



The Tortured Life of Scofield Thayer



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THE TORTURED LIFE OF
SCOFIELD THAYER

JAMES DEMPSEY

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FOR GAIL

I have no home unless it be
The tortured excellence of the sea.

FROM SCOFIELD THAYER'S "ON AN OLD
PAINTING OF PORTSMOUTH HARBOR"

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P R E F A C E

Scofield Thayer's grave is a ten-minute walk from my office, and I visited it many times while writing this book. The three graves in the Thayer lot—his father and mother are also interred there—lie in the shadow of a monolithic lozenge of granite ten feet high. The monument is quite unlike the elaborate crypts and funerary décor in the graveyard, much of which radiates a genteel Victorianism. The Thayer stone is imposingly minimalistic, all the more so for so much work having gone into the smoothness of its upper surface and its flawlessness of form. It is inscribed with the names of the Thayers—Edward, Florence, and Scofield—and the circled pattée cross that Thayer referred to as looking like “a potato-chip or a Nabisco wafer.” Thayer saw everything in terms of metaphor.

Scofield Thayer's mental eclipse came in the prime of his life. He was hospitalized in his late thirties and not long after declared to be, in the unsentimental language of the time, “an insane person.” His madness, which was advertised annually in the local newspaper, as required by state law, ended a flaringly brief career that had powerfully influenced the art and literature of the twentieth century. As owner and editor of the *Dial*, Thayer published the writing and the art of a vast number of talents, both American and European, both avant-garde and traditional, and in doing so introduced the ideas of modernism to America and gave American artists a new audience in Europe.

But Thayer's story has never been fully told. His name appears in many of the books on the intellectual and cultural history of the period, and he shows up again and again in the biographies and correspondence of his contemporaries, where he is more often than not given a walk-on role as a wealthy, effete patron of the arts. With such little concrete information available, it is unsurprising that the image that comes down to us is largely a simplified and therefore distorted

one. For instance, that he was cuckolded by his friend E. E. Cummings and that Hemingway famously referred to him as “Scofield Buggaring Thayer” has given rise to the perception of Thayer as homosexual. But we find from his papers that Thayer discovered soon after his first and only marriage that he could never be happy with one sexual partner and that he needed continuing novelty in his intimacies; it was he who decided that he and his wife would live separately. And as for Hemingway, the fact that his poems were turned down by Thayer is more than enough to provoke such a Hemingwayesque homophobic rant. Biographers, of course, can be somewhat conflicted about using their research skills to put people in bed with others, but with Thayer the endeavor is probably at least defensible (if not wholly honorable), and the record shows that while Thayer may have made an occasional foray into the homoerotic, he was also undeniably and indeed rampantly heterosexual. As his mental illness worsened, his passion for flawless young women apparently perverted itself into a lust for the inappropriately minor female.

Thayer saw himself as a philosopher and a poet. He was a student of the philosopher George Santayana, who would later use a Thayer-like character as the hero in his best-selling novel *The Last Puritan*. Thayer’s verse was praised by Cummings, Marianne Moore, and others. Indeed, the epigraph to this book refers to a line from Thayer’s poem “On an Old Painting of Portsmouth Harbor,” which treats, among other things, of Thayer’s discomfort in the world, his inability to find respite except while piloting his beloved sailboat: “I have no home, unless it be / The tortured excellence of the sea.” Thayer, whose looks women described as Byronic, was a twentieth-century Childe Harold, a disillusioned wanderer, an eternal student of the world around him, one for whom the creations of art and literature brought an aesthetic ecstasy but who was never at peace in the world or with the people who generated those beautiful things.

Thayer’s Oxford friend Valentine Farrar, who died of a bullet wound to the head in the trenches of the Great War, made the prescient remark that Thayer would be remembered for something other than his philosophy or his verse. “If you do any permanent work,” he said, “I doubt if it will be in a genre which will appeal to you.” And indeed, Thayer’s greatest achievement must be the *Dial* of the 1920s. The importance of the little magazine in not only distributing but also formulating the art, literature, and criticism of the twentieth century has long been recognized by scholars, as has the importance of these publications in manifesting the social and aesthetic currents of the period. Further, the *Dial* has been singled out by scholars for its untold influence on

the 1920s and the decades beyond. This was partly due to its relative longevity. Few little magazines outlasted the enthusiasm of their founders, and the rate of infant mortality among these earnest journals was high. *The Dial*, however, lasted the entire decade under Thayer and his partner, James Sibley Watson, thanks to not only the deep and generous pockets of its owners but also the choice of material for the magazine, which was exquisitely in touch with both traditional work and the avant-garde. Many of the writers and artists featured in the *Dial* would comprise a major portion of the canon of the century's culture. *The Dial* brought to the notice of American and European readers the work of Cummings, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Thomas Mann, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Bertrand Russell, Romain Roland, Edmund Wilson, Van Wyck Brooks, and many others. The artists whose work was seen (often for the first time) by readers included Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Klimt, O'Keefe, Demuth, and Lachaise.

But to Thayer, the *Dial* was an albatross around his neck. It never in its almost ten years of existence turned a profit and, in fact, cost its owners as much as a hundred thousand dollars a year to keep going. Thayer complained that the magazine gave him no time to write, but the truth is that Thayer was deeply involved with microscopic details regarding the magazine, once pulping and reprinting an entire run because of a single grammatical error, as well as choosing, buying, and overseeing the reproduction of art in the magazine (his art collection, worth about \$15 million at his death in 1982, was bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York). With running a magazine, traveling, buying art, undergoing analysis, treating his many physical maladies, and conducting a complex set of personal relationships, Thayer had little time for anything else.

And yet, despite the magazine's impact in ushering modernism into America, Thayer himself rejected the label of modern. Indeed, he found much of the modernity celebrated by others—the city, technology, speed, mass-production—utterly horrific. He loathed the internal combustion engine, and many of his travels were not so much a search for adventure as an often desperate quest for peace and quiet. Since his vast fortune was created by his father's busily creative mind and the forces of the industrial and technological revolutions of the nineteenth century, Thayer must have seen the irony in his using that fortune to flee the factories and the cities that had created it.

Thayer found modernism more congenial in the form of art than of literature. He regarded Picasso as the greatest painter of his generation but was completely dismissive of Eliot's "disappointing" *The Waste Land* and

Ezra Pound's "silly" *Cantos*. He regarded James Joyce's later work as an unreadable failure. His championing of Cummings—the *Dial* just about made the poet's reputation—is perhaps understandable, considering how both men were highly visual in their tastes, Cummings as an artist and Thayer as a lover of art.

Thayer was also an early proponent of psychotherapy, and in 1921 he moved to Vienna for two years to become a patient of Freud's. For Thayer, psychoanalysis was very much an active, engaged practice. He challenged his therapists, including Freud, quizzing them on the very premises of their ideas and methods. Of course, this led to further inner conflict, for in challenging these ideas, Thayer was questioning what could potentially cure him. And if the analyst does not believe the process has any healing powers, what can be the outcome except failure? Indeed, one of his friends saw Thayer's eventual breakdown as an existential leap into insanity undertaken so as to demonstrate the superiority of his mind over the Freudian method. In this view, Thayer's mental eclipse was a tragedy of overweening coupled with an unshakeable disillusionment with life that, untouched by the ministrations of Freud and other analysts, sent Thayer plunging almost willingly into madness. There is romance in such a view, but the more banal fact is that the cause of his illness may well have been that form of schizophrenia that attacks the young up to the age of thirty. That Thayer was somewhat older than usual when the disease was noted may simply have been the cushioning effect of his wealth. Certainly, he manifested paranoid and schizophrenic behavior long before being diagnosed.

After his removal from public life in 1927, he became more and more a figure of mystery. The scholar Nicholas Joost hoped to write the biography, but Thayer was still alive, and his guardians refused to allow anything of a personal nature to be mentioned in Joost's books on the *Dial*. By the time he died in 1982, he was all but forgotten except by scholars of modernism.

My hope is that this book will set the figure of Scofield Thayer back where it belongs, at the center of that madding press of movements, talents, and personalities that has been subsumed, for better or worse, under the encrusting rubric of modernism. His correspondence and his personal writings show a man intensely involved in his time. He traveled frequently between America and Europe. His apartment at the Benedick in New York City was visited by artists and writers, and the monthly dinner at the offices of the *Dial* in Greenwich Village attracted artists, musicians, journalists, the literati, and celebrities. Thayer was one of the few Americans invited by Gerald and Sara

Murphy to the legendary champagne dinner party on the Seine to celebrate the 1923 opening of Igor Stravinsky's *Les noces*. Attending were Pablo Picasso, Darius Milhaud, Jean Cocteau, Stravinsky, Sergei Diaghilev, Gontcharova, Mikhail Larionov, Marcelle Mayer, Ernest Ansermet (who conducted *Les noces*), and the poets Tristan Tzara and Blaise Cendrars. The gala itself, which featured hijinks by Picasso, Cocteau, and Stravinsky, has entered the lore of the period and become as much or more of a touchstone of modernism as the event it celebrated. Thayer's work as editor of the *Dial* and his voluminous correspondence with the writers and artists whose work he published gives us a sense of the frenetic and often contradictory intellectual and aesthetic currents that were then flowing, charging the era with a rare energy.

Thayer was a paradox—a millionaire who boasted of voting the Socialist ticket, a romantic who loved prostitutes, a man who would argue over a trifling tradesman's bill and yet who lavished money on artists and poets. With his curious blend of the Victorian and the libertine—social rudeness enraged him, yet he championed free love—Thayer was both a paradigm of propriety and a student of the crude. His taste was similarly far-reaching, and he enjoyed prizefights and burlesque as much as poetry readings and evenings at the opera. He was pugnacious regarding art and literature, and he rarely allowed a reputation to impress him. Of Pound and his exhortation that "Poetry should be at least as well written as prose," Thayer remarked, "Better, we hope, than his prose."

My trips to the hulking Thayer monolith were made with no real purpose other than to put myself into a space where Thayer, in life, had been. We know that he came to the site as a schoolboy when his father died suddenly in 1907. Probably, after being declared insane, he was here with his guardians when his mother died in 1936. And in July 1982, he made his final trip to the grave when his cremated remains were buried here.

Thayer spent much of his life seeking respite from the modern world through medicine, psychoanalysis, travel, and art. There is great irony, then, in his being perceived as the father of the *Dial*, the conduit through which passed so much of what would come to be called modernistic.

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It was Gerard Goggins, author and journalist, who first suggested Scofield Thayer to me as a project, and I thank him for what turned into a job that has pleasurablely dominated my professional life for some years, even though I must say that it is fortunate that, at the tentative beginnings of my research, I was cheerfully ignorant of the vast amount of material I would need to view before this book took its final shape. My interest in the mysterious Thayer was also piqued by the work of three other journalists with whom it was my pleasure to work—Peter Donker, Gary Murray, and Daryl Perch.

I relied heavily on the work done by Nicholas Joost in his several books on Thayer and the *Dial* and also on his papers at Georgetown University Library. While Joost was unable to treat of Thayer's personal life, his precise descriptions of the daily workings of the magazine and its staff were endlessly useful. The Cummings scholar Michael Webster helped in filling in my knowledge of the poet and in transcribing Cummings's handwriting. Another Cummings expert and scholar, Bernard Stehle, was also generous with both his knowledge of and his material on Elaine Orr, Thayer's wife, and her daughter, Nancy. Dale Davis, literary executor for James Sibley Watson, welcomed me into her home and gave me access to material available nowhere else. My gratitude also goes out to the following individuals: Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson for permission to quote from the works and writing of Alyse Gregory; Sally Connely for permission to quote from the works of Llewelyn Powys; Craig Tenney for permission to quote from the works of Sherwood Anderson; Andy Lowe for permission to quote from the writing of Adolf Dehn; Stanley Ellis Cushing of the Boston Athenaeum for permission to quote from the papers of Stewart Mitchell; Anthony Burke for allowing me to quote from Kenneth Burke's correspondence; the Santayana Edition at Indiana University for allowing the use of quotes from

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For the shuttling of my carcass to and from airports, for managing our home affairs during my many research absences, for her suggestions and support, and for allowing me to live for so long with half (or more) of my mind in the early part of the last century, love and thanks to my wife, Gail.

1

AN INTELLECTUAL SEWER

In the summer of 1924, a newspaper reporter from the *Worcester (Mass.) Sunday Telegram* conducted an interview with the portraitist John Christen Johansen, who had been hired by Worcester's Clark University to paint a full-length portrait of its president, Wallace A. Atwood. The college was young, having opened its doors only thirty-five years before, but it had already made a name for itself partly by hooking its star to the newly emerging field of psychology. A conference there in 1909 had drawn such luminaries of the growing discipline as Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud; it was to be, as the college still proudly points out, Freud's only visit to the United States.

Johansen was a successful, prize-winning artist and portraitist and an old-school and unapologetic representationalist who made a living painting the wealthy and powerful. He was in the mood to talk. The artist's first anecdote was intended to demonstrate that, as a craftsman, he would have no truck with the romantic or the mystical. He told of a young woman who had enthused inordinately over one of his portraits.

"Oh, you have got the spirit exactly," she gushed to Johansen. "You have seen through the veil."

"Madam," responded the crusty limner, "if there had been a veil there, I should have painted it."¹

Johansen was just priming himself for an attack on his young contemporaries, who irritated him no end. For one thing, he was furious with what many were beginning to call modern art, which he felt was at best sloppy and at worst fraudulent. "There is no such thing as the modern or the new in art," he said. "There is good, or bad. The 'new' artists want to approach their drawings from an intellectual standpoint. Art comes from the heart. If

it doesn't, it isn't art. They are not willing to spend any time on craft, in learning how to do things well. Even a plumber has apprentices who have to learn their jobs."

Warming to his subject, Johansen expanded his argument to include the so-called naturalists in both arts and letters.

"The naturalists in all the arts have carried things to such idiotic extremes that they have superimposed on their work the very thing they set out to destroy—self-consciousness," he said. "They were dreadfully opposed to the craftsmen in art and called them prudes. But when they themselves write or paint they do so desire not to be prudish that they swing to the other extreme and concentrate upon the obscene. You will find that to be true in the novel and in the 'new' painting. If there is no definite obscene subject, the lines themselves are obscene, and there is an obscene effect."

He also criticized the subject matter of the moderns. "Instead of taking the great point of view, they take the little one," he went on. "They look at a small thing until it becomes too large to them. All great artists have done epic things, with proportionate epic figures. Even Matisse is doing figures of a woman looking searchingly at a hairpin or looking at herself in the mirror."

Modernism was hardly new at the time. The movement, which, among other things, had caused artists of every type to reconsider everything—their subject matter, their methods, their materials, the very definitions and foundations of their art—had been building steadily since the middle of the nineteenth century. The word "modernism" had entered the popular vocabulary following the outcries against such works as Marcel Duchamp's painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* and Igor Stravinsky's opera *Le sacre du printemps*. Modernist works in general were scolded by critics and mocked by the popular press.² Of course, these reactions served only to feed the fires of the movement, since some of the disciples of the avant-garde largely saw a world separated into three groups—artists, those who appreciated artists, and philistines. For some members of the avant-garde, the ire of those who did not understand was both a badge of honor and even a proof that one had indeed created art.

Nor at this point did the steamroller of modernism show signs of slowing down. In literature alone, the 1910s and 1920s had produced T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (the publication of which in the *Dial* was described by poet William Carlos Williams as an "atom bomb");³ the serialization of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which resulted in a celebrated court case; and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, poems that were dense and unyielding of their meaning even by modernist standards. So many -isms proliferated—imagism, vorticism, futurism, Dadaism, surrealism,

cubism—that a couple of wags were able to fool renowned editors, critics, and poets into supporting and championing the movement of spectrism, which was a hoax.⁴ Each movement came with its own manifesto, strident and earnest, puffing and blowing itself into paroxysms of aesthetic self-righteousness.

Like other artists of his generation, Johansen feared what many saw in some versions of modernism—a force that seemed to want to overthrow the very rules of order that for him defined art. “The whole modern world has been mad for sensation and has cared nothing for ideas,” he said.

As soon as people have had one sensation, they hop from one thing to another until they are so frightfully extreme that it’s paralyzing. . . . From this extreme there is beginning to be a reaction again from sensation. There should of course be feeling as well as thought but this search for sensation has been like a prairie fire, burning with no restraint. . . . Take a fire and put it under steamers and boilers, and it’s good for industry. But subject it to no restraints and it does only damage.

The portraitist also gave some counsel to those trying to understand art. He again dragged from his store of cautionary anecdotes a hapless female. “I remember that a woman who had no taste asked my advice about buying pictures,” he said.

Any academic mind can discover what is really best in paintings or pictures. I told her to buy a \$5 one, and live with it a while, then to buy a \$10 picture, and live with it, and when she felt like it to buy another, a \$15 picture, and when she had three she would begin to have a basis for comparison of values and she would begin to learn. . . . If people who go to exhibits would be honest and, instead of admiring things because it was the thing to do, would say, “I don’t like that, I think it’s awful,” there would be some hope for art.

At one point during the interview, he trained his sights on an exhibit held earlier that year at the Worcester Art Museum entitled *Exhibition of the Dial Collection of Paintings, Engravings, and Drawings by Contemporary Artists*. The New York magazine the *Dial* was in many ways the premier avant-garde journal of its time, and one of its owners, Scofield Thayer, had amassed the works of art by a variety of modernist masters that comprised the exhibit.

Johansen was not impressed.

“The *Dial*,” he said, “is an intellectual sewer.”

The Dial, an international magazine of art, literature, and criticism that was published in New York City, was considered by many the leading magazine

of the modern. There were other American magazines of the period that took greater risks, resulting in their being closed down and their editors fined and even imprisoned, but the *Dial* had learned just how close it could sail to the winds of censorship and had achieved a longevity unusual for a “little magazine.” It also helped that the owners, Scofield Thayer and James Sibley Watson, were extremely wealthy and willing to run the magazine at a loss.

Johansen may have felt safe in criticizing this influential journal and its often modernist contents in the pages of a small provincial newspaper that was unlikely to be read by the sophisticates of New York. But, unfortunately for him, Worcester was Scofield Thayer’s hometown, and although Thayer rarely returned to the busy, hardworking mill city that had afforded his family its great wealth, Thayer’s mother, Florence, and other relatives and friends still lived in Worcester, and many were heavily involved in the city’s society and arts scene. One way or another, Thayer was bound to hear about the article.

Hear about it he indeed did, and in August Thayer initiated a campaign to rebuff the forces of philistinism. He wrote to the newspaper asking for permission to reproduce the photograph from the Johansen interview for a piece he was writing in response for the *Dial*.⁵ Margaret Brandenburg of the *Worcester Sunday Telegram* duly sent the photograph and also asked if she might interview Thayer. A few days later, Brandenburg wrote to Thayer again, this time more urgently and now evidently working on damage control. She had spoken with Johansen, she said, and the artist would rather Thayer not refer to the article because there were errors in it and his artistic viewpoint was not adequately represented. Thayer returned the picture, saying he didn’t want to use anything from the newspaper after considering the article. Unless the newspaper apologized for having printed that the *Dial* was an “intellectual sewer,” he said, he retained the right to criticize.

In February, Brandenburg wrote to Thayer again, offering to profile him in the newspaper’s Sunday magazine. She would be happy to allow him to read the copy before publication, she said. Thayer was having none of it, and his response was coolly polite. “Thank you for your kind letter,” he wrote. “I do not know I shall be going to Worcester this winter. Should I do so, I may be able to get in touch with you.”⁶ In the meantime, Thayer got busy drafting his response to the portrait painter’s charges. He had ordered the Johansen article through a clipping service and began notating it. He underlined the headline phrase “Famous American Artist,” which he would reproduce in his article, sarcastically capitalized and centered on the page. Of the college president who was sitting for the portrait, and whom Thayer disliked greatly, he wrote, “One trusts noth-

ing of Atwood will be good.” Overleaf, he tried out a few cutting lines and listed potential points of attack.

His response was published in the May 1925 “Comment” section of the *Dial*. It used as its epigraph Johansen’s “intellectual sewer” remark and then proceeded to vivisection the four players in the matter—the city of Worcester, the local newspaper, university president Atwood, and, of course, Johansen himself. He began mildly enough, characterizing the city of his birth as “this wholesome and brimming receptacle of legitimate activity” and its newspaper as the city’s “outstanding intellectual effort.”⁷ He even allowed himself to be in agreement with several of Johansen’s points regarding art. But then Thayer went on to quote the painter verbatim and, point by point, to demolish his self-contradictory and often downright wrong positions. To Johansen’s assertion that modern painters lacked skill, Thayer pointed out that artists such as Picasso and Matisse were quite able to paint in the classical style if they wished, but that they sought new methods of expression. Regarding the matter of painting to please oneself rather than the public, which Johansen had claimed to do, Thayer stated that it was Johansen, and not Picasso or Georgia O’Keefe, who was making good money painting flattering portraits of the powerful. As for Johansen’s story about teaching a woman to appreciate art, Thayer admitted himself utterly baffled as to what five-dollar, ten-dollar, and fifteen-dollar pictures had to do with the real value of art, not to mention how such a view squared with a man who claimed to paint to please himself.

Finally, Thayer’s article linked Clark University and the *Worcester Telegram* by referring to an incident when the Socialist Scott Nearing was prevented from speaking at Clark after Atwood ordered the janitor to put out the lecture room lights and so end the offending lecture. The newspaper had supported Atwood, Thayer pointed out:

And that same esteemed contemporary journal, after regretting, upon the part of the student body of Clark University, misplaced interest in Freedom of Speech, adventured the following pertinent editorial observation: “Perhaps it is unfortunate Clark college boys do not indulge themselves more extensively in baseball, football and other matters of such critical importance in the lives of ordinary collegians.” That the natural interest of young manhood in athletic games and competition should be in America so hypertrophied as quite to expunge all moral, political, and intellectual interests from American university undergraduate life would appear to be not wholly unsusceptible of explanation.

All in all, the two articles, one in a provincial newspaper, the other in an international highbrow magazine, comprise a classic exchange between the modernist and conventional views of art. Further, it showed that Thayer saw philistinism not only as an individual failing but also as a fault that ran through many levels of society, infecting both academia and the media; Clark University and the Worcester newspaper come off just as badly in the piece as does Johansen. The article also shows Thayer at his most supercilious and combative. He was a man who would always make his point, no matter what.

It follows from a reading of the “Comment” that Thayer had never been particularly fond of Worcester and what he later called its “Alpine village” cultural outlook.⁸ The one institution he had admired was the Worcester Art Museum, but even there he had been required to withdraw from the 1924 exhibit from his collection two works, a large Braque oil and a Picasso drawing, because of fears of how the more conservative art lovers might react to the paintings.⁹

By this time, Thayer had already begun to place pieces from his collection on long-term loan at the museum, and after his mental breakdown in the late 1920s and the consequent determination of his inability to look after himself, his mother continued to offer her son’s pieces to the grateful museum. Most of his collection ended up there, and many people believed that the works would stay at the museum after his death. But when he died in 1982, it was discovered that his will bequeathed the entire collection at Worcester to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. A lawsuit ensued, but the end result was that Thayer’s multimillion-dollar collection was packed up and trucked off to New York sixty years after Thayer’s exhibit there had been censored. On October 18, 1984, *Worcester Telegram* arts writer Peter P. Donker described the seventy-eight carefully packed cartons making their way south and leaving a huge hole in the heart of the Worcester museum’s collection. All of the sculptures fit into the cartons except one. “Gaston Lachaise’s ‘Standing Woman’ was too large,” Donker wrote. “The life-size bronze was wrapped in several blankets before being tied down in the truck. One of the hands was peeking from under the protective cover, and to Sally R. Freitag, the Worcester Art Museum’s Registrar, it looked as though the woman were waving goodbye.”

The will had been drawn up and notarized soon after Thayer used the pages of the *Dial* to slam the *Sunday Telegram* article that started it all. From the grave, and after a lifetime of madness, Thayer forcefully made his point.

2

HOMES OF VIRTUE

Worcester's Rural Cemetery dates back to 1838, and its ornate crypts and plots hold the remains of many of the city's most prosperous nineteenth-century families. Scofield Thayer's ashes lie in the plot next to that of the Crompton family, the patriarch of which was once in business with Thayer's father. The Crompton crypt is a red-tinged edifice of sandstone and granite decorated with carved scrolls and ferns. Sculpted cherubim gaze glumly down from the eaves. The building looks more like a miniature Gothic chapel than a crypt, with stained glass, an oaken door, and a rose window at the back. The Thayer monument next door is minimalist in contrast, a ten-foot, smooth granite oval monolith standing on end and bearing the names of the three departed Thayers, parents Edward and Florence and son Scofield. The trio made up the last small family unit in their particular line of Thayers.

The Worcester of the late nineteenth century was an industrial powerhouse of a mill town that ground out massive wealth for the innovative and the fortunate. It had been a city for only half a century, but during those decades it had grown inordinately. Its success can be in part attributed to the Blackstone Canal. Financed by Rhode Island merchants, the Blackstone moved Worcester's manufacturing products by barge down to the port of Providence and thence to worldwide markets and carried foreign products back into the American hinterland. The canal was relatively successful for twenty years or so, but by midcentury the expanding railroads, which were faster by orders of magnitude than canal transportation and not susceptible to the seasonal problems of flooding, drought, and ice, brought about the demise of the canal. Worcester, with the rude nimbleness of an adolescent, didn't miss a step. The canal had done its duty, giving the city important trade links to the outside

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