



Editorial

DEATH and dislocation dominate the present issue of *The New England Quarterly*, the first of our eighty-sixth volume. In the summer of 1914, Europe was descending into war. With the help of a personal secretary, Henry Adams, who had survived what his brother thought would be a permanently debilitating stroke, was once again sharing his observations with his intimate circle of correspondents. Intent on resisting the “German cultural influence that had seeped into Anglo-American intellectual life,” he recognized, Susan Hanssen insists, “the danger of following German romantic optimism into its denouement in German existential pessimism.” Comforted by songs to the Virgin and attracted to the thought of Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, Adams struggled in the final years of his life to discover whether “there was a confession of faith he could make as a rational assent, a confession of sins that brought grace in its wake.”

Faced with mortality, Henry Adams turned to philosophy and flirted with religion; faced with her husband’s death, Ann Maylem turned to the press and the courts. In the four decades prior to the American Revolution, 40 percent of estate administrators in Newport, Rhode Island, were women. Carefully tracing the activities of Maylem and her cohort, Sara Damiano examines how this office shaped women’s authority in domestic, commercial, and legal settings. As she does so, she makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation about how both the law and the economy were being gendered in colonial America’s rapidly commercializing port cities.

In the waning years of the eighteenth century, Hannah Foster sat down to write her epistolary novel *The Coquette*. The young

nation was plagued, as Thomas Joudrey enumerates, with “internal insurrections, rapidly evolving government institutions, threats of secession, and the menace of foreign military aggression.” “Fluidity and volatility in the political and economic arenas,” many worried, “might well infect family and civic life.” In response, Joudrey argues, Foster portrayed marriage as women’s singular source of stability in an otherwise wayward world. Hers was not a benign gesture, he insists, as he painstakingly reveals how Foster rigged her plot. Men having risked their lives to secure independence through revolution, Foster calls upon women to sacrifice their independence, indeed their very capacity for imagining it, to instantiate the new nation.

The antisuffragists have been tarred with just such a commitment to suppressing women’s rights in the wake of another war that tested the nation’s viability. But as Amy Easton-Flake shows, female opponents of woman suffrage in the post-Civil War period often shared proponents’ views about important matters such as women’s access to education and employment. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s siblings were aligned on both sides of the Woman Question. Lobbied assiduously, the author kept her own counsel, eventually setting forth her attitudes about women’s status in *My Wife and I*, a novel that brought her more letters than any other of her works save *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and that might offer a useful counterpoint to *The Coquette*.

In our Memoranda and Documents feature, Timothy O’Brien exposes the underside of Robert Frost’s “The Pasture,” a poem widely viewed as a romantic pastoral. However, when read in the context of the harsh realities of subsistence farming, much like those the Frosts themselves experienced, the poem’s invitation, “You come too,” seems “not so friendly and innocent as it initially appears.”



We heartily thank ALL of you who contributed to our recent 2012 annual appeal. Whether your name appears at the end of this issue or not, we are immensely grateful to you for helping us broadcast our authors’ voices at home and abroad.

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS