

Amy M. E. Morris. *Popular Measures: Poetry and Church Order in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005. 282 pp. \$53.50. Review by WILLIAM J. SCHEICK, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.

During recent decades the focus of colonial American studies has dramatically shifted from writings commonly understood to be artistic endeavors to discourses explicitly designed to perform practical or political functions. Interest in aesthetic design has been almost entirely displaced by attention to implicit cultural undercurrents and influences. In recent years, as a result, colonial poets have received precious little analytical attention. Even the brilliant verse meditations of Edward Taylor, the most outstanding of colonial American poets, has virtually vanished from critical interest. Taylor's complex poems, which cannot be appreciated without attentive close reading, endure now chiefly though meager samples obligatorily included in American literature anthologies.

Concern with Puritan aesthetics has never been a favored investigative pursuit. At best such studies formed a small, easily ignored patch in a vast grassland of historical commentary. Early critics of colonial American literature often seemed to be historians at heart rather than literary scholars, and it is easy to see how today their historical sensibility, presently garbed as cultural studies, continues to define this field of study. To remark this perennial pattern is not to deny the importance of historical context when trying to appreciate Puritan artistic efforts, but something special and particularly close to the human heart has been disfranchised.

The multifarious performance of language and form evidences more than history or culture. It expresses the human spirit in exuberant pursuit of its own expansive potentialities within any given historical context. How many people commence reading a literary creation in the reductive expectation of experiencing that work's historical or cultural properties? On the other hand, how many read a poem or story in the hope of encountering something quintessentially human that stirs and delights their sense of wonder?

In *Popular Measures* Amy M. E. Morris delves into the performative nature of several Puritan poems. She aims to elucidate at least one major mutual

feature behind their capacity to stir and delight the readers of their time. Her thesis is straightforward: in refashioning poetic English models Puritan poets developed an art that replicated their New England religious culture's peculiar and inconsistent effort to balance conformity and non-conformity, ritualistic liturgical practice and unmediated individual spirituality.

In featuring the Bay Psalm Book, Michael Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom*, and Edward Taylor's *Gods Determinations*, Morris selects writings that have notoriously resisted present-day appreciation as aesthetic undertakings. All three are usually approached in relation to theological or historical considerations. Two, however, were extraordinarily admired in their time as popular art, a contemporary appeal that by and large has baffled critics. That these works were emphatically designed for and well received by an audience becomes Morris's starting point. In undertaking to fathom the relationship between their contemporary allure and their aesthetic design Morris has assigned herself a difficult mission.

The key element in Morris's investigation is a fundamental dilemma that was common to non-conformist churches. On the one hand, non-conformists defined themselves as opposed to fixed liturgical prototypes, including prescribed patterns of prayer which (they believed) encouraged spiritual passivity. On the other hand, their emphasis on active experiential piety, on spontaneous personal encounters with divinity, opened the way to uncivil antinomian impulses. To maintain church authority a variety of conformity-measures (including the halfway covenant) were implemented to restrain these potentially disruptive impulses. This persistent problematical binary, Morris contends, also informed Puritan verse, which inclined toward liturgical forms even as it simultaneously retreated from them.

By insisting on their translation's fidelity to Scripture, the creators of the Bay Psalm Book drew attention to their departure from the elegant example of others. They invited expectations of a more open divine encounter than they believed was customarily provided by human artifice. But, Morris finds, beneath this guise of a deliberate sacrificial imperfection the Bay Psalm Book evinced various kinds of conformity that effectively reinstated liturgy.

*The Day of Doom*, influenced by the Bay Psalm Book, likewise contains narrative self-referential instances questioning the success of its or any other poem's performance as a spiritual mediator. The work's popular ballad form, Morris observes, is tellingly unsuitable to its urgent pious message

about the mysterious process of personal salvation. This disparity, among other clues, underscores the inadequacy of art even as *The Day of Doom* identifies itself as an artistic spiritual agency.

*Gods Determinations*, which was never published but was apparently designed for an audience, similarly departs from expected patterns. Although this long poem withdraws from such models as hymn, prayer, and antiphon, it nonetheless echoes these very forms within a common language akin to personal spiritual relations. In effect, then, Edward Taylor's poem expresses a facilitating tension between formulaic prototype and personal piety that enables the poet to offer an acceptable verse version of a spiritually comforting liturgical aid.

While not every phase of Morris's argument is equally convincing, her investigation into the Puritan aesthetics informing these three audience-oriented poems is deeply informed, generally persuasive and productively suggestive. Especially impressive is her conscientious regard for what others have already observed about Puritan poetry. In the course of writing her book Morris not only undertook the difficult mission of making a case for three critically-resistant works but also the equally daunting task of identifying coherent patterns within the current welter of critical discourse pertinent to her thesis. It is heartening to see this rare sort of scholarly integrity, and Morris has indeed earned her entry into the early Americanist community.

Matthew Glozier. *Marshal Schomberg (1615-1690), "The Ablest Soldier of His Age": International Soldiering and the Formation of State Armies in Seventeenth-Century Europe*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005. xxviii + 250 pp. + 3 illus. Paper \$35.00. Review by EDWARD M. FURGOL, NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER.

For far too long (since 1789) we have awaited a new biography of Marshal Schomberg. Glozier has responded with one in this third book dealing with seventeenth century military history. The account (derived from published primary sources in addition to secondary ones) follows a largely chronological path (with a few diversions such as an account of the general's death on p. 2). Schomberg was not only a product of his age, but also a double victim of it. His parents rose to prominence in the aftermath of the