



Editorial

THIS quarter *The New England Quarterly* takes you into hallowed places; there you will encounter scripture. From the decks of the *Arbella* (or so tradition has it), to the halls of Harvard Divinity School, to the woodlands of Concord, and finally to an Oneida church in Wisconsin, *NEQ*'s contributors traverse space and time to track down the events and writings that inspired four canonic American authors and to show how they, in turn, sought to embody that inspiration in their own empowering texts.

In his Whitehill Prize-winning essay, Abram C. Van Engen unravels the origins and influence of John Winthrop's "city upon a hill" speech. The text, largely ignored in its own time, survives only in manuscript, in a hand other than Winthrop's, and introduced by a curious headnote. Resurrected from the archives in 1838, this "vacant" text—"without history, without prior interpretation"—was ripe for appropriation, and Van Engen maps how (and why) scholars of the mid-twentieth-century consigned it to the pantheon of America's founding documents. First, though, he analyzes the text qua text to trace its probable origins in the verses and commentary of the Geneva Bible (soon to be replaced by the King James Bible) to insist that it indeed assumes a sermonic form and to posit the initiating biblical passage (now missing) from which it was likely derived. In his own formulation, Van Engen sets out to show how "the last farewell of the Geneva Bible" segued into the dawning of Puritan New England, and how three centuries later the resulting vision, as embodied in Winthrop's lay sermon, was sacralized as the story of America's beginning.

Observing that Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Divinity School Address" has "long been characterized as a general attack on Christianity and as a representative transcendentalist document," Jeremy Leatham investigates the origins of the speech to uncover its less revolutionary, more mundane objectives. Emerson, who had been invited to deliver the talk by the seven graduating seniors of the Harvard Divinity School class of 1838, had no desire to "chill or shock," Leatham contends but,

The New England Quarterly, vol. LXXXVI, no. 4 (December 2013). © 2013 by The New England Quarterly. All rights reserved. doi:10.1162/TNEQ.e_00319.

rather, hoped to mentor and to model. Referring to his address as “a kind of Sermon,” the former pastor borrowed from the tradition of Congregationalist/Unitarian ordination sermons to rally the students. He outlined the challenges they would face and admonished them not to babble in their preaching but to speak from the whole heart, as he himself strived to do that summer day in 1838.

Emerson, Lydia Willsky notes, “had called for a ‘new Teacher’ and a ‘new revelation’ that would supplant and surpass all earlier forms of scripture.” But while Emerson “was content to [‘announce’] the approach of new revelations,” he himself ‘did not necessarily have them’ [in the words of David Holland]. Thoreau, on the other hand, did, and he intended to write them down and share them with the world.” Thoreau’s revelation proceeded from a close observation of nature; his Creator was inseparable from its creation. In *Wild Fruits*, left unpublished at his death in 1861, Thoreau fused the best elements of religion and science to fashion his own new testament, a bible rooted in the landscape of New England that would persuade its inhabitants to enter the woods, where they would rediscover their “essential wildness.”

In 1873, twenty-three-year-old Sarah Orne Jewett announced her newfound commitment to her vocation. The writing she had previously undertaken in an amateur spirit, she now sought to invest with spiritual and moral significance. Her quest, Terry Heller maintains, originated in a visit to the Oneida community at Duck Bay, Wisconsin, where she attended an Episcopal service delivered in English and translated for the Indian congregation. It was in that moment, Heller goes on to show, that Jewett recognized her desire to surmount stereotypes and to model how people might get along; and in the sketch “Tame Indians,” which followed from that experience, she discovered the narrative form that would encourage readers to perform the necessary work to form meaningful communities.



It is a sad irony that an issue about American scripture would also announce the passing of the author of *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*, as well as of the more recent *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787–1788* (and other works). Professor Pauline Maier, a renowned scholar and superbly gifted teacher, died on 12 August 2013. We celebrate her many contributions to the board of NEQ Inc., and we will greatly miss her wisdom and good humor (especially her signature laugh).

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS