



Editorial

SOVEREIGNTY: 1) supreme power, esp. over a body politic: DOMINION, SWAY; (2): freedom from external control: AUTONOMY, INDEPENDENCE. In acts variously administrative, diplomatic, economic, literary, and social, the historical figures, fictional characters, and bodies politic you will meet in *NEQ*'s September 2014 issue assert their sovereignty.

When a land dispute between Penobscots and colonists living along Maine's St. Georges River threatened to erupt into violence in the summer of 1736, Governor Jonathan Belcher and the General Court sided with the Indians. It was an unusual, although not unique, instance of intricate frontier diplomacy. As the interests of Massachusetts' most powerful and privileged aligned with those of the Indians, Ian Saxine shows, the Indians seized the opportunity to exercise their authority to negotiate with Belcher's government—a mutual performance of sovereignty designed to preserve a fragile peace.

Sovereignty, as in holding sway over another, is central to Nina Bannett's consideration of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island*. In an odd plot twist, Stowe kills off her heroine near the novel's end. But before she dies, Mara transfers her "ownership" of her fiancé, Moses, to her best friend, Sally. In the novel, the two women function as autonomous beings, voluntarily drawn together by an "interchange of affection," but in lovingly gifting Moses to Sally, Mara inadvertently destroys Sally's prized independence. The novel, then, conjures a world in which women are the agents of their own fates but, finally, forecloses that possibility as it succumbs to sentimental expectations for a traditional heterosexual marriage.

Female-centered communal imaginaries are more resilient in Mary Wilkins Freeman's short fiction, where they emerge as a response to the alienating effects of industrialization within certain New England locales from which labor and resources had been

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extracted. In such stories as “A Mistaken Charity” and “A Taste of Honey,” Jennifer Ansley argues, women’s survival strategies and their subsistence labor open the way to alternative, or queer, configurations of home and family. In embracing such non-normative constructions of intimacy, as well as of solitude, Wilkins Freeman’s characters enact a highly circumscribed but nonetheless quietly noble form of sovereignty.

Mark Sturges, like Ansley, considers industrialization’s consequences for the sustainability and self-determination of rural America. In 1802, David Humphreys sought to solve his state’s economic and environmental woes and reassert New England’s cultural identity and political hegemony when he imported a flock of merino sheep from Spain. An agricultural pioneer and would-be captain of America’s fledgling woolen industry, Humphreys broadcast his economic initiatives in georgic poetry and public addresses, thus harnessing the power of language to promote an agenda that was, in the end, as destructive as it was persuasive.

Also examining sovereignty’s two faces—ownership and autonomy—Jonathan Barth explores the contest over the Massachusetts mint, founded in 1652, after Charles I had been executed but before Cromwell became Lord Protector. When the monarchy was restored in 1660, royal officials began to question the mint not as an economic engine but as the expression of a right that, in Hobbes’s words, “belongeth to the Common-wealth, that is to say, to the Sovereign.” For its part, the radical faction of Massachusetts’ General Court, in a surprisingly bold assertion of political autonomy, resisted the king’s authority to emblazon his stamp on their coinage, viewing such an unwelcome prospect as a sign of “his Majesty’s signall ouning of us.”

The issue’s memorandum treats, arguably, a sovereign political entity’s most fundamental concern: ensuring its own safety. Andrew Fagal investigates how government officials in the new nation balanced the needs of both public and private interests simultaneously to boost the economy and manufacture the arms that enabled it, and may in fact have finally encouraged it, to wage war in 1812.

And now I invite you, our readers, to exercise your sovereignty to discover your own connections, themes, and miscellaneous insights in the issue that follows.

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS