



Anthony Hecht

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Samuel Sewall

Samuel Sewall, in a world of wigs,
Flouted opinion in his personal hair;
For foppery he gave not any figs,
But in his right and honor took the air.

Thus in his naked style, though well attired,
He went forth in the city, or paid court
To Madam Winthrop, whom he much admired,
Most godly, but yet liberal with the port.

And all the town admired for two full years
His excellent address, his gifts of fruit,
Her gracious ways and delicate white ears,
And held the course of nature absolute.

But yet she bade him suffer a peruke,
“That One be not distinguished from the All”;
Delivered of herself this stern rebuke
Framed in the resonant language of St. Paul.

“Madam,” he answered her, “I have a Friend
Furnishes me with hair out of His strength,
And He requires only I attend
Unto His charity and to its length.”

And all the town was witness to his trust:
On Monday he walked out with the widow Gibbs,
A pious lady of charm and notable bust,

Whose heart beat tolerably beneath her ribs.

On Saturday he wrote proposing marriage,
And closed, imploring that she be not cruel,
“Your favorable answer will oblige,
Madam, your humble servant, Samuel Sewall.”

[Hecht takes poetic license, as in lengthening the courtship.]