

ists, given the influence of Dutch merchants in many diverse European historical spheres. In this light, it is especially laudable that the publisher of the volume has made the text freely available in pdf form from the University of Amsterdam Press website via a Creative Commons license.

Erik R. Seeman. *Speaking with the Dead in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. ix + 329 pp. + 25 illus. \$39.95. Review by WILLIAM J. SCHEICK, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.

Death is perfectly natural; life after death is perfectly unnatural. The former is utterly observable, whereas the latter remains remotely imperceptible. Neither fact, however, has prevented deep human sentiment from enthusiastically affirming the reality of an afterlife as well as imagining that state as a perfected version of corporeal existence. Over time, various religious beliefs (both official and unofficial) have morphed in one way or another to accommodate the mind's ego-driven longing to live forever.

It is easy enough to take on faith what is already profoundly desired. Even so, who among believers in an afterlife would not welcome some inkling of verification, especially coming from deceased loved ones bearing good news? This question pervades Erik R. Seeman's readable, thoughtful, and evenhanded *Speaking with the Dead in Early America*. Seeman finds that early American reports of ghostly apparitions during the first half of the seventeenth century reveal a widespread belief in a permeable boundary between this world and the next.

Sometimes, in fact, seventeenth-century friends or relatives made pacts, with each person promising a postmortem contact with the remaining, living member. Various personal narratives recorded the fulfillment of such promises—comforting, not scary accounts. Of course, Protestant clergy expressed skepticism. Wary of Roman Catholic taint in reports of ghostly apparitions, they insisted that no tormented souls ever wandered from purgatory, which did not exist. Church leaders fretted over whether apparitional encounters were merely imagined by the bereaved or, perhaps, were dangerous delu-

sions spawned by fallen angels.

And yet even Increase Mather believed a London mother's testimony. In *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits* (1693), he concluded that in rare instances "Persons after their Death [do] appear unto the Living." His son Cotton Mather likewise credited a Boston man's account of a deceased murdered brother's transatlantic apparition and deduced, in *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), that "the spectre, it seems, took the same time, that the Sun takes, to pass over the Degrees of Longitude, into America." However reluctant their concessions might have been, New England ministers acknowledged that sometimes, albeit seldomly, spirits of the dead could briefly return from the supernatural world. The very notion of this undisputed, yet unknowable, realm of departed souls left ample room for inexplicable experiences such as ghostly visitations.

Less direct, and far more sanctioned, interaction with the dead informed New England funeral poetry. Such occasional verse, brought to and read at burial sites, served as an acceptable medium for the bereaved to speak to and hear from the deceased. These works displayed emotional anticipations of heavenly reunions—a theme that has been (Seeman maintains) mistakenly thought to originate during the second half of the eighteenth century. A century earlier, in fact, Anne Bradstreet engaged this theme in elegies she penned during the 1660s. Moreover, "in New England, Increase and Cotton Mather led the ministerial turn toward greater attention to heavenly reunions."

The rise of "talking gravestones" (in Seeman's phrasing) paralleled a shift in the early eighteenth century from an older Calvinist emphasis on the beatific vision as the saints' heavenly reward to a more humanly comforting hope for a postmortem reunion of loved ones. Gravestones, like elegies, provided another form of communication between the living and the dead. At first, New England graves went unmarked; later, wooden markers were utilized. Gravestones, with winged skulls and folk icons, appeared during the 1670s, when funeral customs became more elaborate. Similar to elegies, engraved epitaphs both addressed and spoke for the deceased. Over time, these enduring gravestones became religious objects possessing a form of agency bordering close to, but remaining distinct from, the forbidden territory of Roman Catholic material culture.

A still greater degree of ambiguity informed eighteenth-century print culture, which featured a dynamic interplay between belief and skepticism about ghosts. Various writings could be considered true relations or mere entertainment—an uncertainty that allowed for multiple reader responses unified only by an abiding curiosity about the afterlife. Here, Seeman finds, lies a wellspring for the nineteenth-century “cult of the dead, a religious complex that in the early nineteenth century emerged from Protestantism but contained lay- and especially female-driven elements distinct from mainstream Protestantism.”

Thomas Keymer. *Poetics of the Pillory: English Literature and Seditious Libel, 1660–1820*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. xviii + 323 pp. + 31 illus. \$35. Review by NIALL ALLSOPP, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER.

Thomas Keymer’s excellent new book is a combined history and critical study of the ways in which conditions of censorship shaped English literature during the long eighteenth century (1660–1820). The book began life as the Clarendon Lectures given at the University of Oxford in 2014–15; these have been expanded with rich archival and critical detail, without sacrificing the energy and lucidity of the lectures (including retaining the use of contractions).

Keymer’s central claim is that indirect censorship via the threat of post-publication retribution proved “a crucial determinant of eighteenth-century authorship” (21). The pillory, memorably described by Daniel Defoe as the “hieroglyphic state machine,” was in reality neither so “wholly indecipherable” as a hieroglyph (7), nor so relentlessly systematic as a machine. Keymer is at pains to warn us against a “totalitarian fallacy” (13), specifically fingered as “Foucauldian” (7), which imagines censorship as a monolithic or coherently-articulated structure. The pillory was a piece of street theatre, a spectacle of “publike terror” (12), which sometimes became an occasion for mob violence, but which could also be converted by its wilier victims into a “festival of defiance” (5). And it was only one component in a larger web of retributive tactics including “extra-legal harassment” and “sleazy