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# Rock-Bound: Fitz Henry Lane in 1862

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During three weeks in January 1862, the painter Fitz Henry Lane (1804–1865) completed *Stage Fort across Gloucester Harbor* in his granite home and studio in Gloucester, Massachusetts (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The flat plane of Gloucester's Outer Harbour is enclosed by the shoreline curving around the painting's right edge, culminating in the rocky promontory known as Stage Fort. In the foreground, two men talk beside a battered canoe, while our attention is directed by the mast lying on the beach to a small sloop being poled to shore, and, further out, to a schooner at anchor and to the lighthouse at the harbour's farthest edge. 'The sea is calm', a Gloucester journalist wrote of the painting upon viewing it in Lane's studio: 'the mellow sunset light throws a charm over the whole scene, mirroring in the glassy deep the rock-bound shore, and vessels on its surface'.<sup>2</sup> Each object – whether body, ship, rope, or rock – has found its place. This sense of serene equanimity has shaped Lane's historical reputation ever since, in the mid-twentieth century, he was re-introduced into the narrative of nineteenth-century American landscape painting. In his formative 1954 article on Lane and his contemporary painters, curator John L. H. Baur drew upon Henry James's short story 'A Landscape Painter' (1866) to find language for this painterly quietude – quoting a passage in which James's protagonist-artist looks upon 'deep, translucent water' in which 'mossy rocks doubled themselves without a flaw in the clear, dark water'. The narrator identifies in the landscape before him 'a lightness, a brilliance, a crudity, which allows perfect liberty of self-assertion to each object in the landscape'.<sup>3</sup>

Accounts of Lane's work have tended to emphasise the 'lightness' and 'brilliance' of his landscapes at the expense of their 'crudity'. Take the rocks in *Stage Fort*. Despite this painting's insistent placidity, the dark, rounded masses of the coastal rocks that litter the shore assert a visual and material dislocation (Fig. 2). Next to the finely-delineated forms of the rigging and sails of ships, these rocks possess a 'liberty of self-assertion', a blunt, geometric, and obstinate presence. Though they 'double themselves' in the water, such doubling produces an uncanny appearance of weightiness and immateriality, as they seem to float upon the surface of the water. Painted with a speckled facture, they are not meticulously detailed or modelled: rather they proliferate in a disruptive repetition, inserting an oscillating circularity into Lane's painting that repeats in the curving harbour bank and the forms of foliage dotting the horizon.

In one of the few surviving letters in Lane's hand (Fig. 3), which describes another recently-completed painting of Stage Fort and the harbour shore, the artist suggests these rocks' assertive force. He writes that the painting 'is a very picturesque scene especially the beach, as there are many rocks which come in to destroy the monotony of a plain sand beach. . . the effect I think is very good indeed'.<sup>4</sup> We might linger, here, on the word 'destroy' – a word that, like the rocks in Lane's painting, punctuates his rather prosaic description. In his letter, the word 'destroy' is itself cleaved by a line break into 'de-stry', a material dislocation of his language that mirrors its active disruption of an otherwise placid painting. Even as Lane here engages with conventions of picturesque

1. See the following two published notices that describe Lane's progress on the painting: 'Visit to Lane's Studio', *Cape Ann Advertiser*, 10 January 1862, p. 1; and 'Marine Painting', *Cape Ann Advertiser*, 31 January 1862, p. 1. As with these notices, my research has relied upon the rich resources compiled in the recent catalogue raisonné; on *Stage Fort*, see Melissa Geider Traffon and Erik Romberg, 'Stage Fort across Gloucester Harbor, 1862 (inv. 237)', *Fitz Henry Lane Online*, Cape Ann Museum, <<https://fitzhenrylaneonline.org/catalog/entry.php?id=237>> [last accessed 9 February 2021].

2. 'Marine Painting', p. 1.

3. Henry James, 'A Landscape Painter', *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1866, 196, quoted in John L. H. Baur, 'American Luminism', *Prospect USA*, vol. 9, Autumn 1954, p. 91. For an historiographical account of the scholarly resurrection and reinvention of Lane and others, see J. Gray Swerney, 'Inventing Luminism: "Labels Are the Dickens"', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2003, pp. 95–120.

4. Fitz Henry Lane, letter to Joseph L. Stevens, c. 1857, Cape Ann Museum and Library Archives, P31A.FF11. This undated letter likely refers to an earlier, smaller picture of Stage Fort (*Dolliver's Neck and the Western Shore from Field Beach*, 1857, Cape Ann Museum), though its modes of description are equally apt for the Metropolitan's *Stage Fort*; see Sam Holdsworth, 'Dolliver's Neck and the Western Shore from Field Beach, 1857 (inv. 3)', *Fitz Henry Lane Online*, Cape Ann Museum, <<http://fitzhenrylaneonline.org/catalog/entry.php?id=3>> [last accessed 9 February 2021].



Fig. 1. Fitz Henry Lane, *Stage Fort across Gloucester Harbor*, 1862, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 152.4 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

5. On the visually disruptive compositions of Lane's paintings, see also David C. Miller, 'The Iconology of Wrecked or Stranded Boats in Mid to Late Nineteenth-Century American Culture', in David C. Miller (ed.), *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 195; and John Conron, 'Fitz Hugh Lane and the American Picturesque', *Revue française d'études américaines*, vol. 26, November 1985, pp. 387, 398–9.

6. In a recent essay, David Peters Corbett gives a new account of Lane's engagement with the active yet 'inscrutable' presence of nonhuman objects, and the attendant 'instability' of human agency, that has informed my reading here; see Corbett, 'The Coasts of Experience: Fitz Henry Lane's *Boat's Rock* (1864)', in Richard Read and Kenneth Haltman (eds), *Colonisation, Wilderness, and Space Between: Nineteenth-Century Landscape Painting in Australia and the United States* (Chicago, IL: Terra Foundation for American Art: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

7. This essay takes methodological inspiration, as well as a model for its title, from Alexander Nemerov's examination of Edward Hopper's paintings and their immanent, if latent historical content. See Nemerov, 'Ground Swell: Edward Hopper in 1939', *American Art*, vol. 22, no. 3, Fall 2008, pp. 59–71.

irregularity, his verbal account of the rocks is inflected by a material force, by objects that 'come in' to the painting and into his letter, seemingly possessed of a self-contained mobility.<sup>5</sup>

Following Lane's lead, this essay takes seriously the notion that these coastal rocks could be understood as having a destructive and disruptive power both within the compositional structure of Lane's paintings, as well as within the historical and social world they recorded.<sup>6</sup> Born in 1804 in Gloucester, a coastal town situated north of Boston on Cape Ann, Lane was the most prominent marine painter in a community that, as a shipping port and important fishery, was defined by its relation to the ocean. By reframing Lane's paintings within this local, historical space of production, this essay seeks to understand him and his paintings as active participants in the construction and preservation of the social world of which he was part.<sup>7</sup> Such an aim is rather different from the long-dominant view of Lane's paintings, in which they are apprehended as hermetic embodiments of nineteenth-century Transcendentalist thought, and in which the natural 'Facts' of the landscape (such as the self-mirroring rocks) are taken as emblems of a universal, Emersonian 'Spirit'.<sup>8</sup> Centring on *Stage Fort* and on the other works Lane painted in 1862, this essay situates Lane's paintings in relation not primarily to Ralph Waldo Emerson or natural theology, but rather to the forms of knowing and conceiving the landscape encoded in local historical accounts, in geological discourse, and in descriptions of Gloucester's social world found in regional newspapers. Though he sent his paintings to Boston and New York for exhibition and received some notice in widely circulated journals, the most probing engagement with his paintings and the



Fig. 2. Detail of Fitz Henry Lane, *Stage Fort across Gloucester Harbor*, 1862 (Fig. 1).

significance of the landscapes they depict took shape, unsurprisingly, in the local press.

In this context, the rocks that litter Lane's canvas are revealed as historical objects in multiple ways. Firstly, they were the material grounding for the construction of Gloucester's past; Stage Fort in particular was summoned as a site for mid-nineteenth-century constructions of the region's settler colonial history. Secondly, Cape Ann's rocks, as described in nineteenth-century geology, constituted a very specific kind of thing endowed with an imagined history, mobility, and force. Lane's painting both stages and suppresses this mineral violence as a way of negotiating a farther, unseen source of communal loss: the ocean storms that, in causing the collision of ships, occasioned enormous loss of life in Gloucester's commercial fisheries. This violence reverberated in an attenuated fashion through the lived experience of its landscape and harbour. This is to say that in January of 1862, Lane's laborious plotting of the objects in his painting was part of a larger, communal work of negotiating the landscape's assertive materiality and inherent violence.

Lane's preoccupation with Gloucester's objects asserts an Appadurai for landscape painting that can be understood through what Arjun Appadurai has called 'the production of locality' – forms of 'spatial practice' that define and defend locality against the political and material aims of nationalism.<sup>9</sup> Signalling the locality of Lane's landscapes thus also signals its counterpoint: the 'national landscape' constructed by painters such as Frederic Edwin Church and Asher Durand, whose art was central to the construction of collective identity in the United States during the fractious nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Rather than what Lauren Berlant has called 'the common language of a common space' – the symbolic means of constructing national identity – Lane returned to the strangeness of his everyday landscape as a means of preserving Gloucester's specific modalities of life and community.<sup>11</sup> Even in the shadow of the American Civil War in 1862 – the culmination of decades of national conflict – the sense of disruption and loss that inheres in Lane's paintings had more local meanings than has generally been acknowledged.<sup>12</sup> Rather than produce paintings aimed at broad legibility, Lane instead embedded his paintings with odd, obstinate things whose significance might have been legible only to a local audience.



Fig. 3. Fitz Henry Lane, letter to Joseph L. Stevens, c. 1857, Library and Archives, Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, MA. (Photo: Cape Ann Museum.)

8. In turning away from such interpretations to focus instead upon the historical, economic, and social contexts of Lane's paintings, I am following Margareta Lovell's important examination of Lane's paintings and the ways they are 'steeped in human intentions, sometimes of war and violence, but always animated by personal, familial, communal, or national memory'. See Lovell, 'Fitz Henry Lane, spectateur de l'histoire', in Didier Aubert and Hélène Quémener (eds), *Refuge l'Amérique: Imaginaire et histoire des États-Unis* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2011), pp. 47–61. Likewise, my work proceeds from Alan Wallach's account of the abistorical and uncritical reception of Lane and his contemporaries in 'Rethinking "Luminism": Taste, Class, and Aestheticizing Tendencies in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Landscape Painting', in Nancy Siegel (ed.), *The Cultural Canvas: New Perspectives on American Landscape Painting* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011), pp. 113–47.

9. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 178–99.

10. See especially Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825–1875* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Franklin Kelly, *Federic Church and the National Landscape* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988).

11. Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 21.

12. On the cultural significance of landscape painting during the American Civil War, see Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Civil War and American Art* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2012), pp. 17–71.

13. John Wingate Thornton, *The Landing at Cape Anne, or, the Charter of the First Permanent Colony on the Territory of the Massachusetts Company* (Boston, MA: Gould and Lincoln, 1854). Different spellings – both Cape Anne and Cape Ann – were used during the nineteenth century, though I use the latter, modern spelling. On Lane's views of Stage Fort and other fortifications in the context of growing interest in Gloucester's early history, see Sharon Worley, 'Fitz Henry Lane and the Legacy of the Codfish Aristocracy', *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, vol. 32, no. 1, Winter 2004, pp. 55–89; and the examination of Lane's historical imagination in Lovell, 'Spectateur de l'histoire'.

14. See Jean M. O'Brien, *Firing and Lining: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

15. John J. Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Including the Town of Rockport* (Gloucester, MA: Proctor Brothers, 1860), p. 45.

16. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 183.

17. John Wingate Thornton to Fitz Henry Lane, 6 January 1858, quoted in Sarah Dardap and Stephanie Buck, *Fitz Henry Lane: Family and Friends* (Gloucester, MA: Church & Mason, 2007), p. 58.

18. Fitz Henry Lane to John Wingate Thornton, 11 January 1858, quoted in Elizabeth Garrity Ellis, 'Cape Ann Views', in John Wimmerling (ed.), *Paintings by Fitz-Hugh Lane* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1988), p. 39.

19. See Dardap and Buck, *Fitz Henry Lane: Family and Friends*, pp. 58–9.

20. 'The Reef of Norman's Wise', *Cape Ann Light*, 8 March 1862, p. 2.

21. See Rebecca Bedell's reading of the erratic boulder, especially in Thomas Cole's cycle of paintings *The Course of Empire* (1833–1836): Bedell, *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and Landscape Painting, 1825–1875* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 29–41.

## Objects of History

By the time Lane began *Stage Fort across Gloucester Harbor* in January 1862, he had given considerable thought to the rocks of Stage Fort (see Fig. 2) – the bulbous, almost biomorphic objects seen across the harbour near the centre of the painting. This rocky outcropping was prominent in Gloucester's historical geography as the first site of settlement by English colonists in the early seventeenth century, and it was a site of particular interest in the 1850s and 1860s. In 1858 Lane had undertaken an ultimately unsuccessful commission for a history painting illustrating the 1624 landing of English colonists on Stage Fort. This commission had come from John Wingate Thornton, a Boston-based attorney and historian, who in 1854 published *The Landing at Cape Anne, or, the Charter of the First Permanent Colony on the Territory of the Massachusetts Company*.<sup>13</sup> Thornton's intent was to assert the primacy of this settlement and its claim as the legal founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In Thornton's emphasis upon Gloucester's historical importance, we see one of the key strains in settler-colonial historicism in nineteenth-century New England, one that aimed to emphasise the origins of Anglo-American history while simultaneously occluding ongoing histories of Indigenous life.<sup>14</sup> This operation took place more explicitly in the history of Gloucester published in 1860 by Lane's friend John J. Babson, which included illustrations by the artist. Just before embarking on his history of the region's earliest English settlers, he writes that 'we should allude to the absence of all evidence that Cape Ann was ever the seat of any Indian settlement', though noting that scattered archaeological findings suggested an obscured former 'presence'.<sup>15</sup> As such, the site of Stage Fort localised the historical trope of settler colonialism's operations of displacement – what Appadurai calls the 'inherently colonizing' act of producing locality.<sup>16</sup>

Thornton asked Lane to provide a picture of the English settlers landing on Stage Fort to use as a frontispiece for a second edition of his book. Writing to Lane on 6 January 1858, Thornton described the site: 'The forests have vanished perhaps, but the chief features... remain unaltered, washed by the same waters'.<sup>17</sup> A few days later, Lane replied and gave his plans for the completion of the picture, agreeing that '[t]he greatest part of the shore, I expect, has undergone but little change, as it is mostly granite rock'.<sup>18</sup> Apparently, though, upon seeing Lane's picture, Thornton was not pleased, and Lane's picture was not included in his book, nor has it been located.<sup>19</sup> Yet this exchange underscores how the historical imagination of Lane and his contemporaries attached itself to specific topographies and to the specific objects of a landscape: in this case, the 'granite rock' of Stage Fort and the harbour's shore, imagined to be 'little change[d]'. Such meaning was evidently and widely clear to local viewers: an 1862 notice in the *Cape Ann Light* described Lane's *Stage Fort* as 'historically interesting as the supposed spot of the "Landing at Cape Anne"', directly referencing Thornton's book.<sup>20</sup> The rocks of Stage Fort thus communicated a very particular historicity, in which the mineral hardness and obdurateness of granite is imagined as a material that bears the legibility of territorially-based identity across long passages of time.<sup>21</sup>

As a site that had been fortified since 1635, and intermittently in use both in colonial wars and during the war of 1812, Stage Fort also represented a different form of violence – this time national, rather than colonial. In January of 1862, with the intensification of the American Civil War, the threat of further conflict would have been quite present to Gloucester's residents. The January 25 issue of the *Cape Ann Light* featured a short notice on its front page, concerning a report from the United States Engineer Department on the

