



Editorial

THE December 2011 issue of *The New England Quarterly* is populated by readers and writers. Some are ordinary folk; some are poets and seers. All conceive of the activities of reading and writing as mutually constitutive, and all are striving for a special understanding of self, community, God, and nation.

The letters between Samuel Smith, his mother Sarah, his sister Susan Parker, and his fiancée Mary White form, as he christened them, a “pen and ink communion.” Revealing the usual intimacies of family life, the letters, as Mary Kelley contextualizes them, also reflect the aspirations of deeply committed individuals who, like their fellow evangelicals, read intently and wrote voluminously to educate themselves and to promote their cause. Some of those writings were published, thus widening their authors’ sphere of influence, partaking of a national proliferation of works in print, and contributing to an international effort to convert the world to Protestantism.

The women of Anne Bruder’s narrative, teachers and students in Anna Ticknor’s Society to Encourage Studies at Home, also participated in a correspondence both intimate and expansive. In addition to examining the educative and communicative power of this “schoolhouse folded inside an envelope,” in which teachers proposed readings and students produced writings, Bruder treats the performative aspects of the epistolary exchange, which allowed the interlocutors to hide unwonted characteristics and to try on empowering new identities. Ultimately, however, the school’s resources were diverted to a movement that brought women together in clubs, which afforded opportunities for outwardly, as opposed to inwardly, directed social and religious activity.

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In his essay on D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), Palmer Rampell closes a circle of influence. Suzuki, a highly renowned yet unorthodox arbiter of Japanese Zen Buddhism, who counted among his readers John Cage, Allen Ginsberg, and J. D. Salinger, was himself inspired by his reading of Emerson and Thoreau. Referring to six of Suzuki's works published over fifty-four years but not yet translated into English, Rampell shows how Suzuki came to view the transcendentalists as advocates of an Eastern way of thinking about the world. Thus, in turn and in this regard, Suzuki recaptured, repackaged, and re-presented their philosophy to a generation hungry for new ideas.

In his idiosyncratic and monumental *Maximus Poems*, Gloucester poet Charles Olson spins his vision of the genuine polis, which involves a special way of looking at the world. Returning to the historic origins of Massachusetts, Olson read widely and questioned incessantly as he struggled to come to terms with John Winthrop. As the characterization of the colony's first governor unfolds within *Maximus*, as Gary Grieve-Carlson carefully details, the flawed historic figure and the gifted seer move alternately in and out of focus, each remaining necessary, each remaining true.

Finally, Rob Hardy shows how James Bowdoin, second governor of the state of Massachusetts and first president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, drew upon those two disciplines—most notably the science of Isaac Newton and the art of Vergil—to come to terms with his era's fundamental conundrum: if, as history amply demonstrated, all nations were doomed to fail, then what hope had the revolutionaries of establishing a stable republic?



We are sad to announce the passing of Professor Oscar Handlin, whose writings were a mainstay of *NEQ*'s middle years and whose organizational dynamism has sustained the journal in recent decades. An In Memoriam will appear in our next issue.

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS