it up by this tyme had it not been for 3 or 4 boates which in a darke and foule night stole over undiscovered of the shipes but tis thought they could not furnish them with much victuales, and if that be spent there is such order taken that they shall very hardly get any more, for besides the ships which lie there close together, and our boats scoutinge out all night they have made a boome with mastes chained together which lieth crosse that place where they shold go in so that they must needes be foule eyther of the shipes or that. Those boates which gott over were guided by two Dutchmen who Ridinge among our shipes had taken notice of the order of our fleet and the likeliest place they might come by them without discovery. They are now taken and to be executed. We tooke the other night two boates which were goeing to the Castle with victualls some other there were which escaped backe againe. We have now arrived 2400 soldiers out of Ireland, and doe expect a supply of shipes and men out of England when they be come I hope we shall not stay here long after I thinke soone after Michaelmos we shall be at home. The King of France [Louis XIII] hath had an army about Rochell ever since our comminge they are reported to be 12000 men but the town and they were on good termes till the 30 of August and then they began to fall out with some store of great shott on both sides but they feare not the kingses forces so long as our fleet keepe the sea open to them When I had well viewed the towne I marveiled not that it holds out so long siege, for I thinke it almost Im-possible to take it by force if they be not shut up at sea as well as by land.25

Winthrop’s narrative tells the tale of two sieges. After recounting the story of the resupply of Marshal Jean de Toiras’s starving garrison at Saint-Martin, which suc-
ceeded despite a giant floating boom of masts chained together to form a blockade, Winthrop observed that La Rochelle would be “impossible to take by force if they be not shut up at sea as well as by land.” This could not occur, “so long as our fleet keepe the sea open to them,” ensuring a lifeline to the Atlantic. In the end, of course, the English fleet was unable to keep the sea lanes open at Île de Ré, and the royal architect Clément Metezeau’s celebrated dike was built across the open mouth of La Rochelle’s harbor. Unlike Buckingham’s giant boom, this marvel of military engineering was successful, and the fortress was sealed off from the rest of the Protestant world.

After returning from the Île de Ré in early November of 1627, John Winthrop Jr. pursued his interests in natural philosophy and military innovations with vigor, especially as regards fortress design and torpedoes. Yet ultimately, the failure of the most powerful fortress in the world to withstand the siege of a determined and innovative enemy would cause him to reconsider old strategies of stationary fortress defense and turn to stealth and craftsmanship in ways that closely approximated artisanal sûreté. He also planned future alchemical journeys to discover the powerful secrets of the philosopher’s stone and achieve the status of adept.

La Rochelle’s fall was now expected. Thus, the discovery of the philosopher’s stone was essential to the economic and military plans of international Protestantism. Hence, Winthrop renewed his scientific correspondence with Edward Howes as soon as he had settled in again at Groton. Howes’s first letter to Groton was typically obscure. Reference to an alchemical recipe was cloaked in a secret code, one of several the two scientists employed in letters. Here, Paracelsian metaphor was used artfully, with the overall effect to convey joy at Winthrop’s safe return in alchemical terms:

Serenissimo mio Amigo, Yours came to me in serena die the supposed cloudes with soe gentill a gale of wind being driven from the horizon of our Auncient yet not old growing Amity. Your Newes was as welcome, as my thankes is readie to expresse my gratefullnes for givinge cause unto me of new borne, or at least renewed Meditations.

I perceive he whoe trusts most in god and least in man, him will god undoubtedly assist in all his enterprises he that trusts in anything but God, that thinge shall faile him, if not shame him, he that is proud of his knowledge, the simple shall put him to silence . . . let me intreat you to send me an Rx to molify Agyarso [meaning “gas,” in an alternate letter code].

For Howes, Winthrop’s letter announcing his return signaled a bright new Boehmian dawn. The clouds of war having been blown away by “soe gentill a gale of wind”—the breath of the spirit?—the two alchemists were united again, and Howes felt the quickening “of renewed [internal and soulish] Meditations,” on earth’s decline, now hastened by events at the Île de Ré and the crucible of La Rochelle. To “trust most in
God and least in man” was all that was necessary. “Him will God undoubtedly assist in all his enterprises,” Howes assured Winthrop, just as “he that trusts in anything but God [Buckingham?], that thinge shall faile him, if not shame him.” The philosopher’s stone might now at last be found by “the simple” who will “put” the “proud . . . to silence.” The secrets of the prolongation of life—the proverbial fountain of youth—might perhaps soon be revealed.27

These themes were reiterated and ramified one month later, when Winthrop received a similarly cryptic letter from his “very lovinge Frinde.” This time, Howes played the client’s role of the humble supplicant to a powerful alchemical patron, alternately reflecting and then “daylie seeinge my selfe . . . fall a loathinge,” in the constant purity of his master’s God-given inner light. This friend was content to accept the “deformed”—and hence, imperfect—material status of a dependent moon, at once “loving” but incapable of generating its own light from within. As in a Copernican solar system, Howes was “veiled” and sublimated with the “daily” rise of his exalted sun and patron. Howes’s supplication was raised to the level of privileged natural–philosophical discourse, as he chose to “vaile” his words again in the shadow of alchemical metaphor:

Deare Sir, The skillfull est painters some tymes bestowe theire best colours upon deformed Pictures And wisely some Orators to blazon the vices of some Catliffe speaketh of the contrarie vertues; Soe you (according to your gentle nature) have provided a vaile to cover my deformitie; that I daylie seeinge my selfe through it, may thereby appeare the more deformed and soe seeinge, fall a loathinge, and then (by divine assistance) leaving my deformitie, become conformed to what you would have me, Even to a conformitie of mynd and manners which as yet I am farre shorte of, though my study be for such perfection. It hath pleased you to conceive better of me than ever I could of myself Yea doe for me more than ever I would have done for my selfe which maketh my love (which you call frindsheipe) a duty ever vowed to you. I love to write playnely for I knowe it pleaseth you, and to displease you, if it weare possible I might I could not. As for the universitie . . . of what neede you be a scholler there, where of you are president, I being but a sophisticall studiuent studie as I am bound to give accompte of my tyme come when you will, I shall be fitted with a plus ultra or something meane while I meane to make hollyday nowe and then when I can but find a holy hower to praye for our prosperous proceedings which God graunt to his glorye and our conforte Amen.

And in a postscript, Howes added; “And all such things as are either secret, or manifest: them I knowe” (Wisd. of Sol. 7:21).28

Ambiguity was used by natural philosophers to control the diffusion of sacred knowledge, and Howes was a masterful inventor of anagrams and other tools of linguistic mystification. Yet he acknowledges in his letter how this practice “displeases” his correspondent. Most of these metaphors conform to ideas and practices widely un-
derstood by early modern “chymists” such as Winthrop, whom Howes first compares to “the skillfullest paynter,” arguably a figure for the Genesis God. When the author “speaketh of contrarie vertues,” it is reasonable to assume that he was representing the conjunction of microcosm and macrocosm (and, by Neoplatonic analogy “downward,” of spirit and matter); so too with “leaving my deformitie, become conformed to what you would have me” (the alchemist’s purification of “deformed” or fallen matter, which thereby achieves a perfect state of being and light); the “conformitie of mynd and manners” (the adept’s synthesis of theory and practice); and “a plus ultra or sometingle meane . . . pray for our prosperous proceedings which God graunt to his glorye” (implicit acknowledgement of linkage between Winthrop [qua sun] and Howes [qua moon]). This relation infers a symbiotic cosmic quest to discover the philosopher’s stone, the holy grail of alchemists; a universal elixir of purification and infinite reproduction that could transmute all things into its own substance. As such, the stone was Christ: a gift from God of the spiritual made material to “simple” men who, like the incarnate Son (also “sun”) himself, was simultaneously exalted (spiritual: “plus ultra”) and banal (material: “sometingle meane”).

Howes was an elusive figure who moved through the lower levels of London’s natural-philosophical circles with relative anonymity. He was known in the city’s libraries and laboratories because of his association with the Downing family, or as a supplier of new scientific books and laboratory instruments, not for his own accomplishments. Scholarship concerning Howes’s minor contribution to the history of science is as invisible as he represented himself to be in the letter to Winthrop. Still, he has received passing attention from historians of seventeenth-century New England. Howes is remembered as Emmanuel Downing’s law clerk and usually trivialized as a singular individual with bizarre intellectual tastes. Thus he is portrayed as a mystical interloper among the sober, rational, and orthodox Winthrops. In effect, he has been depicted as a slightly disrespectful playmate until the governor’s son overcame his personality defect and matured enough to leave childish things behind.

Howes’s letters nonetheless chronicle decades of scientific friendship with the younger Winthrop. He was Howes’s most influential patron in the New World, and Howes remained Winthrop’s lifeline to the main publishing centers and booksellers in London and Frankfurt. This epistolary link was important to Howes for many reasons, but the key connection between the two men would be the search for the philosopher’s stone in the Long Island Sound region and New Netherlands. Howes did not emigrate in the end. This decision was influenced by the changed context in England during the interregnum (when Winthrop himself nearly returned to London) and because Howes was finally able to support himself by teaching. Howes also expressed reservations and anxieties about reports of social repression and religious intolerance in Massachusetts. These fears, combined with his patron’s failure to secure a firm eco-
conomic foothold in America and to find the philosopher’s stone, despite his formidable hermetic skills, undoubtedly played a large role in Howes’s thinking.

By 1644, Howes had left the Downing household to become master at the Ratcliffe Free School in London. He adapted the school’s classical and scholastic pedagogy to the new Paracelsian medical and alchemic tradition. Charles Webster has shown that this program was conducive to the English Calvinist program, when its practitioners domesticated its mystical and occult origins by suppressing them in public. If his letters to Winthrop are indicative, the practice of secrecy was a consuming aspect of Howes’s everyday life. Not much more about the younger Winthrop’s secretive protégé is known, except for one nineteenth-century reference to Howes having entered “holy orders.” Howes’s mystical and Neoplatonic reputation suggests membership in the Rosicrucian brotherhood, and there is plenty of evidence to support the claim that both Winthrop and Howes were at the very least engaged by the promise of this occult society.

An obscure letter of August 1635 showed the intensity of this mutual interest, which was not so arcane among scientists. Howes wrote Winthrop at Ipswich that “I have bin 2 or 3 times since with the Dr. and can get but small satisfaccon about your queries.” The “Dr.” remained unnamed, presumably for reasons of security. Howes continued in a furtive tone, to suggest that his metaphorical informant was associated with the Rosicrucians (“the fratres scientiae”):

I doubt he hath some prejudicate conceipt of one of us, or both; yet I must confesse he seemed verie free to me, only in the maine he was misticall. This he said[:] that when the will of God is you shall knowe what you desire, it will come with such a light, that it will make a harmonie among all your authors, causing them sweetly to agree, and putt you for ever out of doubt and question. To discerne the fratres scientiae I cannot as yet learn of him.30

Perhaps Winthrop sought to discern members of the brotherhood as a means of achieving insight into the “harmonie” (or metaphysical unity of knowledge), to link the fragmented knowledge contained in all the natural-philosophical texts in his library (“amonge all your authors”), but the doctor’s main insight was obscure and “mist-icall.” Harmony would “come” when the “light” of God’s “will” unified macrocosm and microcosm. Howes encountered Rosicrucianism early in his career and, like the younger Winthrop, took it very seriously, as many early modern natural philosophers did, although his occult interests did not prevent him from serving as Calvinist rector of Goldanger in Essex in 1659.31 Although theoretical mathematics—mostly universalist and Neoplatonic in nature—played an important role in Howes’s correspondence with Winthrop, Howes’s only known book, A Short Arithmetick, was a primer that elicited no comment in mathematical circles.32
Wisdom on the Margins

Like Palissy’s, Howes’s Paracelsian Neoplatonism was harnessed to religious violence. This was certainly the context of the letter of January 22, 1627, coming as it did only two months after Winthrop’s return from the Île de Ré, now that the final, catastrophic outcome was in view. To give formal shape to apocalyptic themes of personal security under assault, Howes provided Winthrop with a parting fragment of marginalia (fig. 10.1)—in effect, a pictorial commentary on the letter’s written text—that purported to contain an illuminist’s insight into the cosmological meaning of Winthrop’s recent experience at La Rochelle, with a postscript: “And all such things as are either secret, or manifest: them I knowe.” This is Howes’s translation of Wisdom of Solomon 7:21, an apocryphal text written ca. 30 B.C. by the exiled Hellenistic Jew Philo of Alexandria. Chapter 7 of the Wisdom of Solomon is devoted to the relationship between divine

**Figure 10.1.** Edward Howes, marginalia in a letter to John Winthrop Jr., London, January 22, 1627. Winthrop Family Papers. Courtesy Massachusetts Historical Society.
wisdom and the human—or microcosmic—sciences and crafts. This was another key text in formulating the early modern natural-philosophical analogy of macrocosm and microcosm. It is also thought by some philologists to show the earliest use of the word “craftsmanship” (ergateia), in Greek (although it should be said that ergateia more generally means labor, work, or handicraft). Wisdom—like the earth, a feminine “artificer of all”—is God’s beautiful handmaiden and the divine messenger between microcosm and macrocosm. She is the carrier of Adamic knowledge of the prelapsarian natural world, master of the skills of artisanal replication of Nature’s hidden forms and processes. Wisdom is thus a fundamental text for the fusion of Neoplatonic and Paracelsian alchemy, with the universal soul as intermediary between God and man as the artisan and the physician-alchemist. Solomon (like Palissy) was taught by God through Wisdom to master the microcosmic crafts: the full range of secret skills belonging to the natural philosopher. These included, above all else, the alchemist’s prophetic knowledge and visual perception of “the structure of the universe and the operation of the elements; / the beginning, and end, and middle of times”:

God grant that I speak in accord with his wish,
and conceive thoughts worthy of his gifts,
for he himself is both the guide of Wisdom
and corrector of the wise.
Both we and our words are in his hands,
as well as all understanding and craftsmanship.
For it was he who gave me unerring knowledge of existent
being,
to know the structure of the universe and the operation of
the elements;
the beginning, and end, and middle of times,
the changes of the solstices and the vicissitudes of the
seasons;
the cycles of years and the positions of the stars;
the natures of living creatures and the tempers of beasts;
the violent force of spirits and the reasonings of men;
the species of plants, and the virtues of roots.
I learned both what is hidden and what is manifest,
for Wisdom, the artificer of all, taught me.33

Apropos of Philo’s ambiguous status as an exile from both the land of Israel and Judaism (because of his immersion in Hellenistic natural philosophy), David Winston has constructed a narrative of Philo’s context and personal experience that has much in common with Winthrop’s and Palissy’s narratives of the war years. As “an un-
abashed Platonist,” Winston writes, Philo was concerned with “the hidden meaning which appeals to the few who study soul characteristics, rather than boldly forms.”

At the end of his letter to Winthrop, after the postscript, Howes for his part represented a soulish presence who alone comprehended the hidden meaning of the seemingly incomprehensible sacrifice of the sacred fortress with a Stoic aphorism, which may have been a crude adaptation from Deuteronomy (11:26) or a Ciceronian source: “Dic—Quid lex est illi qui sibi lex est, / Lex mihi Onus et Honus”; “It is said—The law is a thing unto itself, / But for myself the law is both a burden and an honor.”

Appeal to the primacy of the hidden world was not merely a decontextualized intellectual project; rather, knowledge and ambiguous elucidation of “what is hidden and what is manifest” were inextricably linked to Philo’s liminal religious, social, and political status within and outside of his own cultural community and its hosts:

His mode of exposition is characterized by a deliberate ambiguity, which allowed him to cover his tracks when the philosophical views he adopted would have struck the wider Jewish audience he was addressing as essentially alien to their native ways of thinking. I find nothing dishonest nor any lack of integrity in this studied use of ambiguity, but only Philo’s assured conviction that simple faith is for the simple and philosophical faith is for the philosophical.

At the moment of millennial reversal, however, the need for ambiguity would disappear, as would separate nations; a new universal society of the soul would destroy nationalism, war, and the obscuring boundaries between faiths, and a “patrician lineage” of adepts, often hidden invisibly in quotidian occupations and waiting since primitive times, would arise and lead the skillful weak to victory with God’s help:

In response to the divine chastisements visited upon them, the people will repent and make a full confession of their sins. Their conversion in a body to virtue will strike their masters with amazement, who, ashamed to rule over their superiors, will set them free from their captivity. With one impulse they will hasten from their areas of dispersion to one assigned place, guided by a vision divine and superhuman, though invisible to others. Their ruined cities will be rebuilt, the barren land will be rendered fruitful, and they will have wealth so copious it will make that of their progenitors seem negligible by comparison. There will be a sudden reversal of all things. God will turn curses against the enemies who had exulted over their failures, not realizing they were but pawns in the hands of God who had employed them for the admonition of his people. When they begin to receive the wages of their cruelty, they will find that they had wronged not the obscure and inconsequential but men of patrician lineage who had retained the sparks of their noble birth. [Hence,] Philo’s denationalizing and psychologizing tendency . . . refer[s] to the rule of the wise generally, and universal peace . . . [and] appears only as a consequence of
a more important good, man’s inner peace of soul . . . God is designated by Philo not as
the God of Israel, but of all people . . . Philo’s messianic vision . . . reveal[s] the inner ten-
sions in his thought between nationalism and universalism, the mystical and the this-
worldly . . . when Philo is justly described as “a man between two worlds,” the metaphor
needs to be understood in a double sense, for not only does he join Athens with Jerusalem,
but also the supernal, celestial Jerusalem with its lower, terrestrial image.37

Surely, this utopian society brought into being by the sacred conjunction of violence
and wisdom, and elucidated by an exiled Jew caught “between two worlds” in the
metaphorical “double sense” was also an elucidation of Winthrop’s experience at the
Île de Ré as he pondered the situation of two opposing fortresses, and of Palissy’s at
Saintes, La Rochelle, and later Paris.

In the margin of his letter to Winthrop, Howes drew a hermetic hieroglyph cap-
tioned “Mysterium” (fig. 10.1), beneath which he wrote: “The fyre cannot destroye
whats written in the Harte,” a motto that both echoed these resonances with Philo and
paid homage to Francis Bacon’s great utopian fragment The New Atlantis (1626), pub-
lished after Bacon’s death but just a year before Howes’s letter to Winthrop. This es-
say exerted a profound influence on Calvinist leaders as they pondered colonization
and looked through the books of Elizabethan projectors. The New Atlantis described
the operation of a universal scientific laboratory on Philo’s pansophic model, a con-
nection made clear by Bacon’s choice of “Solomon’s House” as its name. We read that
Solomon’s House served the “harmonious and devout society” of Bensalem, island
refuge of “a Christian people, full of piety and humanity.” Charles Webster says of The
New Atlantis:

This island was situated off the coast of America and Bacon’s vision of a perfect society
was undoubtedly influenced by the imaginative and optimistic accounts of America and
the Islands of the West Indies published by Hakluyt, Ralegh and Harriot, or even by the
stream of propaganda on the wonders of the New World issued by the promoters of the
Virginia Company between 1606 and 1624. Bacon himself devoted one of his Essays to
the subject “Of Plantations” and took an active interest in schemes for the plantation of
Ireland, Virginia and Newfoundland.38

Howe’s hieroglyph is a crude freehand ink drawing of a circle encompassing a
square within an equilateral triangle with angles pointing east, west, and south. Inside
are fragments of deliberately obscure, abbreviated text, that defy anything more cer-
tain than a provisional translation. Fortunately, however, all possible interpretations
seem close enough in meaning to proceed on fairly secure ground. The arched space
between the “bottom” of the upside-down triangle—at the uppermost (“north”) sec-
tion of the circle—(meant to signify the white space all around the triangle) contains
the “Mysterium,” or “Religious Rites,” connoting rites of initiation or secrets of the adepts that cannot be divulged. Inside this shaky triangle Howes sketched what he clearly intended to be an aggregate of four more equilateral triangles. Two of these intersect at points on the circumference of the circle—“christus et lapis” (west), and “via ad Indes et Indes” (east)—but taken together their inner and outer angles are all roughly directed toward the four main compass points. As a result, the centrifugal triangles are congruent, and though aimed in opposing directions, form the basis for a hermetic puzzle centered around the phrase “una clamis ad omnia” (“one cloak for all things”). This linked Howes with Winthrop in a grand hermetic project in which they worked together secretly toward a single Neoplatonic solution for all God’s answers hidden in Nature. This interpretation is supported by the form of Howes’s hieroglyph, which may be seen in the depiction of “Mercuri Philosphorum” from Samuel Norton’s Alchymiae complementum of 1630 (fig. 8.19) that itself may have derived from a plate depicting “Alchemy and Geometry” in Atalanta fugiens, Michael Maier’s Rosicrucian manifesto of 1618, which was available to Howes when he wrote the letter.

The mystical mathematician in Howes had composed an axiometric pictograph intended to be deciphered from a God’s-eye view. This perception, of course, was privately joined with that of his privileged reader (Winthrop)—already deified by analogy with the “skillfullest painter” in the text of the letter—as he gazed down at the image on the page from above. Meditating upon this image, Winthrop saw that if the triangles were folded together as a three dimensional unity, (like origami), the image would then be transformed, on the outside, into a blank paper pyramid—with a square on the inside composed of two more triangles—pointing up from a vanishing point at the center of the sacred circle. Thus, simultaneously, it also pointed up, at Winthrop, now secretly singled out by Howes and identified as an adept whose authentic place was with God in the tiny, nearly imperceptible middle of the sacred circle. The role of the adept was therefore to reach down and open up this Trinitarian enigma like a flower (a Rosicrucian rose?)—here, the “Mysterium” of Nature (mysterium also connotes a puzzle)—to search its hidden interior for the key to unifying dispersed humanity under “one cloak.” This was accomplished by reading the “light” in the ancient texts of Nature that only he was privileged to see inscribed beneath the surface. One is reminded instantly of “In patientia sauvitas,” where “the fire” of the siege of La Rochelle is perceived as freeing the purity hidden beneath the ravaged surface, while a rosy cross grows out of the top of the Huguenot Mt. Zion.

Howes optimistically represented this task to Winthrop as a fait accompli (fig. 10.2); after all, his loving friend had already “gently” opened the petals of this sacred flower to reveal a Paracelsian seed at the base of its deepest receptacle—the pyramid’s foundation—to read “una clamis ad omnia” (“one cloak for all things”). In this instance, the secret combination unified the three other spiritually seeking triangular depend-
encies surrounding it in the “Mysterium.” Howes represented the upper left (west) triangle as the philosopher’s stone (“Christ and the Stone”). This was linked inextricably to the upper right (east) triangle (“The Way to the Indies and the Indies”) by the secret combination to unite all things, such that the East and West Indies—and the insurmountable distance between Eastern and Western hemispheres—are finally unified by the replicating power of the spirit in the stone. The south triangle, “quadratur cli Perpet-[uatio] motus” (“The squaring of the circle lies in the perpetuity of motion”), having a downward motion, is also made to point north simultaneously, harnessed to the upwardly pointing unity of macrocosm and microcosm with Winthrop as the chosen intermediary. This makes sense for three reasons. In the simplest mathematical terms, the quadrature refers to the act of squaring; in this instance something

Figure 10.2. Reconstruction and translation of drawing in figure 10.1. The abbreviation “cli” has been translated as the genitive circuli; “perpet-” has been completed as the nominative perpet[uatio].
akin to the Vitruvian squaring of the circle, inasmuch as the two central triangles form a square. In sacred and hermetic terms, the quadrature was generally analogous to God’s heavenly geometry; His empyreal vault in the sky, as opposed to fallen man’s orbicular world. As such, alchemists referred to the existence of a gnostic square and the monistic unification of the macrocosm and the microcosm might then be represented geometrically as the circle squared. In astronomical terms, it can also mean the conjunction of two heavenly bodies within the quadrature (when they are ninety degrees apart), as in horoscopes of the period. Howes may thus refer to the “perpetual” conjunction of the sun (Winthrop) and moon (Howes) in God’s sacred cosmology. This fortuitous arrangement is also inferred by Wisdom of Solomon 7:18–19, in which “the positions of the stars” are underscored. Linking the north and south triangles then, is an alchemic figure for the conjunction of the macrocosm and microcosm, which come together in the spiritual and material experience of the adept—in this instance, Winthrop himself.

The image guaranteed Winthrop the faithful service of his dependent moon (Howes), no matter where he traveled on the geographical plane; that is to say, after he went west to the colonies. Just as they moved in conjunction under “one cloak for all things,” so too the quadrature of Christ (also the cloak of heaven) would square the circle “in the perpetuity of motion” after the sun departed, wherever Winthrop traveled, collapsing the historical fiction of time and space between them. After all, the Copernican sun—as in Winthrop’s chair—was always at the heart of the animate and spinning cosmos. To square the circle perpetually in history meant that Winthrop himself was the American capable of creating a permanent, active synthesis of macrocosm and microcosm on earth through his own connection to the celestial body and the discovery of Christ’s philosopher’s stone.

The three keys, then, to understanding this pictograph for Howes and Winthrop and their agenda for security in the wake of La Rochelle lay in the alchemic quest for the philosopher’s stone, which Howes implies was harnessed to the to the discovery of the Northwest Passage in America; the affinity of this quest to the influential physician–alchemist Robert Fludd’s theories of the “Fortress of Health” and its “enemies”; and the relation of all this to the inscription underneath, which reads “The Fyre Cannot Destroye Whats Written in the Harte.” Therein lies the final piece of the puzzle. Other forms of Howes’s pictograph, such as Norton’s and Maier’s, invariably depict the upturned macrocosmic triangle representing elemental fire and air. Howes inverts this convention and replaces it with the microcosmic water and earth, suggesting that the destructive fire has been mastered and sublimated by Winthrop’s heart and that the story written inside this bodily container of his soul will be revealed where earth and water meet.
Howes’ puzzle tells us that to unify “Christ and the Stone” the alchemic voyager must travel “The Way to the Indies and the Indies.” This meant to acquire the stone, John Winthrop Jr. was poised to find the legendary Northwest Passage and with it the East Indies itself. It is unclear which comes first—the passage or the stone—but the implication is one of simultaneity and clearly one cannot be discovered without the other. Thus, Winthrop was himself set in perpetual motion, having been presented with three choices in 1627–28 after returning from Île de Ré: go back to the university to find the key to the stone there in his books and the laboratory; go immediately to America to gain experience and begin his exploration for the Northwest Passage; or, set off for the Mediterranean (the east), as he had initially intended to do before the Île de Ré expedition intervened. Howes, in his letter of January 22, prescribed the stance of the Paracelsian, when he writes: “As for the university . . . of what neede you be a scholler there, where of you are president.” Winthrop had apparently floated the idea to Howes, who advised rejection of Trinity College, Dublin, or Cambridge, in favor of the school of experience.

Winthrop’s final decision to opt for the latter is indicated by another revealing letter from his clever brother Forth, written from Cambridge sometime in late 1627 or 1628. Forth’s letter is a sort of personal allegory contrasting scholasticism and Paracelsism, as if “brothers educated by different mothers.” To emphasize his role as family scholastic, Forth wrote in Latin:

We are brothers (beloved brother); and yet, what may seem strange, brought up and educated by different mothers and in different soils, it happens that from our different discipline we have derived different habits, and pursue a different kind of life. I, indeed, an alumnus of Cambridge, my alma mater—if I may deserve that title—cling to her beloved halls and chapels, to her sacred precepts of the Muses, and to her illustrious fountains of learning, with so much ardor and affection, and admire them all so greatly, that, there amid the divine abodes of philosophers, I have decided to search out and unravel the secrets which Nature still holds in her silent bosom, to penetrate the labyrinths of philosophy and the obscure sources of sacred letters, even as an astrologer observes the motions of the stars, as the husbandman the plants of the earth, as Oedipus his knotty enigmas, or as an infant clings to the mother’s breast. . . . When, however, I enter on a longer journey than you have undertaken, it is only among my books; where in a little space of time I can sail to Constantinople, and even reach the Indies with a dry foot. . . . Here I am fixed, and such is the fortune of my life. But you, nourished on a foreign soil, your country left behind, are laboring with the desire of seeing unknown lands, and of beholding strange cus-
toms; and so go on with a fortunate foot, and may God be your guide among the rocks of
the ocean. To him fly as to an asylum and the sacred anchor of your safety... who is he
Way, the Life, and the Truth to all who make him their refuge. Farewell.43

Both John and Forth were sons of Mary Forth, first wife of the elder John Win-
throp. But Mary died when Forth was only two years of age, after which their father
remarried, and hence they had been “brought up and educated by different mothers.”
But this was also a metaphor for different paths taken. Forth recognized the signifi-
cance of John’s leaving England for Trinity College, Dublin, while he himself ma-
triculated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. For Forth, his brother had followed a
wanderer’s career from the start. With Paracelsus as his model, John had been edu-
cated “on different soils.” This referred not only to Trinity but also the expedition to
the Île de Ré and La Rochelle, to which Forth gestured, “may God be your guide
among the rocks of the ocean.” John was thus freed from the ancient constraints of
scholasticism: “you, nourished on a foreign soil, your country left behind, are laboring
with the desire of seeing unknown lands, and of beholding strange customs; and so go
on with a fortunate foot.” Forth would stay among “the Muses” at Cambridge, fol-
lowing his older brother’s calling without leaving the library. Forth may have felt phys-
ically weakened when this letter was written—too weak to join his brother on an al-
chemical journey except in the mind—he was to die just two years later. “Here I am
fixed,” said this mind traveler, “and such is the fortune of my life.”

Having decided on the philosophical school of experience in the natural world—
of “the fortunate foot”—John Winthrop Jr. thought first about America, but plans for
the New England Company were hardly in the formative stages, and his father was
uncertain about the timing. “For your Journey entended,” the elder Winthrop wrote
in April 1628, “seeinge you have a resolution to goe to sea I know not where you should
go with such a religious company and under such hope of blessinge, onely I am loth
you should thinke of settling there, as yet, but to be goinge and cominge awhile and
afterward to doe as god shall offer occasion.”44

As the time was not yet right for “settling” in the west, the younger Winthrop voy-
aged first to the east, where he resumed searching for the stone in the Mediterranean.
By June 1628, with Downing’s help, he signed on with the merchant ship London (again
as purser), and headed for the Levant. The London’s first port of call was Leghorn
(Livorno), in Tuscany. Winthrop visited Pisa and Florence, where he did not wish to
spend time viewing art and architecture but in exploring botanical gardens; these mar-
vels—the Italian grottoes of Palissy’s artisanal passion—were also famous outdoor
natural-philosophical laboratories of man’s dominion over the elements of nature.
From there, the London continued east to Constantinople, where Winthrop consid-
ered voyaging on to Jerusalem. Money problems and interesting travel companions
encouraged him to remain on board the London, however, as the vessel doubled back, then sailed up the Adriatic for Venice, the most pluralistic and heterodox city in the Catholic Mediterranean. Finally, Winthrop set sail for London in July 1629, but unfavorable winds in the English Channel forced a quick detour to Amsterdam, and he was unable to return home until August.\textsuperscript{45}

As one might expect from a seeker in quest of the arcane and secret knowledge of eastern alchemy, Winthrop wanted to meet other like-minded friends. One of those Winthrop met on his travels was the Dutch linguist and natural philosopher Jacobus Golius (1596–1667), who gave him access to a formidable collection of Arabic and Persian manuscripts that he had collected on journeys through the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{46} Winthrop met Golius in Constantinople, and they traveled together to Venice on the London, after which they remained correspondents.

The other preoccupation on the Mediterranean voyage was Richelieu and the army of Louis XIII, whose progress Winthrop seems to have followed. After the fall of La Rochelle, Richelieu and the king led this powerful army of 35,000 foot soldiers and 3,000 cavalry into Italy. They entered the War of the Mantuan Succession against the Hapsburgs in support of the Bourbon candidate for the duchy of Mantua (Charles de Nevers), a settlement to which was reached between France and Savoy on March 11, 1629.\textsuperscript{47} Winthrop sent two letters from Venice on March 9 and 28 with his observations, again as a military authority.\textsuperscript{48} Hence, Winthrop was present to report on Richelieu’s two greatest military thrusts of the 1620s, in which he moved huge armies great distances to engage in foreign actions. This was precisely the sort of offensive program that the leaders of international Protestantism expected from absolutism and the Counter-Reformation, and Winthrop continued to formulate his post–La Rochelle defensive strategies in advance of American colonization.

Meanwhile, the elder Winthrop’s plans for colonization finally crystallized with the emergence of the New England Company in 1629. And on August 21, 1629, having just returned from the Mediterranean, his oldest son announced an end to his traveling in a famous letter that has been quoted so often that it has become almost invisible:

For the business of N[ew] E[ngland] I can say no other thing but that I beleve confidently that the whole disposition thereof is of the lord who disposeth all alterations by his blessed will to his owne glory and the good of his, and therefore doe assure my selfe that all thinges shall worke together for the best therein, and for myselfe I have seene so much of the vanity of the world that I esteeme noe more of the diversities of Countries then as so many Innes, whereof the travailer, that hath lodged in the best, or in the worst, findeth no difference when he commeth to his Journies end, and I shall call that my crountrie where I may most glorify God and enjoy the presence of my dearest friends, therefore herein I submit myself to Godes wil, and yours, and with your leave doe dedicate my selfe
On one level, if read conventionally, John Winthrop Jr. is offering a variation on the time-honored theme of telling the old man what he wants to hear—that the wandering (if not prodigal) son has finally returned and is willing to come to heel.

But given what we know about the natural-philosophical context of this letter, it may be read as an alchemical narrative as well. While the younger Winthrop frames his letter as the kind of conventional pilgrimage his father might expect in this context, I think this begs the question: what does the oblique Winthrop mean by the seemingly innocuous statement that “I shall call that my Countrie where I may most glorify God and enjoy the presence of my dearest friends, therefore herein I submit myselfe to Godes wil, and yours”? The answer lies in Winthrop’s very specific perception of what it meant to “submit myselfe” to the will of God. Following his correspondence with Howes—and indeed the focus and experience of his life to that point—this meant Winthrop’s aspiration to the status of adept through the spiritual practice of the Paracelsian physician-alchemist, whose ultimate quest was the philosopher’s stone. Howes meant precisely this in his letter of January 22, 1627, writing that he must “finde a holy hower to praye for our prosperous proceedings which God graunt to his glorye and our comforte.” This was no mere catechistic closing, as Palissy has shown, but an essential opening up of the alchemist to the Holy Spirit. Yet the younger Winthrop also desired to submit to his father’s will (“and yours”), hence the appeal for God’s favor would have been understood from the father’s authoritarian perspective, quite different from the son’s. Having to submit to both God and his father meant the use of a discourse of double meanings for common religious and social language.

If different perceptions between father and son of the meaning of God’s will may be called into question, what was the identity of “my dearest friends”? The assumption has always been the Calvinist community that joined together to form the New England Company and the Winthrop family and friendship network in America. It is logical to assume that this was the way the elder Winthrop would have been expected to read the word “friendship” by his son; that is to say, through his own narrow vision. But we have already seen how the younger Winthrop was building an international network of correspondence and patronage with natural-philosophical friends. When Howes wrote Winthrop about “our friends,” this was what he meant.

What, then, does one make of the correspondence where Howes associates instruments in his alchemic laboratory, and even scientific books, with the word “friendship”? Consider, that for all Winthrop’s talk about his desire to “enjoy the presence of my dearest friends,” he spent as little time as possible in the presence of anyone he knew in New England. Almost from the moment he arrived in Boston, the younger
Winthrop followed the same pattern of personal geographical and physical isolation as he had in Europe. In the Old World, he traveled north from England to Dublin, then south to the siege of La Rochelle, then briefly to England again, then south to the Mediterranean, and then went to America. In New England, he spent little time as commissioner of fortifications in Boston before moving north to Essex County, where he set up the Saugus ironworks and tried to harvest salt in pans like the ones Palissy described being used in the marshes of Saintonge. Then, after several exploratory searches to the Connecticut Valley—during which time he went back and forth between Ipswich, Boston, and Connecticut—and the decisive moment of the death of his father in 1649 (which allowed him to move far from Boston), John Winthrop Jr. settled permanently on the Connecticut side of Long Island Sound, his Mediterranean, on the border of the pluralistic New Netherlands.

Even before this, Winthrop had again become very hard for correspondents to find. Many were forced to address their letters to “somewhere in New England.” In 1650, having moved south to the Long Island Sound basin, Winthrop received a letter from Dr. Robert Child, a natural philosopher exiled from Massachusetts, detailing Child's opinions of available books by four prominent Paracelsians (von Helmont, Glauber, Rulingius, and Harvey). Child, following Winthrop’s early experience, planned to settle in Ireland. He did not expect to return to New England, where the oligarchy alienated him “by their discourtesye,” but “if they would returne me my fine, I would adventure it with you.” Still, “at Kilkenny a new Academy is to be Erected,” he reported hopefully, or failing that, “I shall retreat to a more solitary life, as I can Com-maund my selfe, with 6 or 7 gentlemen and scollars, who have resolved to live retyredly and follow their studyes and Experiences, if these troublesome times molest not.”

Child knew that Winthrop had, from the start, begun his retreat to a more solitary life in which he too resolved to live in seclusion and follow his studies and experiences. Now the long waits between his letters made Child “suppose you are to your Planta-cion, out of the way” of the infamous religious and cultural intolerance that so disturbed the younger Winthrop and his moderate friends, the latitudinarian scientists Howes and Child. In such a solitary life, Winthrop included among his “friends” the books in his alchemical library and his laboratory apparatus, as well as all the correspondents from his inclusive transatlantic scientific network. “Commaund me Sr. if I Can serve you,” Child signed, “for truly I am Your loving frind.”

Alchemical friendship was quietistic, bound by a loving soul, ramified by common natural-philosophical languages found in the Bible, experience in Nature and with natural materials in the laboratory, and knowledge available in the infinitely portable book. When John Winthrop Jr. wrote carefully to his father on the eve of colonization that “all things shall worke together for the best therein, and for my selfe I have scene so much of the vanity of the world that I esteeme no more of the diversities of
Countries then as so many Innes . . . the traveller, that hath lodged in the best, or in the worst, findeth noe difference,” that is precisely what he meant. In his Paracelsian pilgrimage, he thought he had discovered clues to knowledge of the philosopher’s stone, which would enable him to burn off the corruption of “the diversities of Countries” and unveil from beneath the dross the universal spiritual force that would unify mankind. That is why the “travailer” (a fusion of “laborer” and “traveler”) who had “lodged in the best” (pure spirit) “or in the worst” (corrupted matter) “findeth no difference when he commeth to his Journies end.” At that final millennial moment, refined prematurely in the alchemist’s fire, all social as well as material difference would dissolve under “one cloak for all things” through action by the universal elixir, which—like the soul itself—transmuted all things to its own substance in time. As the father built barriers that led to the forceful exclusion of “innovation” and “difference” from the body of Christ in New England, his peripatetic son moved south and settled on the borderlands of the middle colonies, “out of the way,” to a place of hybrid openings where he could exploit his knowledge.

Thus, with Winthrop’s emigration to America, we return at last to unresolved problems in Howes’s pictograph: the link between the philosopher’s stone and the Northwest Passage in the colonies; the influence of Robert Fludd on the puzzle’s formal arrangement and Edward Howes’s coded messages to Winthrop; and, by extension, the part Winthrop’s experience at the Île de Ré and La Rochelle played in the correspondents’ view of their natural-philosophical “proceedings.” How did the “Île of Rue” figure in Howes’s prophetic epigram: “The fyre cannot destroye whats written in the Harte?”

On March 26, 1632, Howes wrote implicitly of their continuing mutual interest in the Northwest Passage, hoping the letter carrier would find “his worthy frind Mr. John Winthrop the yonger at Boston in Mattachusetts Bay or else where these deliver in N: England.”53 Clearly, Winthrop was searching, and on the move again:

I thought good to entreate you to acquaint me with some particulars of your Countrie; vizt. howe farre into the Countrie your planters have discovered, 2 what rivers, Lakes, or saltwaters westward, 3 howe farre you are from Hudsons River and from Canada by land, 4 what are the most useful commodities to send over to traffick with Th[e]Indians, or among your selves; 5 what kind of English graine thrives with you and what not; and what other thinge you please; daringe not to trespass any farther on your gentle disposition, only be pleased to send a map or some discription of your land discoveries. For you know well the cause of my desire to know New England and all the new world, and alsoe to be knowe there, yet not I but Christ, in whom I live and move and have my beinge [my emphasis].54
In a letter dated November 23, 1632, their tacit understanding was made fully explicit by Howes, through his gift of a book:

You would wonder what discoragements the devill putts in most mens mouths against your plantations, some that you are all comming home, others that you are all gone or going for Virginia. For my parte I shall and will by gods leave endeavuour towards you and the work; . . . here inclosed you shall find a booke of the probabilities of the N: West passage, not in the 60 or 70 degree of N: latitude, but rather about the 40th. I sore suspect the Hollanders will have the glory and benifiitt of the passage about Hudsons R[iver] yet God the Author and Finisher of all good works will (I believe) that all shalbe for the good of his Saints. I heare the french have this summer transported a company of priests and Jesuits and such vermine to Canada; but how longe they will staye there, it is a question. I conceive the land too cold for there hott natures.55

The book to which Howes referred was Sir Dudley Digges’s Of the Circumference of the Earth, or, A Treatise of the Northeast Passage (London, 1612). The title is known because it survives in the collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society with some other books of Winthrop’s. According to Digges, the passage would not be found at a forbidding 60 or 70 degrees north, which would put it at the northern reaches of Hudson’s Bay. Rather, Winthrop should explore the fortieth parallel, which ran directly through New Amsterdam and the Hudson River to the west. The context of Howes’s letter—the rumors that the Massachusetts Bay settlers were moving to Virginia or soon would return home to England; the proximity of the Dutch (“I sore suspect the Hollanders will have the glory and benifiitt of the passage”); the Counter-Reformation threat to the security of the passage from the influx of Jesuits and other “such vermine” in New France—seems to suggest that in order to protect the interests of “God . . . and his Saints,” Winthrop should remove to the region of New Netherlands, find the passage, and thereby immediately discover both the Indies and the secret of the stone.

Howes’s inscription in the copy of Digges’s Of the Circumference of the Earth he sent Winthrop made this new map of America’s mystical geography clear. To begin with, Howes altered the title page itself, changing “Northeast” to “Northwest.” Then, to underscore the urgency of this project, Howes changed the date in the imprint from “1612,” to the current year, “1632.” But it was Howes’s inscription to Winthrop on the verso of the gift’s title page that told the whole story:

Happie thrice happie should I be if this little treatise should add any thinge to your knowledge, Invention, or Industrie, to the atcheivinge of that Herculean worke of the Straits of N: England, which I am as verilie perswaded of; that there is either a Strait, as our narrow seas, or a mediterranean Sea [my emphasis], west from you. The dutch O the
dutch I doubt will prevent your discoverie, for they are the nearest, of any that have not as yet discovered it. But doubtlesse there is a man (or shalbe) sett aparte for the discoverie thereof, thereby to communicate more freely more knowingly, and with less charge, the riches of the east with the pleasures of the west, and that the east and west, meetinge with mutual embracements they shall soe love each other, that they shalbe willing to be dissolved into each other; and soe God being manifested in Christ through all the world, and light shininge in thickest darknesse, and that palpable darknesse being expelled, how great and glorious shall that light appear. With God of his mercy hasten to accomplish. To the right noble and worthy Religious and vertuous gent[leman] john Winthrop the yonger all health and felicitie.

yours E. Hows.56

With the discovery of the Northwest Passage, the puzzle will be solved. “Christ and the Stone” will be unified through “the Way to the [East] Indies and the [West] Indies.” This comes to pass because Christ set the sacred “quadrature” in perpetual motion, squaring the circle permanently and allowing the sun (Winthrop), moon (Howes), and earth (Nature) to correspond (both literally—by letter—and figuratively) as a body in unison (with Winthrop at the heart) to complete “the work” through shared wisdom of a universal Neoplatonic soul, utterly unfettered by encumbrance or physical separation. However, for this prophesy to materialize, it was first necessity for Winthrop to find the American Mediterranean Sea—a “midland” (or “intermediate” sea)—located “west from you,” on (or “about”) the fortieth parallel. Once the Northwest Passage had been found, a circuit between east and west would be completed, alchemically “hastened” before the natural course of its preordained millennial completion by God’s decision to intervene with a specially chosen adept: “a man . . . sett apart for his discovery thereof.” This convergence was analogous to other sexualized conjunctions of opposites: the coitus of macrocosm and microcosm; spirit and matter (see figs. 7.2, 8.13). At that passionate moment of universal alchemic convergence, “the east and west, meetinge with mutual embracements they shall soe love each other, that they shalbe willing to be dissolved into each other,” as the ultimate weapon in reforming both Old and New worlds.

Here was the perfect conjunction of clay and glaze of the Huguenot potter’s imagination. The effect of a union at America’s fortieth parallel would be perceived as a continuous “light shining in the thickest darknesse, and that palpable darknesse being expelled, how great and glorious shall that light appear.” This was the pure, unfragmented light that Palissy and Böhme perceived only through dead elemental earth, as a tiny, seductive “flash” or “estincelle,” sparkling through the dark matter of an earthenware pot or pewter pitcher. Winthrop was, of course, that “man . . . sett apart.” Like Howes, he took Long Island Sound to be the eastern extension of the American

Being “at the Île of Rue”
Mediterranean; a fortiori, part of the Mediterranean proper. To control the Sound—and ultimately all of New Netherland and the Hudson River opening up into the western inland sea—would also be to take the narrow path to the fortieth parallel, the Northwest Passage, the philosopher’s stone.

The timing of this correspondence between Howes and Winthrop on the Wisdom of Solomon, the puzzle of the “Mysterium,” and the Northwest Passage in America overlaps significantly with the extension and enormous ramification of Palissy’s alchemical ceramic project into London’s potteries almost immediately after the fall of La Rochelle in 1628. I am thinking here, not only of the few rare survivals of London-made rustic dishes (fig. 10.3), but more particularly of the series of “fecundity” scenes made in free imitation of the Palissy-type molds in rustic relief, of which over twenty examples survive. I say “Palissy-type” because while clearly made by close French and English followers, no exact prototype by Palissy’s hand is known. They were made from different molds, some imported directly from France, and hence at different London factories. Indeed, at least eight different groups have been identified. Most dated examples range between 1633 and 1697. These provocative and sexualized forms were

formed as basins and sometimes made to commemorate a marriage. They were called “Palissy dishes” in England, presumably beginning in the early modern period. The name is an interesting phenomenon in itself, although direct artisanal links beyond obvious linguistic, formal, and technological ones have yet to be established.57

The earliest dated Palissy dish to survive (1633) marked the marriage of Stephen and Elizabeth Fortune (fig. 10.4). This tin-glazed earthenware basin displays one of the eight standard London “fecundity” scenes in a classical courtyard with prominent tiles. The original source for the “fecundity” dishes is arguably a fresco of Danaë painted circa 1533–40 by Giovanni Battista de Jacopo Rosso (1495–1540) on the south wall of François I’s Grande Galerie at Fontainebleau; although individual potters took great liberties with Rosso’s design, particularly by using other print sources with which they were more familiar. At the center of a mythological court scene is a seductive maiden, naked except for her necklace, carrying what appears to be a St. George’s or

Maltese cross. Such a pious symbol is unexpected, since the maiden reclines in a suggestively position, legs almost open. She is surrounded by a group of cavorting cherubs, one of whom has his arms around her while he reaches for the cross. Perhaps the playful putto wants to remove the seductive maiden’s last vestige of piety. Yet on another level, this was a trope for the Neoplatonic quest for the highest spiritual love, that of the imagination. Here, the wrestling putti in the background of the dish suggest “contending desires” within the ecund imaginations of Stephen and Elizabeth Fortune. Ultimately, these contenders are banished, with only one true spiritual love—the little spirit reaching for the maiden’s necklace—emerging triumphant and ennobled (like the redeemed materials in the earthenware dish itself, ennobled by alchemical fire).58

Scholarship on this celebrated group of artifacts is quite extensive. The broad current consensus is that “English delftware potters apparently chose such motifs for their decorative merit alone rather than for any interest in their meaning.”59 This may prove to be a premature conclusion for many of the potters, given the strong possibility that a version of Palissy’s Paracelsian natural philosophy had gained currency among artisans—especially potters—by the seventeenth century, and because it may be argued that the fecundity scenes were derived from the same natural-philosophical tradition that inspired Howes and Winthrop’s alchemical agenda. The motives of the seventeenth-century potters who made fecundity dishes, and of their patrons, can scarcely be known, but arguably some, if not all, of them were motivated by more than “decorative merit alone.” Both the iconography of the fecundity basins and knowledge that they have been linked to Palissy by refugee migration, artisanal and collecting traditions, and common language suggests that at least some potters in seventeenth-century London shared Palissy’s agenda. This logic is supported by the probability that both Howes and Winthrop understood the source and meaning of the available natural-philosophical language of these artifacts; that is to say, it was neither strange to their code-obsessed eyes nor would they have necessarily thought the motifs were merely decorative.

Read from the alchemical perspective of Howes’s postscript from the Wisdom of Solomon and understood as part of the passionate and deeply sensual rhetoric of Paracelsian Neoplatonism that informed his dedication of Digges’s Of the Circumference of the Earth in 1632, a sense of meaning emerges, and becomes available for the “Palissy-style” fecundity basins in the transatlantic context. The seductive and playful woman in an attitude of sexual arousal performs a central role in the Wisdom of Solomon: that of Sophia, goddess of wisdom, God’s “lover,” and his first creation to serve as master artisan in the construction of the earth. David Winston elaborates on Philo’s personification of Sophia as God’s consort, a receptacle and mother figure of “indefinite potentiality”:
The personified Wisdom already makes her appearance in Proverbs and Job in the guise of a charming female figure playing always before Yahweh, having been created by him at the beginning of his work. It is above all in the Wisdom of Solomon, however, that the figure comes into her own . . . Sophia is described in this work as an effluence or effulgence of God's glory and his agent in creation, and it is implied that she contains the paradigmatic pattern of all things . . . the author refers to her as his bride and boasts of living with her and enjoying kinship with her. Sophia anticipates those who desire her and those who seek her will not weary . . . [thus] Philo describes Wisdom . . . as “the mother and nurse of all” . . . words used by Plato in the Timaeus to describe the Receptacle, and Philo himself elsewhere similarly adopts them as a description of matter . . . Philo sometimes employs an alternate pattern in which God is said to have intercourse with his Knowledge or Wisdom and thus produces his only beloved son, the sense-perceptible World . . . in the same terms that were applied to matter . . . [Philo] would employ the figure of Sophia . . . which is characterized by indefinite potentiality.

The figure of Sophia immediately reminds us of the plaque of Flora the feuillue (fig. 5.2) and of the female colossus in Johann Theodore de Bry’s Integrae naturae (fig. 2.3), but also of Palissy’s reconstruction of himself as feminine: an aroused, open receptacle for God’s fiery sexual passion through intercourse with the soul in order to achieve the “fecundity” to construct his New World artisanry out of matter that had already passed through the fire of sacred violence in Saintonge. As it happens, of course, the forms Palissy chose to make were also Platonic receptacles—mostly basins survive—as are the London “Palissy dishes.” Where there were camouflaged, metamorphic lizards, amphibians, and insects that moved furtively through the subterranean flora of Palissy’s natural grottoes, now there were tiny human figures reborn as creatures of the light.

This relationship is also ramified by the source of the cherubic figures playing all around Sophia. Consider the thirty-first figure in Paracelsus’s Propheceien und Weissagungen (1549), “Four Dancing Children” (fig. 10.5), and the “elucidation” of its meaning in Prognosticatio eximii doctoris Theophrasti Paracelsi (The Prophesies of Paracelsus [Strasbourg, 1566]). Here playful “children” (some with strikingly adult faces) nearly identical to those on the fecundity dish of 1633 dance and cavort in what is arguably a print source of the tiled courtyard, with a forested garden in the distance. The pair of boys on the right are convincing as a direct source for their counterparts in the right background of the basin, under the fluted column. “There shall be such a total renewal and change,” Paracelsus explained, in his prophesy that accompanied the woodcut:

that they will be as children that know nothing of the cunning and intrigues of the old. This shall be when they count LX [When LUX, Lux, Light, comes]. . . . Therefore it is
well that we should remember that the time appeareth to be a long time according to a man’s lifetime, but as a short time should we observe and consider it. For to cause so much to fall and to be overthrown, with such a raging and roaring lion that has so long grown, this cannot be done in a moment. But how well it shall be with him that shall be as a little child, for human knowledge causeth but unrest and grief.63

In a very real sense then, these spiritelli, or childlike “sprites,” were also precursors of Böhme’s “sparks,” as well as of Palissy’s étincelles, which play with bodily perception across the surface of pottery from La Chapelle-des-Pots.64

The rustic Paracelsian artisan, returning to first principles, was reborn a man-child through conjunction with Sophia—figure of God’s wisdom in the light of Nature—who “know[s] nothing of the cunning and intrigues of old... for human knowledge...”
causeth but unrest and grief.” The horrors of war and religious violence that began this process of rebirth are sublimated into material life because human knowledge is forgotten. This rebirth of prelapsarian Adamic knowledge will usher in a new world that will unify the separation of spirit and matter. “They shall be willing to be dissolved into each other like transluscent glaze and occluded clay, and cause light to shine throughout the microcosm, unimpeded by dark matter.” A material-holiness synthesis represented in God’s master artisan Sophia was thus “characterized by indefinite potentiality.” At the exact moment that “Palissy’s” follower’s child reached for nourishment at the breast of the mother/nurse Wisdom and found hope in the symbol of the English refuge and new beginnings after 1628, Howes and Winthrop were preparing to dissolve differences and barriers by unifying east and west in the American Mediterranean. They would meet “with mutual embraces” through a door hidden in the far western reaches of Long Island Sound. The door opened onto the Northwest Passage and the secret of the philosopher’s stone as well. “Then will the New World begin,” Paracelsus prophesied, “and the White and the Black shall disappear . . . and the plumes of the bird of the East shall be burnt by the Sun of the South.” This mystical imagery of childlike regeneration continued on the Palissy dishes until at least 1697 and also appeared on articles of domestic use in other media associated with the Huguenot diaspora in England and America: for example, a “Huguenot chair” of post-1685 London (fig. 15.35) exhibits “boyes and crown” carving adapted from a church on the Île de Ré.

The Fortress of Health

Of the part played by the influential English alchemist Robert Fludd in this transatlantic story of the fortieth parallel much more will be said later. For now suffice it to say, that the design of Howes’s pictograph—a complex of interconnected triangles within a circle—was instantly recognizable by natural philosophers of the late 1620s and 1630s as derived from Fludd’s famous “science of pyramids” (Pyramidum scientia) (fig. 10.6), his alchemic representation of the descent into the microcosm and reascent into the macrocosm of the soul. Howes would certainly have known that this science was one of the sacred arts explained in Fludd’s Philosophia sacra, published just a year before his letter to the younger Winthrop of January 22, 1627. Winthrop knew Fludd’s work through his interest in what was known widely as the weapon salve. As we shall see, Winthrop’s well-known correspondent Sir Kenelm Digby marketed this recipe—original to Paracelsus—to his personal advantage. But in 1632, Howes wrote Winthrop to advise the purchase of virtually every Fludd title whenever they became available, having:
Figure 10.6. Johann Theodore de Bry, *Metaphysical and Physical Science of the Pyramids*, from Robert Fludd, *Utruisque cosmi majoris* (1624). Courtesy Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. Foundational to his profoundly Neoplatonic project, Fludd understood the linkages between the purity of God’s realm in heaven (*metaphysicae*) and the corruption of the earth (*physicae*) as a series of hierarchical scales interpenetrated by light and dark Trinitarian triangles. He also depicted these scales as a fret board on a stringed musical instrument.
sent you a taste of the famous and farre renouned English man of our Tymes Fr. Fludd, whoe as you may remember published a booke in defence of the weapon salve before you went over, but that is nothing in comparison to these here menconed, which are all folio bookes, and full of brasse peices [engravings], the like I never saw, for engines, fortifications, and a touch of all opperative workes, as you may conceive by the titles; yet let me tell you this, that the titles, nor my penn, is not able to express, what is in those bookes, as they are, no more than you in a map or sheete of paper, can exactly describe the rivers, creeks, hills, dales, fruitie, beasts, fishes and all other things of your contrie; for I think it is impossible for man to add unto his macrocosme and microcosme, except it be illustration or comment, and that hardly too; his bookes are so bought up beyond sea, we can gett none brought over . . . here you see the titles which I could with all my heart wish the bookes themselves were in your hands as certaine as any thing you have.

Among the fourteen titles on Howes’s wish list was Medicina catholica (1629), which included a plate called Homo sanus (“The Sound Man”), also known as The Fortress of Health (fig. 10.7). The companion piece to this engraving, Hostilis munimenti salutis invadendi typus (“Enemies Invading the Fortress of Health”) (fig. 10.8), did not appear until 1631, when it was finally published in Fludd’s Integrum morborum mysterium. Integrum was not on Howes list in 1632—which included titles up to 1629—but copies of both of Fludd’s medical treatises survive from Winthrop’s original alchemical library. Given the subject of these extraordinary engravings, and knowing Fludd’s commitment to a long and productive relationship with the de Bry family of refugee Huguenot publishers from Frankfurt and Oppenheim in prior years, a strong case can be made that both of these images of the fortress of health under attack were at least partially a response to the siege of La Rochelle. Homo sanus was published in 1629, so it was created during the siege year. Did Hostilis simply extend an original idea to its logical conclusion, or was it a recognition of the historical context—a completion of the siege of “sound man” in which the walls surrounding his body finally crumbled under assault from demons—represented in medical and cosmological terms?

Homo sanus is secure in the “fortress of health” because he prays to God: “Show thy servant the light of thy countenance, and save me for thy mercy’s sake; to which God replies “No plague shall come nigh thy dwelling; for I will give my angels charge of thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” The four archangels Gabriel, Michael, Azazel, and Raphael guard successfully against evil angels of the four winds who unleash plagues of winged diseases against the walls of the fortress. These are certainly “the violent force of spirits and the reasonings of men” of Wisdom of Solomon 7:20, which were always taken to mean “the mighty winds . . . before they became angels [of holiness] . . . are spirits that are created for vengeance. . . . Fire and hail, and famine, and death.” They were arguably the same winds that Palissy claimed assailed his
To construct a fortress of health, the Sound Man prays God to “show thy servant the light of thy countenance, and save me for thy mercy sake” (Ps. 31:16); to which God replies from out of the light that “no plague shall come nigh thy dwelling; for I will give my angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Ps. 91:10–11). Hence, as in figure 8.1, the Sound Man patiently resists corruption with divine wisdom. He is protected in a fortress of the soul from evil angels who assail him with plagues carried by the four winds. The four archangels of God guard the fortress, divided into four chambers, like the anatomy of the heart, the location of the soul in the body. Fludd was a disciple of the physician William Harvey. Translations from Joscelyn Godwin, Robert Fludd: Hermetic Philosopher and Surveyor of Two Worlds (Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala, 1979), 56, fig. 62.
Mortal illness assails this man through the shattered south wall of his fallen fortress of health, which is not guarded by archangels and so is easily breached by the evil angel Azazel. His physician, who examines a urine sample, attends at his bedside. Aware that “The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me” (Job 6.4), the sick man has little hope. The word of God assails him from all four directions: “Because thou hast not hearkened unto my voice, I will afflict thee with . . . cold and will give thee a fearful heart and a sadness of soul until thou perish” (Deut. 28); “Because thou hast not kept my commandments, I will afflict thee in the summer with corrupt air, and give thee the pestilence to pursue thee until thou perish (Deut. 28) . . . I will send serpents among you, which will not be charmed” (Jer. 8:17); “Because thou hast not observed my precepts I will afflict thee with hot and seething . . . and fever”; “I will afflict thee with dropsy” (Luke 14); “I will make thee a lunatic, and afflict with a heavy spirit” (Matt. 17); and “I will dissolve thee with palsy, so that thy enterprises are hindered and thy mouth stopped, that thou canst not speak” (1 Macc. 9:55). Translations from Joscelyn Godwin, Robert Fludd: Hermetic Philosopher and Surveyor of Two Worlds (Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala, 1979), 59, fig. 66.
“dwelling” in Saintes from all sides, where he found security and overcame death by laboring to bring forth the translucent white glaze from the fire. Thus, Palissy wrote, he would “build with the destroyer,” which was also the primary instrument of alchemy. Here, Fludd had represented a credo of Paracelsian medicine: that bodily health and illness were essentially spiritual not physical conditions. “They are not under Divine Justice,” Fludd wrote of the four winds, “but come from Injustice, which is a figment of the Divine Darkness. Health is from God alone, given by his angels whose ruler is Jesus Christ . . . God’s will is carried out by both good and evil Angels, but we, as creatures of the Light, can only be saved and remain healthy by prayer to God.”71 Were Richelieu’s and Louis XIII’s forces of the Counter-Reformation that besieged La Rochelle thought to “come from Injustice, which is a figment of the Divine Darkness”? This would be a significant reversal, since Richelieu argued that the siege was the way to excise demons from inside the fortress and hence from the body of absolutism.

Using Paracelsian medical-alchemic language and imagery, Fludd’s *Homo sanus* graphically restated passages from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians that influenced Huguenots in Aunis-Saintonge during the region’s most fragmented years of confessional violence. Paul, a “prisoner for the Lord” (Eph. 4:1), writes that God has “a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10). Fellow “prisoner[s] for the Lord” must therefore await the fruition of this plan “with all lowliness and meekness, with patience [and] forbearing” (Eph. 4:2), as in the engraving of *In patientia suavitas*. “Finally,” Paul’s eschatology of waiting required oppressed members of the Lord’s “body” to fashion strategies of security to protect against supernatural forces too powerful for fortresses of mortar and stone to withstand:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places . . . above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:10–20)

Unlike La Rochelle before 1628, the fortress Paul describes is an *invisible* one—a fortress of the soul—that emanates from the hidden relationship between God’s universal spirit and the human heart. This was the meaning of the epigram Howes sent Winthrop on his return from the Île de Ré: “The fyre cannot destroye whats written in the Harte.” The fire could destroy things of the earth detached from the spirit, but by destroying the carnal body, violence could also release the sacred into the material world. Winthrop’s prophetic destiny was as “a man sett aparte for the discoverie” of the Northwest Passage “at or about” the fortieth parallel, at the gateway to New
Netherlands and the middle colonies: Long Island Sound. As a survivor of the disas-
ter at La Rochelle, where the fallen were sacrificed by God to purify the body of Christ,
Winthrop acquired the status of an adept whose spirit had emerged prematurely. This
was also the essence of the secretive and domestic forms of artisanal security practiced
by Palissy and his followers, who did not possess a great fortress in Saintonge. Thus,
Palissy predicted the fall of La Rochelle long before anyone inside the fortress could
have imagined and suggested the practice of artisanal security for the New World ex-
perience that would follow. In Fludd’s Hostilis munimenti salutis invadendi typus (fig.
10.8), Winthrop and Howes perceived La Rochelle’s failure to “put on the whole ar-
mor of God,” not as a failure of the outer walls of the fortress of health, but as a col-
lapse of the inner spirit of the heart. Fludd had, in fact, dissected human hearts with
his friend William Harvey and knew from personal experience that the heart had four
lobes—north, south, east, and west—just as the fortresses in Homo sanus and Hostilis
each have four watchtowers (figs. 10.7, 10.8).

In Hostilis, the patient is afflicted with the diseases of the south wind carried
through the crumbling south wall of the fortress by Azazel, because, as the dying man
proclaims with Job: “The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof
drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.”72 This
resonated perfectly with the elder Winthrop’s famous letter to his wife Margaret on
May 15, 1629—on the eve of colonization—in which he compared the fall of La
Rochelle to God’s poisoning his corrupt children: now “he is turning the cuppe towards
us also, and because we are the last, our portion must be, to drink the very dreggs which
remaine.”73 Despite widespread sympathy in the Atlantic world for the people of La
Rochelle, most Calvinists suspected that the Rochelais had been corrupt, and hence
responsible for their own illness and destruction by God’s dark forces. There is no evi-
dence that Howes or Winthrop felt anything but sympathy for their Huguenot co-
religionists as “poore people that lye nowe in the dust.” Yet their authority seemed more
useful when reconstructed in memory. Howes alluded to the sacrifice of the Rochelais,
and to Winthrop’s endurance and triumph, in a prophesy that emerged from their pain,
in his motto: “But for myself the law [that is, God’s law] is both a burden and an
honor.” It would also be hard to miss the significance of the messages of vengeance
that Fludd had his Deus send from all points of the compass into the dying man’s
fortress: “Because thou hast not hearkened unto my voice; . . . kept my command-
ments; . . . observed my precepts; . . . I will afflicthee,” with every variation of bibli-
cal plague, all leading to “a fearful heart and a sadness of soul until thou perish.” In a
sense, then, the victims’ personal lack of faith and self-mastery caused the “Île of Rue,”
which afflicted their hearts (and that of international Protestantism).

For Winthrop the physician-alchemist and master of fortifications for Massachu-
setts Bay, the question was thus how to rebuild the pure underlying spirit of the
Figure 10.9. John Winthrop Jr., plans for a colonial fortress, ca. 1630, Boston or southern coastal Connecticut. Courtesy Massachusetts Historical Society. Both these and the drawings in figure 10.10 were found among miscellaneous notes at the end of the first volume of the elder John Winthrop's journal.
shattered fortress to secure the remnant of international Protestantism that had survived and escaped to America? Winthrop spent time studying fortress design in England soon after returning from the Île de Ré, but before his emigration to America, as is evidenced by a series of letters from December 1629 concerning the design of a particular English fortress, which is described in exquisite detail, down to “the dimensions of the fort and all things about it, as likewise of what several materials what Kinde of Earths or wood the several parts are framed off.” It was deemed “likely [that John Winthrop Jr.] may inquire of some thereabouts, labourers—artificers or artists that helped to make it.” Winthrop now needed practical experience with the design, as it had been decided that this would be the prototype for the first fortress at Boston.74 His early designs for three such fortresses survive, probably drawn for use in coastal Connecticut in consultation with Lion Gardiner, a student of the principles of fortification in Holland under the prince of Orange, and a future grandee of Long Island (fig. 10.9).

But after these plans for the construction of stationary late medieval fortresses in the New World, Winthrop became less interested in corporate fortresses designed on the noblesse d’épée pattern. Nor was he absorbed with the invention of novel weapons as he was in 1627, when he observed the use of the Kuffeler torpedo against the French fleet. Having seen the failure of this ancient mode of security in 1628, Winthrop turned inward, to the mobile, protean, and naturalistic method Palissy proposed as a “recipe” for refugee life, which did not depend for survival on others.

Palissy’s method was private, mobile, and invisible—a moveable defense system that traveled with the refugee the way a snail’s shell did with the snail. Survival was not based on violent frontal defense of authoritarian religious precepts, but rather on quiet, stealthy, and skillful use of domestic space for the cultivation of “Knowledge, Invention or Industrie,” in Howes’s words; for Palissy, it was the place to “multiply the talent you have received from God.” Domestication and commercialization of the spirit negated the curse of “poverty that is the obstacle to happiness and safety.”75 Domestic practice was above all private and latitudinarian, and it observed the flexible presence of the universal spirit “written” in the heart of every individual artisan, farmer, or laborer as they moved through, and improved, the natural world. This was a way of self-mastery and cultural mediation fit for the Mediterranean of the New World, where it was necessary “to communicate more freely more knowingly and with less charge,” across the cultural, material, and spiritual boundaries of pluralistic society.

The Refuge Project on Long Island Sound

In 1635, John Winthrop Jr. returned to Britain. He visited Ireland and Scotland, as well as England. His overriding concern during this first return was to clarify his role in the so-called Warwick Patent, signed in London by a like-minded group of Calvin-
ists on July 7, 1635. The terms of this patent charged the younger Winthrop with gaining control of “the River Connecticut in New England [and] . . . the harbors and places adjoining.” At the same time, Winthrop was to supervise the construction of fortifications and dwellings “at the River” that were suitable for the many “men of quality” who were signatories to the patent, and who planned to use them as places of refuge should religious war spread from the Continent to England, as seemed likely. This group of “Lords and Gentlemen”—which included Lord Saye and Sele, Sir Arthur Hesilrige, Lord Robert Greville Brooke, Henry Lawrence, Sir Richard Saltonstall, John Pym, George Fenwick, and Henry Darley—instructed Winthrop to undertake this project “with all convenient speede.”

The signers of Warwick Patent were not only united by their courtly status and a shared interest in land and refuge in the New World; they converged in other ways as well. For one thing, they were dismayed by the authoritarian religious regime in Boston on both spiritual and material grounds, and they perceived similar doubts in the younger Winthrop. As a result, while the search for refuge was a priority, settlement near Massachusetts Bay was out of the question. Hence, these same figures also became involved in the West Indies, with the Providence Island Company. Although the litany of transatlantic schisms that beset Calvinism was only fully articulated in public discourse by many of these men during the Antinomian Crisis of 1635–37, Howes revealed the rumblings of discontent in London years earlier. “I have heard diverse complaints against the severity of your Governement,” Howes warned Winthrop in April 1632. “I would and doe desire all things might goe well with you all. But certainly if you endeavor in all mildnesse to doe gods worke, he will preserve you from all the enemies of his truth; though there are a thousand eyes watchinge over you to pick a hole in your coats.”

By November of that year, in response to more “mutteringe,” Howes adumbrated the position both he and friends in England and America would take in the Antinomian Crisis. “Allas, alas,” he wrote Winthrop of the hidden soulish principles and belief in cultural pluralism and perhaps sympathy for the Nicodemite he knew they shared, “it is not any outward . . . worship that god requires, but god being a spirit ought to be worshipped in spirit and truth. There are many guifts by one and the same spirit yet not all given to one man.” Winthrop’s careful resistance to joining his father’s attacks on heterodoxy and his decision to stay in Connecticut to keep his distance during Anne Hutchinson’s trial, suggest tacit agreement.

There is no doubt that Howes himself was known to the Warwick group (through Winthrop and Emmanuel Downing) or that they shared the same spiritual and natural-philosophical concerns. Still in 1632, Howes thanked Winthrop for an introduction to Saltonstall: “by your meanes and good words of me to him, I have obtained a most singular sweet frind of him . . . I had inward familiarity with him; he persuadinge me it was your desire that I should imparte my selfe unto him, on your be-
halfe, and for the good of N: E.” There is good reason to believe that the entire group was deeply concerned with Winthrop’s natural-philosophical and alchemical projects for the fortieeth parallel, and that all were not only latitudinarian but also Paracelsians with strong backgrounds in Neoplatonic universalism. Pym and Brooke in particular were patrons of the great Paracelsian reformers Samuel Hartlib, John Dury, and Jan Comenius and supported the idea of a universal laboratory that began to gain favor by the 1640s and would attract Winthrop’s close attention in 1649. Brooke’s ideas were explicitly conducive to the reformers’ universalism. In his book *The Nature of Truth* (London, 1640), Brooke explained that while truth was atomized by experience into “particular rivulets,” it was “that learned, that mighty man Comenius [who] doth hap-pily and rationally endeavor to reduce all into one.” Multiplicity and unity thus coex-isted harmoniously in both nature and human society. With this theory in mind, Win-throp the Younger tried unsuccessfully to persuade Comenius to settle in America and accept the presidency of Harvard College.

Having returned from London in late 1635, Winthrop proceeded “with all deliber-ate speeche” to conform with the wishes of his new patrons, while still laboring to gain a foothold on the fortieth parallel. The result is shown in Winthrop’s detailed design for a courtyarded dwelling in Saybrook, Connecticut, well south of the forty-first parallel, on the north shore of Long Island Sound (fig. 10.10). There, he could borrow Robert Child’s description of his desired life in Ireland, and “I command myself, with 6 or 7 gentlemen and scollers, who have resolved to live retyredly and follow their studyes and Experiences, if these troublesome times molest not.” Did Dr. Child use Winthrop’s Saybrook project of 1635, “out of the way” of Boston, as a prototype for his refuge on the Celtic fringe in 1652?

Winthrop’s design for his courtyarded dwelling is significant for the dwelling itself, which is located in the upper right corner of the page, as well as the diagram of the rural farm complex into which it is set. That plan is located diagonally across and down from the dwelling and may be found in the lower left corner of the same page. Win-throp clearly reserved space for the open courtyard, a sort of amphitheater surrounded by four galleries of chambers and workspaces in the lower right corner of the large en-closed complex of interior buildings, yards, and finally one acre of meadow. In the rooms surrounding the courtyard amphitheater, there are a dairy, larder, hall, kitchen, “parterre” (parterre), and a 30-foot-long “servants Chambre,” containing thirteen “cabbins,” undoubtedly intended for African slaves. At Winthrop’s death in 1676, his primary laboratory assistant was a slave; early modern European alchemical laborato ries required large numbers of workers to turn a profit searching for the great elixir. There are two or three spaces with no specific function designated by Winthrop, which may have been reserved as alchemical laboratories for the gentlemen refugees, with space for their servant assistants and workmen.
John Winthrop Jr., design for a large courtyarded dwelling in Saybrook, Connecticut. Courtesy Massachusetts Historical Society. Numerous spaces were set aside for “Servants Chambre cabbins.” Winthrop’s plan included not only domestic and field servants but laboratory operators and manual laborers as well. The latter extracted and handled ore and performed other physically demanding tasks in Winthrop’s alchemical “factory” on Long Island Sound. Winthrop owned at least one enslaved African-American, who probably served as a laboratory operator.
Pamela Smith has demonstrated that the business of alchemy at the Hapsburg court involved factory-scale production, with a series of different rooms devoted to specific, interconnected alchemical functions. This enabled alchemists in the Holy Roman Empire to synthesize breaking down, grinding, boiling, and distilling materials. Indeed, the design of the Saybrook courtyard, hidden from outside view, yet simultaneously open on the inside to form a central stage for interior dialogue, recalls seventeenth-century natural-philosophical academies and certain European private laboratories. A stage was needed where the adept—in the European context, the alchemist-prince—taught or directed proceedings in the surrounding laboratories.83 We shall see how the walls of such surrounding galleries and architectural spaces also suggest a good setting for a “Theater of Memory” based on Fludd’s engraving “Theater of the World.” Winthrop’s use of the term “parterre” may also have been specific to the Saybrook court as a stage. A parterre was associated in early modern parlance with a space located on the ground floor beneath the galleries or behind the auditorium of a theater.84

Kitchens especially, as places containing fire and caldrons, but halls as well (as spaces with multiple uses), were also commonly used in laboratory settings.85 This was not only practical, but also part of the natural-philosophical ideology of alchemy as part of everyday life. For his Saybrook laboratory on the edge of the Northwest Passage, Winthrop designed an independent, self-contained, secure, rural complex of farm and domestic buildings. Here were medicinal gardens for pharmacopoeia and pleasure gardens with grottoes for contemplation of the elements, laboratories, libraries (he kept many of his alchemical books in Saybrook), and servants’ quarters for labor to facilitate large-scale experiments, exploration of the Long Island Sound region, and the production of commercial goods.

Winthrop’s laboratory-refuge in Saybrook thus provided security and sustenance while he and his courtly colleagues pursued their agenda in the New World. Winthrop’s interest in the promotion of heavy industry and manufacture, as well as the production of salt and mining, shows that his Saybrook agenda encompassed not only the quest for the Northwest Passage and the philosopher’s stone but also the profit motive of the artisan philosopher who wished to use his manual skills, labor, and talent for innovation, to manufacture and market profitable things. For Winthrop, as for Palissy, these projects went hand in hand. They were alchemists (and in Winthrop’s case, a physician as well) concerned with the mobile natural laboratory as both a Paracelsian microcosm of human salvation and reform and “a model of civic negotia and manufacture.”86 In Winthrop’s cosmos—as for the Huguenots of the refuge—the hidden paths to security, commerce, and salvation needed to be inextricably linked. Howes remained very interested in all these aspects of Winthrop’s firm “resolution to plant in Conectecut.” It seems that the further his friend removed from Boston toward the southwestern frontier and the pluralistic Long Island Sound region, the more curious
Howes became, and the more seriously he considered joining him there. “I shall not need to request of you some knowledge of your plantation,” Howes wrote about Saybrook in 1636:

and howe farre you have discovered the [Connecticut] River, and howe you like it, and what newes of the Lake, and howe far you are from the Dutch, and from Boston, I am perswaded you will acquaint me with that which you thinke is fittest for me, and reserve for me the rest untill a seasonable tyme. Only I would gladly see a Mapp of the longe Iland and the coast from Cap Cod to River Hudson when you have one to spare.87

Robert Blair St. George, a folklorist, demonstrates that the design for Winthrop’s courtyarded structure came from an unexpected source. He finds that the evidence for this “is so strong that it almost qualifies as a fifth architectural report in our New World landscape.”88 Although Winthrop lived and studied in Ireland, the design source for the Saybrook refuge was not specific to an Irish bawn—with clear, traditional, and overt military fortifications and intentions (and a long history of use in the colonies). Rather, the design source arose from the influential work of a Frenchman of Palissy’s generation, Charles Estienne (1504–ca. 1564), a translation of whose book on naturalistic rural fortification to protect and multiply production, *Maison Rustique, or, The Countrie Farme* (London, 1600), was in Boston in 1629 and in Winthrop’s library by 1630. “Making it,” St. George claims, “the first book containing precise architectural advice known to have been in the British colonies.”89 *Maison Rustique* was the centerpiece of a campaign of architectural reform among English rural farmers in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—such as Adam Winthrop, John’s grandfather, who also built a courtyarded dwelling at Groton in the 1590s—that used Estienne’s intensive compounds, courtyards, and scientific fertilizing techniques to maximize efficiency in labor, production, and security. *Maison Rustique* was a Paracelsian text, based on practical experience, which “stimulated among . . . freeholders a new commitment to the reclamation of the land, to experimentation with new plow types, and ultimately, to increasing England’s annual crop yields.”90

But if *Maison Rustique* was a Paracelsian text it was also, above all else, a Palissian text. In the sixteenth century, when Estienne was gathering material for his book in France, the very word “rustique” was immediately associated by natural philosophers with Bernard Palissy, the famous maker of “rustique figurines.” His name was harnessed to “rustique” throughout the early modern period in France and England as well. Witness the fashion for “rustic” Palissy plates in London at precisely the same time that *Maison Rustique* promoted reform of rural English architecture. This was one reason the authors chose to use this key word in their title, to associate themselves with the venerable reformed artisanal tradition of Bernard Palissy. Palissy was by then famous in England for his promotion of *marne* (gypsum) to fertilize crops and to
increase productivity. If, as Robert Blair St. George correctly argues, the fashion for courtyarded residences in the French style came to England’s urban centers with Huguenot textile merchants during the 1560s, the natural philosophy and reform of the Huguenot rural farmstead and above all refuge—the core of Winthrop’s charge from the signatories of the Warwick Patent—was adapted for *Maison Rustique* (“The Natural House”) from the same sources that informed Palissy’s famous amphitheater of refuge for Huguenots who survived the civil wars of religion in Saintonge. As Winthrop knew from his copy of Palissy’s *Discours admirables*, and from his experience at the Île de Ré within sight of La Rochelle’s impenetrable walls in 1627, artisanal security was a reliable foundation for a natural fortress of refuge. “I would have you feare nothing more then securitie,” Howes reminded his patron, remembering the Île of Rue.91

Winthrop’s copy of Palissy’s *Discours admirables* (see fig. 6.1) is still in the plain vellum cover in which it was originally bound. We cannot be sure in what year he acquired it for his alchemical library. “Discours Admirable[s]” is written in ink on its spine, but “Eues et Fontaines:—” also appears on the book’s underside, which suggests that Winthrop shelved it on its sturdy spine with this rubric facing outward for identification. Produced in a small octavo format (6¼” by 4¼” by 1”), this was also an easily portable book. It would fit comfortably in a small scholar’s cabinet, a sea chest, or even a reader’s pocket.92

During the five months he spent at anchor off the Île de Ré watching England’s hopes for the liberation of La Rochelle go awry, Winthrop pondered the hidden reality behind La Rochelle’s looming walls. Perhaps he had his little edition of Palissy’s *Discours* with him. No other book in his library provided a record from deep inside the culture of southwestern Huguenot science and material life at the beginning of the wars of religion. Palissy had already foretold the ultimate failure of the quest for refuge behind La Rochelle’s limestone walls. Absent God’s direct intervention at the end of the world, hope for the security of the faithful in the désert was to be sought rather in ambiguity and in invisible “natural” fortresses of one’s own making.

Palissy and his followers were the precursors and earliest practitioners of the universalist artisanal security projected in Saybrook by Winthrop. In the Huguenots’ apocalyptic new world, every individual was compelled to fashion and “put on” a fortress of the soul, the “recipe” for which was “written in the heart” and built “by the destroyer.” That is why during the civil wars of the 1550s, Huguenot artisans and natural philosophers began to ponder the questions Winthrop considered between 1628 and 1635: what quotidian material and commercial forms would the “whole armor of God” take when the walls of ancient strongholds gave way to a “shield of faith,” experiential
knowledge, and manual skill? How would innovation and commercial profit make the pious refugee safe? And when the potter’s dark prophesy was realized in 1628, refugees from Saintonge clung to a warning from Proverbs: “Do not remove an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless; / For Their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you” (Prov. 23:10–11).