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**Mapping the Metaphysical Landscape off Cape Ann: The
Reception of Ralph Waldo Emerson's Transcendentalism
Among the Gloucester Audience of Reverend Amory Dwight
Mayo and Fitz Hugh Lane**

By

Sharon Worley

One of the most intriguing yet elusive areas of scholarship concerning the 19th century marine artist Fitz Hugh Lane (1804-1865) is the connection between his luminist style and Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1803-1882) transcendental philosophy. This influence has been observed in Lane's depiction's of the New England coast enveloped in soft atmospheric hues of meditative stillness which seem to provide an aesthetic counterpart to the romantic nature philosophy of his contemporary Emerson.¹ Cape Ann served as the inspiration for some of

¹ Although the details of Lane's life have been well documented by John Wilmerding, there are no extant sources in which Lane articulated his philosophy of aesthetics. Lane did not keep a journal and his few surviving letters do not provide any clues as to his metaphysical beliefs. In addition, there is not a record of books in his personal library. However, scholars agree that the artist was most likely aware of Emerson's writings. See John Wilmerding, *Fitz Hugh Lane*, NY: Praeger Publishing, 1971, 48; Barbara Novak refers to Lane's art as the "closest parallel to Emerson's Transcendentalism that America produced." See Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, NY: Harper & Row, 1979, 110; John Baur first recognized a parallel between Emerson's effacement of the ego in the "transparent eyeball" of nature's vast domain and the luminist suppression of individual brushstrokes in the smooth surface of the canvas. See John I.H. Baur, "Introduction," *Commemorative Exhibition, Paintings by Martin J. Heade (1819-1904), Fitz Hugh Lane*

Lane's greatest luminist paintings. After the artist returned from Boston to Gloucester permanently in 1848, he continued to paint landscapes and seascapes of the area for the rest of his life. Emerson frequently lectured in Gloucester during the same period, and recorded the profound impact which the region had on him.

As two major cultural figures in the 19th century American Renaissance, Lane and Emerson have been the primary focus of scholarly attention and numerous studies and exhibitions. A less traveled path which forms a tangential but subordinate area of interest is the question of audience. A survey of references to Emerson and transcendentalism by Gloucester residents who patronized Lane provides new insights into context of meaning their literature and art held for ordinary citizens. Oftentimes relegated to the anonymity of unpublished or outdated materials in the archives of small historical societies, the writings of relatively undistinguished local residents assume greater significance in the absence of extant records of the artist's own intentions. While Lane's thoughts on transcendentalism are unavailable, those of his friends, patrons, clergymen and others are extant in a number of sources. These primary historical sources, many of which have never been published or discussed in a secondary or modern source, serve to illuminate a variety of nuances in the philosophical lens through which Lane's paintings were perceived by his contemporaries.

In recognized scholarship, Lane's general proximity to Emerson in time, place and mood has been deemed sufficient to acknowledge a literary and visual correlation between the philosopher's views on nature and the artist's representation of nature, while the lack of any documentary evidence has precluded the attribution of a direct causal relationship between the two. Nonetheless, ascribing a literary source to a non-narrative visual product remains tenuous without a verbal indication by the artist that he or she intended to illustrate a specific program of aesthetic philosophy. One can only state with certainty that the literary expressions of romantic nature philosophy and the reflection of nature in the luminist style were inspired by a common aesthetic response to the New England coastal region in which Lane's hometown of Gloucester, Massachusetts is situated. The beauty of Cape Ann was a common point of reference for its residents and anyone who viewed

(1804-1865), from the Private Collection of Maxim Karolik and the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, May 3 through May 28, 1954, NY: M. Knoedler and Company, 1954.

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Lane's paintings could appreciate them on some aesthetic level. Whether this aesthetic quality also took on a metaphysical significance tempered by Emersonian philosophy depended upon the philosophical or denominational orientation of the viewer.

There were broadly divergent opinions about Emerson which ranged from outright ridicule to cautious acceptance with crucial reservations. Emerson's idiosyncratic philosophy was not easy to digest, and was regarded by many as a radical concept which challenged contemporary economic and religious beliefs. As such, the term "transcendental" sometimes took on pejorative connotations. As we shall see, outward opposition to transcendentalism in certain social circles was overcome through the ministry of the Universalist Reverend Amory Dwight Mayo (1823-1907). Mayo was inspired by Emerson writings, but distinguished his beliefs from those aspects of transcendentalist philosophy which his audience found offensive. The most essential aspects of Emerson's philosophy which Mayo found compatible with his own theology were his belief in the divinity of nature and its reflection in art. For both men the appreciation of beauty was a means of apprehending the metaphysical dimension of existence. Although Emerson has come to epitomize this type of 19th century thought, his unorthodox religious beliefs made many Christians wary. In addition to frequent charges of atheism, his philosophy lacked an apparent means for a practical application in their daily lives. Mayo bridged these obstacles by providing his congregation with traditional Christian goals, and a clear means of achieving them.

One public source for the transmission of transcendentalism in Gloucester was the Lyceum. Many prominent citizens were active in the Lyceum, including Lane who served on the Board of Directors three times: in 1849, 1851 and 1858.² The Lyceum hosted a number of speakers associated with the movement such as Emerson, Orestes Brownson, William Henry Channing, Richard Henry Dana, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Horace Mann, Theodore Parker and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862).³ Out of all these speakers, Emerson was by far the

²Mary Foley, "Fitz Hugh Lane, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the Gloucester Lyceum," *American Art Journal*, vol. xxvii, no. 1 & 2, 1995-1996, 99-101.

³Edward Everett lectured at the Gloucester Lyceum in 1833, Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1838, Horace Mann in 1840, Richard Henry Dana in 1842, Orestes Brownson in 1843, Theodore Parker in 1845, Henry David Thoreau in 1848, William Henry Channing in 1848 and 1849. "Syllabus of Exercises Before the

most frequent lecturer, appearing at least 14 times between the years 1845 and 1863.⁴ Despite his consistent popularity among the Lyceum directors who sponsored his frequent appearances, Emerson was generally derided in the local press. Only Thoreau, who lectured just once, generated as much acrimony as Emerson. While some members of Gloucester's literary and artistic minority may have responded favorably to Thoreau's pantheistic sentiments, others rejected him merely on the basis of his similarity to Emerson. Clergymen, in particular, felt compelled to admonish the philosophers' deviations from traditional theology. Lane's close friend Joseph L. Stevens, Jr. (1823-1908), who was also a Lyceum member, gave some indication of the general reaction of more conservative members of Gloucester society when he recalled the response of his Unitarian minister Reverend Josiah K. Waite⁵ to a Lyceum lecture in 1848 by Thoreau:

Our minister did not take kindly to transcendental thought and mystical speech. When Thoreau was a rising star he gave before the Lyceum his most noted lecture. Pastor Waite's face showed signs of disapproval until the close. Then he said vigorous things to those around him about atheism, pantheism, feeble imitation of Emerson and the like. Agnosticism had not its present

Gloucester Lyceum," Gloucester Telegraph, November 24, November 28, December 1, 1849.

⁴ Marshall W. S. Swan, "Emerson and Cape Ann," Essex Institute Historical Collections, October 1985, 257-268; Emerson's lectures at the Gloucester Lyceum included: "Napoleon" March 6, 1845; "Montaigne" February 25, 1846; "Eloquence" December 30, 1846; "England" February 14, 1849; "The Spirit of the Age" February 13, 1850; "Power, the Spirit of Success," January, 1851; "The Anglo-Saxon" March 9, 1853; "The Anglo-American," March, 1854. See "Syllabus of Exercises Before the Gloucester Lyceum," Gloucester Telegraph, December 1, 1849; Gloucester Telegraph, February 16, 1850, January 25, 1851, March 12, 1853; Gloucester Telegraph and News, April 1, 1854.

⁵ Josiah K. Waite was the minister of the First Parish Church in Gloucester from 1837 until 1849. His appointment coincided with the dissolution of the original Orthodox membership and the adoption of a Unitarian membership. Waite's successor Reverend William Mountford served as pastor from 1850 until 1853. He was a native of England and gave the funeral service for Lane. For a review of Mountford's sermon see "Rev. William Mountford," Gloucester Telegraph, December 11, 1850.

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standing in our vocabulary, else it must also have been called into service.⁶

Thoreau's lecture "Economy" formed the first chapter in his book *Walden* which recounted his experiences living alone in a rustic cabin on the shore of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. The Gloucester press responded no more favorably to Thoreau's ideas than did Pastor Waite. Thoreau's rejection of American mercantile values in favor of living simply and frugally in nature must have been anathema to some business-minded members of his Gloucester audience. A reviewer for the *Gloucester News* conveyed the response of many when he wrote:

Mr. Thoreau and a few other men in the world can despise the pleasures of society, worship God out-doors in old clothes, can hear His voice in the whistling or gently sighing wind, and read eloquent sermons from the spring flowers; but the great mass of men DO and WILL always laugh at such pursuits.⁷

Acerbic reactions to Emerson's lectures often appeared in reviews in the local papers as well. This was a reflection, in part, of the opposition he faced after leaving the Unitarian ministry in 1832 to commence his career as an independent philosopher.⁸ Without a program for the practical implementation of their philosophy, Emerson and Thoreau's lectures became objects of scorn and ridicule. As one reviewer

⁶ Joseph L. Stevens, Jr., "Gloucester's First Parish Unitarian Church," 1879, unpublished essay, Cape Ann Historical Association archives. (Hereafter cited as CAHA archives.)

⁷ "Lyceum," *Gloucester News*, December 23, 1848; Another review of the lecture appeared in the *Gloucester Telegraph*, December 23, 1848: The lecturer gave a very strange account of the state of affairs at Concord. In the shops and offices were large numbers of human beings suffering tortures to which those of the Brahmins are mere pastimes. We cannot say whether this was in jest or in earnest. If a joke, it was a most excruciating one - if true, the attention of the Home Missionary Society should be directed to that quarter forthwith...; Quoted in Peter Anastas, "Thoreau - Lyceum Lectures and Private Impressions: Some historical notes on Thoreau's 1848 Gloucester lecture and his return to Cape Ann ten years later," *Essex Life*, Fall 1983, 99-101, 143-46.

⁸ Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson: A Biography*, NY: Viking Press, 1981, 186-194.

expressed it: Thoreau's lecture was a "literary curiosity" rather than a "practical dissertation on economy."⁹

While Thoreau boldly deprecated commerce and labor, Emerson led his audience on the convoluted path of a Hegelian analysis of western civilization. In his lecture "Spirit of the Age" he divided history into three epochs. The first represented by the Greeks deified nature. The second period represented by the Christian age was characterized by a longing for the infinite and a "disdain for nature" as the "enemy of the soul." In the third period, or modern era, the two previous tendencies combined in a "marriage of man and nature." The following excerpt from a synopsis of the lecture printed in a local paper indicates the confusion in which he left his most of his audience:

The object of government is the enjoyment of nature. By this spirit all other powers are broken. It is the age of commerce. Trade is the power, government but a parachute to a balloon. It is the age of tools and mechanism. Every tool is a monument of genius. Tools have taken man from the elements and lifted him from the earth. To him who wears a shoe, it is as if the earth were covered with leather.¹⁰

Emerson's metaphysical celebration of commerce and invention in the modern age was difficult to grasp, and the reviewer ended his article by intimating that the philosopher was a heretic and a damned infidel. Just one month later, without having given an additional lecture, Emerson was abused again in a review which was ostensibly about another speaker who had degenerated into Emersonian territory with a talk on "Intellectual Health and Disease." The reporter called Emerson "an unmitigated bore, the quintessence of stupidity and nothingness" and surmised that his presence at the Lyceum had been arranged by a "reckless minority:"

If it were not that a man is frequently ignorant of what is said in his absence, we think one must possess unusual hardihood, or unlimited confidence in his own abilities, who ventures to address the Gloucester Lyceum

⁹ "Lyceum," Gloucester News, December 23, 1848.

¹⁰ "The Lyceum," Gloucester Telegraph, February 16, 1850.

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...Emerson commands the greatest attention and admiration at New York. He packs the largest halls in the city with hearers almost as closely as we pack our mackerel. He gathers about him the most aristocratic audiences, not the money aristocracy whose station is based upon their knowledge of the multiplication table, but of intellect...But that does not influence his hearers in this place one iota... The Manhattanese are altogether wrong, undoubtedly, and deserve rather to be pitied than otherwise for being so dazzled by “the great eyeball.”¹¹

Prominent among the “reckless minority” who consistently invited Emerson to Gloucester was Mayo. He served as the sixth pastor of the Gloucester Universalist Church¹² from 1846 to 1854, and acted as a conduit for the transmission of transcendentalism on Cape Ann. His ministry was characterized by a dynamic and innovative assimilation of contemporary literature with his approach to traditional theology. During his eight year residence in Gloucester he combined his interest in adult education at the Gloucester Lyceum with his duties as the spiritual leader of his parish.¹³ As the Lyceum’s corresponding secretary, it was Mayo’s responsibility to invite speakers to lecture. Between the years 1846 and 1853, he wrote seven letters to Emerson to schedule speaking engagements, and in one case he offered to have Emerson stay with him.¹⁴ Mayo also occasionally lectured at the Lyceum himself. During

¹¹ “The Lyceum,” Gloucester Telegraph, March 16, 1850.

¹² Known as the Independent Christian Church, the first Universalist Church in America was established in Gloucester in 1773 by an Englishman John Murray and his Gloucester supporters. They built their first meeting house in 1770. It was replaced in 1805 by a federal style church on Middle Street for which Paul Revere cast the bell. The church still serves as a Universalist Church. See *One of Freedom’s Battles: Where It Was Fought and To Whom the Victory Was Due*, 1920, pamphlet, CAHA archives.

¹³ Mayo left Gloucester in 1856 to take over the ministry of a Universalist church in Cleveland, Ohio. He became a prolific writer on public education later in life. Mayo was born in Warwick, Massachusetts. He attended Amherst College from 1843-44, and received an honorary degree from the college in 1874.

¹⁴ October 14, 1846; November 26, 1846; December 12, 1849; October 17, 1850; August 21, 1852; January 5, 1853; March 4, 1853, Houghton Library,

the 1846-47 season Emerson's lecture on "Eloquence" was followed by Mayo's lecture on the "Relation of Authors to Society."¹⁵

Gloucester was an ideal location Mayo observed because it "possesses many attractions for the lover of quiet life, without the deadness of human interest which often renders a residence in the country tedious." One of the ways in which Mayo shared his literary interests with friends in Gloucester was by forming a "Reading Circle" where members gathered to discuss their insights on literature.¹⁶ The most significant way in which Mayo communicated his transcendental beliefs to a broad audience, however, was through his sermons. It was there that he drew upon basic ideas common to transcendentalism but used them in support of traditional theology rather than as a substitute. In this way he was very effective in conveying new philosophical concepts without offending or alienating his audience. Perhaps most prudent was his inclusion of the merchant class within his theological program, and his recognition that not only the art and literature which he loved was dependent upon their support, but his own position as well:

No person acquainted with the present constitution of American society will deny that the merchants are the leading class in it, and are responsible to a great degree for the character of legislation, social life, and public morals. Even literature, art and the pulpit depend for

Harvard University. In 1854 Mayo was appointed vice president of the Gloucester Lyceum. Joseph Stevens was made recording secretary and Charles Hildreth became the corresponding secretary. "Lyceum," Gloucester Telegraph, February 15, 1854.

¹⁵ Emerson's lecture was given on December 30, 1846 and Mayo's lecture was given on February 24, 1847. See "Syllabus of Exercises Before the Gloucester Lyceum," Gloucester Telegraph, December 1, 1849. Mayo's knowledge of literature was well respected. When he gave a lecture two years later on the importance of reading, The Gloucester Telegraph published a lengthy positive review, February 9, 1850. Mayo also wrote an article on "Theology and Literature," which was published in The Universalist Quarterly and General Review, vol. V, Boston: A. Tompkins, 1848, 252-272.

¹⁶ Amory Dwight Mayo, Selections from the Writings of Mrs. Sarah C. Edgarton Mayo: With A Memoir By Her Husband, Boston: A. Tompkins, 1849, 104, 107

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their opportunities of success more upon the disposition of this class than any other.¹⁷

In direct opposition to Thoreau, Mayo contended that any type of labor provided a means for growth in “spiritual culture.” In his sermon “Use of Human Employments” he addressed the fact that only a small portion of the population was free to devote their time to literature, art and religion, pursuits which Mayo asserted led to a closer communion with God through nature. Mayo used the specific example of the mercantile profession to illustrate ways in which people could develop their spiritual faculties regardless of how they were employed. He even went so far as to contend that the mercantile “faculty of combination, of reconciling contradictory elements, and making a hundred conflicting influences converge to one grand result” was the same “faculty by which a work of art or a great poem is constructed.”

[T]he merchant must hold before his imagination the thing to be accomplished, while his eye sweeps over the whole field, and detects the bearing of each fact upon his central purpose. There are as many artists in commerce as in the studios; and the admirable arrangements of a mercantile establishment have often impressed me with a sense of beauty very like that derived from a fine poem or picture.¹⁸

Mayo was undoubtedly influenced to some extent by Emerson’s views on the relation of nature to society. Emerson articulated his beliefs on the subject in his 1836 essay “Nature,” and reiterated his ideas in his 1850 Gloucester lecture “The Spirit of the Times.” In particular, the two men shared common ground in their assertion that society and its commercial activities were intrinsically connected with a higher aesthetic function of nature though the majority of people overlooked this fact.¹⁹

¹⁷ Amory Dwight Mayo, “Use of Human Employments,” *Graces and Powers of the Christian Life*, Boston: Abel Tompkins, 1852, 199.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 202.

¹⁹ Emerson discusses the relation of commodity and beauty in his essay “Nature,” (1836), *The Best of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Roslyn, NY: Walter J. Black, Inc., 77-84; Elizabeth Garriety Ellis analyzes Emerson’s “Nature” in the context of Lane’s Gloucester paintings in her essay “Cape Ann Views,”

However, Mayo's sermon was directed toward a mainstream audience who still looked to their pastor for guidance in developing their moral acumen in their daily activities. In this respect he was closer to William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) who in his essay "Self Culture" expressed the view that a person's mind should not be limited to the mere mechanics and economic consequences of their occupation. The highest theological and philosophical endeavors, Channing asserted, had been "wrought at the work-bench and amidst the toils of the field." And this intellectual capacity was not limited to men either:

How often, when the arms are mechanically plying a trade, does the mind, lost in reverie or day-dreams, escape to the ends of the earth! How often does the pious heart of woman mingle the greatest of all thoughts, that of God, with household drudgery!²⁰

Channing integrated social reform with his views on theology. He favored adult education like that sponsored by lyceums as a means of helping working class people achieve their intellectual and spiritual potential. The leader of a new liberal movement in the Unitarian Church, Channing took over the pastorate of the Boston Federal Street Church in the early 1820s. Channing is often regarded as the precursor of the transcendental movement. He was Emerson's mentor at the Federal Street Church, and his ideas influenced many of the younger Unitarian ministers who later became associated with the transcendentalist movement. In addition to Emerson, Parker and Clarke, both of whom lectured at the Gloucester Lyceum, as well as George Ripley and Frederic Henry Hedge were all Unitarian ministers associated with transcendentalism.²¹ Channing's nephew William Henry Channing

Paintings by Fitz Hugh Lane, Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1988, 19-44.

²⁰ William Ellery Channing, "Self-Culture: An Address Introductory to the Franklin Lectures, Delivered at Boston, September, 1838," *The Works of William E. Channing, D.D.*, 7th ed., Vol. 11, Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1847, 369.

²¹ Irving H. Bartlett, ed. "Introduction," *William Ellery Channing: Unitarian Christianity and Other Essays*, NY: Liberal Arts Press, 1957, xx-xxi; William R. Hutchinson, *The Transcendentalist Ministers*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959, 31.

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(1810-1884) was also a minister and social reformer who lectured at the Gloucester Lyceum.²² He was influenced by transcendentalism when he founded a new religious society called the American Union of Associationists in Boston in 1847. But like his uncle and Mayo, William Henry Channing disliked the individualism of Emerson's philosophy which bypassed the mysteries of Christianity. In contrast with Emerson, Channing's Associationists devoted themselves to the "establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth."²³

At the time of Mayo's arrival, one of his parishioners Annette Babson (1815-1884) made frequent references in her journal to the elder William Ellery Channing in which she expressed how profoundly she was affected by his writings. In one entry she stated that she had discussed Channing with Mayo who "fully sympathized in my love and admiration of this great and good man."²⁴ Both Channing and Mayo believed that aesthetic beauty as a reflection of divinity played a crucial role in moral education. They also believed that nature provided one source of metaphysical enlightenment which was accessible to all classes. In his lecture "Self Culture" Channing wrote that only a small portion of the world's resources were used for human subsistence while the pervasive beauty of the entire planet could be used to "minister to the sense of beauty:"

Matter becomes beautiful to us, when it seems to lose its material aspect, its inertness, finiteness, and grossness, and by the ethereal lightness of its forms and motions seems to approach spirit;... when it spreads out into a

²² William Henry Channing delivered a lecture on the Associationists on January 17, 1849, "Syllabus of Exercises Before the Gloucester Lyceum," Gloucester Telegraph, December 1, 1849.

²³ Hutchinson, *The Transcendentalist Ministers*, 170; Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Memoirs of William Henry Channing*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1886, 220-247. Elizabeth Garrity Ellis found the name "Fitz H. Lane" on a list of the original members of the American Union of Associationists. See Ellis, "New Discoveries in American Art: Fitz Hugh Lane and the American Union of Associationists," *American Art Journal*, Spring 1985, 89.

²⁴ Annette Babson (1815-1884), June 1, 1846, journal, CAHA archives. Annette also made references to lectures she heard by William Henry Channing. After one sermon by W.H. Channing, she wrote that if she were a man she would be a "reformer for I often dwell in mournful meditation on the abuses of society." Sunday January 16, 1848.

vastness which is a shadow of the Infinite; or when in more awful shapes and movements it speaks of the Omnipotent. Thus outward beauty is akin to something deeper and unseen, it is the reflection of spiritual attributes....²⁵

Involving his parishioners on an aesthetic level was critical to Mayo's belief system. The visual beauty of Gloucester was a common point of reference in many of his sermons which was easily accessible to everyone as well as a source of community pride. Mayo used it as a touch stone for elevating his parishioners spiritually and bringing them closer to God. Nature, Mayo asserted, had been perceived and understood in the same terms by early Christians and transcendentalists alike as a "living organism" and a reflection of the Creator:

In the grand expression of the greatest of modern poets, it is "the garment by which God is seen. "...On one side fading away into infinity, on the other boldly projected into the life of finite existence, it must ever be a medium of communication between the two - the magnetic telegraph of the universe, along which pass and repass tire eternal thought of God and the answering thought of man."²⁶

Mayo's philosophy, like that of Channing and Emerson, affirmed a belief which had long been part of Protestant thought where, in the absence of physical iconographic symbols, nature assumed a divine role as a reflection of God. In a sermon he gave on religious literature shortly after his arrival in Gloucester, Mayo recommended Emerson as well as Thomas Carlyle and James Martineau as superior sources of spiritual enlightenment as opposed to traditional writers whose "prosaic style" and "narrow and constrained" sentiments offered little to elevate the thoughts of his parishioners.²⁷ By making direct reference to Emerson, Mayo sanctioned the philosopher's theories as compatible with his own theology. However, Mayo was cautious about wholeheartedly endorsing

²⁵ Channing, "Self-Culture," *The Works of William E. Channing, D.D.*, 366-67.

²⁶ Amory Dwight Mayo, "Analogy of the Year," *Graces and Powers of the Christian Life*, Boston: Abel Tompkins, 1852, 210-211.

²⁷ Annette Babson, September 6, 1846, journal.

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Emerson. When Mayo's wife Sarah Carter Edgerton Mayo (1819-1849) died suddenly in 1849, he recalled her interest in various authors such as Carlyle, William Ellery Channing, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Friedrich Schiller and Germaine De Stael who were influential among the transcendentalists. While Emerson clearly had the greatest impact on her, Mayo was careful to indicate that she did not completely agree with all the philosopher's ideas:

[H]er attention was chiefly directed to the writings of R. W. Emerson. There she found the highest spiritual philosophy clothed by a radiant poetical imagination; and although she never gave a full intellectual assent to the system of this greatest of mystical writers, she acknowledged that to him she was indebted for much of the intellectual activity and calm faith of her last years.²⁸

As was the case with her husband, Sarah's keen interest in contemporary literature influenced her own writing. Her success as a writer is evident from the fact that she put her brother through college with earnings from publishing her poems and short stories in Universalist periodicals.²⁹ She also created and edited an annual anthology of women's prose for nine years entitled *The Rose of Sharon*. Poetry that she wrote on Cape Ann suggests that she was influenced by both Emerson's transcendentalism and Lane's luminism. In *A Morning Landscape* (1848) she expressed the same romantic ambience of sights and activity along the shore which Lane rendered on canvas:

Amid the rosy fog stole in and out The little boat. The
rower dipped his oar, Gleaming with liquid gold; and all
about The red-sailed ship went swimming from the
shore... The sea from silvery white to deepest blue
Changed 'neath the changing colors of the sky The
distant lighthouse broke upon the view, And the long
landpoint spread before the eye.

²⁸ Mayo, *Selections from the Writings of Mrs. Sarah C. Edgerton Mayo*, 106.

²⁹ *ibid*, 9-125. Sarah's access to literature was enhanced by her borrowing privileges at Amherst and Harvard Colleges where Mayo and her brother were students, respectively. She also purchased books with her earnings from publishing. By 1844 her personal library contained approximately 450 volumes.

Clear as a mirror lay the rock-bound cove; Far off one
blasted pine against the sky Lifted its scraggy form; the
crow above Flapped his black wings, and wound his
long shrill cry.

I paced the beach like some sleep-waking child, Wrapt
in a dream of beauty and of awe; Were they ideal visions
that beguiled? Was it my eye, or but my soul, that saw?³⁰

Phrases like “rosy fog,” “gleaming with liquid gold” and “clear as a mirror” which she used to describe the elements of atmosphere and water evoke the same distinguishing features of Lane’s luminist paintings. In a painting such as Lane’s *Island with Beacon* (fig. 1) one sees the jewel-like glow of red and gold reflected on the water, and senses the tranquil communion with nature the lone figure experiences as he ventures out into the water in his small boat with a thrust of his oar. In addition, her reference to the eye as the metaphysical receptor of the soul which transforms natural beauty into “ideal visions” recalls Emerson’s essay *Nature* (1836) in which he refers to himself as the “transparent eyeball” through which “the currents of the Universal Being circulate.”³¹ Much of her poetry, however, remained devoutly religious. For her, nature served primarily as a direct metaphor for traditional Christian teachings.³²

³⁰ Sarah Carter Edgarton Mayo, *Selections from the Writings of Mrs. Sarah C. Edgarton Mayo*, 224-225.

³¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “*Nature*” (1836), *The Best of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 76. Novak has discussed the influence of this passage by Emerson on Fitz Hugh Lane in *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, 110.

³² For example Sarah Carter Edgarton Mayo’s poem “*Types of Heaven*” (1839):
Why to me do woodland springs Whisper sweet and holy things? Why does
every bed of moss Tell me of my Saviour’s cross? Why in every dimpled wave
Smiles the light from oer the grave? See Sarah Carter Edgarton Mayo, ed., *The Rose of Sharon: A Religious Souvenir*, Boston: A. Tompkins and B.B. Mussey & Co., 1849, 284.

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Figure 1. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Island With Beacon*, 1851, Oil/canvas.
Collection, Cape Ann Historical Museum, Gloucester, MA

Although Mayo made his teachings palatable for Gloucester's male merchants, sea captains and others engaged in trade, the female members of this class were the ones who took the time to record Mayo's impact on their personal philosophy. The most penetrating insight into his beliefs and their effect on his audience is found in the journals of young women in the Babson family who attended both Lyceum lectures and Mayo's sermons at the Universalist Church. The Babsons were typical of the educated merchant families who patronized Lane. Descended from the area's earliest English settlers, male members of this family were generally merchants and sea captains. However, one member, John James Babson (1809-1886), in addition to a career in banking, devoted much of his life to education. He served as the Superintendent of Schools for several years, and wrote the most comprehensive history of Gloucester to date which was published in 1860.³³ John James became active in the Lyceum shortly after it formed in 1830. He gave lectures and served in various positions including recording secretary, director and president.³⁴ His enthusiasm for public education and the Lyceum was also shared by women in his family. The women, however, relied on personal written expression as a means of developing their intellectual gifts.

Despite the strides towards feminist activism by women associated with the transcendentalist movement such as Margaret Fuller, and the literary role models they admired, like Madame Germaine De Stael, the Babson women did not have the same opportunities for participating in the Lyceum as their male counterparts.³⁵ They were not even allowed to

³³ John James Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Gloucester, MA: Proctor Brothers, 1860.*

³⁴ Catherine Finney-MacDougal, *The Babson Genealogy, 1637-1977*, Watertown, MA: Eaton Press, 1978, 55-56, 92-94; Charles C. Smith, *Memoir of the Hon. John J. Babson*, Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1886, CAHA archives.

³⁵ Margaret Fuller published her feminist essay "The Great Lawsuit - Man versus Men; Woman versus Women" in *The Dial* in Boston in July 1843. Madame De Stael was not only well known to the transcendentalists from her book *De l'Allemagne* (1813) which included a survey of Romantic philosophy, but was also among a growing number of female role models for women. Her biography appeared in books such as S.G. Goodrich, *Lives of Celebrated Women*, Boston: Higgins and Bradley, 1856; For the influence of De Stael on the transcendentalists see Stanley M. Vogel, *German Literary Influences on the American Transcendentalists*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

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speak before the Lyceum according to the local paper “since the Scriptures forbid the public speaking of females in the assemblages of men.” Instead they were provided with a box for depositing their comments which were then read before the Lyceum by a male member of the audience.³⁶ Nonetheless, women like the Babsons apparently formed the majority of the audience. A writer for the local paper observed at the opening of the Lyceum lecture course in 1849:

As usual the ladies predominated in numbers, as they are superior in intelligence and a desire for information. They are far more ready to leave their firesides for the purpose of receiving or imparting information than are men to leave their places of business or their haunts of leisure.³⁷

When Babson married his second wife Lydia Ann Mason (1822-1907) in 1851, he chose a woman whose intellectual talents matched his own. She was well read like her husband and developed a reputation for her extensive knowledge of botany which stretched beyond the realm of a popular women’s hobby and the borders of Gloucester. Prior to her marriage she taught a private school for girls which several of John James Babson’s nieces attended. Recognizing the educational potential of the Gloucester Lyceum for her students, she required that they attend lectures and write abstracts in their journals.

Like her husband, Lydia Ann was a member of a wealthy old Cape Ann merchant family who patronized Lane, and her upbringing and intellectual pursuits reflected the privileges of her class. She spent several years on her uncle Sidney Mason’s mahogany plantation in San Juan, Puerto Rico where she “enjoyed exceptional musical and social advantages.”³⁸ One such advantage may have been the presence of Emerson’s brother Edward who worked as Mason’s secretary. Another

³⁶ “Our Lyceum,” Gloucester Telegraph, November 17, 1849.

³⁷ “The Lyceum,” Gloucester Telegraph, November 24, 1849.

³⁸ Sarah G. Duley, “In Memoriam: Ann Mason Babson, February 19, 1822 - January 11, 1907,” Sarah G. Duley scrapbooks, vol. D, 14, CAHA archives; Cassie Mason Myers Julian-James, *Biographical Sketches of the Bailey-Myers-Mason Families, 1776-1905: Key to a Cabinet of Heirlooms in the National Museum, Washington, D.C., (privately printed, 1908), 113-118, CAHA archives.*

was certainly Mason's opulent mansion where he entertained diplomatic guests as the acting U.S. Consul to Puerto Rico. According to one of Emerson's biographers, Mason lived in "baronial style in a building extending from one street to another, with large, high-ceilinged rooms, long passages to a courtyard, and servants lodged in various quarters."³⁹ Mason commissioned several paintings by Lane of the harbors where he had business interests. One of these paintings, Gloucester Harbor (Fig. 2),⁴⁰ transformed the sources of his material wealth and prosperity into perfect visions of aesthetic harmony. Whether Mason appreciated Lane's paintings on a spiritual level is unknown. Yet nowhere was the merchant's trade expressed in artistic terms more elegantly. Taking Mayo's cue, one could truly see the mercantile profession in aesthetic and metaphysical terms. The graceful arc of the fishermen's net spread from Chebacco boat at the center foreground of the painting is echoed in the dramatic billowing clouds above. The contrast between the shimmering silvery blue of the water and the saturated gray blue clouds is heightened by a crown of white cumulus clouds lending an otherworldly aura to white silhouette of the town below. The town itself is framed by Mason's Pavilion Hotel on the far left hand side and the ramparts of Fort Point on the right which served as a proud reminder of Gloucester's participation in the Revolutionary War.⁴¹

³⁹ Allen, Waldo Emerson, 180-181.

⁴⁰ Mason's painting by Lane of Gloucester Harbor was donated to the City of Gloucester in 1913 by his granddaughter Mrs. Julian-James. "Painting by Lane of Town in 1852 Presented by Washington Lady As Memento of Her Grandfather Mason," 1913, unidentified newspaper clipping in Artists and Authors of Cape Ann scrapbook, CAHA archives.

⁴¹ Sidney Mason's father John Mason and his brother Alphonso Mason operated another hotel called the Gloucester House. It is the three-story brick building located just to the right of Sidney's Pavilion Hotel. John James Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Including the Town of Rockport, Gloucester, MA*: Peter Smith, 1972, 561; The ramparts of Fort Point were erected on the site where a landing party from a British war ship was intercepted and defeated. See James R. Pringle, *History of the Town and City of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Massachusetts (1892)*, Gloucester, MA: Ten Pound Island Book Co., 1997, 76-77. For more on Mason's Pavilion Hotel see James F. O'Gorman, "The Pavilion that Sidney Built," *This Other Gloucester: Occasional Papers on the Arts of Cape Ann, Massachusetts*, Gloucester, MA: Ten Pound Island Book Company, 1990.

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Although Lane received a substantial number of commissions from men, women in the Mason and Babson families also commissioned paintings. Lydia Ann's sister Harriet took art lessons from Lane,⁴² and, following her marriage to fishing magnate William Fuller Davis, commissioned Lane's painting *Stage Rocks and Western Shore of Gloucester Outer Harbor* (Fig. 3).⁴³ The painting depicts the peaceful commercial activity of two lumber schooners about to pass each other in Gloucester's outer harbor. The lumber may have come from Maine for use in Gloucester's shipbuilding industry.⁴⁴ The commerce itself recalls Mason's Puerto Rican mahogany plantation Santa Catalina which Harriet named her only child after. But the overriding aesthetic feeling this painting conveys is one of tranquility as the vessels glide effortlessly across the glassy surface of the water which reflects the light of the vast

⁴² Wilmerding, Fitz Hugh Lane, 42.

⁴³ Harriet Mason married William Fuller Davis in the early 1850s. Mason was Davis' second wife. He began his career as a sail maker and later purchased a wharf and fishing fleet. For more on Davis see his obituary, January 3, 1874, CAHA biography files; Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester*, 75. The painting Harriet commissioned by Lane, *Stage Rocks and Western Shore of Gloucester Outer Harbor* (1857), was donated to the Cape Ann Historical Museum by their daughter Catalina Davis (1853-1932). A notation on the drawing for the painting indicates that a copy was made for Mrs. William F. Davis. (Joseph Stevens made notations on many of Lane's drawings indicating who purchased copies of paintings from the drawings. He gave or sold over 100 of Lane's drawings to Samuel Mansfield, who, in turn, donated them to the Cape Ann Historical Association.) See *Paintings and Drawings by Fitz Hugh Lane at the Cape Ann Historical Association*, 18-19. Davis's daughters Catalina and her half sister Lucy Brown Davis were major benefactors of the early Cape Ann Historical Association. They donated paintings, furniture and funded the construction of a new wing to the museum's original historic house in 1936. See *Minutes of the Cape Ann Historical Association, 1936*, CAHA archives; Lane may have used the same drawing for his painting *Landing at Cape Ann, 1623* (now lost) which was commissioned by J. Wingate Thornton to illustrate his history of the same subject. John James Babson, who wrote his own history of Gloucester several years later, was interested in the endeavor and discussed Lane's painting with Wingate. See Wilmerding, *Fitz Hugh Lane*, 72-72; Fred W. Tibbets, "C.A.S.&L.A. Weekly Column on Matters of Local History: Fitz Hugh Lane," unidentified newspaper clipping, *Artists and Authors*, scrapbook, CAHA archives.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to marine historian Erik A.R. Ronnberg, Jr. for this suggestion.

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expanse of blue sky above. Thus, the tools of mercantile trade become aesthetic instruments in the artist's composition.



Figure 2. Fitz Hugh Lane. *Stage Rocks and Western Shore of Gloucester Outer Harbor*, 1857, Oil/ canvas. Collection, Cap Ann Historical Museum, Gloucester, MA

John James Babson's brother Edward (1811-1879) was a sea captain who also commissioned work by Lane which reflected the commercial prosperity of his profession: a portrait of his ship *Cadet* (Fig.4).⁴⁵ While

⁴⁵ Captain Edward Babson was engaged in Gloucester's lucrative trade with the Dutch colony Surinam. Gloucester traded dried salt fish used to feed plantation slaves for molasses which was converted to rum in a local distillery. See "The

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Captain Babson spent long periods away from home at sea, his daughters Isabel and Hannah harvested the cultural fruits made possible by his labors. One of Lane's most romantic and quintessentially transcendental paintings *The Western Shore with Norman's Woe* (fig. 5) was donated together with Lane's portrait of the Cadet to the Cape Ann Historical Museum by Edward's granddaughter Isabel Babson Lane (1878-1960). In this painting Lane turned from the topographical accuracy of the buildings and vessels which defined Gloucester's horizon to focus on broad expanses of sky, sea and barren shore with lone or abandoned vessels. Here the viewer's attention is guided around a gently shaped cove which terminates in a small rocky island. The translucent surface of the water mirrors the form of the island and the sky creating an overall aura of serenity. *The Western Shore with Norman's Woe* was probably owned by Edward's daughter Isabel Babson (1848-1917). A notation on the preparatory drawing indicates that a copy of the painting was commissioned by Isabel's friend Florence Foster. Whether Isabel also commissioned a copy of the painting or later came into possession of her friend's version is unknown.⁴⁶ But an inscription by Foster in Isabel's autograph album suggests that the two women shared the same beliefs in which every aspect of their daily existence was permeated by a greater unseen spiritual dimension:

Our life, seeming little, becomes really great by being godlike and its least and lowliest deeds cease to be small and low through the inspirations which fill and ennoble them. A gentle word, a kind deed, a truthful thought are no longer mere word, deed, thought, but are expanded... into the very soul and unconfined essence of goodness.⁴⁷

The idea that contemplation of the material world provided the basis for metaphysical exercises which could bring one closer to the spiritual core of existence was integral to Mayo's belief system and its

Surinam Business," unidentified article, Cameron Scrapbooks, vol. 18, CAHA archives; Finney-MacDougal, *The Babson Genealogy*, 55-56, 94-95.

⁴⁶ Foster also accompanied Lydia Ann and John James Babson on a trip to Europe in 1871. Duley, "Ann Mason Babson"; *Paintings and Drawings by Fitz Hugh Lane at the Cape Ann Historical Association*, 28-29.

⁴⁷ Florence Foster, June 1863, inscription in Isabel Babson's (1848-1917) autograph album, CAHA archives.

implementation on Cape Ann. He exhorted both men and women to use their gender specific daily regimen as a means for discerning the eternal character of life in an appreciation of natural beauty.

Isabel's older sister Hannah Stanwood Babson (1834-1909) attended both Emerson's lectures at the Lyceum and Mayo's sermons which she recorded in her journal. Attendance at Lyceum lectures was required by her teacher and future aunt Lydia Ann Mason. Lectures that Hannah attended included one by William Henry Channing in 1849, and Emerson's lectures on "England" and the "The Spirit of the Times" in 1849 and 1850 respectively. But according to her journal, a sermon by Mayo given 10 days after Emerson's "Spirit of the Times" lecture had the greatest impact on her. The sermon was based on a passage from Corinthians 3:6: "The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life." For Mayo, art, like nature, provided a metaphysical framework in which one could be elevated spiritually through aesthetic appreciation. Nature, art and literature functioned like religion as catalysts for perceiving divinity. In all categories, he distinguished between the "letter and the spirit." Men who perceived the letter and not the spirit would only see the utility of nature for growing crops or catching fish:

A man of this class will pull up his children's roses to plant his corn and a mother will not let her daughter walk in the gardens, or gaze upon the ocean, or sit under the shade of a tree and look upon the beauties of nature all around for fear that it will prevent her from becoming a good housekeeper.

In contrast, one who saw the spirit in nature "lifts up the thin veil that is between this and another world and sees the Eternal One in all his glory." The same held true for art and literature where one who perceived only the letter would view it critically pointing out technical deficiencies whereas one who saw the spirit "when he gazes upon a beautiful work of art ...feels overpowered by his emotions, and all around him is solemn and full of sublimity."⁴⁸ For the Babson family, the duality of Mayo's neo-platonic system satisfied both practical and metaphysical needs, and Lane's paintings were a reflection of this binary world. Thus, Captain Babson could proudly admire a painting by Lane of ships in the

⁴⁸ Hannah Stanwood Babson (1834-1909), journal, February 24, 1850, CAHA archives.

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harbor as a reflection of both material and noumenal well being. For the female members of the Babson family who had more leisure time in which to contemplate nature, Lane's paintings were the pure embodiment of the spiritual beauty which surrounded them.

Isabel and Hannah's aunt Annette Babson (1815-1884) also attended both Mayo's sermons and Lyceum lectures. She never married and spent much of her time engaged in self education. Her journal entries show how much she was stimulated by Mayo's arrival in Gloucester as opposed to his predecessor whose voice she found to have a "very lulling sound and soothes me oft to sleep like a mother's lullaby."⁴⁹ Annette's journal provides an example of the ambiguous reception of transcendentalism in Gloucester before and after Mayo's arrival. Her specific references to the term 'transcendental' indicate that it had pejorative connotations for her, while her thoughts on the divinity of nature show a strong affinity with the content of transcendentalism. This gap between an unfashionable descriptive term and the application of the idea behind it was bridged by Mayo.

Annette's earliest reference to transcendentalism occurred in 1841 where she writes that she came home to find two visitors Dr. Adams and Mr. Baker engaged in a "logical discussion" on the subject. The opposing views they supported were characteristic of contemporary reactions. Dr. Adams, echoing the American constitutional liberty of freedom of speech, "declared it to be his opinion that anyone should proclaim in a bold and fearless manner what they felt to be the truth sanctioned and supported by conscience." Mr. Baker, on the other hand, contended that it was immoral to advance such radical theological sentiments unless they would clearly benefit mankind as a whole.⁵⁰ The attitude that transcendentalism was immoral was shared by many people. After hearing her first lecture by Emerson at the Gloucester Lyceum on the subject 'Montaigne' Annette wrote:

[I] attended a Lyceum lecture by R. Waldo Emerson on 'Montaigne' a professed skeptic and the lecture was such as one might expect, transcendental in style, entirely beyond the comprehension of anyone. It was a tirade of high sounding words with scarcely an idea in them all

⁴⁹ Annette Babson, May 9, 1846, journal. Mayo's predecessor Reverend H.B. Soule was the pastor of the Gloucester Universalist Church from 1845-46.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, August 28, 1841.

and left a vague impression of something not at all satisfactory or improving; in fact a decidedly immoral tendency was the result of this great show of nonsense.... What a pity that this man's talents are so perverted. It seems to me he is half crazy. To advocate a professed infidel argues himself one of the same stamp.⁵¹

Emerson's lecture on the French author Michael Montaigne (1533-92) was part of his series of essays entitled Representative Men (1850). Annette's indignant accusation of incomprehensible atheism was typical of the response of a conservative audiences to Emerson. Because Emerson rejected historical Christianity and its ceremonies, he developed an inflammatory reputation as an atheist which people like Annette, who prided themselves on their Christian piety, were quick to denounce. Although Annette did not identify with the transcendentalist movement, those who knew her in Gloucester clearly viewed her ideas in that light. After visiting a local store one day, the owner Mr. Tompkins teased her about her "*transcendental* ideas:"

He said he would give more to see me a wife than anyone he knows. I ask him his reasons and they appear to be only that he wants to see me divested of these romantic high flown feelings which he thinks are now mine.⁵²

Annette's transcendental ideas were gleaned from Mayo's ministry more so than from any of the transcendentalist speakers she heard at the Lyceum. Mayo was aware of the dramatic effect Cape Ann's scenery had on viewers and incorporated it into his sermons. Even the local fishing fleet so vital to Gloucester's economy was aestheticized into a source of divine inspiration. For him, the exterior landscape was interchangeable with his study where he prepared his sermons. In later years he fondly recalled the beauty which kindled his enthusiasm:

I was all the time enfolded in this wonderful gospel of nature on this New England coast. The restless ocean; this tumble of hills, sown with rocks, the deep quiet pine

⁵¹ *ibid*, February 25, 1846.

⁵² *ibid*, May 1846.

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woods; the summits from which I looked off on the silver circle of the all-surrounding sea; the fleets of fishing boats, like troops of white-winged spirits of the deep, dimly seen through the morning mists along the horizon line; all were as familiar as the floor of my own study.⁵³

For Emerson, the ocean viewed from Cape Ann's shore likewise suggested eternal beauty and an all-consuming infinite power which could be captured in literary expression. In contrast with Mayo who used it as a didactic tool, Emerson attempted to discern the elemental essence of its psychological power. After a trip to Cape Ann's Pigeon Cove in 1856 where he "made the acquaintance of the sea for seven days" with a group of his friends including Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and others, Emerson recorded the impact the spectacular scenery had on him:

'Tis a noble friendly power and seemed to say to me ...Lie down on my warm ledges and learn that a very little but is all you need ..And behold the sea, the opaline, the strong, yet beautiful as the rose or the rainbow, full offood, nourisher of men, purger of the world, creating a sweet climate, and, in its unchangeable ebb and flow, and in its beauty at a few furlongs, giving a hint of that which changes not, and is perfect.⁵⁴

A visual record of beauty was even more accurate than any literary description. Thus it offered a closer approximation of the divine message. For both Mayo and Emerson, art transcended the mechanics of its creation and embodied the origin of humanity's spiritual nature in the aesthetic response. The difference between the two lay in terminology and practical application. While Mayo maintained the Christian tradition of aspiring to a closer communion with God, Emerson tapped the universal currents of the "original soul." Where Mayo used the traditional term of "creator" Emerson used the phrase "aboriginal Power." The distinction between the two was significant to Mayo and his

⁵³ Rev. Amory Dwight Mayo quoted in Richard Eddy, *Universalism in Gloucester*, Gloucester, MA: Procter Brothers, 1892, 93.

⁵⁴ Bliss Perry, ed., *The Heart of Emerson 's Journals*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1926, 276-277.

congregation. It amounted to the difference between appreciating nature as a Christian or an atheist. In his essay "Art" (1841) Emerson wrote:

The reference of all production at last to an aboriginal Power explains the traits common to all works of the highest art, - that they are universally intelligible; that they restore to us the simplest states of mind; and are religious. Since what skill is therein shown is the reappearance of the original soul, a jet of pure light, it should produce a similar impression to that made by natural objects.⁵⁵

Emerson's deft use of language elicited images which easily rivaled Lane's paintings in their rich clarity. It was his ability to capture with words the aesthetic splendor of the New England coast which people like Mayo found so inspiring. In his essay "Nature" (1844) Emerson expounded on the aesthetic qualities of nature which transcend the cares of everyday existence and transport men to a higher realm of "medicinal" enchantment. For Emerson as for Mayo, nature was the incarnation of humanity's highest metaphysical aspirations. Emerson struck a common chord when he described the exhilarating feelings natural beauty could elicit from an observer:

I go with my friend to the shore of our little river, and with one stroke of the paddle, I leave... the world of villages and personalities behind, and pass into a delicate realm of sunset and moonlight, too bright almost for spotted man to enter without noviciate and probation. We penetrate bodily this incredible beauty; we dip our hands in this painted element: our eyes are bathed in these lights and forms. A holiday, a villeggiatura, a royal revel, the proudest, most heart rejoicing festival that valor and beauty, power and taste, ever decked and enjoyed, establishes itself on the instant. These sunset clouds, these delicately emerging stars, with their private and ineffable glances, signify it and proffer it.⁵⁶

After Mayo began his ministry, Annette filled her journal with new responses to her natural surroundings in her frequent walks around Cape Ann in which she was motivated to find spiritual parallels. When she returned home, she would write about the impact of Mayo's ideas and

⁵⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Art" from his *Essays: First Series* (1841). See ed. Douglas Crase, *Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays: First and Second Series*, NY: Vintage Books/The Library of America, 1990, 204-205.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 313.

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how that affected her perception of the natural scenery she enjoyed afterwards. In her own words, she found herself lifting her “eyes from the written page to the more glowing page of nature.”⁵⁷ The ocean which surrounded Cape Ann offered the most immediate metaphor for spiritual creativity. Its vastness was awe-inspiring and it reinforced her notions about divine omnipotence. After attending one of Mayo’s sermons, she wrote:

Mr. Mayo ...preached ..on the beauty of holiness - the beautiful in Nature, Art and Life ...He thought that we were all more affected by beauty than we were apt to suppose - that it influenced us to refinement, purity and finally to PIETY. He disclaims against those who whine about Nature in a sickly sentimental strain and prayed that no one word of his should ever [encourage] such nonsense. He took a Christian view of it and urged us to cultivate a love of nature [and] art because it was an emanation of the beautiful spirit of God [and] because it would lead us up to the creator. After tea my brother William] and J[ohn] accompanied me to Bass Rocks. I do not often walk on Sunday but a storm last eve I knew had agitated the waves and I thought a Sabbath twilight in view of the scene would be awfullvo I turned from the written page to read from the book of Nature ...My thoughts as I stood by those thundering waves were almost too deep for utterance... We gazed in wonder and awe - words trembled on our tongues but the voice of God in the rushing of the sea hushed our own feeble voices. As there is sublime poetry in a scene like this my thoughts rise into verse:

Thy temple is the rolling sea
Where I, O God would worship thee!
I hear thy voice. I see thy form
In wind, land, wave and raging storm ...⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Annette Babson, September 19, 1846, journal.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, Sunday September 23, 1849. Other examples of this type of entry are: Sun Aug 30. Mr. Mayo preached finely. His remarks on freedom of religious opinion were excellent ..After tea William] and Sarah walked [with me] on the beach by the light of a glorious moon. We had it all to ourselves and the silence was unbroken save by our psalms of praise blending with the gentle murmur of the waves. The scene was fraught with heavenly beauty and a peace not of earth

Unlike Emerson, Mayo was careful to indicate that an aesthetic appreciation of nature was limited to the service of Christianity. Cultivating an aesthetic response to her surroundings became a form of worship for Annette. Her creativity flourished in her journal entries as she attempted to capture the beauty she saw with language. After a storm cleared, ships which had taken refuge in the harbor “spread their snowy sails and glided off like a vapor. I thought few sights on this earth were more glorious than this.” Following Mayo’s example, the ships which frequented Gloucester harbor and represented the town’s prosperity were transformed by her aesthetic faculty into vehicles for metaphysical transcendence. Another time while gathering mosses at Bass rocks, Annette and her companions could not “keep our eyes from the broad blue sea covered with myriad’s of white sails. I wished for the genius of Raphael or even our own artist Fitz Hugh Lane to immortalize this perfect ocean scene.”⁵⁹

According to Mayo, artists were especially sensitive to the divine beauty which God bestowed upon the earth. Creating art was a means of worship. Any dichotomy between the artist’s perception and his ability to recreate it on canvas was evidence of a deep metaphysical yearning to give tangible form to divine attributes. In a sermon on “Immortality” which Mayo gave following his wife’s death, he referred to Washington Allston’s (1779-1843) long struggle to complete his unfinished painting *Belshazzar’s Feast* (1817-1843)⁶⁰ when he wrote:

What longing admiration influences the soul of the true
Artist, and how far below the beauty which he sees, is the beauty

seemed brooding over the whole the mysterious influence of which breathed upon our hearts... Sat Sept 19. Sarah went with me to Bass rocks. Never did I see anything so awfully sublime as the breakers dashing and foaming - roaring and tumbling over the rocks. It was fearfully grand and glorious. How little, how absolutely less than nothing did I feel myself to be as [I] stood and gazed. Even rocks and surf, waves and sky sunk into insignificance as a faint idea of the immensity of God came over the soul. To me tis very profitable thus to commune with Nature up to nature’s God. There is rapture on the lovely shore. There is society where none intrudes by the deep sea and music of its roar.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p. 50, 1848.

⁶⁰ William H. Gerdts and Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., “A Man of Genius “: The Art of Washington Allston (1779-1843), Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1979, 108-110, 158-163.

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he can create? And must he vanish from being while the vision is still shining before him?... When I look upon that great picture which wearied out his mortal existence, shall I think of all that labor lost, or shall I believe that by it a spirit was disciplined for greater efforts beyond the grave?⁶¹

Thus artists like Lane were endowed with a talent for transcribing visual expressions of divinity. The end result of their efforts was not simply a metaphysical or psychological sensation, but a method for preparing their soul for the hereafter. In this respect, Mayo used a concept common to transcendentalism in the service of traditional Christian beliefs. Annette often visited the Lane's studio and expressed her desire to have his artistic ability on more than one occasion. After stopping by his studio one day with a friend Annette saw the painting Gloucester, Stage Fort Beach (Fig.6), and was struck by his precise representation of one of her favorite spots:

The shore, the ocean, the beach, the rich sunset radiance falling upon all with dark shadows here and there all made up a perfect picture. E. Somes walked with me to the spot whereon he stood to sketch it. No one could mistake it- so true to nature has he drawn it. What would I give if I had such genius - but then I would prefer the use of limbs which he has not to enable me to move at my pleasure. Thus he has genius to make good the law of compensation. While I am poorly endowed with natural gifts yet have all my faculties and senses which may be cultivated and improved.⁶²

Visiting Lane's studio was a source of pleasure for many residents who found accurate reflections of their native surroundings in his paintings. The local paper recognized the public appeal his art held and

⁶¹ Rev. A. D. Mayo, "Immortality: A Discourse delivered on the Sabbath after the decease of Mrs. S.C.E. Mayo," Gloucester, MA: printed sermon, 1848, CAHA archives. Inscriptions on the inside cover read: "Mrs. Eliza Dexter with respect of B.K. Hough, Jr." "From Joseph L. Stevens, 1898." Lane's closest friend in Gloucester, Stevens, was active in Gloucester's first library and historical society. He evidently gave this pamphlet as a gift to one of these early institutions.

⁶² Annette Babson, September 22, 1849, journal.

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frequently ran articles about him which included descriptions of his current paintings. Lane's painting Gloucester, Stage Fort Beach elicited an exceptionally long description which conveyed not only the artist's accuracy in representing a specific site but those aspects of light and color which are unique to Lane's luminist style:



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Figure 3. Fitz Hugh Lane, *Gloucester, Stage Fort Beach*, 1849, Oil/canvas. Private Collection. Photo courtesy of Vose Galleries, Boston, MA

The view is from a high rock near the western end of “Half Moon Beach. “ The effect is that of a clear, summer sunset, and hill, tree-top, rock, sail, and pennon are flooded with rosy and golden light...Just beyond the bluff, and still further towards the west, lies “Fresh Water Cove, “ lengthening shadows from the hills and trees beyond interrupting the sheet of light reflected from its surface: groups of buildings stand on the low point forming the opposite shore; a yacht, jib and foresail down, and peak of mainsail dropped, has just reached her mooring in the Cove. Nearer that part of the foreground ..a large sloop lies at anchor, her perfect image mirrored from the calm surface of the water, and off to the left, a home bound brig is slowly making her way towards the inner harbor. The complete success with which the artist has represented on his canvass the glory of the sunset, is evident to the most careless beholder. The few scattered cloud specks in the sky are tinged with warmest hues; the rounded cloudlike outlines of dense pine tops reflect a golden color, in striking relief to the dark green shading of their lower branches; and the sloping rocks, shrubbery, sails, and sleeping water are bathed in gorgeous red. So beautifully is the whole landscape delineated, that the illusion is perfect; and the beholder forgets, while gazing, that he is not standing on that old grey ledge at “Half Moon Beach, “ drinking in the loveliness of a real scene.⁶³

⁶³ Lane’s painting, *Gloucester, Stage Fort Beach*, was exhibited at the De Cordova Museum, Lincoln, MA (March 20 -- April 17, 1966), Colby College Art Museum, ME (April 30 – June 6, 1966) and W.A. Farnsworth Library & Art Museum, Rockland, ME (July – September 15, 1974, no. 17). Wilmerding included it in his checklist of known Lane paintings as No. 18, *Fitz Hugh Lane: American Marine Painter*, 1964. Vose Galleries, Boston, MA sold the painting to a private collection. “Paintings by Fitz H. Lane, Esq.,” *Gloucester News*, September 22, 1849. The painting which the reviewer for the *Gloucester News* described, entitled, *Gloucester, Stage Fort Beach* (Figure 3), was commissioned by William Edward Coffin, and was on display in Lane’s studio for several days when Annette Babson saw it and wrote about it in her journal (September 22, 1849, see footnote 62). Coffin, who was born in 1813 in Gloucester, had already moved to Boston to pursue business interests at the time he commissioned the painting. See “A Fine Painting,” *The Telegraph* (Gloucester), September 26, 1849. Lanes’ pupil,

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The reviewer did not indicate whether the painting held any metaphysical meaning for the general public. However, for Mayo and his congregation Lane's paintings provided transcriptions of the divine sermons which surrounded them on Cape Ann. The greater the artist's ability in capturing the clarity of nature's beauty, the closer his art brought the viewer to God. Mayo transformed Emerson's philosophy into a medium in which all members of Gloucester society could participate without violating their personal belief system. Lane's paintings operated on the same principle by appealing to the artistic needs of the entire social strata. The convergence of transcendental nature philosophy and Lane's art on Cape Ann was the result of a mutual aesthetic epiphany. Both the artist and the transcendental minister created from a common point of reference: the sublime scenery which surrounded them. While Lane recorded his visual impressions directly, Mayo incorporated his perceptions into his beliefs about the comprehension of divinity. The visual and literary responses reinforced one another. Lane's art crystallized the most salient details of Cape Ann's topography into perfect visions of natural beauty which genuinely serve as illustrations for metaphysical theories of nature and aesthetics.

Mary Blood Mellen (born 1817), the wife of Universalist minister, Reverend C.W. Mellen, made a similar painting of the same site, entitled, *Field Beach, Stage Fort Park* (1850s), which was donated to the Cape Ann Historical Museum by Jean Stanley Dice. For a checklist of Mellen's paintings which were based on Lane's work, see Michael Moses, "Mary Blood Mellen and Fitz Hugh Lane," *Antiques*, November 1991.