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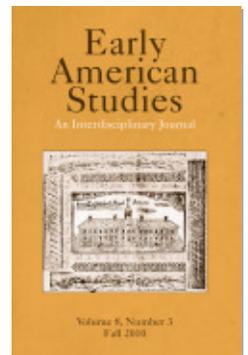
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The Antinomian Controversy Did Not Take Place

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ABSTRACT The Antinomian Controversy that has preoccupied generations of early Americanists did not occur as a theological crisis in Massachusetts Bay in the 1630s. Instead, its status as a distinctive crisis in the history of early New England is an artifact of debates between apologists for the New England Way and Presbyterian heresiographers in the 1640s. Reading these texts of this debate in conjunction with John Winthrop's journal and the far more benign account John Clarke offers in *Ill News from New England* (1652) reveals that it is trans-Atlantic print exchanges between Presbyterians and Independents that impose the familiar structure of the Antinomian Controversy as a singular crisis with Anne Hutchinson at its center. Despite their ideological differences, Independent and Presbyterian polemicists colluded to produce a narrative of these events that exaggerated their exceptional nature. With few exceptions, the frame this religious debate imposed on the events of the 1630s has dictated the terms of subsequent historical debates of these events, from Cotton Mather to the present.

This article borrows its title from Jean Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*.¹ Baudrillard's title refers to actual events in the Persian Gulf rendered virtual to audiences on the other side of the world through specific conditions and technologies of representation.² Conversely, my concern is with a Massachusetts Bay event that did not take place, made real for audi-

1. Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

2. As Patton explains in his introduction, "The [first] Gulf War thus witnessed the birth of a new kind of military apparatus which incorporates the power to control the production and circulation of images as well as the power to direct the actions of bodies and machines." *Ibid.*, 6.

ences on the other side of the Atlantic through specific conditions and technologies of representation. To clarify: Anne Hutchinson was real. Her civil and ecclesiastical trials were real. John Wheelwright really preached a fast sermon that the General Court deemed seditious, and many Hutchinson sympathizers really decamped to Rhode Island or to New Hampshire. All these things took place.

What did not take place was the distinct, high-stakes contest for the future of the Bay Colony that is a staple of New England historiography from its earliest to its most recent iterations. Instead, these narratives of a crisis are an artifact of the historiography of the event, from Thomas Weld and John Winthrop's *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians, Familists, and Libertines* to the most recent scholarship on colonial New England.³ The Antinomian Controversy was only one of several crises that afflicted the Bay Colony in its first decade, and which unfolded simultaneously. The events gathered under the label of the Antinomian Controversy were part of a much broader spectrum of trouble for the Bay Colony. Alongside the threat of heterodoxy posed by John Cotton's role in the Antinomian Controversy, there are the real blows to the infant colony in the form of Roger Williams's apostasy and exile, and Thomas Hooker's departure for Hartford, and a host of civil woes.

The passage of texts back and forth across the Atlantic, however, carved the diffuse and chaotic reality of colonial Massachusetts into a metropolitan narrative presenting a much more pronounced contrast between the Antinomian Controversy and the rest of the early history of the Bay Colony. In historiography both then and now, the Antinomian Controversy frequently emerges as a specific episode of crisis in high relief against the artificially smooth backdrop of everyday life in the Bible Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There is, however, another way of telling this story—as we will see, even as Independent apologists and Presbyterian heresiographers both labored to produce a narrative of a crisis, at least one narrator outside this debate saw the events of the Antinomian Controversy as part of the natural evolution of the English settlement of New England.

3. Michael Winship's *Making Heretics*, the first book-length study of these events in a generation, makes a salutary intervention in replacing "Antinomian Controversy" with "Free Grace Controversy," but in its continued focus on a (single) controversy, and its 1636–41 trajectory, it does work to reinscribe the familiar contours of Hutchinson's rise, reign, and ruin. Michael Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1. Various editions of *A Short Story* spell *ruin* differently. This article follows the usage of David Hall's text.

The emergence of the Antinomian Controversy as the signal event of the first decade of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s is not the product of Winthrop's narrative or indeed of any single text. Rather, tracing the emergence of the Antinomian Controversy as a distinct phenomenon, presented as an anomalous event outside the normative state of affairs of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, reveals how trans-Atlantic ideological conflicts in the 1640s produced this event in its familiar form, and continue to shape current academic discourse about this issue.

Understanding the Antinomian Controversy as an artifact of print culture, rather than as an event, does not diminish the significance of the rich scholarly discourse it has produced. Instead, this recognition has the potential to offer a degree of coherence to a heterogeneous and contentious historiography covering nearly four centuries. The various ideological investments narrators such as Weld, Baillie, Johnson, and Mather have in this story are not hard to discern. It is not as clear, however, what the stakes are for more recent narrators. This essay seeks to retell a familiar story in the hope that rethinking this well-trampled vignette of early American history will raise some significant questions about what we mean by primary and secondary sources, and what, as scholars, our investment is in the past.

ORDER AND SENSE

The primary evidence that the Antinomian Controversy did not take place comes from a patient reading of John Winthrop's journal. Of course, Winthrop's journal also forms a significant portion of the documentary evidence for what we call the Antinomian Controversy. The historian of the Antinomian Controversy must pick Antinomian-related events out of the litany of travails Winthrop relates. Thus, if one reads Winthrop's journal straight through, the Antinomian Controversy recedes in importance. In addition to the departure of Hooker and his congregation to Connecticut, and the apostasy and exile of Williams, Winthrop reports more contained turmoil in churches at Charlestown, Salem, Saugus, Watertown, and Woburn. These ecclesiastical contentions, not to mention ongoing political bickering, all played out against a background of the Pequot war, shipwrecks, infanticide, marauding wolves and wildcats, and surprisingly colorful judicial deliberations on cases of sexual deviancy.⁴ The kind of challenge Anne Hutchinson

4. John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649*, ed. Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yandle (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996) (hereafter JWJ). For Hooker, see especially 126–28, 177; Williams, 163; Charlestown, 172; Salem, 151; Saugus, 164–65. Watertown, 60, 72; Woburn, 420–21; Indian attacks, 181–238; shipwrecks, 331, 340; infanticide,

posed to the Bay Colony does not begin with her arrival or end with her departure. In December 1638 Winthrop mentions that Mary Oliver, who had earlier been in trouble in England “for refusing to bow at the name of Jesus,” was “for ability of speech, and appearance of zeal and devotion . . . far before Mrs. Hutchinson” and might have done more harm than Hutchinson, but for her inferior social rank.⁵ After Hutchinson, various incursions of Familists and Baptists troubled the Bay Colony, followed by the Quaker invasions of the late 1650s and early 1660s. As a story, as the star of the Antinomian Controversy, however, Anne Hutchinson becomes a token in an ideological contest between the Bay Colony’s apologists and its opponents. The true church, beset by a Jezebel, is a story suitable for export; chronic arguments and defections within the body of New England clergy are not.

To consider how these events function in historiography, a brief review of the events constituting the Antinomian Controversy may be useful. In the summer of 1634, Anne Hutchinson and her family arrived in Boston, having followed John Cotton from Lincolnshire. At some point in the next two years, Anne Hutchinson began to hold meetings in her house to repeat and discuss the previous week’s sermons.⁶ In October 1636, Bay Colony ministers convened a “conference in private” with Hutchinson, Cotton, and John Wheelwright, Hutchinson’s brother-in-law. This meeting served not only to address Hutchinson’s unorthodox ideas, but also to consider whether John Cotton was their source. The ministers were able to settle these questions of justification and sanctification, but parishioners of the Boston church loyal to Hutchinson proposed that Wheelwright take the place of John Wilson, a Hutchinson opponent, as the second minister of the Boston church.⁷ Winthrop resolved this confrontation in favor of Wilson, but it led to a second meeting of ministers with Cotton and Hutchinson. In the meantime, on December 7, Henry Vane resigned as governor, and then withdrew his

269–70; cats, 341; deviancy, 361, 370–72, 374, 385. These examples are representative rather than exhaustive.

5. *Ibid.*, 275.

6. David Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), 5. This is the first but not the only case in which Bay Colony apologetics are repackaged to be more appealing to metropolitan London readers—*Hypocrisie Unmasked*, Edward Winslow’s attack on Samuel Gorton, evidently found few London readers, for the original sheets were rebound with a new title, “The Danger of Tolerating Levellers in a Civil State.”

7. Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, 6.

resignation. Differences of opinion about justification and sanctification grew into larger questions about covenants of grace and covenants of works that continued to divide the colony, and the General Court called for a general fast on January 19, 1637.⁸ John Wheelwright, invited to preach the fast sermon, took the occasion to rail against the covenant of works.

On March 9, the General Court met again and called on Wheelwright to explain himself; in doing so, he indicated that many of his fellow ministers were legalists. In response, the court found Wheelwright guilty of “contempt and sedition.”⁹ The next election, on May 17, was moved to Newtown (Cambridge) in an effort to temper the Antinomian influence over the proceedings. This effort was successful, and Winthrop carried the election. After this attempt to address the civil threat posed by the Antinomians, the Bay Colony clergy convened a synod, beginning on August 30.¹⁰ Tensions continued, and on November 2 the General Court voted to disenfranchise and banish the leaders of the Antinomian party, and to impose lesser penalties on the other colonists who had signed a petition in favor of Wheelwright. Hutchinson’s civil and ecclesiastical trials followed, which culminated in her excommunication on March 22, 1638. In one context, this act ended the story—in another, the story of the Antinomian Controversy ends with the death of Anne Hutchinson and much of her family at the hands of Indians near present-day Westchester, New York.

This disagreement about where and when the story of the Antinomian Controversy ends points to the work that is necessary to connect these events into this narrative. There is nothing natural or logical about seeing the conclusion of a rather technical soteriological debate among Bay Colony clergy in the murder of a woman in New York. As the historiography of this affair evolves, however, its narrators do not simply identify Anne Hutchinson with it, but also make her the literal embodiment of the Antinomian Controversy.



For a time it appeared as if the story of the Antinomian Controversy might wither on the vine in New England, ending with the exile of Hutchinson and her party. More than five years after what might appear to be the logical conclusion of the event, however, the story was resuscitated for metropolitan consumption. Through the offices of the Bay Colony’s agents, Win-

8. *Ibid.*, 7.

9. *Ibid.*, 8.

10. *Ibid.*, 9.

throp's account, *Antinomians and Familists Condemned by the Synod of Elders in New England*, appeared in August 1644. This original quasi-official narrative of events was an effort to rebut charges that the Independent Way was a nursery of error, as Presbyterians charged. *Antinomians and Familists Condemned* appears as a response to an increasing number of questions from London about the tendency of the Independent Way to produce error, such as William Rathband's *Briefe Narration of some Church courses held in opinion and practice in the churches lately erected in New England* (1643); Simeon Ashe's *Letter of many ministers in Old England, requesting the judgment of their bretheren in New England* (1643); and John Ball's *Tryall of the New Church way, in New England and in Old* (1644).

In its original form, *Antinomians and Familists Condemned* leaves much to be desired as a work of propaganda. It begins without fanfare, listing eighty-two errors with their confutations, and nine "unsavory speeches" and their confutations, and then presents what are essentially transcripts of the trials of the leading Antinomians, a brief account of Mary Dyer's "monstrous birth," and the ecclesiastical trials of Wheelwright and Anne Hutchinson.

Evidently, these documents did not make the Bay Colony's case plain enough in this form, because the Bay Colony representative Thomas Weld was moved to produce a second edition, retitled *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of Antinomians, Familists and Libertines*. Weld allows in his preface to this edition that he was "earnestly pressed by diverse to perfect it, by laying downe the order and the sense of this story, (which in the book is omitted)."¹¹ The "order and sense" begins thus: "After we had escaped the cruell hands of persecuting Prelates, and the dangers at Sea, and had prettily well outgrowne our wildernes troubles in our first plantings in New-England; And when our Common-wealth began to be founded, and our Churches sweetely settled in Peace (God abounding to us in more happy enjoyments then we could have expected:) Lest we should, now, grow secure, our wise God (who seldome suffers his owne, in this their wearisome Pilgrimage, to be long without trouble) sent a new storme after us, which proved the sorest tryall that ever befell us since we left our Native soyle."¹²

This narrative, produced for English readers, is already a radical departure from the way these events appear in Winthrop's own journal. There the turmoil related to Hutchinson is but one thread in a tangled web of challenges for the colony. The new title Weld provides also shifts the stakes

11. *Ibid.*, 201.

12. *Ibid.*

of the conflict from theological debates on the order of salvation to a broader valence of ideological struggle. If *Antinomians and Familists Condemned* has the dreary procedural feel of a seventeenth-century print version of a C-SPAN broadcast, the preface to *Rise, Reign, and Ruine* is Fox News. *Rise, Reign, and Ruine* suggests a kind of apocalyptic battle that is absent from the original title: in giving the story “order and sense,” Weld also isolates it from contemporary events in New England and exaggerates the drama of the conflict. As he explains, “the Lord heard our groanes to heaven, and freed us from this great and sore affliction . . . and hath . . . given the churches rest from this disturbance ever since, that we know none who lifts up his head to disturbe our sweet peace in any of the Churches of Christ amongst us.”¹³

Weld’s narrative was intended to demonstrate the Bay Colony’s ability to regulate religion, but, especially in the form Weld presented it, this story was also ready-made for opponents of the Bay Colony, particularly heresiographers. Heresiographies, or taxonomies of heretical belief, were a response to the sectarian ferment of London in the 1640s. Several Scots Presbyterians in London for the Westminster Assembly, most notably Thomas Edwards, attempted to record each new refinement of heresy in order to be thorough in their condemnation of error. What Winthrop’s journal suggests was one thread in the troubled warp and woof of life in New England became simultaneously compressed and amplified in Weld’s version—and when heresiographers appropriated the story, they only exacerbated this tendency. In London Presbyterians read the *Short Story* as explicit proof of the dangerous, fissiparous nature of Independency, rather than an indication of an Independent church’s ability to handle upheavals.

Presbyterians were keen to make an example of the Antinomian Controversy. In *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (1648) Samuel Rutherford indicates that the churches of New England “learned from the sad experience of these seducers from that time, as I am informed to move farther from M. Robinson’s democracie and popular government, and come a little closer to Presbyteriall government.” Rutherford asserts that until the Bay Colony fully embraced this form of government, “they shall ever be infested with heresies, as now they are this day with new Bee-hives of Anabaptists, Seekers, Enthusiasts, Familists and Antinomians.”¹⁴

Presbyterian revisions of the Antinomian Controversy in London dem-

13. *Ibid.*, 218.

14. Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (London: J. D. and R. I. for Andrew Crooke, 1648), 177.

onstrate the dangerous instability of trans-Atlantic discourse: propaganda from so far away can be readily harnessed to a diametrically opposed argument. The trajectory of *Rise, Reign, and Ruine*, intended to illustrate the ability of the Bay Colony to enforce religious order, looms instead as evidence of the volatile and unsafe nature of the New England Way. In this vein, Anne Hughes offers an intriguing formulation of *A Short Story* as an “own goal for the Independents, for it gave men like Edwards wonderful ammunition for their argument that a congregational church structure led inevitably to error and anarchy.”¹⁵

This formulation is appealing. It echoes an earlier assessment by Hall that the *Short Story* “to an English audience, and especially to English Presbyterians . . . provided ammunition for an attack on the New England Way.”¹⁶ It would be difficult to gainsay the idea that *A Short Story* backfired in its intentions, for it provides substance for a series of Presbyterian heresiographies intended to demonstrate the danger of the Independent Way. Despite the ideological contest about the meaning of this story, however, it is important to recognize that Independents and Presbyterians agreed on its fundamental trajectory. Rather than the litany of other problems in the Bay Colony, this event became the focus of anti-Independent Presbyterian propaganda.

The most significant reiterations of the story by heresiographers come in Robert Baillie’s *Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time* (1645), Ephraim Pagitt’s *Heresiography* (1645), and Samuel Rutherford’s *Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (1648). Most significantly, these accounts are essentially verbatim transcriptions of Weld’s own narrative, but they are framed in a way that leads the reader to a rather different conclusion about the meaning of the event. For example, Pagitt’s *Heresiography* cribs its account of the New England Antinomians directly from Weld, and even directs readers to where they can buy *A Short Story*. Pagitt’s book appeared in five editions between 1645 and 1654, with the same text appropriated from *A Short Story* in each. In a similar vein, Rutherford borrows *A Short Story*’s list of errors, but distills them to fifty-three.¹⁷

Pagitt’s words are essentially Weld’s, but in a metropolitan rather than a colonial context, they take on a different meaning. In London Antinomians

15. Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 83. “Own goal” is a term from soccer that refers to a goal accidentally scored against one’s own side.

16. Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, 200.

17. Rutherford, *Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist*, 171–76.

were a constituent of a swarm of errors afflicting the church, whereas in Boston they were the antagonists in a life-and-death struggle between good and evil. The trajectory of *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians, Familists, and Libertines* is that of a particular people in a winner-takes-all showdown with the minions of the Antichrist; in Baillie's *Dissuasive*, and other London heresiographies, this epic struggle is reduced to one of a litany of illustrations of the dangers of Independency. Concluding the familiar tale, Baillie observes of *Rise, Reign, and Ruine*, "all this, and more, we read of the independents in one short narration of two or three years accidents among them—what if we had their full history from any faithfull hand?"¹⁸ For Baillie, Hutchinson is a representative woman, typical of what will happen with the kind of Independent church way that was in place in Massachusetts Bay. The symptom, rather than the cure, emerges as the crux of the story.



In a broader sense, however, contesting the meaning of the Antinomian Controversy worked to the ideological benefit of the Bay Colony, for this contest worked to keep the focus on this event, and on Anne Hutchinson in particular, rather than the many other challenges the colony faced that could not simply be exiled to Rhode Island. Indeed, throughout these heresiographies, a fluid and contentious situation became formalized into an increasingly rigid narrative through repetition. Especially in the account of Anne Hutchinson's and Mary Dyer's monstrous births, the heresiographers appropriated Weld's language, but to a different end. Weld and his Presbyterian readers drew different inferences from Anne Hutchinson's story, but the reiteration of the story in successive heresiographies worked to inscribe a rigid narrative on a complex doctrinal and social situation: Hutchinson beguiled Cotton, claimed to repeat his sermons, incited upheavals, was finally brought to justice, had a monstrous birth, was exiled, left Rhode Island, and was killed by Indians. For Presbyterian ideologues, the story of Anne Hutchinson became the story of the Antinomian Controversy.

The Presbyterian narratives tended to portray Cotton, one of New England Independency's leading theologians, as the doctrinal mastermind, and Anne Hutchinson as his moll. Obviously, this emphasis was unacceptable in New England, so the focus on Anne Hutchinson became even more pronounced in subsequent accounts of the Antinomian Controversy from writers sympathetic to the Bay Colony. Edward Johnson was the first New

18. Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time* (London, 1645), 65.

England resident to attempt the “full history” Baillie hoped for. Johnson did refer to specific heresiographers by name, and he announced he would set the record straight; at the same time, it behooved Johnson to extend the example of the heresiographers and make Anne Hutchinson the embodiment of the controversy. This approach minimized Cotton’s culpability, and it also figured dissent as something contained in a person who can be exiled, so that Johnson could dismiss this anomalous event and return to the glories of the Bay Colony’s expansion.

The Antinomian Controversy is clearly a disruption in Johnson’s narrative, but it appears that he was compelled to describe it because of the prominence the event gained in London through the efforts of heresiographers. The structure of Johnson’s *History of New-England* accentuates the distinctive and anomalous nature of the Antinomian Controversy. Johnson’s history, better known as *Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England*, presents a narrative of expansion as the form of New England’s history, very literally—the majority of the chapters describe settling and establishing a particular town and church, so events that do not fit this comfortable narrative stand out from what appears to be an otherwise smooth process of growth. After one chapter, “Of the Thirteenth Church of Christ gathered at Hingham,” and before another, “Of the Planting of the Fourteenth Church of Christ under the government of the Mattachusetts Bay, called Dedham,” Johnson brackets the Antinomian Controversy with several chapters concerning “The First appearing in the Field . . . the enemies of Christ’s people in point of Reformation.”¹⁹

Johnson figures the Antinomian Controversy as Satan’s counterpunch against the assault on the Antichrist represented by the settling of New England: “Now Satan . . . seeing how these resolved souldiers of Christ in New England, with indefatigable paines laboured, not onley the finall ruine of Antichrist . . . but also the advance of Christ’s Kingdome, in seting up daily Churches.”²⁰ Johnson mentions that that these churches were set up not so much because of divisions of existing churches as much as to establish new ones, and the rhetoric of expansion conceals the fissures in New England’s polity that expanded as settlements grew. After presenting a condensed version of the errors of the erronists, Johnson identified Hutchinson as the center of the storm: “the congregation of the people of God began to

19. Edward Johnson, *A History of New-England: From the English planting in the yeere 1628. untill the yeere 1652.* . . . (London: For Nath. Brooke at the Angel in Corn-Hill, 1653), 85, 125, 90.

20. *Ibid.*, 91.

be forsaken, and the weaker Sex prevailed so farre, that they set up a priest of their own Profession and sex.”²¹ Johnson lamented the travails occasioned by this upheaval, but he attributed a supernatural power to the synod to return New England to a righteous path. The members of the synod were “chiefe Champions of his truth, able through his mercy to wield the bright weapon of his word prepared by the spirit for this purpose, and to bring to the block these Traytours to his truths one by one, and behead them before your eyes, and for this very end, they are to gather together as one man in a Synodically way.”²² In the face of a threat, the New England clergy formed like Voltron and exterminated it. Beyond the language Johnson used in casting the Antinomian Controversy as the rise and fall of Anne Hutchinson, the place her story occupies in the structure of Johnson’s larger narrative is equally important. He interrupted his narrative of expansion to describe a disruption, and he returned to his main narrative of expansion when the troublesome interloper was dispatched.

Edward Johnson’s Hutchinson-centered iteration of this story became the paradigm for New England historians. The most notable contemporary history of seventeenth-century New England is Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, and his chapter “Hydra Decapitata, or the first synod of New England, quelling the storm of Antinomian opinions” deploys this same strategy of containment. With the benefit of a few decades’ hindsight, Mather did not feel the need to list all eighty-two errors, instead echoing Johnson’s focus on the power of the synod to quell error. Again, the story ends in death—the Hutchinson massacre and the stillborn monsters.

Weld, Baillie, Johnson, and Mather presented these events for disparate ideological reasons, but a common thread appears—these narratives locate dissent in the body of Anne Hutchinson, exemplified by the episodes of monstrous birth. As Amy Schrager Lang observes, “Weld’s narrative must at once hold Hutchinson punishable for her errors and deny her power to give them tangible form.”²³ Identifying rebellion with the body of Anne Hutchinson contains it both socially and temporally. The story of Anne Hutchinson ends when she dies, or perhaps even when she is exiled. What is otherwise part of an evolving, contentious society becomes hardened into

21. *Ibid.*, 100.

22. *Ibid.*, 118. In the original edition, pages 103–20 repeat in the pagination. This reference is to the first page 118, in chapter 3 of Book 2.

23. Amy Schrager Lang, *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 57.

a discrete event. This version of the Antinomian Controversy, with its rise, reign, and ruin, implies that outside this anomaly, the Bay Colony went about its orthodox business. The events of the 1630s in New England became fodder for the London heresiographies of the 1640s, which in turn were recycled in New England historiography from the 1640s onward. This ideological dialectic of Congregational event, Presbyterian heresiography, and Congregational history revolves around a central consensus on the facts of the case, even as the interpretations of these facts vary widely. These facts, or rather the contour of this narrative, we must remember, begin with Thomas Weld's effort to impose "order and sense" on the chaos of the first decade of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

MINORITY REPORT

Understanding that the Antinomian Controversy in the form we know it is a discursive invention becomes more urgent when we realize there was an alternative view of these events. John Clarke, a Rhode Island Baptist on the outside of the Independent-Presbyterian debate that framed the trans-Atlantic construction of the Antinomian Controversy in the seventeenth century, offers a view of the Antinomian Controversy that is radical in its benign account of the events. If it is read at all, Clarke's narrative is a primary source for the history of Rhode Island, and for Baptists in America, but reading it as a secondary source in the historiography of Massachusetts reveals that the meaning of the events of 1636–38 were not clear when he wrote in 1652.

In his *Ill Newes from New—England*, Clarke describes arriving in the middle of a religious controversy: "In the year 37 I left my native land, and in the ninth moneth of the same, I (through mercy) arrived at Boston, I was no sooner on shore, but there appeared to me differences among them touching the covenants . . . some prest hard for the Covenant of works . . . others prest as hard for the Covenant of grace. . . . I thought it not strange to see men differ about matters of Heaven for I expect no less upon Earth."²⁴ Clarke's description of his arrival is so measured in its tone that it is possible not to recognize that the "differences" he refers to are the Anti-

24. Clarke's language here echoes Cotton's effort to downplay these events in 1637; John Clarke, *Ill Newes from New-England; or, A nar[r]ative of New-Englands persecution: wherin is declared that while old England is becoming new, New-England is become old: also four proposals to the Honoured Parliament and Council of State, touching the way to propagate the Gospel of Christ . . . : also four conclusions touching the faith and order of the Gospel of Christ out of his last will and testament, confirmed and justified* (London, 1652) (hereafter INFNE), [xvi–xviii].

nomian Controversy. Certainly, “differences among them touching the covenants” is a different way to describe the state of affairs in Boston in 1637 than is the “reign” of “Antinomians, Familists and Libertines” that Winthrop asserts “infected the Churches of New-England.”²⁵

As someone who was familiar with the fractious world of London gathered churches, Clarke was not likely to be unduly troubled by a soteriological debate among the good citizens of his new home. In place of the eighty-two errors tediously detailed in *A Short Story*, Clarke describes the root of the issue as a simple difference of opinion among Christians.²⁶ When he had to indicate the ramifications of this affair, Clarke described them in a way that reconfigured the relation of the Antinomians and their antagonists: “But to see that they were not able to bear with each other in their different understandings and consciences, as in those utmost parts of the World to live peaceably together, whereupon I moved the latter [advocates of grace], for as much land as there was before us and wide enough, with the proffer of Abraham to Lot, and for peace sake, to turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”²⁷ Against Weld’s image of the conflict being like “halfe a dozen Pistols discharged at the face of the Preacher,” this notion of an amicable separation of two equal parties advanced by Clarke is a radical revision of the Antinomian narrative.²⁸ Indeed, an “inability to bear with . . . different understandings” foreshadows the language that Clarke used to draft the Rhode Island charter a decade later in its implication of the right of individuals to differ in matters of faith.

Clarke had his own ideological investment in this version of events, for he wished to portray the settlement of Portsmouth and Newport by Antinomian sympathizers as part of the natural and organic development of New England, rather than as apostates’ exiles. It is possible that Clarke may even have been deliberately disingenuous in his understatement of the turmoil that attended these events. To a London reader occupying a rather more heterogeneous religious landscape than that in New England, however, this minority report was as plausible a reconstruction of events as we see in the prevailing narrative running from Weld to Mather and beyond.

25. [John Winthrop], *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign and Ruine of the Antinomians, . . .* (London: 1644). Reprinted in Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, 199.

26. In this light, it is curious that Winthrop relied on an approach that was so similar to that of the Presbyterian heresiographers who were opponents of the New England Way.

27. INFNE, [xvii].

28. Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, 209.

ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSIES

Clarke's revision of what happened in Boston in the 1630s has methodological as well as historic consequences. *Ill Newes from New England* is an important primary source for scholars interested in Baptists and Rhode Island, or Clarke himself, but it also functions as a secondary source. The nature of texts means that even the most straightforward evidentiary documents also bear the marks of their authors in the effort they make to cast events or ideas into language. As such, even the most immediate primary source participates in the kind of reinterpretation that we associate with secondary sources, while even the most distant and objective scholarship is not free of the kind of ideological investment we associate with primary documents.

The question of these investments is where the stakes of this revision of the Antinomian Controversy come into focus. The stakes of Baudrillard's formulation of a Gulf War that did not take place, if not as legible as an op-ed in the *New York Times*, does at least stand as an indictment of the complicity of global power and global media. What, then are the stakes of withdrawing the status of event from the Antinomian Controversy? Scholars of the last hundred years or so do not share the ideological investments of Independents and Presbyterians, but to a significant degree, they use the same framework, where the Antinomian Controversy is a discrete event, with solid boundaries. Charles Francis Adams invoked it as one of his "Three Episodes of Massachusetts History," and David D. Hall's foundational documentary history is titled *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638*. In the introduction to this history, Hall offered his succinct account of the events that came to be known as the Antinomian Controversy: "Though the documents cover a period of nearly three years, the Antinomian Controversy took place essentially in the seventeen months between October, 1636, and March, 1638. The story of what occurred during those months must begin with a woman, Anne Hutchinson" (4–5). This language is more temperate than Cotton Mather's alarmed "Dux Femina Facta," but the effect is the same.²⁹ In both cases, gender is an issue, but Hutchinson's status as a female protagonist can occlude the issue of her status as a protagonist. A protagonist inhabits a narrative, and a narrative has to be carved out of the unruly substance of daily experience, and a narrative has a distinct beginning and end.

To a surprising degree, the temporal distance of present-day academics

29. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford: Silas Andrus, 1853), 2:516.

from the 1630s allows for the same phenomenon that the spatial distance from Boston allowed London heresiographers. We have seen how New England apologists and their Presbyterian antagonists told essentially the same story, even as they disagreed on its meaning. Lang followed the historiographic tradition in locating Hutchinson as the locus of these events, but she did so to make a much-needed feminist intervention in the historiography of colonial New England. In particular, Lang surveyed the history of Anne Hutchinson to identify a narrative in which the doctrinal debates of the 1630s evolve into a notion of Antinomianism as “a heretical form of individualism discernible in the bearing of the heretic, and peculiarly typified by the Woman.” In this context, Hutchinson was “the model of an ever-proliferating dissent,” and thus she came to be seen as “opposing the very idea of America.”³⁰ Lang recognized that “we must distinguish between the antinomian controversy itself—a historical event important largely because it sheds light on the social reality of the early colonies—and the narrative accounts of that controversy”; but in the formulation of the Antinomian Controversy as a “historical event” that “sheds light on the social reality,” Lang collapsed the narrative back into the event.³¹ Lang’s intervention marks a leap forward in the historiography of colonial New England, but her argument—her ideological work—is animated by its engagement with the earlier ideological work of narrators from Weld to Mather to Lyle Koehler and his identification of Hutchinson as a profeminist, as much as it is with a reinterpretation of events.³²

More generally, Hall’s editorial work has made the events commonly gathered under the rubric of the “Antinomian Controversy” much more accessible to subsequent generations of scholars. Many of them have availed themselves of this work by engaging this event in their monographs, and they bracket the controversy in ways that are consistent with Hall’s editorial work, and Adams’s, Mather’s, Johnson’s, Baillie’s and Weld’s historiographic work. A chapter on the Antinomian Controversy is a nearly ubiquitous feature of monographs on seventeenth-century New England that have appeared since Hall’s anthology.³³ Materially, and especially before the

30. Lang, *Prophetic Woman*, 70, 71, 51.

31. *Ibid.*, 9.

32. *Ibid.*, 219–20.

33. Examples from the last decade include “Discipline and Disinfect,” in Jim Egan’s *Authorizing Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); “John Cotton and the Dialectic of Antinomian Dissent” and “Antinomianism Defeated” in Darren Staloff’s *The Making of an American Thinking Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); “The Antinomian Moment” in Louise Breen’s *Transgress-*

availability of resources like Early English Books Online for scholars lucky enough to be affiliated with subscribing institutions, Hall's editorial work produced an appealing field of inquiry for scholars that they do not have to travel to archives or struggle with microfiche to use. If Hall's anthology promotes scholarship on the Antinomian Controversy, scholarship on the Antinomian Controversy also promotes further scholarship on the Antinomian Controversy. These works make the Antinomian Controversy one of the deepest fields of inquiry in colonial American studies, but reading through this literature produces a surprising sense of continuity and consensus that appears despite, or perhaps because of, the desire of these scholars to intervene in a lively conversation.

This desire to intervene is common to Weld, Mather, a graduate student encountering Hall's anthology in a seminar, and the author of this article. This continuity makes it impossible to establish a distinction between the primary and secondary literature of the Antinomian Controversy—from the first to the last these texts share a desire to narrate and to revise. Realizing that the Antinomian Controversy is always already an artifact of print culture demands that we, as readers, consider the event as a literary, rather than historical, phenomenon, for it is in texts, rather than space and time, that the Antinomian Controversy continues to take place.

ing the Bounds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and "All This Strife among Us" in Lisa Gordis's *Opening Scripture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). "New England Ways" in Janice Knight's *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) opens with a similar vignette, but she uses it as evidence of a much more extensive fissure in Puritan culture.