



## Editorial

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“**T**HINE ever, or never.” Thus did Ralph Waldo Emerson close his letter to an imaginary “Dear Friend” in his essay “Friendship.” In that arresting, self-contradictory literary gesture can be found the dueling hopes and fears of human relationship. The authors of this, the second number of *NEQ*’s eighty-first volume, take up the issue of relationship—of how people approach one another, the natural world in which they live, and the God(s) they hope to please. Specifically, the essays examine the ways in which individuals steel themselves against and act in the face of humanity’s inescapable, universal experience of half-knowledge, loss, and failure.

Given the premise of man’s postlapsarian fallibility, for example, how do the faithful posit a workable human order? With their gaze fixed on millennial perfection, early Puritans conceived of democracy as the profane best that an errant humanity can accomplish in the absence of an omniscient God, Jared Hickman shows. But what shifts, Hickman reflects, when God is viewed as a similarly finite partner in a mutually constructed world of possibilities, a world that (in the words of William James) is “not certain to be saved,” whose “perfection” is “conditional merely”?

While Hickman ranges widely across time to survey the intellectual sweep of American democracy, Reiner Smolinski delves deeply into the evolving thought of one individual to examine the cross-national project to reconcile Christian scripture with emergent scientific advances. As Smolinski states, the lively scientific debate about the particulars of certain biblical events was largely intended to “update” “the old familiar story of an all-powerful God maintaining control at the center,” to make that story “more fashionable” for a global Christian intelligentsia.

Still, even such a paragon of orthodoxy as Cotton Mather occasionally struggled to align what he knew with what he believed.

Sandwiched between Hickman's thought-piece and Smolinski's learned investigation are two essays on the nature of friendship—specifically as seen from the vantage point of transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Thomas Constantinesco brings both French and American critical thought to bear on Emerson's "Friendship." Probing the essay's discordant longings and repulsions, its affirmations and renunciations, Constantinesco encourages readers to reflect on the textual and emotional complexities of Emerson's injunction "write that I may *know* thee." Thoreau, too, explored friendship, but as William Rossi notes, "while both men represent friendship as a relation that can never be sustained, Thoreau insists that neither can it be permanently lost," thus demonstrating his capacity for intimacy and his divergence from his hard-to-please mentor and friend.

I despair of adequately synopsizing this rich and dense issue, and so I encourage you to dive into it. We offer you a bonus this spring—more pages. In addition to the four major essays, you will find three lively memoranda and, to inform and guide your further reading in the field of New England life and letters, over a dozen reviews.

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We call your attention to our masthead, where you will see that Laura Dassow Walls has joined our board of editors. Author of books on Emerson and Thoreau, she brings to *NEQ* an interest in the intersections between literature and science.

And not least, toward the end of the book, you will find a list of those individuals who have contributed one hundred dollars or more to *NEQ*. We are grateful for *all* donations, large and small, a vital supplement to the institutional support we receive for *NEQ*'s editorial operation. We are honored by how many of you, our readers, chose to respond to our 2007 annual appeal. Thank you!

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS