Editorial

WITH this issue we wish to acknowledge the generous response of all our friends to the Annual Appeal, and while space limits our public acknowledgment in this issue to donations of over $100, we are gratified by the support of all our contributors because they represent an affirmation of the value of the *Quarterly*.

In the *Pirkei Avot* Rabbi Yose ven Yehudah asks "He who learns from the old, unto what can he be compared? He can be compared to one who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine." On the drinking of old wine, Rabbi Meir counseled to not pay attention to the container but to that which is in it. "There is a new container full of old wine, and here is an old container which does not even contain new wine."[1] Challenging Luke's caution against putting new wine into old containers, our essays in this issue demonstrate the wisdom of Rabbis Yehudi and Meir to not let appearances get in the way of finding good wine or ripe grapes. Each of our essays in this issue addresses in different ways how a re-imagining of the past provides us with a deeper understanding of the transformation of late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century New England.

Whitney Barlow Robles examines how individuals came to understand the Cape Ann Earthquake of 1755 through the prisms of religion and natural philosophy. As New Englanders reported their observations and explained the causes and meaning of the earthquake, she finds in the public discourse attempts

[1] Pirkei Avot, 4:20, Luke, 5:36-39. See D. T. Lancaster, "New Wine and Old Wineskins," *Bethel Immanuel Sabbath Fellowship*, www.bethimmanuel.org/articles/new-wineand-old-wineskins-parable-luke536-39-re-examined (accessed December 14, 2016).

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to reconcile morality and science. Having to take into account the subsequent Lisbon earthquake, colonial observers were reluctant to surrender the traditional moral implications Cape Ann indicated in its providential signals; in the process earthquakes became subjects of reflection and discussion. Lisbon, Robles points out, added to the ambiguous, problematic mix of science and religion for eighteenth–century Massachusetts colonists. Finding themselves with similar catastrophic experiences, writers had to look outward beyond their provincial horizons to find explanations in science At the same time, they had to wonder inwardly about an earlier time when God's providence provided clearer signals of a society's moral state, of a time when "every weathervane stood intact to tell them the direction the winds were blowing."

Just as Robles set the discussion of the Cape Ann Earthquake in a network of public discourse and transatlantic calamity, Brian Baaki re-imagines Joseph Mountain's apologia for his life of crime and studies the implications of the dissemination of the story. Baaki finds in Mountain's autobiographical confessional a vehicle for examining the origins and progress of the myth of the black rapist, and his reconstruction of Mountain's life illustrates the merits of looking in old containers in search of good wine. Placing his life in a more specific chronological moment and in a larger transatlantic context, Baaki finds subtleties and nuance in the reconstruction of Mountain's life. Rather than seeing the confessional as part of a static, stereotyped representation of the threats of black masculinity and slave revolt, Baaki teases out a broader, more radical, that is the more fundamental threat Mountain represented to late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century America, that his apologia for his crimes only came to represent the conventional threatening image of the black rapist when joined as part of a pattern with other, later, and similar confessionals by convicted African American rapists. When, however, viewed from the perspective of Shays's Rebellion and London's Gordon Riots, Mountain's story intimates ironically a more radical view, an indication that his life represented a larger, more significant potential for cross-racial,

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trans-class, proletarian revolt. Although its literary merits, Baaki asserts, should compel reading Mountain's confessional within this radical transatlantic context, its popular distribution following the Haitian Revolution made it the racialized document that illustrated for American readers the threats of the black rapist and slave revolts.

Good wine is also to be found in Rebecca Berthold's sensitive re-imagining of the environment of sound in Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*. Bechtold identifies Hawthorne's auditory environment to connect "a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away." By rendering Hawthorne's scenes audible, Bechtold not only reminds us of the nineteenth-century practice of reading aloud, she teaches us how to hear the early nineteenth-century life's adaptations to a new commercial, capitalist economy and the impact of its reforms of prison life. The bell in Hepzibah's shop, the silence marking penitentiary reform, and Clifford's imprisonment, and the intimation of spiritual aurality become vehicles for understanding the impact of change in nineteenth-century New England and enhance the subtlety in reading Hawthorne's *Seven Gables*. Bechtold's essay also offers us a perspective on Hawthorne's story telling abilities and the auditory impact upon his readers. In Bechtold's reading, sound also becomes for Hawthorne a means for using his reader's auditory environment and knowledge in telling the echoes of past wrongs and moral messages in his story.

Unlike Robles, Baaki, and Bechtold who provide us with different ways of re-imagining text, Kenyon Gradert points out the ways in which Ralph Waldo Emerson and Wendell Phillips found common ground in a re-imagined understanding of their shared Puritan origins. Emerson and Phillips, Gradert tells us, reconceptualized their common history, embracing a militant Puritanism at odds with their contemporaries' embarrassment over its religious intolerance and violence. By re-imagining the history of their ancestors, two temperamentally different individuals found a common rationale in Puritan militancy for their opposition to slavery. The reconceptualization of Puritanism to

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emphasize its idealism and rigor linked its history and Emerson and Phillips to abolitionist ends, to find in dissenters like Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams models for spiritual and moral regeneration that contrasted with the materialism of their times.

—Jonathan M. Chu

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