



Editorial

IN the midst of a post-doc spent among first-year students at a highly selective law school, I became mystified by their inability to comprehend the doctrine in contract law known as the Four Corners Rule. In brief, the rule requires that the intentions of contracting parties must be determined by the plain language within the four corners of the writing. The problem for my very bright young colleagues—who, much like the Napoleonic privates carrying field marshal’s batons in their haversacks, aspired to seats on the federal appellate bench, the Supreme Court, or, perhaps for the less ambitious, a partnership in a prestigious, national law firm—was the corollary to the rule: of determining when the text was unclear and justified invoking facts or evidence outside the four corners of the written contract. This issue of the *QUARTERLY* would have only confused them further as it sheds light about reading sources. Our two major essays, Christine DeLucia’s “Terrapolitics in the Dawnland” and Sari Edelstein’s, ““Good Mother, Farewell,”” Paul Lewis’s *RECONSIDERATIONS* essay identifying the author of the poem “Lines Written by a Lady,” and Lawrence Buell’s “Bicentennial Thoreau” suggest how much our understanding of documents requires a mastery of context, of knowing how seemingly unambiguous text hides significant narratives or of recognizing the facile ways “homely facts” are connected to broad generalizations.

Christine DeLucia’s essay “Terrapolitics of the Dawnland” points out the ways in which Wampanoags understood their multiple connections to geographic place and applies those relationships to her analysis of Native people’s interactions with British settlers. In particular, the essay would have taught my

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law school colleagues the constructed nature of legal documents, of their representations of multiple meanings even when, to an English setter, the legal language seemed *prima facie* clear and unambiguous. DeLucia chronicles how, despite the imposition of an Anglo legal system upon Wampanoag people, they still found ways to navigate within it and resist its linguistic and legal hegemony. Sari Edelstein's study of the story of Elizabeth "Mumbet" Freeman illustrates further the difficulties of authoritative facts. Freeman's story has a rare redemptive quality for New Englanders, a slave, she, with the help of the celebrated Sedgwick family, sues for her freedom and sets one of the precedents that effectively ends slavery in Massachusetts. In examining the evolution of the re-telling of this story, Edelstein points out how the narratives are utilitarian and functional: developed to tell the stories of the emotional needs of the Sedgwick family, to cloak northern slave culture within a more beneficent air and redeem New England from its sin, but not to illuminate her life. Like Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*, Edelstein demonstrates the importance of the deep interrogation of documents to know "who lives/ who dies/ who tells your story."

In a similar fashion, Paul Lewis suggests that identifying the author of the anonymous poem "Lines Written by a Lady" might contribute to our understanding of women's place in the early republic. Consistent with the other essays in this issue, Lewis does not rest upon the plain language of the text but uses a wide range of techniques and contexts—examining meter, comparisons to others, and contextualizing its personal circumstances and publication history—to conclude that "Lines" was written by Judith Sargent Murray. Having arrived at its authorship, Lewis goes on to suggest the implications of this conclusion for Murray, feminist literature of the period, and, not so coincidentally, a better understanding the poem.

Celebrating, albeit belatedly, Henry David Thoreau's bicentennial, we are fortunate to have Lawrence Buell's review on the current state of Thoreauvian scholarship. Commenting on the recent efflorescence of scholarship both prior to and after the bicentennial of Thoreau's birth, Buell notes the ways in

which recent scholars have integrated the sage into his community and circumstances. Recent Thoreau biographers like Laura Dassaw Walls and Dieter Schulz have moved beyond the narrow and political sphere, placed him within the context of his social network in Concord, and thus given us a wider appreciation of his intellectual gifts. The studies of Thoreau as naturalist and scientist, Buell notes, have given us perspectives that provide us with a deeper appreciation of his writings and genius, affirm the wisdom of interdisciplinary approaches to the analysis of text, and create epiphanic moments evoking broad vistas but ones tied to “homely facts on the ground.”

All four essays also speak to the value of diverse perspectives. Pundits are all too quick to assume the value of diversity as a virtue unto itself; however, here at the *QUARTERLY*, we find wisdom in the diversity of perspectives found in our submissions and reviews because they reflect continuities with the past while promising opportunities for future study and deeper understanding. We do not continue to assume, as Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. did, that Massachusetts or New England lies at the hub of the solar system, but we do believe that these studies remind us that New England remains an important medium for reflection about the contours of the history and culture of the United States and the world. We are especially pleased that in their significant manner these essays continue to use homely facts to create epiphanic moments and help us better delineate broad vistas.

The *QUARTERLY* is pleased to announce its fall personnel changes. Daniel O’Hara, a graduate student in English, joins our staff as an editorial assistant; and Ryan Hunt, an undergraduate history major, as an editorial intern.

We also encourage submissions for the 2019 Whitehill Prize; the submission deadline this year has been extended to January 15, 2020. For further information, please refer to the posting in this issue.

—Jonathan M. Chu