



## Editorial

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THIS issue of the *Quarterly* illustrates the value of deep, careful textual analysis. All five of our essays reflect the work of scholars who have plunged deeply into the sources to find hidden, layered stories that either demand the reconsideration of familiar subjects or use new perspectives and methods. A consistent theme of our authors has been the connection of intense scrutiny and sensitive reading of texts, broadly construed, to a keen awareness of the larger context of events. Each in his or her own fashion reflects extraordinary abilities to find in small details insights into New England's history and literature: the story of a black, enslaved puritan church member, the social and cultural implications of sacred meals among Protestants, Catholics, and indigenous peoples, layered meanings in a commercial literary genre peculiar to nineteenth-century publishing, the myth surrounding the Boston Athenaeum's founding, and a new perspective on the clergy's position during the Salem witch trials.

Deborah Colleen McNally's "To Secure her Freedom" and Clive Holmes's "The Opinion of the Cambridge Association" demonstrate the utility of intense, careful reading of sources in contrasting, but equally beneficial, ways. McNally scours church meeting records and gathers the small detail and isolated fragment to construct the religious and life history of Dorcas, who although black and enslaved was a highly regarded attendee at two puritan churches and a full church member of one of them. Clive Holmes's resurrection and close reading of a neglected text sheds new light on the position of the clergy regarding the use of spectral evidence. His reading compels the reconsideration not only of the cultural implications of the use of spectral

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evidence in identifying and convicting witches but of the impact of significant figures like Cotton and Increase Mather and Samuel Willard.

Our other major essays, by Carla Cevasco, Lynda Yankaskas, and Alexandra Urakova, caution us against the acceptance of obvious and superficial reading of texts. Cevasco translates material culture into texts that reveal the ideas and practices shaping puritans', Catholics', and Native Americans' use of vessels in sacred meals. Her close analysis of the form and structure of the instruments used in communion reveals the underlying cultures of these communities of faith. Approaching her texts in a similarly comparative fashion, Yankaskas looks beyond the recollections about the origins of the Boston Athenaeum to find a more complicated story of local needs, regional rivalries and boosterism, and transatlantic communication and fashion, that informs our recent conversations about the origins of Americans' sense of national identity and the cultural implications of shifting political fortunes in the early republic. She cautions us to be careful of the ways in which memories all too easily are malleable. Like Cevasco and Yankaskas, Urakova is not content with the obvious story. In her examination of Hawthorne's contributions to the genre of the gift book, a particular form of antebellum commercial publishing, she opens up a window into his early stories and their role in the emergence of an American literary esthetic that challenged a safe, sentimental form of sociability in favor of a darker, more substantive literary tradition on native ground.

This issue also marks another transition in the life of the *Quarterly* at the University of Massachusetts. We bid farewell to our first graduate assistant, Kristof Nelson, and welcome Sarah Black. Kristof was instrumental in helping us to get settled in our new offices and capably dealt with the new and frequently unanticipated challenges of putting out the journal. With Sarah and Gabby Garneau, our continuing graduate assistant, he has left us in capable hands.

—JONATHAN M. CHU