# TRANSCENDENTALISM AND THE CRISIS OF SELF IN AMERICAN ART AND CULTURE, 1830-1930

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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**Abstract**

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND THE CRISIS OF SELF IN AMERICAN ART AND CULTURE, 1830-1930

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This dissertation explores the manner in which Transcendentalism impacted American artists and their productions from 1830-1930 through a series of four case studies. The central theme that unites these studies is the crisis of self, the feeling that the once stable, integrated entity—what Ralph Waldo Emerson referred to as "this idea called 'I'"—was being pulled apart in the modern age. I investigate the manner in which Emerson, Henry D. Thoreau and Walt Whitman managed this feeling of dislocation and how their texts influenced cultural productions.

Beginning with Martin Johnson Heade's salt marsh paintings, the first case examines how the critical language of Transcendentalism created landscapes that audiences read on numerous levels. I trace Heade's contact with Transcendentalism to his previously unknown residence in Cincinnati, during which time Emerson gave a series of influential lectures. I also explore the manner in which Emerson's ideas influenced his compositional strategies, focusing on the three distinct levels of relating to natural forms that Emerson posited in *Nature.* In the second study, I explore how the continued promotion of Transcendentalism influenced Albert Pinkham Ryder's moonlit marine paintings and how influential critics constructed an image consonant with Transcendentalism's legacy for his life. I examine the manner in which the environment

of New Bedford, his childhood home, and his circle of friends in New York strengthened the philosophy's influence on him.

The last two studies deal with the promotion of Transcendentalism into the public realm, rather than as a private remedy. In the third study, using Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft Community as an example, I trace the influence of Transcendentalism on the Arts and Crafts in the United States. In addition to positing an alternative for the movement's exclusively British model, I also look at how Transcendentalism's navigation of modernity created the conditions for the American practitioners to accept mechanization with less reservation than their British counterparts. In the final study, I explore how the philosophy remained a viable force well into the twentieth century and examine how the mass-produced housing of Sears, Roebuck and Company continued to speak to the Transcendentalists' legacy.

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## Introduction: Modernity, Anxiety and the Crisis of Self

> When a workman is constantly and exclusively engaged in making one object, he ends by performing this work with singular dexterity. But at the same time, he loses the general faculty of applying his mind to the way he is working. Every day he becomes more adroit and less industrious, and one may say that in his case, the man is degraded as the workman improves... In a word, he no longer belongs to himself, but to his chosen calling.
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 1840[1]

De Tocqueville's observations regarding the effects of specialized labor upon the worker signal a larger concern that was intensifying throughout this period: the perceived loss of autonomy and splintering of the self. Although this was by no means confined to the United States, visitors and residents alike found that one of the principal experiences of modernity for Americans was a sense of dislocation and anxiety. De Tocqueville's worry that man "no longer belongs to himself" was but one among many manifestations of this concern. Describing her travels through the United States in 1834-5, British-born sociologist Harriet Martineau commented that "with the exception of some Southerners, ruined by slavery," there was "no class in the United states so anxious about the means of living as the farmers of New England."[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) offered an even grimmer appraisal of the age in his essay "Self-Reliance:" "the sinew and heart of a man seem to be drawn out, and we [have] become timorous, desponding whimperers. We are afraid of truth, afraid of fortune, afraid of death, and afraid of each other. Our age yields no great and perfect persons."[3] Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), recounting his time at Walden Pond, found "quiet desperation" as the cardinal feature of existence

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 555.

[2] Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (New York: Saunders and Otley, 1837), 293.

[3] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self Reliance," in *Essays* (1841), reprint *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 146.

and swore he saw "unconscious despair" lurking beneath society's "games and amusements."[4] For all of its material promise, modernity frequently provoked feelings of dislocation and anxiety.[5]

Transcendentalism is part religion, part philosophy and part cultural phenomenon. Broadly speaking, it is a movement that emerged in the 1830s in New England, which centered on the lectures and writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and stressed nature's divinity and the importance of the individual. Indebted to German Romanticism, Transcendentalism also stressed the importance of the subjective experience over objective facts.[6] Emerson, in his 1842 essay "The Transcendentalist," explained this distinction by illustrating the differences between idealists and materialists:

> In the order of thought, the materialist takes his departure from the external world, and esteems man as a product of that. The idealist [or Transcendentalist] takes his departure from consciousness, and reckons the world an appearance. Mind is the only reality… Nature, literature, [and] history are only subjective phenomena.[7]

As Emerson's popularity increased, other figures such as Henry David Thoreau, Amos Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller and Walt Whitman were drawn to the philosophy. More an outlook than a dogmatic set of creeds, Transcendentalism—as variously practiced by different figures—had numerous manifestations. In spite of these differences, all of the

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[4] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854), reprinted in *Walden and Civil Disobedience,* Penguin Classics Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 50.

[5] Some earlier historians have focused exclusively on the material promise of the age, even enlisting Emerson and Thoreau as evidence of this "hopefulness." See for example: R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), esp. 13-27.

[6] Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," (1842) in *Essential Writings,* 86 stated: "It is well known to most of my audience, that the Idealism of the present day acquired the name Transcendental, from the use of that term by Immanuel Kant of Konigsberg…."

[7] Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," 83.

Transcendentalists were united by Emerson's observation that the Transcendentalist insists "on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture."[8]

The perception that the previously integrated self had become fractured precipitated the crisis of self, which I define as the anxiety and psychological trauma that accompanied this realization. Throughout the dissertation, I explore the manner through which Transcendentalism became a philosophy used to stabilize the self and mend these rifts in consciousness. Through a series of four case studies—Martin Heade's marsh paintings, Albert Ryder's moonlit marine paintings, Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft community, and Sears, Roebuck and Company's Modern Homes venture—I examine different aspects of Transcendentalism's proposed solutions to this crisis. By no means do I intend for these cases to represent the entirety of Transcendentalism's contributions to American art and culture during this period.[9] Rather, I see each case as instructive, serving as a type of guide that will help measure and define similar reactions to this crisis. These examples were chosen because of the way in which each represents a different means of using Transcendentalism, and also because the standard modern narratives of artistic and cultural history have failed to incorporate adequately these figures and ventures. The trajectory traced by this arc follows a chronological track and also demonstrates the push of Transcendentalism from a private and insular concern,

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[8] Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," 81.

[9] Although attempts to discern Transcendentalism's impact upon the visual arts have been essayed at various times, these publications have been narrowly focused and emphasize a much different vision of Transcendentalism than what I am concerned with. See, for instance, *The Great Decade in American Writing, 1850-1860: Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, Whitman; Books and Manuscripts, with Paintings by Friends and Contemporaries of the Authors* (New York: American Academy of Arts and Letters and National Institute of Arts and Letters, 1954). More commonly, a singular figure, rather than the broader philosophy is examined, as in Geoffrey M. Sill and Roberta K. Tarbell, eds. *Walt Whitman and the Visual Arts* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

into the corporate realm and public consciousness. By using Transcendentalism as a lens through which to understand their actions and achievements, these subjects are more meaningfully integrated into the history of their era(s).

In chapter one, I analyze the salt marsh paintings of Martin Johnson Heade, using the essays and lectures of Emerson to decipher the tensions Heade placed within his images. Although art historians tend to view these paintings as orderly, measured and rational spaces, I explore how the artist continually included details to the contrary. In particular, I examine how Heade's deliberate subversion of the accepted conventions of scale mirrored the sense of dislocation described by the Transcendentalists. Rather than take Heade's exposure to the philosophy for granted, I examine his imagery in the context of his residence in Cincinnati from 1849-50—a previously unknown chapter in his life—and relate it to the series of lectures Emerson delivered there during this period. The sense of "ambivalent acknowledgement" alluded to in the title of this chapter reflects the detached, intellectual manner by which Heade appropriated Transcendentalist texts. Rather than embracing a vigorously Transcendentalist lifestyle, as Thoreau did in his sojourn to Walden Pond, Heade mined the texts for the imagery of cultural criticism.

In the second chapter I examine the moonlit marine paintings of Albert Pinkham Ryder in the context of the Transcendentalist meaning of the image of a ship at night. Focusing on the canvas which, since its sale in 1915, has been known as *Toilers of the Sea* (fig 2.2) I demonstrate how the understanding of his paintings has been by hampered by erroneously attaching narratives to his image. Drawing from "Leaves of Grass," by Walt Whitman (1819-92), and Thoreau's *Walden,* I explore the manner in which Ryder's non-narrative, small, subjective canvasses visualize these texts and record an inner journey of exploration. As in the previous chapter, biography plays an important role whose function is to locate securely the subject's connection to Transcendentalism. Looking at Ryder's childhood home of New Bedford, I examine the

poet Daniel Ricketson's influence, especially his friendships with Thoreau and Emerson and demonstrate how Transcendentalist philosophy formed an integral part of the city's civic life. Then, tracing Ryder's friendships with Richard Watson Gilder's circle, I explore how Ryder's exposure in New York to strong supporters of the Transcendentalists impacted his approach to painting. I suggest that critics created a public image of Ryder that recalled Thoreau and Whitman, and document the manner in which his identity reflected established Transcendentalist types.

Chapter three discusses the life of Elbert Hubbard, founder of the Roycroft Arts and Crafts community, and explores how Transcendentalism influenced the reception of the Arts and Crafts in the United States. While many critics view Hubbard's sympathy for the structure of corporate capitalism as antithetical to the movement's beliefs, I demonstrate the manner in which Transcendentalism allowed for, and even encouraged, the mediation of these disparate positions. In addition to exploring the effect of Hubbard's trip to Concord, Massachusetts to relive the Transcendentalist's golden age, as well as his trip to Camden to visit Whitman, I look at the Transcendentalist publications he produced and document how he kept the names of Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau in the public consciousness. This chapter provides a new lens through which to understand the Arts and Crafts movement by correcting the exclusive emphasis placed upon the British variant of this movement. While Hubbard used figures such as John Ruskin and William Morris to promote his vision, their philosophies were understood along a Transcendentalist continuum. Whereas the previous two chapters have focused primarily on the private manifestations of the philosophy, Hubbard's career serves as a bridge that connects the inner, private life of the individual with the outer, civic space of modern society using his business ventures and public life as the conduit.

In chapter four, the final case study, I examine the way that the fundamental questions posed by the Arts and Crafts reformers were answered by larger corporations

and trace the evolution of Transcendentalism out to a national scale. By documenting the manner in which Sears, Roebuck and Company's Modern Homes Division (1908- c. 1942) employed the idioms of the Arts and Crafts, Spanish Mission Style, and Prairie School, I demonstrate how Transcendentalism remained an important lens through which the anxieties of modernity could be effectively managed. Because the home functioned as a talismanic protector from the evils of the outside world, a projection of identity into the community and a marker of wealth, successful marketing required careful navigation of these meanings. The tendency to frame Sears' success as self-evident—emphasizing only the lower cost of their homes—has obscured the manner in which the company successfully navigated this potentially problematic terrain.

The century-long period defined by the title (1830-1930) is largely accurate, but also represents a concession to my desire for ease in speaking the title. Emerson's first secular lecture in 1833, or the publication of *Nature* in 1836 might be a more distinct starting point, though these also were dependent on events that predated them. As Emerson's biographer Robert Richardson has argued, 1830 signals an important shift in Emerson's beliefs: he began to rethink radically his theology and focus more on the individual. This shift is evident in his description of God as recorded in his journal, as "the most elevated conception of character that can be formed in the mind. It is the individual's own soul carried out to perfection."[10] I chose a terminal date of 1930—despite Sears' production of homes for another twelve years—because I believe that the crash of the stock market in October 1929 and realization of a full-scale depression in the subsequent months radically altered conceptions about the home. A comparison of the company's 1930 and 1931 catalogs adequately demonstrates this distinction

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[10] Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 97.

visually, but other markers are equally important. Throughout the 1930s, the language used to define the home, and even the metaphors that described its production, shifted radically and represent a retreat from the Transcendentalist-infused conceptions of self that had marked earlier productions. In treating this period as deserving of a continuous narrative, I follow the advice of contemporary economists whose work demonstrates the limited impact of the Civil War upon American industrialization.[11]

In addition to the claims made for each of these case studies, I also demonstrate the fallacy of the continued belief that Transcendentalism's declined following the Civil War. Attempts at tracing connectivity across a period such as the one I have defined often are stymied by the state of American intellectual history which, since the early twentieth century, has continued to presume a break in the philosophical tradition at the time of the Civil War.[12] As a result, the rich intellectual and cultural tradition that Transcendentalism provided has been quietly excised from the academic tradition. Although Transcendentalism had been a dominant philosophical element in antebellum culture, the unwarranted assumption that it became irrelevant after the Civil War continues to shape the manner in which it is perceived.

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[11] Although the myth of the Civil War's impact on industrialization continues to be repeated, there is no evidence that the war was responsible for accelerating industrialization beyond a few specialized industries, and indeed, some economists have argued the opposite. See for instance Thomas C. Cochran, "Did the Civil War Retard Industrialization?" *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 48 (Sept. 1961): 197-210. For a critique of Cochran's methodology see Pershing Vartanian, "The Cochran Thesis: A Critique in Statistical Analysis," *Journal of American History* 51 (June 1964): 77-89. More recently, Cochran's thesis has been validated by Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, "Technology and Industrialization," in *Cambridge Economic History*, 379-80 who note "… while the Civil War may have had some particular effects on individual industries, such as armaments and food preparation, it is not to be regarded as a cause of economic growth across a broad spectrum…. The war period itself, rather than being a period of accelerated growth, meant mainly a slowing down of manufacturing growth and limited transition within manufacturing."

[12] For an exceptional study that charts the reception of Transcendentalism in scholarly circles see Charles Capper, "'A Little Beyond': The Problem of the Transcendentalist Movement in American History," *The Journal of American History* 85 (Sept. 1998): 502-39.

According to many accounts, Transcendentalism died a quiet death in the midst of the Civil War, abandoned by its ardent supporters and denied even by its founding practitioners.[13] The genesis of this proposition can be traced back to historian George Frederickson's *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of Union*, which was first published in 1965.[14] Frederickson found that:

> The war was shaping a generation which would have little respect for the broad enthusiasms of their elders, which would think in more practical or "pragmatic" terms. These men were not likely to be deficient in duty, but their concept of "duty" would be less defined in relation to great causes, and more as a matter of doing necessary tasks in an efficient way. It was more, however, than a love of "causes" that was being shed—it was the whole Emersonian style of intellectuality.[15]

Yet, Frederickson's account, which now represents a dominant voice in American intellectual history, is problematic. To begin with, he took a very narrow sample of scholars and intellectuals and conflated their personal experiences with Emersonian intellectuality with those of the broader population. Regardless of how Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. or other northern intellectuals' attitudes towards the legacy of Emerson shifted, the wealth of information which tracks Transcendentalism's popularity in the popular consciousness suggests that the examples Frederickson chose were anomalies.

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[13] While modern critics continue to rely on Frederickson's account of the period, it is instructive to note that he was indebted to a mythology surrounding the philosophy which extended back into the nineteenth century as documented in Capper, "'A Little Beyond,'" who cites among other works Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England: A History* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1876); and Van Wyck Brooks, *America's Coming of Age* (1915) as low points in Transcendentalism's turbulent reception.

[14] George M. Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965; Urbana and Chicago: 1993). Although Frederickson's narrative of the period is admittedly problematic, many scholars—especially those for whom Pragmatism is the pinnacle achievement in America thought—continue to rely upon his text. See, for example, Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), esp. chap. 3.

[15] Frederickson, *Inner Civil War*, 172.

Frederickson's idea of Transcendentalism's decline, however, has gained a place in academic literature and remains virtually unchallenged.

In fact, rather than declining after the war, Transcendentalism's popularity exploded. Although relatively unknown before the Civil War, Henry David Thoreau became virtually a household name by the turn of the century.[16] Emerson's death in 1882 did not accelerate the decline of the philosophy but helped to cement his place in the popular consciousness. Similarly, Walt Whitman had risen from relative obscurity in the 1850s to a place of prominence among the pantheon of American writers at the time of his death in 1892.[17] In 1900, Emerson received the most votes for New York University's Hall of Prominent Americans and three years later *The New York Times* called the centennial of his birth "Emerson year."[18] Among the many figures who saw the occasion as a chance to praise Emerson's legacy were John Dewey and William James, the same "pragmatic" men whose legacy has been so cleanly separated from Emerson's in intellectual histories. Dewey celebrated the occasion by penning the

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[16] Although Thoreau wrote in his journal on 28 October 1853 "I now have a library of nearly 900 volumes over 700 of which I wrote myself," in the years following his death in 1862 his popularity rose. Later in that year Ticknor and Fields reprinted *Walden* and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Subsequent years saw the release of *Excursions* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields,1863); *The Maine Woods* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields,1864); *Cape Cod* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields,1865, and 1866); *A Yankee in Canada with Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields,1866). In 1893, thirty-one years after his death, the first comprehensive edition of his works was released: *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: With Bibliographic Introductions and Full Indexes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1893). I have drawn heavily upon Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986) for a summary of Thoreau's life as well as his intellectual influences and development.

[17] For the mythic stature of Whitman's rejection by the nation, see David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Random House, 1996), 339-62.

[18] See "Names for Hall of Fame," *The New York Times,* 11 October 1900; also "Emerson Year," *The New York Times,* 21 February 1903.

essay, "Emerson: The Philosopher of Democracy," for the *International Journal of Ethics* and William James spoke at the ceremony in Concord.[19]

**Transcendentalists and Transcendentalism**

In addition to the figures and organizations that form the foundation of each case study, the texts of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman form the connective tissue of this dissertation. Although the exclusive emphasis on these figures might strike some readers as a modern conception, they were associated with each other during this period with each other and, more broadly, with Transcendentalism.[20] As early as 1868, in an article titled "Before Genius," the poet-naturalist John Burroughs grouped the three together when he remarked:

> [i]f we except "Leaves of Grass" and Emerson's works, there is little yet in American literature that shows much advance beyond the merely conventional or scholastic. Thoreau occupies a niche by himself…his writings have a strong characteristic flavor. There is real electric discharge into the mind from every page. He is anti-scorbutic, like leeks and onion. He has reference, also, to the highest truths.[21]

While Burroughs' statement validates the idea of this triumvirate as a historical concept, it was more common for critics to emphasize the Transcendentalist nature of a given text by pairing its author alongside Emerson. Whitman exploited this strategy when he

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[19] See John Dewey, "Emerson: The Philosopher of Democracy," *International Journal of Ethics* 13 (1902-03): 405-13; "Address of William James," in *The Emerson Centenary in Concord* 67-77.

[20] See Havelock Ellis, *The New Spirit* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890), esp. 89-132.

[21] John Burroughs, "Before Genius," *The Galaxy* 5 (April 1868): 421-426. Burroughs is remembered today in a number of different ways: Whitman's friend and biographer, poet, naturalist, and author. For a basic biography of Burroughs see, Edward J. Renehan Jr., *John Burroughs: an American Naturalist* (Post Mills, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 1992). "Anti-scorbutic" is a medical term that describes something known to prevent scurvy. For a detailed description of scurvy and roughly contemporary use of the term "anti-scorbutic" see, for example, James Copland, *A Dictionary of Practical Medicine*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1858), 3:767-785.

allowed the publication of Emerson's letter of thanks after receiving *Leaves of Grass* from the poet.[22] First published in *The New York Tribune* on October 10, 1855, and subsequently included as a promotional piece in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Emerson's letter was an endorsement of Whitman's exuberant, celebratory style that confirmed the Transcendentalist nature of Whitman's verse:

> … I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "Leaves of Grass." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile & stingy nature, as if too much handiwork or too much lymph in the temperament were making our western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment, which so delights us, & which large perception only can inspire. I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely of fortifying & encouraging....[23]

Indeed, even before this letter was published, reviewers had begun to link Whitman's verse with Emersonian Transcendentalism. For instance, in September 1855, a reviewer in *Putnam's* described the poems in *Leaves of Grass* as, "a compound of the New England transcendentalist and New York rowdy."[24] On September 18, Brooklyn's *Daily Eagle* was even more effusive in its praise, calling the work "[a]n Extraordinary book… one of the strangest combinations of transcendentalism, bombast, philosophy, folly, wisdom, wit and dullness which it ever entered the heart of man to conceive."

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[22] See Reynolds, *Whitman's America,* 341-5*;* also Richardson, *Thoreau,* 347.

[23] Ralph Waldo Emerson to Walt Whitman, 21 July 1855, Charles E. Fineberg Collection, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[24] "Editorial Notes," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art* 6 (September 1855): 321.

Stressing the subjective nature of Whitman's verse, the reviewer noted that "the contents of the book form a daguerreotype of his inner being."[25]

Critics came to use the label of Transcendentalism not only to praise Whitman, but to complain about his poetry too. While modern scholarship has documented the difficult relationship Whitman has with the philosophy, it is instructive to note how persistent these connections remained, especially in the press.[26] On July 24 1860, Brooklyn's *Daily Eagle* reprinted two negative reviews of *Leaves of Grass* before noting:

> He is certainly an unredeemed New York rowdy of the lowest stamp. He is absolutely without sense of decency. He has obviously no acquaintance with the masters of his art, and his studies have been apparently confined to Mr. Tupper, his newspaper, and the semi-lyrical rhapsodies of the Boston transcendentalists.[27]

As late as 1870, a critic in the *Daily Eagle* complained that Whitman "ceased to pour out the sort of transcendentalism," for which he was known.[28] Not only did Emersonian Transcendentalism affect the manner in which Whitman was discussed, but Whitman's reputation occasionally influenced the critical reception of Emerson's writing, which further strengthened the connections between the authors. Reprinting a review of Emerson's *Conduct of Life* that had appeared in England's *Westminster Review*, *The New York Evangelist* reported "… in the present volume he is evidently dominated by that disreputable countryman of his, Walt Whitman; many a page might be transferred to

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[25] "Book Notices: "Leaves of Grass"—An Extraordinary Book." *Brooklyn Daily Eagle,* 18 September 1855.

[26] See Reynolds, *Whitman's America,* 254 where he suggests that the relationship with Emersonian Transcendentalism was difficult because of Whitman's belief that Emerson "had also taken Kant's subjectivism to… a relativist extreme."

[27] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 24 July 1860. The "Tupper" referred to here is Martin Farquhar Tupper, whose highly popular "prose poems" were a precedent for Whitman. See Reynolds, *Whitman's America,* 314-16.

[28] "Walt Whitman," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle,* 6 January 1870.

the notorious "Leaves of Grass," of course to the cleanest and most decent of that strange production, which he christened the first fruit of American poetry."[29]

While I use the term Transcendentalist to describe each of these authors, I do so with a certain amount of caution in Whitman's case. Whereas Emerson and Thoreau have an unimpeachably clear association with the philosophy, Whitman's poetry and his brash, frank sexuality are more difficult to circumscribe completely with this term. In considering Whitman a Transcendentalist, I focus on his reaction to the crisis of self and his enthusiastic support for repairing the rifts in consciousness. Other aspects of Whitman's persona, pertinent to a broader understanding of the poet's are of lesser concern to this study. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on the "Emersonian" side of Whitman, the Transcendentalist who declared in 1855 that "nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's-self is."[30]

Emerson's numerous publications and frequent lectures helped him become synonymous with Transcendentalism in the United States. Born in Boston in 1803, Emerson studied at Harvard before entering the clergy as a Unitarian Minister. By the age of thirty, however, he had left the church and embarked upon a career as an author and lecturer. As a figure of literary and cultural importance, his reputation started to rise with the publication of *Nature* in 1836. The following year, he delivered his now-famous "American Scholar" address at Harvard University and the following July gave a highly controversial lecture at Harvard's Divinity School.[31] In 1841 Emerson's *Essays,* a

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[29] "The Westminster Review of Ralph Waldo Emerson," *The New York Evangelist* 32 (9 May 1861): 4.

[30] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855), reprinted in *Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition,* Penguin Classics edition, ed. Malcom Cowley (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), line 1264.

[31] Many of Emerson's lectures were published as small books or pamphlets. The American Scholar lecture was first published as Ralph Waldo Emerson, *An Oration, Delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, August 31, 1837* (Boston: James Munroe and

collection of his writing containing “Self-Reliance,” and “Art,” among others, was published.[32] Emerson’s *Essays: Second Series* was published in 1844, and three years later he published his first collection of poetry.[33] *Nature*, which had gone out of print following its initial publication, continued to be released, first in England, and then in subsequent editions in the United States throughout the 1840s and into the following decade.[34] In the 1850s, in addition to new printings of *Essays* and older works, versions of Emerson’s *Representative Men* (1850)*, English Traits* (1856)*,* and *Poems* kept him in the public consciousness. Also active in this period as an editor and contributor, Emerson wrote an introduction to Thomas Carlyle’s *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (1839)*,* served as editor and contributor for *the Dial* (1840-44), and contributed to *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852).[35] In addition, even the publications of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 and, to a lesser degree, Thoreau’s *Walden,* were also means through which the philosophy was dispersed since reviewers recorded their impressions of Emerson’s influence upon these works.

Although Emerson, more than any other figure, came to define Transcendentalism to Americans in this period, his version of the philosophy

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Company, 1837; Second edition in 1838); later published as Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Man Thinking* (London: C. E. Mundie, 1844). For publication of Emerson’s “Divinity School Lecture” see, Ralph Waldo Emerson, *An Address Before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday Evening, 15 July, 1838* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1837).

[32] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1841).

[33] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: Second Series* (Boston: J. Munroe, 1844); Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Poems* (Boston: J. Munroe and Co., 1847).

[34] Emerson’s *Nature* was released a number of different times in different formats throughout the 1840s. See for instance Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature (London : H.G. Clarke, 1844); Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, New Edition* (Boston: J. Munroe, 1849); Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Addresses and Lectures* (Boston: J. Munroe, 1849).

[35] See Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (Boston: J. Munroe and Company, 1839); also Margaret Fuller Ossoli et al., *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1852).

represented only one of the myriad forms it could take. He became the public face of Transcendentalism because his extensive publications and non-stop lecturing schedule constantly highlighted that role to the larger public. While he was acknowledged as the father of American Transcendentalism, he engaged the philosophy primarily on an intellectual level. Thoreau, by contrast, provided a more practical example of the philosophy, especially in the text of *Walden*. Thoreau is Transcendentalism's doer, measurer, and recorder, meticulously calculating and analyzing the costs of his two years at Walden Pond. Whereas Emerson's persona seems most comfortable in the confines of a library or lecture hall, Thoreau's persona demanded the outdoors.

Thoreau was born in Concord, Massachusetts, the town to which Emerson had moved in 1834. He attended Harvard from 1833-1837, and may even have been present for Emerson's commencement lecture "The American Scholar." He had knowledge of Emerson's *Nature* as early as April 1837, and is recorded as having twice borrowed it from Harvard's library.[36] Emerson's awareness of Thoreau can be documented to the same period, when he wrote a letter in support of Thoreau to Harvard's President Quincy. Whereas Emerson cultivated a worldly and cosmopolitan persona, Thoreau's character was decidedly more rustic. Thoreau engaged the natural world by concentrating his energy on a specific locale rather than broadly describing the whole of it in Emerson's broader, philosophical terms.

In 1845, Thoreau began his now-famous residence in a cabin along the shores of Walden Pond, locating his structure on land that Emerson owned.[37] Whereas Emerson was rapidly becoming a household name, Thoreau's literary career remained, up to this

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[36] Richardson, *Thoreau,* 20-21 records Thoreau borrowing the book in April 1837, then in "the third week in June."

[37] See Richardson, *Thoreau,* esp. 148-49 for a concise account of Emerson's ownership of the land and the beginning of Thoreau's sojourn.

point, undistinguished. Through the late 1840s, he might have been selectively known to those who happened to come across the few essays and reviews that he had published.[38] He contributed "Resistance to Civil Government," (later known as *Civil Disobedience*) to the Transcendentalist anthology *Aesthetic Papers* in 1849 and later in the year—following Emerson's advice—paid to have *Week on the Concord and Merrimack River* printed by James Munroe and Company.[39] In 1854, Munroe and Company published *Walden,* which sold poorly. In contrast to Emerson's career and popularity, success continued to evade Thoreau throughout the rest of his short life. On May 6, 1862 he died from tuberculosis.

Whitman represents a third side of the philosophy: a celebratory, even riotous individualist who was simultaneously at home in the wilderness and enthralled by the spectacle of urban spaces. Born in Long Island in 1819, Whitman's exposure to Emersonian Transcendentalism can be traced to 1842 when he reported on Emerson's lectures for the *New York Aurora, Tribune* and *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle.*[40] On November 9, 1856 Thoreau and Amos Bronson Alcott sought the poet in his Brooklyn home and spent a few hours in conversation with him.[41] Thoreau's reaction to Whitman and his poems demonstrated the difficulty that many of the Transcendentalists experienced with Whitman's overtly carnal imagery. On the one hand, Thoreau found

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[38] See for instance Henry D. Thoreau, "The Landlord," T*he United States Magazine, and Democratic Review* 13 (October 1843): 427-30; or Henry D. Thoreau, "Thomas Carlyle and his Works," *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* 30 (March 1847): 145-52. Thoreau's most important piece before the publication of *Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* was "Ktaadn and the Maine Woods," [in 5 parts] *Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 3, nos. 1-5 (July to Nov. 1848).

[39] Elizabeth Peabody, ed., *The Aesthetic Papers* (Boston: The Editor; New York: G. P. Putnam, 1849), 189-213.

[40] See Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, eds. *The Selected Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2005), 82 for an excerpt of Whitman's report for the *New York Tribune***;** see also Reynolds, *Whitman's America,* 82.

[41] Richardson, *Life of the Mind,* 347-50; Reynolds, *Whitman's America,* 363-65.

Whitman "the most interesting fact… at present" but worried about the frank, sexual nature of the poems. Despite this ambivalence, Whitman later learned that Thoreau carried a copy of *Leaves of Grass* around with him in Concord. Whitman's engagement with the Transcendentalists, although strongest at the beginning of his career, remained an aspect of his writing upon which critics and admirers continually commented.

The various authors and case studies presented in this dissertation share fundamental strategies of representation that bind them together. These strategies, evident as early as 1836 in Emerson's *Nature,* became ubiquitous features of Transcendentalist culture. All practitioners promoted the essential tenets of the philosophy: communion with nature, the primacy of subjective experience, and an emphasis on the self as a valid and complete entity. Additionally, each example also manifests the anxiety of the modern age by rejecting—either literally or symbolically—the material gains and luxury associated with industrial society.

The tendency to reject "high" culture—I have termed this tendency "rustication"—formed an important part of the manner in which Transcendentalism was used as a cultural critique. On one level, evidenced in Thoreau's time at Walden Pond, rustication became a way to engage a pre-industrial past by fostering a direct and vital connection to the land. It meant, quite literally turning one's back on the modern world and seeking an authentic, integrated experience of the self within the confines of a rustic, rural existence. For Emerson, whose engagement was intellectual more than practical, rustication manifest itself through his denial of the typical markers of culture. As he noted in his essay "The American Scholar:" "I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic;… I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low."[42] In Whitman, Emerson's embrace of the common and low took a linguistic turn as

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[42] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," (1837) in *Essential Writings,* 57.

the poet embraced a vernacular more reserved for Bowery "b'hoys" rather than poets.[43] The deliberate subversion of accepted markers of culture further strengthens the association of each case study with Transcendentalism. At its core, Transcendentalism was a method to critique modernity.[44]

The attempts to frame Transcendentalism as a set of doctrines rather than as a critical methodology have hampered a clear definition of the movement almost since its inception. Even Emerson, in his 1842 lecture "The Transcendentalist," seemed to struggle with a functional definition of the term and defined it mainly through historical and philosophical associations. While admitting that "what are called new views in New England… are not new, but the very oldest of thoughts cast into the mould of these new times," Emerson told the audience that "what is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism." In the lecture's most troubling passages, Emerson presented a confusing and convoluted assessment of the philosophy that illustrates the difficulty of arriving at a satisfying and coherent definition:

> … I say I make my circumstances; but if you ask me, Whence am I? I feel like other men my relation to that Fact which cannot be spoken, or defined, nor even thought, but which exists, and will exist.[45]

Ultimately, Emerson concluded that "there is no such thing as a Transcendental *party*… there is no pure Transcendentalist." Ironically, although he, Thoreau, and Whitman

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[43] Reynolds, *Whitman's America*, esp. 103-05.

[44] The idea that Transcendentalism is a critical method rather than a doctrine can be traced back at least as far as 1911 to the poet-philosopher of Harvard, George Santayana: "Transcendentalism proper, like romanticism, is not any particular set of dogmas about what things exist; it is not a system of the universe regarded as a fact, or as a collection of facts. It is a method, a point of view, from which any world, no matter what it might contain, could be approached by a self-conscious observer. Transcendentalism is systematic subjectivism." George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy: Address delivered before the Philosophical Union of the University of California, August 25, 1911," in *Winds of Doctrine: Studies in Contemporary Opinion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913): 193-94

[45] Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," 84.

became the primary representatives of Transcendentalism in the public's perception, none of these authors ever created a workable definition of the philosophy. Instead, William H. Channing, the Concord poet and friend of Emerson and Thoreau, offered a definition in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* that remains the most relevant to this study:

> Transcendentalism was an assertion of the inalienable integrity of man… Transcendentalism, as viewed by its disciples, was a pilgrimage from the idolatrous world of creeds and rituals to the Temple of the Living God in the soul."[46]

Channing's use of the term "integrity" functions on two levels. First, it implies the worth of the individual by suggesting the justness of character or morality of each person. More importantly, it also means "wholeness" or "completeness" and on this level reinforces the function of Transcendentalism as a remedy to the fractured self that was brought about by modernity. The following chapters explore the manner in which artists, designers, and corporate entities struggled to make sense of modernity and preserve man's "inalienable integrity" in a time of shifting values.

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[46] William H. Channing, "Transcendentalism," in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli Vol. 2* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1875), 12. For an erroneous attribution of the quote to Fuller, see William Walker Atkinson, *New Thought: Its History and Principles* (Mount Holyoke: Elizabeth Towne Co., 1915), 11.

## Chapter One: Heade

### Introduction / Argument

Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904) was among the most prolific American painters of the nineteenth century (fig. 1.1).[1] Throughout the nearly seven decades he worked, the artist excelled at landscapes, portraits, still life and flower painting. He left behind a rich trove of visual evidence, but he remains among the American painters who are most difficult to classify accurately. In general, present-day descriptions of the artist's sensibilities share some variation of the terms Realism or Romanticism—varying from "Romantic Realism," "Pantheistic Realism," and "Individual Romanticism," to "Surrealism" and, more recently, "Luminist."[2] As the art historian Barbara Novak noted in

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[1] Heade's life and works have been the subject of numerous monographs and essays. See for instance Roberta Smith Favis, *Martin Johnson Heade in Florida* (Gainesville: 2003); Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000); Theodore Stebbins et al, *Martin Johnson Heade,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999); *Martin Johnson Heade: A Survey: 1840-1900*, ed. Timothy A. Eaton, (West Palm Beach, Fl., Eaton Fine Art, 1996); Sarah Cash, *Ominous Hush: The Thunderstorm Paintings of Martin Johnson Heade,* (Fort Worth, Texas: 1994); Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., *The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975; Theodore Stebbins Jr., *Martin Johnson Heade,* Museum of Fine Arts Boston 9 July – 24 August 1969 (University of Maryland); Robert G. McIntyre, *Martin Johnson Heade: 1819-1904* (New York, Pantheon Press: 1948).

[2] John I. H. Baur, "Trends in American Painting 1815-65," in *M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Painting 1815 to 1865*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), xli – xliv. Although Luminism is a topic with abundant critical literature that spans nearly six decades, a definition that scholars can agree on has proved elusive. See especially J. Gray Sweeney, "Inventing Luminism: 'Labels are the Dickens'," *Oxford Art Journal* 26 (2003): 93-120. For Heade, Transcendentalism and the Luminist Painters see, Kevin Radaker, "'A Separate Intention of the Eye': Luminist Eternity in Thoreau's A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 18 (1987): 41–60; Gayle L. Smith, "Emerson and the Luminist Painters: A Study of Their Styles," *American Quarterly* 37 (1985): 193–215; John Conron, "Bright American Rivers: The Luminist Landscapes of Thoreau's A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," *American Quarterly* 32 (1980): 143–66; Barton Levi St. Armand, "Luminism in the Work of Henry David Thoreau: The Dark and the Light," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 11 (1980): 13–30. For earlier literature that helped to define the Luminist cannon see John Wilmerding, et al. *American Light: The Luminist Movement 1850-75* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1980); William H. Gerdts, *American Luminism*, (New York: Coe Kerr Gallery, 1978); Baur, John I. H. "American Luminism: A Neglected Aspect of the Realist Movement in Nineteenth-Century America." *Perspectives USA* 9 (1954): 90–98.

her hegemonic study *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, "that I could call the same painter primitive, Gothic, Mannerist, and Surrealist (as well as classic and proto-Impressionist) may sound so all-inclusive as to appear meaningless."[3] Novak's candor points to the larger issue: critics, both in Heade's time and presently, have struggled to make sense of Heade's oeuvre.

The principal problem which Heade's paintings present is that they often fail to satisfy the viewer's expectations. This was a problem which critics in the artist's day struggled with as well. Especially in his depictions of marshes, Heade subverted the standard practice of landscape by choosing scenery that was traditionally considered unattractive. Even more puzzlingly, he refused to follow the prescriptive formulas of picturesque imagery that leaders of the American landscape school, such as Thomas Cole and Asher B. Durand, were actively promoting. Critics who took note of these divergencies found his work "peculiar," "very faulty," "inexplicable," and even "realistic to a disagreeable degree."[4]

Underlying Heade's imagery is a sense of discontinuity and tension that defies easy classification and compels the use of seemingly endless qualifications to these labels. Heade created subtle visual tensions in many of his works, and frequently altered the manner in which these were manifest. At times, he employed impossible shifts of scale that undercut the scene's presumed clarity. In other works, he used fleeting and ambivalent depictions of weather to create a sense of dissonance that contradicted the sense of stillness with which he endowed the image. In some images

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[3] Barbara Novak, "Martin Johnson Heade: Haystacks and Light," in *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism and the American Experience,* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 128.

[4] "The Art Association: Third Day of the Exhibition—More of the Pictures," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 21 March 1868; James Jackson Jarves, *The Art-Idea: Sculpture, Painting and Architecture in America,* Second Edition (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1865), 236.

he suggested tension by provoking a sense of disconnection between the characters within the canvas and the scene in which they were set. The frequency with which Heade used these strategies demonstrates a deliberate pattern to his actions that scholars have been unwilling to grant him. These tensions and sense of the uncanny that often permeates Heade's paintings are central to this chapter. Rather than dismissing these instances as mistakes or evidence of his deficient training, I see them as choices that emerged from a Transcendentalist perspective.

Although many scholars have attempted to connect Heade's paintings to Transcendentalist literature, these efforts have been hampered by a very narrow reading of the philosophy. Since John I. H. Baur, a curator at the Brooklyn Museum, first proposed this connection in 1954, art historians have reduced the essential tenets of the philosophy to a singular concern: "a transparent eyeball."[5] Transcendentalism has become solely a moment of ecstasy in which the subject and object merge into a continuous infinity. Scholars have managed to create an impression of Transcendentalism that has obscured the function of the philosophy as a viable form of social criticism.[6] I trace Heade's exposure to these ideas by emphasizing his residence in Cincinnati from 1849-50, a period of his life that previously had eluded scholars. By exploring the manner in which Emerson's Cincinnati lectures described the function of nature and landscape painting, I will propose an explanation of the factors accounting for the major shift in Heade's approach to landscape painting in the mid 1850s.

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[5] Baur, "American Luminism," 98.

[6] In particular, Barbara Novak has emphasized Emerson's "transparent eyeball," as the defining feature of Luminism and, if I understand her correctly, as the central feature of Transcendentalism as well. See Novak, "Fitz Hugh Lane: A Paradigm of Luminism," in *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, 110. The problem is that this idea, which ultimately derives from Baur, "American Luminism," 98 represents a moment of Transcendental ecstasy that seems more the exception than the rule. Indeed, Emerson's passage is only one of myriad interactions with the natural word that he describes in the essay.

Using Transcendentalism as a lens through which to view Heade's marsh paintings affords us a better understanding of the meaning of Heade's nuanced imagery. Emerson's essay, *Nature*, provides a useful tool to examine landscape painting because it details three fundamental levels on which an audience appreciates beauty: the formal, the spiritual, and the intellectual.[7] The structure of Heade's imagery and the critical reaction of his contemporaries to his paintings conform closely to Emerson's text and demonstrate a range of possible readings. On the most basic level, Heade's marshes paintings speak quite nostalgically of the past and include elements that are tender and sentimental. The traditional role of the farmer, for instance, living off the land and reaping Nature's bounty, is highlighted. Light emanates from these canvases creating a sense of peace and stillness. Yet, looking closer, it becomes evident that these images are unreal and unsustainable. It is as though Heade created visual riddles which are irresolvable but that cause the eye to linger in an attempt to identify this feeling of tension or uneasiness. Using Emerson's *Nature* as a template, I propose that Heade's distortions of space were intentional, and meant to be read as a critical commentary on modernity.

Heade's paintings are concerned with the crucial Transcendentalist issue of the fractured self in the modern world. They do not offer a solution to this problem but, instead, signify an ambivalent acknowledgment of modernity's problems. Heade becomes both the builder and dismantler of an escapist, nostalgic fantasy, depending on the manner in which the viewer engages the image. He painted a visual counterpart to the Transcendentalist's critique of society, embedding in his paintings the images of dislocation that Emerson's texts and lectures spoke of. He provided the idyllic images

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[7] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature,* (1836); reprinted in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 2000**)**, 3-39.

the market clearly desired, yet he was careful to encode clues in these paintings that expose these scenes for the fictions they were.

In the interim between the first catalogue raisonée of Heade's work in 1975 and the present, the number of paintings attributed to the artist has swollen from 380 to more than 620.[8] Of this number, the depictions of salt marshes and coastal plains make up over one-fifth of his total output.[9] Heade's emphasis on this subject is even more striking within the context of his landscape production, as these views account for nearly half of the more than 270 landscapes he painted. The sheer number of instances of this subject indicates its importance to the artist and provides a rich visual record through which to explore Heade's various visual strategies.

### Conflicting Remarks: Criticism and Artistic Expectations in Heade's Era

> Every one who has visited the Academy has observed this picture, and everyone has indulged in criticism upon it… [I]t is really amusing to mingle with the throng and listen to the conflicting remarks made upon it.
> —*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1868[10]

As it did when it was first shown at the Brooklyn Art Association's Spring Exhibition in 1868, Heade's *Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay* (fig. 1.2) continues to engender a great deal of "conflicting remarks." During the spring of 1868, first at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the following month at the National Academy of Design,

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[8] These figures do not include any of the sketchbooks, drawings or chromolithographs executed by the artist. Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 198-366, lists 621 paintings by Heade; I have given an approximate number since additional works have come up for auction, such as a recently discovered "a small oil on board after "The Approaching Storm" Metropolitan Museum of Art," that was authenticated by Theodore Stebbins and sold by John McInnis Auctioneers on May 28, 2004.

[9] There is no exact science to counting the number of Marsh and coastal plains views, though I have attempted to err on the side of caution. The final number I arrived at averaged 135 (just under 22% of the total number of paintings). I did not include any marine paintings, images of the shore, tropical landscapes or the orchard views of 1874-75 in this total.

[10] "The Art Association: Third Day of the Exhibition."

critical reception of the work was divided with a majority of reviews who mentioned the work commenting negatively and singling out color as the major weakness. As art historian Sarah Cash has noted, the painting was not universally noticed, and only a handful of publications included any mention of the work.[11] The reviewer for *Watson's Art Journal* was the only reviewer who had anything specifically positive to say, though even this comment was tempered with criticism of Heade's execution. Describing the painting as "without much color," the review noted that, "[t]he effect of the storm is well expressed, and with a variety of tints the work would be as good as it is original."[12] A few other publications, like the *New York Commercial Advertiser* and *The Evening Post* simply mentioned the painting, without providing any description or critical commentary, and a number of others were highly critical.[13] *The New York Leader,* for instance, found the work "equally as bad [as Cropsey's "abominable" Lake George]."[14] Critic T. C. Grannis was similarly unimpressed and found that the painting showed "a painful amount of labor and a corresponding feeling of hardness in color and execution… [i]t is to be regretted that so hard and chilling a painting as this should have been allowed to leave his studio."[15] The reviewer for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* was the most explicitly critical and told readers that, "[t]aken as a whole, the painting is very faulty. The coloring

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[11] See Cash, *Ominous Hush*, 87 who lists twenty-three journals did not mention the painting in their review, versus six that did. Oddly, she includes *Watson's Art Journal* on her list despite excerpting their review.

[12] "Exhibition of the National Academy of Design: Concluding Article," *Watson's Art Journal* 9 (20 June 1868): 106.

[13] See Cash, *Ominous Hush*, 80-81.

[14] "National Academy of Design, Forty-third Annual Exhibition: Fifth Notice," *New York Leader*, 16 May 1868; also reprinted in Cash, *Ominous Hush*, 81.

[15] T. C. Grannis, *National Academy of Design: Exhibition of 1868* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1868), 87.

is badly managed, and the colors badly chosen."[16] Despite these reviews, by the middle of June an unidentified buyer purchased the painting from Heade after seeing it at the National Academy.[17]

The painting disappeared from public view for nearly seventy years, only to emerge at the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Romantic Painting in America* as the image that would cement Heade's reputation and kick-start a revival of interest in his work. Heade's first modern biographer, Robert McIntyre of the Macbeth Gallery, described what many seem to have experienced when he recorded his first impression of the work:

> I was struck with the force of the thing, with the powerful drama being enacted—a sort of cosmic catastrophe, fraught with a breath-taking sense of elemental fury; or it might be a concluding phase of human existence, the prelude to a new chapter. For a brief moment I felt myself back in the time of the Book of Genesis, though there was no particularly literary derivation or illusion. It was like a drama enacted within the artist himself, and projected on a screen.[18]

Curator John I. H. Baur found it "rapt, lyrical, [and] filled with a sense of awe," a position that art historian Theodore Stebbins initially found tenable.[19] More recently, however, Stebbins has modified that view and suggested that, on the one hand, "superficial similarities to Surrealism, which was in vogue at the time, doubtless played a role in making [Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay's] impact on the viewers of that exhibition so powerful."[20] At the same time, though, Stebbins also found elements in the work that

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[16] "The Art Association: Third Day of the Exhibition"

[17] Martin Johnson Heade to Frederic Church, 27 April 1868, Martin Johnson Heade Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, DC. Available online at: http://www.aaa.si.edu/search/index.cfm/fuseaction/Items.ViewImageDetails/ItemID/5265?search_string=martin%20johnson%20heade#martin1 accessed 10 November 2007.

[18] McIntyre, *Martin Johnson Heade*, 2.

[19] Baur, "Luminism," 98; see also Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade* (1969), [16].

[20] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 108.

provoked anxiety and endowed the image with a sense of dread and sublimity: "[t]he hushed quiet of the picture is as powerful of that as Church's *Twilight in the Wilderness*… or Fitz Hugh Lane's *Brace's Rock, Brace's Cove…* but Heade's calm moment of epiphany is essentially unlike theirs… it seems dangerous."[21] Although Stebbins tried to distance himself from what he saw as the surrealist elements in other critical commentary, the psychological undercurrents of his descriptions of *Thunder Storm* tread a line perilously close to those of critics whom he would dismiss.

The sensation of psychological tension within the image is a thread common to many critics and also formed the basis for two of the more contemporary approaches to Heade's work which were undertaken, by J. Gray Sweeney and by Sarah Cash. Sweeney argues that Heade's use of these underlying tensions "may have attempted to address the popularity of [Thomas] Cole's famous works, especially *The Voyage of Life,* …by creating a secularized conflation of the last two works in the series, *Manhood* and *Old Age*…."[22] Although Sweeny adeptly reminds his audience of the continued popularity of Cole's images into the second half of the nineteenth century, there are fundamental differences between these works that make a direct comparison problematic. The main difference between the works cannot be reduced, as Sweeney suggests, to a simple binary between sacred and secular imagery without ignoring the role of narrative in the reception of each of these images. While Cole's series—and indeed most of his paintings—contain didactic, narrative elements, these are absent in Heade's brooding, ambiguous depiction of Narragansett Bay.

Sarah Cash, in her book *Ominous Hush: The Thunderstorm Paintings of Martin Johnson Heade*, frames these images as visualizations of the thunderstorm metaphors

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[21] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 110.

[22] Sweeney, "A Very Peculiar Picture," 7.

that were widely used to describe the American experience of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Cash employs a rich diversity of poetry, sermons, and other images to buttress her argument, and demonstrates that two prominent preachers who employed these metaphors—Noah Hunt Schenck and Henry Ward Beecher—each owned one of Heade's thunderstorm paintings. For Cash, "*Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay* is the culmination of Heade's thunderstorm pictures, which began with his first known view of that type, *Storm Clouds on the Coast* of 1859."[23] It is unclear precisely what criteria formed the basis for Cash's selections, but the absence of later thunderstorm paintings such as *Thunderstorm at the Shore* (c. 1870-71), *Marsh in a Thunderstorm* (c. 1871-75, #199) or *Marsh Scene: Storm* (c. 1895-1904), diminishes the force of her argument by presenting an incomplete assessment.[24]

A number of scholars have been critical of Cash's thesis, although none of them have provided a more viable alternative for either the artist's motivation or the audience's reception of these images. John Updike, whose essay "Heade Storms" was among the first published criticisms of Cash's thesis, found that after "[s]tudying the set of storm paintings, [he] could not bring [him]self to believe that they had much to do with the Civil War and Reconstruction."[25] Updike's analysis, based upon his own feelings about Heade's intentions as a painter and a knowledge of Heade through Stebbins's 1975 publication, does not account for the way an audience—or even a purchaser—of the painting might have responded, except to state that "[t]he Victorians… saw portents and

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[23] Cash, *Ominous Hush,* 24.

[24] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, nos. 189 and 305.

[25] John Updike, "Heade Storms," in *Still Looking* (New York: Knopf, 2007): 49. This essay originally appeared as John Updike, "Heade Storms," review of *Ominous Hush: The Thunderstorm Paintings of Martin Johnson Heade,* by Sarah Cash, *New York Review of Books* 42 (12 January 1995).

symbols everywhere."[26] Eventually, Updike reveals that he senses in Heade's work "a modern mood, an ambivalent mood tinged with dread and yet imbued with a certain lightness… [it] could even be said to be religious," but offers no more clues as to the context or origin of this subjectivism.[27] A similar conclusion is reached by Barbara Novak in her essay "Martin Johnson Heade: The Enigmatic Self."[28] Equally dismissive of Cash's theory that the Civil War and Reconstruction were the primary source for the tension in Heade's work, Novak posits that the darkness in *Thunder Storm* results from Heade's sadness over his father's failing health. The argument is problematic though, since as Novak admits, "we do not know when this fatal illness began," or whether his father's demise overlapped with the creation of the image.[29] She concludes with the suggestion that "the contradictions in Heade's work may well reflect the ambiguities of his multiple self," but does not elaborate further on this phenomenon of multiple selves.[30]

The idea that Heade's *Thunder Storm* is about something more than simply the weather at the beach on a given day unites even the most disparate critical writings on Heade's painting. In spite of the differences of time, generational gaps, methodological approaches, and the conditions under which the image was seen, many people have walked away from Heade's paintings and wondered exactly what they meant. For McIntyre, Updike, and Novak, although their works span nearly half of a century, the

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[26] Updike, "Heade Storms," 51. At the time this essay was originally published, Stebbins had not yet published his updated *Catalogue Raisonné*.

[27] Updike, "Heade Storms," 55.

[28] Barbara Novak, "Martin Johnson Heade: The Enigmatic Self," in *Martin Johnson Heade: A Survey: 1840-1900* ed. Timothy A. Eaton (West Palm Beach, Fl., Eaton Fine Art, 1996), 14.

[29] Ibid. Church and Heade do not discuss the illness until October 1868, nearly six months after the painting was first exhibited and Heade's father did not die until February of the following year.

[30] Ibid.

experience centered on a vague feeling of religion, or spiritualism that reflected what McIntyre described as something "like a drama within the artist himself, projected on a screen."[31] For Cash, Sweeney, and Stebbins, despite the very different conclusions they reach, the painting retains the sense that it is an artifact, capable of illuminating the era in which it was created, provided it is placed within a proper context. Since the time that this painting was first exhibited, critical writing on *Thunder Storm* specifically—and Heade in general—has sought to understand the strange and complex choices that were involved in its creation.

The desire to understand Heade's choices for the image motivated the long, penetrating account that appeared in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in the spring of 1868. Although the review is generally negative, the author's text on *Thunder Strom* is the longest and most detailed examination of any work in the exhibition. For the most part, the reviewer was positive about what was in the exhibition, and complimented the artists on their "exquisite truthfulness to nature," "well managed" chiaroscuro and perspective, "very effective" compositions, and "well chosen" color.[32] Where critical, the focus was mainly on formal commentary and an artist's ability to render depictions according to these ideas and standards. Besides Heade's *Thunder Storm,* the only painting worthy of the critic's disdain was J. W. Hill's *Fawn's Leap* which, "deserve[d] notice on account of its altogether inartistic character. The coloring, the drawing, the perspective, and the lights and shades are all faulty." Whereas there was virtually no aspect that recommended Hill's painting to the public, in Heade's case, the reviewer struggled to make sense of it all. In particular, the difficulty that arose was the tension between the fitness of the conception and the poor quality of the execution.

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[31] McIntyre, *Martin Johnson Heade*, 2.

[32] "The Art Association: Third Day of the Exhibition."

Rather than dismissing the painting in its entirety, the *Daily Eagle's* critic reveled in describing precisely the painting's most troubling aspects. As the reviewer explained, although the scene had compositional potential, he found that Heade's disturbing execution precluded the traditional enjoyment one expected to find in such a scene:

> As will be seen by the description the artist's conception is good, and with judicious coloring a very charming picture might have been made up of such materials. The execution however is not by any means equal to the conception. The beach is filled with the most unpleasant combination of yellowed umbers which we ever remember to have seen, while the waters of the bay are represented in as heavy and tiring a collection of "blacks" as could have possibly been chosen… [33]

These sentiments, echoed two months later in the review of *Thunder Storm* in *Watson's Art Journal,* demonstrate that critics objected to Heade's painting because they could not comprehend the reasons for his strange execution.[34] T. C. Grannis reacted to the painting similarly when he noted, "we have rarely before seen an example from the easel of Mr. Heade which did not elicit a feeling of admiration for the sentiment with which he had invested his subject."[35] The problem, Grannis explained, was that this was an image devoid of that sentiment, a painting that remained "hard and chilling" by the conventional standards employed for looking at paintings.

According to the *Eagle's* reviewer, the difficulty with criticism about the painting was exacerbated by its strange formal qualities and failure to conform to normal standards. "Criticism on the picture is very difficult," he wrote, "especially if one takes it by detail, as there is not a single point that does not challenge comment." One senses that underneath the reviewer's revulsion lurked a sense of fascination with the image that compelled him to devote more space to this "very faulty" image than to any of those

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[33] "The Art Association: Third Day of the Exhibition."

[34] "Exhibition of the National Academy of Design: Concluding Article," *Watson's Art Journal* 9 (20 June 1868): 106.

[35] Grannis, *National Academy,* 87.

pictures whose merits he praised. Even the sections of the painting he liked were susceptible to criticism: "[t]he sky effect is the only good part of the picture, but even this is marred by the introduction of the flash of lightning, which is about the weakest attempt that ever was made by an artist to represent the effect of the electric fluid on the clouds." What seems to have disturbed the reviewer the most was that Heade's treatment of the scene *should* have been better. Heade did not demonstrate a lack of talent; it had been proven over time throughout by numerous paintings in other exhibitions. Rather the critic objected to Heade's blatant disregard for the rules that made paintings legible. The use of light and dark was therefore "inexplicable," the positions of the reflections and source of lighting equally puzzling and, "[t]he only point upon which everyone agrees is that Mr. Haede's [sic] picture is that it is "very peculiar.""[36]

Ironically, modern scholars, who have maintained that Heade was a Luminist, a realist, or a Romantic painter, have continually stressed a sense of clarity and precision, while critics in Heade's time generally found the opposite to be true.[37] Dissonance, rather than clarity, dominated the review of Heade's *Thunder Storm,* and that forms an important element throughout his oeuvre. The psychological tensions inherent in *Thunder Storm* are manifest in virtually all of Heade's paintings from 1855, the date of his first mature landscape painting, up to his death in 1904. In part, the language that has been used to describe Heade often has denied the subjective manner of his works by stressing the importance of factual, objectively-based painting. This bias of

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[36] See "The Art Association: Third Day of the Exhibition." for the quotations used in this paragraph.

[37] See for instance Earl A. Powell, "Luminism and the American Sublime," in *American Light*, 83-4. Powell states "[i]n no other American landscapes does spatial recession play such an important role or is it developed with such geometric precision." For a similar claim, see Elizabeth M. Thompson, "Spatial Definition in the Landscape Paintings of Martin Johnson Heade," *Rutgers Art Review* 4 (January 1983): 61-7.

objectivism, combined with a lack of nuanced understanding of the impact of Transcendentalism on artists and aesthetics in the nineteenth century, has neatly excised all discussion of artistic subjectivity from Heade's work.

### Heade's Early Training and Contact with Transcendentalism

Heade's frequent travels throughout his early career anticipated his later peripatetic nature and illustrate the difficulties the young artist faced gaining experience in a nation with little opportunities for instruction. Born in Lumberville, Pennsylvania, in 1819, Heade may have worked briefly with the primitive painter Edward Hicks in the late 1830s, but the extent and effect of this training is difficult to determine. By the early 1840s, however, the artist's energies were devoted almost entirely to portraiture.[38] Heade's early portraits were decidedly provincial in both subject and execution, and he often honed his technique on family members and friends. In the portrait of his sister *Ann Rebecca Heed*, for instance, the forms are too sharply defined to convincingly create a sense of space within the canvas, and the result is decidedly flat (fig. 1.3). Though Heade had begun to imitate the techniques of finer painters—placing, for instance, a reflective highlight in his sister's hair—he had not yet sufficiently mastered sufficient skills to create a convincing illusion of depth. His colors are fairly solid and in many of these extant early works, the sitter's skin looks hard and opaque.

The progression of Heade's style, from that of an adequate "primitive" painter to a competent portraitist, coincided with his move away from rural Pennsylvania and is indebted to the contemporary works he was exposed to in metropolitan areas. Heade

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[38] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 2-3 notes that although Hick's instruction during this period is impossible to corroborate by external means, nineteenth-century writers were insistent on its occurrence.

gained exposure to more sophisticated, painterly styles through nearly constant travel in the early 1840s and by exhibiting his work in various venues. By 1841, he showed *Portrait of a Little Girl* at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Annual Exhibition, a location at which he would continue to exhibit over the next decade, though never with a discernible regularity.[39] In 1843, he moved to New York City and exhibited *Portrait of a Young Lady* at the National Academy of Design.[40] The following year, Heade moved back, closer to home, and resided for a brief period in Trenton, New Jersey. Although critic Henry Tuckerman noted in 1867 that, "the love of travel was strong within him," Theodore Stebbins's observation that, "Heade did not travel so much as remain constantly in motion," is closer to the truth.[41] In the decade following his move to New York in 1843, the artist lived or worked in Trenton (1844), Brooklyn (1845), Richmond, Virginia (1845), back to Trenton (1847), Philadelphia (1847), Rome (1848-49), Cincinnati (1849-51), St. Louis (1851-1852), and Chicago (1853).

In some ways it was inescapable for Heade, as a resident of the east coast in the 1840s, to have avoided a cursory awareness of Transcendentalism, since Emerson's lecture schedule brought him continually through the Mid-Atlantic and New England region. Emerson began lecturing in New York City as early as 1840 and was a popular speaker by the time Heade moved there in 1843. That year, he appeared ten times in New York and Brooklyn during February and March, and also once in Newark, New

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[39] See Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné,* 4 and 200. Although Stebbins suggests that this image may be presently known as *Ruth Scarborough* (c. 1841, oil on canvas, 24 x 22 in., Private Collection), this painting has not been identified since it was exhibited and there is no evidence that corroborates this assertion.

[40] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné,* 199 suggests that the painting exhibited as *Portrait of a Young Lady* might be presently known as *Ann Rebecca Heed* (c. 1840-41, oil on canvas, 20 3/4 x 18 1/4 in., private collection), but offers no evidence to support this assertion.

[41] See Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists, American Artist Life,* (New York, G. P. Putnam and Son, 1867), 542 and Stebbins *Catalogue Raisonné*, 30.

Jersey.[42] As early as 1841, Emerson's two major works, *Nature* (1836) and *Essays* (1841), had been published and a few other addresses had appeared in pamphlet form.[43] Although Emerson's early publications were limited in distribution, throughout the late 1830s and into the 1840s his popularity continued to rise because periodicals frequently excerpted his writings or summarized his position. In January 1838, for instance, *The Boston Quarterly Review* printed a fifteen-page review of Emerson's Phi Beta Kappa Address at Harvard the previous year which included a substantial amount of Emerson's text .[44] In 1841, *The New-Yorker* published the article, "Gems from Emerson's Essays," which reprinted selections from different essays.[45] By the early 1850s, in spite of low sales of his publications by today's standards, Emerson had become a household name and Transcendentalism was becoming a popular philosophy. As a writer in *The American Whig Review* noted in 1851:

> The men who are doing most to impress their views on the character of the age are those who are advocating some metaphysical system in a popular form. They are Wordsworth, rearing the superstructure of his poetry on the groundwork of a philosophical system; Coleridge, Carlyle, and Emerson, baptized with the spirit of German transcendentalism, and in various ways disseminating its mystic sentiments among their countrymen. These are the writers who, more than any other at the present day, are shaping public opinion in England and America.[46]

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[42] William Charvat, "A Chronological List of Emerson's American Lecture Engagements, part one," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 64 (September 1960): 504-05.

[43] For a thorough list of Emerson's publications during this period see notes 31n to 34 in the introduction.

[44] "Art. VII.—*An Oration delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, August* 31, 1837, by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Boston. James Munroe & Co. 8vo. pp. 26," *The Boston Quarterly Review* 1 (January 1838): 106-20. The unconventional use of italics are original.

[45] "Gems from Emerson's Essays," *The New-Yorker* 11 (3 April 1841): 48.

[46] "Speculative Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century," *The American Whig Review* 13 (May 1851): 464.

The dissemination of Emerson's ideas, partly through direct access to his writing, although more through his heavy lecture schedule, and through critics' propensity to quote or cite him, made Emersonian Transcendentalism a major intellectual force in the United States.

Like many aspiring artists frustrated with the scarcity of artistic resources available in the United States, Heade traveled to Europe to sometime in either late 1847 or early 1848. Although the precise date of his departure is uncertain, he had arrived in Rome by January 1848 when the *Literary World*'s correspondent reported that, "Heade of Philadelphia is here, but I know not what about."[47] Substantial confusion remains regarding the date of his departure from Europe, the duration and location of any travels he may have taken while living abroad, the date he returned, and where he chose to reside after returning.[48]

Heade's whereabouts after his European sojourn have been misunderstood, and it was not realized that he settled in Cincinnati or its environs. Although Stebbins thought that Heade remained in Rome "probably through July [of 1849]," before visiting England and France and returning home, his exhibition and commission history demonstrates must have returned to the United States early in the spring of 1849.[49] Heade likely moved to Cincinnati immediately following his return to the United States

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[47] See Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 8 and note 25.

[48] Unmentioned in the literature is that during his stay in Rome in 1848-49, he may well have had additional points of interaction with Transcendentalism and its adherents. Margaret Fuller, a friend of Emerson's and former editor of the Transcendentalist's periodical *The Dial*, was in Rome at precisely the same time and took "an active part in the (unsuccessful) revolution in Rome." (Richardson, *Mind on Fire*, 482). While in Rome, Fuller wrote a manuscript detailing her experiences. Unfortunately, the manuscript does not survive, as it was lost in the sinking of the *Elizabeth* which claimed the life of Fuller, her child, and her husband on July 18, 1850. There are a number of biographies of Fuller including, [Margaret Fuller], *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* eds. Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1857); and more recently David Watson, *Margaret Fuller: an American Romantic* (New York: 1988).

[49] See Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 171 and 10-12.

since shortly thereafter he began to exhibit at the Western Art Union.[50] The reasons for his move to Cincinnati are not known, although he may have found the reduced artistic competition in the burgeoning Midwestern city appealing. Heade did not return a substantially changed painter; he continued to look to portraiture as a steady source of income, but he began to mine his European experiences for subject matter over the next eighteen months. Among the paintings Heade initially exhibited at the Western Art Union in Cincinnati in May 1849 was a portrait owned by William Wiswell (1849, unlocated) that he also showed in June and September.[51] In order to have secured the commission and completed the portrait of this citizen of Cincinnati in sufficient time for its exhibition in May, Heade must have arrived in Cincinnati no later than April 1849.

The portrait of Wiswell was an important commission for Heade that would greatly impact his career, although he may not have realized it at the time. Wiswell, a resident of Cincinnati from 1834 until his death in the 1880s, was listed by the late 1840s as "a looking glass dealer and framer" in the Cincinnati city directories. He was a major figure in the city's developing art scene.[52] It is likely because of this portrait that Heade came to the attention of the head of the Western Art Union—Charles Stetson—whose organization provided Heade a steady venue to exhibit in during his residence in Cincinnati.[53] Wiswell's frame shop was a nexus that connected artists, patrons, and

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[50] See James L. Yarnell and William H. Gerdts, *The National Museum of American Art's Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogues From the Beginning through the 1876 Centennial Year,* 5 Vols. (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1986), 3:1667-70.

[51] Although the painting was only identified at the time of its exhibition as *Portrait,* Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 204 accepts this is a portrait of the owner William Wiswell.

[52] For general information about the workings of the Art Union and the figures involved I have drawn extensively on Jane Aldrich Downing Adams, "A Study of Art Unions in the United States of America in the Nineteenth Century," (master's thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1990), 29.

[53] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 10, states "… how Heade's work came to the attention of [the Art Union's] head, Charles Stetson, remains unknown.

those interested in the arts; indeed, the shop became a central part of the artistic culture of the city. Members of the Art Union acknowledged Wiswell's significance by electing him to their board of directors in 1850.

Although Heade does not appear in the Cincinnati Directories from 1849-51, his exhibition records from this period strongly suggest that he was living in or near Cincinnati, possibly across the river in Covington, Kentucky. Throughout 1849 and 1850, Heade entered works into exhibitions twenty-three times; all but one of these in Cincinnati.[54] Moreover, in addition to the portrait of Wiswell, Heade painted a portrait of Noah Hunt Schenck, who had moved to Cincinnati in 1848 and remained there until 1851. While Sarah Cash has argued this painting stems from an earlier period in which Heade and Schenck both had been in Trenton, it is more likely that it was painted closer to the first recorded exhibition of the portrait in October 1849.[55] At least two other works exhibited in this period also were owned by Cincinnatians: I[saac] Bruce owned Heade's *Generva*, and John Crawford owned *The Goat Herd*.[56]

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[54] The number twenty-three refers to the number of entries, some of which were for the same painting. The one exception was the exhibition of a painting called *Opposition* in 1849 (location unknown since 19th century) at the Philadelphia Academy, See Stebbins (2000), 171 and 203. Although Yarnell and Gerdts, *Index,* 3: 1667-70, document Heade's exhibition activities in Cincinnati, no mention is made of *Opposition.*

[55] Heade's portrait of Noah Hunt Schenck is wrongly presumed to be a New Jersey production executed in 1847, while both Heade and Schenck were living in Trenton. Part of this confusion is understandable: since nobody was looking for Heade to be in Cincinnati, the assumption was that the portrait must have been executed at a point of contact earlier in both the artist's and subject's lives. The argument was first advanced in Cash, *Ominous Hush*, 72 and then acknowledged in Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 201.

[56] The 1850 Federal Census lists very few males with the last name Bruce and a first name beginning with "I". The only one who meets these qualifications and was living in Cincinnati at the time was Isaac Bruce, a 37 year-old coach maker who was born in New York. See United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850), reel 688, page 308, line 21. The same census lists seven persons named "John Crawford" living in Cincinnati which makes more specific information about the patron impossible to determine.

Heade's exhibition history in Cincinnati also is aligned precisely with the tenure of Wiswell on the board of directors of the Art Union, an organization which was dissolved in 1850 amid a scandal that questioned the organization's ethical and financial obligations. Critics charged that the Union was favoring professional artists at the expense of supporting amateurs who were struggling to make their mark. Heade's decision to stop exhibiting with the Art Union at precisely this point further strengthens his connection to Wiswell, to whom he remained connected even after his involvement with the Art Union ended in April 1850. In Wiswell, Heade found a supportive patron and, more importantly, an exhibition space to continue showing his works. As author Charles Cist in, his *Sketches and Statistics of Cincinnati in 1851* wrote:

> William Wiswell, a public-spirited citizen of ours, has recently fitted up a picture gallery, to which visitors are not only admitted free of charge, but afforded the opportunity of seeing it during any period of daylight, which may suit their convenience—the entrance door standing open at all time.
>
> A valuable collection of three hundred portraits, fancy and historical pieces, embracing the works of Kellogg, Beard, Rothermel, Heade and other well-known artists, is there placed, under the safeguard of the community, to whose sense of honor and justice, the proprietor has appealed; and up to this period, with well justified confidence.[57]

Heade's residence in Cincinnati also formed a crucial time in his artistic development since he began to show interest in genres other than portraiture. Up to that point, the vast majority of his exhibited works were portraits, with the rare exceptions being *The Dead-Fall* (c. 1844, present location unknown), which was exhibited in Philadelphia in 1844, *and The Sleepy Fisherman* (c. 1847, present location unknown) exhibited at New York City's American Art Union in 1847. By December of 1849, however, Heade exhibited a greater variety of subjects that included genre scenes, copies after notable European works, European subjects, and portraits. Although Heade

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[57] Charles Cist, *Sketches and Statistics of Cincinnati in 1851* (Cincinnati: 1851): 121.

made Cincinnati his home base, from May to November 1849 he painted images from his European sojourn while there. He exhibited these exclusively at the Western Art Union, and in December of 1849, Heade showed most of his known European subjects: *Beatrice Cenci (After Guido [Reni]), Shelley's Genevra, Street Scene in Rome, Scene from Campbell's Ruellura,* and *Roman News Boys.*[58]

Heade continued to reside in Cincinnati at least through the fall of 1850 when he was recorded in the Federal Census, at the Burnet House Hotel (fig 1.4) on September 30, 1850.[59] Like many of the census entries throughout the late nineteenth century, there are minor inconsistencies and errors, but none so serious as to cast Heade's presence there in doubt. Although his birthplace was incorrectly identified as Ohio, not Pennsylvania; and his age was recorded as thirty-five not thirty-one, these errors are consonant with inconsistencies that appear throughout the entries. Many of the hotel's residents must have been unavailable to interview directly and the recorder, [J?] Blacklum, simply filled in what he could. In the pages preceding Heade's listing, Blacklum left numerous entries blank in the column labeled "occupation." He was not the most careful recorder, and over the course of nearly eleven pages of entries he managed to misspell the words "hotel" and "Burnet" every time and even the word "house" once.

Heade's choice of the Burnet House suggests he had a reasonable level of financial success as it was reportedly the finest place to stay in Cincinnati. Like many hotels of the era, the Burnet House could accommodate patrons for short stays or

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[58] Despite the thoroughness with which his work is documented in Cincinnati, virtually none of the paintings from his time there have been located. The two exceptions are the *Roman Newsboy* pair.

[59] Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census,* reel 687, page 180, line 16: "[M?] J Heade" was residing in the "Burnett House Hotell [sic]" in Cincinnati. Significantly, his occupation is listed as "artist." Among the difficulties with this entry is the illegibility of the first letter, which could be read in a number of different ways

extended residences. Interestingly, a few lines above the entry for Heade, Blacklum recorded a "Mr. [Noah] H. Schenck," a lawyer who was born in New Jersey. Although the hotel could not have been either Heade's or Schenck's initial residence in Cincinnati—it had opened only in May 1850—the entry further strengthens the connection between artist and patron at this time. Heade must have been a man of some means at this point for although he had just completed an extended trip to Europe and was never known for the high prices his work commanded, he chose to live in the city's finest hotel. Commenting on the hotel's reputation for luxury, Frank Blackwell Mayer wrote that "the Burnet house is a *magnificent* hotel of Palladian architecture—adorned with the finest mirrors, gilding, marble pavements & finest furniture."[60] Charles Cist was even more effusive in his praise, calling it "undoubtedly the most spacious, and probably the best, hotel, in its interior and domestic arrangements, of any in the world… The entire house contains three hundred and forty rooms, all properly lighted and ventilated."[61] Even more importantly, the hotel was located just one block away from Wiswell's shop.[62]

The scant remaining exhibition records indicate that Heade's work sold reasonably well in the Art Union, and it must have continued to do so at Wiswell's gallery. Although only a single work can be traced to his stay in St. Louis from the fall of 1851 to 1853, and none survive from his time in Chicago, the fact that Heade began to speculate in land during this time suggests a certain amount of disposable income. While Stebbins believes that Heade could not have saved enough from his the sale of

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[60] Frank Blackwell Mayer, *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier in 1851: The Diary and Sketches of Frank Blackwell Mayer,* ed. Bertha L. Heilbron (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), 46.

[61] Cist, *Sketches and Statistics*, 164.

[62] Kathleen M. Dillon, "Painters and Patrons: The Fine Arts in Cincinnati, 1820-1860," *Ohio History* 96 (Winter-Spring 1987): 25.

his paintings to afford such a lifestyle, no other alternative would appear to satisfy this question.[63] Indeed, this level of financial security suggests that Heade's work had to have sold well, and it is likely that a connection with Wiswell may have continued throughout this period.[64]

Heade's residence in Cincinnati, his connection to Wiswell, and his success at the Western Art Union also provide a direct point of contact with the major figure of Transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson.[65] In May 1850, less than a month after Heade's last showing with the Western Art Union, Emerson came to Cincinnati and delivered an important series of eight lectures that were covered regularly in the city's newspapers.[66] Significantly, Charles Stetson, who had been head of the Western Art Union up until the dissolution of the board, was among the group of prominent citizens

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[63] Though Heade's father was described as "a prosperous farmer," Stebbins rightly doubts his ability to support his numerous children. See Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 13.

[64] A number of works that Wiswell owned were auctioned after his death, but the majority of the works were etchings and prints, and none of the few oil paintings listed were by Heade. See Ezekiel & Bernheim Company, *Mr. Wm. Wiswell's Entire Valuable Collection, Paintings, Engravings, Now on Exhibition and to Be Sold at Public Auction Commencing Wednesday, December 16, 1885 by Ezekiel & Bernheim, Auctioneers*. [Cincinnati: [the auctioneers], 1885] Unfortunately, no extant records have been uncovered which indicate exactly what Heade was showing at Wiswell's Gallery, or the prices he was commanding for his work in Cincinnati.

[65] Significantly, Cincinnati became somewhat of a center of later Transcendentalist thought, particularly through the efforts of Moncure D. Conway, a Transcendentalist and Unitarian preacher who had befriended Emerson and Thoreau and later published a periodical *The Dial* from Cincinnati. Although Conway's tenure in the city did not overlap with Heade's, his description of Wiswell suggests that the art dealer had significant interest in Transcendentalism, which can be dated no later than shortly following Heade's departure. Referring to "one of our number, an art dealer named William Wiswell," Conway briefly describes Wiswell's sympathies and the schism among Cincinnati Unitarians in his autobiography. See Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography: Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway Volume One,* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1905): 306.

[66] Emerson's Cincinnati lectures are well documented in Mary Kupiec Cayton, "The Making of an American Prophet: Emerson, His Audiences, and the Rise of the Culture Industry in Nineteenth-Century America," *The American Historical Review* 92 (June 1987): 597-620; and also Louise Hastings, "Emerson in Cincinnati," *New England Quarterly* 11 (September 1938): 443-69.

who pledged money for Emerson's lectures.[67] Emerson became something of a celebrity in Cincinnati: he remained there for two weeks, met numerous times with members of the Cincinnati Literary Club, and even voyaged to a prehistoric site at Fort Ancient with some of the club's members.[68] Although Emerson stayed at the Burnett House Hotel—Heade's recorded residence in the 1850 census—it is uncertain if Heade was living there at that point.

Cincinnati became an early outpost of Transcendentalist culture following its enthusiastic response to Emerson's lectures in the spring of 1850. To the surprise of many critics, Emerson's lectures were not the obtuse philosophical wanderings they had expected, but radiated clarity and ease of understanding. As a reviewer in the *Daily Cincinnati Gazette* reported, "his most remarkable trait is that of plain common-sense."[69] This same writer noted that the man who arrived to lecture:

> is so far, in his intellectual and oratorical lineaments, from resembling the newspaper portraits . . . that we half incline to think the wrong man has come along, and attempted to play off a hoax on us backwoods people.
>
> If this gentleman has not mistaken himself for Mr. Emerson, Gothamitic [sic] scribes have certainly mistaken Mr. Emerson for somebody else, and given descriptions of him which will not be recognized in this region.[70]

Although Emerson was initially invited to give a course of five lectures, these proved so successful that he was immediately invited to give three more which included, "The Natural History of Intellect," "The Identity of Thought with Nature," and "Instinct and Inspiration." Historian Mary Kupiec Cayton finds a signal shift in Emerson's Cincinnati lectures, noting that his "underlying philosophy and his religious stance in these lectures

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[67] Hastings, "Emerson in Cincinnati," 443.

[68] Hastings, "Emerson in Cincinnati," 450.

[69] *Daily Cincinnati Gazette*, 24 May 1850; See also Cayton, "An American Prophet," 610.

[70] *Daily Cincinnati Gazette*, 24 May 1850; quoted in Hastings, "Emerson in Cincinnati," 446.

had not changed substantially from his more controversial *Nature* and "Divinity School Address," but Emerson was no longer explicitly using the languages of philosophy or religion to make his points."[71] In essence, Emerson's lectures turned his promotion of the relationship of man to nature and uncompromising self-reliance from abstract philosophy into more concrete, tangible substance.

Among Emerson's ideas that Heade may have found particularly useful was the notion that the natural world functions as a system of symbols that reveals a higher truth. Unlike Romantic philosophers who saw the world almost exclusively as a signifier of God's presence, Emerson's lectures pointed to a more personal, subjective symbolism. In his May 31 lecture "The Identity of Thought with Nature" he asked:

> What is the interest of tropes and symbols to men? I think it is that… unexpected relationship. Each remote part corresponds to each other, can represent the other; because we all spring from one root.[72]

Emerson had been promoting a similar idea since the publication of *Nature* in 1836, though here his description of the correspondences between man and the world was more nuanced and multi-layered. In *Nature* he had suggested that one's understanding of the landscape lay not in the objective features perceived, but in how the subjective, inner life filtered these objects. "Nature," he stated, "always wears the color of the spirit. To a man laboring under a calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then there is the kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost a dear friend."[73] Without denying God's presence in the natural world, Emerson was slowly

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[71] Cayton, "An American Prophet," especially 610-11.

[72] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Relation of Intellect to Natural Science," in *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* eds. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, (Athens, Georgia: University of Athens Press, 2001): 155. This lecture was delivered under the title "The Identity of Thought with Nature" in Cincinnati. The ellipsis indicates only that I have removed a superfluous semicolon from the text.

[73] Emerson, *Nature*, 7.

transforming prevailing Romantic associations and stressing, instead, the primacy of man's inner, subjective world as the most potent determinant of vision and perception. Indeed, in his last lecture in May, Emerson favored personal experience and the inner life over traditional philosophy and held nature as the primary symbol of thought:

> I had rather have a good symbol of my thought, or a good analogy, than the suffrage of Kant and Plato. If you agree with me, or if Locke, Montesquieu, or Spinoza agree, I may yet be wrong. But if the elm tree thinks the same thing, if running water, if burning coal; if crystals and alkalies [sic], in their several fashions, say what I say, it must be true.[74]

A similar theme pervaded Emerson's May 24th lecture, "The Spirit of the Times," which also featured critical commentary on the primary effects of modernity in the United States. Although some critics of Emerson have framed his philosophy as self-absorbed, and capable of fostering at times an isolationist mentality in which the good of the individual superceded all other concerns, this is an overly narrow and biased misreading of Emerson's thought. In this lecture, Emerson stated that the idea that "[t]he individual is the world," was particularly modern but ultimately detrimental:

> This perception is a sword such as was never drawn before. It divides and detaches bone and marrow, soul and body, yea,—almost the man from himself. It is the Age of Severance, of Dislocation, of Freedom, of Detachment. It is the Age of first person singular. Every man for himself.[75]

For Emerson, the balance of the competing forces of individualism and association became a primary concern, since this was a necessary condition for the reintegration of the fractured and dislocated self. With the ease afforded by the advancements in technology and rapid communication, Emerson worried that a mob mentality might prevail in which the moral compass residing in each individual was ignored for the sake

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[74] Emerson, "The Relation of Intellect," 155.

[75] Emerson, "Spirit of the Times," in *The Selected Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* ed. Ronald Bosco and Joel Myerson, (Athens, Georgia, 2005), 117.

of the majority's desires. On the other hand, he noted that the dangerous emphasis on self-culture might lead into a state of self-absorption that would make meaningful association virtually disappear. Emerson found both of these tendencies in modernity and described their effects directly in his lecture. He worried that an excess of individualism led to a world in which, "[t]he social sentiments are weak. The sentiment of patriotism is weak. Veneration is low: The natural affectations are weaker than they were," he also saw a danger in the opposite extreme.[76] Emerson's negative reception of Communism and Socialism stemmed from his belief that a sound and whole individual must be the foundation of any larger group. "[E]very society that can be depended on," he stated, "must be composed of men that are themselves complete."[77]

From Emerson's lectures then, Heade would have gained a number of insights regarding the modern world, each framed in visual terms. As Emerson saw it, the principal experience of modernity—what he termed, "the Age of Severance… Dislocation… and Detachment,"—was a divided self. As he stated in *Nature,* "[t]he reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, in because man is disunited with himself."[78] One way in which this condition was manifest was a sense of uneasiness and inability to relate to nature, a phenomenon Emerson visualized in terms of irreconcilable scale:

> Man is the dwarf of himself. Once he was permeated and dissolved by spirit. He filled nature with his overflowing currents… But, having made for himself this huge shell, his waters retired; he no longer fills the veins and veinlets; he is shrunk to a drop. He sees that the structure still fits him, but fits him colossally.[79]

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[76] Emerson, "Spirit of the Times," 117.

[77] Emerson, "Spirit of the Times," 129.

[78] Emerson, *Nature,* 38.

[79] Emerson, *Nature,* 37.

In the ensuing decade, Heade would begin his career as a landscapist and include in virtually all of his works a sense of tension that often derived from his use of competing scales. For Heade, the marsh became a space into which the physical manifestation of Emerson's critical commentary could be projected.

Heade left Cincinnati sometime between the fall of 1850 and the fall of the following year, but he never lost contact with the city's art scene and must have remained in contact with the friends and patrons he made during his residence. Writing to Frederic Church in the spring of 1868, he noted, "Cincinnati is waking up again, after a ten years sleep & is to have a big exhibition in the fall."[80] In hindsight, Heade's statement was partly true, for while Cincinnati had hosted the Western Sanitary Fair exhibition as recently as 1863, the "big exhibition" marked the return of William Wiswell's gallery to a position of prominence. Although it was held at the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts, the show was subtitled: "Catalogue of the First Exhibition at Wiswell's Gallery…"[81] Heade sent a painting titled *Apple Blossoms,* and exhibited with Wiswell one additional time when *Landscape, The Tropics* was accepted in the "Second Exhibition at Wiswell's Gallery" later that year.[82]

Heade's subsequent moves in the later 1850s brought him into additional points of contact with Emersonian Transcendentalism. This coincided with his development as a landscape painter and explains many of the compositional choices he made later in his

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[80] Martin Johnson Heade to Frederic Church, 27 April 1868, Martin Johnson Heade Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, DC. Available online at: http://www.aaa.si.edu/search/index.cfm/fuseaction/Items.ViewImageDetails/ItemID/5265?search_string=martin%20johnson%20heade#martin1 accessed 10 November 2007.

[81] See Yarnell and Gerdts, *Index,* 1:38. The full title of the exhibition is Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts, *Catalogue of the First Exhibition at Wiswell's Gallery, No. 70 West Fourth Street. 1868,* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1868). Heade exhibited *Apple Blossoms* (Cat. no. 67) at the Cincinnati Academy that same year, see Yarnell and Gerdts, *Index,* 3:1667.

[82] See Yarnell and Gerdts, *Index,* 1:38 for exhibition title and 3:1668 (Catalog no. 46) for the painting exhibited.

career. Starting with his move to Providence, Rhode Island, in 1856, Heade found circles of friends and places to live that brought him into closer contact with Transcendentalist thought. For instance, Thoreau had lectured at Providence's Lyceum in 1854, and Emerson had spoken on there on occasion too. In 1857, the year in which Heade began exhibiting in Boston, Emerson lectured sixteen times throughout eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island from February through early April. Later that year Heade visited William Francis Channing in Boston, hoping to paint Channing's father's portrait for a commission he had received from Brown University. As Stebbins astutely noted, Channing's first cousin, "the younger William Ellery was an intimate of Emerson, Thoreau and Margaret Fuller."[83] By the 1860s, Heade's circle of friends contained numerous figures prominent in Emerson's circle such as the scientist Louis Agassiz, and artist and illustrator F. O. C. Darley.[84] Heade's transformation from a painter working within the conventions of a picturesque, Romantic tradition, to that of a painter whose works were subjective meditations on the landscape occurred in the period marked by his closeness to Transcendentalism. In order to understand the signal shift in his approach to landscape, it is necessary to read his paintings against the texts and ideas of Transcendentalism.

## Emerson's *Art* and Aesthetic Texts in the United States

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[83] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 18. Significantly, the Channing family had a large impact on Emerson's intellectual development. Edward Tyrell Channing (1790-1856) was a professor at Harvard who taught English to Emerson, and his elder brother William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) provided Emerson with a two reading lists to further his education in Divinity School. See Richardson, *Mind on Fire,* 14 and 55-7.

[84] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 15-19 details Heade's movements and circle of friends c. 1855-60. For Heade and Agassiz see ibid., 63; Heade and F. O. C. Darley, see ibid., 54 and 228 for Heade and Darley's collaboration *Sheep in a Landscape* (1863, oil on canvas, 15 x 30 inches, collection of Elizabeth Rider Gosnell, New York).

Heade's landscapes underwent a radical change that began precisely in 1855, based on the visual evidence of *Rocks in New England* (fig 1.5) and that was complete by 1859, the year of his first marsh scene. Although Stebbins asserts that his earlier landscape paintings "had all been little more than daubs, probably copies based on prints or paintings of others," this oversimplifies the shift.[85] *Rocks in New England* signifies a major difference of outlook, not just of ability. Heade's earlier paintings, such as *A Farm in the Valley* (1844, DG Jordon) and *Scene Near the Delaware* (c. 1850) are far from daubs (figs 1.6 and 1.7). Both are fairly large works, each measuring approximately two by three feet and are finished paintings, executed in oil on canvas rather than simple studies on artist board or paper. Additionally, both images followed the conventions of picturesque painting and sought to evoke a Romantic, sentimental relationship between man and nature. Stebbins chose not to comment on these images in his most recent work on Heade, but in his earlier monograph he found *A Farm in the Valley* "crude," and believed it "followed the primitive manner of Thomas and Edward Hicks."[86] Yet, whereas Hicks's paintings show no awareness of academic tendencies, Heade's employ atmospheric and linear perspective. In terms of his paint handling, these early landscapes demonstrate that by the 1850s Heade had shed the obvious markers of his primitive training and was working in a more academic style.

Heade endowed both paintings with a sense of generalized sentimentalism consonant with the conventions of Romantic painting, rather than the more descriptive realism that Asher B. Durand and Frederic Church were practicing. Although Heade's *Scene Near the Delaware River* may well represent a specific location along the river,

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[85] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 15.

[86] Stebbins, *Life and Works* (1975), 26. One should note too that although they were relatives, Thomas Hicks demonstrated an academic style quite different than his cousin Edward's primitive paintings.

the generalizations Heade employed throughout the composition suggest a vague idealism rather than objective rendering. The old farmhouse across the water, with its un-mended fence, the picnickers sitting beneath the trees, the strolling couple, and branches parting to viewer reveal this scene, lend to the painting a sense of fictionalized sentimentality that prevents the development of the psychological depth and tension found in his best works. This type of imagery finds precedent not in the work of Edward Hicks, but in the landscape painters such as Thomas Doughty and Alvin Fisher whose work still enjoyed considerable popularity throughout the mid 1840s.[87]

In these early works, Heade looked outside of the mainstream Hudson River School style and sought to master earlier precedents. In Doughty's work of the 1820s, one finds many of the formal devices and strategies that Heade employed in this early phase of landscape painting. In *Beech Hill*, for instance, Doughty placed small staffage figures enjoying the surprisingly well manicured outdoors in a manner that Heade would mirror in his *Scene near the Delaware River*. Heade's work from this period seems indebted to the compositional strategies Doughty employed, such as the foreground in *Landscape with Fisherman,* with its crisply rendered fern fronds and sharply recorded vegetation.

*Rocks in New England* signals a move away from the sentimental sweetness of the earlier works and presents instead a landscape that is difficult to apprehend and decidedly un-picturesque. It is transitional and anticipates a number of strategies evident in Heade's later landscapes, like the fastidious attention to foreground detail and

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[87] Heade may have seen Doughty's work in Philadelphia as early as 1840, when a painting titled *American Scenery* was exhibited at the Philadelphia Art Association from April 16 to June 10 or the following year when Doughty exhibited again at the same venue. From May to October 1849, both Doughty and Heade were exhibiting works at the Western Art Union in Cincinnati. See Yarnell and Gerdts, *Index*, 1:1075-79. The standard source on Doughty, despite its age, is Frank H. Goodyear Jr., *Thomas Doughty, 1793-185: An American Pioneer in Landscape Painting* (Philadelphia: 1973).

rejection of the picturesque mode, and retains some older conventions such as the tree as a compositional framing element. Scholars have documented this shift, but have failed to account for the motivating forces behind it. As a result, Heade's rejection of the dominant mode of landscape representation appears unprecedented and radical. Yet, this shift towards a more personal, interpretive vision of landscape painting mirrored the ideas that Emerson had concisely stated by as early as 1841 in his essay *Art*. Emerson's essay reveled in creating a new mission for the artist and spoke out specifically against the type of conventional relationship to painting espoused by the artist Thomas Cole.

For an aspiring landscape painter, Cole's "Essay on American Scenery" (1836) was among the most useful critical texts that appeared before the 1840s.[88] Cole was the acknowledged leader of the American School of landscape painting, and his ideas and images were among the best known of the time. While some scholars have commented on the similarities between Cole's *Essay* and Emerson's *Art*, this obscures the fundamental distinctions between these works.[89] Cole's belief that "the wilderness is YET a fitting place to speak of God," directly parallels Emerson's statement in *Nature* that, "the noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God," but this likely

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[88] For a concise list of aesthetic writing in the United States, William H. Gerdts, "The American "Discourses": A Survey of Lectures and Writings on American Art," *American Art Journal* 15 (Summer 1983), 61-79 provides an adequate summary though does not include Emerson's essay for consideration. Cole's essay appeared at least twice in print in this period: Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," *American Monthly Magazine* ns1 (January 1836), 1-12; subsequently reprinted with alterations as "Lecture on American Scenery: Delivered before the Catskill Lyceum, April 1, 1841," *Northern Light* 1 (May 1841), 25-6. Cole's essay is reprinted in John W. McCoubrey, *American Art 1700-1960: Sources and Documents* (Englewood, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), 98-110.

[89] See for instance McCoubrey, *Sources and Documents*, 98; Barbara Novak, "American Landscape: Changing Concepts of the Sublime," *American Art Journal* 4 (Spring 1972): 36-42.

owes more to a common Romantic heritage than any direct influence.[90] Additionally, this aspect of nature was only one of many positions Emerson held regarding the function of landscape. He was more likely to reiterate the idea he set forth in his lecture "The Uses of Natural History": "It is in my judgment the greatest office of natural science, and one which has only begun to be discharged, to explain man to himself."[91] In Emerson's text, landscape became a subjective, introspective tool that rejected the conventionalism Cole often favored.[92]

The most obvious and striking distance between Cole's *Essay* and Emerson's *Art* is the manner in which each dealt with sentimental symbols. Though Cole's sympathies towards landscape tended toward the sublime, he also recognized the value of the sentimental landscape. As he noted at the beginning of the essay, "the cultivated must not be forgotten, for it is still more important to man in his social capacity…though devoid of the sterner sublimity of the wild, its quieter spirit steals tenderly into our bosoms mingled with a thousand domestic affections and heart-touching associations."[93] Heade's *Scene near the Delaware River*, with its unmended fence and quaint farmhouse, mirrors directly the sentimentality of which Cole spoke. Emerson, by contrast, viewed these "heart-touching associations" disparagingly and remarked:

> As soon as beauty is sought, not from religion and love but for pleasure, it degrades the seeker. High beauty is no longer attainable by him in canvas... an effeminate, prudent, sickly beauty, which is not beauty, is all

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[90] See Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," in McCoubrey, *Sources and Documents,* 100, and Emerson, *Nature,* 32.

[91] Emerson, "Uses of Natural History," 15.

[92] For Cole see, William H. Truettner and Alan Wallach eds., *Thomas Cole: Landscape into History* (New Haven: Yale University Press; Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1994); see also Ella M. Foshay and Barbara Novak, *Intimate Friends: Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, William Cullen Bryant* (New York: New York Historical Society, 2000).

[93] Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," 100.

> that can be formed; for the hand can never execute anything higher than the character can inspire.[94]

In Emerson's mind, art was in danger of becoming merely a distraction, poisoned by conventionalism, "a superficial talent." The quaint nostalgia that Cole found an acceptable, even desirable, feature of painting, Emerson found repugnant.

Additionally, Cole's essay promoted a sense of conformity by holding the American artist to standards of judgment based on European precedent. He hoped that the stature of the American landscape would be elevated so as to place it on equal footing with European scenery, and worked specifically against what he saw as an anti-American bias in the arts. In order for American painting to be taken seriously, Cole realized that he must expose the inherent biases against it and specifically detail those elements that were beautiful, picturesque and sublime:

> There are those who through ignorance or prejudice strive to maintain that American Scenery little that is interesting or truly beautiful—that it is rude without picturesqueness, and monotonous without sublimity—–that being destitute of all vestiges of antiquity, whose associations strongly affect the mind, it cannot be compared with European Scenery.[95]

Cole struggled to overcome established perceptions of inferiority, creating throughout this essay the justification for the scenes he painted by promoting their intrinsic value. His quest was both personal and nationalist: it was personal to the degree to which the cultivation of a taste for American scenery would benefit him as an artist, and nationalist in that it was striving to validate the Americans as a capable group of painters with a suitable subject. His intention, as he made clear by the essay's end, was, "to attempt a

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[94] Emerson, "Art," 282.

[95] Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," 101.

description of several districts remarkable for their picturesqueness and truly American character."[96]

Whereas Cole reveled in the idea of creating an American picturesque, equal to but different from European taste, Emerson despised the idea and favored images that were born of an internal impulse in the artist, rather than based on style or fashion. The position he laid out in *Art* is unequivocal: "Pictures must not be too picturesque. Nothing astonishes men so much as commonsense and plain dealing. All great actions have been simple, and all great pictures are."[97] Emerson disliked the idea that the impulse to create art came from mere egotism rather an internal impulse. He stated that, "art must not be a superficial talent, but must begin farther back in man… It is in vain that we look for genius to reiterate itself in the old arts; it is its instinct to find beauty and holiness in the new and necessary facts, in the field and road-side, the shop and mill."[98] While Cole wanted to align American scenery with European notions, Emerson rejected this idea outrightly. The artist, Emerson stated, "need not cumber himself with a conventional nature and culture, nor ask what is made in Rome and Paris…"[99] In *Self-Reliance,* he took the notion one step further by stating, "[w]hoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist."[100] While Cole consistently promoted a reliance on precedent, Emerson was encouraging artists to reject the notion of style and submit instead to a subjective, creative process.

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[96] Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," 109.

[97] Emerson, "Art," 279.

[98] Emerson, "Art," 282

[99] Emerson, "Art," 278.

[100] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 134.

In his series of marsh scenes, the earliest of which dates from 1859, Heade rejected the model of landscape prescribed by Cole in favor of Emerson's subjective vision. On the most basic level, Heade's attraction to the salt marsh as a subject spoke to the admiration of "the common" or "low" features that Transcendentalism vaunted. As Emerson stated in *The American Scholar:* "I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic… I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds."[101] In choosing the marsh, Heade deliberately chose scenery that traditionally had been represented as "common" and "low," inhospitable, unpleasant, and even ugly. In the 1830s, a reviewer in *The North American Review* tellingly observed: "Miss Leslie says, 'the salt marsh was unanimously declared not to be pleasant… One good way of enjoying such places is to forget the salt-marsh and to preserve the flowers.'"[102] One of Transcendentalism's major contributions to the discourse of Art was to force a reconsideration of the hierarchy that normally pervaded the choice of subject. This embrace of the low and common emerged in Emerson's writings and was subsequently promoted by Transcendentalists such as Thoreau and Whitman, all the while slowly becoming an accepted part of the intellectual culture.

Heade's rejection of the picturesque in his landscapes, beginning in the mid 1850s, was by definition Emersonian and was likely reinforced by Asher B. Durand's series *Letters on Landscape Painting* which was published in *The Crayon* in 1855-56.[103]

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[101] Emerson, *The American Scholar,* 57.

[102] "Art. VII–Miss Leslie's Pencil Sketches*," North American Review* 37 (October 1833): 473.

[103] Asher B. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting [8 parts]," *The Crayon* 1 (1855): 1-2; 34-35; 66-67; 97-98; 145-46; 209-11; 273-75; 354-55. For an in depth analysis of *The Crayon* see Janice Simon, "'The Crayon', 1855-1861: The Voice of Nature in Criticism of the Fine Arts," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990)

Although scholarship has emphasized the Ruskinian bias of this periodical, Emerson's Transcendentalist vision of nature and the function of landscape painting were also well represented. Some of this overlap can be attributed to Ruskin's writings, which both Durand and Emerson were familiar with.[104] More importantly, both Ruskin and Emerson counted Thomas Carlyle as a friend whose substantial body of cultural criticism had shaped and influenced their works.[105]

*The Crayon's* promotion of Emersonian Transcendentalism also reflected the aesthetic sensibilities of one of the magazine's founders, William Stillman.[106] Although scholarship on the American Pre-Raphaelites has largely ignored the close, and often blurred, line between this movement and Transcendentalism, Stillman's writing demonstrates how the two were not mutually exclusive. Scholar and author Ida Gertrude Everson noted, for instance, that Stillman shared with Emerson, "a love of nature's symbolism and other transcendental ideals."[107] The two men were friends and Stillman featured the author prominently in his painting *Philosopher's Adirondacks Camp* (fig 1.8) and later had the first stanza of Emerson's poem about the trip engraved on the

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[104] See Linda S. Ferber, ed., *Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American Landscape* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2007), 153 and 231 for Durand and Ruskin; see also Richardson, *Mind on Fire*, 447, who noted that Emerson read Ruskin's *Modern Painters* during his second trip to England in October 1847. Though this occurred after he had published "Art," he probably appreciated the similar views the held.

[105] For a recent and exhaustive biography of Ruskin see Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin* (New Haven, Conn.: 2002).

[106] Simon, "The Crayon," 7-8, notes also the influence of Justin Winsor, "whose contributions to the magazine equal those of Stillman himself," and "[t]he transcendental idealist Joseph G. Brownlee (1824-88) [who] joined Winsor in shaping *The Crayon's* point of view after Stillman's departure." Brown, she states, "was a great admirer of Emerson, as was Justin Winsor, and can be counted as a follower of the Transcendentalists."

[107] Ida G. Everson, "William J. Stillman: Emerson's "Gallant Artist,"" *The New England Quarterly* 31 (March 1958), 37-8.

frame's plaque.[108] Though Stillman is remembered almost entirely for his connections to the Pre-Raphaelites, this position obscures the considerable overlap between Transcendentalism and the Pre-Raphaelite sensibilities found in the *Crayon*.[109] Whereas Ruskin stressed a fidelity to nature based on close observation and meticulous rendering, Emerson and Stillman took a more subjective approach to the natural world. As Stillman wrote to his friend Charles Eliot Norton in 1858:

> I have done little in landscape except the part of my picture that is forest, in which I have a good study, but I am more than ever sure… that there is but one way for me to paint landscape as such and that is not to paint from nature. I must work out from the slow process of self expression.[110]

While scholars have stressed Stillman's Ruskinian connections, he rejected the principal tenet of the movement—painting from nature—and favored Emerson's subjectivism instead. The "slow process of self expression" of which Stillman wrote mirrored the personal function of landscape found throughout Emerson's texts and lectures. In an address delivered in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1837, Emerson had stated this guiding principle of subjective exploration:

> What is the end of human life? It is not, believe me, the chief end of man that he should make a fortune and beget children whose end is likewise to make fortunes, but it is, in a few words, that he should explore

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[108] William J. Stillman, "The Adirondack Club: Emerson and Agassiz," in *Autobiography of a Journalist* (n.p.: 1901), 248-167 details the excursion. The opening quatrain of Emerson's poem, "The Adirondacs," reads: Wise and polite, — and if I drew / Their several portraits, you would own /Chaucer had no such worthy crew, / Nor Boccace in Decameron." See Everson, "Stillman," 36.

[109] For a recent example of how scholarship on Stillman continues exclusively to emphasize Ruskin's impact on his worldview see Theodore Stebbins Jr., et al, *The Last Ruskinians: Charles Eliot Norton, Charles Herbert Moore and Their Circle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Universty Art Museums, 2007), 14-15. Even Simon, "The Crayon," 202, attributes Stillman's beliefs to the influence of Ruskin, despite the earlier formation of these ideas by Emerson: "For Stillman, inspired by Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, a passive, ever receptive mind more completely accepted and adopted the benefits of the natural environment."

[110] Everson, "Stillman," 37.

> himself—an inexhaustible mine—and external nature is but the candle to illuminate in turn the innumerable and profound obscurities of the soul.[111]

Among the principal lessons Transcendentalism conveyed was not, as is often intoned, that Nature is the marker and symbol of God. Instead, through the efforts of Emerson and his followers, Nature became the means through which one's inner life could be explored. As Stillman explicitly told readers of *The Crayon*, "[t]hought comes to us not when we ask for it, but when we have fitted the mind to receive it tranquilly and humbly… [then] peaceful and pure in heart, we can tranquilize the inner world so that it shall harmonize with the outer."[112]

Asher B. Durand's "Letters on Landscape Painting," in spite of his friendship with Thomas Cole and the tendency to emphasize his Hudson River School associations, was not "a compendium of Picturesque theory for the American painter."[113] Rather, this series of essays specifically warned against it, reiterating the Transcendentalist's view of nature that Emerson had laid out in *Art*. While Durand continued to move between a range of styles that included the picturesque mode, *Letters* warned against the type of conventionalism that marked many of his Hudson River School efforts. In these essays, he specifically advised younger painters to turn away from the Cole-dominated model of Hudson River School painting by rejecting dramatic vistas and moralizing landscape. He noted, for instance, that the "fascinations of the *picturesque*…[were] beautiful indeed,"

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[111] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "An Address Delivered at Providence Rhode Island, on the Occasion of the Opening of the Greene Street School," *Selected Lectures,* 48.

[112] William J. Stillman, "Sketchings," *The Crayon* 1 (24 January 1855), 59. A longer excerpt of this article is reprinted in Simon, "The Crayon," 202.

[113] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 116. For Durand, see Foshay and Novak, *Kindred Spirits;* see also David B. Lawall, *Asher Brown Durand: His Art and Art Theory in Relation to his Times,* (New York: Garland, 1977). *The Crayon and the American Landscape,* curated by Marion Grzesiak and with an essay by Alan Wallach (Montclair, N. J.: Montclair Art Museum, 1993) remains among the only exhibitions to exclusively look at the impact of *The Crayon* on American Painting.

but questioned whether they belonged "more to the service of the tourist and historian than to that of the true landscape artist."[114] Like Emerson, Durand seemed concerned with the beauty of a work arising from an internal impulse in the artist. As Emerson noted more than a decade earlier, "though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us, or we find it not."[115] For Emerson and Durand, the impulse that created art needed to come from an internal realization, rather than the external and false dictums of style and fashion.

Although Durand, at times, promoted ideas consonant with Emerson's understanding of landscape, significant differences remained regarding the exact definition of landscape painting's higher purpose. Both agreed that the contemplation of nature must lead the viewer beyond the image, but here their paths diverged. Durand believed that landscape painting must transcend mere decoration, and become what he called "a thing more than outward beauty, or a piece of furniture."[116] Yet, like Cole, he tended to view landscape painting as a didactic tool complete with clear lessons to be learned. Rather than favor a subjective, inner experience, Durand believed that "the external appearance of our dwelling-place…is fraught with lessons of high and holy meaning, only surpassed by the light of revelation."[117] For Durand, contemplation of the landscape necessary led the audience to contemplate their relationship with God. In this view, Nature functioned solely as a reminder of God's presence.

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[114] Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting. Letter III," *The Crayon* 1 (31 January 1855): 66. Emphasis in original.

[115] Emerson, "Art," 278.

[116] Asher B. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting, Letter IV," *The Crayon* 1 (14 February 1855): 98.

[117] Asher B. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting, Letter II," *The Crayon* 1 (17 January 1855): 34-5.

Emerson's view, in contrast, allowed for and even promoted the subjective experience of viewing. His rejection of the picturesque reinforced the notion that because the landscape painting was linked intimately to the inner world of its creator, a standard set of rules could not dictate its creation. As he argued in *Nature*, the complicated formulations of style corrupted man by diminishing "his power to connect his thought with the proper symbol."[118] Without denying God's presence, or even restricting the ability of the artist to signal it through the proper choice of symbols, Emerson argued that the primary purpose of the landscape relied on its ability to direct the viewer inward. Under his subjective agenda, the imitation of natural forms was secondary in concern to recording the emotional and psychological experience associated with nature. While artist's grounded the outward appearance of a landscape painting in the physical world, this did not necessarily entail a verbatim description of that scenery. As Emerson stated in "The Transcendentalist": "[m]ind is the only reality, of which men and all other natures are better or worse reflectors."[119] In "The Poet," a lecture Emerson delivered in New York in March 1841, he asked the audience:

> Does happiness depend on "uninterrupted prosperity" as it called? Oh no, but on expression. Expression is prosperity. […] The love of nature, what is it, but that I find with wonder in the landscape certain high portraiture of my thoughts and emotions?[120]

Although Durand could approach this sentiment at times, he never embraced subjectivism with the same consistency or enthusiasm as Emerson. Durand believed that landscape, "becomes companionable, holding silent converse with the feelings,

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[118] Emerson, "Nature," 14.

[119] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," in *Essential Writings,* 83.

[120] Emerson, "The Poet," in *Selected Lectures,* 84-85.

playful or pensive," but he continued to stress the religious aspect of nature with terms like "elevated" and "purified" to describe the artist's progress.[121]

Throughout his series of marsh paintings, Heade drew upon the advice of Emerson for the subjective, humble, and low aspects of his imagery while looking to Durand and others for practical advice on painting. At times, the two offered startlingly similar advice, as when Durand noted that, "[t]he poet sees in nature more than mere matter of fact, yet he does not see more than is there, nor what another may see when he points it out."[122] But Heade resisted the impulse to paint what Durand referred to as "the Virgin charms of our native land" and "other forms of Nature yet spared from the pollutions of civilization," and focused instead on the humble, cultivated landscape promoted by the Transcendentalists.[123] Unlike many of his contemporaries who painted almost exclusively in the grand manner of the Hudson River School tradition, Heade produced a body of work that consciously resisted these trappings of subject and style. The artist's contemporaries took note of this; remarking upon his refusal to paint idealized landscapes. Critic James Jackson Jarves called Heade's paintings "realistic to a disagreeable degree."[124]

**Heade's New Life**

Martin Johnson Heade arrived in New York City in the fall of 1858 and took "one of the large studios on the ground floor" of the recently constructed Tenth Street Studio

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[121] Durand, "Letter IV," 98. For Durand's use of the terms "elevated" and "purified", see Durand, "Letter II," 34.

[122] Durand, "Letter IV," 98.

[123] Durand, " Letter II," 34-5.

[124] Jarves, *The Art-Idea,* 236.

Building.[125] Having spent the previous decade moving throughout the Midwest and New England, Heade seems to have felt that he was competent enough to make a living in the nation's art center. Although Stebbins has suggested that, "how [he] ended up in New York remains a mystery," (22) Heade had long been drawn to the city. In addition to having lived there briefly in 1843, Heade exhibited paintings in 1843 at the National Academy, in 1847 at the American Art Union, and in 1852 at the National Academy. For an aspiring landscape painter, New York's lively art scene offered a chance to see the latest trends and attract a premier clientele. Heade's letters reveal hints of a headstrong individuality that is consonant with Emerson's views on non-conformity. Writing to his friend John Russell Bartlett, Heade stated that although the room he took was "not desirable for most of [his fellow artists] because of its south light… that's precisely what I want." Though he confessed to Bartlett that he had "not yet got to work" because of "a vast deal to do in the way of fitting up," Heade concluded his letter with a note of optimism: "I feel as if I'd opened on a sort of new life!"[126]

In retrospect, Heade's "new life" seems to have meant a number of things: his move to New York, his newfound devotion to landscape painting, and a more Transcendalist-oriented subjective expressiveness in his imagery. Heade's initial awareness of Emerson appeared can be documented to the same period in which his painting shifts. In February 1858 he wrote a brief, anonymous statement critical of Emerson's poetry—which he called "the gammon of Emerson"—for the *Providence*

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[125] Martin Johnson Heade to John Russell Bartlett, 4 Nov. 1858, John Russell Bartlett Papers, John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island. Unless indicated, subsequent references to the correspondence of Heade and Bartlett comes from this repository. See also Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné,* 121.

[126] Martin Johnson Heade to John Russell Bartlett, 4 Nov. 1858, John Russell Bartlett Papers, John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island; see also Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné,* 121.

*Journal.*[127] Stebbins found this statement evidence of Heade's "definite tastes in poetry," but Heade's letters reveal an entirely different motivation.[128] In a letter to John Russell Bartlett dated July 28,1857, Heade described the desire to write "a light gossipy letter" for publication.[129] In December of that year, he described his writings for the *Journal* as "a bunch of helter-skelter stuff," and suggested that the editor (Bartlett's brother-in-law) had "full liberty to change, curtail, or totally destroy [the submission] without fear of offending me."[130] Additionally, less than a month before the publication of this statement, Heade restated his desire to submit writing of a "trifling, gossipy style."[131] Rather than displaying a disdain for Emerson, Heade was deliberately playing to a type of criticism that was becoming increasingly prominent throughout the 1850s. As Elizabeth Cayton suggested, "both literary and religious criticism continued to be produced, and, in fact, critics frequently evaluated [Emerson's] writing in either negative or decidedly mixed fashion."[132] Heade's familiarity with this type of criticism stemmed from his time in Cincinnati that overlapped with Emerson's lectures, as well as additional points of contact in New England.

Surprisingly, Emerson-bashing was a fairly popular trope that was employed by critics in the press and by the author's friends and supporters. Throughout the 1850s, while his popularity and image continued to rise, critics continually found his style

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[127] P.D. "Daily Journal. Correspondence of the Journal. Cotton Yarns." *Providence Journal,* February 5, 1858 as quoted in Stebbins *Catalogue Raisonné*, 7. Walter William Skeet, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language,* 2nd ed., (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1893), 227 defines gammon as "nonsense."

[128] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 7.

[129] Heade to Bartlett, 28 July 1857; also in Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné,* 18.

[130] Heade to Bartlett, 19 Dec. 1857; also in Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné,* 19.

[131] Heade to Bartlett 24 Jan 1858; also in Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné,* 19.

[132] Cayton, "An American Prophet," 603.

"epigrammatic and somewhat abrupt and disconnected," or as Heade would later state, "gammon."[133] Since popular perception regarded Emersonian Transcendentalism as murky and contradictory, critics even began to question the truthfulness of positive reviews. An anonymous reviewer for *The New Monthly Magazine* stated that a favorable review of Emerson was "balderdash" and asked, "[r]emembering all the extravagances of Boston Spiritualism, one might ask: Can anything good come out of that school of the prophets?"[134] Even Walt Whitman, who had famously remarked that Emerson brought him "to a boil," joined in the criticism. As he noted in *Specimen Days and Collect*:

> Emerson writes frequently in the atmosphere of this thought, and his books report one or two things from that very ocean and air, and more legibly address'd to our age and the American polity than by any man yet. But I will begin by scarifying him—thus proving that I am not insensible to his deepest lessons.[135]

Emersonian self-reliance, Whitman was keen to note, meant that even Emerson would not be immune to criticism. Thoreau had learned this lesson even earlier and, in spite of his admiration and respect for Emerson, refused to idolize him. Commenting on Emerson's poem *Ode to Beauty,* Thoreau told his friend "the tune is altogether unworthy of your thoughts. You slope too quickly into rhyme… It sounds like parody."[136] Thus, the viewpoint which Heade expressed in his brief commentary was typical of the time and mirrored the accepted manner of commenting on Emerson. As a critic in *The New*

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[133] Cayton, "An American Prophet," 611. See also *Daily Cincinnati Gazette*, 30 May 1850.

[134] Reprinted in "Kingsley's Phaethon," *The Living Age,* January 15, 1853, 108

[135] Walt Whitman, "Emerson's Books (The Shadows of Them)," *Specimen Days and Collect* (1882), (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 319.

[136] Quoted in F. O. Mattheisen, *The American Renaissance,* 53.

*Englander and Yale Review* noted: "[Emerson] seems to us not quite enough in earnest, except in his negations—not quite clear, except in his rejections."[137]

## Three Ways of Reading

Critical work on Heade has continually ignored the strange compositional choices Heade made throughout his career, preferring instead to emphasize the artist's "realism" as the dominant quality of his work.[138] Yet, by 1859, the year of Heade's first marsh painting *Marsh at Dawn* (fig. 1.9), he had already shed the traditional strategies of representation and began to emphasize an Emersonian subjectivism in his paintings. Like *Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay*, Heade's marsh paintings revel in expressing what Emerson called "unexpected relationships" and explored the dislocation of man from nature in visual terms. Heade used impossible relations of scale, illegible patterns of weather and the lack of meaningful connection between the elements in his paintings to signal this. Throughout his marsh series, the deliberate manner in which he endowed his images with subtle visual tension forms an unmistakable pattern that mirrors precisely the cultural criticism of the Transcendentalists. Using the marsh as a backdrop, Heade projected the anxieties of modernity onto the scenes, drawing from the sense of dislocation, division, and lack of social cohesion of which Emerson spoke. Not only does Heade's imagery closely align with Emerson's texts, but Heade's audience seems to have reacted to these images in manners promoted by the Transcendentalists.

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[137] "Art. VII—Emerson's English Traits," *New Englander and Yale Review,* (November 1856), 592.

[138] The genesis of the term seems to stem, ironically, from Jarves's comment that Heade was "realistic to disagreeable degree." See John I. H. Baur, "Early Studies in Light and Air by American Landscape Painters," *Brooklyn Museum Bulletin* 9 (Fall 1947): 1-9 for an early an extensive use of Jarves to frame the productions of Heade and Fitz Henry Lane. See also Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade* (1969), [16]: "he was a realist… he painted real places."

In *Nature* (1836), Emerson detailed three distinct ways of seeing beauty that form a useful guide to understanding how Heade's audience responded to his paintings. The natural world, Emerson felt, served "a nobler want of man… the love of beauty." Engagement with natural forms was a complex action composed of visual, spiritual, and intellectual elements. Emerson structured his section on beauty by leading the reader from the simplest form of appreciation—what he called "the simple perception of natural forms"—to the most complex function of nature, the "relation to thought." Art was a crucial part of the Transcendentalist method of viewing the world because, as Emerson noted, "[a] work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, in miniature."

On the most basic level, Emerson believed that "natural forms" offered audiences a chance to escape the crushing din of modernity. This restorative view of nature began the process of healing the schism and dislocation of self that Emerson found endemic to the age. In *Nature* he stated:

> … the simple perception of natural forms is a delight. […] To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone. The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street and sees the sky and the woods, and is a man again. In their eternal calm, he finds himself. The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon.[139]

Judging from the reviews, many of Heade's contemporaries seem to have reacted in precisely this manner, favoring the pleasurable formal qualities of his imagery over a deeper meaning. Critic Henry Tuckerman, for instance, stated that Heade, "especially succeeds in representing marsh-lands, with hay-ricks and the peculiar atmospheric effects thereof," and noted that, "none of our painters has a more refined sense of

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[139] Emerson, *Nature,* 9.

beauty, or a more delicate feeling for color."[140] A critic in London's *Art Journal* found that the "high praise" accorded one of Heade's paintings on display in London "depends mainly on its art merit; for the subject although original and startling, is not interesting."[141] Heade's choice of subjects, which typically rejected the grand views and vistas traditionally associated with landscape painting in favor of more humble settings, demonstrated a level of critical looking consonant with Emerson's dictum that "the invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common."[142]

In addition to the visual sumptuousness of formal qualities, Heade's landscapes also spoke to what Emerson called, "the presence of… the spiritual element."[143] For Transcendentalists, the manifestation of this element did not require the Baroque intensity of drama often associated with the sublime, but relied upon a more intimate and quietly personal relationship with the natural world. As Emerson stated in *Nature,* "[a]ll things are moral… [t]herefore is Nature ever the ally of Religion." James Jackson Jarves contrasted the effect of Heade's imagery with its "rich sun-glow of summer warmth," with "the dreary, mechanical intellectuality of [contemporaries Jasper Cropsey, Sontag, and Gignoux]." For those whose beliefs were consonant with Emerson's, or shared the more traditional Romanticism that Cole and Durand espoused, one level of meaning that the landscape contained was religious. As Emerson noted in *Nature*, "every change in vegetation from the first principle of growth in the eye of a leaf, to the tropical forest…

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[140] Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists,* 542-3.

[141] "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal* [London] n.s. 12 (July 1873): 213. Also quoted in Clara Erskine Clement and Laurence Hutton, *Artists of the Nineteenth Century and Their Works: a Handbook Containing Two Thousand and Fifty Biographical Sketches* (Boston: Houghton Osgood and Company, 1879), 340.

[142] Emerson, *Nature,* 38

[143] Emerson, *Nature,* 11.

shall hint or thunder to man the laws of right and wrong and echo the Ten Commandments."[144]

Emerson noted that the final way in which "the beauty of the world may be viewed… [is] as it becomes an object of the intellect."[145] Transcendentalism's promotion of the intellectual side of forms became the most significant way of ascribing meaning to the act of seeing. Unlike the grand, didactic views promoted by many American landscape painters in the mid 1830s, Emerson was urging a quiet, even introspective relationship to natural forms. He continually returned to this theme throughout his lecturing, refining his idea of an intellectual relationship with the world in which an audience would penetrate the forms of objects and understand them, instead, as symbols. He had started this discourse in *Nature* by noting:

> It is not words only that are emblematic; it is things which are emblematic. Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture.[146]

Five years later, in his essay "Intellect," Emerson made clearer the higher functions of this type of vision. A person "who is immersed in what concerns person or place cannot see the problem of existence. This is what the intellect always ponders. Nature shows all things formed and bound. The intellect pierces the form, overleaps the wall, detects intrinsic likeness between remote things and reduces all things into a few principles."[147] For Transcendentalists, intellect allowed forms to take on greater meanings since it

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[144] Emerson, *Nature,* 21.

[145] Emerson, *Nature,* 12.

[146] Emerson, *Nature,* 14

[147] Emerson, "Intellect," *Essays* (1841), in *Essential Writings,* 264-5.

directed the viewer inward, and enabled them to consider what Emerson called “the problem of existence.”

Heade’s depictions of marshes should be read on these three levels to understand how an audience versed in the principles of Transcendentalist vision would have seen them. In his first image in this series, *Marsh at Dawn,* Heade exhibited the hallmarks of visual tension that form an integral part of this series, yet this tension has been largely ignored by present-day scholarship. Instead, even those scholars who have attempted to relate Heade’s work to Transcendentalism have focused on Emerson’s first two ways of seeing: the formal and spiritual. The intellectual side of vision—arguably the most important since it differentiates Transcendentalism from Romanticism—has gone unnoticed. As Emerson made clear, the intellect always pondered “the problem of existence,” or what he had variously described as the markers of the age: dislocation and division. Intellect alone provided the ability to penetrate the world’s forms and discern nature’s inherent symbolism.

The format Heade chose for *Marsh at Dawn* was one that would eventually define virtually all of his marsh views. The vantage point is low and Heade emphasized the sweeping recession into space by placing the horizon line in the lower third of the canvas. Devoid of any framing elements to constrain the space, Heade’s depiction of this space actively subverted the conventions favored by his contemporaries and represents a departure from his earlier landscapes. On one level, the scene appears peaceful and represents Emerson’s belief that nature “is medicinal and restores [the] tone” of the weary body and mind. At the same time, the Romantic, warm glow of the sun likely served Heade’s audience as a token on God’s beneficence. The scene appears, at first glance, to represent what Emerson called “that eternal calm” of nature that restores the spirit. Yet in this painting, as he would in many others, Heade employed a scale for the figures that does not match the scale of the rest of the scene.

Heade's distortion of space, which begins precisely with his marsh paintings signals a new direction in his painting. Up to this point, his landscapes such as *Scene Along the Delaware River* continued to employ the Romantic painterly tropes favored by his contemporaries. Images that predate Heade's transformation from a conventional to an exceptional painter relied upon an internal logic to govern their use scale and give the images a sense of consistency.[148] In *Scene Along the Delaware River,* although figures are dwarfed by the forest setting, they relate to each other in an understandable fashion, as well as to the man-made elements in the scene like the quaint cottage across the river. Nature's grandeur is not disorienting or disturbing, but conforms to the standard rules that govern sentimental depictions at the time. *Marsh at Dawn,* however, presents a different type of spatial distortion in which the haystacks loom large over the figures. Heade has created a scene in which the figures no longer relate to their activity. In visual terms, Heade seems to be exploring Emerson's commentary that modernity has dislocated man from nature. As he stated in his essay *Nature,* "[man] no longer fills the veins and veinlets; he is shrunk to a drop. He sees that the structure still fits him, but fits him colossally."[149]

For most modern critics, the spatial dislocation that Heade consistently employed does not even factor into descriptions of the artist, and the visual tensions in his canvas have gone largely unnoticed. In part, the problem stems from the various terms that have been used to describe Heade's work and the general tendency to conflate "representational painting" and "realism."[150] Although Theodore Stebbins has argued

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[148] The use of exceptional here is distracting, though it is a commentary on his failure to conform, rather than on the quality of his works.

[149] Emerson, *Nature,* 37.

[150] Novak, "On Defining Luminism," in *American Light*, 23 is one of the few critics to attempt to explain this distinction though her conclusion that "categories of the real and ideal are reciprocally tempered," is somewhat murky.

that "superficial similarities to Surrealism, which was in vogue at the time" impacted the critical reception of Heade at the time of the artist's rediscovery, it is instructive to note how unwilling critics have been to cede the idea of realism in their descriptions of Heade's paintings.[151] In 1955, John I. H. Baur, for instance, believed that Heade's scenes were not merely realistic, but indeed real views. "There is evidence," he said, " [that Heade] took few liberties with nature and scarcely composed at all—except to choose, like a photographer, [his] position in the landscape and the extent of the view."[152] In 1969, Stebbins came to a similar conclusion: "He was a realist… as were the Hudson River School People: they all painted real places."[153] At the time of the canonical exhibition of Luminist works in 1980, art historian Lisa Fellows Andrus maintained that Heade's marsh scenes were "a compendium of the Luminist purpose: the portrayal of the particular facts of a specific place arranged to reveal universal truths."[154] Heade's images, however, have little to do with "particular facts" or "real places," and are rooted instead in the "intellectual" aspect of nature as a symbol that Emerson spoke of. The scholarly insistence on Heade's credentials as a realist is so pervasive that it has become the rule by which to measure the competence of his efforts. In effect, Heade's choice in the matter of his paintings has been erased thoroughly from the record.

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[151] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 108.

[152] John I. H. Baur Introduction to *Paintings by Martin J. Heade (1819-1904), Fitz Hugh Lane (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, 1854.* (New York: M. Knoedler and Company): 5.

[153] Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade*, (1969), [4].

[154] Andrus, "Design and Measurement in Luminist Art," in *American Light*, 47.

*Sunrise on the Marshes* (fig 1.10) is among the largest marsh scenes that Heade painted.[155] As with virtually all of his marsh views, there is a simplicity to the scene that engages the viewer through Emerson's first level of appreciation, by presenting the "eternal calm" of a natural scene. Through the misty, glowing sky, haystacks extend into the distance. As is typical in Heade's work, the perspective is rendered dramatically, and the view seems to extend back almost infinitely. Heade reinforced the spatial recession of the scene by building up the middle-ground of the marsh with thin, horizontal brushstrokes of muted color. This almost imperceptible patterning leads the eye back in carefully measured steps, before the marsh and mist merge in the distance. In the right-hand foreground, a young boy and an older, gray-haired man appear to celebrate the fish they have just landed, as their boat rests near the bank of a winding stream with a mirror-like surface. In the center foreground, a broken and disused fencepost leans lazily to one side. Its presence serves to remind the viewer that this scene is not one of untrammeled wilderness, nor vacant plains. Rather, Heade's setting is a land that has a long history of settlement and agricultural activity. Were it not for the inexplicable treatment of the cows surrounding the haystack furthest to the left (fig 1.11), the scene would be comforting, idyllic, and nostalgic.

Beginning with *Marsh at Dawn* in 1859, Heade employed the strategy of scale manipulation within his marsh scenes with startling regularity. This can be seen in numerous paintings including *Single Haystack in a Flat Marsh* (fig 1.12); *Haystacks on the Newburyport Meadows* (Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 1862); *Mare and Colt in a*

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[155] The measurements for the canvas are 26 3/4 by 50 1/4 inches. As Theodore Stebbins has noted, this image is closely related in size to *Haystacks on the Newburyport Marshes* (1862, Walters Art Gallery, 25 1/16 by 50 inches). Even more significant is that the same compositional strategies are evident in both works. *Duck Hunters in a Twilight Marsh* (1866, oil on canvas, 30 x 60 in., Vose Galleries, Boston) is the only larger scene known. See Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 235.

*Marsh* (Yale University Art Gallery, c. 1862-3); and *Sunset, Newburyport Meadows* (St Louis Art Museum, 1863). Despite the frequency of these spatial distortions, Stebbins assumed these were errors. Describing *Sunrise on the Marshes*, he noted that "the haystacks…seem impossibly large, towering over nearby figures and cattle, while the distance of the marsh seems vast; this problem of scale would be remedied in later marsh pictures."[156] However, the visual evidence of Heade's later marsh pictures contradicts this assertion.

Although Heade painted *Sunlight and Shadow: The Newbury Marshes* (fig 1.13) almost a decade after *Sunrise on the Marshes,* he still actively subverted the idea of rational space within this canvas. As before, the scene appears sweet and easy to understand at first glance. The pink-tinged clouds, the patches of sunlight, and tranquilly winding stream endow the image with the tokens of Romanticism that are a common feature in Heade's marsh paintings. Yet, once again, the scale of the two cows is difficult to reconcile with the size of the haystacks in the distance. Clearly, by their vertical placement within the composition, Heade intended to make the viewer aware that these are closer to the foreground than the large, centrally located haystack. Yet, if this is the case, these elements do not relate to each other in expected ways, since Heade's haystacks are towering and massive.

*Sunlight and Shadow* is important not only because of the relatively late date of the image, but because National Gallery of Art exhaustively examined the work before exhibiting it in 2004. Through infrared reflectography they determined that Heade "painted out a haystack in the middle of his canvas and then moved this prominent

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[156] Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 47.

element slightly forward and to the left."[157] In his essay on the image, Charles Brock attributed this move solely to formal concerns: "by bringing the haystack out of the shadow and into the sunlight [Heade] was better able to balance the composition and enrich the play of light and dark."[158] It is equally important to note that Heade did not correct the disparity of scale but heightened the sensation of tension by moving the haystack forward and emphasizing its size. Rather than establishing an internal consistency and ameliorating the sense of dislocation, Heade juxtaposed the haystack with the diminutive cows across the river—as he also had done in *Single Haystack in a Flat Marsh*—and heightened the visual drama of the image.

Whereas Stebbins has treated this strategy as a mistake, others have come to similar conclusions but cloaked their observations in more veiled language. Whenever Heade's images fail to conform to standard expectations, critics constantly attempt to dismiss Heade's active participation or choice in the matter. For instance, when scholar David Miller observed that Heade's paintings portray the contradictory elements of fleeting change and apparent stillness, he marginalized Heade's agency by depriving the artist of any choice in the matter. Citing Heade's brief association with the primitive painter and Quaker preacher, Edward Hicks, Miller believed that "this suspended animation is partly a vestige of Heade's early training as a folk painter…"[159] Barbara Novak had made similar claims when she found in Heade's *Thunder Storm* "a very

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[157] C[harles] B[rock], "[catalog entry for] Sunlight and Shadow: The Newbury Marshes," in *American Masters from Bingham to Eakins: The John Wilmerding Collection*, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2004), 74," in *American Masters from Bingham to Eakins*, 72-73. According to the essay, the repositioning of the haystack, a ghost of which is just visible to the naked eye, was confirmed by the use of infrared reflectography.

[158] Brock, "Sunlight and Shadow," 73.

[159] See David Cameron Miller, "Kindred Spirits: Martin Johnson Heade, Painter; Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, Poet; and the Identification with "Desert" Places," *American Quarterly,* 32:2 (Summer 1980): 181.

narrow line between the Luminist and folk artist."[160] Yet, it is difficult to believe that Heade would have experienced such difficulties since he had shed virtually all the markers of his primitive style by the late 1840s. Certainly none of his portraits from that period, or even the few landscapes he executed in the 1840s and early 1850s indicate that the representation of space or motion was an issue with which he struggled. The principal problem that Heade depicted continually throughout these scenes was the sense of dislocation of man from nature, which resulted in the fractured dislocation of man from himself. As Emerson had foretold in *Nature*, "the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become one maxim."[161]

Similar compositional strategies and layers of meaning pervade Heade's *Marshfield Meadows* (fig. 1.14). While the contents of the scene—the young boy fishing, the man raking hay and the workers in the field—engage a pre-industrial, agrarian lifestyle consonant with Romantic idealism, the relationship between the parts creates a visual tension. In subtle ways, this tension is forecast by the positioning of characters and props within the foreground. The man has his back turned to the boy, too involved in his work to make a connection. At first, the boat appears to belong to the boy and the man, but Heade's placement of this elements across the stream, unreachable by either man or boy, denies that possibility. Like the man and the boy, Heade's elements often share a relationship of proximity, but not of substantive connection. Heade's structuring of the relationships suggests a visual manifestation of Emerson's concerns about the "age of first person singular" in which "social sentiments are weak."[162]

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[160] Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century,* 104.

[161] Emerson, "The American Scholar," *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* (New York: Modern Library, 2000): 45-6.

[162] Emerson, "Spirit of the Times," 117.

*Marshfield Meadows* also shares the same sort of structural dissonance created by competing scales that we have previously noted, although the source of this tension is less visually prominent. Space appears to recede evenly and geometrically, marked off in easy intervals by the haystacks and strengthened by the horizontal brushwork of the middle ground. The scale of the figures within the composition likewise proceeds naturally and there is no tangible disturbance between the size of the foreground figures and the men loading hay onto a wagon in the middle ground. However, towards the center of the painting, just beyond the wagon, all rational space breaks down. It is here, in a small pool of sunlight, that Heade has included three workers and deliberately diminished their scale (fig. 1.15).

It is striking that these three figures, located almost precisely in the center of the canvas, have received no mention in critical literature. Heade emphasized this group by placing them in a pool of sunlight, the only one, in fact, on that side of the canvas. As if to draw further attention to this group, the foremost fencepost points directly to this area. As in other canvasses, Heade has suggested the rationality of his space with a strong orthogonal that aligns itself along significant forms and appears to mark off space evenly. In *Marshfield Meadows* a line connects the stake to which the boat is tied, the feet of the boy, the edge of the large haystack, the haystack diagonally behind the large one, and finally the point at which the last hill meets the marsh. Set against this appearance of measured order, Heade's introduction of a competing scale undermines the clarity of the scene and introduces an element of visual tension.

Heade's treatment of the cow, located on the right hand side of the canvas, is equally puzzling. Like so many elements in his paintings, it falls along a strongly implied diagonal. The subtle line begins at the bottom edge of the boat, continues through the top of the lower hole in the foreground fencepost, crosses the bent arm of the man raking (precisely at his elbow), and terminates at the base of the distant hill. Despite

having shed the primitive qualities that defined his work in the early 1840s, however, the cow is oddly flattened. Unlike the horse pulling the wagon of hay in the middle ground, Heade's cow lacks any sense of surrounding atmosphere. In addition, because of the cow's strong coloration and odd size, it seems to move to the surface of the canvas and does not convincingly recede into space. Furthermore, the positioning of this cow within the space is difficult to discern—it is unclear whether it is standing on the hill or just behind it.

Instead of directing the eye inward, towards the marsh's recession, this detail pulls it outward towards the edge of the canvas. This imbalance, along with the bright red shirt of the man raking and the strange band of sunlight next to him, counteract the pull of space back into the marsh. The strategy is similar to Heade's foreground figures in *Sunrise on the Marshes*, especially in the flattened characteristics of the boy holding the fish. Like *Sunrise on the Marshes, Marshfield Meadows* is a large, finely painted canvas.[163] Its size, and Heade's structuring of the elements along clear lines of connection throughout the canvas negate the possibility that Heade made accidents or mistakes that he refused—or was unable—to fix.

Heade's willingness to engage landscape as a subjective vehicle layered with personal symbolism is especially evident in the two strange images he painted in the early 1870s known as *Gremlin in Studio* (figs. 1.16 and 1.17). These are strange works which, like many of Heade's compositions, defy the conventions associated with landscape painting. They are part trompe l'oeil, part landscape. Each is a puzzling riddle in which Heade actively subverted rational spatial relationships. The setting for each is deceptively simple: in the upper part of the canvas, Heade depicted a painting of

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[163] *Marshfield Meadows* is substantially larger than most of Heade's marshes measures 17 ¾ by 44 inches.

a marsh scene propped up on a set of sawhorses. Water leaks out from the painted space and puddles onto the neutral colored ground below. Between the sawhorses Heade placed the "gremlin": a strange, rusty-brown, moon-faced stick figure. Standing with its knees bent, its hands placed firmly upon its thighs, the gremlin cocks its head and stares up at the painting.

Scholars have either ignored these works altogether, or dismissed the images' importance by attributing them to Heade's sense of humor. In his 1975 monograph on the artist, Theodore Stebbins found these works indicative "that one of [Heade's] great qualities was his sense of humor, as evidenced in the rather bad puns he exchanged over the years with Darley, Church and other correspondents."[164] Stebbins' interpretation of the painting reiterated the standard reading of the images that had been established as early as 1909. In an anonymous article entitled "Reminiscences of Some famous Artists," A. Cary Smith, described only as a "distinguished yacht designer and Naval Architect," offered this account:

> M. J. Heade, who occupied Church's room for a while, was painting a sunset—a meadow scene—and left a part of the canvas below the picture. When Heade went out Church at once finished the lower part. The water from the meadow was leaking down in every direction. The effect was immense.[165]

Although Heade's first biographer, Robert McIntyre believed the article's assertions, later scholars saw little evidence of Church's hand in the handling of paint or treatment of the

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[164] Stebbins, *Life and Works* (1975), 178. The idea is drawn directly from Heade's first biographer, Robert McIntyre, *Martin Johnson Heade,* 65-66. In Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, there is no mention of the images except to catalog them. See also Brock, "Sunlight and Shadow," 74. Brock states that in Gremlin in the Studio II, "[Heade] reveals explicitly and with great humor and wit the studio mechanics of his marsh paintings." There have been scholars who have tried to decipher these images, though the treatment of them has been too brief to truly penetrate the meaning of them. See for instance: Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, *Hudson River School: Masterworks from the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003): 126.

[165] "Reminiscences Of Some Famous Artists," *New York Herald,* 4 April 1909, Literary and Art Section, 3.

water.[166] It is striking that in Smith's early account, the humor is derived from the circumstances under which the painting was created rather than the visual evidence of the image. Without the knowledge of the prank that Church played, the image's humor is largely unintelligible. While present-day critics have preserved the work's alleged humor, they removed the context that this interpretation hinged upon.

Compounding the difficulties encountered in a critical exploration of this pair is the misleading and inaccurate descriptive language critics have used to describe the works. To begin with, even the title that has been assigned to these works is troubling, for when read against the visual evidence of the images, the notion of a "studio" falls apart. While it is impossible to discern precisely the location of the scene Heade painted, the uneven, earthen floor in both versions cannot be his studio in the Tenth Street building. Yet, based on the cast shadow of the painting, the recesses of light and dark and the play of light across the scene, there is some indication of an enclosed space with a single light source. The space that Heade depicts is a kind of intermediate area that contains rustic elements of nature and blends them with features from the cultivated interiors of civilized settlement. Despite the certainty implied by the title, the visual evidence in the pair of paintings underscores each work's illegibility.

In the same manner, the descriptive language employed to analyze other elements within the image has obfuscated the choices Heade made and diminished their impact. While the standard reading of these images has described the elements

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[166] See McIntyre, *Martin Johnson Heade,* 65-66. Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade* (1969), 13 dated the painting to the 1860s and took a more cautious approach to this story than McIntyre, noting, "there may be some grain of truth to this [attribution], though it seems unlikely considering the size and shape of the canvas… and the existence of a second, almost identical painting…" Heade's tenure at the Tenth Street Studio Building had two distinct phases. In the first, he had his own studio, though this lasted only from late 1858 into part of 1859. Later, from 1866 to 1879, Heade subleased Church's studio. See Annette Blaugrund, "The Tenth Street Studio Building," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1987), especially 151-55. See also Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Painted Sketch: American Impressions from Nature, 1830-1880* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1998), 70-71.

supporting the marsh painting as sawhorses, these are fictional elements. By the mid-1860s, sawhorses looked little like the ones he painted, resembling instead their modern counterparts much more closely. As C. J. Fay's patent drawing from 1864 demonstrates (fig. 1.18), by the end of the Civil War sawhorses had moving legs, pinned hinges, and machine-shaped forms.[167] By contrast, the sawhorses Heade depicted are deliberately rusticated, tokens of a rural, pre-industrial era rather than what his audience would have understood as typical, contemporary examples. Heade further emphasized the rustic character of his inventions by leaving the bark on each log prominently visible. Instead of folding, shaped legs, each "sawhorse" has four sticks emerging from its body with virtually no signs of mechanical refinement evident. What Heade painted were rusticated tokens of a sawhorse—symbols of a bygone, pre-industrial era—that spoke to the idea of self-reliance, Yankee ingenuity, and living off the land.

Like most of Heade's marsh paintings, both versions of *Gremlin* share visual ambiguities that heighten the illegibility of the space within the scene. The marsh painting in each image is propped precariously on the extreme end of the sawhorse in a virtually impossible manner. Despite the fact that these "paintings" push forward to the surface of the picture plane, Heade included a small strip of the floor in each version that further denies the legibility of space within the canvas. The water that leaks from the canvas falls back into space, hitting the ground at or behind the legs of the sawhorses before flowing out towards the viewer. The very conventions of viewership that allow for the rational interpretation of space in the marsh section of the paintings are contradicted by the "studio" spaces below. It becomes impossible to rectify the outward push of the marsh section with the deliberate pull of the studio sections as the rational, painted

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[167] United States Patent and Trade Office, *Patent No. 41912*, 15 March 1864, C. J. Fay, inventor.

space in the canvases collapse. In addition, Heade employed the same distortions of scale that had created visual tension in *Sunrise on the Marshes* and *Marsh at Dawn*. Instead of creating a space that "marked off distances in measured ratios," Heade employed a sense of scale that deliberately undermined attempts to rationalize this space and thus created a view that is decidedly unrealistic.[168]

Visually, the structure of the composition is revealing. In both examples of the work, Heade's placement of his signature deliberately preserves the fiction of "real space" versus the "painting" within each work. Instead of signing these images at the bottom of the canvas, Heade signed each in the lower corner of the marsh section. As such, Heade was engaging the strategies employed by trompe l'oeil painters and deliberately blurred the boundaries of the real and fictive spaces within his canvas. Although the entire canvas deviates from the 2:1 ratio of width to height prevalent throughout Heade's marsh paintings, the "painting" area in each of the versions precisely conforms to this ratio.[169] While critics have continually sought to dismiss these works as merely quirky humor, what emerges instead is a pattern of deliberate choices evident in the placement of the signatures; the size and position of each canvas; and the production of a second version.

The final, and perhaps most-perplexing, element in these paintings is the gremlin itself. Although linked visually to the sawhorses by both color and shape, the *Gremlin in the Studio* has no precedent in American art or in any of Heade's earlier work.

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[168] See Lisa Fellows Andrus, "Design and Measurement in Luminist Art," in *American Light,* 46. Andrus is following the lead of other scholars who have likewise emphasized the clarity of order in Heade's work that is at odds with the visual evidence. See also Barbara Novak, "On Defining Luminism," *American Light,* 23; and also Powell, "Luminism and the American Sublime," *American Light,* 83.

[169] See Stebbins *Life and Works* (1975), especially pp. 254-7. Virtually all the marshes Heade painted in this period (1871-75) have a ratio of about 2:1, though the exact measurements may be off slightly. Both of the *Gremlin* canvasses are much more square, with a width to height ratio of roughly 1.4:1.

Undeniably, though, the central feature, the mischievous, moon-faced stick figure, commands the viewer's attention. As the most blatant of Heade's ambiguities, the image of the gremlin taunts the viewer precisely because it cannot quite be discerned in any rational sense. Though it is painted and positioned clearly within the works, one is at a loss to reconcile its presence in these paintings. This tension—the realistic representation of the impossible—is one that Heade continually explored, if often in a subtler manner. Heade's strategies of representation—evident to such an extreme in both versions of *Gremlin in the Studio*—revel in the creation of what Emerson called "unexpected relationships."

**The Marsh as Metaphor**

While many artists followed the Romantic convention of representation that spoke of God in the landscape, Transcendental criticism focused more often on the treatment of landscape in painting as a symbol of the inner self. Emerson argued, "that in the healthy mind, the thought is not a barren thesis, but expands, varies, and recruits itself with relations to all nature, paints itself in wonderful symbols, appears in new men, in institutions, in social arrangements, in wood, in stone, in art, in books."[170] Sidney Lanier (1842-81), a Transcendentalist and poet, provided the most explicit link between the strategies of representation in the arts and the inner self of the artist in his posthumously published poem titled "Individuality:"

> Well-answered! -- O dear artists, ye
> -- Whether in forms of curve or hue
> Or tone your gospels be --
> Say wrong `This work is not of me,
> But God:' it is not true, it is not true.
>
> Awful is Art because 'tis free.

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[170] Emerson, "Tendencies and Duties," *Selected Lectures*, 140.

> The artist trembles o'er his plan
> Where men his Self must see.
> Who made a song or picture, he
> Did it, and not another, God nor man.[171]

Significantly, Lanier's poem presents a direct, written counterpart to Heade's work by projecting the inner struggle of identity onto the marsh. In *Hymns of Marshes* Lanier, like Heade, explored and chronicled the marshes throughout the various times and changing conditions of the day. Lanier, who regularly traveled to New York and other cities, may well have been familiar with Heade's work. For instance, he was in New York City for over a month in the spring of 1867, during which time Heade's *Sunset View of the Marshes Near Newburyport* was on display at Goupil's Gallery.[172]

Lanier's verse also demonstrates the manner in which Emersonian Transcendentalism was able to penetrate the popular consciousness through a variety of sources, not just direct connection. In proposing that an artist's work directly reflected the sense of self, Lanier echoed similar claims that Emerson had made in "Art":

> No man can quite emancipate himself from his age and country, or produce a model in which the education, the religion, the politics, usages and arts of his time will have no share… Above his will and out of his sight he is necessitated by the air he breathes and the idea on which he and his contemporaries live and toil, to share in the manner of his times…[173]

Not only did Emerson see in each work the reflection of its maker's era, but he viewed each man as "a finer and compacter landscape than the horizon figures…"[174] Transcendentalism, through various channels of promotion, gradually blurred the line

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[171] Sidney Lanier, "Individuality," in *Hymns of the Marshes* (New York: 1912): 35-37. For a biography of Lanier see Edward Mims, *Sidney Lanier* (New York and Cambridge, Mass.: 1906).

[172] See Stebbins, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 173 for Heade's exhibition at Goupil's in 1867.

[173] Emerson, "Art," *Essential Writings,* 275.

[174] Emerson, "Art," *Essential Writings,* 275.

between the creator and the object, and created an experience of viewing in which the individual concerns of the era were writ large upon the canvas.

Although Heade was among the first Americans to employ the salt-marsh as a personal emblem, he was not the only one to do so in his generation. Sidney Lanier's posthumously published poem "Individuality," demonstrates how the salt-marsh was transformed from an unpleasant, barren place into a spiritual ground upon which the individuality of the viewer could be written. Earlier in the century, critics found it unpleasant, if not septic, but by the end of the century the marsh had become picturesque. In large part, Heade's constant exhibition of marsh paintings created a means by which this space could be visualized as artistic and worthy of depiction. As one critic—who must have been familiar with Heade's work—noted:

> Very fascinating scenes are presented by those vast reaches of salt marsh lands that occur along our coast at the mouths of rivers. These are often rich in delightful pictures; especially at the time when they are dotted with hay-ricks and animated groups of laborers. One of the most charming objects to be seen in these regions is the hay-boat wending inland through tortuous channels, propelled by oars or by a picturesque square of weather-beaten sail. Such scenes present few discordant elements, and may almost be taken just as they are and wrought into beautiful designs.[175]

Although scholars have ignored Heade's impact on American art and preferred to see him as a loner, it is because of Heade's efforts that the marsh became a potent symbol for numerous artists in and around Newburyport such as Samuel Lancaster Gerry, Frank Thurlo, and Arthur Wesley Dow.

Heade's juxtaposition of idealized light and space with subtle tensions created by distortions of scale and ambiguous changes in weather form a visual counterpart to Emerson's cultural commentary. Rather than relating to Transcendentalism as a

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[175] Charles H. Moore, "Materials for Landscape Art in America," *Atlantic Monthly* 64 (November 1889): 675-76.

religious phenomenon, Heade employed it as a practical lens in which the fundamental crisis of the era—the splintered and dislocated self—became visible. He explored the condition of modernity with an Emersonian intellectual detachment, preferring to frame the crisis through imagery instead of embracing Thoreau's experimentalist lifestyle or Whitman's ebullient celebration. Heade's marsh paintings demonstrate one of the principle ways that Emersonian Transcendentalism filtered into the visual arts, by framing the imagery of what Emerson termed "the problem of existence."[176] By continually distorting space and time throughout his marsh series, Heade's work reinforced strongly what Emerson believed was the essential kernel of Transcendentalism: "[m]ind is the only reality."[177]

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[176] Emerson, "Intellect," *Essential Writings,* 264-5.

[177] Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," *Essential Writings,* 83.

## Inner Oceans: Albert Pinkham Ryder's Transcendental Journey

### Introduction / Argument

Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917), like Heade, has proved a source of puzzlement for both critics and admirers of his work (fig 2.1). As an artist, Ryder straddled the fence between modernity and conventionality; this tension is evident in the juxtaposition of his modern style and his thematic traditionalism. In his life, he failed to fit comfortably into the categories of either modern or traditional modes, and maintained the outward appearance of a recluse even while living in New York City, the most populated American metropolis of the time. Although he garnered a substantial amount of recognition in the press, these reviews often fail to describe his work and reinforce the impression that his paintings were a difficult subject for many of his contemporaries. Instead of characterizing, in a general way, the type of artist Ryder was, much less giving a precise description of his subject and style, reviewers sought refuge in vague descriptions of his work mired in generalities and filled with slippery language about the artist as "a modern colorist" or "poet in paint."[1] Much of the difficulty critics had in describing Ryder's work is due to his avoidance of narrative constructions. The subjectivism that critics either scorned or celebrated in Ryder's work from the early 1880s onward stemmed from his continual engagement with Transcendentalism as a method for artistic creation. Ryder's seascapes, with their avoidance of narrative, their compact size and their presentation of an essential struggle—man against the sea—

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[1] See, for example, Henry Eckford [Charles de Kay], "A Modern Colorist: Albert Pinkham Ryder," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 40:2 (June 1890): 250-59; also "Albert P. Ryder—A Poe of the Brush," *New York Press*, 16 December 1906; "A Poet's Painter," *Literary Digest* 54 (21 April 1917): 1164-66.

encapsulated the fundamental positions promoted by the Transcendentalists and manifest them visually.

Ryder—both as a personality and through his body of work—continues to defy the viewer's expectation(s) and refuses to fit securely into the visually-based categories of style that permeate scholarly assessments of the latter half of the nineteenth century.[2] In this sense, Ryder is linked to Heade not only by the influence of Transcendentalism upon his work, but also by the failure of critics, in both his time and ours, to find a suitable language through which to explore his body of work. Throughout this chapter, I argue that, like Heade, Ryder has proved a difficult subject for art historians because the genesis of his work relied predominately upon a process of creation that emerged from within, rather than through the appropriation of outward visual sources.[3] Both artists shared a common intellectual framework provided by Transcendentalists who stressed the importance of the personal and poetic over the mimetic trappings of style.

Yet, whereas Heade's engagement with Transcendentalism relied upon employing the visual markers of the philosophy at a reserved distance, Ryder lived and painted the essential tenets of the movement. Heade maintained an almost Emersonian reserve and translated the lexicon of the Transcendentalist critique of society into visual terms, without fully embracing the philosophy actively as a lifestyle. Ryder, on the other

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[2] Charles Henry Caffin, *The Story of American Painting: The Evolution of Painting in America From* (), 218-222, included a short essay on Ryder under "Examples of Independence." Caffin found that "the best way to estimate" Ryder's work was to "divest our minds for a moment of the habit of looking in a landscape for an intimate study of nature and estimate [the works]… simply as pictorial convention, a symphony of colour [sic] based upon nature *motif*, intended to affect us in a purely abstract way…." (218, emphasis original) Caffin argued that subjectivism was the best lens through which to understand Ryder's work and thought that the artist's literary suggestions (such as titling works *Jonah and the Whale, Siegfried and the Rhine Maidens, Temple of the Mind* and *The Flying Dutchman)* "confuse the situation."

[3] I do not dispute that Ryder employed visual sources but am focused instead on the textual sources that provided the artist the authority to explore subjectivism. For a detailed—if at times unconvincing—study of Ryder's formal sources, see Dorinda Evans, "Albert Pinkham Ryder's Use of Visual Sources," *Winterthur Portfolio* 21:1 (Spring 1986), 21-39.

hand, constructed an identity that fulfilled the essential qualities of great men as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman had each spelled them out. As a result, it is necessary to modify the manner by which modern scholars have framed Ryder's biography, not to dispute the events of his life but to reframe them.[4] Placing Ryder firmly along the continuum of Transcendentalism provides a lens through which to better understand the events of his life and restores his place in the intellectual and artistic traditions of the Northeast, instead of treating him as an outsider. In this light, New York City's "self-described recluse" was neither mad nor anti-social, but was a living embodiment of Transcendental idealism.

Ryder's most forceful visualization of Transcendentalism is evident in the series of seascapes he began to produce in the 1880s, precisely at the time when his mature style emerged. In shifting away from the Barbizon-inspired tonalism that had dominated his earlier work, Ryder began to actively engage Transcendental beliefs about art and developed a process of painting consonant with these beliefs. His involvement with the philosophy was manifest in a number of ways, each with its own importance to the artist, critics, and the viewing public. By rejecting the narrative structure or genre elements common to many of smaller seascapes by other artists from this period, Ryder changed the dynamics of viewing by squarely shifting the experience of the piece from an external

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[4] There are numerous sources that provide biographies of Ryder, and in most cases the basic facts of his life are not disputed. For the most recent monographs on the artist see, William Inness Homer and Lloyd Goodrich, *Albert Pinkham Ryder, Painter of Dreams* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1989) and Elizabeth Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989). Older monographs include, Lloyd Goodrich, *Albert P. Ryder* (New York: G. Brazillier, 1959); Frederick Price Newlin, *Ryder, A Study of Appreciation* (New York: W. E. Rudge, 1932); and Frederick Fairchild Sherman, *Albert Pinkham Ryder* (New York: 1920) [privately printed]. Ryder has figured prominently in several larger thematic studies including Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkley: Universoty of California Press, 2004); Barbara Novak, *Voyages of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 3-18.

construction—in which the objective elements of the narrative were essential to the experience—to an internal one, in which the subjective experience of the viewer was brought to the forefront. In a similar manner, his refusal to paint with the materials and techniques commonly used by his contemporaries likewise removed external standards of artistry and refocused attention on the subjective experience.

Not surprisingly, it is at this same time when critics began to have difficulty describing and evaluating his artistic productions. Of all his seascapes, *Toilers of the Sea* (fig. 2.2) is among the least well understood, in spite of—or perhaps because of—the voluminous attention it has received in scholarly writing. Yet, if it is possible to disentangle the painting from the numerous, and quite often erroneous myths that surround it, then Ryder's original intentions for the painting, and the manner by which audiences could have understood it, will become clearer. Like a number of Ryder's paintings, the various levels of meaning in *Toilers of the Sea* have been obscured by later critics' insistence on discussing the painting purely as a narrative work. The continued and unfounded belief that this work, originally untitled, was indebted to Victor Hugo's novel, *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* (1866) continues to hamper attempts at understanding Ryder's relation to aspects of American culture. Such attempts to impose a narrative structure on Ryder's work also highlight how even contemporary critics and scholars continue to have difficulty understanding the function of subjectivism.[5] .

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[5] Eric Mark Rosenberg, "Intricate Channels of Resemblance: Albert Pinkham Ryder and the Politics of Colorism," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1992), 165-67 asserts that critics dislike for the non-narrative structure, what he terms "the proliferation of the illegible in the work of Whitman, Fuller and Ryder," illustrated the mounting anxieties regarding "the spread of European radicalism" throughout the Unites States. Unfortunately, the evidence he brings to bear for this argument is based on his associations of figures and attitudes rather than demonstrated connections between these sometimes disparate points. For instance, he states that "Ryder's work was sufficiently close to Fuller's to suggest that Higginson would have been wary, by association, of the younger painter's similarities with Whitman." (167) A similar tendency seems to pervade his whole thesis: "I am concerned with how Ryder is very closely associated in *The Critic* in 1883 with a painter like Adolphe Monticelli; how Monticelli is compared in the *New York Times* in 1879 with the contemporary Roman-Spanish school of painting, whose most famous

Similarly, the general tendency to either dismiss Ryder's poetry by ignoring it outrightly or stressing a relationship only to the older generation of English Romantics has biased our view of the artist by stressing how he was out of step with modernity rather than a part of it.[6] Although some of Ryder's poetry is conventional, other poems are remarkably modern and ignore the traditional rhyming schemes and meters of the older generation of poets. In fact, while he was in New York in the early 1870s, Ryder's circle of friends expanded to include the Gilder and deKay families, both of whom immersed themselves in Transcendental culture and had strong connections to Walt Whitman.[7] It is almost certain that by this point Ryder was familiar with Whitman's poetry and he appears to have modeled his own compositions on Whitman's verse.[8] In

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practitioner, for us today, is Giovanni Boldini; how the Roman-Spanish school is labeled in 1878 in the *Atlantic Monthly* "rank communism" because of its failure to represent a recognizable scene or narrative; and how "rank communism" calls up the fact that no threat was more gravely feared by critics like [Charles] de Kay in the 1870s and the 1880s than the spread of the Paris Commune and its level of social unrest" (9).

[6] Ryder's poetry has been sporadically addressed by scholars since his death and these essays vary widely in scope and quality. See for instance "Part Two: An Estimation of His Poetry," in Sherman, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* 29-32. For an early, though fairly unscholarly account see Richard Braddock, "The Literary World of Ryder," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 33:971 (sixth series, January 1948): 47-54; Harry L. Carr, "The Comparison of Poetry and Painting: Whitman's Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking and Some Paintings of Albert Pinkham Ryder," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1959); Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism and the American Experience* (New York: 1969; second edition New York: 1979): esp. 212-23.

[7] Richard Watson Gilder and his wife Helena cultivated a circle of friends that reinforced the Transcendentalists' point(s) of view and frequently included the movement's prominent figures. The couple met Ralph Waldo Emerson in the summer of 1875 during a visit to Concord. In July 1875, Helena de Kay Gilder recorded in her journal that "Emerson—of all these people [we have met in Concord]—impressed us as the genuine child of genius. His profile was enchanting—the brow and nose and chin quite firm—the lips singularly delicate and with the most exquisite, refined and lovely expression." See, [Gilder, Richard Watson], *Letters of Richard Watson Gilder* ed. Rosamond Gilder, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916), 70. For a concise overview of this group of critics and their connections see Thayer Tolles, "Augustus Saint-Gaudens, His Critics, and the New School of American Sculpture, 1875-93," (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2003), esp. 30-45.

[8] Rosenberg, "Intricate Channels," suggests that an important link between Ryder and Whitman was what he terms "colorism… [which] functioned for late-nineteenth-century American audiences with much the same force as Impressionism did for a French art public at the same time."

addition, this circle of friends and influential critics like Sadakichi Hartmann strongly admired Whitman. I argue that following the death of the poet in 1892, they began to cultivate an image of Ryder that was consonant with Whitman's legacy.

I consider Ryder's relationship to Transcendentalism on a number of levels: his own knowledge and use of the philosophy in his painting, the influence of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman on his extant texts, and the manner in which influential critics applied the philosophy and its associated ideas to help fashion Ryder's public persona. As with Heade, similar strategies of adaptation are present, all of which need to be read against the sense of dislocation that emerged from the fragmentation of the self in order to be understood in a Transcendental context. Although the same thematic markers—a reverence for simplicity, a sense of rusticity, and the use of major Transcendental texts—are present, the use of them is slightly modified by Ryder. Unlike Heade, who maintained an almost Emersonian intellectual detachment in his adoption of Transcendentalism's vocabulary of cultural criticism, Ryder's relationship to the philosophy manifested itself more experientially, more in the manner of Thoreau and Whitman. Whereas Heade painted a world in which sense dislocation was made palpable by Transcendental visualization of the problem, Ryder's paintings depicted the inner journeys that the Transcendentalists posited as a solution to the fragmentation of the self.

## Toilers of the Sea

Ryder's small marine, known since its purchase at auction in 1915 as *Toilers of the Sea* has come to represent one of the most popular themes of his painting: the

moonlit marine.[9] As art historian Elizabeth Broun has noted, "collectors and critics have come to consider the moonlight marine as Ryder's personal emblem…for they are like conversations with the soul."[10] *Toilers* is a small painting, measuring just eleven and one-half by twelve inches. The popularity of this small canvas derives from a number of reasons: the prominence of the collection to which it belongs, the fact it served as a model for numerous forgeries, and the thematic concerns the small canvas expresses.[11] As in many of his paintings from the 1880s and later, Ryder built up areas in a thick impasto, enhancing the flatness of the canvas by the addition of these visible strokes upon the surface. A lone sailboat dominates the canvas. Its hull crashes into an oncoming wave and turns the water to white foam as it continues sailing. The wind is apparently strong, for the sail is fully distended and seems to be straining against the rigging. A single figure in the back of the boat seems intent on steering it home, towards

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[9] Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* 303 erroneously states that, "[t]he painting acquired its present title in 1884, its source being Victor Hugo's *Toilers of the Sea…"* In fact, both times it was exhibited in 1884 it was untitled. For a detailed discussion of the name change, see Doreen Bolger Burke, *American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Volume 3* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), 15-16. Curiously Zalesch, "Among the Writers," 162 misidentifies this work as *Moonlight Marine* (c. 1870-90, MMA). It is likewise puzzling that even though the painting was exhibited by March 1884, the Metropolitan continues to date it from 1880-1885. See for example the museum's website object page for the painting at: http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/viewOne.asp?dep=2&viewmode=1&item=15.32 [accessed 6 Oct 2007]. It is also likely the work was shown one additional time in the intervening years, and that in this instance it was again untitled. "Paintings at the Lotos Club," *New York Times*, 23 March 1894, notes "from the L. T. Williams [sic] collection comes a moonlit marine, with quaint sailing craft, by Albert P. Ryder, sea and sky very bold." Unlike many of the paintings in the review that are identified by title, this is one of the few in the article that is mentioned only by its description. If indeed this is the image known as *Toilers*, it is noteworthy that in the ten years since Williams owned it, the image had not acquired its present title. The exhibition was also mentioned in "Gallery and Studio," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 25 November 1894.

[10] Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 112.

[11] Not only was the image in the Metropolitan Museum of Art since 1915, but by 1930 it also had been discussed and published in numerous sources. See for instance *American Art Annual* 12 (1915), 296; *MMA Bulletin* 10 (April 1915), 81; *Catalog of the Loan Exhibition of Works by Albert Pinkham Ryder* (1918), illustrated no. 35; Frederick Fairchild Sherman, "The Marines of Albert P. Ryder," *Art in America* 8 (Dec. 1919): 31; Frederick Fairchild Sherman, *Albert Ryder*, 30, 53, 71; Walter de S. Beck, "Albert Pinkham Ryder: An Appreciation," *International Studio* 70 (April 1920): xlv (illustrated); H. E. Schnakenberg, "Albert P. Ryder," *Arts* 6 (October 1924): 274; F. Newlin Price "Albert Pinkham Ryder," *International Studio* 81 (July 1925): 287.

the full moon.[12] The general tonality of the canvas is muted and quiet; prosaic, detailed description is absent. Significantly, when the painting was shown in the Society of American Artists' 1884 Annual Exhibition, the image bore no title but was identified only by the following lines, which Ryder presumably composed:

> Neath the shifting skies,
> O'er the billowy foam,
> The hardy fisher flies
> To his island home.[13]

Although Ryder's verse is not inconsistent with Hugo's novel, there is very little in it that would specifically identify *Toilers of the Sea* as the source. Critics at the time—even those who understood the literary basis of Ryder's other works—did not mention the connection if they saw it. What Ryder instead identified by his inclusion of the verse is a type of primal experience: man in nature, surrounded by the elements.

Two of the themes that came to dominate Ryder's oeuvre, or at least the popular perception of his paintings, were moonlight and the seascape. One of the earliest commentators to pick up on this aspect of Ryder's work was the artist Marsden Hartley, whose admiration for Ryder's painting is well documented. Referring to the artist as "moon-ridden," Hartley emphasized the importance of the night sky as a subject and inspiration for Ryder.[14] Since Ryder's death, virtually all scholarship has noted these two themes and the power they seem to have held for the artist. Lloyd Goodrich, in the first

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[12] Although Burns, "Dirty Pictures," 229 finds "[t]wo barely visible figures crouch in the hull," many viewers, myself included, find only one.

[13] As Burke, *American Paintings,* 17 argued "the painting was probably at the Providence Art Club 1884," for although it was not listed in the catalog there is a partial exhibition label on the frame. It was certainly exhibited in 1884 at *Society of American Artists* "between nos. 68 and 69, untitled, lent by T. C. [probably I. T.] Williams prints poem..." The poem has been subsequently reprinted in many sources, see for instance Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 303; Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams*, 211.

[14] See Marsden Hartley, "A. P. Ryder: 'The Light that Never Was,'" in Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams*, 227-8.

modern reappraisal of the artist's work in 1947, described Ryder's canon as "the most profound sea poems in our art" and posited that, "[t]he sea, which has always meant so much to New England, haunted this transplanted New Englander."[15]

In terms of current Ryder scholarship, the sea and the night hold continue to provide viable avenues of exploration. Sarah Burns has recently characterized Ryder's work as evidence of a perpetuating Gothic undercurrent in nineteenth-century art. Her book, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America,* devotes an entire to chapter to Ryder, whom, she claims to be "an endearing, harmless and hopelessly romantic eccentric, living in his own land of dreams."[16] While she does not challenge the validity of Ryder's moniker, "the painter of dreams," Burns seeks to change this from a pastoral, romantic dreaminess into a darker, more disturbing exploration of the artist's psyche. "His "dreams,"" she states, "plumbed the perilous depths of the psyche where madness lurked, waiting for a chance to surface."[17] Burns connects *Toilers of the Sea* to a passage in Hugo's novel in which the French author speaks of "the mystery we term a dream;" "the darker side of human life, invisible reality;" and "those unknown abysses till now hidden in gloom." These phrases are used to strengthen her claim that Ryder was the misunderstood Romantic. Yet there is little to suggest in Ryder's work the type of menacing undercurrents she describes, and none of the contemporary reviews of his work suggested these darker impulses. Ryder's moonlit marine paintings are pensive and mysterious, even haunting in their ambiguity, but not frightening in either form or content.

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[15] Lloyd Goodrich, *Centenary Exhibition*, 18.

[16] Burns, "Dirty Pictures," 223.

[17] Burns, "Dirty Pictures," 223.

Like many scholars who have written on *Toilers,* Burns built her interpretation of the painting specifically upon her knowledge of Victor Hugo's novel. In a sense, the emotional and visual qualities she has described in the image are predicated upon her aligning these observations with her understanding of the book. That the image was untitled when Ryder exhibited it is a significant issue that needs to be addressed, for whether or not he based the image upon Hugo's work, he specifically chose to suppress any such literary connection in the minds of his audience by showing the work without a title. Reviewing the work in 1884, a critic for the *New York Times* found the painting, "in a curious scheme of color… and fantastic after a fashion of which he alone knows the secret."[18] A reviewer for *The New York Sun* was markedly less impressed, noting for instance "a weird gale of insidious brown glazing and thick portentous mastic," but still cited no connections to Hugo's novel.[19] Moreover, although the short verse that accompanied the piece does not exclude the possibility that the work is based upon this literary source, in no way does the visual imagery confirm it either. The problem with continuing the association of Ryder's painting with Hugo's novel is that this connection is that there is no substantiating evidence. For Burns, as it was for Burke, Broun, and others before her, the choice of name became an act with deliberate significance.

To date there has been no proof submitted which would substantiate the motivations that scholars have placed upon Ryder. The only thing known with certainty is that between 1884, when the painting was first exhibited, and 1915, when it appeared for sale as part of the Williams collection, the work acquired its present title.[20] The

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[18] "Society of Artists," *New York Times,* 25 May 1884, 9.

[19] *New York Sun,* 1 June 1884; also quoted in Burke, *American Paintings,* 16. Significantly, none of the reviews connected the work to Hugo. In addition to the reviews noted above see, *New York Daily Graphic*, 27 May 1884.

[20] The painting is listed as no. 73 in *Notable Collection of Valuable Paintings Formed by the Late Ichabod T. Williams, esq.,* held by the American Art Association, at the Plaza Hotel, 2-3

genesis of the myth that it was likely Ryder who added this title is found in Doreen Bolger Burke's essay on the panel which was published in 1980.[21] Although her suggestion has come to be taken as fact since its publication, it is useful to note the tentative nature with which she put forth her hypothesis. Burke posited that "since the painting was owned by one of Ryder's friends, it is likely that the artist either selected or approved the title it now bears."[22] Yet this idea, which allowed her to connect the Ryder painting to Hugo's novel, is not confirmed by the painting's exhibition history.

The first mention of the new title was in 1915, thirty-one years since the painting was last exhibited, at the estate sale of Ichabod T. Williams. Described in his obituary as "an extensive art collector," with a particular interest in Barbizon-style painting, Williams had died in New York City in 1899 at the age of seventy-five.[23] As there are no known records of the painting between the 1884 exhibition and the 1915 sale, it remains unclear when precisely the painting was named. Ryder's knowledge or approval, whether tacit or explicit, cannot be demonstrated. It is impossible to know whether indeed it was during Williams's lifetime that the painting was titled—which might lend credence to the idea that Ryder named the painting—or, if in the interim sixteen years between his 1899 death and the 1915 sale of his collection that the painting was named by, or on behalf of, Williams's estate. Significantly, none of the audience that recorded their impressions of the work suggested a connection between the novel and Ryder's canvas.

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February 1915. See also "A Maris painting Sold for $12,000," *The New York Times*, 5 February 1915 which records the sale of the painting (identified as *The Toilers of the Sea*) for $2,050 to "B. Burroughs."

[21] Burke, *American Paintings,* 15-16.

[22] Burke, *American Paintings,* 15.

[23] "Death List of a Day," *New York Times,* 3 March 1899.

For many in the viewing audience, Ryder's constant revisiting of the moonlit marine would have evoked strong associations with the cultural legacy of Transcendentalism that was particularly prominent in the Northeast. Although Romantic artists like Washington Allston (1779-1843) also used moonlight and the sea as subjects for their paintings, these tended to speak to traditional constructions of sublimity or evoke mood with a narrative device like bandits or lovers.[24] On the other hand, Transcendentalists used such images to evoke an inward journey of self-realization. As Whitman had noted in *Leaves of Grass,* "I am he that walks in the tender and growing night, / I call to the earth and sea half-held by night."[25] Later in the poem he argued specifically for the type of inner subjectivism that Ryder's paintings spoke to:

> Logic and Sermons never convince,
> The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.[26]

For an audience raised with Transcendentalism's legacy still fresh in their minds, the sea—and specifically the sea at night—became a metaphor through which to convey the type of inner journey necessary to preserve an integrated sense of self in a rapidly changing world. Nowhere was this metaphor more forcefully stated than in the

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[24] For a general overview of Romanticism see Kenneth Clark, *The Romantic Rebellion: Romantic versus Classic Art* (New York: Harper & Row,1973); for Romanticism in the United States, see: David C. Huntington, *Art and the Excited Spirit: American in the Romantic Period* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1972); Jay Bryan Wolf, *Romantic Re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). For a more recent argument, see Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *The Spirit and the Vision: The Influence of Christian Romanticism on the Development of 19th-Century American Art* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 2005).

[25] Walt Whitman, "[Song of Myself]," *Leaves of Grass* (1855), reprinted as Walt Whitman, *Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition* ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) lines 434-35. David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Random House, 1995), 591 provides a succinct summary of the problems in deciding among which of the numerous versions of *Leaves of Grass* released between 1855 and 1892 to quote from. Because my concern is with the ideas Whitman spoke of, rather than the precise language of the works, I have relied upon the 1855 edition unless otherwise indicated.

[26] Whitman, "[Song of Myself]," *Leaves of Grass,* lines 652-53.

conclusion of Thoreau's *Walden* where the author abandons virtually all references to the locale of the pond and instead highlights the human condition:

> What was the meaning of the South-Sea Exploring Expedition, with all its parade and expense, but an indirect recognition of the fact, that there are continents and seas in the moral world, to which every man is an isthmus or inlet, yet unexplored by him, but that it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone.[27]

Following the lead of Thoreau, Ryder's moonlit marine paintings read as the visual manifestation of these texts. On the one hand, these quiet, seemingly impenetrable seascapes promised the viewer a respite from the visual cacophony of the modern era and seemed to revel in the idea of a simple, vital struggle for existence. Read another way, these small paintings form the visual record of Ryder's own engagement with the Transcendental process and philosophy.[28]

The connections between Ryder and Transcendentalism have been mentioned for nearly one hundred years, and are evident as far back as the early part of the twentieth century in the writings of the artist Marsden Hartley.[29] In an unpublished manuscript titled *Mr. Montross Comes and Believes,* Hartley stated that, "when I learned that [Ryder] was from New England the same feeling came over me…as came out of

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[27] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854), reprinted in *Walden and Civil Disobedience,* Penguin Classics Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 369-70. The reference here is to the United States Exploring Expedition led by Charles Wilkes, which surveyed the Pacific Ocean from 1838-42. For a summary of the expedition see: Nathaniel Philbrick, *Sea of Glory: America's Voyage of Discovery, the U. S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-42* (New York: Viking, 2003).

[28] Charles Lewis Hind illustrates the propensity of critics to identify Ryder's work with the inner, true self: "it is intolerably difficult to paint the whole creditably unless one's nature flows deeply, and one lives exhaustively on the plane expressed by William Watson: When overarched by gorgeous night / I wave my trivial self away; / When all I was to all men's sight / Shares the erasure of the day; Then do I cast my cumbering load, / Then do I gain a sense of God." Charles Lewis Hind, *Art and I* (New York: John Lane Company, 1920), 73.

[29] The earliest association of Ryder with the Transcendentalists I have found is C[larence] Cook, "Fine Arts. Society of American Artists," *New York Herald* (12 April 1880), in which the critic compared Ryder to both Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau. See also Zalesch, "Among the Writers," 144 and 181 (note 90).

Emerson's *Essays* when they were first given to me—I felt as if I had read a page of the Bible in both cases."[30] Hartley's statement is noteworthy for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that, regardless of Ryder's intentions, there was a segment of his audience that was capable of reading these works through a Transcendentalist lens. Second, and more significantly, Hartley's comments reinforce the importance of Emerson's writings and the continued popularity of Transcendentalism in the post-Civil War intellectual environment.[31]

Modern scholarship, with the exception of Barbara Novak, has tended to downplay the effect of Transcendentalism in general, and more specifically on Ryder's painting.[32] Homer and Goodrich avoided the term "Transcendentalist" (and its variants) altogether, but briefly mentioned Emerson and Thoreau in passing.[33] Whitman fares somewhat better—mainly because of Ryder's penchant for poetry—but there is little in terms of critical analysis.[34] Elizabeth Broun sidestepped any lingering questions regarding Emerson and Thoreau's influence(s) altogether by avoiding any mention of the authors. She limited Transcendentalism's influence specifically by her comparison of

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[30] Quoted in Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams*, 100; and 244, n. 27.

[31] Ruth L. Bohan, *Looking Into Walt Whitman: American Art 1850-1920* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 144 makes a similar claim regarding the use of Hartley's admiration for Whitman: "The early career of painter and poet Marsden Hartley provides important access to the networks of diffusion that mediated Whitman's reception within the country's expanding modernist community." The same claim, I would argue, can (and should) be made regarding his access to and appreciation of Emerson. Though scholarship has tended to frame Transcendentalism exclusively as anti-modern, Hartley's and Ryder's appropriation of Emerson's texts should force a reconsideration of this thesis.

[32] Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century,* 211-220.

[33] See Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 112 and 100, respectively for mentions of Thoreau and Emerson.

[34] Curiously, Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 245 (note 24) cite two important instances of contemporary critics acknowledging a connection between Whitman and Ryder but never develop it beyond a mention. See *New York Sun* 29 March 1917, which referred to Ryder as "The Whitman of the Brush;" see also the obituary of Ryder in *New York Evening Journal,* 29 March 1917.

Ryder to Whitman, noting: "Whitman marked a transition from this world to the new culture that dominated the end of the century, but his roots in the transcendentalist past were stronger than Ryder's."[35] Yet, this is a misreading, both of Whitman's life and of Ryder's, whose early years in New Bedford and subsequent residence in New York explicitly linked him to Transcendental traditions and circles of friends.

## Repositioning Ryder

Albert Pinkham Ryder was born on March 19, 1847, in New Bedford, Massachusetts. "Pinkie," as he was affectionately called throughout his life, was the youngest of four children and the only member of his family born in New Bedford. Both of his parents came from New England families with deep roots that they traced back to the earliest settlements in Cape Cod.[36] His father, Alexander Gage Ryder, worked various jobs throughout the family's stay in New Bedford including hack driver, laborer, and custom's house officer.[37] By one account, he left the family shortly after Albert's birth and headed west to find gold where, despite failing to return with a fortune, he was

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[35] Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 141.

[36] Ryder's ancestry is mentioned in numerous texts, see, for instance Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 11; Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 8.

[37] Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 12, lists "laborer,… cab driver, or hackman, … boarding officer at the United States Customs House; and finally a dealer in prepared fuel—granulated wood," as Alexander Gage Ryder's occupations. Similarly Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 8, notes that he "moved from job to job, working as a hackman, boatman at the customhouse, boarding officer, and finally as a dealer in prepared fuel at Ryder's Granulated Wood Company. He may also have worked for a time as an undertaker's assistant." These assertions are confirmed by city directory and census information on Alexander Gage Ryder (often spelled "Rider"). See for instance, *The New Bedford Directory, Containing The City Register, A General Directory of the Citizens, and a Special Directory of Trades, Professions, & C.* (New Bedford: C. & A. Taber, 1849), 134 where he is listed as "hackman." By 1859 he was listed as a "Boarding Officer, Custom-house," see *The New Bedford Directory, Containing the City Register and a General Directory of the Citizens* (New Bedford: Charles Taber & Co., 1859), 149.

"distinguished for his nobility of character and high order of courage and decision."[38] Like many children in this period, Ryder completed schooling only through grammar school. One posthumous account attributed the decision to end his schooling to problems with his eyes, and problems with vision did indeed plague the artist throughout his life.[39] Prone to inflammation and ulceration, he frequently struggled not to strain his eyes through overuse or exposure to bright light.

In 1850, although New Bedford, with a population of less than 17,000, paled in comparison to larger metropolitan areas like New York, Boston, and Cincinnati, it nonetheless had a vibrant art scene.[40] The Ryder family lived in a house across the street from Albert Bierstadt's family, though there is no evidence to support the often-made claim that the young Ryder received any instruction from his famous neighbor.[41] Bierstadt had left New Bedford in 1850, living for a time in Boston and later Europe before returning in 1857. He remained in New Bedford until the spring of 1859—Ryder would have been barely twelve—before moving to New York City. It is worth noting, however, that the New Bedford Library had three Bierstadt paintings on display, and in

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[38] [C. G. B.], *Notes on Albert Pinkham Ryder obtained by C. G. B.*, (Albert Pinkham Ryder Collection, AAA); see also Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 12; also Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* 8 and 181.

[39] Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 12, attribute the quote to "[h]is sister-in-law, Mrs. Edward N. Ryder, [who] told a reporter after his death: "Albert was vaccinated when he was a boy, and the vaccine affected his eyes," and cite David M. Cheney, "New Bedford's Painter of Dreams," New Bedford *Sunday Standard*, 10 June 1917.

[40] According to the 1850 United States Census, the population of New Bedford was 16,443 which, when compared to that of New York City 515,547 (excluding Brooklyn) was rather minor. However, census records also indicate that New Bedford was ranked the 42nd most populous urban area at the time. See http://www.census.gov/population/documentation/twps0027/tab08.txt accessed October 15, 2007.

[41] The question of Bierstadt's influence on Ryder was raised as early as 1921 when Frank Jewett Mather Jr., suggested that "one or two pieces… suggest in their sirupy [sic] brownness the influence of Albert Bierstadt." See, Frank Jewett Mather Jr., "Albert Pinkham Ryder's Beginninings," *Art in America* 9 (April 1921): 120. For a recent refutation of this idea see Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 12.

1858 that artist organized an exhibition that brought 150 paintings by fifty artists into the community.[42] New Bedford was also home to a number of significant landscapists including William Allen Wall, William Bradford, Albert van Beest, and R. Swain Gifford.[43] As Homer and Goodrich have noted, "the city must have had a strong interest in art, for it was able to support three frame shops."[44]

Although today it is still remembered primarily as a whaling town, New Bedford also had strong ties to Transcendentalist culture. It was here that Emerson, upon returning from Europe in October 1833 and fresh from his first secular lecture titled "The Uses of Natural History," spent a month preaching in the Unitarian Church. While Emerson's position was temporary—he was filling in for his cousin Orville Dewey—his biographer Richardson notes that "between November 1833 and April 1834 Emerson spent almost three months [there]."[45] Ryder's family did not arrive until 1840, but New Bedford continued to have strong Transcendentalist associations throughout the 1840s and 1850s, both through direct connections to the Concord group and the strong Abolitionist presence in the town. During this time, the political leanings of the city seem to have shifted from a conservative acceptance of racial segregation to a more progressive view that demanded equality between the races. As Frederick Douglass

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[42] *Catalogue of the New Bedford Art Exhibtion Commencing July 1st, and closing August 7,* 1858, (New Bedford: Evening Standard Steam Press, 1858), reprinted in its entirety in Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), 304-05. See also, Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 14 where the number of works exhibited is erroneously cited as 125**;** for an early, succinct summary of Bierstadt's role in the planning of this exhibtion see Richard Shafer Trump, "The Life and Works of Albert Bierstadt," (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1963), 58-60. The exhibition was also reviewed in "Domestic Art Gossip**,"** *Crayon* 5:8 (August 1858): 237.

[43] Interestingly, William Wall may have been an early advocate of Transcendentalism in New Bedford since he knew Emerson fairly well. The two traveled throughout Italy, France and Rome together in the spring of 1833. See Richard C. Kugler, *William Allen Wall: An Artist of New Bedford* (New Bedford: Old Dartmouth Historical Society, 1978), 5.

[44] Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 14.

[45] Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 157.

later recalled, the shift in policy at New Bedford's Lyceum was largely due to the influence of Transcendentalists and abolitionists:

> For instance, though colored children attended the schools, and were treated kindly by their teachers, the New Bedford Lyceum refused till several years after my residence in that city to allow any colored person to attend the lectures delivered in its hall. Not until such men as Hon. Chas. Sumner, Theodore Parker, Ralph W. Emerson, and Horace Mann refused to lecture in their course while there was such a restriction was it abandoned.[46]

Founded in 1828, the Lyceum's conservative position towards racial equality was evident in its vote to exclude blacks from membership in 1845.[47] As a result of this vote, Emerson refused an invitation to lecture there—detailing his reasons in a letter of 17 November 1845—despite having appeared there twice the previous year.[48] Like many towns, New Bedford's Lyceum rivaled the town's churches in the claim of being an intellectual center and was one of the primary channels through which ideas and discourse circulated throughout the citizenry.

Ryder remained in New Bedford at least until 1868 and his residence there coincided with the height of the Transcendentalists' presence in the town. In part, this was due to a strong Lyceum that regularly attracted interesting speakers. Emerson was a regular lecturer throughout the 1850s and 1860s, lecturing on at least eighteen occasions during these two decades.[49] Even Thoreau, who was never as successful or

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[46] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Hartford, Conn.: Park Publishing Co., 1882; Scituate, Mass.: Digital Scanning, Inc., 2001), 261.

[47] For an early history of New Bedford that mentions the founding of the lyceum, see Daniel Ricketson, *The History of New Bedford, Bristol County, Massachusetts: Including a History of the Old Township of Dartmouth and the Present Townships of Westport, Dartmouth, and Fairhaven, from their Settlement to the Present Time* (New Beford, Mass: [the author], 1858), 324.

[48] William Charvat, "A Chronological List of Emerson's American Lecture Engagements," Bulletin of the New York Public Library 64 (September 1960): 505-506.

[49] For a thorough list of Emerson's lectures see William Charvat, "A Chronological List of Emerson's American Lecture Engagements, [parts I-V]" Bulletin of the New York Public Library

as popular a lecturer as Emerson, spoke at the town's Lyceum, delivering a lecture on 26 December 1854. In addition to the formal lectures at the Lyceum, New Bedford was attracting a population—both permanent and transitory—that often held ideas consonant with Emerson's own. Ellery Channing, a resident of Concord, nephew of the famous Unitarian Minister, friend of Emerson, and a poet in his own right, moved to New Bedford in February 1856 to assume the position of assistant editor of *The New Bedford Mercury*.[50] Following his initial lecture in the town, Thoreau, and later Channing, Emerson, and A. Bronson Alcott each became frequent visitors to the area.

In addition to the direct influence of Emerson and Thoreau, New Bedford's own Daniel Ricketson (1813-98) may have provided a source for Ryder's awareness of Transcendentalism during these formative years (fig 2.3).[51] Ricketson never achieved great fame or even more than modest popularity as a writer, yet he was well known throughout New Bedford and Concord, and regularly corresponded with Thoreau and later Emerson, A. Bronson Alcott, and Channing. In the mid 1840s, preceding Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond by a few years, Ricketson built what he termed his "shanty" at Brooklawn (fig. 2.4), three miles outside of New Bedford. Like Thoreau's cabin, Ricketson's shanty was designed to be a quiet place for meditation that was deliberately removed from the hustle and bustle of city life. Ricketson also was among the first

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(September 1960- January 1961); subsequently reprinted as William Charvat, *Emerson's American Lecture Engagements: A Chronological List* (New York: New York Public Library, 1961).

[50] Frederick T McGill, *Channing of Concord* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1967), 150. Regarding a terminal date for Channing's employment McGill states, "His employment [at *The New Bedford Mercury*] cannot be said to have terminated; it just tapered off." (154) Although he was at the paper as late as the Winter of 1858, by the Spring of the following year he no longer continued to work there.

[51] [Daniel Ricketson], *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends: Letters, Poems, Sketches, etc.,* ed. Anna Ricketson and Walton Ricketson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1902).

readers of *Walden,* and recorded in his journal that he purchased the book on 10 August 1854.[52] Two days later, on August 12th, Ricketson had finished the book and remarked in his journal that it was, "the most truly original one I have ever read," and later that it was, "a great source of comfort to me in reading."[53] Buoyed with enthusiasm for the book, he wrote to Thoreau that same day and remarked on "the great satisfaction [your book] has afforded me. Having always been a lover of Nature, in man, as well as in the material universe, I hail with pleasure every original production in literature which bears the stamp of a genuine and earnest love for the true philosophy of human life.—Such I assure you I esteem your book to be."[54] The letter was effusive in its praise and required Ricketson two days to finish.

Ricketson waited quite some time before Thoreau eventually responded—nearly two months later—on 1 October 1854. The letter arrived in New Bedford three days later and was, in comparison to Ricketson's initial letter, short and terse. In his journal, Ricketson noted: "received a letter from Henry D. Thoreau to-day in reply to mine to him. Letter hastily written and hardly satisfactory, evidently well meant though over cautious."[55] Undeterred by the lack of attention Thoreau had paid him, he wrote back

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[52] The first edition of *Walden* came out in August 1854. Ricketson appears to have purchased his copy in New Bedford.

[53] *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, 279-280. Ricketson's journal, which records the date he purchased *Walden* as well as his initial impressions of Thoreau, is excerpted in this text. Unless otherwise specified I have used this source for the background on Ricketson. Portions of the text are excerpted in Earl J. Dias, "Daniel Ricketson and Henry Thoreau," *The New England Quarterly* 26 (September 1953), 188-96, but the transcription is sloppily done with little attention paid to Ricketson's punctuation. Additionally, there are a number of words missing from Ricketson's text.

[54] Daniel Ricketson to Henry David Thoreau, 12 [and 13th] August 1854. Quoted in *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, 25. Ricketson's notation, "I wrote the above last evening," (see page 30) indicates the letter was written over the course of two days.

[55] Ricketson's journal entry (4 October 1854) as quoted in *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, 280. One wonders how carefully he had read Walden since Thoreau himself had stated, "For my part, I could easily do without the post-office. I think there are very few important communications made through it." (138)

within a week, addressing the letter to "Dear Mr. Walden," and confessing, "your short and hastily written note embarrasses me, and I hardly know whether it best or no to send what I have now written, and so conclude, whether this shall reach you or not."[56] He invited Thoreau—and even Thomas Cholmondoley, an English author who was then staying with Thoreau—out to New Bedford to "sally forth into the adjoining country—to the fine ponds in question and… other objects of interest."[57] Once again, Thoreau waited some time before responding, and seemed uncomfortable with the attention Ricketson paid him.[58] However, by early December Thoreau had lined up lectures in New Bedford and Nantucket, and accepted Ricketson's invitation. On Christmas Day, 1854, Thoreau made his first of many trips to the shanty and initiated an era of the Transcendentalists' presence in New Bedford.

The New Bedford of Ryder's youth—through Daniel Ricketson's reputation and the seemingly constant visits of Emerson, Alcott, Channing, and Thoreau—became a place in which a young man would have gained repeated exposure to the Transcendentalists and their ideas. As early as 1858, New Bedford's Free Public Library had copies of Emerson's *Nature* and *English Traits,* Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* and *Walden, or Life in the Woods,* as well as numerous writings from various members of the Channing family.[59] Coupled with the young painter's

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[56] DR to HDT 12 October 1854, in *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, 32-34.

[57] *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, 33

[58] Ricketson is unabashed in his admiration for Thoreau and insists upon a familiarity that is rather odd when one considers the two had never met. This seemed to accelerate after Thoreau's brief stay in New Bedford and on 9 January 1855 (in a letter addressed "Dear Walden") states: "You address me as Mr. Ricketson. What did I do while you were here to warrant so much deference… you should have addressed "Dear Brooklawn [the name of Ricketson's home]." Thoreau was warming up somewhat but still addressed the next letter (1 February 1855) "Dear Sir."

[59] See *Catalog of the Free Public Library, New Bedford, Mass*., (New Bedford: B. Lindsey, 1858), 100, 320 and 55 respectively.

interest in poetry and the general popularity of Emerson as the spokesman of this philosophy, these circumstances virtually assured more than just a passing knowledge of Transcendentalism. Yet, there is little in the artist's early work that necessarily suggests an immediate indebtedness to that philosophy. For Ryder, Transcendentalism remained a cultural touchstone, a philosophy that he could fall back upon when necessary, but not one that instantly dominated his life.

The critical period in Ryder's artistic development occurred in the late 1870s, when his paintings shed the obvious markers of his Barbizon style beginnings and moved into a moodier, "poetic" phase.[60] This earlier style, evident in works such as *Barnyard Scene* (fig 2.5), was characterized by loose brushwork and rural subjects. In New York, Ryder's circle of friends likely strengthened the exposure he had to Transcendentalist thought growing up in New Bedford. Beginning with his time at the National Academy of Design where he studied from 1870 to 1875, Ryder came in contact with individuals who would eventually aid his critical reception. Among the most important contacts he made during this time was Helena de Kay Gilder, who was also a student at the Academy.[61] Helena Gilder was the sister of Charles de Kay, who from 1876-1894 served as the art critic for the *New York Times*. She was also the wife of Richard Watson Gilder, a poet and writer who, along with his brother Joseph and sister

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[60] There is general consensus among scholars that Ryder's painting shifted sometime in the late 1870s. See for instance Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams*, 62-67; Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 80-110. For a notable exception to this idea of change see Rosenberg 30, who sees no change in Ryder's output and suggests that the images Ryder was exhibiting by the early 1880s were "not far removed from those he exhibited in 1873."

[61] Helena de Kay married Richard Watson Gilder on June 3, 1874. See Herbert F Smith, "Chronology," in *Richard Watson Gilder* (New York: Twayne, 1970), 12. For succinct biographies of Helena de Kay Gilder, Daniel Cottier and other members of the circle of people Ryder came into contact with during this period, see Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, "Dictionary of Architects, Artisans, Artists and Manufacturers," in Doreen Bolger Burke et al, *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 412-16 and 418-19. See also Thayer C. Tolles, "Helena de Kay Gilder: Her Role in the New Movement," (master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1990)

Jeanette, started the magazine *The Critic* in 1881.[62] Recalling the couple's friendship, Walt Whitman stated:

> … at a time when most everybody else in their set threw me down they were nobly and unhesitatingly hospitable. The Gilders were without pride and without shame—they just asked me along in the natural way. It was beautiful—beautiful. You know how at one time the church was an asylum for fugitives—the Church, God's right arm fending the innocent. I was such an innocent and the Gilders took me in.[63]

In addition to founding that magazine, Gilder had served as assistant editor at *Scribner's Monthly* and would later become editor of its successor, *The Century*. The Gilders and their circle were advocates of a new subjectivism in painting, which they felt was repressed by the National Academy. They were also active supporters of the Society of American Artists, which was formed in 1877.[64]

Ryder joined the Society of American Artists shortly after its founding and was admitted in time to participate in the first exhibition in March 1878. Although the Society presumably was formed in defense of progressive ideals, the range of painters was diverse and juxtaposed academic realists like Louis Comfort Tiffany alongside less conventional painters like John La Farge, Alexander Wyant, and Ryder. Ryder likely maintained a hospitable relationship with the National Academy—he was elected associate member in 1902 and a full academician in 1906—yet he showed almost

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[62] Whitman's involvement with the Gilder's began in June 1878 when he met Jeanette L. Gilder, who was then working for the *New York Herald*. See David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 528-29. For the friendship between Whitman and Gilder see Smith, *Richard Watson Gilder,* esp. 36 and 45-54.

[63] *Letters of Richard Watson Gilder*, ed. Rosamond Gilder (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 66. The same passage is quoted by Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* 25.

[64] Jennifer A. Martin Bienenstock, "The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists, 1877-1884," (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1983), 19-21 provides a fine factual summary of the Society's formation, though her arguments are often strained, especially regarding the radical versus conservative binary she establishes as the dominant lens to see the period through. See Zalesch, "Ryder among the Writers," esp. 19-30 for a convincing rebuttal of Bienenstock's thesis.

exclusively with the Society of American Artists in their early years from 1878 through 1881. During this time, Ryder received some favorable reviews in the press, but remained somewhat of an outsider and never seemed to engender a large following in the press or public. The few reviews of his early work suggest that critics had little idea of how to discuss his small paintings, many of which defied conventional expectations by resisting the comforting narrative that was a crucial part of traditional academic works.

**Critics and Criticism**

That Ryder always proved a sort of puzzle for critics is evident throughout virtually all of his career as is evidenced by the quality of language used to describe his work. As early as 1878, while his work was still transitioning to a point at which the narrative would cease to be present, hints of this critical tendency emerged.[65] A prescient critic in the *New York Times* (probably Charles de Kay), summed up the difficulty in apprehending Ryder's submission, *Moonlight:*

> Now look at No. 74, near-by—"Moonlight," by Albert Ryder—a queer little picture consisting of a part of a house, trees, a moon, a carriage and horse. There is a picture you come back to; that possesses a mysterious power; that stimulates the imagination. What does it mean?[66]

Even in an age where subjectivism was becoming an acceptable means with which to explore the inner life of the artist, the viewing public (and very often critics too) expected some sort of narrative point through which to connect with the painting. One year later, an anonymous critic in *The Critic* (perhaps Richard Gilder or his sister) echoed these sentiments. The response was generally positive, and the reviewer also gave insight into the general reception of Ryder's works: "[m]ost people do not know what to make of

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[65] Rosenberg, "Politics," 30 sees no change in Ryder's output and suggests that the images Ryder was exhibiting by the early 1880s were "not far removed from those he exhibited in 1873."

[66] "Pictures at the Loan Exhibition," *New York Times,* 25 Oct 1878.

Mr. Albert Ryder's mysterious pictures of horsemen following hounds through the twilight, of a woman in a wood with children. They have been much praised and much laughed at."[67] Generally, Ryder's works were praised for their treatment of color and laughed at for their lack of drawing skills.[68] It seems likely that this was a not too subtle code—since the Academy only taught drawing and avoided color theory—implying that Ryder's paintings were unrefined and somewhat amateurish by academic standards.[69]

Critics also became increasingly frustrated with the lack of narrative that Ryder's works were beginning to display. As the urge to discover the meaning of Ryder's works collided with the inscrutable visage they often presented to the audience, this conflict was exacerbated, especially for those who sought a didactic lesson rather than an inner experience. Some particularly prescient critics were able to articulate this phenomenon as it happened and provide exceptional insight into the dynamics of viewing Ryder's work for his contemporaries. As William C. Brownell stated in *Scribner's Monthly*: "[h]is pictures are marked by an almost contempt for form; they assume a hostility to the observer bent on "making them out ;" they seem to take it for granted that a picture is a simple rather than a complex thing, and to assert directly that a suggestive hint is as

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[67] "The Society of American Artists," *Scribner's Monthly* 18 (June 1879): 312.

[68] See for instance, "National Academy of Design" *New York Evening Post* (16 April 1884): 3, in which the reviewer describes Ryder's *Waste of Water is Their Field* as, "neither [made by] a good method nor tolerable execution. It is the type of a large class of painters who, sometimes from want of executive ability… avoids the study of nature…" The reviewer found that paintings like this became "as sensible as [the poems of] poets who dispense with grammar and reading." See also Zalesch, "Ryder among the Writers," 162-4.

[69] For a concise history of the National Academy see, Eliot Candee Clark, *History of the National Academy of Design* (New York: Columbia University, 1954). For a more general view of the importance of drawing to art instruction in the United States in the nineteenth century, see Henry Kiddle and Alexander J. Schem, eds., *The Cyclopædia of Education: A Dictionary of Information for the Use of Teachers, Schools Officers, Parents and Others Third Edition* (New York: E. Steiger & Co., 1883), 50-54.

good as a complete expression."[70] Writing about one of the many Ryder canvasses titled *Moonlight* (fig. 2.6), Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer stated, "It is one of these products which cannot be analyzed, which can only be felt, which perhaps will not be very strongly felt by eyes enamored of realities only, but which by poetry loving minds will be felt with extraordinary force."[71] The 'poetic' sensibility of Ryder was not merely an amorphous, fuzzy sense of feeling as much as a way to signal that his works resisted a narrative explanation.

The lack of concrete descriptors that seemed to define the critical reception of Ryder should not be taken as ambivalence towards the paintings, nor should it be seen as indication of incompetence, either on the part of the artist or critics. Rather, it is an indication of the function of the paintings, which were intended to serve as meditations more than descriptions. The major difficulty critics encountered when reviewing Ryder's paintings was directly related to the idea of "subject," which became a secondary concern as "mood" and "feeling" were elevated as a painting's primary features. As Ryder's subjectivism began to dominate the canvas, the traditional language of art criticism became irrelevant and ceased to properly function. No longer could a critic rely on subject or execution to convey to readers the force of the painting but, instead, needed to rethink the structure of language and observation to convey this different sense. In fact, a few critics at the time strove to peel back the layers of intent and described quite accurately the experience of viewing these works, as well as the

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[70] William C. Brownell, "The Younger Painters of America—First Paper," *Scribner's Monthly* 20 (May 1880): 10. I have left intact Brownell's spacing between punctuation. For Brownell and his involvement in the Gilder's circle, see Rosenberg, "Politics," 5.

[71] Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer, "Fine and Arts," *The Independent* 39 (19 May 1887): 6. The most comprehensive assessment of Van Rensselaer's life and career is Lois Dinnerstein, "Opulence and Ocular Delight, Splendor and Squalor: Critical Writings in Art and Architecture by Mariana Van Rensselaer," (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1979).

secondary nature of the subject. Describing Ryder's *A Waste of Waters is their Field* (fig. 2.7), John C. Van Dyke recalled:

> The light is dull, the figures and the boat mere suggestions, and the waves scarcely distinguishable, as I remember them; yet there is an indefinable something about the picture that draws us to it. It is not the painting of it, for that is hardly up to the average. I can scarcely describe what it is except by saying that the picture conveys to one the idea of loneliness, the weirdness, the wildness of a continued existence at sea amid storms and tempests and dangers innumerable…We forget the material parts of the picture after a time, yet the idea haunts us…The Painter holds us by his thought, his conception…[72]

Van Dyke was exceptionally qualified to articulate what he saw, as he was a respected scholar and author who in 1891 became the first Professor of Art History at Rutgers University. Throughout the following decade he authored numerous books on aesthetic appreciation and art theory, among them *Art for Art's Sake (1893),* and *Nature for its own Sake (1898)*. His inclusion of Ryder in *How to Judge a Picture* indicates that while the number of Ryder's admirers may have been fairly small, as some have contended, they were not simply motivated by elitist fears and class anxieties, but were comprised of a broad spectrum of the population. Other critics were equally as adamant as Van Dyke in acknowledging the feeling that Ryder's images evoked a sense of something deeper; something beyond the mere application of paint. Charles de Kay, writing as Henry Eckford, summed this sentiment up when he stated, "the picture may not be a great dramatic group, nor an historical fact, nor a remarkable view, nor even an actual landscape, and yet it holds one with some hardly explicable charm. As near to it as anything would be a lovely strain of music which refuses analysis, or a string of simple-

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[72] This appeared in John Charles Van Dyke, *How to Judge a Picture* (New York and Cincinnati: Chautauqua Press, 1888) and was excerpted in "Current Literature Review," *New Englander and Yale Review* 49 (August 1888): 134.

seeming words which forms by some enchantment a great little poem."[73] For many viewers, viewing a painting by Ryder became a type of Transcendentalist meditative exercise, a chance simultaneously to connect with the inner world of the artist and be moved in one's own sentiment by the feelings these paintings elicited.

In his doctoral dissertation *Ryder Among the Writers,* Saul Zalesch questioned the motivation of those who gave Ryder's work positive reviews and attempted to link it to class issues and the rise of the nouveau riche in New York City during the Gilded Age. Essentially, his argument hinges on two main points: disenfranchised patrician families like the Gilders and de Kays promoted Ryder's work in an attempt to recover in cultural capital what they lacked in physical capital, and that the perceived schism between the National Academy of Design and The Society of American Artists was inflated and exploited by these same critics. Unfortunately, while Zalesch's thorough research sheds crucial light on the connections and, at times, complete lack of hostility between the National Academy and the Society, his approach to Ryder and his virtual dismissal of subjective art weakens his argument. At times, it seems as though he struggles to understand how critics could have liked Ryder, especially with comments like: "the exact appeal of his paintings to his contemporaries is impossible to assess today because their surface appearance has changed drastically."[74] This is a particularly puzzling statement since some of Ryder's contemporaries left detailed accounts of their responses to his paintings.

Among the most verbose of Ryder's supporters was the critic Sadakichi Hartmann (1867-1944), who detailed a visit to the studio of Ryder in the first issue of his

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[73] Eckford, "A Modern Colorist," 254. The pseudonym he chose was that of his great-grandfather, a ship builder. See Tolles, "Augustus Saint-Gaudens," 33.

[74] Zalesch, "Ryder among the Writers," 1.

short-lived periodical *Art News,* and later reprinted it in his book, *A History of American Art*, first published in 1901.[75] Hartmann is an important lens through which to see Ryder because he consciously rejected the vague language employed by many of his peers, and sought to enlarge the discourse on Ryder. In devoting the final thirteen pages of the first volume to Ryder, he challenged the prevalent assumptions about the artist and sought a new language by which to describe him:

> His sense for colours…seems to me but an inferior quality. I fail to see that he is a great colourist; surely he is not a colourist in the sense of Titian, Delacroix, Turner, Makart, Bocklin or Chavannes—even La Farge and Newman are, in my opinion, by far better colourists; he is not even a tone painter like Michel, Whistler, or Maris; also, to Monticelli and Diaz he is related more in regard to method than colour; Ryder is a chiaroscurist, an *ideal* black-and-white artist, with a special aptitude for moonlight effects. His technique, reminding me of Blake's wood-cuts, is quite his own…[76]

Rather than repeating the preconceptions he held, Hartmann sought to probe each of these ideas, extracting from it the kernel of truth it contained while ridding these phrases of wanton inaccuracy. In comparison to de Kay's panegyric, Hartmann's language was specific and demonstrated an early attempt to understand how these paintings functioned.

For Hartman, the key to Ryder's paintings was to see beyond the surface of them and explore the psychological realms of the artist. Following the Transcendentalists' reasoning, Hartmann was mentally prepared to appreciate the larger symbolic—what Emerson termed "intellectual"—aspects of the images. "I anxiously lay in wait," he recalled, "for an opportunity to enter Ryder's individuality; to find a key to all its

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[75] Sadakichi Hartmann, "A Visit to the Studio of A. P. Ryder," *Art News* 1 (March 1897), 1-3; reprinted in Sadakichi Hartmann, *A History of American Art, Volume One,* (Boston: L. C. Page and Co., 1901): 312-13. For Hartmann's biography, see Jane Ann Calhoun Weaver, "Sadakichi Hartmann: Herald of Modernism in American Art," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1985).

[76] Hartmann, *History,* 312-13. In the abstract of her dissertation Weaver incorrectly identifies the date of this book as 1902.

treasures."[77] Oddly, rather than find "Ryder's individuality" in one of the small moonlit marines that engendered similar reactions from critics, Hartmann was drawn to a portrait:

> Looking about the room, I suddenly saw a life-size portrait gazing at me from a corner. The first glance told me that it was a man in United States uniform; after that I only saw the face: the tightened lips, *the eyes,* it was as if a soul were bursting from them, and then it seemed to me as if Ryder, his soul was steadily gazing at me. This portrait immediately gave me a keener insight into his artistic character than any other picture. Everything was sacrificed to express the radiance of the innermost, the most subtle and most intense expression of a human soul.[78]

Hartmann was among the first to realize that Ryder's paintings were poetic not only because they failed to include any narrative action, but also because they functioned for the artist as evidence of a process. For Hartmann, Ryder's paintings intensely revealed the artist's "character" and "soul." His comments reveal how, following the ideas Emerson had continually developed, each image became a symbol and signifier of the mind of its creator. Ryder's images were the very record of his inner turmoil, they revealed the tumultuous struggle to maintain a clear sense of self in a rapidly-changing world.

In many ways, Hartmann was the ideal person to understand Ryder's process, since he himself had such strong ties to Transcendental culture that may have predated his days in Philadelphia. Having come to the United States in 1882, Hartmann had begun working in Philadelphia and eventually began to write art reviews in various local

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[77] Hartmann, *History*, 312.

[78] Hartmann, *History,* 316. It is unclear precisely what image Hartmann saw, though Hartmann's description makes it seem like a military portrait. Though Ryder's portraiture is rare, his poetry of the period showed on at least one occasion that he found the war a fruitful subject for imagery. See Ryder's untitled poem ("From afar, from afar / From brass trumpets of war…") quoted in Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 318-20. The poem in question bears uncanny resemblances to Whitman's "Dirge for Two Veterans."

journals.[79] In November 1884, he made his first visit across the Delaware River to Camden, New Jersey, to visit the aging Walt Whitman. This visit—along with subsequent visits in the following months and years—formed the basis of his 1895 book *Conversations with Walt Whitman,* which detailed Hartmann's response to the poet and quoted some of Whitman's purported own statements as well.[80] Whitman's and Hartmann's discussions included poetry, politics, and even a memorable exchange on Emerson, but rarely painting. Hartmann's confession that he "cannot understand the worship of Emerson," was the basis for Whitman's striking assertion that, "[h]e [Emerson] is a deep thinker, though he had hardly any influence on me." Although Whitman quickly tempered this by adding, "people say so; maybe, without my knowledge," it remains as one of the stranger statements he made regarding Emerson.[81] Whether or not the statement is true, it is significant that Hartmann described "the worship of Emerson" as a current event, not an intellectual relic from the antebellum past. Well versed in both the philosophy of Emerson and the poetry of Whitman, Hartmann was predisposed to seek the sense of individualism and strong sense of self that he felt Ryder's art contained.

Many reviewers of Ryder's work expressed a keen sensitivity to the psychological aspects of his small, moonlit marine paintings. Lacking a narrative

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[79] Weaver, 9-28 details Hartmann's time in Philadelphia and Boston. It should not be dismissed that in many ways Hartmann's background contained a blend of influences (Asian and German) that Emerson had found compatible with Transcendentalism. See Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," esp. 85-6 for a detailed discussion of the links between German Idealism, Buddhist thought and Transcendentalism in the United States.

[80] Sadakichi Hartmann, *Conversations with Walt Whitman* (New York: E. P. Coby & Co., 1895).

[81] It is especially striking when juxtaposed next to Whitman's more famous description of Emerson: "I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil," that was quoted in J. T. Trowbridge, *My Own Story: With Recollections of Noted Persons,* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903): 367; also David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988): 24. It should be noted also that in 1854, Whitman wrote a manuscript titled "Emerson: An Appreciation" (fig. 2.8)

structure with which to guide the audience and avoiding the clear indicators of style that made his contemporaries easier to classify, these works became intensely personal meditations for both the artist and his audience. As the discourse of criticism began to change, critics started to avoid a formal or structural analysis of Ryder's work and focus instead what was known in psychology as the *Binnenleben*, or inner life. As William James astutely noted, "this inner personal tone is what we can't communicate or articulately describe to others, but the wraith and ghost of it, so to speak, is often what our friends and intimates feel as our most characteristic quality."[82] While critics have associated Ryder's avoidance of the narrative with dreaminess and poetic qualities, Ryder explicitly viewed his work as a journey. As he once wrote: "have you ever seen an inchworm crawl up a leaf or twig, and then clinging to the very end, revolve in the air, feeling for something to reach something? That's like me. I am trying to find something out there beyond the place on which I have a footing."[83]

Zalesch's dissertation is equally unconvincing in its treatment of the idea of "finish" for the paintings and the debate this engendered. His attempts to center the debates on Ryder and his art ignore the impact of J. M. W. Turner's work and the criticism that surrounded its exhibitions in the United States.[84] Turner's work, certainly more than that of Ryder, brought about debate over the merits of the modern painter versus the classical artist. Charles de Kay, Richard Watson Gilder, and Mariana

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[82] William James, "The Gospel of Relaxation," *The American 1890s: A Cultural Reader,* ed. Susan Harris Smith and Melanie Dawson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 263. This essay originally in *Scribner's Monthly* in April 1899.

[83] Goodrich*, Albert P. Ryder*, 24. See also E. P. Richardson, *Painting in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1956), 352.

[84] For a discussion of the reception of Turner's *Slave Ship* in New York City and the debate surrounding non-narrative imagery, see Rosenberg, "[Chapter 1] Contempt for Form: Nascent Colorism and Turner's Slave Ship in New York, 1873-1878," in Rosenberg "Politics," 11-81.

Griswold van Rensselaer did not, as Zalesch contends, develop a new methodology of criticism but rather chose sides in a discourse that had been established for over twenty-five years. Evidence of these opposing sides appeared throughout the press in the years between Emerson's essay *Art* and the emergence of Ryder as a painter of note. In 1855, for example, an anonymous critic in *Putnam's Magazine* who acknowledged the importance of Turner stated:

> …modern art, corresponding to the changes in the spirit of society, and in obedience to the greater spirituality and larger individual freedom of the age, has taken the form mainly of the subjective and spiritual arts, which are of equal dignity and worth with other arts, if not superior to them, while it has carried these to a degree of vigor and excellence which it would be idle to look for in antiquity or the middle ages.[85]

Ryder, like these critics, was a participant in this debate rather than a creator of it. Zalesch's account of this era is misleading: in his determination to prove that "critics used Ryder as a primary vehicle for restructuring the critical debate," he tells but part of the story.[86] The assumptions he makes about "prevailing pictorial expectations" are mired in the misunderstanding that Ryder and these critics were engaging in a new, if not revolutionary, discourse.[87] In fact, Ryder and these critics were active participants on a clear side of an established line of thought that is easily traceable from Turner, through Emerson, to the supporters of the Barbizon school and into the 1870s.

Yet, as virtually all critics—regardless of what side of the debate they chose—acknowledged that one standard way to "read" a painting during Ryder's time was to establish a link to a known story or event, and examine how the artist executed this

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[85] "The Late Horace Binney Wallace," rev. of, *Art, Scenery and Philosophy in Europe* by Horace Binney Wallace, *Putnam's: a Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* 6 (September 1855): 275.

[86] Zalesch, "Ryder among the Writers," 109.

[87] Zalesch, "Ryder among the Writers," 109.

scene.[88] The narrative impulse of stories was often associated with the notion of "finish," as Charles de Kay alluded to in an editorial for the *New York Times* in 1878. Summarizing the difficulty some critics would later have with Ryder's paintings, de Kay noted:

> [t]here is something definite to say about a picture which is elaborately finished… there is no doubt whatever that the artist has worked a long , long while over his canvas…. We need not vex our minds with the question as to whether the artist meant anything by his picture, or has brought out the idea which he obviously intended.[89]

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, in light of the desire of Ryder's audience to "understand" or "analyze" his works, that narrative references would be attached to his works in the same manner as happened in *Toilers of the Sea.* As Elizabeth Broun has noted, Ryder's patrons exhibited his works with titles that differed from the ones they had at the time of their purchase on at least two additional occasions. As in the case of *Toilers,* neither of these works appear to have been renamed by the artist.

As early as 1905, fully ten years before the sale of *Toilers,* William T. Evans lent a painting that has since been known as *With Sloping Mast and Dipping Prow* (fig. 2.9), a phrase taken from Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner.*[90] Known originally as

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[88] Rosenberg, "Politics," 33 asserts that "what colorism threatened most in its complication of narrative representation was the clarity of the heroic male figure as representational anchor." His argument suggests that this threat became so pervasive that artists like Thomas Eakins responded by creating images such as Eakins's *The Gross Clinic* because "[t]he only realm left [for heroic action] was that of science." (34) However, in his assessment of the image's critical reception Rosenberg never adequately addresses why so many critics found fault with the image, nor why—if indeed it was such a heroic representation—the painting was rejected for display in the Fine Arts section of the 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia. In the end, he speculates that the painting was relegated to the medical section of the exposition since the image "could invoke such recently denigrated figures such as Custer, Cook or Grant" (37). See Henry Adams, *Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of An American* Artist (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 215-41 for a detailed rebuttal of the "heroic" nature of the painting and a broader interpretation of critical reactions to the work.

[89] "A Plea for Finish in Art," *New York Times* (17 March 1878): 6. See also Zalesch, "Ryder among the Writers," 214-15, who identifies the author as Charles de Kay.

[90] Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 310-11.

*Moonlight,* the painting's supposed connections with Coleridge's poem stretch the credulity of the visual evidence. Coleridge's poem, and in particular the passages from which the title was borrowed, is fraught with a sense of anxiety and turmoil that seems unrelated to the painting's stasis.[91] There is a deliberate lack of clear action, and it is difficult to tell what, if anything, the boatmen might be engaged in. Although Broun found the painting's mood "ominous," there is little visual evidence to support her interpretation or that it matches the artist's intention. The sailors do not appear to be in imminent danger: the wave breaks below the bow and, significantly, the sails appear in good condition.[92]

None of the elements that would definitively connect Ryder's painting to Coleridge's poem—the albatross, the "mist and snow," or "ice, mast-high… as green as emerald"—are present. As in many of his paintings, Ryder suppressed the details to such a degree that specific identification becomes impossible. As a result, the audience might be able to discern a mood, but this is a visual experience rather than a contextual one based upon the knowledge of a story or event. It is this lack of narrative and concrete identifiers that seems to have promoted both the use of vague descriptors—like "poetic" and "dreamy"—and strengthened the desire to place a narrative construction upon the pieces. The urge to contextualize the image within the confines of an event or specific passage—and the texts chosen for the task—speaks more to the difficulty associated with viewing a highly subjective work than it does to the intentions of the artist.

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[91] Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 311 puzzlingly asserts that, "Ryder's painting takes its mood from the narrative but not from Coleridge's ominous message."

[92] In other paintings, such as *Moonlight* (1887, oil on mahogany panel cradled, 15 7/8 x 17 3/4 in., Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC), Ryder builds a sense of tension by giving the vessel tattered sails and no clear means of control. None of these features are present here however and the fate of the sailor seems less pessimistic and much more wide-open to a variety of interpretations.

The same fate has befallen Ryder's painting *The Sea,* which was given to the Smithsonian American Art Museum (then called the National Gallery of Art) in 1929 as *Lord Ullin's Daughter* (fig. 2.10)[93] As Broun noted, the collector John Gellatly (1852-1931) was the first to provide a textual source for this painting, athough, in this case, it was twelve years after the artist's death and, as a result, impossible to verify.[94] Her assertion that "[a]lthough the figures in the boat can be only vaguely perceived, autoradiographs reveal that one figure is falling backward with his legs flying up and his arms out, knocked off his seat by the wave at left crashing against the boat," is indicative of the problems these later literary associations are capable of causing: they reframe our understanding of the picture..[95] Whether or not Gellatly's interpretation of the painting was correct, Broun's description is predicated on her knowledge of the text more than a visual analysis of the canvas. Indeed, in this example, when the text is weighed against the visual evidence of the painting, the disparity between the two strongly suggests that Gellatly's attribution is incorrect.

It is particularly useful to notice precisely how Broun moves from "figures... that can be only vaguely perceived," to a gender specific identification (male) of the figure in the back of the boat.[96] It is only because Gellatly made the association with the Thomas Campbell's same-titled poem that Broun can identify the figure being knocked about by the waves as male. For the painting to fit the poem—or, in order to justify a narrative structure being imposed upon the painting—the figures shown must correspond to those Campbell mentioned. None of this is indicated visually either in the present condition of

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[93] For information on the bequest see Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 247; see also Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams*, 94.

[94] Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 247.

[95] Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* 247-48.

[96] Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 247-48.

the painting, nor in the autoradiograph, the only way Broun can make this assertion comes from the poem itself. Yet, in spite of having the text of the poem , Broun's interpretation is doubly problematic as it relies on a misreading of the visual evidence of the painting and a textual misinterpretation of the poem. Her observation that, "[t]he steeply angled boat crashing against the waves in *Toilers of the Sea* recurs in *Lord Ullin's Daughter* (cat. 32), which presents a similar theme of lovers eloping by sea," illustrates how invasive these narrative impositions can become.

None of the details that Ryder included in his painting appear to bear any relation to the poem's imagery. The sky is bright and blue, a far cry from Campbell's repeated descriptions of "drearier" night, "raging of the skies," and "tempest[uous]" conditions. That there appear to be only two figures in the boat is likewise troubling, for Campbell's poem is explicit: in addition to Lord Ullin's daughter and her lover (identified only as "the chief of Ulva's isle") there was a third figure present. Campbell describes him only as "the hardy Highland wight," but it is this character who drives the boat, telling the fleeing lover's that, "though the waves are raging white, / I'll row you o'er the ferry."[97] Nor can the scene Ryder depicted be that of the following party since, according to Campbell, Lord Ullin followed the initial group closely. In his vain attempt to rescue his daughter, he crossed "through storm and shade," only to discover that his daughter, along with the others in the boat, had drowned. Clearly Ryder's scene cannot was not based upon Campbell's poem. More likely, the later title of the work reflects the efforts of Gellatly or another critic to attach a narrative meaning to the composition.

In the series of moonlit marine paintings he executed, Ryder actively subverted the narrative impulse by refusing to give audiences a point to which they could attach a

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[97] All quotes of this poem are taken from: Thomas Campbell, "Lord Ullin's Daughter," in *The Harvard Classics English Poetry: Volume II From Collins to Fitzgerald*, ed. Charles W. Elliot, LLD (New York: P. F. Collier and Son: 1910): 792-4

literary reference. One strategy that he continually employed was to give the paintings only the most general of titles, such as *Moonlight* or *The Sea,* when he bothered even to title them at all. Whether or not these images began with an impulse from a narrative work, Ryder's refusal to specify that for the viewer—and indeed the softness and indistinguishable forms he favored—virtually assured that any narrative origins for the work would remain hidden from the audience. It is in these works that the Transcendental experience is the most evident, for the images reflect an inner voyage which extended beyond the mere observation of sensation that Romantic painters like Allston had promoted and spoke more directly to a humble and unique inner experience.

**Rustication**

One of the common strategies employed by those nineteenth-century artists seeking to engage the Transcendentalist legacy was a deliberate rustication of elements. For Heade, this strategy manifested itself most noticeably through the fictionalized saw horses he created for each of his *Gremlin in the Studio* paintings, and also through his willingness to adopt "primitive" painting strategies. For Ryder, rustication offered a way to remove the artifice of the process of painting and serve directly as a conduit of subjective expression. Although Homer and Goodrich have posited that Ryder, "intuitively adopted the governing principle of much late-nineteenth-century painting from James McNeill Whistler through the French Symbolists: that painting is artifice, that it can never fully duplicate what the eye sees," this parallel is problematic.[98] For Whistler, "art for art's sake" divorced the necessity of meaning from paintings and allowed for the primacy of painting as an aesthetic, even decorative, exercise to emerge. By contrast, Ryder's work, although at times decorative, seems to

[98] Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 20.

be more concerned with an inner spiritual journey than simply outward appearances or formal strategies. In spite of his academic training, Ryder increasingly moved further away from traditional models, both in terms of the formal aspects of his creations and also in regard to the narrative and didactic function of imagery. Beginning in the early 1880s, he began to strip away both the visual and cultural signifiers of narrative that had long been an established part of exhibitions. This was especially true in his moonlit marine images, many of which were untitled, and virtually all of which lacked a clear visual narrative.

For Ryder, freeing himself from the conventional strategies of representation was linked to his rejection of the conventional techniques of painting. In a much quoted passage from "Paragraphs from the Studio of a Recluse," the moment is presented as inspirational and direct, but the Transcendental basis for experience is often diminished by scholars who excise crucial parts of quotation's beginning.[99] In fact, Ryder's process is described similarly to that of Thoreau's voyage to *Walden*, in which he returns to nature as a restorative source of inspiration and strength:

> Nature is a teacher who never deceives. When I grew weary with the futile struggle to imitate the canvases of the past, I went out into the fields, determined to serve nature as faithfully as I had served art.

While in these fields Ryder comes to the realization that art must be a creative experience, rather than simply mimetic endeavor. Even the greatest painting he was capable of became "coarse and crude" and "infinitely below the standard" of nature. It is only at the point when Ryder is willing to cast aside the academic training he had sought out when he came New York that his work becomes important. The climax of the story is when Ryder inverts the standard practice of art and "threw [his] brushes aside," finding them "too small for the work in hand" and chooses to work with his palette knife and "big

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[99] Rosenberg, "Politics," 219; Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* 20-21.

chunks of pure, moist color." Ryder's embrace of the rustic manifest itself as a return to nature and eschewal of academic painting in favor of direct emotional experience. His voyage to the fields, both literally and figuratively, like Thoreau's sojourn to Walden Pond, offered a chance to remove the artifice of modern life and live vitally.

The description of Ryder's revelation that afternoon details a method of painting that aligns the artist with God-like qualities of creative power. Not only does Ryder capture a vision of nature he is finally satisfied with, but he "saw nature springing to life upon [his] dead canvas." In language reminiscent of God's assessment of the creation of the world, he looks down and "saw that it was good and clean and strong… it was vibrating with the thrill of new creation."[100] Ryder's reaction—he "raced around the fields like a colt let loose, and literally bellowed for joy"—captures the sense of reckless abandon that was impossible to act upon in a cultured, modern society. His process becomes a combination of Transcendental and religious sources in which both the *Book of Genesis* and Thoreau's quiet journey inward are punctuated by Whitman's "barbaric yawp."[101] For Ryder's audience, these references would have still had resonance, as one contemporary study of American Literature made clear:

> It is a far cry from all this sweet, dainty, and somewhat irresolute music of Manhattan's present-day singers to the "barbaric yawp" of WALT WHITMAN, a looming, rugged figure still on trial before the court of critics. In 1855 there broke upon the world a sound that impressed most hearers as a bestial bellow… Hitherto its poets, Harvard professors, Concord sages, graceful southerners, polished Philadelphians and New Yorkers, had written like the pure-hearted, cultivated gentleman they were, cherishing those chivalries and holy privacies which are the slowly

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[100] In the King James edition of the Book of Genesis, the text "and God Saw that it was good," appears five times in the first chapter. See Genesis 1:10; 1:12, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25.

[101] In the closing lines of "Song of Myself" (1855), Whitman wrote: "I too am not a bit tamed…. I too am untranslatable, / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." See Whitman, ["Song of Myself"], *Leaves of Grass* (1855), lines 1322-23.

> ripened fruit of civilization…. Emerson and Thoreau were the foremost of his welcomers.[102]

In promoting this mythic version of his life events, Ryder was strengthening the association of his persona with those qualities found in Transcendentalist figures. His subjectivism, his rustic rejection of academic training and even his lifestyle choices all worked to reinforce a Transcendentalist basis by which to understand the artist.

Another facet of Ryder's rustication emerged in the manner by which critics portrayed him: he was often seen as other-worldly because he rejected the splendor of materialism that consumed artists of the Gilded Age. Whereas contemporaries such as William Merritt Chase and John Singer Sargent cultivated public personas that reveled in material splendor and a sense of sophistication, Ryder embraced a more Spartan lifestyle.[103] Rejecting the foppish and effete, he lived simply, choosing to wear workman's clothes and resisting the clarion call to fashion that was in vogue among many of his contemporary artists. In one of the more perceptive and early analyses of Ryder's career, Lewis Mumford stated, "that an art such as Ryder's should have grown up and survived in the midst of the massive materialism which characterized the Brown Decades is one of those ironic commentaries by which the spirit is forever mocking the limitations of the flesh."[104] The tension present—between the material and the spiritual needs of man—is, in essence, one of the fundamental energies that activate Ryder's paintings. For Ryder, the search for the solid self in a world of increasing and even "massive" materialism underlay virtually all of his moonlit marines.

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[102] Katharine Lee Bates, *American Literature* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1898), 198-99.

[103] See for example Sarah Burns, "[Chapter 2] The Artist in the age of Surfaces: The Culture of Display and the Taint of Trade," in *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 46-76.

[104] Mumford, *Brown Decades,* 104.

Because of the way in which Ryder's story is told, it is sometimes difficult to remember that Ryder as the anti-materialist is a construct that only began to emerge in the mid 1890s. Charles de Kay made no mention of this phenomenon, nor did he dwell upon any of the odd characteristics of Ryder's personality that began to fascinate writers from the mid 1890s onward in his initial in-depth article on the painter.[105] Ryder was presented first and foremost as a normal artist who had, "the humility of genius, but also the fine impatient scorn that goes with genius." Significantly, de Kay also noted that, "he is enough of the world to show the latter rarely."[106] By the middle of the 1890s however, critics were promoting a persona of the artist as an outsider, one who failed to conform to the normal standards of either social or artistic practices. Between 1890 and 1894, in just the span of four years, de Kay transformed the way he wrote about Ryder and stopped presenting the clean-cut gentleman of the 1880s, an image that the artist pictured in his *Self-portrait* (fig 2.11).[107] In its place, de Kay and his circle began to promote an idea of Ryder that stressed radical, individualistic and anti-materialist beliefs. Regardless of whether or not Ryder underwent a fundamental change in his personality, critics found it useful to stress attributes that spoke to well-established types and reiterated the Transcendentalist legacy.

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[105] See Eckford, "A Modern Colorist." I do not debate that Ryder have become more peculiar as time went on, but the suddenness with which the transformation is presented by his supporters and their fascination with depicting him in unflattering terms speaks to the larger function for presenting Ryder as a "type," rather than simply objective description of his personality.

[106] Eckford, "A Modern Colorist" 258. As late as 1897, it was clear that this identity had not yet permeated the critical reception of Ryder entirely, though it was beginning to influence the manner in which he was reported. An unidentified critic in *The Brooklyn Eagle* described Ryder as "a man more heard of than seen, since he seldom exhibits nowadays and is said to paint out more than he paints." See "Gallery and Studio," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 6 June 1897.

[107] Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 283 states: "Apart from two small vignettes on a mirror frame (cat. 9) [*The Culprit Fay,* 1879, cherry frame for glass mirror with painted panels, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York], this is the only instance in which Ryder attempted a portrait, this assertion is contradicted by the description of Ryder's studio by Sadakichi Hartmann. See Hartmann, *History,* 316.

Certainly, Transcendentalism was not unique in its suspicions regarding the effect of an age of materialism on the individual's well-being, but it became the dominant domestic philosophy that codified this rejection in the nineteenth century.[108] Many of the movement's most vocal advocates promoted either a physical or symbolic rejection of material goods as a means to counteract society's pernicious influence. Not only was Thoreau's position in this regard especially forceful, but his popularity was buoyed by the increased attention paid to Transcendentalism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As an experiment, Thoreau's sojourn to Walden proved that the rampant materialism afforded by the Industrial Revolution need not be a necessary part of one's life. While many celebrated the reduced costs of goods and their greater availability, Thoreau expressly worried that the quantity of goods decreased the quality of one's life:

> Most of the luxuries, and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hinderances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meager life than the poor… None can be an impartial or wise observer of human life but from the vantage ground of what *we* should call voluntary poverty. [emphasis original][109]

The image of Ryder that began to appear in the mid 1890s seemed designed to take on the markers of this "voluntary poverty," and frame Ryder within the Transcendental continuum. No longer was he simply an academic painter or merely poetic, Ryder now was an individualistic, reclusive, and almost monastic figure. Writing in the *Chicago*

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[108] Rosenberg, "Politics," 117-18, as I understand it, makes a similar claim to the function of Ryder's asceticism, but insists upon a European precedent for this impulse, citing in particular Helena de Kay [Gilder]'s translation of Alfred Sensier, *Jean-Francois Millet: Peasant and Painter* (Boston: 1881) as a source. Whether or not this aided in her desire to construct Ryder as anti-materialist, or influenced others in their circle, she and her husband had a long engagement with Transcendentalism's anti-materialism that predated this translation and formed the lens through which even Millet was seen.

[109] Thoreau, *Walden,* 56-7.

*Daily Tribune* in 1894, Charles de Kay described Ryder as one who lived, "apart from his fellows… in the garret of a dingy house in New York."[110]

In his eccentric dress and self-described reclusiveness, the artist did not demonstrate tokens of insanity, as Burns has suggested, but actively worked against what was seen as the dangerous notion of becoming "overly cultured." The idea of excessive culture became a catchall euphemism with which critics railed against the notion of industrial city life, expressed concerns over the feminization of labor, and into which anxieties about of leaving behind the agrarian past could be channeled. Describing the pitfalls of "being civilized too much" in 1897, one critic in *The Atlantic Monthly* noted that, "their [the overly cultured] trouble is that they are far from nature,—they have no strong opinion of themselves, no absolute standards, no instinctive way of separating the false from the true, and consequently they are at the mercy of every new fad as it arises."[111] In the minds of many, the connection to nature was instructive, it built character and gave one a solid moral ground on which to stand. It promoted a solid sense of self, complete with "absolute standards," and the knowledge of right and wrong. Importantly, the essay also demonstrates the continued impact of Transcendental thought in determining how one was to manage and confront modernity.

Although *Walden* is often perceived today as one man's journey into the woods, an escapist flight from society, this is a misreading of both the text and the author's intent. That the first and longest chapter of the book is titled "Economy" gives some indication of Thoreau's ambition for the work. Rather than merely a statement regarding the economic realities of his era, Thoreau's choice of title reveals a nuanced double

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[110] Charles de Kay, "Up In His Old Garret," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 18 March 1894.

[111] Henry Childs Merwin, "On Being Civilized Too Much," *The Atlantic Monthly,* 79 (June 1897): 838-46. Reprinted also in *The American 1890s*, 306-17, where the author is erroneously identified as Henry Charles Merwin.

meaning. It is at once both an assessment of the economic changes he was witnessing in New England, and at the same time a call for a more spartan style of living, a rejection of the new standards of comfort and convenience made possible by the mechanization of labor. It was not an utter rejection of modernity in so much as an exploration for the tools to manage the anxieties of the period. As Thoreau made clear, he intended *Walden* for a contemporary audience, dissatisfied with modernity. The crux of *Walden's* meaning is a sense of hope, a willingness to question whether individuals must accept the dire prediction of modernity or if it can be improved:

> I would fain say something… [to] you who read these pages, who are said to live in New England; something about your condition, especially about your outward condition or circumstances in the world, in this town, what it is, whether it is necessary that it be as bad as it is, whether it cannot be improved as well as not.[112]

Even in this introductory statement, Thoreau emphasized the possibility that modernity and individualism were not necessarily exclusive concepts. One important factor in reconciling these seemingly-opposing ideas was consciousness, a state that was likely to be brought about by a direct connection with the natural world. Describing life in the modern world, Thoreau noted that "[t]he mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation… [in which] a stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind."[113] By removing himself into nature Thoreau stated his purpose "was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles."[114] In looking to nature as the catalyst for this process, Thoreau was quite literally working out his inner struggle on Emerson's physical and philosophical terrain.

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[112] Thoreau, *Walden,* 46.

[113] Thoreau, *Walden,* 50.

[114] Thoreau, *Walden,* 62.

As early as 1836, Emerson had codified and published the seed of these beliefs in his essay *Nature*, by stating: "the moral influence of nature upon every individual is that amount of truth which it illustrates to him."[115] Nature, and the interaction and appreciation of it, was responsible for the formation of a strong moral character, a clear and defined sense of self. For Emerson, nature was not merely a facet of life, or a useful tool helpful in the quest towards self-enlightenment and understanding, it was the pinnacle achievement. "I only wish," he stated, "to indicate the true position of nature in regard to man, wherein to establish man all right education tends; as the ground which to attain is the object of human life, that is, of man's connection with nature."[116] This sentiment, the importance of a communion with nature, became the foundation of Transcendental thought. It was continued by Thoreau who stated in 1854, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."[117] For Emerson and Thoreau, nature was not solely a chance to witness the glory and grandeur of God in man's environment. It was a chance to turn inward, an opportunity for solitude and reflection.

Although Emerson had begun to codify the impact of nature on man in his 1836 essay *Nature*, it was the following the year's address at Harvard titled *The American Scholar* that most forcefully articulated the importance of the individual. Nature was the means for this exploration, a tool with which to learn the truths of existence, rather than an end unto itself. The American scholar, he wrote, "shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal and one is print. Its beauty is the

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[115] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836), reprinted in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 22.

[116] Emerson, *Nature,* 30.

[117] Thoreau, *Walden,* 135.

beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments…the ancient precept, 'Know thyself,' and the modern precept, 'Study nature,' become at last one maxim."[118] In part, Emerson's doctrines were not as revolutionary as they now seem, but rather a progressive advance along a continuum that had begun well before his address. In this passage Emerson's ideas of correspondence echo the sentiments of Sampson Reed's *The Mind Cure,* published in 1826.[119] Although Reed, as a follower of Swedenborg, believed in a strict and precise correspondence that Emerson would come to reject, the statement that "Nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part," stems from his exposure to these works. Where Emerson advanced these notions, rather than simply restating them, he insisted that nature forms a bond not only with God but, more importantly, with the inner workings of the viewer.

Since the parameters of Ryder's life conformed to those elements of Transcendentalism with which a contemporary audience would have been familiar, descriptions of Ryder's clothing would have or suggested a direct connection to the philosophy's leaders, particularly Thoreau. Following the lead of Emerson, who stated that in society "the virtue in most request is conformity," Thoreau devoted substantial space in his opening chapter of *Walden* to the effects of mass-produced clothing upon the individual.[120] For Thoreau, clothing was a complex issue because he was aware that beyond the basic necessity of covering one's self, clothing was rife with symbolic

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[118] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar* (1837), reprinted in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 45-6.

[119] For the influence of Sampson Reed upon Emerson, see F. O. Matthiessen, *The American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 40-41. Though Mattheissen explores the influence of Reed upon Emerson's essay "Poetry and Imagination," the parallels seem appropriate for a discussion of his earlier essays as well.

[120] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 134.

implications. On the one hand, the greater regularity with which clothing was produced in this period might lead to a sense of anonymity, not only in appearance but, more importantly, in mentality. This was caused, in Thoreau's view, by the fact that "we are led oftener by the love of novelty, and a regard for the opinions of men, in procuring it [clothing], than by a true utility."[121] At the other end of the spectrum, clothing was a social marker, an indicator of status that subverted the democratic principles Thoreau held dear. "It is an interesting question," he noted, "how far men would retain their relative rank if they were divested of their clothes... Even in our democratic New England towns, the accidental possession of wealth, and its manifestation in dress and equipage alone, obtain for the possessor almost universal respect."[122]

Descriptions of Ryder's clothing, equally puzzling for the manner in which they appear to revel in conveying the most unflattering detail, also spoke to Transcendentalist anti-materialism. Citing the corrupting influence of material possessions as the authority for his criticism, Thoreau condemned the elements of society that emphasized fashion over character:

> No man ever stood lower in my estimation for having a patch in his clothes; yet I am sure there is a greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience.[123]

Contemporary descriptions of Ryder's clothing, notable for the manner in which they appear to revel in conveying the most unflattering detail, also spoke to Transcendentalist anti-materialism. In a world in which clothing, and the ability to procure the latest fashions were constant reminders of the triumphal power of the mechanized mill and a

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[121] Thoreau, *Walden,* 64.

[122] Thoreau, *Walden,* 65.

[123] Thoreau, *Walden,* 64.

commercial society, Ryder's deliberately unfashionable attire was a conscious protest against the system.

Thoreau detailed the present condition of society in which the race for fashion and the desire to strike out from the old ways were becoming ubiquitous:

> At present men make shift to wear what they can get. Like shipwrecked sailors they put on what they can find on the beach, and at a little distance, whether space or time, laugh at each other's masquerade. Each generation laughs at the olds fashions, but follows religiously the new.[124]

Even Ryder's friends could detail his "eccentricities" since they were not so much a condemnation of his behavior as much as a signifier that he actively resisted the elements of modernity which threatened the integrity of the self. His bizarre habits confirmed the primacy of his artwork in his life and also spoke to deeper-seated notions of anti-materialism that were the direct inheritance of the Transcendentalists.

At the most basic level, Ryder's refusal to sacrifice his vision of art for financial success represented a moral argument on behalf of poverty that became more prevalent as anxieties regarding rampant materialism increased at the end of the nineteenth century. Although historian Jackson Lears has attempted to frame this phenomenon primarily as a later-nineteenth century event, its roots extended much earlier into the middle of the century.[125] Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) became one of the most visible manifestations of this phenomenon especially with its call for "voluntary poverty" but other examples abounded too. In *Leaves of Grass,* Whitman described the swirling effect of contemporary society with "the latest news….discoveries, inventions, societies….authors old and new," but came to the conclusion that, "they are not the me

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[124] Thoreau, *Walden,* 68.

[125] See Lears, *No Place of Grace,* esp. 26-32.

myself."[126] Indeed for Whitman, as it would later be for Ryder, maintaining the integrity of the self within the city required delicate navigation and constant awareness. As Whitman noted, "Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am, …[b]oth in and out of the game, watching and wondering at it."[127] When an unidentified author in 1908 noted that, "as if to emphasize his contempt for material things he lives in a back room in a lodging-house, amidst piled up debris and confusion," it became clear that Ryder's circumstances were not the markers of financial success or failure, but rather a deliberate attempt to avoid the pitfalls of materialism.[128] The essential argument in favor of anti-materialism—that this position was necessary to restore / preserve the integral self—became an increasingly popular trope as the twentieth century proceeded.

In particular, one of the remnants of Transcendentalism that remained in the popular consciousness was the idea that the frantic and hurried pace of modernity had damaging effects upon the character that needed to be addressed. Transcendentalism's tendency to emphasize the moral and restorative effects of contact with the natural world became ingrained in the popular consciousness and formed the basis of the intellectual character of the northeast to which Ryder was exposed. Whereas Romanticism mainly stressed an appreciation of the natural world, Transcendentalism—especially as evidenced by Thoreau and Whitman—encouraged a direct and vital engagement with nature as a means of self-awareness and as a restorative cure for the fractured self. Whitman's opening lines from *Leaves of Grass* "I loaf and invite my soul, / I lean and loaf at my ease….observing a spear of summer grass," were themselves a fulfillment of Emerson's early advice:

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[126] Whitman, ["Song of Myself"], *Leaves of Grass*, lines 60-65. The ellipses seen in this passage are original, as indicated by the four periods Whitman used.

[127] Whitman, ["Song of Myself"], *Leaves of Grass* (1855), lines 66, 70.

[128] "Albert Ryder's Mystic Art," *Current Literature* 45 (September 1908): 289.

> … there is not an object in nature so mean or so loathsome, not a weed, not a toad, not an earwig, but a knowledge of its habits would lessen our disgust, and convert it into an object of some worth; perhaps of admiration. Nothing is indifferent to the wise. If a man should study the economy of a spire of grass…it would show him a design in the form…[129]

Thoreau was even more explicit in his reasons for living at Walden pond and his desire to reject the materialism of his age:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover I had not lived. […] I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live sturdily and Spartan-like…[130]

Sentiments that began in the essays of Emerson, steadily gained popularity as they were interpreted and reiterated in Whitman's and Thoreau's writing. These writings reinforced that impulse to strip away the illusion of prosperity afforded by material things and return to a simpler, more direct connection with the self. Even William James, notable for his Pragmatism and usually held up in opposition to Transcendentalism wound up promoting these ideas. As late as 1899, he promoted the same restorative view of nature that had been established by Emerson and reiterated and reformed in various texts throughout the following decades:

> Well, if our dear American character is weakened by all this over-tension—and I think, what reserves you may make, gentle reader, that you will agree to the main facts—where does the remedy lie? It lies, of course, where lay the origins of the disease. If a vicious fashion and taste are to blame for the thing, the fashion and taste must be changed. And though it is no small thing to inoculate seventy millions of people with new standards, yet, if there is to be any relief, that will have to be done. We must change ourselves from a race that admires jerk and snap for their own sakes, and looks upon low voices and quiet ways as dull, to one that, on the contrary, has calm for its ideal, and for their own sakes loves harmony, dignity and ease. [131]

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[129] Emerson, "The Uses of Natural History," 10.

[130] Thoreau, *Walden,* 135.

[131] James, "The Gospel of Relaxation," 268.

For both Thoreau and James, the solution to the unhappiness with the modern era was not a full retreat from it, for even Thoreau returned from the woods, but a journey inward that would allow one the strength and conviction to shape the modern era into a palatable and productive space. As Thoreau had noted almost a half-century before James:

> I delight to come to my bearings,—not walk in procession with pomp and parade, in a conspicuous place, but to walk even with the Builder of the universe, if I may—not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by.[132]

Introspection, more than anything else, became the key to surviving the chaotic swirl of modernity, and Ryder, like both James and Thoreau, sought that elusive and meditative inner world to accommodate this process.

Concurrent with the mythic anti-materialism of Ryder cultivated by De Kay was the idea of the artist as a reclusive, mystical hermit, living the archetypal existence of the Old Testament prophets, and needing only the barest of essentials to meet his needs.[133] So powerful is this myth that despite the ample evidence of his numerous friendships and contacts, it remains intact. Indeed, even more damaging to the scholarship on Ryder is that this myth of Ryder the Hermit was written retrospectively onto the artist's career with little attention paid to the manner in which it was developed in his lifetime. Long forgotten in the artist's histories is that this construct emerged only later in his career. It is accepted almost without consideration of how bizarre a circumstance this was, as though it were standard practice for an artist's supporters to emphasize the conditions of squalor in which he lived. In the end, though it is clear Ryder had peculiar

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[132] Thoreau, *Walden,* 378.

[133] For instance, Thoreau's quote, "My greatest skill has been to want but little," was featured on the title page of William Ellery Channing, *Thoreau: The Poet-Naturalist*, ed. and enlarged by F. B. Sanborn (Boston: Charles E. Goodspeed, 1902).

habits, it is almost incidental whether he actually lived in the conditions that are ascribed to him, for without a proper context to understand why such a description would be useful, the layers of meaning and significance attached to such imagery remain lost. For Ryder's circle of supporters, however, these ideas—the artist as a poet, living the life of a virtual recluse amidst an environment of squalor—further strengthened the Transcendental aspects of his character by strongly aligning Ryder with the legacy of Walt Whitman (fig. 2.12).

Surprisingly, de Kay's early essay for *Century Magazine* on Ryder makes no mention of any strange habits later ascribed to the artist. For the most part he seems fairly normal, at least in comparison to the hermetic, squalor-filled life associated with his later years. Ryder's *Self Portrait***,** in which the artist depicts himself with a white shirt, bow tie and well-trimmed hair and beard, confirms this view and. As his friend John Robinson later recounted:

> I have read of Ryder being a recluse. I can hardly think that, for the small luncheon and dinner parties, where a few friends met, were never complete without him. As I have said, he never talked much; he was an excellent listener, and his laugh was very infectious.[134]

Indeed, throughout the 1880s and even into the 1890s, while Ryder was known as a "colorist," or a "poet in paint," the attributes of eccentricity so often ascribed to him were non-existent. In 1919, the painter Salvator Guarino recalled a visit he and a friend made to Ryder's apartment—"the Palace of Dreams" as he called it—in November 1907.[135] Guarino remembered Ryder not as a recluse, but as "very shy or diffident," and told how he stayed with Ryder discussing art and art critics until "long after midnight." As late as 1911, in a letter to J. Alden Weir, Ryder's own words made his frustration with his own

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[134] John Robinson, "Personal Reminiscences of Albert Pinkham Ryder," *Art in America and Elsewhere* 13 (April 1925): 180. See also Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 31, for slightly different wording and punctuation.

[135] Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 220-21.

poor health, as well as his desire to connect with people, abundantly clear. “Don’t ask me to write anymore today,” he wrote, “[it is] like staying in the cage, I want to get out, and need to, although a great deal later, have had a close call, with the gout or one of the Fifty Kinds of Rheumatism.”[136] Not only do these reminiscences and Ryder’s own letters reveal an almost constant yearning for connection (one which may also be read throughout many of his poems) but they detail the poor physical health he was in, long before his kidney infection and subsequent death.

Although a few scholars have acknowledged that the attributes associated with Ryder’s eccentricities arose out of a mythic interpretation of the artist, there has been virtually no discussion of precisely why this myth may have developed, and few attempts to place it within the cultural context of the mid 1890s. In *Inventing the Modern Artist*, Sarah Burns suggests that Ryder, “probably owed the survival and aggrandizement of his reputation in part to his many-times-recorded eccentricities,” but she delivers a portrait of an artist who was, “so lost in his dreams that he could not even pick up after himself.”[137] For Burns, Ryder is best understood through a lens of Bohemianism, a convincing argument that explains in part the desire to frame Ryder as reclusive. Missing from the discussion is the American precedents for resisting the trappings of society that Ryder’s New Bedford upbringing would have exposed him to. In Ricketson and Thoreau, Ryder would have found models that satisfied the urge to withdraw, even temporarily, from society.

Ryder’s reclusiveness was hardly the solitary, monastic life that many have ascribed to him, but rather a nineteenth-century Romantic construction that his

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[136] Albert Pinkham Ryder to Julian Alden Weir, 11 August 1911, J. Alden Weir Manuscript Collection, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, as quoted in Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 207.

[137] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 271.

supporters emphasized to align him with the Transcendentalist legacy. Indeed it seems if anything to speak to the idea of solitude amidst the crowd, or the ability to preserve the pre-industrial solidity of the self in modern society, became a prevalent theme throughout Transcendentalist writings. In becoming the recluse, while living in the most populous city in the United States, Ryder's identity fulfilled the essential qualities of individualism that emerged in Emerson's essays. As Emerson noted in "Self-Reliance": "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of a crowd is keeps with perfect independence the sweetness of solitude."[138] In *Walden*, Thoreau modified this call to arms but reiterated the underlying sentiment when he stated that, "it would be of some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of outward civilization..."[139] Thoreau's goal became one of blending primitive, pre-industrial strength with the introspective and educated outlook made possible by modern life. As he asked in the next paragraph, "is it impossible to combine the hardiness of these savages with the intellectualness of the civilized man?"[140] That same sense of paradox, blending of the modern and traditional permeated even the work of Whitman who stated in *Leaves of Grass* that he was:

> Not merely of the New World but of Africa Europe or Asia... a wandering savage,
> A farmer, mechanic, or artist....a gentleman, sailor, lover or quaker,
> A prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician or priest.[141]

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[138] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 136.

[139] Thoreau, *Walden,* 54.

[140] Thoreau, *Walden,* 55.

[141] Walt Whitman, "[Song of Myself]," *Leaves of Grass* (1855), lines 344-6. For Whitman's ability to balance modern industry and pre-modern wilderness see Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), esp. 222-25.

The paradoxical nature of Ryder, the sense of insistent modernism that was always coupled with an almost monastic traditionalism was forecast in the writings of the major Transcendentalists. Ryder's navigation of the modern and traditional roles of the artist and the individual were consonant with positions espoused by these writers.

In spite of how little is known of Ryder's intentions, it is clear that he approved of and even, at some level, cultivated this image of a reclusive figure, living with the voluntary poverty of Thoreau's asceticism. Although most critics have mistaken the one substantial statement about Ryder's beliefs and methods—"Notes from the Studio of a Recluse" which appeared in *Broadway Magazine* in 1905—with his actual words, none of these paragraphs were authored by him.[142] It is impossible to say for sure whether the language bears more strongly the impress of the artist or the author who retold these snippets, yet when Ryder wrote that he approved of the text (except for "the instance of copying old masters"), he was approving the image that these paragraphs created.[143] For the public at large, the ideas that were conveyed in these short paragraphs created an image that was consummate with the legacy of the Transcendentalists. The beliefs that "the artist needs but a roof, a crust of bread and his easel, and all the rest God gives him in abundance," and that the artist "must live to paint and not paint to live," emphasized his own anti-materialism, and placed his work above the corrupting sphere

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[142] Though many scholars have treated this text as Ryder's Words, the article is "a record, from memory, of an interview by Adelaide Louise Samson," (*Painter of Dreams* 185). As Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 185 have noted, "the florid style of language suggests that Samson may have taken some liberties in writing down Ryder's remarks." Indeed, although we know that it was transcribed from memory, it is unclear how long a span of time had passed between the interview and Samson's record of it. In a letter to John Pickard, Ryder attested to the accuracy of the interview but took exception with the idea that he copied old masters.

[143] See Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 185. Originally the article was published as "Notes from the Studio of a Recluse," *Broadway Magazine* (September 1905), 110-11.

of the market.[144] The persona of Ryder fashioned in this article touched upon the major facets of Transcendentalism's engagement with the arts and society: anti-materialism, a reverence for simplicity, deliberate rustication, and a strong sense individualism and originality.

The paragraphs which purport to detail Ryder's working methods and the manner in which he conceived of the act of painting are remarkable for the level which they echo Emerson's statements in his 1841 essay, *Art*. The belief advanced in *Broadway Magazine* that, "imitation is not inspiration, and inspiration only can give birth to a work of art…", found its genesis in Emerson's text. It is likely too that the idea that a painting "was better than nature, for it was vibrating with the thrill of a new creation," also emerged from the same text.[145] In Emerson's essay, one finds the same essential qualities which critics later talked about in Ryder's work, and which Ryder himself condoned:

> Thus in our fine arts, not imitation but creation is the aim. In landscapes the painter should give the suggestion of a fairer creation than we know. The details, the prose of nature he should omit and give us only the spirit and the splendor. He should know that the landscape has a beauty for his eye because it expresses a thought which is to him good; and this because the same power which sees through his eyes is seen in that spectacle; and he will come to value the expression of nature and not nature itself, and so exalt in his copy the features that please him.[146]

Perhaps because in 1841 these ideas were concurrent with the rise of the Hudson River School's emphasis on grandeur and detail, Emerson's suggestions went unheeded or, at least, remained outside of the mainstream approach to art that was prevalent in landscape painting. However, a close reading of his philosophy of art reveals many

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[144]Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 185.

[145] Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 185-6.

[146] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Art" (1841), *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 274.

connections with Ryder's approach. Rather than working from the outside in, or using the formal aspects of style to define each painting, Emerson called for artists to work from the inside out: to let sentiment and expression dictate the final look of the painting. As such, Ryder's work fulfills the requirements that Emerson had established for a Transcendentalist painter, where emotions and ideas took precedence over formal concerns.

Another element of these statements which spoke to the Transcendentalist conception of the artist was the sense of reductive simplicity that avoided what Emerson had called "the details, the prose of nature." In Ryder's paintings this was referred to as "the maze of detail" and the breakthrough moment of inspiration for the artist was codified in "Paragraphs from the Studio of a Recluse":

> In my desire to be accurate I became lost in a maze of detail. Try as I would, my colors were not those of nature. My leaves were infinitely below the standard of a leaf, my finest strokes were course and crude. The old scene presented itself one day before my eyes framed in an opening between two trees. It stood out like a painted canvas—the deep blue of a midday sky—a solitary tree, brilliant with the green of early summer, a foundation of brown earth and gnarled roots. There was no detail to vex the eye.[147]

For Transcendentalists, painting became a means to achieve inner exploration only if the artist was able to push aside the temptation to paint conventional representations and 'feel' his way through the work. When Hartmann, De Kay, or Gilder looked upon a work of Ryder's and sought to explain the impressions they felt or received, that impulse arose from this method of painting which suppressed detail and favored inspiration over imitation. In *Walden,* Thoreau stated that the remedy of modernity would not be found in its materials, in its details, but rather in simplicity. Significantly, he also connected this

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[147] "Studio of a Recluse," 110-11; also in Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 186.

quest for the solid self with the metaphor of the ship looking for its harbor amidst a sea of chaos and confusion:

> Our life is frittered away by detail. …Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! …In the midst of the chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator who succeeds. Simplify, simplify.[148]

Ryder's numerous images of the storm-tossed boat at sea are a particularly strong visualization of this concept and demonstrate how a contemporary audience, still familiar with Transcendental texts would have easily assimilated Ryder into their folds.

### First Citizen of the Moon, the Poet in Paint

Both Ryder and Thoreau used similar strategies in their personal and artistic lives to accomplish this task of communion with the self. In particular, both actively sought the quiet solitude of night as a means to foster this connection. For Ryder, this is evidenced not only in his moonlit marine paintings, but also in contemporary descriptions of him that detail his long nighttime walks and close observation of the sky.[149] As Charles de Kay noted, "he is particularly moved by the lapis lazuli of a clear night sky and loves to produce it with or without a moon."[150] Sadakichi Hartmann also noted Ryder's "patient waiting (running away from his studio to absorb November skies or moonlit nights)," and viewed this as a key to understanding his creative vision.[151]

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[148] Thoreau, *Walden,* 135-36. It is noteworthy that Thoreau again alludes to the inner journey of life in nautical terms.

[149] Rosenberg, "Politics," 116 note 53 and 190-91 frames the descriptions of Ryder's activity as having their origins in European precedents, emphasizing types such as James Joyce's Leopold Bloom, or Baudelaire's Flaneur and cites Raymond Williams, *The City and Country* (London: 1973) as his source. However, it is difficult to reconcile Ryder's contempt for materialism with the type of urban sophistication characteristically associated with the term.

[150] Eckford, "A Modern Colorist," 252.

[151] Hartmann, *History,* 317.

Marsden Hartley called Ryder, "moon-ridden," and recalled that he would often walk at night, "starting his mystical rounds with slow walks up 8th avenue, hands joined behind his back, eyes fixed upon a world so far from clanging trolleys that he could not possibly have heard their wearisome din."[152] Nighttime had particular value to Thoreau also who, through language, linked such dark voyages of introspection to the sea. In *Walden*, Thoreau had compared his nighttime walks to a ship navigating the dark ocean, searching for its way home:

> By night, of course, the perplexity is infinitely greater, In our most trivial walks, we are constantly, though unconsciously, steering like pilots by certain well-known beacons and headlands, and if we go beyond our usual course we still carry in our minds the bearing of some neighboring cape; and not till we are completely lost, or turned round,—for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost,—do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature.[153]

Significantly, the function of these walks was not simply to explore and understand nature for its own sake, but to use that process of exploration to better understand one's self. It was a surrender to the grandeur of the world, not to appreciate it, but to lose it, and in that process to discover the essential aspect of one's being. "Not till we are lost," Thoreau maintained, "in other words, till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations."[154] In images like *Moonlit Cove* (fig 2.13) and *Moonlight on the Sea* (fig 2.14) Ryder's imagery aligns precisely with Thoreau's repeated visualization of the inner journey. The artist's circle of friends and critics, many of whom knew Whitman and a few who had visited Concord, would have seen the connection between Ryder's perambulations and Thoreau's texts. Ryder's appropriation of strategies that drew from the intellectual heritage of

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[152] See Marsden Hartley, "A. P. Ryder: 'The Light that Never Was,'" reprinted in Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 227-8.

[153] Thoreau, *Walden,* 217.

[154] Thoreau, *Walden,* 217.

Northeastern United States culture strengthened his association with the Transcendentalists in the mind of critics and admirers. His moonlit marine paintings exist not, as Sarah Burns claims, as a token of the dark-self threatening to break through and unleash chaos, but as tokens of an inward exploration. They contain both the lyrical poetry of Whitman and the inward journeys which Transcendentalists like Thoreau advocated as a solution to the fractious effects of the world on the individual.

In addition, framing Ryder in this manner brings a sense of cohesiveness to his cannon and unites seemingly disparate works through an underlying sameness of intention rather than the outward appearance of form and subject. His religious paintings, instead of being an anomaly, serve the same inward desire as his marines: they attempt to define and connect with a solid sense of self. They are, when taken in this context, indicative of the many avenues of exploration that the artist pursued. They look to both nature and tradition as a solution to the fractured world in which Ryder found himself. Though modern in design and execution, they are images from a bygone era, tokens of a world which lacked the discontinuity, anxiety, and chaos that the modern world had fostered in Ryder. His paintings were vehicles for self-discovery and exploration, enigmas that he himself was struggling to solve.

This same sense of exploration and personal voyage is evident in Ryder's extant poetry, which also further strengthens his identification with Whitman. Since the late 1870s, critics had remarked on Ryder's poetic sensibility and, since he knew many of the critics that helped forge this reputation, it would appear likely that this was an image that Ryder actively cultivated. Interestingly, Ryder remembered Jeanette Gilder—the first member of this circle to befriend Whitman—as the one who "was kind enough to say my

pictures were poems in paint."[155] Although Ryder gave no indication of when Gilder made the statement, it is clear that throughout the 1880s his reputation as a "poetic" painter continued to coalesce. As early as 1881, *The Art Journal* reported that "A. P. Ryder had a color fantasy to which as title he had appended in the catalogue a stanza of poetry which expressed his conception of its meaning…."[156] In an 1887 review of the Society of American Artists Exhibition, Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer found his *Moonlight*, "[c]hief among [the landscapes] for poetical interest."[157] Charles de Kay, stated in 1890, "[t]he mystery and poetic charms of twilight and deeper night touch him as they do poets."[158] By the late 1890s, virtually every description of Ryder included some allusion to his poetic nature and for his audience the association would have been unavoidable.

Unfortunately, art historians have tended to avoid analyses of Ryder's poetry, preferring to denigrate rather than explore it.[159] Frederic Fairchild Sherman started this trend in 1920 when he noted that Ryder "was, however, no more master of the technic [sic] of verse than of painting, and consequently most of his best stanzas are remarkable for the thought rather than the manner of expression."[160] Homer and Goodrich later found that "[h]is verse… was written in the spirit of the English Romantic Poets, though

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[155] Albert Pinkham Ryder to Colonel Wood, 2 October 1899, as quoted in Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 210.

[156] "Art Notes," *Art Journal* n. s. 5 (May 1881): 157; see also Rosenberg, "Politics," 20 for a longer excerpt.

[157] Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer, "Fine Arts. The Society of American Artists. II," *The Independent* 39 (19 May 1887): 7.

[158] Eckford, "A Modern Colorist," 252

[159] The exception to this rule is the chapter "Courting the Gentle Muse," in Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 80-99. Her conclusions, unfortunately, tend to be similar to that of previous critics despite a more in depth analysis.

[160] Sherman, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* 30.

without their skill."[161] Barbara Novak, in her recent *Voyages of the Self,* notes that she avoids Ryder's poems "because they are too few in number and too questionable (for the most part) in quality," when compared to those of Emily Dickinson.[162] But such an attitude is more useful for connoisseurs of poetry than art historians. Whether or not Ryder's poems are any good seems beside the point, as they are among a handful of primary documents that provide insight into his complex and often enigmatic personality.

Among the prominent themes that linger in the back of his verses—and even in his paintings—is the pain of unrequited love and longing. Thematically, this is most evident in paintings like *The Passing Song, The Lovers' Boat* and *The Lovers* (c. 1880, Vassar College Art Gallery) and in a number of his verses. The frank and sexual nature of Ryder's poetry seems at odds with Ryder's mythic persona, which like that of Whitman's, suggest a man of limited affections who prefers an almost monastic singular existence and is devoid of carnal desire.[163] Kenneth Hayes Miller, who had met the artist in 1909, recalled that Ryder, "had been in love with an opera singer—the male and female were balanced within him—He was a virgin. Nothing hurt about him."[164] So important was the idea of Ryder's virginal purity that Miller alleged that after falling in love with the opera singer—"[q]uite an unsuitable person"—Daniel Cottier took Ryder to

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[161] Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 211.

[162] Novak, *Voyages of the Self,* 181. Novak had made the connection between Ryder and Dickinson much earlier, see Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, 212 although her comparison is based upon a short and misleading excerpt from Ryder's "Joan of Arc." In *Voyages of the Self,* 106 she continues to promote this connection using the same excerpted text and fails once again to place it within the context of the longer work. The same passage is quoted by Sherman, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* 30 who stated, "The stanza almost equals one of Emerson's or Emily Dickinson's in its incisive and illuminating statement of a large fact."

[163] For the manner in which Whitman and his circle cultivated a mythic purity see Reynolds, *Whitman's America,* especially 487-89.

[164] Lloyd Goodrich, [Interview with Kenneth Hayes Miller], 2 November 1933 as quoted in Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 229.

Europe.[165] In Miller's mind, Ryder's sexual desire in was spoken of as a clinical diagnosis of which one should hope to be "completely cured."[166]

Ryder's poem *Voice of the Night Wind* offers a different image of the artist, not the monkish recluse but rather a man full of sexual longing and desire.[167] Here, the narrator imagines himself as transparent and vaporous, devoid of any body and carried along through the air. The poem's initial imagery seems to indicate lusty pursuit, with the narrator traveling "soft as a panther treads / when moving for its prey," over beds of "sweet roses" and "violets pale."[168] The "unseen wanderings" of which Ryder speaks seems to correlate to his unspoken or unvoiced sexual desires, which carry with them a sense of isolation or frustration. Not only are Ryder's wanderings "unseen," but the narrator rhetorically asks, "[w]ho can pursue, who comprehend?" In this fantasy, he begins by bending flowers "till, disturbed in their slumber / They bend from my gay

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[165] Daniel Cottier (1838-91) founded Cottier and Company, a London based art furniture shop which had opened a New York City branch in 1873, and served as Ryder's primary dealer. For a succinct biography see Max Donnelly, "Cottier and Company, Art Furniture Makers," *The Magazine Antiques* 159 (June 2001): 916-25; see also Burke et al., *The Aesthetic Movement* 414-16; and Margaret H. Hobler, "In Search of Daniel Cottier, Artistic Entrepreneur, 1838-91," (master's thesis, Hunter College, 1987). A slightly different version of the story appears in Sherman, *Albert Ryder,* 26-27, where the subject of Ryder's desire is a "violin player." An even stranger story is recounted in Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, 87 and 190 in which Albert Groll, a friend of Ryder's, "found a 12-year old girl, a simple country type, in Ryder's studio. [Ryder] had found her in the street and was going to take of her."

[166] Neither Homer or Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 230 commented on the fact that as Miller was telling a story about which he could not have possible had first-hand knowledge, his accounts were based largely on the mythic stature of Ryder that de Kay and others were promoting. Miller's account of the trip to Europe with Cottier ends with "Afterwards, Ryder seemed completely cured."

[167] Like his paintings, very few of Ryder's poems are dated, however as this selection was printed in the Century Magazine by June 1890 we have at least the *terminus ad quem* date. In a letter to John Gellatly the artist acknowledged that it was the only poem "faithfully rendered" by a publisher. See Albert Pinkham Ryder to John Gellatly, 8 June 1897, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; reprinted in Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 191.

[168] There are a few versions of the poem known, and each has slight differences. I have taken the text from the article in *Century Magazine* since Ryder acknowledged its accuracy.

caress—" Although it is Ryder as the wind who pursues, he becomes enchanted with the idea of being himself coveted and called by the flowers.

In the second stanza, Ryder's scale of conquest has changed and the concept of power is added to the sexual component of his initial imagery . Whereas the first stanza stresses a sense of delicacy and a voyeuristic relationship with the object of desire, the second stanza is forceful and active. The wind is no longer the gentle breeze but a furious storm—"[a]s fickle as lightning, swift as light"—who relishes the idea of power and the ability to incite fear. Instead of the delicate stalks of flowers, the narrator moves towards bigger, stronger structures: "I seize on the giants of the forest / And shake them to their roots! / I make them tremble to their sap!" There is no mention of slumber, no tempting with perfume. Here the narrator emerges and takes what he wants by force. Ryder's narrator emerges in this stanza to conquer, to instill fear, and to dominate.

In the third stanza, Ryder again advances his scale of conquest, not in terms of size but complexity, moving from the metaphoric rape in the plant kingdom to the realm of "maidens." Here, Ryder makes the explicit sexual content of the poem clear when the narrator expresses the intention or desire to travel "to where / Maidens are sighing for fond lovers,"

> And softly coo and woo and whisper in their ears,
> With sigh answering sighs,
> Making their hearts to throb,
> Their bosoms rise
> Till I hardly seem from without—
> Almost within the voice
> Of their soul's illusion!
> What lover would not give his all for this:
> To kiss that rosy cheek,
> Those dewey lids that luscious mouth
> So wantonly to lift those woven tresses
> And breathe upon those rounded bosoms

In both literary and sexual terms, Ryder has been building up to this climatic moment, first gently suggesting the idea of conquest before moving onto to actual conquest,

culminating in the release of the woman's bodice. Though ostensibly the metaphor is the narrator becoming the breath of the maiden ("till I hardly seem from without"), the idea of a perfect and total union is sexualized by the listing of body parts (cheek, mouth, and bosoms) and also by the rhetorical question, "what lover would not give his all for this?"

In the culminating stanza of the poem, Ryder quickly shifts directions. Instead of the release that has been sought after and built up to since the poem's first moment, Ryder gives the audience a retreat, an introspective removal from the sexual conquest that has dominated the poem's imagery. In many ways, this last verse codifies his outer persona, styling himself as shy, somewhat reclusive, but also profoundly introspective. It is about a retreat from the sensual world of desire into the artistic world of imagination. Although the narrator appears to control this decision, it is not without a slight melancholy:

> But I'm the wind, the wind, the wind
> I'll away to gloomy pools profound
> And stir the silence
> Of their reflective depths
> With rippling laughter
> At my wanton freaks.
> And my fantastic wanderings
> Who can pursue, who comprehend?[169]

Ryder's last act in the poem is a retreat into his imagination signaled by the shift in the poem from "unseen" to "fantastic wanderings." The shift from the sublimated, or unrecognized realm that involves engagement with the outer world is inverted by the term "fantastic" which signals a drawing into the mind.

This shift from the external to the internal also hinges upon Ryder's repetition of the word "wanton" and the different manners in which its meaning is constructed. While

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[169] As quoted in Eckford, "A Modern Colorist," 255; see also Homer and Goodrich, *Painter of Dreams,* 213.

in the previous verse the term was used to describe the sexual abandon of unclothing the maiden, in the final verse it retains a function more difficult to discern, paired as it is with "freaks." Because the language strongly recalls reviews Ryder received precisely at the transitional point in his career when he shifted from the external world of Barbizon-inspired painting to the inner world of Transcendental subjectivism, the reference here apparently is to painting. Commenting on Ryder's work in 1880, William C. Brownell found "a number of pictures justly denominated to be freaks in respect of their serene and conscious disregard for the conventions of painting."[170] At the Society of American Artists' exhibition the previous year, a critic from *Scribner's* reminded readers that Ryder's paintings had "been much laughed at."[171] Ryder's voyage inward, then, reads as a conscious awareness and embrace of his melancholy tendencies ("I'll away to gloomy pools profound") and his desire to translate this inner life into paintings with little concern for the appreciation of critics. As such, the act of painting—and the inherent sense of self-reliance which accompanies it—fulfills the Transcendentalists' mandates about the function of art and the self in modern society.

The very elusiveness of Ryder, this sense of mystery that pervades the artist and his paintings, is crucial to understanding the discourse that he engaged in. What has been lost in all the literature on Ryder is his connections to the intellectual and social currents of Northeastern culture that shaped his development, and helped determine his reactions to modernity. Transcendentalism, and its subsequent distillation over the second half of the nineteenth century, remained for Ryder a touchstone, a method by which to manage the concerns and fears regarding the perceived fracture of the self into

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[170] William C Brownell, "The Younger Painters of America—First Paper," *Scribner's Monthly* 20 (May 1880): 1-15.

[171] "The Society of American Artists," *Scribner's Monthly* 18 (June 1879): 312.

discreet units with no solid center or unifying thread. By appropriating the strategies for managing modernity that Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman had each laid out, Ryder transformed landscape painting from a static record of the external world into a vibrant, personal journey inward. His constant searching for that elusive “true self” evident in his small moonlit marine paintings, is among the clearest representations of the subjective Transcendentalist process in painting.

**Chapter 3: Elbert Hubbard, Transcendentalism, and the Arts and Crafts in America**

> Beauty must come back to the useful arts, and the distinction between the fine and useful arts forgotten.
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Art," 1841[1]

Emerson's statement makes a powerful claim for a native tradition in the American Arts and Crafts movement in the United States. His call for a rehabilitation of the useful arts, his desire to bring back beauty into daily life, and his concern for the effects of a mechanized age upon the worker appeared well before either John Ruskin's or William Morris's better-known writings on the subject.[2] Indeed, a quotation such as this permits Ralph Waldo Emerson to be recognized as a spokesman for the Arts and Crafts movement in the Unites States. Instead Emerson, and any traces of the Transcendentalist tradition, have been excluded from the history of the movement. In the American variation of the Arts and Crafts, British idealism continues to reign supreme. The lens through which the movement is viewed in the United States—and in turn the criteria by which its successes and failures are judged—continues to rely almost exclusively upon a British tradition for its authority.[3]

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[1] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Art," in *Essays* (1841), reprinted in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 282.

[2] Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *Stones of Venice* (1851-53) were major influences on the development of Morris's vision of the Arts and Crafts. See for instance, William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art: Five Lectures Delivered in Birmingham, London, and Nottingham, 1878-81* (London: Ellis and White, 1883), 200: "I know I know that the pith of what I am saying on this subject was set forth years ago, and for the first time by Mr. Ruskin in that chapter of the Stones of Venice, which is entitled, "On the Nature of Gothic," in words more clear and eloquent than any man else now living could use. So important do they seem to me, that to my mind they should have been posted up in every school of art throughout the country; nay, in every association of English-speaking people which professes in any way to further the culture of mankind."

[3] The idea of that the Arts and Crafts in America was based upon a long-standing tradition that can be traced back to the period. See Oscar Lovell Triggs, *Chapters in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Chicago: Bohemia Guild of the Industrial Art League, 1902).

All too often, the history of the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States is told as a story of failure.[4] It was a movement doomed from the start: incompatible with modernity, anxious about the role of mechanization, and yet inevitably bound to a system of corporate capitalism which, as Jackson Lears has noted, "blunted the polemical edge Morris had given to the figure of the artisan."[5] American practitioners are judged exclusively by how they measure up to British ideals, with virtually no attempt to account for cultural traditions that may have created the numerous disparities between the two. The reasons for this, when given, are presumed to be self-explanatory, and readers are left with the distinct impression that Americans are simply different. Whereas the British were concerned with labor and its relation to the individual, Americans were only concerned with profit. As Leslie Green Bowman stated in her award-winning catalog *American Arts & Crafts: Virtue and Design*, "the acceptance of labor division by most American arts and crafts participants was profit-oriented, and it

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Modern scholarship on the American Arts and Crafts began with the groundbreaking exhibition and catalog: Robert Judson Clark, ed., *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America 1876-1916,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), which repeated the English bias. More recently the British bias is reiterated in Wendy Kaplan, *The Art that is Life,* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987); Leslie Green Bowman, *American Arts and Crafts: Virtue in Design*, (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1990); Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America: Design for the Modern World* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004); and Karen Livingstone and Linda Parry eds., *International Arts and Crafts* (London and New York: Victoria and Albert with Harry N. Abrams, 2005).

[4] Among the first scholars to take note of this phenomenon was Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), xiv, who notes, "at first glance, the story of what happened to the English example in America is a story of failure." Unfortunately, Boris never challenges the fundamental assumption of failure, but rather tracks "the devolution of the craftsman ideal," in her effort to shed light on "cultural identity and class formation during a crucial period of social transformation." (xiv) Ironically, the British version was also doomed to failure.

[5] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920,* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 91. Lears continually emphasizes Morris as the model that Americans should be measured against in this period, although he acknowledges that "craft leaders were partly influenced by indigenous social circumstances and cultural traditions… [and] drew heavily on Puritan and republican tradition…" (61).

overrode Ruskin's concern for the plight of the worker."[6] The history of the Arts and Crafts movement in America is thus reduced to a series of mis-steps, half steps, and stumbles.

Notably absent from histories of the American movement is any sense of historical continuity with indigenous traditions, intellectual or otherwise. By most accounts, the Arts and Crafts movement began exclusively in England, where it was indebted to anxieties about modernization that can be traced back at least as far as the reform movement of the 1830s.[7] Figures such as A. W. Pugin, whose *Contrasts* of 1836 documented the spiritual depravity of the era, form the intellectual support of the movement, though it would not fully develop until later. Less frequently, both today and during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, are Thomas Carlyle's writings given the credit they deserve. Professor Oscar Lovell Triggs, who in 1902 published *Chapters in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, was among the first Americans who attempted to frame the history of this phenomenon. Triggs stated that, "Carlyle's relationship to the new industrialism, as I will call it, is remote and in his own mind quite unconscious."[8] Carlyle, he thought, "was never anything more than a voice crying out in an age of transition," and later found that:

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[6] Leslie Green Bowman, "Myths and Realities of the American Arts and Crafts Movement," in *American Arts and Crafts: Virtue in Design*, (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1990), 39. This book received the Charles F. Montgomery Award of the Decorative Arts Society of the Society of Architectural Historians.

[7] For additional examples of the British bias of the Arts and Crafts movement—beyond those enumerated in note 5—see Nikolas Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949) reinforced this notion; see also Robert Judson Clark, ed., *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America 1876-1916,* (1972) 8th printing (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), xii: "from [Thomas] Carlyle through John Ruskin to William Morris a sincere distrust of the modern age was the legacy… The United States had no figures comparable to these three British thinkers and artists."

[8] Triggs, *Chapters,* 1-2.

> Carlyle's literary faculty was his undoing as a Sociologist; for he was wont to prophesy without data in experience. And, lacking clairvoyancy [sic?], unable to see any other outcome for a society rapidly democratizing save anarchy and chaos, he was prevented from uttering the creative word that might have inaugurated a new epoch.[9]

Triggs's contributions to periodicals such as *The Craftsman, Brush and Pencil,* and *Arts for America* made him among the most prolific and visible supporters of the movement. Although he accurately traced the connection of the American variant to John Ruskin and William Morris, there is no suggestion by Triggs of cultural factors that altered the movement's fundamental critiques of late-nineteenth century life when it appeared in the United States. Indeed, Triggs never considered why his own views regarding industrialization and mechanization differed so widely from those of the British forerunners he so admired.

The exclusive reliance on the British model for the American version of the movement is not without its own set of difficulties. To begin with, such a reading usually focuses on a very narrow slice of the British movement, ignoring key statements and figures that American reformers looked to for intellectual and social inspiration. While the earlier aspects of the philosophy of Ruskin and Morris dominate this reading, other important figures such as Charles Robert Ashbee (1863-1942), who spoke eloquently of accommodating the machine into modern life, are summarily dismissed.[10] In a similar manner, the career of Christopher Dresser—whose acceptance of industrial methods and desire to apply the principles of good design to industry practices would make him a

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[9] Triggs, *Chapters,* 2 and 10.

[10] There are a number of sources that are useful for understanding Ashbee's life and his contribution to the Arts and Crafts movement. See for instance, Alan Crawford, *C. R. Ashbee: Architect, Designer and Romantic Socialist* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985); Lionel Lambourne, *Utopian Craftsmen: The Arts and Crafts Movement from the Cotswolds to Chicago* (London: Astragal Books, 1980); Fiona MacCarthy, *The Simple Life: C. R. Ashbee in the Cotswolds* (London: Lund Humphries, 1981); Peter Stansky, *Redesigning the World: William Morris, the 1800s, and the Arts and Crafts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

useful forerunner to the American variant of the movement—is rarely employed as a model of accommodation.[11] It is almost as though the preconceived biases of those telling the history—which repeatedly are against any incorporation of mechanization into the movement—have determined the cannon of literature included, rather than exposing the diverse, and at times contradictory, aspects of the Arts and Crafts.

In general, the American version of the Arts and Crafts suffers as a result of this anti-mechanized and anti-capitalist selectivity, and few figures are more difficult to include into the canon than Elbert Green Hubbard (1856-1915), founder of the Roycroft community in East Aurora, New York (1895-1938) (fig 3.1).[12] In large part, Hubbard's paradoxical personality has allowed scholars to place him outside the mainstream tendencies of the movement and to treat him as an afterthought, rather than as a central example. Irreverent and even caustic, Hubbard rarely appeared to take himself or the

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[11] See Charlotte Gere and Michael Whiteway, "Dr. Christopher Dresser: His Life and Career," in *Shock of the Old: Christopher Dresser's Design Revolution* (New York: Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, 2004), 17-45. Dresser, who gave a series of lectures in 1876 at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, is an interesting role model for the American Arts and Crafts movement. He was known in the United States as a lecturer, author, a purchaser for Tiffany and Company (1877), and a designer of wallpaper. I am grateful to Rosemary Bletter for suggesting this connection.

[12] The literature on Hubbard tends to be descriptive rather than analytical and, as a result, there are numerous biographical accounts of his life. See for instance, Felix Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora* (New York: William Wise and Company, 1926); Mary Hubbard Heath, *The Elbert Hubbard I Knew* (East Aurora, New York: Roycrofters, 1929); David Arnold Balch, *Elbert Hubbard: Genius of Roycroft* (New York: Frederick A Stokes Company, 1940); H. Kenneth Dirlam, and Ernest E. Simmons, *Sinners, This is East Aurora: The Story of Elbert Hubbard and The Roycroft Shops* (New York: Vantage Press, 1964). For a history of the press, with the most accurate assessment of Hubbard's contributions see Richard J. Wolfe and Paul McKenna, *Louis Herman Kinder and Fine Bookbinding in America: A Chapter in the History of the Roycroft Shop,* (Newton, Penn.: Bird & Bull Press, 1985). For an exhibition catalog with essays on various subjects that vary widely in quality and accuracy, see Marie Via and Marjorie Searl, eds., *Head, Heart and Hand: Elbert Hubbard and the Roycrofters* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1994). See also Lynette I. Rhodes, *The Roycroft Shops, 1894-1915: A Propelling Force of the American Arts and Crafts Movement,* (Erie, Pa.: Erie Arts Center, 1974).

philosophy of Arts and Crafts all that seriously. But even more damning was his unapologetic support for the structure of corporate capitalism. Whereas some Arts and Crafts reformers struggled to frame the movement in direct opposition to the emerging economic realities of the late-nineteenth century, Hubbard unabashedly ran the Roycrofters as a corporation. Rather than model his community on the Romantic, if delusional, idea of medieval guilds, Hubbard's vision was firmly rooted in contemporary economics. For Hubbard, Arts and Crafts was a manner by which to preserve the solidity of the self associated with pre-industrial life, while still reaping the benefits of modernity.

Hubbard's vision of Arts and Crafts was a blend of British sources and Northeastern cultural identity. He drew not only on the legacy of William Morris and John Ruskin, but also on Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. Whereas Ryder sought an inward retreat in his adoption of the Transcendental mentality, Hubbard viewed Transcendentalism as a public force that would transform the outer, civic space of society. In Hubbard's hands, Transcendentalism became a tool to remake the corporate structure in order to preserve the solidity of the self. Like many American Arts and Crafts figures, Hubbard's engagement with the movement was influenced by his continual reliance on the intellectual and cultural heritage of Transcendentalism.

As one of the speakers noted at Hubbard's memorial service: "that Elbert Hubbard was a many-sided man is shown by our anxiety to analyze him. He was hateful to some, beloved by many, interesting to all, indifferent to few."[13] Hubbard is a difficult

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[13] Michael Monahan, *Nemesis* (New York: Frank-Maurice, 1926), 146. Monahan's book contains three chapters in which Hubbard and the Roycrofters appear: "Elbert Hubbard," 145-74; "Diabolus," 175-79; and "A Footnote," 180-83.

subject in a number of ways, not only because he continued to defy the monolithic identity of the Arts and Crafts movement, but because it is difficult to get an accurate assessment of his character. To be certain, Hubbard never lived up to the benevolent socialistic archetype of the Arts and Crafts ideal that was constructed by some of the movement's practitioners and which continues to be promoted by some scholars. Moreover, throughout his career Hubbard deliberately manipulated the factual accounts of his life by adding or deleting events at will, in order to construct an identity that would have broad appeal to a public whose knowledge of Transcendental types remained strong.

Hubbard's myth-making manifested itself on a number of levels: at the most basic level, he rewrote his history almost at will; moving deeper, he constructed a personality that spoke to ideas of Emersonian self-reliance, American ingenuity, and a *Walden*-like sense of rustic isolation.[14] That his autobiographical statements often bore little, if any, relation to the facts of his life demonstrate how, at some level, Hubbard deliberately suppressed the details of his life in order to fashion this persona. So strong was his pursuit of this goal, that at times he risked becoming a caricature of the rustic reformer he so strongly promoted. Yet, in their exuberance, these myths reveal the power that Transcendentalism continued to have as a cultural force at the turn of the century. That Hubbard was able to portray himself as Emerson reborn, an heir apparent to Thoreau and Whitman, and that he could successfully sell this posturing to a broad audience speaks to the continued power that the philosophy wielded.

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[14] Throughout the text I use the term myth-making (and its variants) to describe the process of self-construction in which Hubbard was constantly and deliberately engaged. To me it is a more useful term than "lying," as it is able to speak more constructively to the motivations behind Hubbard's persistent dishonesty.

In addition to placing Hubbard's work within the context of a Transcendentalist continuum, this chapter will also illuminate the manner in which this philosophy formed a basis for the reception of the Arts and Crafts in the United States. Because the Arts and Crafts movement spoke to the same cultural anxieties that Transcendentalism sought to mediate, the writings of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman remained cultural touchstones in this period and formed an intellectual and philosophical heritage upon which many drew. Through their continually rising popularity Transcendentalism was transformed from a minor phenomenon into one of the readily available, and even dominant mentalities, that shaped the culture of the Northeast. Placing the Arts and Crafts within this continuum will allow for a better understanding of the period by providing a language with which to address the complexities and nuances of the difficult struggle for a solid selfhood in an age of continued change.

## The Paradox of Roycroft

> There has always been the suspicion of pose about Mr. Hubbard… Practical as Hubbard is, there is much of the seer in him. He is Walt Whitman and Ruskin. He is strangely of the vulgar and frustratively transcendental, brutally strong, and softly feminine—not effeminate.
>
> —William Marion Reedy, 1900[15]

Reedy's words capture the paradoxical nature of Hubbard's character that polarized the opinions of people who knew him.[16] Hubbard was monastic, yet he perpetrated sexual infidelities; he was a man of the people, but one of the wealthy; he

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[15] William Marion Reedy, "A Criticism," *The Philistine: A Periodical of Protest* 11 (June 1900): 33. The magazine indicates this article is reprinted from the St. Louis Mirror 19 April 1900. The only substantive summary of Reedy's life is Max Putzel, *The Man in the Mirror: William Marion Reedy and His Magazine* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

[16] According to Reedy—a fellow publisher and author—he and Hubbard shared a twenty-year friendship before Hubbard's untimely death. For Reedy's recollection of their friendship see: *In Memoriam: Elbert and Alice Hubbard* (East Aurora, New York: Roycrofters, 1915), 35-46.

was a moralist who was an atheist; a writer who would abandon the rules of language; and an individualist who believed in the efficiency of the corporate structure. It was inevitable that Hubbard's Roycroft community would reflect the paradoxical nature of its leader.

Founded in 1895, Hubbard's Roycrofters presented a complex blend of utopian idealism and corporate pragmatism in the simple guise of an Arts and Crafts community. Though indebted to the legacy of Morris and the British variant of the Art and Crafts movement, Hubbard's emphasis on individualism, his refusal to condone socialism and reliance on the philosophical tenets of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman to shape his vision produced a startlingly different variation of the movement. Initially achieving notoriety as a printing operation, Hubbard soon expanded the venture to include a furniture making department (c. 1897), a metalworking department (1899), and a modeled leather department (1905).[17] Throughout the shop's history, the financial success of the venture was linked to the sale of periodicals, beginning with *The Philistine* (1895-1915) and later with *The Fra* (1908-17), *Roycroft* (1917-26) and *The Roycrofter* (1926-32).[18] Each of these publications became a vehicle for Hubbard to assert his own brand of Emersonian non-conformity and advertise the products carried by the different Roycroft divisions. Like the Larkin mail-order company from which Hubbard had retired,

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[17] The beginning of the press is well documented from a contract reprinted in Wolfe and McKenna, *Louis Herman Kinder,* 22; see also Paul McKenna, *History and Bibliography of the Roycroft Printing Shop* (North Tonawanda, New York: Tona Graphics, 1986). For a concise history of the furniture shop see Frederick R. Brandt, "'Made to last a Century": The Work of the Roycroft Furniture Shop," in *Head, Heart and Hand,* 55-74. See Robert Rust, Kitty Turgeon-Rust, Marie Via, and Marjorie B. Searl, "Alchemy in East Aurora: Roycroft Metal Arts," in *Head, Heart and Hand,* 75-96 for a summary of the metalworking shop. Although "modeled leather" was a phrase employed to describe a process by which ground leather and a binding agent were pressed into a mold to create three-dimensional designs for book covers, purses and table mats, the department also used traditional methods like embossing and hand-tooling.

[18] Jean-Francois Vilain, "The Roycroft Printing Shop," in *Head, Heart and Hand,* 38-42.

his Roycroft enterprise was soon supplying a diverse selection of products to customers throughout the country. At one point, customers could even order "a wooden trunk filled with sausage, nuts, honey, home-made pecan patties and other wholesome foodstuffs from the Roycroft farms," known as a "goodie box" from the company.[19] The company began as a press, but Hubbard's vision quickly expanded the firm's services to embrace virtually every aspect of domestic need.

Hubbard often promoted a proprietary relationship with the idea of the Roycrofters, but he came to own the concept only after it was established. Henry P. Taber, more than Hubbard, was responsible for the genesis of the concept as he chose the name for the press and began publishing *The Philistine* in June 1895. Hubbard's later recollection of the publication—that "there was no intention at first of issuing more than one number of this pamphlet, but in order to get it through the mails at magazine rates we made up a little subscription list…"—is pure fiction.[20] As Richard Wolfe and Paul McKenna have documented, "[Hubbard] was mainly an interested helper and observer during the publication of this first volume."[21] While he contributed articles to the first volume of the magazine, he had no financial stake in the venture. It was only in November 1895 that Hubbard bought Taber's share and took financial control of the magazine.

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[19] Jack Quinlan, "Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft," in *Head, Heart and Hand,* 12.

[20] [Elbert Hubbard], "An Interesting Personality: Elbert Hubbard," *The Cosmopolitan: a Monthly Illustrated Magazine* 32 (January 1902): 312. See also Rollin Lynde Hartt, "Elbert Hubbard," *The Critic* 35 (November 1899): 1005.

[21] For a clear and direct history of the press see: Wolfe and McKenna, *Fine Bookbinding in America*. Unless otherwise stated, information regarding the press is taken from this source. Though it predates *Head, Heart and Hand* by nearly ten years, the later continues to repeat versions of stories that are convincingly repudiated by Wolfe and McKenna. Among the persistent myths of the Roycrofters is that Hubbard took full control of the magazine as a result of a disagreement with Taber over sexual content.

"The only way to make money," Hubbard wrote, "is to render a service for humanity—to supply something that people want, and to carry things from where they are plentiful to where they are needed."[22] East Aurora, because of its relative isolation, provided a substantial base of labor without the competitive pricing that a more urban setting might have fostered.[23] The service that Hubbard could provide was a way of life, or outlook. Beginning with *The Philistine*, Hubbard was able to sell the essential tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement in a fashion that was far more palatable to the general public. As the success of the magazine allowed, and aided by a lucrative lecture schedule, Hubbard gradually expanded his emerging empire in a manner that dovetailed with his corporate philosophy. The first expansion was entirely practical, if not mundane: Hubbard ceased sending manuscripts out for publication and began, much like Morris's Kelmscott Press, to set the type, print the books, and manufacture the bindings himself.

In economic terms, this portion of Hubbard's expansion was vertical and enabled him to control many of the various processes necessary for the production of books. More interesting, though, and somewhat riskier because on his lack of knowledge in the field, was Hubbard's horizontal expansion encompassing furniture making, metalworking, molded leather, and even fine arts production. Although his first efforts had been strictly literary, Hubbard was soon packaging an entire way of life for his customers; blending the cultural critiques of the Transcendentalists with aspects of the

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[22] [Elbert Hubbard], *The Note Book of Elbert Hubbard,* ed. Elbert Hubbard II (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1927), 185.

[23] Located twenty-five miles east of Buffalo, New York, East Aurora was a small village with a population in 1900 of just 2366 residents. See Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Census Reports Volume 1: Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900,* "Table 5—Population of the States and Territories by Minor Civil Divisions: 1890 and 1900," (Washington: United States Census Office, 1901), 277.

British Art and Crafts movement, Hubbard created a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that could be promoted in his publications and purchased in installments.

The expansion of Hubbard's enterprise to include furniture production demonstrates his effort to align himself with the products associated with the Arts and Crafts tradition as well as turn a profit.[24] His own description of the humble origins of this venture is somewhat suspect, but indicates his desire to expand the market for his wares, as well as make full use of his employees. Recalling this turn of events, he wrote, "the place got too small when we began to bind books, so we built a wing on one side; then a wing on the other side. To keep the three carpenters busy who had been building the wings, I set them to making furniture for the place. They made furniture as good as they could—folks came along and bought it."[25] There are probably, however, some essential truths in this statement: Hubbard did expand the campus of Roycrofters, he was an opportunist who recognized profit potential, and he did detest waste. As he recorded in his *Note Book*, "there is only one sin, and that is waste; and disuse and misuse are both forms of waste. The best brains are now at work, endeavoring to eliminate lost motion and take up the economic slack."[26] The furniture shop and other peripheral ventures that emerged out of the success of the Roycroft Press seem to have been designed to create an environment where labor and material were used efficiently.

Instead of offering high salaries to his employees, Hubbard used a profit-sharing plan to induce them to work, and reinforced these bonds of allegiance through notions of

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[24] Carol Bohdan, "The Roycrofters of East Aurora," *The Connoisseur* 203 (March 1980): 212.

[25] Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 312**;** see also Elbert Hubbard, *The Roycroft Shop: A History* (East Aurora: The Roycrofters, 1908), 8; and Frederick R. Brandt, ""Made to Last a Century" The Work of the Roycroft Furniture Shop," in *Head, Heart and Hand,* 55.

[26] Hubbard, *Note Book,* 185.

fraternity that the community offered. The Roycrofters had a marching band, baseball team, and regular dances and lectures. By focusing on the sense of fraternity and his emotional concern for his employees, Hubbard manipulated the cultural distrust of accumulated wealth, and used these ideas as a basis for reducing the wages of employees. Indeed, playing directly to the deep-seated aversion to materialism that the Arts and Crafts often resorted to, one observer noted:

> The charge has been several times made that the Roycrofters are underpaid. Perhaps this is true if man lives by bread alone; but when there is taken into consideration the fact that the employees receive an intellectual and aesthetic development superior to that of others in their class, their compensations seem sufficient.[27]

Noteworthy, also, is Hubbard's complete lack of training in either design or construction of furniture, because it played no role in deterring him from setting up the furniture shop. His products, derived from examples of the standard Arts and Crafts objects such as the Morris recliner (fig 3.2) appropriated the vocabulary of the movement in the use of linear design, mortise and tenon construction, and a preference for stained over painted woods. Indeed, although Hubbard relied strongly upon American antecedents for his philosophical grounding, his furniture bears testimony to the continuing influence of British design on his aesthetic. Interestingly, Hubbard often rejected the more severe and rectilinear aspects of British design and instead favored details reminiscent of Charles Mackmurdo (fig. 3.3). The furniture shop appears to have been self-sustaining, though unable to match the financial success of the Press.

The Roycroft metalworking shop began in a similar manner as did the furniture shop, and reflects the corporate identity that Hubbard instilled in the community. "The business that begins small and grows," he wrote, "is a safe business, the business that

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[27] Anna B. McGill, "The Roycrofters," *Catholic World* 73 (September 1901): 791.

begins big is the one that goes by the board."[28] Like the furniture shop, Hubbard's foray into metalworking reflected the desire to furnish his furniture and buildings with his own materials, rather than pay an outside shop to manufacture them.[29] What began essentially as a blacksmith operation in 1899 had, by the time of Hubbard's death in 1915, become a successful venture that was able to supply not only the expanding Roycroft community with wares, but also was awarded larger commissions from outside sources.[30] Karl Kipp, a former banker turned craftsman who took over the shop in 1908, is generally credited with the transformation of the shop into a successful and self-sustaining enterprise. Aesthetically, the metalworking shop produced a range of wares that demonstrated myriad influences, both foreign and domestic. Some vases and bowls echoed the reductive floriform shapes of the Grueby Faience Company's critically acclaimed ceramics (figs. 3.4 and 3.5), while others demonstrated a persistent and quiet classicism (fig. 3.6). Among the department's most progressive deigns were those that used the geometric simplicity of the Secessionist design aesthetic (figs. 3.7 and 3.8).

Under Hubbard's direction, the Roycroft shops became transformed from a small press into a crafts village that contained a furniture shop, art school, metal shop, stained glass workshop, an inn, a pottery, and an expanded press. The corporate structure of the community—and also because the various craft enterprises were based on the workshop model—guaranteed perpetuity of style and assured a transfer of skills. In addition, Hubbard made common visual sources available to the community, such as

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[28] Hubbard, *Note Book,* 184.

[29] See Robert Rust et al., "Alchemy in East Aurora: Roycroft Metal Arts," in *Head, Heart and Hand,* 75-96.

[30] One notable commission of 1912 was for the Grove Park Inn, located in Asheville, North Carolina; see Rust et al., "Roycroft Metal Arts," 84.

*International Studio, Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* and *Dekorative Kunst* that—especially when combined with the lack of training that many employees entered with—strengthened the visual unity to the products.[31] Because design strategies became ingrained within the methodology of the shop it is often difficult to attribute unsigned works to a specific designer or worker.

The sense of communal cohesion was further buttressed by the insular nature of the community and the psychological benefits of belonging to the Roycrofters. Hubbard's vision was succinctly articulated in *The Book of the Roycrofters:* "[t]he Roycroft has no figureheads, no hangers-on, no pensioners—everybody works. The Roycroft is a school and factory combined, and many of the workers fully realize that they are getting paid here for doing what they would have to pay for the privilege of doing elsewhere."[32] The mentality of a brotherhood to which one was fortunate to belong assured a sense of harmony and duty that only served to strengthen Hubbard's corporation. As one observer noted, "the result of this unusual arrangement is a strong interest in the shop on the part of the workers, a more intimate connection with it than if they were employed on the usual basis."[33] Indeed incompatible though they first seem, Hubbard's synthesis of communal and corporate interests, combined with his self-promotional savvy, allowed him to build a successful and profitable community.

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[31] Dard Hunter, *My Life with Paper: An Autobiography* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 43.

[32] Francis Farrar and Abigail Farrar, *Book of the Roycrofters* (East Aurora: Roycroft Press, 1907), 15. The idea of the combination school and factory had particular resonance in American Arts and Crafts and was an early aspect of the Rookwood Pottery that was frequently promoted in the firm's literature. Although dated, Herbert Peck, *The Book of Rookwood Pottery* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1968), still provides the most accurate and detailed chronology of the pottery.

[33] McGill, "The Roycrofters," 791.

Unfortunately, the structure and location of the community also allowed for less-skilled workers to rise through the ranks rather quickly and often led to charges of inferior craftsmanship. Janet Ashbee noted her in journal that the work was, "queer stuff," punctuated all too infrequently by "a successful fluke."[34] Although her comments give the impression that she found Hubbard quite charming, she also had the experience and acumen to give a critical assessment of the shortcomings of the printing shop:

> He has 8 or 10 presses worked by a gas engine, and one little forlorn hand press that he uses for special proofs. What the place lacks is someone with a strong instinct of beauty, who will refuse to pass those inorganic designs, and the colours that fight. At present they go on the "do it as well as you can" principle, which is very human; but they do turn out a lot of poor work.[35]

Indeed, one of the worries about the Arts and Crafts movement in general—expressed by both critics and advocates alike—was that the emphasis on the restorative value of hand work was frequently at the expense of the product's quality. As artisan and writer Ernest A. Batchelder noted in *The Craftsman*, the charge of "amateurish" was not only valid, but directly related to the "do it as well as you can" type of principle that Janet Ashbee remarked upon:

> The justice of the criticism that our work is amateurish and our workers incompetent depends largely upon the point of view of the critic. No doubt many of us in America are playing at arts and crafts. We take a few lessons in an art school, and hasten forth to set up shops of our own, produce wares to sell, and teach others the fascinating pastime of "expressing" themselves in hammer-tracked copper, tooled leather or pottery.[36]

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[34] As quoted in Robert Winter, "American Sheaves from C. R. A. and Janet Ashbee," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 30 (December 1971): 319.

[35] Felicity Asbee, *Janet Ashbee: Love, Marriage and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 65.

[36] Ernest A. Batchelder, "The Arts and Crafts Movement in America: Work or Play?" *The Craftsman* 16 (August 1909): 546.

In Batchelder's view, "the fact that an article is made by hand does not necessarily reflect to its credit." Indeed, while present-day scholarship on the Arts and Crafts frequently fetishizes the handicrafts, Batchelder expressed one of the concerns of Arts and Crafts practitioners, that the emphasis on handmade items distorted the underlying principles of the movement:

> We have long made a virtue of the "little irregularities," and the artistic accidents" of hand work. Such things may very readily become an affectation, a convenient excuse for unskilled technique, at the hands of a worker of immature practice and experience… Art demands sincerity of purpose; craft demands skilled workmanship.[37]

Hubbard's previous success in the business world probably had reinforced his faith in the efficacy of the corporate structure, and he increasingly drew heavily on Transcendentalist writings for support of this position. Abigail and Francis Farrar, writing at the behest of Hubbard in 1907, noted that, "The Roycrofters are organized as a corporation, but work together as a community."[38] From the beginning, Hubbard seems to have treated this venture as a corporation that used the medievalizing notions of brotherhood, germane to an Arts and Crafts community, to strengthen his position as leader. Hubbard never denied the economic side of modernity, as Jackson Lears suggests throughout his study, but, rather, sought from the beginning to enhance the beneficial aspects of it by working from within the corporate ethos.

Of all the Transcendentalists, Thoreau most directly articulated a willing embrace of the productive potential of modernity and provided Hubbard a philosophical base upon which he to stand. In *Civil Disobedience,* Thoreau remarked that, "a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation *with* a

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[37] Batchelder, "Work or Play?" 547.

[38] Farrar and Farrar, *Book of the Roycrofters,* 10.

conscience."[39] For Thoreau, it was not the structure of the organization that defined its potential, as much as the intention of those who created it. It is on this point that Hubbard's understanding of Transcendentalism is most closely aligned with Thoreau's and his familiarity with the major texts becomes obvious. As Hubbard would later state in his short story *Five Babies:*

> … if you answer that corporations have no souls, I'll say: "Friend, you were never more mistaken in your life. The business that has no soul soon ceases to exist; and the success of a company or corporation turns on the kind of soul it possesses. Soul is necessary to service. Courtesy, kindness, honesty and efficiency are tangible soul-assets...[40]

Of course, Thoreau was not the only source Hubbard employed as justification for the corporate structure of his community, for Whitman and even Emerson were closely scrutinized to determine their positions on modernity as well. In addition, Hubbard also relied on the Transcendentalists' belief in the importance of intention as further justification for his enterprise.

Hubbard's careful reading of the texts would have allowed him to realize that Thoreau's sojourn to Walden Pond was not simply an escapist flight away from modernity. Instead, Thoreau ventured into the woods fully with the intention of leaving them and returning to society. His intention was not to live apart from modernity (which he could have, had he chosen not to return) but to learn how to live vitally within the context of modern times. This rationale was made clear when he stated: "It would be of some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of outward civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessaries [sic] of life and what methods

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[39] Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (1849), reprinted in *Walden and Civil Disobedience,* Penguin Classics Edition (New York: Penguin, 1986), 387. Emphasis is original.

[40] Elbert Hubbard, "Five Babies," in *The Mintage* (East Aurora, New York: 1910), 14-15. See also Hubbard, "Why I am a Philistine," 78-9 for another appropriation of Thoreau's quote.

have been taken to obtain them..." [41] Rather than deny modernity, Hubbard sought to modify it, as Thoreau suggested, by restoring the solidity of the pre-industrial self without sacrificing the benefits of the modern era.

While many who were anxious about the pernicious effects of modernity targeted the corporate structure as one of the attendant evils created by the division of labor, Hubbard sought to ameliorate those fears by placing the structure within a historical narrative. Like Thoreau, Hubbard emphasized that it was not the structure itself that was at fault, but rather the intentions of those who ran the structure that determined the worth of the enterprise. Painting the structure as both historic and benevolent, Hubbard argued that:

> The corporation had its rise in the fertile brain of Julius Caesar, and was founded on the idea of the Tenth Legion that never died…Caesar set apart a hundred men to make an aqueduct. Knowing that it would take probably longer than the lifetime of these men to complete the task, Caesar ordered that whenever one of the hundred died the rest should elect his successor, and thus, though the original hundred men would pass away, yet the corporation would live on.[42]

The example Hubbard illustrated is in many ways a semantic slight-of-hand, since his comparison is concerned with civic works (not pecuniary remuneration) and emphasized the structure as a necessary factor in carrying out tasks for the public good. Yet, in stretching the definition of a corporation to minimize the importance of profit and stress the idea of public good, Hubbard also revealed how strongly the notion of "intention" would factor in to an assessment of the American Arts and Crafts.

Among the features common to the British and American variants of the Arts and Crafts movement is the fundamental importance placed upon the idea of intent: the

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[41] Thoreau, *Walden,* 54.

[42] Hubbard, *Note Book*, 87.

belief that the motivation behind an action was as important—if not more so— as that action's result. Although the priorities of the two movements differed, this structural similarity remains. Even William Morris, despite his own Socialist leanings, left open the possibility that a money-making enterprise could exist within the definition of the Arts and Crafts when he repeatedly stressed the idea that work should be produced "for use and not for profit."[43] Morris did not preclude the possibility that profits will follow from this work; rather, he insisted upon not making profits the primary motive. When Janet Ashbee, wife of C. R. Ashbee, visited East Aurora in 1900, she recorded a similar sentiment in her journal: "[*The Philistine*] amply pays wages, prints books, … and enables a delightful crank to run what appears to be an ideal community. If he also makes good profits, who's to blame him."[44] For Hubbard, a close reading of Transcendental and British reform sources enabled him to explore the potential of the corporation without diminishing the potency of critique. His success in the corporate world had buttressed his own aversion to socialism, a feeling rooted in the American mythos of meritocracy that stemmed from Puritan and republican traditions.

For the most part, American reformers wanted little to do with Morris's vision of a socialist state, and calls for that type of structure were infrequent and unheeded.[45] Americans might have admired the impulse of communal work and cooperation, but this

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[43] See, for example William Morris, *Art and Its Producers, and The Arts & Crafts of Today: Two Addresses Delivered before the National Association for the Advancement of Art* (London: Longmans & Co., 1901), 7.

[44] As quoted in Winter, "American Sheaves," 319.

[45] The exception to this rule seems to be Irene Sargent, whose articles and influence in the early part of Stickley's *Craftsman Magazine* create the impression that American Arts and Crafts reformers were much more interested in Socialism than would appear to be the case. For Sargent's contributions see Cleota Reed, "Irene Sargent: Rediscovering a Lost Legend," *Courier* 14 (Summer 1979): 4-9; see also Cleota Reed, "Irene Sargent: A Comprehensive Bibliography of her Published Writings," *Courier* 18 (Spring 1981): 10-17.

was more likely to be acceptable as a function of like-minded wills than a top-down political or social structure. On the whole, Americans were suspicious of socialism, probably because it seemed to repeal freedoms that were part of the historical understanding of their national identity. As Hubbard noted, "Socialism, with its restrictions on what any man shall receive would never have produced a Marshall Field, a Commodore, a Vanderbilt, a Henry Ford."[46] Indeed, because the Arts and Crafts in America was so strongly attached to the notion of rehabilitating the sense of self within the individual, any suggestion of a system that undermined the integrity of the self—or seemed to inhibit the capacity for the individual to achieve their fullest potential—found few supporters.

Hubbard's relationship with Morris, as a result of his aversion to socialism, became a difficult affair to navigate. On one hand, it was impossible to promote the Arts and Crafts without being associated with Morris, Ruskin, and the British movement in general. Conversely, the American insistence on individualism made it dangerous to be too closely associated with British precedent. As *The Book of the Roycrofters* pointed out:

> It has been said that the Roycroft work was founded on the idea of William Morris, but let no one imagine the Roycrofters are mere imitators—they have, in many respects, passed Morris far [sic].[47]

Among the many paradoxes of Hubbard's community was this difficult relationship with the legacy of Morris which ultimately led to a cycle of embracing and rejecting Morris. The phases of the cycle were probably more practical than philosophical: Hubbard seemed eager to embrace the legacy of the Kelmscott Press when it was most

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[46] Hubbard, *Note Book,* 134.

[47] Farrar and Farrar, *Book of the Roycrofters*, 14.

advantageous; conversely, he asserted his enterprise as a product of individualism when that was more desirable.

The idea of intention, and the power that this notion held in determining the value of an endeavor, seems to have been particularly important to Hubbard. Although he worked hard to promote the Roycroft community and was a tireless lecturer throughout his involvement, rarely if ever was a financial motive mentioned. Indeed, while Hubbard could brag about the prosperity of his venture, he always framed his success as the result of "good fortune," and "chance," rather than desire. In order to justify his capitalist leanings, Hubbard needed (at least in words) to suppress his desire to make money. In the American variation of the Arts and Crafts, as Hubbard's career indicates, profit was acceptable as a result of action but taboo if it became the primary motivation for a venture.

Hubbard structured the Roycrofters as a blend of capitalist and socialist impulses in which the competing systems would not cancel each other out, but complement each other. Reports from the community continually stressed the joyful quality of the work, no doubt alluding to Morris's observation that "art is the expression of man's joy in his labor."[48] In regards to making profit, Hubbard evaded (at least in his own mind) any charges of inconsistency since he did not place the taking of profits over the dignity of labor or the joy it was presumed to bring to the craftsman. For some reviewers, the structure of the community was a perfect blend of these traditions that created an

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[48] As quoted in Hartt, "Elbert Hubbard," 1005. Hubbard frequently alluded to this quote, though he varied the language slightly. See also ibid., 1007: "let us make the art product a joy to the producer."

"industrial commune" without resorting to "town socialism… that remunerative slavery, in which the best shall be ruled by the second best."[49]

Hubbard painted the Roycrofters as an idyllic corporation in which brotherhood and equality dominated the daily lives of those involved. In a sense, this allowed him to bypass the debate about Socialism since he was actively creating a community that fostered all of the necessary benefits of the system, but none of the adverse effects. Work was not the laborious, tedious repetition of tasks that one associated with a factory setting, but a satisfying and even enjoyable part of life. The Roycroft community was a place of honesty and integrity, free of the negative traits of crime and "hoodlumism" so often associated with modern life.[50] Hubbard's description of his press shop actively promoted these views:

> We had four girls and three boys working for us then. The Shop was never locked, and the boys and girls used to come around evenings. It was really more pleasant than home.
> I brought over a shelf of books from the library. Then I brought over a piano, because the youngsters wanted to dance.
> The girls brought flowers and birds, and the boys put up curtains at the windows. We were having a lot o' fun, with new subscriptions coming in almost every day, and once and a while an order for a book.[51]

Without ever mentioning Morris by name, in this passage, Hubbard carefully aligned himself with fundamental tenet of the British ideology by highlighting the idea of joyful labor. Indeed, throughout his career, Hubbard carefully cultivated a blend of British Arts and Crafts and Transcendentalist ideologies by creating a public persona that spoke simultaneously to these traditions.

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[49] C[harles] M S[kinner], "Handicrafts Revived in the Roycroft Shop," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (3 September 1899): 15. Portions of this text were reprinted as "The Home of the Roycrofters," *Current Literature* 26 (December 1899): 1-4.

[50] "Hoodlumism" is the term Hubbard uses. See Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 310.

[51] Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 312.

**Inventing Hubbard: Myths, Facts and the Function of Autobiography**

In order to understand the myths Hubbard engaged for the construction of his biography, his deliberate manipulation of the facts of his life need to be read as part of this period in which the popularity of Transcendentalism continued to rise. Even before he had started the Roycroft Community in East Aurora, Hubbard had begun to engage in a Transcendental fantasy that strengthened his emotional connections with the major figures in this movement. Although he never met Emerson or Thoreau, Hubbard apparently sought out Whitman during the poet's later years in Camden.[52] It is around this time, or at some point in the early 1890s, that Hubbard's involvement with Transcendentalism transformed from a passive appreciation of the movement to a more active role in which the construction of self-identity was a primary concern. No longer content to simply idolize his heroes, Hubbard deliberately manipulated his autobiography to bring it in line with Transcendentalist legacy and memory.

Elbert Green Hubbard was born in Bloomington, Illinois, on June 19, 1856. His father was a country doctor whom, Hubbard noted, never made more than five hundred dollars a year.[53] By the age of fifteen, Hubbard had finished school, as he would later recall, "with a fair hold on the three R's, and beyond this my education in 'manual

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[52] Although Hubbard's visit is recorded in *Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors,* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), many of these Journeys were fictional. However, Sadakichi Hartmann and others did precisely the same thing so it is possible that Hubbard did too.

[53] Though it is clear that Hubbard is attempting to downplay the extent of his father's wealth, other references to his father's financial situation indicate that this figure should not be accepted uncritically. See Felix Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora* (New York: 1926), 29. Shay quotes a letter from Hubbard to his mother c. 1892/3 in which he describes his father as, along with himself, "probably the only men in the whole U. S. who have all the money they desire."

training' had been good."[54] In 1871, at the age of fifteen, Hubbard met John D. Larkin, a partner in the Chicago Soap firm of Larkin and Weller. The two met by chance, as Larkin had begun courting Hubbard's sister.[55] The relationship would prove beneficial to Hubbard, however, as Larkin hired him to sell soap door to door. Over the next four years, Hubbard established a reputation as a successful and innovative salesman, traits that evidently made an impression on Larkin. In 1875, Larkin, who in the interim had married Hubbard's sister and left the firm to open his own manufacturing plant in Buffalo, New York, invited Hubbard to join as a junior partner.

Hubbard's own recollection of this period was somewhat different when he wrote a brief autobiographical sketch for *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in 1902.[56] He downplayed the successes he had as a businessman and salesman, and focused instead on the virtues of his rural upbringing. He spoke indirectly of Larkin, never mentioning him by name, and constructed a wandering narrative of fortune, diligence, and determination. In this autobiographical sketch, Hubbard's myth-making is readily apparent, not only in the events he chose, but the considerable gaps he left untouched. More a statement of beliefs and intentions than an account of his life, Hubbard's sketch avoided virtually all details of his life before Roycroft. What he offered, instead, as a history of his life was a document that traced the history and development of his character. He used types that

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[54] Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 317. This is a lengthy autobiographical statement that is a valuable resource to track the construction of Hubbard's identity. A reprint of the text with minor editorial changes appeared under the heading "Autobiographical," in *Little Journeys to the Homes of Good Men and Great,* (New York: William Wise and Co., 1928).

[55] Jack Quinan, "Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft," *Head, Heart and Hand: Elbert Hubbard and the Roycrofters,* Rochester: University of Rochester Press (1994): 2-7 provides an accurate summary of this period in Hubbard's life.

[56] Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 309-20.

were widely known to an audience raised within the Transcendental tradition, and constructed a narrative that demonstrated and legitimized his sense of self.

Hubbard's essay was more promotional than historical in its scope, and cloaked its deliberate omissions with the guise of humility and brevity. This history is not a linear narrative, but rather a meandering pastiche of facts, types, and associations through which the character of the subject is emphasized more than the order of events in his life. There is the sense that for Hubbard, the present is everything, and the past is a malleable sheet upon which he hammered out a justification for the then-current moment. Hubbard presented himself concurrently as a man of his time and as a trans-historical archetype of individualism. He was at once promoter, philosopher, businessman, and Midwesterner:

> Concerning my own history, I'll not tarry long to tell it. It has been too much like the career of many another, born in the semi-pioneer times of the Middle West, to attract much attention, unless one should go into the psychology of the thing with the intent to show the evolution of a soul. But that will require a book—and some day I'll write it, after the manner of Saint Augustine or Jean Jacques Rousseau.[57]

The sense of false humility revealing an overstated ambition is quintessential Hubbard. On one hand, his career is too similar to that of others to be worth mentioning but, on the other, it is as deserving as St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Rousseau's same-titled work.

Although these works might seem strange models to live up to, they served the purpose of aligning Hubbard's persona with the life and legacy of Emerson. As Hubbard recounted for readers of *The Philistine* almost a decade earlier:

> In the year 1848… [Emerson] made a lecturing tour through England. Among the town he visited was Coventry, where he was entertained at the residence of Mr. Charles Bray. In the family of Mr. Bray lived a young

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[57] Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 316.

> woman by the name of Mary Ann Evans, and although this Miss Evans was not handsome, either in face or figure, she made a decided impression on Mr. Emerson…
> "What is you favorite book?" said Mr. Emerson to Miss Evans, somewhat abruptly.
> "Rousseau's *Confessions*," said the young woman instantly.
> "And so it is mine," answered Mr. Emerson.[58]

Throughout his career, Hubbard continuously fluctuated between high culture and popular mythology, a strategy that enabled him to engage a wide audience. His folksy patterns of speech likewise softened the literary references sprinkled throughout his texts, and made him seem more a man of the people than a self-referential, educated elitist. In the publications of his Roycroft Press, he continued to strengthen his ties to the major figures of Transcendentalism directly through panegyric essays and reprints of major works. At the same time, he furthered the process of self-identification with the Transcendentalists through a process of subtle, text-based associations.

His description of the skills he learned during his childhood, in addition to omitting any specific reference to Larkin, played upon the dichotomy of country and city life that was intrinsic to Transcendentalist concerns. In order to construct himself as heir apparent to Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, Hubbard needed to demonstrate to his audience that his character was genuine and true. Deeply-ingrained beliefs regarding the superiority of country life upon the moral fiber of character informed Hubbard's essay and became an integral part of the myth he constructed. His brief mention of school is followed by a list of his skills and achievements:

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[58] Elbert Hubbard, "The Confessional in Letters," *The Philistine: A Periodical of Protest* 1 (August 1895)" 82-3. Hubbard attributes the quote to Moncure Conway's *Emerson at Home and Abroad* (Boston: 1882), a book he mined for source material on other occasions as well: see note 86. The same exchange also appeared in a somewhat altered view and without an attribution to Conway, see Elbert Hubbard, "George Elliot," *Little Journeys to the Homes of Good Men and Great,* (New York: William Wise and Co., 1928), 55.

> I knew all the forest-trees, all wild animals thereabout, every kind of fish, frog, fowl or bird that swam, ran or flew. I knew every kind of grain or vegetable, and its comparative value. I knew the different breeds of cattle, horses, sheep and swine.
> I could teach wild cows to stand while being milked; break horses to saddle or harness; could sow, plow and reap; knew the mysteries of apple-butter, pumpkin pie, pickled beef, smoked side-meat, and could make lye at a leach and formulate soft soap.
> That is to say, I was a bright, strong, active country boy who had been brought up to help his father and mother get a living for a large family.[59]

Although some of this description may be true, Hubbard's construction of himself as a country boy, full of the skills of survival and a self-reliant persona, seems a calculated response to middle-class fears regarding the effects of modernity.

Among the worries frequently expressed was the feminization of males that emerged as labor became less physical, and culture and ease more prevalent.[60] T. J. Jackson Lears has located these fears with the growth of industry following the Civil War—"the second industrial revolution"—but his argument obscures the manner that similar cultural critiques had been introduced by the Transcendentalists well before.[61] Emerson had described precisely this phenomenon, as early as 1841, and linked it explicitly with the emergence of a new economy. In "Self-Reliance" he warned readers that, "society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members."[62] Hubbard echoed the palpable fear that gentile society was an emasculating force, to be remedied by involvement in the Arts and Crafts movement,

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[59] Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 317.

[60] See Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf: 1977; New York: Noonday Press, 1998).

[61] Lears, *No Place of Grace,* esp. 7-10.

[62] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," (1841) in *Essential Writings,* 134.

when he stated that, "the word Philistine [has] become a synonym for manly independence."[63]

For Transcendentalists, restoring the solidity to the self—what William Channing described as the "inalienable integrity of man"—was a task historically associated with the natural world. Beginning with Emerson's 1836 essay, *Nature*, continued by the founding of George Ripley's Brook Farm in April 1841, and confirmed by the 1854 published account of Thoreau's sojourn to Walden Pond, the restorative power of nature had moved from philosophical theory to concrete fact. Fears regarding the dandified manner of city life and its decadent, corrupting influences strengthened the belief that rural life was morally to superior to city life. The Transcendentalist adoption of this concept was not wholly original; Adam Smith had expressed a similar sentiment in *Wealth of Nations* when he stated that everyone acknowledged that the "lower ranks of people in the country are really superior to those of the town."[64] Yet, for Transcendentalism, nature was not merely the storehouse of superior character but also the reflection of the soul. In order for a man to truly understand himself, a close connection to Nature was necessary. Thus, by emphasizing himself as a man versed in the language of nature, Hubbard spoke to the Republican, frontier tradition that emphasized virility, Emerson's "Self-Reliance," and an introspective Transcendentalist communion.

In addition to emphasizing his rustic credentials in his autobiography, Hubbard also suppressed his success as a businessman, again playing to popular perceptions regarding the moral character of this type. What Hubbard instead emphasized was the

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[63] Elbert Hubbard, "Why I am a Philistine," *The Philistine* 3 (February 1896): 85.

[64] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), reprinted as *Wealth of Nations,* ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 146.

manner in which he was able to resist the temptations of wealth: specifically the "millions" that the Larkin Company was destined to make as a result of his involvement. This sense of moral restraint that Hubbard gave to his autobiography helped diminish the attention that might normally have been paid to the wealth he accumulated. This was a strategy he would use throughout his career, and often in his writing he drew attention to the disparity of wealth or privilege between himself and others. Although he aligned himself strongly with Morris, he was cautious to distance himself, at least in the minds of his readers, by emphasizing Morris's inheritance. As *The Book of the Roycrofters* noted:

> It has been said that the Roycroft work was founded on the idea of William Morris, but let no one imagine the Roycrofters are mere imitators—they have, in many respects, surpassed Morris far. One thing, William Morris inherited a fortune and always had the money to secure the talent he desired, if it was not close at hand. But the Roycroft has had to produce its workmen.[65]

By continually emphasizing his rural roots and downplaying the role of money in his own life and business ventures, Hubbard constructed a persona that seems deliberately intended to deflect the growing class hostility and resentment towards the wealthy. His constant references to good fortune, hard work, and diligence became ways to justify his fortune and make it acceptable to a larger public by cloaking it in the terms of the self-made man. Hubbard's emphasis that William Morris's money was inherited—the mention of which only serves to remind the reader that Hubbard's was not—likewise framed his wealth as an indication of the strength of his character, rather than as a corrupting influence upon him. Made for a democratic society that liked to view itself as a meritocracy, Hubbard's narrative was calculated not to alienate any of his potential constituency over the issue of wealth.

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[65] Farrar and Farrar, *The Book of the Roycrofters,* 14.

Perhaps content with, or bored by, his own success, Hubbard informed Larkin that he would retire by January 1893 in order to pursue studies in writing at Harvard University. Recalling this period in his life for *The Cosmopolitan,* Hubbard was predictably nonchalant and perpetuated the myth of the self-made businessman, but he also tempered his narrative with allusions to frontier-style Yankeeism and rugged self-reliance. Although he had walked away with a substantial fortune, and later in this article estimated the profits of the Roycroft shops at "something over two hundred thousand dollars," he insisted from the start of the article that, "I am not rich as the world counts wealth."[66] For Hubbard, wealth needed to be an outward sign of the strength of his character, and his history needed to confirm that. He told readers:

> I skipped out for the West and became a cowboy; tired of this and went to Chicago; worked in a printing-office; peddled soap from house to house; shoved lumber on the docks; read all the books I could find; wrote letters back to country newspapers and became a reporter; next got a job as a traveling salesman; taught district school and read Emerson, Carlyle and Macaulay; worked in a soap factory; read Shakespeare and committed most of "Hamlet" to memory with an eye on the stage; became manager of the soap-factory, then partner; evolved an idea for the concern and put it on the track of making millions—knew it was going to make millions—did not want them; sold out my interest for seventy-five thousand dollars and went to Harvard College; tramped through Europe; wrote for sundry newspapers; penned two books (couldn't find a publisher); taught night school in Buffalo; tramped through Europe some more and met William Morris (caught it); came back to East Aurora and started "Chautauqua Circles"; studied Greek and Latin with a local clergyman; raised trotting-horses; wrote "Little Journeys to the Homes of Good Men and Great" (couldn't find a publisher).[67]

Hubbard's ability to compress the history of his formative years into less than two hundred words is admirable, yet it is soon evident that accuracy has been sacrificed for brevity and the effect of the narrative. As he retold the story in subsequent versions,

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[66] Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 318 and 309 respectively. Hubbard's estimation of the Roycroft earnings was on top of "a good living for everybody." (318)

[67] Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 317.

Hubbard emphasized the predestined, miraculous nature of this journey by starting this section with: "I went westward like the course of empire."[68] The difficulty with such a passage, which in turn is the difficulty with Hubbard's persona, is its elusiveness. In order to make sense of the thing, one must disentangle the kernels of strength from the factual exaggerations and the temporal distortions evident in the chronology.

Hubbard's story is incorrect on a number of accounts. Hubbard wrote more than two books by the time he left Harvard, and each was published, seemingly without too much difficulty or incident.[69] Although he came from a business background and had published four novels and a number of articles before his involvement in the *Philistine*, Hubbard deliberately positioned himself as one who worked against the system. He became, in essence, a man who through the sheer force of will and determination arrived at his place in life. Hubbard's narrative forecasts the manner by which he later transformed Emerson's concept of self-reliance from a character trait into an economic mantra.

Additionally, though a number of publishing houses initially passed on the opportunity to publish his *Little Journeys* when he first submitted it, Putnam and Sons reconsidered shortly thereafter and a contract was soon signed. This was published after Hubbard traveled to Europe the first time, and despite his desire to meet William

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[68] "Autobiographical," *Good Men and Great*, xxxii.

[69] Hubbard actually had three novels published between 1893 and 1894: Elbert Hubbard, *One Day: A Tale of the Prairies* (Boston: 1893); Elbert Hubbard, *No Enemy (but Himself)* (New York: 1894); Elbert Hubbard, *Forbes of Harvard* (Boston: 1894). Interestingly, Hubbard makes no mention of his first book, nor does he discuss his only one written under a pseudonym: Apasia Hobbs [Elbert Hubbard and Alice Moore], *The Man* (NY: 1891). The high / low dynamic of Hubbard's work is already evident in the tension between the lowbrow drama of the novel and the choice of pseudonym. "Apasia," is the English translation of a Greek term that roughly translates to "the elimination of true ignorance." See Leonardo Tarán, "Platonism and Socratic Ignorance (With Special Reference to Republic 1)," *Collected Papers 1962-1999* (Leiden, Boston, Cologne: 2001), 223. Hubbard also may have enjoyed that the term was linguistically very close to "aphasia," though quite different in meaning.

Morris, and his subsequent efforts to construct himself as an American Morris, no such meeting ever took place. The idea that Hubbard met Morris, however, was a lie he constantly perpetuated up until his death. It was only in 1916 that his son Bert revealed that Morris was sick in bed when the two of them arrived at Kelmscott Press and was never seen during the visit. [70] Throughout Hubbard's tempestuous narrative is an almost swirling, cosmic and pre-ordained sense that everything in the past had miraculously prepared Hubbard for the present. It was as if the divine forces that pushed American settlement westward and the Transcendental strength of individual character had combined in Hubbard to produce a man incapable of anything other than success.

Inherent in any estimation of Hubbard is the paradoxical nature of his personality. Although he chose the Arts and Crafts as the outlet for his energies, and continually stressed the importance of a determined, genuine existence, much of his own life was shrouded in deception and accusations of fraud.[71] Despite being aware of these charges (or perhaps because of them), Hubbard seems to have enjoyed remaining an enigmatic figure. Rather than retreat inward, Hubbard fully engaged the role of provocateur and at times seemed to be taunting his critics, almost daring them to prove him a fraud (fig. 3.9). By drawing upon his Transcendentalist philosophical heritage, Hubbard sought to remake the British variant of the Arts and Crafts movement to align more easily with American expectations and attitudes regarding business, labor and the function of handicrafts.

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[70] See for instance Wolfe and McKenna, *Louis Herman Kinder,* 27.

[71] Apparently Michael Monahan was not alone in this criticism of Hubbard. Even Hubbard's more sympathetic biographers told of how when he lectured ""the old fraud" was a favorite epithet. See H. Kenneth Dirlam and Ernest E. Simmons, *Sinners, this is East Aurora: The Story of Elbert Hubbard and the Roycroft Shops* (New York, Vantage Press, 1964), 210.

**Concord and the Transcendentalists**

Hubbard's immersion in the traditions and personalities of the Transcendentalist movement predates his involvement in the Arts and Crafts. In February 1893 Hubbard made a pilgrimage to Concord to study and absorb the folklore and experiences of his heroes. As Freeman Champney recalled:

> In February he had visited Concord, with a letter of introduction to the Misses Hosmer, and they had feasted him on reminiscences from the great days of Transcendentalism. Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and the Alcotts had all been old friends and neighbors, and Hubbard was quite overcome by this close brush with greatness. He wrote of it to Daisy, enclosing "a sprig from the tall pine that rocks to and fro in the breeze over the grave of Emerson, whose resting place is marked only by a huge boulder on which the chisel has never left its mark. Nearby are the graves of Hawthorne and Thoreau." (figs. 3.10 and 3.11)[72]

Concord was a chance to connect with the legacy of Emerson who, for Hubbard, represented the pinnacle of achievement in American philosophy. His gathering of sprigs from the pine over Emerson's grave demonstrates the near-talismanic belief he had in the power of things associated with the "sage of Concord." It also demonstrates the manner in which Hubbard was willing to employ pre-existing types in his self-construction: Moncure D. Conway's touching memoir *Emerson at Home and Abroad* of 1882 contains an almost identical passage.[73]

Hubbard's desire for self-identification and his construction of a social self consonant with Transcendental expectations is manifest even in his early novels and seems to increase over time. In *No Enemy (But Himself),* the identification is minor and

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[72] Champney, *Art and Glory*, 46.

[73] Moncure Conway, *Emerson at Home and Abroad* (Boston: 1882), 2: "I send you," a friend writes, "a sprig from the evergreen that bordered Emerson's grave as his coffin was lowered into it this afternoon." Hubbard was familiar with this work as he quoted from it on a number of other occasions.

is manifest mainly through allusions to Walt Whitman's writings.[74] The main character is a tramp called "His Whiskers"—although he is actually the wealthy and attractive John Hillard—who trades his wealth for experience and decides, for a brief period, to live the life of a tramp. While attempting to secure a meal, he suddenly channels Whitman:

> The farmer smiled, and told one of the several children that were crowding around the door to get the accordion. It was brought, and seating himself on the step, His Whiskers sang, first announcing: "Ladies and Gentlemen, *I loaf and invite my soul; I sing you a song of myself.*"[75]

The reference, one that Hubbard would use again throughout his career, was to the opening lines of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.[76] Hubbard's appropriation of Whitman's phrase demonstrates the importance he will place upon self-awareness and individualism when he later becomes engaged in the Arts and Crafts movement.

In Hubbard's second novel, *Forbes of Harvard,* the association with the Transcendentalists is even stronger, indicating that Hubbard sought to live vicariously through his main character, Arthur Forbes. Set mainly in Concord, Hubbard's novel features both Emerson and Thoreau as peripheral characters. The story is somewhat banal: Arthur Forbes (Harvard, Class of 1852) is suffering from consumption and heads out west. While there he has many adventures, is eventually arrested, and falls in love with Honor Harold, a young woman with whom he has been corresponding.[77] His friend and classmate in Cambridge—John Holworthy—also is smitten by Honor, makes an

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[74] Elbert Hubbard, *No Enemy (But Himself)* (Boston: Arena Publishers, 1894).

[75] Hubbard, *No Enemy (But Himself),* 67.

[76] Walt Whitman, [Song of Myself, 1855], *Leaves of Grass* (1855), line 4: "I loafe and invite my soul." For Hubbard, the phrase became a kind of mantra that he appears to have used when describing himself. See Felix Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora* (New York: William H. Wise, 1926), 28: "He [Hubbard] retired to loaf and invite his soul, and incidentally to pursue higher education."

[77] The name of Hubbard's love probably has a double significance. The first, implying chastity is obvious. The second is less so: Hubbard had a younger sister named Honor.

advance, but is rejected. Honor, it turns out, is smitten by Arthur. She writes to the President asking for a pardon, which is granted to Forbes and the young lovers are married in San Francisco. Hubbard constructed the novel as a series of letters, to and from Arthur Forbes, which had been entrusted to him to edit and publish after Forbes's untimely death.[78]

Overall, the critical reception of Hubbard's literary works was mixed, but many noted the connections between Hubbard and the philosophical heritage of Transcendentalism. A reviewer in *The Critic* noted that, "the letters of the lovers breathe a spirit of Emersonian optimism, due, perhaps, to the subtle influence of the Concord atmosphere."[79] B. O. Flower mentioned that Emerson and Thoreau were characters in the work before praising the books' "group of broad-minded, progressive and growing characters… [who] represent various phases of human thought and development." He also found the book, "characterized by high thinking," and observed that, "the tendency of this work is to raise the ideals of life."[80] Boston's *Congregationalist* was less enthusiastic, noting that, "some of the letters are more fanciful or philosophical than the interests of the story demand. It is pleasant reading, and sometimes amusing, but hardly engrossing."[81] In *Forbes of Harvard* Hubbard demonstrated—and audiences noticed—the degree to which he perpetuated the essential tenets of Transcendentalism.

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[78] Ironically, Arthur Forbes died on a ship that sank in the English channel.

[79] "Free Thought and Transcendentalism," *The Critic* 22 (14 July 1894): 22.

[80] B. O. Flowers, "Books of the Day: Forbes of Harvard," *The Arena* 10 (June 1894): ix. Although Flowers cannot be considered an objective source, since Hubbard was writing for Flowers' publication *The Arena* and his works were being published by Arena Press, his reviews were one of the channels through which Hubbard's connections to Transcendentalism were made clear.

[81] "Stories," *Congregationalist* 79 (24 May 1894): 733.

In addition to inspiration and source material for two of his novels, Hubbard also left Concord with a conception of what would later become his "Little Journeys."[82] These brief biographical portraits of famous men, and less-frequently women, were modeled on Emerson's *Representative Men.* Like Emerson's work, they were intended to fulfill the dictum which the poet had laid out in "Self-Reliance": "...all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons."[83] By December 1894, about six months before the first issue of *The Philistine* appeared, G. P. Putnam began to issue Hubbard's *Little Journeys* series as a periodical, and Hubbard began fashioning an identity that spoke to his Transcendental heritage.

The financial success of this modest venture undoubtedly prompted Putnam's to release *Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors*, a collection of essays that featured Hubbard's work as well as some earlier authors' manuscripts. In essence, the volume was a reprinting of the earlier work *Homes of American Authors,* which was published in 1853. Regarding the decision to revise and expand the work, the publisher noted that, "[we] thought that the generation which has grown up since the first publication of this book would be interested in reading these literary studies of a half century back... the publication of which has been initiated with the twelve papers of Mr. Elbert Hubbard issued in 1895."[84] Among the authors featured, the Transcendentalists were particularly well represented with Emerson, Hawthorne, and Whitman each receiving a chapter. Ironically, although Hubbard had begun to strongly identify with

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[82] "Publishers Note," *Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), n. p.

[83] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 140. Not surprisingly, this same passage was quoted by Elbert Hubbard II, [preface], in *Little Journeys to the Homes of Good Men and Great,* (New York: William Wise, 1928), vi.

[84] Publishers Note," *Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors,* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), n. p.

Emerson as a spiritual role model and mentor, Emerson would be the one subject in all of his "Little Journeys" whose absence was notable. It appears likely that since *Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors* included an essay on him by George William Curtis, Hubbard was in no position to write a similar chapter for this volume or subsequent ones.

Hubbard may not have been able to contribute an autobiographical sketch of Emerson directly, but he used his publications as a means to continually address the impact and resonance of Emerson's philosophy on his own development, and on the development of others. References to Emerson occur throughout his *Little Journeys* and appear in "Wendell Phillips," "Henry D. Thoreau," "George Elliot," "Walt Whitman," and others. Not only do references to Emerson appear throughout his *Little Journey* series, but Hubbard also drew upon Emerson's texts for his articles and printed quotations as stand-alone epithets within his magazines. In the Roycroft Inn, Hubbard hung a number of signs across the dining area for visitors to ponder as they ate, one of which read: "Self-Reliance."

Transcendentalism was so central to the identity of the Roycroft Community that Hubbard promoted this vision through both primary and secondary channels. For example, between purchasing the Roycroft press in November 1895 and his death twenty years later, Hubbard oversaw the publication of Emerson's *Essay on Friendship* (1899), *Self-Reliance* (1902), *Compensation* (1904), *Nature* (1905), as well as works by Whitman and Thoreau. Clearly, Emerson functioned for Hubbard as a role model, illustrating the possibility of the poet-philosopher as a force for change. He also may have demonstrated the possibility of material successes that a solid, dedicated sense individualism could foster, even in a period of increasing conformity and mechanization. In addition to these reprints, Hubbard kept the Transcendental memory alive in his own

periodicals and, less-frequently, in other magazines. In 1902, for instance, his articles "An Anecdote of Emerson," and "Walt Whitman and John Boroughs," appeared in *The Cosmopolitan*.[85]

Hubbard began to deify Emerson, which began in this pre-Roycroft period of his development, and found in *Self-Reliance* and other writings the foundations of a gospel of individualism on which he would model his life.[86] While critics of Transcendentalism have continually framed it as contradictory, murky, and confusing, it is clear that Hubbard was drawing strength from Transcendental texts and fashioning an identity consonant with aspects of Emerson's philosophy. Hubbard's immersion in the philosophy served both private and public needs: it formed a general guide for his living and became a practical model by which to conduct business. As Hubbard's personal life began to dissolve into a maelstrom of chaos at the end of the nineteenth-century closed, he increasingly fell back upon the writings of his heroes for strength and support.

Hubbard's attraction to the rigid morality and perceived uprightness of the Transcendentalists may well have served a psychological as well as business function for him, becoming a way for him to engage a moral superiority that was absent in his own life. Hubbard was a man divided in his love and loyalty, to two women: his wife Bertha Crawford and his mistress Alice Moore.[87] Whereas Bertha provided him with a stable sense of family and support, it was Alice who encouraged Hubbard to break away

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[85] See Elbert Hubbard, "An Anecdote of Emerson," *Cosmopolitan* 32 (March 1902): 566; and Elbert Hubbard, "Walt Whitman and John Boroughs," *Cosmopolitan* 33 (May 1902): 110-11.

[86] Hubbard reprinted many of Transcendentalists writings. See for instance, Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance* (East Aurora, New York: Roycroft Shops, 1902); Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (East Aurora, New York: Roycroft Shops, 1905); Henry David Thoreau, *Friendship, Love and Marriage* (East Aurora, New York: Roycrofters, 1910); Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* (East Aurora, New York: Roycrofters, 1904).

[87] The affair with Moore seems to have begun 1891 when the two were collaborating on *The Man*.

from traditionalism and pursue his own, individualistic artistic vision. In 1894, though still married to Bertha, he fathered a daughter with Alice; one year later his wife Bertha also gave birth to a daughter. Hubbard never wrote directly about this experience, but some idea of his position may be gathered in his essay on Henry Ward Beecher.[88] One of the premier orators of the nineteenth century, Beecher was sued in 1875 by Theodore Tilton, a member of his congregation in Brooklyn, after an affair between Beecher and the plaintiff's wife, Elizabeth R. Tilton, was made public.[89] The suit asked that Tilton be awarded $100,000 in compensation, as Beecher's actions had alienated the affection of his wife . "The worst thing about a double life," Hubbard suggested, "is not its immorality––it is that the relationship makes the man a liar. The universe is not planned for duplicity––all the energy we have is needed in our business, and he who starts out on the pathway of untruth finds himself treading upon brambles and nettles which close behind him and make return impossible."[90] By the time he published this essay, Hubbard himself had realized that return was impossible; in 1902, Elbert and Bertha divorced, and Hubbard married Alice Moore two years later.

## A Transcendental Identity

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[88] Hubbard's cryptic references in his autobiographical account for *Cosmopolitan,* written in the wake of public knowledge of his affair, was probably as close as he would come to addressing the issue directly. "I have never," he stated, "committed capital crimes, and although the blackmailer has recently camped upon my trail, I have chilled his zeal and dampened his ardor by a willingness to 'tell all.'" See Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 309.

[89] There are numerous sources devoted to the scandal, see for instance: Richard Wrightman Fox, *Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal* (Chicago: 1999); Altina L. Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America,* (Amherst: U Mass, 1982).

[90] Elbert Hubbard, "Henry Ward Beecher," *Little Journeys to the Homes of Eminent Orators* (New York: William Wise and Co., 1926), 371. This passage is also quoted in Champney, *Art and Glory,* 49. Champney arrived at a similar conclusion with regard to this passage, but curiously never analyzes the text.

> There's a flash of the fire of poetic madness in him. He has a leaning towards mysticism… He is Walt Whitman and Ruskin.
>
> —William Marion Reedy, 1900 [91]

Hubbard worshipped at the altar of Emerson, creating a persona that was modeled upon his hero and, in essence, crafting a contemporary version of Emerson's *Representative Men* with his publication of the series "Little Journeys." Yet, rather than exclusively pursuing a rigidly Emersonian identity he drew heavily on the precedents and personalities of Thoreau and Whitman. His willingness to engage and perpetuate the tradition of Transcendentalism throughout the first decades of the twentieth century is indicative of the power this philosophy continued to wield on the American consciousness. Hubbard was not reviving a form that had died out, as much as continuing to engage a popular mindset. In practical terms, Hubbard seized the opportunity to take charge of the movement, as the deaths of Emerson in 1882, and Whitman in 1892 had left a leadership vacuum and no clear successor. By the mid 1890s, Hubbard was using his press to create a literary record, and less-frequently visual one, that would place him at the head of the post-Whitman Transcendentalists.

Hubbard's identification with Whitman was particularly strong and forms one of the clearest visual records of his appropriation of the poet's identity. In *The Mintage,* first published in 1910, the portrait of Hubbard at the beginning of the collection bears a striking resemblance to Whitman's portrait from the 1855 frontispiece for *Leaves of Grass* (figs. 3.12 and 3.13).[92] Although Hubbard had used photographs in many of his

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[91] William Marrion Reedy, "A Criticism," *The Philistine: A Periodical of Protest* 11 (June 1900): 33, the byline indicates the article is reprinted from *The St. Louis Mirror,* 19 April 1900.

[92] Whitman used a number of different images depending on the edition. For a discussion of the image see Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); see also Reynolds, *Whitman's America,* 283-85.

earlier publications, here he chose the same medium as Whitman had, an engraving.[93] This image of Whitman was clearly known to Hubbard, for that very image illustrated the chapter he had written on the poet for the book *Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors*.

While both images share similar elements that link them, they are also filled with notable differences. Both Whitman and Hubbard stand with their right arm bent, their hands resting on their hip. Both subjects bear their weight on their right leg, indicated by the position of the right hip. Each is dressed in workingman's clothes: a plain shirt open at the neck and nondescript trousers. In dressing this way, both authors consciously rejected the fashions of the day in order to associate themselves with the working-class. It was a strategy that Hubbard had used earlier in his autobiographical statement when he projected the image of an unpretentious laborer. As Whitman had noted in the introduction to *Leaves of Grass,* "...the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors ... but always most in the common people."[94]

Yet, whereas Whitman's chin is tipped up, and he gazes at the viewer with a sense of strength and certainty, Hubbard's pose is much less virile and strong. Hubbard's head tips down slightly, his prominent forehead replaces Whitman's hat, and his chest is concave and deflated. The strong implied vertical line in Whitman's portrait, which runs from his right inseam, up through his shirt to the point at which his hat's brim and top intersect, is absent in the image of Hubbard. Instead, Hubbard appears

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[93] The image that appeared in *Leaves of Grass* was an etching after daguerreotype by Gabriel Harrison (present location unknown).

[94] Walt Whitman, "[Introduction]," *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 5-6. The second ellipsis is part of the text.

rumpled, and lacks the strong lines that further enhance the impression of power in Whitman's image. These factors, in combination with the slightly smaller scale with which his figure is framed, contribute to the appearance of relative weakness when the two are viewed side by side.

Whereas the frontispiece for *The Mintage* was certainly an homage to Whitman, it also strengthened Hubbard's identification with Thoreau by linking the two authors through visual metaphors. In the lower left of the page, just as Hubbard's image dissolves, the artist included a small drawing of a cabin (fig. 3.14). Set amongst a grove of trees, the one-room cabin is indebted to, though not identical with, depictions that appeared at the beginning of *Walden* (fig. 3.15).[95] In fact, Hubbard's appropriation of the cabin is more than a stylistic device and represents the depth with which he pursued an identity consonant with Transcendentalist symbolism. Like Thoreau, Hubbard built himself a cabin in the woods (fig. 3.16) where he could escape the pernicious aspects of civilization and find a peaceful environment in which to create. In combining the personas of Thoreau and Whitman, Hubbard was fashioning an image that combined the puritanical hardiness of rugged frontier living with a more modern sense of defiance and rebellion. For Hubbard, Thoreau and Whitman must have represented figures who successfully had turned their backs on aspects of society they despised. Part of their appeal may have been that, as writers, their popularity was not diminished by their cultural critique, but actually rose as a result of it.

For Hubbard, this deliberate adoption of "common people" types functioned similarly to the strategies of rustication found in Heade and Ryder's lives and careers. The way in which it manifest itself throughout his work was far more varied than in those

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[95] The iconography of the cabin at Walden Pond is treated most fully by W. Barksdale Maynard, "Thoreaus's Cabin at Walden," *The Art Bulletin* 81 (June 1999): 303-25.

of Heade or Ryder. For Hubbard, the strategy of rustication was a ubiquitous feature across all of his productions (visual, textual, ethical) that served to unite the often-disparate pieces of his Arts and Crafts empire. In its most blatant physical form, the Roycrofter's *Ali Baba* bench (fig. 3.17), with its rustic hewn top and still-present bark mirrored the strategies of association evident in Heade's sawhorses. It also is evident especially in Hubbard's language, the folksy tone of a middle-American, the sort of persona that Michael Monahan claims to have witnessed Hubbard rehearsing.[96] His playful use of colorful vernacular and deliberate misspellings seem intended to draw attention away from the literary references and self-referential style of writing in which he engaged. Visually, the medievalizing tendencies of the Arts and Crafts and the rustic simplicity of the forms the shop made spoke to similar formal strategies in the productions of the shop. Even ethically, Hubbard strongly advocated (though perhaps practiced inconsistently) an ascetic version of the puritanical work ethic that seems rooted much more in a mid-nineteenth-century mindset than a twentieth-century one.

Linguistically, the tone Hubbard adopted throughout his literature appears deliberately designed to recall the rustic, plain-spoken rhythms of rural America. Hubbard consciously, and often disingenuously, created an image that served to distance himself from the genteel trappings of society and re-engage a pre-industrial, frontier mentality. As former employee and rival publisher Michael Monahan noted, despite Hubbard's considerable wealth and success in business, "the Fra was needlessly concerned to suppress it, preoccupied always with the construction of a fitting

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[96] Michael Monahan, "A Footnote," in *Nemesis,* 181-2, recalled: "He [Hubbard] used to tell a yarn of his life as a cowboy in the west, which part he dressed very well, having furnished himself with a regular broncho [sic] buster's outfit to make the thing good. I remember I once laughed at this when he had given a rehearsal for my special behoof [sic] in his barn at East Aurora. He never quite forgave me. Artists are so sensitive!"

legend, and he at times romanced extravagantly in order to hide the real facts of his early career."[97] Monahan's observations seem remarkably prescient when read against Hubbard's autobiographical narrative from *The Cosmopolitan*:

> I think I am honest enough to sink self, to stand outside my own personality, and answer the proposition. Let me begin by telling what I am not, and thus reach the vital issue by elimination.
> First, I am not popular in "Society," and those who champion my cause in my own town are plain, unpretentious people.
> Second, I am not a popular writer, since my name has never been mentioned in the "Atlantic," "Scribner's," Harper's," "The Century," or "Ladies' Home Journal."[98]

Again, the difficulty with this passage is extracting the kernels of truths contained within the overall structure of posturing and deception. Hubbard's claim that his name was never mentioned in these magazines is false. In 1895, for instance, Hubbard's book *No Enemy (But Himself)* was reviewed in the *Atlantic Monthly.* While the review was more descriptive than analytical, the author did note that, "in the tramp period of the tale there is a fair share of humor of the type affected by the vaudeville comedian... it is needless to say that this humor is of the broader type; but such as it is, it stands out as the most successful element of the book."[99] Likewise, in 1899 Hubbard's publisher G. P. Putnam and Sons promoted his *Little Journeys* series in a full page advertisement in *The Century Magazine*.[100] Though Hubbard delivers the impression that his work was overlooked by the establishment, this is a willful distortion of the facts: Hubbard's novels

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[97] Monahan, "A Footnote," in *Nemesis,* 181.

[98] Hubbard, "An Interesting Personality," 309.

[99] "Comment on New Books," *The Atlantic Monthly,* volume 75, issue 449 (march 1895): 424.

[100] See *The Century* 58 (October 1899): 16.

received mention and favorable reviews in a number of notable periodicals.[101] Hubbard's mythic treatment of his life and willful distortion of the truth raises larger issues about how he fits into a movement that constantly promoted simplicity and honesty as cardinal virtues.

**Remembering Hubbard**

> And the questions naturally arise, Who am I, and what have I done, that the intelligent public of America should take an interest in what I am doing?
>
> —Elbert Hubbard, 1902

Since his death in 1915, the questions Hubbard raised regarding his own importance continue to be asked by scholars of the Arts and Crafts movement. On one hand, it is easy to make the case that Hubbard was a self-made man whose numerous roles prove his value to the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States. Among his many roles, supporters would count: a magazine editor, successful author, popular lecturer, and leader of the Roycroft community, one of the longest-lasting Utopian Arts and Crafts social experiment founded in the United States. While the factual integrity of these statements is irrefutable, the context of Hubbard's career continually makes him a difficult figure to classify. For on the other hand, Hubbard was unapologetic in his support for corporate capitalism and believed it to be best for the worker, ultimately democratic, and consonant with the legacy of Transcendentalism. Looking across the breadth of his writings these anomalies are readily apparent. The same man who wrote

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[101] See for instance, "Stories of Real Merit," *The Washington Post* (16 April 1894): 4; or "Free Thought and Transcendentalism," *The Critic: A Weekly review of Literature and the Arts* 22 (14 July 1894): 22; or "The Author of Little Journeys," *Current Literature* 18 (November 1895): 378.

about visiting William Morris also wrote glowing accounts of the Standard Oil Company, and numerous wealthy businessmen including John J. Astor.[102]

In part, the difficulty encountered in how to remember Hubbard is a difficulty endemic to the Arts and Crafts as a whole. Jackson Lears's observation that the, ""Arts and Crafts movement" was less a cohesive social phenomenon than a catchall polemical phrase," is a part of the answer, but in missing the Transcendental contribution to the American variant of the Arts and Crafts this analysis remains unsatisfying.

On May 1, 1915, Elbert Hubbard and his wife Alice were among the 1,989 passengers who boarded the Lusitania for its fateful last voyage.[103] Like much of his life, in Hubbard's death a palpable sense of irony pervaded the event: had President Wilson not pardoned Hubbard, he could have never boarded the boat; had the submarine not been low on fuel, it would have never intercepted the boat; had the captain of the German submarine listened to his quartermaster, the torpedo would never have been fired and, of course, had Hubbard heeded the warning of the German consulate he might have stayed home, having decided the trip was too risky.[104] None of this happened, and six days later, on the afternoon of May 7th, Elbert and Alice Hubbard were among hundreds killed when a German u-boat sank the Lusitania off the coast of

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[102] The mix of Transcendentalism and corporate titans was not unknown, for Walt Whitman in his later life became a staunch defender of Andrew Carnegie, see Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America,* 482-83 and 496.

[103] The Lusitania sank on May 7, 1915. See "Honor the Memory of Elbert Hubbard," *The New York Times,* 24 May 1915.

[104] Hubbard lost his citizenship when he was found guilty in January 1913 to six counts of violating the federal criminal code. The charges were brought about by a joke published in the November 1912 issue and resulted in a $100 fine on the first charge and a suspended sentence on the remaining five charges. When Hubbard application for a visa in 1915 was denied under the terms of his suspended sentence. However, on 23 March 1915, Woodrow Wilson signed a full and unconditional pardon for Hubbard. See *Head, Heart and Hand,* 48 for a reproduction of the pardon and the history of the events surrounding it.

Ireland. Typical of the hubris and bravado he was known to display, Hubbard's stated intentions in taking the trip were to "write a series of articles on this war from an English viewpoint… [and] try to obtain an interview with the kaiser [sic] with whom I was once on friendly terms."[105] Furthering the strange irony of his death were the words he had written in jest more than fifteen years earlier:

> Blackhart further instigated the Associated Press to send out a dispatch stating I had been drowned in the Irish Sea and that as I had the Society of Philistines in my vest pocket, the American Academy of Immortals was No More.[106]

Even Hubbard's friends and supporters seemed to struggle with the notion of his legacy in the period following his and his wife's death. Nearly three weeks after their deaths aboard the Lusitania, a Memorial Convention was held at the Roycroft campus in East Aurora, New York, to honor the memory of Elbert and his wife Alice.[107] Inexplicably, among those chosen to speak at the event was Hubbard's former employee and former friend Michael Monahan. Known to readers of Hubbard's *Philistine* as "that Black Dwarf," Monahan publicly had attacked Hubbard's reputation, then left the Roycrofters and began his own magazine, *The Papyrus.* Although it is impossible to know precisely when the bad blood between them started, certainly it had erupted into a full blown-feud by early 1902 when Monahan rented out the East Aurora

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[105] As quoted in "East Aurora Mourns Loss of Elbert Hubbard," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (9 May 1915).

[106] Elbert Hubbard, "A Manifesto!" *The Philistine: A Periodical of Protest* 8 (January 1899): 36.

[107] According to Michael Monahan, "Elbert Hubbard," in *Nemesis* (New York: 1926), 146 the convention lasted from July 4th to 11th. It is impossible to think that those planning this ceremony were unaware of the dual significance of this date to Hubbard: the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the date on which Thoreau's sojourn at Walden Pond began in 1845, and the release in 1855 of the first edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

Opera House and spoke to a large audience about Hubbard's shortcomings.[108] Of Hubbard, Monahan stated:

> [H]ow woefully he has deceived himself with his pert repetition of commonplaces, his ridiculous assumption of a message, his flash ignorance and irrelevance, his absurd personal fakery, his degenerate female following, and the indiscriminate worship of the half-baked.[109]

Though no immediate response from Hubbard was recorded, in the years following Monahan's departure from the Roycrofters, *The Philistine* and *Papyrus* became vehicles to trade insults and barbs, and spread rumors.

For a while, it seemed as though neither time nor distance would soften the positions of either man, and well into 1905 the feuding continued. Monahan was more direct in his criticism and mockery than Hubbard, preferring unequivocally to go on the offensive to Hubbard's more ironic tone. Lampooning Hubbard's literary achievements by questioning the value and truthfulness of his immensely popular *Message to Garcia*, Monahan once railed in his magazine:

> This man who wrote the widely advertised screed about the piece of fake heroism known as the carrying of the message to Garcia (which probably was not carried), has also fallen into obscurity, like his hero, and loses a good deal more by it. When I last heard of him, he was doing one-night stands, carrying his message as an appendix to a lantern-slide exhibit, showing 57 varieties of himself, his Art, his untamed Progeny (raised on Grape Nuts and the Cosmic plan), his bughouse Community patterned on the Oneida model (all but!), and the several parcels of Real Estate which he has acquired by the marble cheek and the skilled right hand.
>
> The poor devil is almost pitiable in this, that he can not see that he is becoming a Dead One, and goes on repeating his old gags to the handful of freaks who are still interested in him. Senility adds its terribly grotesque touch to the picture of this man's decadence—I am truly sorry for him.[110]

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[108] See Champney, *Art and Glory,* 97.

[109] Quoted in Champney, *Art and Glory,* 98 from Buffalo *Express,* 2 February 1902.

[110] Michael Monahan, "Three Men and A Message," *The Papyrus: A Magazine of Individuality* 4 (March 1905): 8. Interestingly, Monahan was not the only one who questioned the

Although the feud eventually lost momentum, the two never reconciled. Monahan, it appears, never forgave Hubbard for breaking the vows of his first marriage, nor could he ever come to see him as anything but a fraud. Apart from the sheer theatricality of it all, there was little reason to invite Monahan to speak at Hubbard's memorial.

By the time of the ceremony, however, Monahan's tone was tame by comparison and he was largely flattering in his recollections of his former employer. He told the crowd, estimated at around 3,000, that Hubbard was "a master of life" who "presented the novel and inspiring spectacle of a Soul in Business."[111] Monahan praised his writing as "full of keenness… very widely diffused and [of] extraordinary influence."[112] Making only the briefest mention of what he called "our estrangement," he downplayed Hubbard's infidelity and mentioned later that Hubbard "never could acquire a due respect for quotation marks; never could see the iniquity and, in the long run, the suicidal error of purloining the fruit of another man's brain."[113] Monahan also stressed the Transcendental nature of Hubbard's personality, when he recalled that, "[Hubbard] once told me that the bible and Emerson were the only two books he ever read *for the love of them*."[114] Throughout most of Hubbard's adult life, Transcendentalist writings were a constant source of strength and inspiration from which he drew.

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veracity of Hubbard's account. Champney, *Art and Glory,* 223, details that Stephen Crane wrote to Hubbard, "I strongly object to your paragraphs about Rowan… he didn't do anything worthy at all… Besides he is personally a chump… When you want to monkey with some of our national heroes you had better ask me, because I know and your perspective is almost out of sight."

[111] Monahan, *Nemesis,* 172-73.

[112] Monahan, *Nemesis,* 173.

[113] Monahan, *Nemesis,* 182.

[114] Monahan, *Nemesis,* 147. Emphasis is original. Also quoted in Champney, *Art and Glory,* 198.

Despite a wealth of information which supports a Transcendental heritage for the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States, scholars have continued to emphasized the relationship of the movement exclusively to the British counterpart.[115] This narrative, however, tells only one aspect of the movement's development and fails to account for the meaningful and substantial differences between these two versions. Absent from virtually all the literature is any mention of Transcendentalism's role in providing an intellectual or cultural base for the movement.

### Americans and the Arts and Crafts: Alternate Sources

> I believe John Ruskin, William Morris, Henry Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Leo Tolstoy to be Prophets of God & they should rank in mental reach and spiritual insight with Elijah, Hosea, Ezekiel and Isaiah.
>
> —Elbert Hubbard, 1900[116]

Although there is consensus among scholars that the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States varied considerably from its British counterpart, virtually no energy has been expended explaining the reasons for this occurrence. Americans, it is often intimated, were too self-oriented to fully commit to the socialist agenda espoused by Morris. This same quality is then used to explain why the handicrafts never fully had a chance in American culture: profits above all else dictated the terms of our engagement with every movement. As a result, in the American version of the Arts and Crafts the worker loses, capitalism wins, and Morris's dream of a socialist utopia is thwarted by the suspect character of both producer and consumer. Supposedly, Americans further perverted the original intentions of the Arts and Crafts by focusing exclusively on the

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[115] See especially note 3, which details the historic trends in this regard.

[116] Fra Elbertus [Elbert Hubbard], *The Philistine* 10:4 (March 1900): unpaginated material at the front.

individual, therapeutic qualities of work, rather than seeking a broad transformation of labor. In essence, American greed is portrayed as the underlying cause of the movement's failure in the United States.

Yet, as the quotation from Emerson at the head of this chapter reminds us, the ideology now exclusively linked with the British incarnation of the Arts and Crafts had precedents in the United States. This fact was noted early on by Horace Traubel, a leader of the Rose Valley Arts and Crafts community, editor of *The Artsman,* and friend of Whitman.[117] Traubel complained that, "Triggs speaks of the crafts idea as English. It has English roots in its concrete foundations. But the philosophy has seesawed across the ocean. Such a phenomenon as Brook Farm was in reality an attempt to get nearer to the earth."[118] As the nineteenth century drew to an end, Brook Farm, the utopian community founded by Reverend George Ripley in West Roxbury, Massachusetts in 1841, remained a strong memory of Transcendental idealism for many in the Arts and Crafts, both in the United States and in England.[119] When Janet Ashbee visited Hubbard's Roycroft Shops in 1900 and noted: "there's a Brook farm feeling about it too.

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[117] Traubel wrote and edited a number of books on Whitman including: *At the Graveside of Walt Whitman, Harleigh, Camden, New Jersey, March 30, 1892; and, Sprigs of lilac,* ed. Horace Traubel (Philadelphia: 1892); also *Camden's Compliments to Walt Whitman, May 31, 1889: Notes, Addresses, Letters, Telegrams,* ed. Horace Traubel (Philadelphia: 1889); *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman: Issued Under the Editorial Supervision of His Literary Executors*, *Richard Maurice Bucke, Thomas B. Harned, and Horace L. Traubel*, *with Additional Bibliographical and Critical Material Prepared by Oscar Lovell Triggs* (New York: 1903); *In re Walt Whitman,* eds. Horace L. Traubel, Richard Maurice Bucke, Thomas B. Harned (Philadelphia: 1893); and Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (New York: 1919). For biographical accounts of Traubel see William English Walling, *Whitman and Traubel* (New York: 1916); for insight into Traubel and Hartley's connection to the Whitman circle see William Inness Homer, ed., *Heart's Gate: Letters between Marsden Hartley and Horace Traubel, 1906-1915* (Highlands, North Carolina: 1982).

[118] Horace Traubel, "The Arts and Crafts to Date," *Artsman* 1 (November 1903): 56.

[119] For the most recent account of this community see, Sterling F. Delano, *Brook Farm: The Dark Side of Utopia* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2004).

Sundays they go out in a crowd for a three hours tramp through the field…"[120] For many Americans, the philosophy of Morris and Ruskin were presented along a continuum that Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman initiated.

American Arts and Crafts reformers used the Transcendentalists to lend the British reformers a comfortable context within which they would be more palatable to American readers and consumers. To achieve this goal, editors or designers displayed quotes from Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau within their periodicals that would lead the audience to draw the connections themselves. In addition to Hubbard's deification of Emerson, Horace Traubel's periodical *The Artsman* often published snippets of text from the Transcendentalists under the heading "Rose Valley Scriptures."[121] In the *Craftsman,* Gustav Stickley reminded readers of the links between Transcendentalism and the Arts and Crafts that aided his development:

> At first, in obedience to public demand, I produced in my workshop adaptations of historic styles, but always under silent protest: my opposition developing, as I believe, out of a course of reading, largely from Ruskin and Emerson, which I followed in my early youth.[122]

Alongside his promotion of the movement's British leaders, readers of the *Craftsman* could also find references to the Transcendentalists and occasional excerpts of text.[123] Alice Hubbard buttressed her husband's promotion of the philosophy too when she edited a collection of inspirational sayings from Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson,

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[120] Ashbee Memoirs, 1: 269.

[121] See for instance, "Rose Valley Scriptures," *Artsman* 1 (January 1904): 242; Horace Traubel, "The One Question and the One Answer," *Artsman* 3 (January 1906): 110; "Rose Valley Scriptures," *Artsman* 3 (July 1906): 177.

[122] Gustav Stickley, "Thoughts Occasioned by an Anniversary: A Plea for a Democratic Art," *Craftsman* 7 (October 1904): 42.

[123] See for instance, [Henry David Thoreau], "Excerpt from Thoreau's Walking" *The Craftsman* 5 (May 1904): 176.

Emerson, Whitman, and others titled *An American Bible.*[124] The stated purpose of the book was to, "teach the philosophy of business and show how it benefits man."[125] With its tooled leather cover and hand-laid type, the book encapsulates the manner in which industry and the Arts and Crafts were not antithetical forces in the United States.

For many scholars, the relationship of the individual to labor and the accommodation of mechanized labor are the major differences in the English and American versions of the Arts and Crafts movements. Today, many scholars claim that the failure of the American variant of the movement hinges upon this point as well: by accommodating the practices of the machine, American reformers lost all credibility. In part, this reading relies upon a very narrow reading of Morris and Ruskin and a complete disregard for the sources that American reformers looked to in order to buttress their beliefs. Jackson Lears, for instance, cites Morris's statement that, "apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization." Lears believes that this is evidence of Morris's fundamental philosophy, and he imparts a consistency to Morris that is often at odds with Morris's contradictory and confusing statements.[126] In truth, even Morris demonstrated ambivalence towards machinery. Though at times he railed against the intrusion of the machine into modern life, on other occasions he seemed to find it a tolerable facet of modernity. Speaking to the Society for the Advancement of Art in 1888, Morris told the crowd, "we must try to change the system of production of wares. To meet possible

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[124] See Alice Hubbard, ed., *An American Bible* (East Aurora: 1908). This work features a selection of quotes from Franklin, Thomas Paine, Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Whitman, Robert Ingersoll, Emerson and Elbert Hubbard.

[125] Alice Hubbard, ed., *An American Bible,* 15.

[126] William Morris, "How I Became a Socialist," in Holbrook Jackson, ed., *William Morris On Art and Socialism* (London, 1947), 276 as quoted by Lears, *No Place of Grace,* 62.

objections once more, I do not mean by this abolishing all machinery: I would do some things by machinery which are now done by hand, and other things by hand which are now done by machinery.: in short, we should be the masters of our machines and not the slaves, as we are now."[127] It was statements like this, ones in which Morris expressed a sympathy for mechanization and allowed it as a possibility, that American reformers like Hubbard were drawn to, in part because the Transcendental foundation upon which they built had never insisted upon the elimination of either the machine or the system of capitalism.

What American reformers seized upon were the statements in which the use of the machine, and not the machine itself, was condemned. This distinction allowed them to preserve their belief in the modern industrial system while at the same time displaying a willingness to engage and change that system. To frame the "devolution of the craftsman ideal," as a result of American profit motive is to mistake the causes of the problematic for its effects. Since the 1840s, Transcendentalism provided Americans with the possibility that, if rightly managed, the process of modernity could preserve the autonomy of the self and bring about material gain. As a result, in the United States attitudes towards mechanization had a history in which the binary of good vs. evil regarding the role of the machine simply did not gain much traction. Instead, reformers sought a more tempered, middle ground in which the dynamics of the modern system would be transformed through a process of conscious action and deliberate awareness.

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[127] William Morris, "Art and Its Producers: A Lecture Delivered in Liverpool in 1888," in *Art and Its Producers , and the Arts & Crafts of Today: Two Lectures Delivered Before the National Association for the Advancement of Art* (London: 1901), 15.

It is this potential for optimism that allowed Whitman to remark, "in the labor of engines and trades and the labor of fields I find the developments and eternal meanings."[128]

Because Transcendentalism did not encumber Arts and Crafts leaders in the United States with an anti-industrial bias, it allowed them to hold out the possibility that, even under the present economic and social conditions, advances might be achieved that would elevate the position of the worker. Seeking out Morris's statements that held the promise of a world in which the fundamental discourse of modernity was not simply abandoned but modified for the benefit of the individual, American reformers began to vocally reframe the debate surrounding mechanization and production. Although some within the movement initially promoted the anarchistic posturing of Prince Kropotkin's radical return to pre-industrial society, most practitioners of the Arts and Crafts ignored such rhetoric as impractical and foolish. Gustav Stickley's *Craftsman* was one such publication initially devoted, at least in tone and text, to Morris's socialism, though this evaporated with the departure of Irene Sargent, a major contributor to the early volumes. The consistency of views in the years following her departure (by 1903?) up until the magazine folded in 1916 suggests that Stickley's views were more accommodating to industrial capitalism. Indeed, as Ernest Batchelder noted in the magazine:

> To criticize the movement as being out of touch with modern thought is to misinterpret its best ideals. It seeks to bring a better standard to industrial work, establish a permanent demand for better things, and furnish an adequate livelihood for those who are competent to give beauty to hand work. It does not necessarily antagonize machinery, nor does it hope to achieve its ends through a reversion to primitive methods.[129]

The very notion of the American Arts and Crafts as a movement exclusively anti-modern is fallacious, as is the exclusive reliance on the English model for its origins.

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[128] Walt Whitman, as quoted in *The Artsman* 1 (October 1903): 30.

[129] Batchelder, "Work or Play?" 547.

Rather than framing the movement as a devolution, in which corporate interests destroyed the socially progressive agenda laid out by the British founders, the American Arts and Crafts movement emerged with different requirements and circumstances from the British model. In Rose Valley, an Arts and Crafts community founded by William Lightfoot Price outside of Philadelphia, *The Artsman* proudly proclaimed the communities' attitude of acceptance of mechanized society from the very start. In the first issue of this periodical, Traubel stated this position clearly:

> Rose Valley is a cross between economic revolution and the stock exchange. Rose Valley is not shutting one door and opening another. Rose Valley connects in the open with industry. It is not a break. It is an evolution.[130]

In attempting to frame their engagement with the process of modernity as an evolution, Rose Valley demonstrated the manner in which the legacy of Transcendentalism allowed for the engagement with modernity rather than a retreat from it. Although admittedly the community still looked to the Gothic style for their aesthetic inspiration (fig. 3.18), the process of labor organization and execution was not, in itself, necessarily medievalizing. For some Americans, the Arts and Crafts movement was not a chance to escape modernity as much as it was an opportunity to dictate its terms . It was an opportunity to perform a social experiment under which the effects of mechanization upon the individual's sense of self could be controlled and remedied. Traubel spoke eloquently to this idea:

> Rose Valley will endeavor to prove that even under industrial conditions as they are certain things may be done to reestablish labor in the splendid inheritance from which it has so long been debarred. Our civilization has produced the machine. It has not given the machine to man. It has given man to the machine. Rose Valley sees that this adjustment has demonstrated its own inefficacy.[131]

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[130] Horace Traubel, "Rose Valley in General," *The Artsman* 1 (October 1903): 23.

[131] Horace Traubel, "Rose Valley in General," *The Artsman* 1 (October 1903): 23.

In their attempts to re-prioritize the relative hierarchy of man, labor, and machine, American Arts and Crafts reformers often sought refuge in communal environments that, for many, continued to evoke Transcendental associations with earlier utopian settlements.

Among the persistent themes often ignored in the writings of the American Arts and Crafts reformers is the division between those who favored only handicrafts and those whose outlook were decidedly more modern. As early as 1903, Adelaide Alsop Robineau's magazine *Keramic Studio* cautioned readers that, "students are not to be discouraged from using the casting process by the advocates of 'all hand work,' who have gotten far enough into the crafts movement to become enthusiastic, but not far enough to recognize necessary limitations."[132] Similarly, speaking to the Society of Arts in Crafts in Boston in 1907, President H. Langford Warren summed up the tension:

> …for the so-called Arts and Crafts movement is not only often misunderstood, but is sometimes in danger of misrepresentation in the works and opinions of those who claim to be a part of it. The movement is not a mere striving after odd or bizarre design, though some of the results as yet achieved in its name may seem to justify this view. It is not an attempt to set back the clock of the world in an impossible endeavor to revive bygone conditions and insist on making things by hand which might better or as well be done by machine though some of its advocates have seemed to insist on this extreme opinion.[133]

Indeed, although Lears and others have been quick to dismiss what they see as the therapeutic bias in the American Arts and Crafts as proof of the manner in which the selfishness of rugged individualism corrupted the socialist dreams of Morris, the

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[132] "Pottery at the Arts and Crafts Exhibit, Craftsman Building, Syracuse," *Keramic Studio* 5 (June 1903): 36, 37-38. Also quoted in Cleota Reed, "'Near the Yates,' Craft, Machine, and Ideology in Arts and Crafts Syracuse, 1900-1910," in *Substance of Style*, 368.

[133] Professor H. Langford Warren, speaking at "the society of Arts and Crafts in Boston for its decenniel [sic] exhibition," as quoted in Frederic Allen Whiting, "On Exhibition Catalogs," *Handicraft* 3 (April 1910): 14-15.

evidence here is far from conclusive. Even Morris's speeches seem to stress the importance of individual fulfillment as a necessary result of the reorientation of man and labor. Speaking before the Association for the Advancement of Art, Morris reminded the crowd, "we are driven at last, then, to this conclusion, that pleasure and interest in the work itself are necessary to the production of a work of art however humble."[134] Indeed, even more troubling than the unwarranted consistency with which scholars have attempted to portray Morris, is the bizarre inconsistency of thought within his texts.

Morris, like many reformers, encountered myriad logistical problems in his attempts to define and implement a Utopian relationship between man and labor. Perhaps none was more obvious than the fact that any work, on some level, was capable of being unsatisfying or unrewarding. This seemed to be a complaint endemic to utopian labor arrangements, but often disregarded by Socialists. As Nathaniel Hawthorne told his fiancée in a letter from Brook Farm, "belovedest, labor is the curse of the world and nobody can meddle with it, without becoming proportionally brutified… Thank God, my soul is not utterly buried under a dung-heap."[135] In one of the stranger twists of logic, however, Morris sidestepped this question altogether by suggesting that the experience of pleasure in one's work was no longer a necessary factor for fulfillment. In essence, Morris determined that a worker's self-awareness of pleasure was not required for the work to be fulfilling or enjoyable:

> … the workman works up with his wares not only because he must (for he is not conscious of compulsion in the matter) *but because he likes to, though he is often not conscious of his pleasure* - this real architectural art

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[134] Morris, "Art and Its Producers," 14-15.

[135] As quoted in Richard Francis, *Transcendental Utopias: Individual and Community at Brook Farm, Fruitlands and Walden* (Ithaca, New York: 1997), 49.

> depends on the wares of which it forms a part being produced by craftsmanship, for the use of persons who understand craftsmanship.[136]

Apparently in Morris's version of the Arts and Crafts, the worker's consciousness of his or her own happiness was incidental. By contrast, American reformers highlighted not only the physical experience of joy, but the worker's cognizance of his or her role in the creation of an object as two fundamental features of craft reform. As Ernest Batchelder told readers of *The Craftsman,* "the dignity of labor is of the mind and heart, not of the hand alone."[137] In the United States, consciousness was everything.

Even in communities in which the accommodation of mechanization was eschewed, Transcendentalism could still form an integral part of framing and understanding the discourse of modernity. In one of the lesser-known social experiments, Unitarian minister Edward Pearson Pressey founded the community of New Clairvaux in Montague, Massachusetts, in 1901.[138] Designed along the lines of Prince Kropotkin's land reforms, Pressey's community stressed the redemptive powers of a connection to the land and the handicrafts. Intended to be self-supporting but not necessarily profitable, the community was short-lived and by 1908 had disbanded. Following a visit to Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft Shops in 1901, Pressey acquired a hand-operated press and by January 1902 issued the first installment of *Country Time and Tide, A Magazine for More Profitable Country Life.*[139]

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[136] Morris, "Art and its Producers," 3-4.

[137] Batchelder, "Work or Play?" 548.

[138] The community is mentioned in a number of texts. See for instance Jeannine Falino, "The Monastic Ideal in Rural Massachusetts: Edward Pearson Pressey and New Clairvaux," in *The Substance of Style: Perspectives on the American Arts and Crafts Movement,* ed. Bert Denker (Winterthur, Del.: 1986), 375-95; see also Borris, *Art and Labor,* 158-60; and Lears, esp. "The Figure of the Artisan: Arts & Crafts Ideology," 60-96.

[139] As has been noted in Borris 159, and Falino 384, the name is a variation of John Ruskin's book *Time and Tide*.

The first issue of *Country Time and Tide* was notable in that it recounted a visit to Hubbard's Roycroft Shops, spoke of the founding of the New Clairvaux community, and featured a contribution by Frederic Allen Whiting who was President of the Boston Society of Arts and Crafts. Although the community sought to restore the solidity of self by constructing a pre-industrial environment, the periodical seems to have included a full range of attitudes to mechanization that reflected the spectrum of views held by Arts and Crafts practitioners at the time. Hubbard's affinity for the corporate structure of a utopian community; the Boston Society's market-conscious attitudes towards the promotion of crafts; and New Clairvaux's radical simplicity were not seen as antithetical but, rather, existed as different points along the continuum of Arts and Crafts ideologies, each bound to the legacy of Transcendentalism.

Pressey promoted his community as a blend of traditional New England Transcendentalism and British Arts and Crafts reform. His remedy for the anxieties caused by the dislocation of man from the natural world was a balanced combination of theoretical and practical advice. In addition to the spiritual sustenance required, Pressey also promoted a practical version of Kropotkin's agrarian reforms that was rooted in a practical understanding of Transcendentalism. More than simply a religious community, New Clairvaux was a community in which practical concerns, frontier myths, Transcendental tradition, and social reform mixed seamlessly. Preesy informed his readers that:

> The first question naturally was, how much does it cost a family of two, three, four, five, etc. to live in the most desirable simple way. He began to experiment in the direction of testing Henry D. Thoreau's "Law of domestic economy," outlined in chapter I. of Walden, and found that it was an approximately reliable fact that a single man can subsist in country New England and live the life of a cultured person upon five or six weeks of manual labor each year.[140]

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[140] "New Clairvaux," *Country Time and Tide* 1 (January 1902): 14.

When man was not controlled by the demands of his labor, life could return to a more natural state in which the mind could be cultivated. To this end, Pressey also told his readers that, "sometimes they had lectures… upon Ruskin, William Morris, Carlyle, Charles Kingsley, Emerson, Robert Owen, Tolstoy, or some other prophet of the heavenly this world life, the eternity of now."[141] Although Elbert Hubbard is the most obvious example of Transcendentalism's influence on the American Arts and Crafts movement, he was not alone in his promotion and use of the philosophy. That the Arts and Crafts reformers continually included Emerson and the Transcendentalists as a means of familiarizing and validating subsequent voices speaks to the continued importance of the philosophy as a cultural touchstone into the early twentieth century.

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[141] "New Clairvaux," *Country Time and Tide* 1 (January 1902): 15.

**Chapter 4: Accommodation—Transcendentalism, Technology and the Home**

> If it is asserted that civilization is a real advance in the condition of man… it must be shown that it has produced better dwellings without making them more costly.
>
> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* 1854[1]

> Ideals are as portable as bonds, and individuality alone, despite the value of cooperation, frequently shapes the destiny of man and house.
>
> Samuel Howe, *The Craftsman* 1902[2]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Transcendentalism had become a viable remedy for the crisis of self that seemed intrinsic to the experience of modernity. In part, as in the case of Ryder, it operated on a personal scale as an individual remedy: an inward journey that promised the chance to reintegrate the fractured pieces of the self Arts and Crafts reformers like Hubbard capitalized on the movement's popular potential by bringing it more directly into the marketplace and promoting an increased scale of reform. Taken as a whole, however, the solutions proposed by Arts and Crafts reformers remained modest in scale and presented a broad spectrum of opinions and ideas regarding modernity. Ranging from Edward Pressey's near-total rejection of modern industrial life at New Clairvaux, to Hubbard's unabashed corporate sympathies, and to Horace Traubel's stated goal of reconciliation with mechanized industry, craft reformers used Transcendentalism to alleviate the anxieties that so often accompanied modernity. Despite the different solutions these reformers proposed, each drew upon Transcendentalism's texts and ideas to lend a sense of historical perspective to their claims. In a time characterized by rapid change and motion, reformers and

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[1] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854), reprinted in *Walden and Civil Disobedience,* Penguin Classics Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 73.

[2] Samuel Howe, "A Visit to the House of Mr. Stickley," *The Craftsman*, 3.3 (December 1902): 165-66.

businessmen both sought a sense of cultural authority by rooting their ideas in the native philosophical traditions of Transcendentalism.

The steps taken by Arts and Crafts reformers appeared to pose as many questions as they answered. For instance, if mechanization could be accommodated on the small scale of an artistic community like Rose Valley or the Roycrofters, why not on a larger corporate scale? The logical outgrowth of the arguments proposed by many of the Arts and Crafts reformers was to accept the integration of machinery into modern life rather than to deny outright a mechanized modernity. The steps taken by figures such as Hubbard to integrate the tradition of the Arts and Crafts into a larger dialog with modern economics needed to be explored on a larger scale in order to be effective. The home became a significant arena through which the tensions that seemed to divide mass-production and individualism was explored and negotiated. As the United States' largest single provider of homes from 1908 to 1930, Sears, Roebuck and Company's success in this endeavor relied upon its ability to adeptly mediate these conflicts.[3]

The fluency of styles that Sears' Modern Homes Division demonstrated throughout the course of its existence has led to the often-repeated statement that there is no "Sears style." While this assertion is true in the sense that the company failed to produce homes of a single aesthetic, it is hardly illuminating. For example, it fails to account for the reasons homes were designed in a multitude of styles and to examine

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[3] The standard source for Sears Homes is Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, *Houses by Mail: a Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986). Although peer-reviewed, Amanda Cooke and Avi Friedman, "Ahead of Their Time, The Sears Catalogue Prefabricated Houses," *Journal of Design History* 14 (2001): 53-69, adds little of substance to the general knowledge. Rosemary Thornton, *The Houses that Sears Built, Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Sears Catalog Homes*, (Alton, Ill., Gentle Beam, 2002) is a poorly-written, privately-published work with numerous factual errors. By 1926, the company boasted there were "34,000 Honor Bilt Homes in the U.S.A." Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (Chicago and Philadelphia: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1926), 5.

the manner in which the borders between disparate genres were dissolved. It is an argument that at its core relies on the surety that 'style' is a fixed point, malleable but only to a point, and it views a panoply of styles as evidence of uncertainty and, in the end, stylelessness. Yet, rather than completely condemning this synthesis, or looking, as Jackson Lears has, at this process of accommodation as signifying "the impoverishment of a culture which lacked the resources for creating its own symbols," we might look at this as a mediation of rigid, insular styles.[4] Instead of a culture that lacked the resources for creating its own symbols, we might instead view a culture unsatisfied with the didactic mantras of reformers and which had the foresight to append and change these idioms into practical, palatable forms.

**The Promise and Perils of Mail Order Housing**

In 1908, Sears, Roebuck and Company launched an ambitious plan to sell homes, via catalogs, to customers throughout the United States.[5] Following the lead of the Aladdin Company which pioneered the concept of the mail order home two years earlier, Sears, Roebuck and Company's first *Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans* contained twenty-two designs that ranged from $650 and $2500 and that were mainly late-Victorian in nature.[6] Aesthetically, the designs Sears presented demonstrated the type of architectural conservatism that could describe much of its output in the following years. Sears was never a trendsetter; instead, it relied on marketing, tried and tested

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[4] Lears, *No Place of Grace,* 33.

[5] For general information on the evolution of Sears and Aladdin see Eve Joselow, "The Ideal Catalogue House: Mail Order Architecture and Consumer Culture, 1914-1930," (PhD diss., Graduate Center, City University of New York, 1998), especially 69-80.

[6] Sears, Roebuck and Co., *Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1908). Throughout the company's history the title varied.

styles to the public, and emphasized reduced cost rather than aesthetic innovation as its most significant feature.

The company's Modern Homes Division originated as an outgrowth of the financially-troubled building materials division.[7] In the wake of poor sales and lagging profits, Sears had considered dissolving the division in 1906, and transferred Frank W. Kushell to oversee the process. Believing that he could make the department profitable, however, Kushell restructured the department and in 1908 issued the first catalog of homes. Success came quickly to the department, as is evident from its numerous expansions—both physically and in terms of the products they offered—in the ensuing decades. By 1911, the company's catalog boasted eighty models and by 1918 the total increased to ninety.[8] In order to expand its offerings, Sears also purchased additional facilities, and between 1909 and 1912 added a lumber mill, a lumberyard, and a millwork plant. Access to rail lines was crucial for distribution and helped keep prices lower by reducing transportation costs.

Based on the offerings in the catalogs, The Modern Homes Division's history can be divided into four main parts, each of which had a distinct aesthetic. The first phase of the division began in 1906 with the transfer of Kushnell and continued through 1910. The designs of this period are markedly Victorian, a fact that is reflected in the use of terms such as "chamber" and "parlor" on the plans.[9] From 1911 to 1917 Sears seemed to be in a transitional phase, and although new models began to reflect the Arts and

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[7] See Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, *Houses by Mail,* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), 20-37 which remains the best summary of the company's history.

[8] See Sears, Roebuck and Co., *Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1911); Sears, Roebuck and Co., *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1918).

[9] For a summary of this style see for instance, Janet W. Foster, *Queen Anne House: America's Victorian Vernacular* (New York: Abrams, 2006).

Crafts bungalow sensibility, Victorian-inspired designs remained a substantial part of the company's offerings. The system of referring to the homes by their model number remained intact throughout these two periods. In 1918, however, the Modern Homes Division inaugurated what would become the most successful phase of the company's history, and issued a catalog that broke with the traditions established in the first two periods. From 1918 to 1929, the bungalow became the dominant offering and all vestigial remains of Victorian aesthetics were shed. The company also introduced two Prairie School homes in this period, alongside the three Mission Style dwellings they offered.[10] Abandoning the practice of numbering homes, each model—both new and pre-existing—received a name. The division's final period, from 1930 until 1942, was marked by the gradual reduction of offerings and simplification of exterior details which had marked the department's most successful designs.

The "redi-cut" method that Sears employed was in many ways the logical extension of pattern book plans that had been popularized during the mid-nineteenth century.[11] For Americans, the idea of taking the plans for a house from an architectural pattern book was an established manner of operation, with roots extending back prior to the founding of the nation.[12] Sears, however, modernized this concept significantly and

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[10] Although the "mission style" is a designation about which scholars continue to disagree, I use it here in a general sense indicating an engagement with what was understood—at the time—as representative of Spanish colonial architecture. Furthermore, the term is one Sears employed to describe these models.

[11] Sears used a number of terms to describe their approach to building including "Ready-Cut," "Already Cut and Fitted," and "Redi-Cut." For a longer view of the pattern book phenomenon in the United States, see Daniel D. Reiff, *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950; a History and Guide* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

[12] Undoubtedly some of the production innovations were tied to the advent of balloon-framed houses which emerged in Chicago. Traditionally, the first building credited as using this method of construction is Augustine Taylor's *St. Mary's Church,* 1833, Chicago, Illinois.

used technological advances in transportation and factory production to offer substantial savings at three crucial junctures: design, materials, and construction. Additionally, because the plans were little more than an inducement to buy building materials from the company, they could be offered at no cost, provided the building materials were purchased by the consumer, thereby eliminating an additional five to ten-percent cost typically paid to an architect.[13]

The mechanics of the program were simple: the first step for the customer was to choose a plan and decide whether or not the materials were to be purchased from Sears. Once the process was set in motion, the purchaser received a set of blueprints, a schedule of building materials, and an instructional manual titled *How to Build Your Ready-Cut Honor Bilt Home*.[14] Sears then began shipping materials to the nearest rail yard, apparently on a predetermined schedule that followed the order in which they were to be needed.[15] Realizing that some allowance was needed in scheduling, the company told buyers to notify a representative, "if, after you have started your building, you find that material is scheduled to arrive before you can use it, or if you will need it sooner than scheduled."[16] Sears advised its customers to immediately sort and inspect the

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[13] From 1908-1918 the company offered the plans for free provided you bought the materials from the company, otherwise, you could purchase the plans for a nominal fee. Gustav Stickley employed a similar inducement by offering free architectural plans for his Craftsman Homes with a year's subscription to the magazine.

[14] It is useful to note that throughout the company's literature the term "home" is used almost exclusively, likely because of the rich social and psychological associations the word contains. In contrast to the term "house" which simply denotes a physical structure, the term "home" connotes an emotional connection.

[15] Information regarding the company's delivery practices and policies was gleaned from [Sears, Roebuck and Company], *How to Build Your Ready-Cut Honor Bilt Home,* (np, nd [probably c. 1930]) unless otherwise indicated. Because the type and layout in this text is similar to that of Sears' catalogs in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the manual can be dated with reasonable certainty. In earlier versions the title may have varied.

[16]Sears, Roebuck and Co., *How to Build,* 3.

material (for quality and quantity) to avoid problems. Although the process of construction was supposed to be simple, the company was clearly aware that many customers, confronted with something they did not understand, might try and find their own solution. As quantities were pre-measured, Sears strongly cautioned against attempting to modify the plans or deviate from the instructions:

> DO NOT CUT MATERIAL INTENDED FOR ONE PLACE AND USE IT IN ANOTHER. DO NOT CHANGE PLANS… Do not take anyone's advice as to how your building should be erected. We have found upon investigation that this causes more difficulty in the erection of our buildings than all the other things put together. **Erect your buildings only as provided for on blueprints and instructions and you will encounter no difficulty.**[17] [emphasis original]

Sears spoke about savings and homebuilding, but often cloaked its observations in language designed to provoke consumers into buying a home if only to alleviate their anxiety. Among the significant claims the company made was that by reducing the middleman, the company would pass on savings to its customers. Playing on deep-seated fears about the accelerated emergence of a managerial class in post-Civil War society, Sears was able to distance itself from the negative connotations of modern corporate business and align themselves with the ideas of productive labor. By aligning themselves with Sears through their purchases, customers were supporting a productive enterprise rather than simply giving money away to parasitic middle-men.

As communities in the early twentieth century became less stable due to the greater ease of transportation, the constancy of a reliable corporation became an unfailing standard of trustworthiness in an otherwise fluid society. Whereas friends, family, and neighbors might move away, the ubiquitous character of the national corporation provided a sense of stability and quality assurance, regardless of locale.

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[17] Sears, Roebuck and Co., *How to Build,* 5.

Ironically, corporations like Sears tried to emphasize the untrustworthiness of the local enterprise while also humanizing their own wares. The strategies necessitated by these opposing needs generated a palpable sense of ambivalence toward local builders throughout the catalogs: on one hand, the local builder was not to be trusted with erecting a house, but at the same time he was needed for his personal testimony. The catalog promised that the company's architectural service would save consumers from "poor workmanship and faulty craftsmanship" and, in addition, would prevent "butchered carpentry."[18] Moreover, the language that Sears used in the catalogs demonstrated that the company actively sought to frame itself as a symbol of trust and dependability. "There is considerable risk and disappointment when building with unproven plans" the catalog noted, asking "where else can you match such a dependable service so free from risk or loss?"[19]

It was clear that for Sears to succeed, the company needed to connect with customers on a personal level, if only to alleviate the possibility of being perceived as a dehumanized, technologically-driven corporation. With American culture still favoring the primacy of individualism and self-reliance, navigating the discursive space that lay between conceptions of the self and fears regarding the corporate tendency towards effacement of individual distinction and difference was essential to the success of any large scale commercial venture. Increasingly, Sears highlighted the testimony of "average" individuals who became spokespersons for the Modern Homes division and who attested to the strength, accuracy, and dependability of the plans and homes. In

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[18] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (Chicago and Philadelphia: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1926), 17. This catalog was reprinted as *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 Catalog, an Unabridged Reprint* (Philadelphia and New York: The Athenaeum of Philadelphia / Dover Publications, 1991).

[19] Sears, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (1926), 17.

this fashion, Sears was able to personalize the process of home buying by responding to the public's hesitance in regard to such a substantial purchase. Images of homes were illustrated in the introductory and back pages of the catalogs, accompanied by excerpts of letters and glowing reviews that the company had received. Sears used images of local contractors and excerpts from their letters as a way of demonstrating the quality of the finished product, as well as the significant savings the packages afforded. Not surprisingly, contractors and owners were "well pleased with" the "redi-cut" [sic] method and marveled at materials which were "a better quality than those furnished by local dealers."[20] In the strange relationship that emerged from this dynamic, the company relied upon the individual contractor—who had proved his trustworthiness by providing his customers with an affordable, high-quality product—and each party secured a sense of stability that neither were capable of achieving on their own.

It is within this climate of social uncertainty that Sears, Roebuck and Company issued its first catalog of home plans in 1908. The company's goal in issuing the catalog was to facilitate the easy order and purchase of a home, based on the same principles of mail-order business that had garnered them success in other industries. Each model was illustrated in the catalog and included a schematic floor plan and brief description. Price estimates were included and customers were informed of additional options available for purchase—such as storm windows and doors, shingle and trim variations, and choices of doors—as well as the additional cost of each. The number of homes offered in these catalogs greatly increased, from twenty-two in 1908 to ninety-two in 1930, and Sears consistently marketed homes across a broad spectrum of the populace to accommodate buyers from varied classes and backgrounds. As the 1936 catalog

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[20] Sears, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (1926), 112.

proclaimed, “scattered over the middle west and eastern sections of the country, *Sears* number among its hundreds of satisfied “Honor Bilt” [sic] home owners people from every walk of life—farmers, doctors, college professors, steel workers, writers, etc. A list of them would provide a cross section of American life.”[21] The key to the company’s success in marketing its homes was a policy of inclusiveness that reached across different classes, different architectural styles, and spoke to different aspirations of potential buyers. The mediation of these differences entailed a restructuring of production that allowed for an unprecedented flexibility of choice in a mass-produced item.

None of the available literature on Sears Homes has addressed the critical questions of how or why the company was successful in this endeavor. Instead, the success of a mail-order home that arrived in pre-cut pieces and awaited assembly has been treated as inevitable. Kathleen Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl were the first to explore the subject, and their methodology has become a kind of template for later writers. Essentially a guidebook, *Houses by Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company* features a brief introductory text that contains an overview of the company’s operations. The supposition that the company was both ahead of its time (in terms of method) and behind the times (in terms of aesthetic innovation) points to a larger problem within the literature as a whole: the inability to contextualize these developments in a historically significant fashion. Rather than build the upon the archeological nature of Stevenson and Jandl’s initial work, later writers have tended merely to repeat the same facts, show similar examples from the catalogs, and all but ignore the issue of context.

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[21] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (Chicago and Newark, New Jersey: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1936), 1.

In order to redefine the methods of production it became necessary for Sears to refine the conception of the house into a unit that was suitable for mass-production. Sears began to conceive of the house, not as a single unified unit, but rather as a pastiche of parts—a collage of combined pieces. By distilling the process of home building into manageable, but distinct parts, Sears was able to focus on cheaply producing these elemental forms, which could later be used to create a wide variety of styles and choices. The most basic of these elements were the framing members: the studs, joists, and rafters. By standardizing ceiling heights and the distance from floor to window, the company was able to cut sufficient quantities of these members en masse and reduce the cost per unit. These pieces, once cut, were marked and stored in warehouses where they would be pulled for each order, according to the itemized sheet of materials that accompanied each set of plans. As early as 1914, the company's catalog featured photographs of the specialized warehouses that held the materials. Throughout the 1920s, catalogs depicted workers with carts walking through a warehouse in which clearly marked bays containing various lengths of lumber; these images were placed prominently in the introductory pages.[22] In addition to simplifying and standardizing straight cuts on studs and joists, Sears also applied these principles to the more geometrically complex cuts in the rafters. In the 1930 catalog, for instance, the same dimension of rafters that appear in *The Winthrop* are interchangeable with those in *The Willard*, *The Brookwood*, *The Rodessa*, and *The Fairy*.[23]

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[22] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes,* (1926), 16.

[23] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Catalog of Modern Homes*, (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1930). See pages 24, 28, 61, 62 and 69 respectively for individual descriptions of the models listed.

From 1908 until 1942, Sears was the largest single provider of homes in the United States.[24] Modernity, as envisioned by Sears, was a process rather than a stylistic notion, and denoted the factory-cut preparation of the wood, the ease of shopping via catalog for a home, and the speed at which the method of delivery would bring the product to the customer. The majority of the 450 designs created over the division's thirty-four year existence reflected middle-class American architectural ambitions, and tended to be interpretations of prevalent, contemporary styles.[25] In the first phase of the department's development (1906-10) there was a strong sense of architectural conservatism and virtually all of the designs looked back to Victorian design precedents. Throughout the second and third phases of the company (1911-17, 1918-29), however designers introduced examples that demonstrated a cautious engagement with progressive architectural movements. In particular, the company's embrace of Arts and Crafts, Prairie School, and Mission Style aesthetic elements denoted a willingness to engage contemporary architectural trends and provide customers a wide range of choices when selecting the design of their home. Moreover, these designs also serve as useful markers in examining the popular reception of progressive architectural styles in the first half of the twentieth century.

## Layers of Meaning

[24] Virtually all of the sources incorrectly assign 1940 as the terminal date for the department, based on the last year of publication for a catalog. However, since the division continued to advertise into 1941 and was featured in several newspaper articles, the last of which I was able to locate is dated December 7, 1941. As a result, the terminal date of the division must be pushed back to December 1941 at the earliest, and it is likely that the division quietly dissolved sometime in 1942.

[25] See Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail,* 19.

Among the difficulties encountered in understanding Sears' ambitious program is a general misunderstanding about the symbolic function of the home at the turn of the century. Social historians who study the era, often armed with a Marxist critique of commodification, have contextualized the home as one among many of the victims of corporate capitalism. As Jackson Lears has argued: "it was impossible for the home to remain altogether isolated from the market society. Inevitably the haven embodied many of the values of the heartless world outside."[26] Lears's text reveals that he, like many of the scholars writing on the Arts and Crafts movement, sees the intrusion of the outside world—in particular, market society—into the home as necessarily evil. Because he approaches the subject with this bias in place, Lears never strays far from the path that will lead him to a conclusion which confirms his beliefs. Transcendentalism, however, despite its fears about the future of modernity, allowed for the chance that modernity and human happiness were not antithetical ideas. The successful negotiation of modernity that Transcendentalism proposed required participants to suspend the belief that the modern world was doomed and work actively to shape their own destinies.

The home, more so than virtually any other commodity, was used by both the owners and the general society to construct myriad layers of meaning. It was, as Lears's text suggests, supposed to perform an almost talismanic function and protect the inhabitants from the perils of the outside world, whether material or moral, but this was one among many of its functions. In addition to the idea of a private retreat, the home also announced the status of the inhabitants to the community at large. Decoratively, as it always had, the home reflected trends circulating in society and could be read on

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[26] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16.

some level to reveal the taste and ambition of its owners, builders, and residents. As a writer in *Brush and Pencil* commented:

> A home is a living place with the idea of permanency as its foundation. It is a spot hallowed by associations, to which one is attached by the joys and griefs that have gone into the upbuilding, and the articles with which it is filled ought not to be mere things, but should be animate with cherished memories, or expressions of the tastes, convictions, and condition of the possessor.[27]

Straddling the boundaries of the public and private side of its inhabitants, the home became a nexus for the many aspects of the divided self in the modern world and was, for many, perhaps the single point at which the numerous facets of selfhood could coalesce.

Among the symbolic functions of the home to which writers of the era continually returned was the idea that the home was a bastion of comfort and security, a relief from the outside world. As an anonymous writer in *Ladies Repository*, identified only as "A Housekeeper," noted:

> The World can make but poor and partial amends to him who takes refuge in its activities from the intolerable irritations of a disorderly, comfortless home; while no earthly disaster can sever the soul from its heavenly moorings and drift it helplessly hither and thither, if the true life of the home 'encompass it with bands,' and hold it fast by appreciative, intelligent sympathy and affection.[28]

For the Arts and Crafts movement, the home became a barrier through which the insidious influences of the external world were not permitted pass. In fact, for many reformers, the presence of too many commodities in the home threatened the sanctity of the space and diluted its moral influence. John Ruskin's description of the home, which

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[27] Douglas Volk, "The Human Element in Arts and Crafts," *Brush and Pencil* 11 (March 1903): 444.

[28] A Housekeeper, "Housekeeping and Homes," *Ladies Repository* 22 (October 1862): 609.

was widely influential in the organized resistance to Victorian decadence, clearly elucidated this notion:

> [The home] is the place of peace; the shelter, not only from injury, but from all terror, doubt and division. In so far as it not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be a home.[29]

Sears likewise promoted the home, and particularly ownership of a home, as an aspect of modern life that provided security, comfort and health. The company asked potential customers to consider homeownership as a stabilizing factor: "Why look around for a new flat or a temporary cottage from which you will very probably move in six to twelve months time?"[30] Whereas the city was noxious and unstable, suburban life held the promise of a restorative natural environment that had been heralded in Transcendentalist literature. Sears insisted to customers that ownership was the best way to assure the sense of emotional security that Ruskin emphasized and combine it with a prudent financial security too.

In addition to protecting the occupants, the home was also a vehicle through which the personality of the residents was projected into the surrounding community. It was, in essence, the public face of the family, but never at the expense of losing its private, restorative powers in the process. Though clearly a marker of wealth and status, the home also transcended that role whereas smaller, private items for personal

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[29] As quoted in Lizabeth A. Cohens "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915," *Common Places, Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach eds., (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1986), 263. Cohen's footnote indicates that the quote is from Ruskin's "Of Queen's Gardens" and that she initially found it in Gwendolyn Wright, "Making the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago" (PhD diss., U.C. Berkley, 1978), 21.

[30] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1914), 31. The same statement had been used since 1912.

consumption tended not to in this period. These items may have reflected character through proscribed notions of taste, but they did not offer a refuge from the hustle and bustle of modern life. Indeed, it was often the very clutter of accumulation that was seen as a threat to the restorative powers of the home.

Critics throughout the late-nineteenth century noted the multivalent meanings of the home in plain, stark language. The increasingly-popular suburban house, with its explicit ties to nature and open space, further transformed the home from a shelter for urban escapists into a separate sphere of existence that offered the inhabitants a restive, tranquil security.[31] An article entitled "The Physiognomy of the House", which appeared in *Appletons' Journal*, made this connection particularly clear. Noting the differences between city and country homes, the author stated that "the home is the staple which fastens us to the world…it is the place where we take off our masks and disguises and seem most nakedly what we are. It is the retreat where we shut out the storm and weather, and shut in friendship and love."[32] With the idea of unmasking and the image of nakedness, the home was transformed into the place where the most authentic aspect of self was revealed. As a place of security, it offered the necessary shelter in which the individual could develop unimpeded by the outer world.

Not only was the home a physical and symbolic refuge from the increasingly chaotic urban pace of life, but the home became a projection of the self into the public arena as well. As critic Eugene Clarence Gardner noted in 1875, "[i]t is a solemn thing

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[31] The growth of suburban life is well documented in numerous sources. See for instance, Sam Warner Bass, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

[32] Joel Benton, "The Physiognomy of the House," *Appletons' Journal: A Magazine of General Literature* 1 (October 1876): 367.

to build even the outside of a house. You not only influence your fellow-men, but reveal your own character; for houses have a facial expression as marked as human beings…"[33] As a reflection of the homebuilder or buyer, this projection seems to be almost exclusively male and again functioned as a marker of wealth and taste in addition to character. The persistence of this concept is evident in Samuel Howe's comments, too, written more than twenty-five years later for Gustav Stickley's *Craftsman,* which echoed this sentiment almost exactly. Recalling his impressions of a visit to Stickley's home, Howe noted that, "a curious fact remains, that in spite of all our modern ease of communication, men still remain individual. Interchange is powerless to subdue it and man can still, by giving his thought, stamp his individuality on his house, so that when you look at the house, you view the man."[34] Because of the layers of meaning encoded in the home, selling a mass-produced product was a difficult process that often involved the successful mediation of nuanced, and at times opposing, beliefs.

The critical questions framed by the Transcendentalists more than half a century earlier continued to occupy the discourse of modernity. Channing's definition, that Transcendentalism "was an assertion of the inalienable integrity of man," should remind us that it was the fractured and dis-integrated self—brought on by the economic conditions of modernity—which was the root of cultural anxiety. Philosophically, the generation of classical Pragmatists like William James and John Dewey that rose to prominence during the dawn of the twentieth century remained indebted to the Transcendentalists, not only for framing the parameters of the problem so eloquently,

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[33] Eugene Clarence Gardner, *Homes, and How to Make Them* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1875), 16-17.

[34] Samuel Howe, "A Visit to the House of Mr. Stickley," *The Craftsman* 3 (December 1902): 165.

but also for the solutions they proposed. Rather than emphasizing the schism brought about by the Civil War, the corporate accommodation of Transcendentalist attitudes regarding mechanization and the self demonstrates the manner in which strands of connectivity between antebellum culture and the Gilded Age deserves further attention.

Since the 1960s, the tendency to view the concerns of the Gilded Age as an efficiently-managed and Pragmatic construction has obscured Transcendentalism's contribution to the cultural discourse of the period.[35] Not only has Transcendentalism been removed from the cultural history in favor of Pragmatism, but the Transcendental roots of many of the leading Pragmatists have likewise been obscured.[36] Although Transcendentalism remains in the minds of many as primarily a Northeastern phenomenon, it is important to note that Chicago became a major outpost by the early twentieth century.

In addition to Oscar Lovell Triggs's Transcendental influence at the University of Chicago through his lecturing, both John Dewey and Jane Addams were products of the Transcendental tradition.[37] Dewey had been educated by Henry Torrey in Burlington, Vermont, and was infused with the ideas of James Marsh, the area's principal

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[35] See for instance Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); see also George M. Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965; Urbana and Chicago: 1993).

[36] The connections between Transcendentalism and Pragmatism have been examined since the 1910s. See George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy: Address delivered before the Philosophical Union of the University of California, August 25, 1911," in *Winds of Doctrine: Studies in Contemporary Opinion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913); Frederic I. Carpenter, "Points of Comparison between Emerson and William James," *The New England Quarterly* 2 (July 1929): 458-74; also Mark Uffelman, "The Role of Self-Cultivation in Classical Pragmatism," (PhD diss., Temple University 2005).

[37] Louis Menand, *The Metaphyscial Club* (New York: 2001): 307-8 called Addams, "a devotee of the most transcendental of the American Transcendentalists. (She is supposed to have competed for the privilege of scraping the mud off Bronson Alcott's boots when he visited Rockford.)"

Transcendentalist. Louis Menand, in his Pulitzer Prize winning book *The Metaphysical Club,* attempted to distance Dewey from Emersonian Transcendentalism when he noted that, "the Burlington philosophy was Transcendentalist, but it was not Emersonian," but the philosopher's stance was not so cut and dried. In 1892, for instance, Dewey proposed to give a series of lectures on "Tendencies of English Thought during the 19th Century," which included "the conflict—Carlyle," and "the Hope—Emerson," as the fifth and sixth lectures respectively.[38] The correspondence indicates that by the summer of 1903 Dewey had begun to reevaluate Emerson's contributions to modern philosophy and began rereading Emerson's essays. As he confided to his colleague Warring Wilkinson:

> I agree thoroughly with what you say about Emerson. In rereading some of his essays this summer I could not but be struck by the extent to which he has anticipated various points of view to which modern psychology has already come, or in the direction of which it is rapidly moving. …I think there will be much less complaint about Emerson's being vague and transcendental, etc.[39]

Even as late as 1928 Dewey defended his views on Emerson and noted that, "I have not changed, so far as I am aware, my views on Emerson… Personally, I regard his somewhat transcendental terminology—Oriental or German—as a rather accidental garb for ideas which are pertinent today, and in some sense distinctly American even."[40]

For Dewey, as it had been for the Transcendentalists before him, one of the pressing issues of modernity was successfully reconciliation of the individual with a

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[38] John Dewey to Thomas Davidson 8 March 1892. *The Correspondence of John Dewey Volume 1: 1871-1918,* ed. Larry A. Hickman, Electronic edition, (Intelex Corporation): 1892.03.08 (00468). Subsequent correspondence is from the same source.

[39] John Dewey to Warring Wilkinson, 8 August 1903, 1903.08.08 (00833).

[40] John Dewey to Frederick Ives Carpenter, 6 October 1928, *The Correspondence of John Dewey Volume 2: 1919-1939*. ed. Larry A. Hickman, Electronic edition, (Intelex Corporation): 1928.10.06 (18680). The views he was referring to were those he stated in his 1903 essay, "Emerson—the Philosopher of Democracy."

mechanized world.[41] "The deepest problem of our time," he stated, "[is] the problem of constructing a new individuality consonant with the objective conditions under which we live."[42] The anxiety and dislocation that were often symptomatic of modernity, in Dewey's mind, existed because of the insistence on attempting to preserve an older notion of the individual—one that was out of step with modern sensibilities and thus would be unable to exist in this era. Because he realized that a reversion to a pre-industrial, anti-modern life was impossible, Dewey's arguments find a place along a continuum of thinkers who sought to alter the dynamic of modernity, not by resisting it, but by actively engaging it toward a positive end. The Transcendental kernel that insists modernity can be a positive and even beneficial experience is traceable through Thoreau, Hubbard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Dewey.

Dewey's own sensitivity to the nature of the problem never caused him to retreat from his beliefs that modernity was a positive force, even if it entailed significant growing pains. In a prescient assessment of the antimodern mindset, Dewey observed that, "it is evident enough, that the rapid industrialization of our civilization took us unawares. Being mentally and morally unprepared, our older creeds have become ingrown; the more we depart from them in fact, the more loudly we proclaim them."[43] Like the Transcendentalists, Dewey found these old attitudes and style "an encumbrance,"[44]

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[41] Although Menand, *The Metaphysical Club,* 237 is correct in noting that "he was at home in modernity," he believes that Dewey was the exception in this regard and does not tie the attitudes back to Transcendentalist influences or philosophy.

[42] John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Minton Balch and Company, 1930; Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1999): 16.

[43] Dewey, *Individualism Old and New,* 8.

[44] Dewey, *Individualism Old and New,* 46.

insomuch as they prevented palpable steps towards a new reconciliation of the self with the realities of the modern era:

> The machine is condemned wholesale because it is seen through the eyes of a spirituality that belonged to another state of culture. Present evil consequences are treated as if they were eternally necessary, because they cannot be made consistent with the ideals of another age. In reality, a machine age is a challenge to generate new conceptions of the ideal and the spiritual.[45]

The 'ideals' of mass-production, then, needed to be altered to accommodate and preserve the feelings of choice and individualism that buyers would be looking for in a home. The persistence of the association of the individual with the home provided a formidable challenge for those desiring to mass-produce units. Sears, Roebuck and Company's success as a mail order home supplier is directly linked to its ability to tailor production in a manner that would preserve the cost-benefits of assembly line production, continue to offer a substantial variety of products, and still leave the "inalienable integrity" of the individual unchallenged.

In discussing the manner in which the company's success was linked to the legacy of Transcendentalism, I am not claiming that there was a deliberate mandate or directive. Nor do I assume that this was an intentional action. My concern instead remains how the legacy of the Transcendentalists, which by this point was ingrained in the mentality of the Northeast and had penetrated the intellectual consciousness of the Chicago reformers, prepared the public to accept Sears's productions. In this regard I am interested in the manner by which the company's strategies for selling homes to the public aligned with a broader understanding of Transcendentalism that had been promoted by figures such as Hubbard and other craft reformers.

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[45] Dewey, *Individualism Old and New,* 73.

The appropriation of styles that marked the Sears aesthetic served a number of functions both practical and ideological. In terms of the market, it certainly allowed the company to engage a broader base of consumers by speaking to the tastes of disparate groups. Furthermore, it permitted the company to respond to rapidly-changing tastes and preserve its role in the industry by continuing to provide a sense of 'current' fashion to the consumer. For the purposes of this chapter, the diversity might be read as an indication of the struggle for a cohesive identity that manifested itself in an almost endless experiment with myriad styles and modes of decoration.

Some scholars have identified this proliferation of designs as a negative facet of life. Lears, for instance, concluded that "[this] eclecticism signified the impoverishment of a culture which lacked the resources for creating its own symbols," because designers "unwittingly undermined the power of these earlier forms."[46] Yet, the power of these forms lay in the psychological and historical associations that they held for a contemporary audience, and as such it is difficult to determine how they could be undermined. Once again, it seems that the singularity with which Lears has interpreted these symbols is the cause of trouble for his argument, for it is likely that while these signs shared common cultural significance, they were also subject to highly personal interpretations. While these forms lacked the originality and flair of initial creations, it does not mean they held less value, or that their power to convey meaning was diminished. While meanings undoubtedly shifted, it would appear that many times the intention in resurrecting design motifs relied on exposing their 'cash-value' as tokens of a past. As such, these forms and styles created trans-historical connections, evoking the ideals of a past that was now unreachable, except in surrogate form. The referencing of

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[46] Lears, *No Place of Grace,* 33.

the past should was simply one among many attempts to mediate the displacement of the self that had become an inherent feature of modernity. The various eclectic approaches designers undertook remain powerful symbols of the era that are laden with meaning.

### Sears, Roebuck and Company and the Craftsman Ideal in America

Almost from its inception, the Modern Homes division revealed Sears' desire to cultivate an image for its homes that was consonant with Arts and Crafts design and philosophy. Unlike the Arts and Crafts reformers who engaged the style with a singular zeal and constructed their identities around it, Sears did not engage the Arts and Crafts—either aesthetically or philosophically—with any exclusiveness. Like everything the company traded in, style was malleable rather than fixed. Despite the fact that Gustav Stickley, Elbert Hubbard, and Rose Valley each actively sought profits, their intentions, we are led to believe, were somehow more pure, their influence less corrupting. Yet, Sears' success in providing dignified homes for the average worker was an accomplishment many reformers' efforts could only hope to equal. While reformers might talk about the dignity of labor and the value of working with one's hands, many of them came from (or found themselves in) financial situations quite distant from those they were purporting to save. Although the corporation was often framed as evil, there were shining moments of corporate responsibility throughout the period: among them was the factory town of Sears homes in Carlinville, Illinois.[47]

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[47] See for example, "Miners' Homes Run the Gamut From Best to Worst: Carlinville's "Mansions" Famous; Nilwood's Huts Infamous, *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 3 November 1919. The article included a photograph titled "Some Illinois Coal Miners' Homes and a Typical Family," which called the homes "the best type of residence for bituminous mine workers."

Before the Arts and Crafts vernacular was evident in the design of its homes, Sears began to embrace the aesthetic in its building supplies and home furnishings departments. As early as 1910, Sears had begun specifically to employ the term "Craftsman" for a number of products offered in its Building Materials catalog.[48] Seeking to capitalize on the rustic, traditionalist associations the term had with the public, the company designed a logo for the line that represented the letters as a hand-made assemblage of wooden boards (fig 4.1). Constructed entirely of straight lines and with the grain of each segment clearly visible, the company's logo served to reinforce the aesthetics of the emergent style to consumers idly flipping through the catalog. The company was aware of the cultural value of such a term, yet its attempts to define it remained puzzling and elusive. Ironically, this probably served them well since it allowed its customers a broad range of interpretations rather than a narrow, didactic view:

> The meaning of the term "Craftsman" as applied to architecture and furniture is something that has been turned out by master workman. It is very similar in design to the Mission style, with which everyone is familiar. Of late years, after the bungalow, Craftsman cottage and Mission dwellings became so popular…[49]

Clearly, "Craftsman," was a stylistic notion rather than a method of production. The main feature the company seemed to associate with the Craftsman style was an almost complete lack of curved lines. Sears' "Craftsman Trim" line of molding emphasized

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[48] Sears does not appear to have encountered the legal difficulty with the term that others who sought to employ it faced. Apparently the term was so completely associated with Stickley that in 1913 he was able to successfully sue Jud Yoho for using the phrase "Craftsman Bungalows," to market his homes. See "Stickley Defends His Trademark," in *Stickley's Craftsman Homes* 38-43. Even today Sears carries a Craftsman line of tools—remnants of this earlier period that are indebted to Stickley's magazine and the do-it-yourself projects he regularly featured.

[49] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Our Special Catalog for Home Builders* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1910), 11.

rectilinear structure rather than the elegant curves and machine-carved fussiness of the firm's other lines. As the catalog later indicated, the term—and the aesthetic principles that defined it—signified a number of ideas such as, "neat, simple and artistic."[50] For those seeking to avoid the materialistic over-stimulation associated with the late Victorian period, Sears offered a practical and, most importantly, affordable remedy.

The company's insistence that the term "Craftsman" was essentially an aesthetic principle rather than a method of production might strike modern readers as a departure from the basic principles of the Arts and Crafts movement. In fact, Sears was engaging many of the philosophical tenets that well-known leaders of the movement like Gustav Stickley, Adelaide Alsop Robineau, and Elbert Hubbard had articulated previously. As Stickley noted in *The Craftsman,* "the one essential element of Craftsmanship, which is not the mere doing of things by hand, but the putting of thought, care and individuality into the task of making honestly and well something that satisfies a real need."[51] In his quest to "satisfy a real need," Stickley transformed his version of the Arts and Crafts from an exclusively ideological movement to a more practically rooted one. Sparseness and economy of living, which was the invective against an over-civilized and effete culture, served as a moral buttress and remained the marker of superior moral character among some of the wealthy.

By 1911, Sears had begun to embrace the Arts and Crafts idiom in the design of its houses. Rather than drawing from a single source, the company's plans—and even understanding of the movement's significance—were a pastiche of different influences and philosophies. Though certainly aware of Stickley's contribution to the movement,

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[50] Sears, *Our Special Catalog for Home Builders,* 61.

[51] Gustav Stickley, "The Use and Abuse of Machinery and Its Relation to the Arts and Crafts," *The Craftsman* 11 (November 1906): 202.

Sears also looked to other sources like the softer-lined West Coast Arts and Crafts bungalows of Greene and Greene to broaden its visual vocabulary and soften the rigidity of design. In the early development of the division, these designs were, like their influences, an often-confusing assortment of current trends. Lacking a coherent philosophical basis on which to advance, and relying on a multitude of sources, these designs are among the firm's most awkward productions. They tend to be somewhat clunky in feeling. The houses never coalesce as complete entities but remain a pastiche of details assembled with little regard for the final proportions. Sears appears to have dressed up an existing basic form with details that moderately resembled, in spirit, the ethos of the movement, rather than designing a coherent whole.

*Modern Home No. 178*, which the company described as "a craftsman style two-story house with a bungalow style roof," is indicative of this type of emulation (fig. 4.2).[52] While the exposed rafters visible in the roof are reminiscent of those found in a "bungalow style roof," there is little else in the design that correctly interprets the genre. The massive, oversized porch employs an almost colossal order of Craftsman pillars and seems out of proportion with the façade it shields. In addition, the projecting two-story bay is a vestigial Victorian detail, wholly at odds with the spirit of the Craftsman movement.

As a strategy, Sears' early attempts at modifying designs to conform to the Craftsman ideal were unsuccessful, largely because of poor design choices. In addition to the general misunderstanding of the style displayed in the detailing of *Modern Home No. 178*, any sense of design originality is undercut by the similarly-structured *Modern Home No. 124* that appeared a few pages later (fig. 4.3). Using the exact same

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[52] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1914), 19.

measurements for the footprints of the houses, the designers modified the exterior details slightly and moved the vantage point from which the home was illustrated. On the interior, though, it appears that slight changes have been made, The failure of interior measurements to correctly add up calls these changes into question. On the second floor, the bedrooms were modified slightly in size to accommodate a different configuration of closets, but the essential room widths stay the same: fourteen feet on the left-hand side and thirteen feet on the right. Even the descriptions of the houses were transparently similar: *No.* 178 was "a Craftsman style two-story house with a bungalow style roof and *No. 124* was described as "a bungalow…[that] can be finished with Craftsman hardwood trim."[53]

Amidst the confusion of styles, however, Sears also began to promote homes that better conformed in aesthetics and philosophy to the Craftsman ideal. Compact in size and with well-proportioned details, a handful of homes in the 1912 catalog were more stylistically advanced than the company's other offerings. These homes—all of which were labeled bungalows in the catalog—mark the first wave of what was to become a major engagement with the Arts and Crafts vernacular.

*Modern Home No. 225* (fig. 4.4) typified this new engagement with the bungalow and contained many of the features that would be found throughout the Sears bungalow. Unlike its main rival, Aladdin Homes of Bay City, Michigan, Sears was demonstrating its ability to produce homes that were highly detailed and, though competitively priced, did not seem stripped down. Aesthetically, the most striking element of the home's design is the clustered supports found on the front porch. Grouped tightly together, this

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[53] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1912), 19 and 31. Subsequently reprinted as *Homes in a Box* (Atglen, Penn.: Schiffer Publishing, 1998).

configuration of square posts is one that Sears would rely upon frequently in the following years. Although the company would vary the arrangement by the presence or absence of brackets at the top and horizontal connecting members, this design became a standard in Sears' design repertoire that was used in various configurations right up until the division's demise. While this detail speaks to the company's ability to rearrange a limited number of design elements and successfully achieve a compelling visual variation of forms, it also reveals a likely candidate for one of the company's sources: architect Henry Lawrence Wilson.[54]

Because of the loss of archival records, the suggestion that Wilson provided designs for Sears remains circumstantial, though the evidence is mounting.[55] As Ward and Jandl noted in *Houses by Mail,* the catalog cover from Sears' 1916 *Catalog of Modern Homes* featured the same home that was on the cover of *Bungalow Magazine* in July 1914 (figs. 4.5 and 4.6).[56] Wilson was by then a well-known figure in Chicago as he had achieved national recognition through his numerous designs. In 1910, the fifth edition of his *Bungalow Book* was published in Chicago, and featured plans and photos

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[54] Aside from publishing *Bungalow Magazine* (1907-12) and a popular book of home plans titled *The Bungalow Book* little appears to be known about Wilson. None of the sources consulted included birth or death dates for him.

[55] Sears has closed their archives to outside researchers and did not respond to inquiries about what, if anything, they have.

[56] See *Houses by Mail,* 32-33. Curiously, Ward and Jandl posit that this home is "adapted from" the one that graced the cover of the magazine even though the photographs are of the same building. By 1914, Wilson had sold the magazine to Jud Yoho, a Seattle based businessman, though the details of the transaction, and the arrangement of the company are not clear. As Yoho was not an architect it remains unclear where the designs came from, nor is it clear whether Wilson had any further connection with the magazine. Various accounts appear of Yoho's life and all touch on the magazine, see for example: Janet Ore, *The Seattle Bungalow: People & Houses 1900-1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), especially pages 78-86. See also John Mack Faragher, "Bungalow and Ranch: The Architectural Backwash," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 32 (Summer 2001), especially 12-13.

for 112 houses.[57] A comparison of details suggests that Wilson's *No. 257* served as the model for Sears' *Modern Home No. 225* and *No. 172.* The three-part post, which would become a frequent motif for Sears, appears throughout Wilson's work but not in *The Craftsman* or other popular sources for bungalow plans.[58]

Throughout the ensuing decades, the Modern Homes division continued to create and refine bungalow designs. Typical of its work in this regard is the *Vallonia*, which was introduced in the 1921 *Catalog of Modern Homes (*fig 4.7). Although it shares formal similarities to *Modern Home No. 225* (fig. 4.4), it is better proportioned and less bulky in its overall shape. Immediately noticeable is the more harmonious resolution of the transition between the columns and porch roof. Both the shorter columns and less-massive capitals aid this transition, and another major factor is the inclusion of a beam between the columns that helps articulate the space and endow a more finished feel to this area. The hard lines of the beam are softened by a shallow curve cut into it, as well as by the token keystone form centered over the stairs. In addition, the shift from four to two columns simplified the busy-ness of the porch and focused attention on the entrance and the physical space of the porch, rather than on its borders. The design is once again indebted to, if not actually by, Henry L. Wilson, who employed similar strategies in *No. 382* and *No. 688* (figs. 4.8 and 4.9).

Although Wilson's designs proved to be a major influence on the look of Sears' bungalows, the company also drew on other sources for designs, including Gustav

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[57] Henry L. Wilson, *The Bungalow Book,* 5th Edition (Chicago: Henry L. Wilson, 1910; Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2006).

[58] In the 1910 edition of Wilson's *Bungalow Book* this column configuration and related variants appeared in 29 of the 120 designs, or roughly one quarter of the productions. By contrast, the Radford Architectural Company, another well-known provider of bungalow designs of the era rarely shows this configuration and never with the same detailing as Sears and Wilson. See Radford Architectural Company, *Radford's Artistic Bungalows: The Complete 1908 Catalog* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997) for limited examples of this.

Stickley's *Craftsman,* which by January 1904 had begun to publish home designs.[59] Initially, one plan was featured in each month's issue, but soon this number rose and by the end of the initial year *The Craftsman* had presented readers with eighteen plans. Like virtually all of the catalog and pattern books, *The Craftsman* featured a pencil rendering of the exterior, sometimes accompanied by several interior views and a general floor plan.[60] It is clear that throughout this period the idea of the pattern book home was consonant with Arts and Crafts ideals and not seen as a threat to a solid sense of self, or as degrading one's individualism. In addition to promoting his own homes, Stickley also carried advertisements for the Keith Company, which boasted that, "150 beautiful homes are illustrated in 12 numbers of *Keith's Magazine*," and offered a number of pattern books for the aspiring homeowner.[61]

From *The Craftsman* Sears drew both general inspiration regarding the philosophy of the bungalow, and specific design ideas as well. For instance, *The Ardara* (fig. 4.10), which was introduced by Sears in 1919, bears a strong resemblance to Sylvanus B. Marston's "Cottage Bungalow," which was illustrated in the November 1914 issue of *The Craftsman* (fig 4.11).[62] *The Art World,* which absorbed Stickley's *Craftsman*

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[59] For an extensive summary of the homes featured in *The Craftsman* see Ray Stubblebine, *Stickley's Craftsman Homes: Plans, Drawings and Photographs* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2006).

[60] Aladdin seems to be one of the rare companies who used photography, though not always to their advantage. Examples of homes with building debris in the front yard and other messes likely proved more a detriment than benefit—see for example illustrations of *The Addison* or *The Kingston* from the 1913 catalog pages 32 and 26 respectively.

[61] For an example of the Keith's Magazine advertisement see *The Craftsman* 4 (January 1903): unpaginated back material.

[62] The house was illustrated in "Cottage-Bungalow: A New Development in Intimate Home Architecture," *Craftsman* 27 (November 1914): 211 where the architect is identified as Sylvanus B. Marston. It was subsequently illustrated in Charles Alma Byers, "Colonial Influence Brings the Bungalow to Greater Perfection," *The Art World* 3 (February 1918): 445-7.

following his bankruptcy claim, published a design in 1918 that likely served as the model for *Crescent,* which Sears debuted in 1922 (figs. 4.12 and 4.13).[63]

In many ways, the bungalow was the perfect vehicle for Sears since it was reasonably small, relatively inexpensive and layered with meanings. As Henry Wilson noted, "in the Bungalow is the possibility of combining economy of cost with artistic beauty to an almost unlimited degree."[64] Having emerged on the west coast before spreading east, the bungalow rapidly became among the most popular of housing options in the first two decades of the twentieth century.[65] Contemporary promotional material described the benefits in both economic and spiritual terms:

> There is nothing formal about it, and this very restfulness of appearance refreshes the tired city dweller who is the slave of conventionalities. The bungalow is a tangible protest of modern life against the limitations and severities of humdrum existence… A bungalow has individuality.[66]

By aligning itself with a movement known for both its economic and emotional benefits, Sears was able to capitalize on the practical and associational values that this type of housing held for its contemporary audience. The legacy of Transcendentalism continued to provide a basis for the company through which they could engage the fundamental critiques of Arts and Crafts reformers, but bring these to a wider audience.

## MISSION STYLE

In 1918, the Modern Homes Division presented a different side of the Arts and Crafts design aesthetic with the introduction of *The Alhambra*, its first offering in a

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[63] Byers, "Colonial Iinfluence," 445.

[64] Wilson, *The Bungalow Book,* 3.

[65] See Clay Lancaster, "The American Bungalow," *Art Bulletin* 40 (Sept. 1958): 239-53.

[66] *Radford's Artistic Bungalows*, 3-4.

Mission style (fig. 4.14).[67] Whereas the Craftsman style relied upon linear elements that originated in the British Arts and Crafts to form the basic vocabulary of forms, Sears' engagement of the Mission aesthetic was inspired by Spanish colonial architecture of California. Although the company was relatively late in releasing this model, it nonetheless enjoyed considerable longevity and was featured regularly in *Modern Homes* catalogs from 1918 to 1930. Ranging in price from $1,969 to $3,134, the economy of the design is due in part to its four-square origin. Reminiscent of *Modern Home No. 157*, though smaller in scale, *The Alhambra's* floor plan employs the same essential strategies for the division of interior space. Measuring only twenty-eight by twenty-eight feet, compared to *No. 157's* thirty- by forty-foot footprint, there are no major differences in the homes' interiors, save the general reduction in room size that a smaller plan necessitates. The removal of the staircase from the center of the house to the exterior wall allowed for the identical placement of rooms in upper story and a similar arrangement of rooms in the downstairs. Both plans feature the dining room and kitchen at the back wall of the house, as well as a large living room in the front section of the house. In *The Alhambra*, the entrance is shifted from the right to the left side of the house, and the entrance opens into a multi-function sunroom rather than a reception hall. In the upstairs, the placement of rooms is identical, though the hall configuration differs slightly as a result of the decreased plan size and exterior stair placement.

The interior design of *The Alhambra* reflects both the influence of Arts and Crafts idioms and a general trend towards economy that pervaded much of the Modern Home Department's designs. The catalog assured customers that, "*The Alhambra* is an

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[67] Although precise definition of the term has proved elusive, the aesthetic Sears sought to mimic is well represented in a number of recent publications. See for instance, S. F. Cook III and Tina Skinner, *Spanish Revival Architecture* (Atglen, Penn.: Schiffer, 2005); Arrol Gellner, *Red Tile Style: America's Spanish revival Architecture* (New York: Viking, 2002).

effective Mission style of architecture. Its exterior appearance, as well as the interior arrangement, will appeal to anyone who likes massiveness and plenty of room."[68] Introduced with a two-page spread in the 1918 catalog, *The Alhambra*'s description also included decoration advice from "a recognized authority on interior decoration." Readers were reminded to keep the restorative powers of the home in mind as they decorated since colors, "have a magical touch, but like all magical things must be used with the utmost care and restraint… Too much brilliant color excites and tires us and too drab color give us no stimulus." In addition to the use of heavy, dark-stained crown molding, a second band of thick wood trim unites the tops of all doors and windows in the Dining Room (fig 4.15). The curving lines of the Spanish style are brought into the interior as well, particularly in the use of arched openings that flank the living room. Although modest in scale and price, the trim scheme as well as the brickwork in the fireplace mantel added details to the public spaces in the house that added to the impression of a fully-realized Mission home (4.16).

In the private spaces of the home, such as the bedrooms and kitchen, however, there was little if any attention to Mission Style detailing. Instead of the thick trim and rich wood trim found throughout the lower rooms, the upper rooms present a more traditional strategy for interior design. In a view of the bedroom published in the 1926 *Modern Homes* catalog the trim surrounding the windows and doors is painted a light color and a smaller strip of shadow molding replaced the heavy crown molding of the lower rooms. The interior detailing of the kitchen reflects the same modest scale of the private home spaces in its aversion to Arts and Crafts detailing and clean, functional lines.

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[68] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1918), 30.

Sears designed the external aspects of these houses to meet public expectations of the term "mission." Judging from the numerous plans which appeared throughout a number of popular periodicals and plan books, the idea of "mission" in architecture seemed to revolve around three major details: a stucco exterior, pale colors, and architectural detailing with curves that vaguely recalled the Spanish Baroque. Perhaps because of the specific geographic associations with the term, the Mission style remained a relatively minor architectural phenomenon. Its association with the Arts and Crafts movement was fostered instead through furnishings and interior decoration with a massive feel and simple, clean lines. Despite its limited market penetration, the style became something of a design staple and was promoted in publications such as architect Henry L. Wilson's *The Bungalow Book*, among others. Many of these designs, and most especially Wilson's, lacked the restraint of Sears' offering and today seem positively bizarre. This type of design strategy, and one that Sears largely avoided, was a source of constant concern for Arts and Crafts reformers who frequently expressed concern over, "this deterioration in our self-created environment…[and the] loss of sincerity which architecture has suffered."[69]

Although *The Alhambra* appeared in the Sears catalog for many years, indicating the success of its design and attests to its popularity with consumers, Mission style architecture was among the least well-represented of the company's engagements with the Arts and Crafts idiom. Only two additional Mission Style models appeared, *The Monterey* in 1924 and *The San Jose* in 1928-29 (figs. 4.17 and 4.18). *The Monterey* was essentially a copy of *The Alhambra* with minor alterations in exterior detailing and a reversed first floor plan. *The San Jose* defined its Spanish influence by a stucco

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[69] Claude Fayette Bragdon, "The Sleeping Beauty," *The Craftsman* 4 (August 1903): 338-47.

exterior, rounded arch openings, and a two-story bell tower which articulated the entrance of the house. This was a common effect, if perhaps a less than effective choice and Henry Wilson and others would have provided ample precedent for such a strategy.[70] Sears's Mission style examples were modifications of traditional designs that were altered by the addition of interior and exterior detailing. In this way, the structure of the home became a kind of blank canvas to which detail could be added to at will—altering the style of the house became of function of detail and vernacular design rather than any defining changes to the organization of interior space.

**Chicago and The Prairie School**

> America, and especially Chicago and vicinity, has produced a school of men of particular trend of mind, who were able to look ahead and see a golden future for the architect and his work.
>
> John S. Van Bergen, 1915[71]

By 1910, Sears demonstrated an awareness of the Prairie School style and had already begun to appropriate the visual strategies of the emerging school in a number of its decorative products. As with the appropriation of the Arts and Crafts movement, a clear division between the aesthetic and philosophical implications of the style is impossible. By engaging the Prairie School aesthetic, Sears promoted—whether intentionally or as the product of association—the fundamental beliefs of the movement, including a faith in the technical progress of machinery and the capacity of industry to better the lives of the individual. Prominent Chicago architects like Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright had found support in Transcendentalism for their ideas, and made

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[70] See for example Wilson, *Bungalow Book,* 30-31; 98; and 116.

[71] John S. Van Bergen, "A Plea for Americanism in Our Architecture," *Western Architect* (April 1915): 24.

reference to the philosophy in their writings. In essence, when Sears, Roebuck and Company began to promote the visual markers of the Prairie School style, it also became a conduit for the continued promotion of Transcendentalism. Although the Modern Homes Division's engagement with the style was limited to a period from 1910-1918, it formed an important aspect of its aesthetic.

Among the earliest uses of a Prairie School idiom for Sears' products comes in their offering of the "Latest Designs in L'Art Nouveau Leaded Glass," which the company promoted in their 1910 homebuilders catalog. Alongside traditional, Victorian style windows and Art Nouveau inspired floral designs, the Prairie School proved to be a viable option and was represented in over one-quarter of the forty designs illustrated (fig. 4.19).[72] By highlighting the glass as a key feature of this emerging style, Sears was echoing sentiments that had been expressed in serious, professional journals. For instance, George Dean noted in *Brush and Pencil* that:

> On the artistic side of building, glass is the key. In the early stages of a vital style it shows a purity of purpose and simplicity of scheme far ahead of the baser materials… The new movement in London, Munich and Chicago—I say Chicago, for if other cities in the United States have any movement their catalogues and architectural journals do not advise us of it—finds its greatest expression in its glass.[73]

While some of the windows were purely abstract, geometric designs, a number of them still retained enough of their original character to determine their floral origin. These designs were not simply the company mimicking the outward appearance of the glass, but seemed to hint at a deeper understanding of the design process that fostered unity throughout different decorative elements within the Prairie style. Dean spoke to this

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[72] See Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Our Special Catalog for Home Builders,* 49.

[73] George R. Dean, "New Movement in American Architecture. II. Glass," *Brush and Pencil* (April 1900): 31-33.

process of designing windows when he noted that, “they show a great variety in treatment, from almost natural forms to conventionalization so severe that the original form is lost and only the character remains.”[74]

Whereas the leading figures of the Prairie School such as Wright and George Washington Maher promoted a purity of vision that excluded virtually all other styles from their homes, Sears was more able to pick and choose a selective, even tentative engagement with the Prairie School aesthetic. As a strategy, this became evident by 1911 when the interior of *Modern Home No. 151* was featured in the company’s catalog (fig 4.20).[75] This model became an important tool for selling houses, since the 1911-14 catalogs featured a full-page illustration of the interior and, in at least one instance, a model of the house was erected for the public to view and walk through at a state fair in Illinois (fig. 4.21). The design of the house likely reflected numerous sources, from the work of Frank Lloyd Wright to similarly designed bungalows illustrated in the catalogs of Sears’ competitors like the Radford Architectural Company.[76]

While the exterior of the home is a simple, hipped-roof, single-story cottage with a front porch, the interior displays a wealth of disparate influences. The dominant theme in the room, with its quarter-sawn oak detailing, exposed beams and Gothicizing pointed arches indicates an affinity for the Arts and Crafts idiom, but the vases, the strange form between them on the mantle, and the floral stained-glass windows each betray a sensibility more in line with Art Nouveau. Other details, such as the massive dining table with delicate ball and claw feet, and the Queen Anne style chair beneath an Arts and

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[74] Dean, “New Movement,” 33.

[75] Like many of the models, this home appears under different model names and numbers, first as *Modern Home No. 151*; then as *Modern Home No. 264P151* (1914).

[76] For similar designs that may have inspired Sears, see Radford Architectural Company, *Radford’s Artistic Bungalows,* esp. 178-79.

Crafts wall clock reinforce the notion of commingled styles. The most dominant element of the room is the column and screen assembly, described in the catalog as "Colonial columns and balustrade work…new and up to date features being used only in high priced houses."[77] While the fluted, wooden columns may have their antecedent in Colonial forms, the balustrade is a product of Prairie School decorative effect that mirrors exactly one Frank Lloyd Wright designed for the Ward Willits House in 1901, and elsewhere (fig. 4.22).[78]

Indeed, the blend of Prairie School, Art Nouveau and East Cost Arts and Crafts sensibilities found in many of the Sears home designs mirrored the artistic sensibilities of Chicago where these elements were frequently juxtaposed.[79] Wright and other architects working in this style tended to eschew the historicizing elements like exposed beams and fieldstone fireplaces favored by many of the East Coast Arts and Crafts designers, but they all shared a respect for materials and often a similar process of treating them. Even as he was forging a new style of architecture, Wright told readers of the *Architectural Record* to, "bring out the nature of your materials, let their nature intimately into your scheme." Wright also employed some of the same finishing techniques that many of the prominent Arts and Crafts figures used. For instance,

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[77] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (1912), 33.

[78] There were a number of designs published prior to this interior that might have formed the model for this room division. See for example, photographs of the Hillside Home School, SMB Hunt House (living room side), and Wright's Oak Park Studio exterior that appeared in FLW, "In the Cause of Architecture," *Architectural Record* 23: 3 (March 1908): 155-221. See also "Three Craftsman Cottages, Series of 1907: Number II," *The Craftsman* 11 (February 1907): 609. For the dates and locations of Wright's houses I have relied on Alan Hess et al., *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Houses* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), unless otherwise noted.

[79] The relationship of these two movements began to be documented as early as the 1970s with the renewed interest in the Arts and Crafts. See for instance H. Allen Brooks, "Chicago Architecture: It's Debt to the Arts and Crafts," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 30 (December 1971): 312-17.

illustrations of the Darwin Martin House (Buffalo, 1904-07) specified that the interior woodwork was "fumed white oak."[80]

Wright's beliefs about the house, specifically those regarding the importance of reflecting the individuality of the occupants were part of the Transcendental legacy he inherited.[81] "There should be," he stated, "as many kinds (styles) of houses as there are kinds (styles) of people and as many differentiations as there are different individuals. A man who has individuality (and what man lacks it?) has the right to its expression in his own environment."[82] According to Wright's son John, these attitudes stemmed directly from the Transcendentalist sources:

> David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Emerson and Henry Van Dyke were Papa's friends, too. They never flattered him, but I think he liked them best of all. He spent long hours printing selections from their writings in tracing cloth. He would blueprint them and pass them out to his friends.[83]

Wright himself traced these attitudes back to his ancestors' brand of Unitarianism which was tempered with Transcendental influences. In his *Autobiography*, Wright noted:

> Now came back to the ancestral Valley from the East, by way of Sister Anna and her "preacher," the "Unitarianism" worked out in the transcendentalism of the sentimental group at Concord: Whittier, Lowell. Longfellow, yes, and Emerson, too. Thoreau? Well, Thoreau seemed to them too smart. He made them uncomfortable.

For those who employed the visual vernacular of the Prairie Style, it was impossible not to advance the Transcendentalist position, whether intentionally or not, because of the

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[80] Frank Lloyd Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture," *Architectural Record* 23 (March 1908): 201.

[81] On Wright and Transcendentalism see for instance Robert Vickery, "The Transcendental Dream, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Suburbia," *Architectural Design Magazine* 48 (1978): 512-15.

[82] Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture," 157.

[83] John Lloyd Wright, *My Father Who is on Earth,* (New York: G P Putnam's Sons, 1946): 33.

volume of writings Wright had published. Whether or not the association was clear for the architect—though it would appear that at least sometimes this was the case—it was certainly available to the viewing public.

It is not surprising, because of his domineering personality in the field, that Sears' use of the Prairie School idiom inevitably was rooted in Wright's work more than that of his contemporaries. Wright's influence appears in the layout of Sears' Modern Homes as early as 1911, and runs the gamut from minor aesthetic details to homes that reflect a total embrace of the Prairie School aesthetic. Whereas many of the Prairie School figures achieved only local notoriety, Wright achieved national notoriety, due in part to his contributions of two designs for concrete houses to the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1901.[84] In addition, he had secured a critical reputation through articles like Robert C. Spencer's "The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright" which appeared in *The Architectural Review* in 1900, and publications of his work here and abroad including *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* (first published in 1910) only strengthened his national and international reputation.[85] The Modern Homes department's adoption, in varying degrees, of his idioms across numerous designs represents the company's first wholehearted embrace of modern, progressive architectural styles.

The department's success in this era may be due to the manner in which it allowed consumers to pick the intensity of design by varying its strength. At one end of the spectrum, the Prairie School idiom manifested itself in the application of ornamental motifs to basic home designs as is evident in *Modern Home No. 157,* which was

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[84] For a brief summary of Wright and the *Ladies Home Journal* homes, see Robert McCarter, *Frank Lloyd Wright* (London: Phaidon Press, Ltd., 1997), 43-4.

[85] See Robert C Spencer, "The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," *The Architectural Review* 7, no. 5 (May 1900): 61-72. This article is often erroneously indicated as coming from the June 1900 issue in the literature on Wright.

produced from 1911-13 (fig. 4.23). The banding around the windows in a contrasting color from the façade, the geometric articulation of the dormer window and low, flat roof of the porch are elements that demonstrate detailing consistent with Prairie School idioms. In addition, the abstract, geometric treatment of the brickwork in the chimney further confirms the sources for this design. Unmistakably though, this design is the reworking of Sears' basic four-square home that had its roots in Victorian design. The Victorian origin of the home is further suggested in the language of the floor plan which included "chambers" on the second floor and a centrally located "reception hall" on the first floor.[86] The ornament functions in this design as a way to mediate the desire to embrace modernity while continuing to preserve older notions of home arrangement that had yet to outlast their functional purpose.

A fuller, though not yet total, embrace of the Prairie School idiom is evident in the design of *Modern Home No. 126* (1911-14), which employed both the organizational strategy and aesthetic elements of the movement (fig. 4.24). The low-slung, overhanging hipped roof, symmetrical organization of the façade and articulation of the entrance are reminiscent of Wright's early work exemplified in his *William Winslow House* (River Forest, Illinois, 1893) (fig. 4.25). The reductive appropriation evident in the exterior is carried inside in *Modern Home No. 126* by the use of a floor plan similar to that in the *Winslow House*. Both entrances open onto a central reception hall, which in turn opens into a living room that runs the entire length of the right side of the plan. In both plans, the transition between these two spaces is fluid: a broad opening, rather than a smaller door, signifies and unites the separate spaces. On the left side of the plan, *No. 126* appropriates, on a smaller scale, the division of space and room separation evident

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[86] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (1912), 13.

in Wright's plan. Although small in scale and relatively inexpensive, the architectural ambition evident in the plan and façade were continued, in token form, by raising the ceiling height in this model an additional foot to a finished height of ten feet.[87]

A complete embrace of Prairie School style would not occur until 1918 when the company introduced both *The Aurora* and *The Carlton* (figs. 4.26 and 4.27). With the introduction of these two homes, Sears' use of the Prairie School idiom was transformed from a subtle, largely hidden influence that occasionally was seen in some detailing and the general layout of the home to the central design aesthetic. That these designs reminded viewers of Wright's work was not coincidental, for in the minds of many the Prairie School aesthetic and Wright were a single entity. Sears was intent on suggesting this connection too and noted in 1918 that, "*The Carlton*… is a prominent architect's conception of what a twentieth-century residence should be." The resemblance of the homes to Wright's work was not simply a case of shared motifs, but of direct influence as well: both designs are the work of John S. Van Bergen (1885-1969), a Prairie School architect who had worked for Walter Burley Griffin and later Frank Lloyd Wright.[88] Although the plans are not credited to Van Bergen in the 1918 catalog, similar designs by him were published in *Western Architect* in April 1915, and some of the photographs of Van Bergen's interiors were recycled for the *Modern Homes* catalog.[89]

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[87] The standard height of ceilings in the catalog at this time was nine feet. Estimates for total building cost of the home were 1,615 including all materials and labor. See *Homes in a Box* 35. That similarly styled homes also appeared in *Radford's Artistic Bungalows* (1908) suggests that Wright's aesthetic had a considerable impact on the production of architecture emanating from Chicago between 1900-1910.

[88] Van Bergen remains a figure deserving of a more complete treatment within the context of the prairie school. See Brooks, *Prairie School*, esp. 147-49 and 279-80. For a recent biographical treatment of the architect and the first catalog of his work see Martin Hackl, *The Work of John S. Van Bergen, Architect,* (privately published, 2001). Also available online at http://www.re-building.com/johnvanbergen/title.html. Retrieved 08/16/2007.

[89] Van Bergen, "A Plea for Americanism," 26.

*The Aurora* was the more modestly-priced of the two offerings, with plans available for $5.00, or a kit "already cut and fitted" for $2,357.[90] The design is clearly based on Van Bergen's William H. Griffith House and Garage (fig. 4.28) from 1913, which is itself a reinterpretation of an earlier design of his cottage for Mr. F. Blondeel (fig. 4.29) that was illustrated in *Western Architect.*[91] Because of the similarities of both of Van Bergen's designs to the Sears homes, it appears likely that in addition to employing a staff of architects, the division also licensed existing designs from established architects. Sensitive customers might been alerted to this fact had they noticed that the interior and exterior images that Sears chose to illustrate the Aurora and Carlton were the only photographs in the catalog.

Van Bergen's design is indebted to compositional ideas found in Wright's Ward Willits House (Highland Park, Ill., 1902), though it was closer in scale to his lesser-known George Barton House (Buffalo, NY: 1903). In many ways, Van Bergen was the perfect choice for an architect to license designs from, since his experience in Wright's studio gave the company a tangible link to the most notable figure practicing this progressive architectural style. In addition, whereas Wright's commissions seemed to have endless capital supporting them, Van Bergen's private practice was more modest in scale. As a result, his clientele and the cost of buildings he executed better approximated the market realities of the population segment Sears was attempting to attract. As he noted late in his life, "I <u>had</u> to keep <u>down</u> the costs, the others didn't care."[92] Van Bergen's published statements regarding the ideal size of the home also appear to have been consonant

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[90] Jandl and Stevenson, *Houses by Mail,* 287 incorrectly reports the price as $2,740.

[91] Van Bergen, "A Plea for Americanism," 24.

[92] John S. Van Bergen to Charles Masterson, 10 April 1968. Private Collection. Emphasis is original. I am grateful to Marty Hackl for sharing this letter.

with Sears' needs. As he wrote in *Western Architect* in 1915, "a costly residence may, from the standpoint of a real home if carelessly handled, be ruined beyond repair. This has happened so often that it is rather the rule, while the small inexpensive building very often becomes ideal."[93]

Sears' other offering of Prairie School architecture, *The Carlton*, was a substantially more expensive home that cost $5,118 for materials alone.[94] Plans were available for ten dollars and came with "specifications and guaranteed price of materials for the material to build it." It is clearly based upon Van Bergen's Residence for Mr. C. P. Skillin (Wilmette, Ill., 1914), which was prominently featured in a 1915 issue of *The Western Architect* that highlighted the architect's work (fig. 4.30). Subtle modifications were made to the design Sears offered its customers. Presumably to reduce cost, Van Bergen trimmed down the size of the plan and removed the maid's room, a bathroom, and two closets from the first floor. The catalog's photograph of the library, which was reused directly from *The Western Architect,* still shows a small closet towards the rear entrance of the house.

Although the design of *The Carlton* was clearly adapted from Van Bergen's plan for the C. P. Skillin house, it also derived much of its effect directly from Wright's vocabulary. In particular, Van Bergen borrowed liberally from Wright's 1909 design for the Hiram Baldwin House (fig. 4.31) in Kenilworth, Illinois, a house with which he would have been intimately familiar. Indeed, so strong are the points of similarity that it seems Van Bergen is quoting Wright directly in some aspects of the design. Part of this might be attributable to the training he had: Van Bergen's time working for Wright appears to

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[93] Van Bergen, "A Plea for Americanism," 26.

[94] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1918), facing page 1.

have little time for direct mentoring and was instead a quick and thorough immersion in the architect's affairs. As Van Bergen later recalled, "When Wright finally went off with Mrs. Cheney, I was the only one, except Miss Roberts, on the payroll… [and] I completed the work then in the office."[95] The Hiram Baldwin House, which clearly served as the model for the C. P. Skillin Residence, was among the projects that Van Bergen was in charge of during his year in Wright's office. Thus we are left with the conundrum of whether when working on *The Carlton,* Van Bergen was mimicking Wright or merely repeating elements he had designed for Wright.

The published interior photographs indicate the degree to which the Prairie School ethos was maintained inside the house. While the sun parlor, replete with wicker furniture, was not rigorously modern in its furnishings, the library demonstrates that in some public areas of the home formal qualities of the Prairie School idiom were included (4.32). The semi-open staircase and built-in bookcase display a rigid geometry that aided the overall effect. In addition, the banded moldings on the soffit over the door as well as the articulation of the room's geometry by including ceiling trim is reminiscent of the strategy Wright employed in the Robie House, (Chicago, Illinois, 1907) even if the overall effect is less impressive (fig. 4.33). The 1918 *Catalog of Modern Homes* stated, "this is a house with individuality, and that will be a constant source of pleasure and pride to its owners."[96] While it is impossible to understate the influence these two designs had on the overall effect of the design department, these examples demonstrate

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[95] As quoted in H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and his Midwestern Contemporaries* (Toronto: University of Tornto, 1972), 85-6 citing a letter from Van Bergen to him dated 16 May 1961.

[96] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1926), facing page 1.

an acknowledgement of progressive Prairie School architecture and a willingness to engage a larger consumer base by providing non-traditional options in home design.

### Self-Reliance and Morality in a Mechanized Age

> Machinery can not be abolished, nor should it be, but it can be mastered by the growth of truer standards and made to keep in its place and to do its own work.
>
> Gustav Stickley, date[97]

> We knew it would come… machine-made art will soon be all the rage.
>
> "R.C.," 1907[98]

The physical process of construction that Sears promoted spoke not only to the advancements in technology that its system offered, but appealed to notions of self-reliance that were virtually ubiquitous by the first decades of the twentieth century. Sears successfully posited the kit home as both the fulfillment of technological supremacy of the American factory system and the ultimately democratic demonstration of practical self-reliance. Harkening back to the legacy of Thoreau, Sears repeatedly emphasized the process of building—not simply the ownership—of the home. By creating a system in which virtually anyone could put their home together, Sears demystified the building process and allowed even those unskilled in the building trades to participate in the ritual of building.

Sears was cautious too, not to emphasize the commodities and convenience it sold to customers in a manner that would seem to question their character. While people marveled at the ease with which transformations occurred in modernity, it was disquieting to think that money alone—or simply a product of that money—had as much

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[97] Stickley, "Use and Abuse," 207.

[98] RC, "Machine in Art Here to Stay," *Brush and Pencil* 19 (February 1907): 63.

force as individual will. Emphasizing character over earthly possessions, Sears reminded readers that, "… money alone never built anything, whereas **Resolution, Grit and Co-operation** have improved entire sections and built big cities" (emphasis original).[99] The mail-order kit home was not only the creation of an ultra-modern, electrified factory, but it represented a chance to reconnect with handicraft by assembling one's home. Even if the associations were largely illusory, the idea that a new homeowner could erect his house spoke directly to Emersonian and Republican values by eliciting a sense of self-reliance.

Sears' method of construction promised to dignify the output of machines since the customer would (the company asserted) be creating something that was both useful and beautiful. The variety of designs submitted to the public also avoided the mindless mechanical repetition against which reformers railed. When Sears emphasized the quality and practicality of the homes, frequent reference was made to the modernity of process and material advantages this afforded. The same respect for the mechanized process that the company promoted in its catalog was found in reform texts throughout the period by figures such as Wright, Stickley, and Triggs. One aspect of Sears' marketing campaign was built upon the concept of "skyscraper construction" which guaranteed homes that were "stronger, easier to erect and more economical."[100] As the catalog stated:

> You no doubt have often viewed a skyscraper in the course of construction and are impressed with the orderly way in which all I-beams, angle irons and columns are swung into place, each member being marked with the key letter to correspond to the key letter on the blue prints denoting the exact position in which it was to be used! This careful

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[99] See catalogs 1912-14. The emphasis (both capitalization and bold) is original.

[100] Sears, *Modern Homes* (1936), 6-7. The company had been using the idea of "skyscraper principles" since the mid 1920s in their advertising campaigns.

> cutting and fitting of material before it is delivered to the job, whether it be steel or lumber, not only saves the cost of skilled labor, but makes for stronger and more solid construction.[101]

In fact, the savings in labor were scientifically demonstrated and sworn to by affidavit in August 1921 to be as much as 40%, in a side-by-side comparison to traditional building methods.[102] The savings promised by this method were further amplified by the lack of skilled labor needed at the job, or the ability of the homeowner to furnish part or all of the labor. The catalogs assured buyers that, "all our plans are drawn especially for our houses. Even the smallest details are so clearly shown that many people with only ordinary ability have built their own homes and thus saved the cost of ALL Carpenter Labor."[103] Throughout the catalogs, technology became a force that rather than excluding people from the home building process included them by demystifying the planning of the home and simplifying the construction of it.

Sears recognized that customer's associations regarding technology and the production of homes ranged from enthusiasm to fear, and actively sought to capitalize on the positive features while diminishing any ill connotations. "This is the age of modern efficiency," the company declared, "no longer can human hands compete with machine precision and production. 'Speed with accuracy' is the watchword in any department of our great factories."[104] Introductory pages of the catalogs were routinely filled with images and descriptions of machine processes, as well as descriptions of the benefits these facilities and processes offered. In 1930, for example the catalog

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[101] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1930), 6.

[102] This assertion appears in numerous catalogs throughout the 1920s, see for example Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (1926), 11.

[103] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (1936), 11.

[104] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (1936), 2.

prominently stated that, "a Glimpse of Our Factories shows how mass production saves you time and money."[105] The Port Newark plant, it was noted, had a total yard capacity of "14,000,000 feet of lumber—as much as would ordinarily be carried by seventy retail yards."[106] One could witness "the buzzing of giant electric machines; the screech of electric spider-like lumber carriers carrying four ton loads…a battery of electric driven saws doing work in a few minutes that would take hours to accomplish by hand."[107] Technology, when used responsibly was not a threat, but rather a means to simplify life and relieve humanity of the drudgery of manual tasks, a sentiment that echoed the utopian hopes which even Stickley's *Craftsman* had earlier expressed. As Oliver Lovell Triggs stated:

> We want machinery. We want more and more of it. But when machinery has done its work, when all our common and primitive needs are satisfied by quantitative production, when everything that is really mechanical in conduct is mechanized, then we escape into a transcendental sphere where the will is free, where conduct is vital every moment.[108]

Provided that machinery could function in a manner that would not undermine the ideas of individualism, its use was widely accepted by reformers and capitalists alike. The promise of the machine age was most fully realized when mechanization would allow for the preservation of desirable portions of the older ideal of individualism. In this manner, mass-production could serve as a liberating force that would not obliterate the individual, but allow for the very notion of selfhood to advance.

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[105] This fact appeared in various catalogs throughout the 1930s including Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (1930), 8-9, and Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (1936), 2.

[106] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (1936), 2.

[107] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (1936), 2.

[108] Oscar L. Triggs, "The New Industrialism," *The Craftsman* 3 (November 1902): 105. See also Lears, *No Place of Grace,* 90 and 339 (note 71 for chapter 2).

Perhaps the combination of Transcendental attitudes, a new architectural tradition which emerged after the great fire of 1871**,** and the relative youth of the city were sufficient to foster in Chicago a positively enthusiastic embrace of machinery.[109] Though the position was not unified—*Brush and Pencil* documented both sides of the debate in the late 1890s—advocates of mechanized life were gaining support by the turn of the century. Among the points persistently made in the press was that making something by hand was neither necessary, nor sufficient to endow an object with beauty. As one writer scathingly noted in *Brush and Pencil*:

> Our furniture is not ugly because of machinery. It is ugly in spite of it. We are only beginning as a nation to know what beauty is. It was not the handicraft which produced universally beautiful furniture. It is crude thought which takes crude form in furniture.[110]

Arguing along similar lines to reformers like Hubbard who sought an integration of the capitalist tradition with the Arts and Crafts, pro-machine reformers considered the intentions of those using the machine more important than the fact of use. In a similar vein, Frank Lloyd Wright told readers that, "the machine is intellect mastering the drudgery of earth," and insisted that, "the machine is a marvelous simplifier; the emancipator of the creative mind, and in time the regenerator of the creative conscience."[111] By 1907, the sense that the pendulum had swung fully towards the direction of mechanization was palpable when a critic noted that, "the term hand-made, which has been heretofore the "open sesame" to the purses of particular buyers, is

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[109] For the influence of Transcendentalism on key figures of Chicago's architectural practice see: Edward H. Madden, "Transcendental Influences on Louis H. Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright," *Charles H. Peirce Society, Transactions* 31 (Spring 1995): 286-321.

[110] Louis H. Gibson, "The Machine in Art," *Brush and Pencil* 1 (March 1898): 203. Interestingly, Gibson's article is in response to Oscar Lovell Triggs, "Arts and Crafts," *Brush and Pencil* 1 (December 1897): 47-8 whose own views were decidedly antimodern at this time.

[111] Frank Lloyd Wright, "The Art and Craft of the Machine," *Brush and Pencil* 8 (May 1901): 79 and 88 respectively.

losing its potency. What sensible purchasers want now is genuine excellence and accuracy."[112]

While stressing the advantages of mass production as a time- and money-saving device, the Modern Homes Division was quick to anticipate and mediate criticism leveled against the department. One of the strategies employed in this endeavor was to emphasize, often by association, traditionalism and the persistence of Republican values. Although this strategy became particularly evident following the depression of 1929, when the selection of homes offered shifted back to more conservative styles, the associational value of homes had a long history of importance to the company. By the 1918 catalog, the earlier practice of numbering homes was abandoned entirely and the remnants of a cold, mechanized formula were cast aside by exploiting the historical and cultural associations that names evoked. Examples such as *The Harmony* (1920), *The Rest* (1921-22, 1925) and *The Arcadia* (1921-22)—all small, cottage-type homes—are indicative of the peaceful, pastoral associations through which Sears hoped to engage potential buyers. Colonial designs followed a similar formula in naming: *The Lexington, The Concord*, *The Trenton,* and *The Princeton,* all named after important Revolutionary War Battle sites, evoked a sense of history. In addition, names like *The Betsy Ross, The Martha Washington, The Salem,* and *The Puritan* also spoke to a secure past that would ground the individual despite the frenetic pace of the world. That Sears attempted, despite the vast amount of technology employed in the fabrication of components for its houses, to construct a link to a historical past, and demonstrates the company's continued intention to remedy the schism between mass-production and the individual. While it is difficult to tell whether this strategy had a calculable impact on

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[112] RC, "Machine in Art," 63-5.

sales, it is clear that Sears actively sought multiple levels of engagement with the customer (stylistic and associative), and that the company continued this strategy until the closing of the Modern Homes department around 1942.[113]

Sears made associations with traditional building materials explicit. "There is a certain 'hominess' about a wooden house," the company noted, "a readiness to receive the stamp of its owner's personality."[114] Even more importantly though, Sears stated that "many of our national shrines, Mount Vernon, the Paul Revere House, the Randolph home and many others have stood, defying the storms of decade after decade, as staunch and sturdy today as when they were built to shelter the great men of a new republic."[115] The company's continued concern with aligning the past with the present highlights the broader, cultural concerns over technology and the struggle for selfhood.

Sears' active portrayal of suburban life as a restorative power able to combat the evils of the city meshed soundly with prevalent Transcendental beliefs. While anti-modern escapists might employ the legacy of Thoreau suggest one has to leave society altogether, Transcendentalism insisted upon a reconciliation of the individual with society at large. By allowing themselves to imagine the suburbs as Thoreau's "primitive and frontier life… in the midst of outward civilization," homeowners used the kit home and bucolic location to recall an older, nostalgic view of the individual that was rife with self-reliance and republican virtue. As the 1926 catalog noted:

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[113] By 1916, Sears sales made the company the undisputed top retailer of mail-order homes. Whether this is due to increased demand for housing, a changing economic climate or a combination of any or all of these elements has yet to be explored.

[114] "Homes of Wood," from Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (1936), facing page 1.

[115] "Homes of Wood," from Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (1936), facing page 1.

> To get the full share of Good Health, Long Life and happiness for yourself and kiddies, to get the most out of life as our Creator intended it should be, A HOME OF YOUR OWN is an absolute necessity. It promotes happiness and contentment, for it is the most pleasant and natural way to live. It has the correct environment made up of the natural instead of the artificial. Green grass, trees, shrubbery, flower and vegetable gardens all your own, provide a pleasant pastime, and an abundance of things we all crave. It is the real life that leads to happiness, for you, and those you love.[116]

The suburbs became a literal and figurative middle-ground that could preserve the benefits of urban and rural life, while attempting to diminish or negate the disadvantages. As such, it would prove a particularly suitable environment for the development of the individual, an association that could be traced back to the middle of the previous century. As the author Joel Benton noted in 1876, "The city house is a different species from its country cousin. It has no room for much individuality and must conform to the etiquette which aggregation imposes as rigidly on houses as it does on men."[117] By stressing the importance of the natural over the artificial, advertisers continued to promote the links between a connection to the earth and the development of authentic character.

**The End of Sears Homes: 1930-1942**

Although Sears offered *The Alhambra* for the last time in the 1930 edition of its *Catalog of Modern Homes*, the company had reworked the catalog radically in response to the Stock Market crash and ensuing economic depression.[118] Whether the collapse of financial markets caused or was merely coincident with the shift in home design remains

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[116] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (1926), 1.

[117] Benton 366.

[118] See Stevenson and Jandl, *Houses by Mail,* 286 which asserts incorrectly that production of The Alhambra had ceased in 1929. Not only does the model appear on pages 86-7 of the 1930 catalog, but it is also illustrated in the introductory pages of the catalog in brick veneer.

unknown. The 1930 catalog, however, signaled the beginning of a shift in attitudes towards the conceptualization of the home. Expanded to 132 pages, the catalog continued to feature the most popular designs such as *The Gladstone*, *The Vallonia,* and *The Alhambra,* but also offered far more new designs based on a simplified exterior aesthetic and conscious economy of form and materials. Initial public response to the catalog seemed favorable, and despite a forty-eight percent decrease in building of one- and two-family homes between 1929 and 1930, general manager Harvey L. Harris announced in January 1931 that he "expected the annual report of his division…would show an increase of 5 to 10 percent in volume of business."[119] Among the policies instituted in this period to aid in the selling of homes were liberal mortgage arrangements and the introduction of multiple designs that featured the same footprint and floor plan. In April 1933, the company announced that chief architect David S. Betcone had designed four houses that could be sold and erected for $1,928, including plumbing and electric systems.[120]

One way to assess the change in attitudes towards the home is to examine the evolution of metaphors Sears employed to contextualize the home. Assembly line rhetoric began to supersede the language of building trades in the company's promotional literature, and the production process of the automobile was looked to for inspiration. As a metaphor for efficient assembly, the automobile continued to provide Sears a manner by which to promote its homes and stress both cost-effective

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[119] "Mail-Order Homes Have a Record Year," *The New York Times,* 20 January 1931.

[120] "Model T Home," *Business Week,* no. 89 (19 April 1933): 8. Interestingly, Betcone was granted at least one patent, no. 2137767 and appears to have come over to Sears from their chief rival Aladdin Homes. Bettcone's patent is for a system of interlocking walls that can be prefabricated away from the job site. See United States Patent Office, *Patent 2,137,767,* Building Construction, David S. Betcone, Youngstown, Ohio, 17 December 1937.

construction and almost limitless aesthetic options. As early as 1931, Harvey L. Harris stated that one of the reasons for his division's success was the ease of purchasing, noting that a customer "is able to sign a contract with us for the finished product, just as a man goes into an automobile showroom and buys a car."[121] In 1933, with the announcement of David Betcone's new low-cost designs, New York regional manager E. R. Dibbs noted that "almost every popular architectural style is offered, just as the automobile manufacturer today offers various body and paint-job models to meet the desires of individual buyers."[122] Indeed, Dibbs favored the metaphor so much that he expanded it to explain the process of home customization in the same manner as one would purchase options on an automobile:

> The time is not far distant when the prospective home owner can visit the sales office of an authorized dealer for any number of large factory producers of modern homes and pick out from models on display the house which is to be erected on his lot…If a specially designed home is wanted, the purchaser can arrange to have it constructed on his lot, just as an automobile purchaser can have a special body job built on any car chassis he may favor, but this will cost more than a standard stock job.[123]

This link was not only promoted from within the company, but appeared also in literature about the company: *The New York Times* noted that homes were "sold like automobiles" in 1930; *Business Week* in 1933 titled an article "Model T Home." Retrospectively, the connection of the production methods and sale options of the home and automobile in this manner seems to foreshadow Sears' desire to shift from ready-cut to fully prefabricated houses.

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[121] "Mail-Order Homes Have a Record Year," *The New York Times,* 20 January 1931.

[122] "Standardized Homes to Meet Low Price Demand," *The New York Times,* 9 April 1933.

[123] "Long Island Agency For Standard Homes," *The New York Times*, 11 June 1933.

In transferring the discourse of home building and production from a Walden-like myth of rustic, self-reliance to that of the calculated rationalism of the assembly line, Sears' literature indicated a signal shift in perceptions of the home. It is in the 1930s when the idea of individualism begins to be divorced from the home, and in this period, too, when the commodification of the home—and the conceptualization of the home as one among many assets—seems to fully take hold. Whereas the home had been linked to a sense of permanency and stability in the past, the association with the automobile throughout the 1930s seems indicative of a shift from the permanent to the transient, commodity-like qualities the home was gaining. Although Wright, Stickley, and Sears had embraced the potential of the machine as a positive force in the history of humanity, they had avoided doing so at the expense of losing the integral sense of self. This shift is evident in the physical manifestation of the home too, which underwent a period of radical simplification in this time.

The final period of sales for the Modern Home department began in the wake of the Depression and ended with the closing of the division around 1942, at the outbreak of World War II. This era saw a more cautious, conservative approach to home design and a more adamant embrace of the Colonial idiom. On the whole, it also represents a turning away from the individual detailing of the third period (c. 1918-29) that had brought the division its most successful returns. Instead of the columns and crafted supports evident in models such as *The Vallonia* and *The Americus*, unadorned straight, square posts were employed. Doors and windows, rather than being articulated features of the façade, merged into a quiet anonymity and were treated with simple casements virtually devoid of ornament. This strategy likely served a variety of functions, practical and psychological, and certainly reduced the cost of homes as a means of enticing consumers in a time of shrinking demand.

The process of reductive elimination is most noticeable in the evolution of *The Gladstone,* which Sears produced from 1925 until 1938 (figs 4.34 to 4.36). In the 1926 catalog, with its paired windows, dormer, and multi-part columns, the design emphasized the porch and demonstrated one of myriad strategies to avoid the monotony of the four-square plan. By 1930, however, the first signs of elimination were noticeable: the dormer has been removed, and the windows on the first floor façade have been regularized in size and connected. In addition, a metal unit replaced the assembled wooden railing on the porch, and the house seems to more strongly declare its four-square origins. By 1936, the process of reduction was complete and there was little left to remind consumers of the model's more individiduated origins. The porch was completely removed and, in its place, an entrance portico, devoid of architectural interest and ambition, was attached. Because the entrance was reduced virtually to the ground level, the proportions of the house were diminished, in part because the foundation did not need to be raised to the height of the porch floor. The front windows, which added to the architectural character of the main façade, were also simplified. No longer are these two- or three-unit windows but, now, simply a single, double-hung model. That this reductive process modified new models and existing designs suggests that it was an essential part of the design strategy in this final period.

Whereas the company's third period (1918-29) was marked by a level of consistency in terms of aesthetics and quality, the final phase of the Modern Homes Division haphazardly embraced many styles and strategies. Clearly seeking to minimize the disruption brought about by the Depression, Sears began to seek new markets for its products, even if they were small. In September 1935, Sears formed a partnership with General Houses, Inc., architect Howard Fisher's Chicago-based firm that specialized in

the construction of prefabricated steel-panel houses.[124] Although there is only one surviving image of the fruits of this partnership, it was reported that thirty single-story designs were to be offered, ranging in cost from $2,900 to $4,200. The designs retained the formed steel structural units that all General Houses employed, but modifications were made to the exterior which one critic noted "ought to appeal more immediately to Sears' rural and suburban trade."[125] Exterior walls would be made of plywood, rather than steel, panels. The hard lines of the flat roof, though constructed of steel and still modern in appearance, were softened by decorative projecting beams that helped break up the monotony of surface. Although the first series of designs included only one-story houses, the company indicated that additional two-story designs would be offered at a later date. It remains unclear if any prefabricated homes were erected, including the five-room display house the company had planned to erect in Chicago.

That Sears, which by this time had sold an estimated 55,000 homes through the mail, would pair up with such a small-scale partner is particularly puzzling. Although the critical reception of the International Style had been bolstered by the Museum of Modern Art's International Style exhibit in 1932, and the Century of Progress Exhibition in 1933, the market had not yet not embraced this aesthetic for domestic architecture.[126] As former employee Lawrence Perkins noted:

> We had everything in the way of procedures. The only thing we didn't have right was the major premise. All of the subordinate details were great. We didn't have a house that anybody wanted; it was much too modern. It would still be pretty red meat, pretty severe, even right now. Even at the height of the Miesian domination it would have been a little

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[124] "Sears Roebuck Boards the Prefabrication Bandwagon with Plywood Houses," *The Architectural Forum* 63 (October 1935): 452.

[125] "Sears Roebuck Boards the Prefabrication Bandwagon," 452.

[126] *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition; New York, Feb. 10 to March 23, 1932, Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum, 1932).

> too austere. Howard was more rational than artistic and if it was unreasonable that an ornament be put there, then it wasn't there. Also, one of the things that meant was that it could never be inexpensive.[127]

While the details of the partnership remain unclear, in 1936 *Business Week* reported a restructuring of the agreement, noting that while General Houses would manufacture and sell homes, Sears would remain an "interested party" and use the homes as vehicles for product placement rather than be involved in the construction process.[128]

The dissolution of the partnership between Sears and General Houses likely resulted from concerns over the quality of the prefabricated product in addition to troubling aspects of Howard Fisher's personality. Although in 1939 *Business Week* attributed the demise to Sears' "dissatisfaction over too close a relationship between exterior and interior temperatures in the pre-fabricated structures," numerous other problems existed.[129] The flat roof of Fisher's first General Houses design, the Ruth Page House in Winnetka, shared the same fate as many flat roofs of the time: a tendency to leak. The first occupants of the house, Fisher's employee Lawrence Perkins and his wife, described in detail the problems they encountered during their residence:

> We came home [one] night and two, four by- twelve pieces of ceiling paneling that had been holding water for days had finally given up right over our beds. The insulation material above it was four inches of laminated corrugated paper that was then the popular refrigeration thing for General Electric refrigerators. That was the insulation detail at that time. These blocks had that inadequate roofing: flat, just laid in the steel. It had just one fault; it didn't keep the rain out![130]

In addition to the structural issues present in the homes, Fisher's ornery personality and

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[127] Betty J. Blum, *Oral History of Lawrence Bradford Perkins* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), 44.

[128] "Sears' House Plan," *Business Week* 348 (2 May 1936): 17-8.

[129] *Business Week* (2 September 1939): 28

[130] Blum, *Perkins,* 43-44.

constant revision of plans and designs likely added to the relationship's demise. E. Todd Wheeler recalled that, "General Houses had the shortcoming that happens to a good many inventions, and that is that the inventor could never leave it alone and produce."[131] Lawrence Perkins, a lifelong friend of Fisher, also described him similarly and noted, "he was a supremely difficult and arbitrary person."[132] It is difficult to imagine that this partnership, with the combination of structural shortcomings and Fisher's difficult personality, could have ended differently.

Sears' flirtation with the International Style might have ended in 1935, were it not for the brief and unsuccessful tenure of *The Bryant* in 1938 (fig. 4.38). The obvious shortcomings of the design serve as metaphor for the lack of vision that plagued the Modern Homes Division in this final phase. In attempting to dress a split-level home up in the trappings of the International Style, Sears reverted to the same flawed strategies that had hampered its department during the second phase of its development. Offered only in 1938, the catalog described the model as "a home that is far ahead in design and yet cannot be termed too extreme or severe in departure."[133] Priced at $2,100 to $2,400, *The Bryant* was designed as an affordable, middle-class home which allowed for future expansion. The translation of a split-level home into a modernist vocabulary was predictably awkward. Unable to design or gauge the types of homes that consumers wanted, the Modern Homes Division issued its last catalog in 1940.

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[131] Betty J. Blum, *Interview with E. Todd Wheeler,* revised edition (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2003), 7.

[132] Blum, *Perkins,* 44.

[133] Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1938), 40.

## Conclusion

By choosing 1930 as the terminal date for this study I am not suggesting that the crisis of self had been solved, or that Transcendentalism lost all value as a lens through which to understand culture. However, in the nearly sixteen years between the onset of the Great Depression and the end of World War II, I believe that American attitudes towards the construction of individuality and the notion of self began to change. Although each of the final two case studies—the Roycrofters and Sears, Roebuck and Company's Modern Homes Division—weathered the initial onset of this economic crisis, their reprieves were short-lived and neither would outlast this transitional period. Under the direction of Elbert Hubbard's son Bert, the Roycrofters lingered on, but finally closed in 1938. Sears' Modern Homes Division lasted until held 1942 when, in spite of a complete shift in their aesthetic, they were no longer able to compete. Individualism, which had previously been such a strong factor in the construction of identity gave way to a more conformist ideal in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The dominant values that shaped the idea of culture in 1929 seem far removed from those with which Americans emerged at the end of World War II. As sociologist Daniel Bell has posited, "the methodological premise of the second half of the twentieth century is the management of organized complexity."[1] As a result, he notes, "one [had] to use algorithms, rather than intuitive judgments, in making decisions."[2] Transcedentalism, which reveled in creating a subjective world in which the intuitive was prized, was put aside and an emphasis of scientific rationalism prospered. Yet, looking at the longer view of history, it would appear that this ebb and flow of

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[1] Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* Special Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 28.

[2] Bell, *Post-Industrial Society*, 32.

Transcendentalism's use is cyclical, and part of a larger pattern of engagement with the modern world in the United States. In the same way in which the supposed corporate-ness of the Gilded Age carried Transcendentalist undercurrents into the twentieth century, the conformity of the late 1940s and 1950s gave way to the radicalism of the 1960s in which the integrity of the self was once more asserted.

The crisis of self that arose in the wake of the Industrial Revolution is far from solved and fundamental questions regarding the effects of mass-production upon the integrity of the self continue to influence into popular discourse. As political scientist Marshall Berman noted, this situation, in many ways, is the defining feature of modernity. The irresolvable riddle of the modern world is the condition of dislocation and detachment that Emerson noted—what Berman terms the "lack of authenticity"—that material progress engenders:

> There is something strange about such a concern. It seems to violate the most basic principle of logic, the law of identity, that A is A. After all, isn't everybody himself already? Who or what else could he be? To pursue authenticity as an ideal, as something that must be achieved, is to be self-consciously paradoxical. But those who seek authenticity insist that this paradox is built into the structure of the world they live in. This world, they say, represses, alienates, divides, denies, destroys the self. To be oneself in such a world is not a tautology, but a *problem* [emphasis original].[3]

In the twenty-first century, our culture still confronts this problem of authenticity, though the parameters of the solution have changed. The integrity of the self is still sought after and nature remains on of the key catalysts for reintegration.

From the outset, the primary purpose of this dissertation was to examine Transcendentalism's impact on American culture and create a framework or structure for further exploration. My hope is that by demonstrating how each of these four cases

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[3] Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (Atheneum, NY, 1970), xvi.

used Transcendentalism it will be easier to assess additional examples in whose ethos the philosophy played a similar role. I have attempted to avoid the seemingly-inevitable questions about who was (or was not) a Transcendentalist because this path seems less fruitful for the type of research and analysis that interests me. I have resisted this question mainly because the answer—presuming for a moment that there was one—holds little value for the underlying concerns of this project. George Santayana's definition—that it "is a method, a point of view, from which any world, no matter what it might contain, could be approached by a self-conscious observer"—is a better model from which to proceed.[4] By stressing the functional aspects of the philosophy, Santayana's definition spoke to ideas of "use" rather than "faith." Emerson had long acknowledged this side of the philosophy when he reminded readers in 1842 that "there is no such thing as a Transcendental *party*; that there is no pure Transcendentalist."[5] Instead, as I have attempted to show in this study, Transcendentalism became a cultural force, a way of apprehending the world, that shaped the American discourse on modernity. It was not, as has been so often asserted, the philosophical casualty of the Civil War, but remained instead an important model of thought, whose impact we are just beginning to accurately assess.

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[4] George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy: Address delivered before the Philosophical Union of the University of California, August 25, 1911," in *Winds of Doctrine: Studies in Contemporary Opinion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 193-94.

[5] Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," reprinted in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 85. Emphasis original.

## Select Bibliography

Because of the themes interwoven throughout the chapters of this dissertation, a bibliography divided into different subjects and chapters could present more problems than it might solve. As a result, what follows is an alphabetical list of select sources with minimal interruptions, excepting a list of archival material and their locations at the beginning. While this selection represents the types of sources I used throughout my research, it is by no means comprehensive. Additional resources can be found within the notes for each chapter.

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**Illustrations**