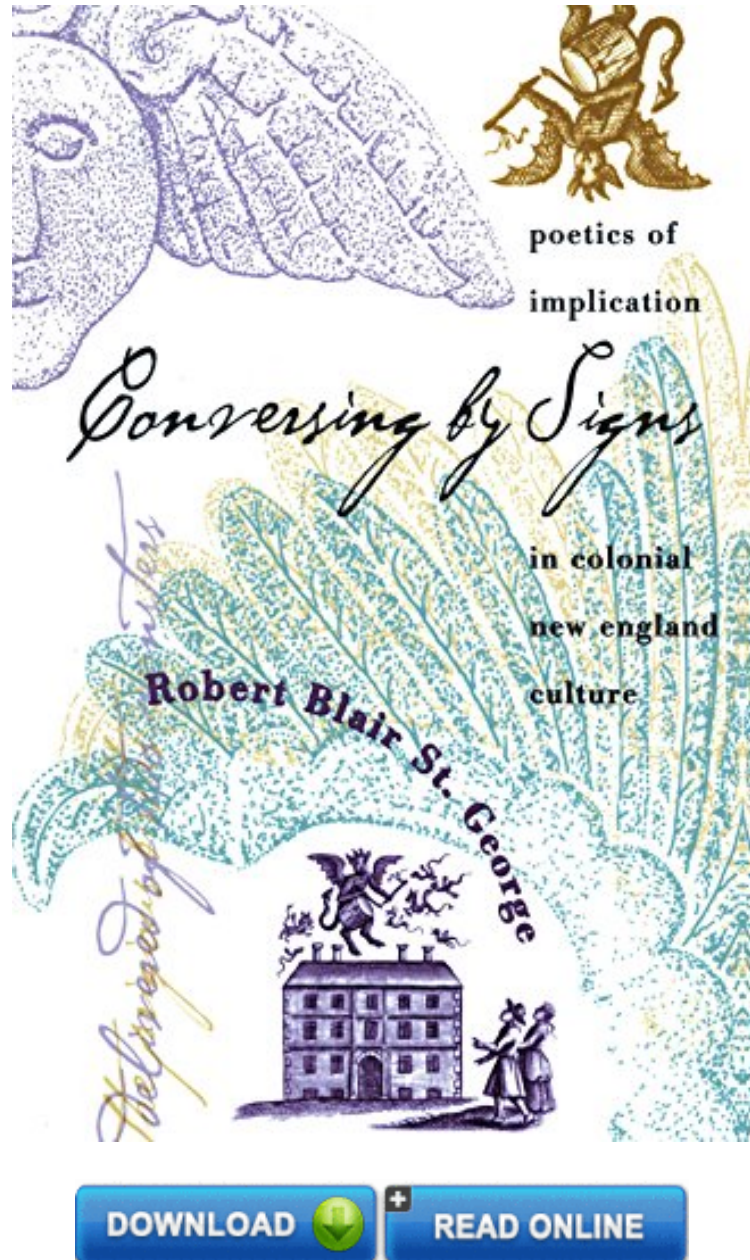


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Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture

Robert Blair St. George

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Robert Blair St. George : Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture*:

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and cosmology of colonial New England. Used it many times in my thesis research.

The people of colonial New England lived in a densely metaphoric landscape--a world where familiars invaded bodies without warning, witches passed with ease through locked doors, and houses blew down in gusts of angry, providential wind. Meaning, Robert St. George argues, was layered, often indirect, and inextricably intertwined with memory, apprehension, and imagination. By exploring the linkages between such cultural expressions as seventeenth-century farmsteads, witchcraft narratives, eighteenth-century crowd violence, and popular portraits of New England Federalists, St. George demonstrates that in early New England, things mattered as much as words in the shaping of metaphor. These forms of cultural representation--architecture and gravestones, metaphysical poetry and sermons, popular religion and labor politics--are connected through what St. George calls a 'poetics of implication.' Words, objects, and actions, referentially interdependent, demonstrate the continued resilience and power of seventeenth-century popular culture throughout the eighteenth century. Illuminating their interconnectedness, St. George calls into question the actual impact of the so-called Enlightenment, suggesting just how long a shadow the colonial climate of fear and inner instability cast over the warm glow of the early national period.

[A] "tour de force" examination of the multiple meanings embedded in corporeal things."The Journal of American History"St. George finesses the epistemic shift from faith to science into a richly suggestive account."American Literary History"Perhaps the book's greatest accomplishment is its willingness to question long-standing assumptions."American Historical ""In its loving treatment of detail and its balanced and profound reflections, the book makes a wonderful read."Journal of American Folklore""[M]ajor--yea, an outstanding--contribution to material culture, New England, and early American studies, and should take its place proudly."Vernacular Architecture Newsletter""A "tour de force" examination of the multiple meanings embedded in corporeal things."The Journal of American History"In its loving treatment of detail and its balanced and profound reflections, the book makes a wonderful read."Journal of American Folklore"Major--yea, an outstanding--contribution to material culture, New England, and early American studies, and should take its place proudly."Vernacular Architecture Newsletter"[M]ajor--yea, an outstanding--contribution to material culture, New England, and early American studies, and should take its place proudly."Vernacular Architecture Newsletter"[M]ajor--yea, an outstanding--contribution to material culture, New England, and early American studies, and should take its place proudly."Vernacular Architecture Newsletter" Enriched by wide reading in theory as well as in architectural and cultural history, and informed by plain old digging for relevant texts, St. George imagines a lost world unlike any we have envisioned before. Is it quirky? In places, yes. Is it stimulating and engaging? Definitely.--William and Mary QuarterlyEnormously rewarding. . . . Perhaps the book's greatest accomplishment is its willingness to question long-standing assumptions about historical and cultural processes that far transcend the limited scope of early New England. Recover[s] multilayered complexity in past experience.--American Historical This is as daring a book as one is likely to find in the entire corpus of scholarly writing on colonial America.-- s in American HistoryConversing by Signs is a model example of archaeological history. In its loving treatment of detail and its balanced and profound reflections, the book makes a wonderful read.-- Journal of American FolkloreConversing by Signs dramatically expands the exploration of early New England architecture, landscape, and material culture. In this provocative and engaging book, Robert Blair St. George offers a series of elegantly crafted interpretations that excite the historical imagination. From the investigation of body imagery in the seventeenth-century New England house to the representation of landscapes in eighteenth-century portraiture, Conversing by Signs stands as a model of interdisciplinary thought at its best.--Bernard Herman, University of DelawareWritten in St. George's inimitable voice, Conversing by Signs is a tour de force examination of the multiple meanings embedded in corporeal things, as well as the means, or conversation, by which they are expressed. . . . A landmark work that should, like the implicated ideas that St. George cites, continue to exert influence, overt and tacit, for generations to come.--The Journal of American HistoryA monumental book. Its painstaking and inventive scholarship and exhaustive original research would alone qualify it as a landmark in the understanding of material culture; but the scope and intelligence of its symbolic interpretations carry it far beyond the familiar boundaries of its grounding discipline. It is gracefully, confidently, and lucidly written, highly imaginative without falling into mere ingenuity and idiosyncrasy, intellectually bold and fresh without bowing too deeply to current poststructuralist and new-historicist fashions.--Robert S. Cantwell, author of Ethnomimesis: Folklife and the Representation of CultureA major -- yea, an outstanding -- contribution to material culture, New England, and early American studies, and should take its place proudly . . . on the shelves of those concerned with this array of topics.--Vernacular Architecture NewsletterSt. George finesses the epistemic shift from faith to science into a richly suggestive account of the continuities and paradoxes in New England colonial social relations.--American Literary HistoryAn intricate and multilayered analysis.--ChoiceAbout the AuthorRobert Blair St. George is associate professor of folklore and folklife at the University of Pennsylvania.