'defences of the sea coast of this State', which proposed a series of refortifications including 'twenty [heavy guns] at Gloucester'.<sup>22</sup> Yet in the next week's issue of that newspaper, the opening lines of its lead article read: 'After the bustle and stir which has attended the enlistment of men since the rebellion started, the present quiet is very marked'.<sup>23</sup> In what Robert Slifkin has called Lane's 'compromised landscape' – one traversed by the period's spatial conflicts over enslavement and national identity – Gloucester's harbour can be seen as suspended in the anticipation of destruction, a state of watchfulness for future loss.<sup>24</sup> The rocks and shores of Gloucester's harbour pointed both towards distant, mythic pasts of settlement, but also towards an uncertain future. To make a painting of Stage Fort in January of 1862, then, would have been to contemplate how history manifests itself not metaphorically, but materially in the local landscape. Rather than an eternal stillness, Lane's painting of Stage Fort instead stages 'the present quiet' – a relative peace that is temporary and potentially violable.

### Lost Rocks

The remainder of Cape Ann's mineral landscape, however, could appear startlingly resistant to interpretation, even illegible. Here we can return to Babson's 1860 *History of the Town of Gloucester*. Babson opens his volume, in traditional form, with a description of the town's topography, beginning with the 'friendly embrace' of its harbour. But he turns quickly to Gloucester's geological oddity:

The surface of the town is uneven; and its particular character strikes every beholder, at first sight, with astonishment. Bald, rocky hills, bold and precipitous ledges of rock, with acres of boulders of various sizes, in many places scattered thickly over the surface, combine to present a rare scene of naked ruggedness and complete sterility.<sup>25</sup>

As Rebecca Bedell's work has shown, geology provided a rich and expansive hermeneutic for reading, experiencing, and depicting the American landscape in the nineteenth century – a new geological visuality that would have been particularly attuned to the 'boulders' and mineral debris that, in Babson's account, defined Gloucester's landscape and its 'precipitous' qualities.<sup>26</sup> In the language of nineteenth-century geology, such 'boulders', often described as 'erratic' or 'lost', were unaccountable and nonconforming objects that challenged the assumptions of geological theory.<sup>27</sup> The dark rounded forms of the smaller rocks and glacial debris lining Gloucester's harbour forcibly redirect the scansion of the painting away from the measured recession of space, back upon their presence. Their weighty circularity resists the dematerialisation figured in the vast sky of Lane's painting. If the discourse on nineteenth-century geology often emphasises conflicts over religious belief, scientific inquiry, and historical time, in Lane's case, we might also be able to recover the material force, and underlying violence, of geological looking.<sup>28</sup>

The material instability embedded in Gloucester's landscape surfaces in the writings of Charles Hitchcock, who led the US Geological Survey of Massachusetts in the 1830s. In his description of Gloucester, paired in his *Report* with illustrations (Fig. 4), he writes that the landscape's scattered rocks prompt imaginings of unseen and unknown upheaval:

[T]he surface is almost literally covered, either with rocks in place, or with boulders of every size. In the northwest part of Gloucester particularly, the soil is almost wholly concealed by the countless number of these rounded masses. . . . [T]he traveler naturally enquires whether the soil has been carried, which must once have covered the rocks; and

22. 'Our Forts', *Cape Ann Light*, 25 January 1862, p. 1.

23. Unfiled editorial, *Cape Ann Light*, 1 February 1862, p. 1.

24. Robert Slifkin, 'Titz Henry Lane and the Compromised Landscape, 1848–1865', *American Art*, vol. 27, no. 3, Fall 2013, pp. 64–83.

25. Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester*, pp. 1–3.

26. See Bedell, *Anatomy of Nature*, esp. pp. 3–15; and Bedell, 'The History of the Earth: Darwin, Geology, and Landscape Art', in Diana Donald and Jane Munro (eds), *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science, and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Fitzwilliam Museum; New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 2009), pp. 49–79.

27. See Timothy Mitchell, 'Frederic Church's "The Iceberg": Erratic Boulders and Time's Slow Changes', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, vol. 3, no. 4, Autumn 1989, pp. 2–23.

28. For recent accounts of the materiality of geological and ecological forces in nineteenth-century American landscape painting, see Kimia R. Shahi, 'Entanglements of Land and Water: Picturing Contingency in Martin Johnson Heade's *Newburyport Harbor: Approaching Storm*', in Karl Kusserow and Alan Bradlock, *Nature's Nation: American Art and Environment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Art Museum, 2018), pp. 80–11; and James H. Miller, 'The Flow Will Return: Geological Time in Winslow Homer's *Work*', *American Art*, vol. 33, no. 1, Spring 2019, pp. 74–91. On historical time and contested geological theories in the work of Caspar David Friedrich, see Stephanie O'Rourke, 'Staring into the Abyss of Time', *Representations*, vol. 148, Fall 2019, pp. 30–56.

29. Charles Hitchcock, *Final Report on the Geology of Massachusetts*, 2 vols (Amherst, MA: J. S. and C. Adams, 1841), vol. 1, pp. 268–70 (emphasis in the original). This section of the report was reprinted in the *Gloucester Telegraph*, 24 May 1834, p. 2. As Bedell notes, this section of Hitchcock's report ('Scenographical Geology') was 'quickly turned into a guidebook to the state's natural wonders'; Bedell, *Anatomy of Nature*, p. 88.

30. Charles Hitchcock, *Elementary Geology* (Amherst, MA: J. S. & C. Adams, 1840), p. 169. In 1841, Hitchcock read Agassiz's *Étude sur les glaciers* (1840) and began to revise his diluvial theories; see Bedell, *The Anatomy of Nature*, p. 117.

31. Hitchcock, *Elementary Geology*, p. 190.

32. Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (London: John Murray, 1853), p. 231.

33. Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1849), vol. 1, p. 17, qtd in Mitchell, 'Frederic Church's *The Iceberg*', p. 15.

It is not rocks alone that form striking objects upon Cape Ann. For in some places these are covered by pure white sand: producing a striking contrast to the rocky cliffs and boulders. Fig. 27 is a northerly view of Squam on the northeast part of Cape Ann; and it exhibits both kinds of scenery at one coup d'œil.

Fig. 27.



View of Squam in Gloucester — H. J. Van Lennep, del.

The sketch shown in Fig. 28 was taken a little south from the spot where Fig. 27 was drawn; and on the road leading to Gloucester. It will convey an idea of the appearance of hundreds of acres in that part of Gloucester. What a complete image does it present of perfect barrenness and desolation.

Fig. 4. Henry J. Van Lennep, 'View of Squam in Gloucester', from Charles Hitchcock, *Final Report on the Geology of Massachusetts*, vol. 1 (Amherst, MA: J. S. and C. Adams, 1841). (Photo: archive.org.)

what mighty flood of waters could have swept over this region with the fury requisite to produce such destruction. . . . It is scarcely possible for any man, however little interested in the bizarre of natural scenery, to traverse this region for the first time, without having his attention forcibly and constantly directed to the landscape around him.<sup>29</sup>

Gloucester thus seemed paradoxically to assert its own formation by destruction – by a violent movement of water and rock whose force continues to reverberate through the landscape's scattered objects. Such a reading of Gloucester's rocks would be expected from Hitchcock. At the time of his survey of Massachusetts, he was one of the foremost proponents in America of the 'diluvial' theory of geological change that theorised the formation of the world by Biblical flood and 'the powerful dashing and wasting agency of the waves'.<sup>30</sup> Viewed with a geological eye, the rocks of Gloucester's harbour persistently, forcibly suggest their own histories of wild mobility.

Yet next to this cataclysmic view of nature's force, there were other agents of geological formation that were figured as slower yet indelibly forceful. Sitting at the threshold of land and water, the polished surface and smoothed roundness of the boulders in Lane's painting could have also been seen as the result of constant, attenuated coastal erosion – in Hitchcock's words, 'one of the most remarkable effects of diluvial action'.<sup>31</sup> Thus, a geological vision uncovers not only a history of violence embedded in rock, but also invests the seemingly stilled harbour water with a slow, formative force that might produce the proliferating 'rounded masses' of Gloucester's landscape. Such slower process of generation would be bodied forth in revised geological theories of the nineteenth century. The prominent Scottish geologist Charles Lyell rejected the theory of 'deluge', and proposed instead that iceberg drift had carried and deposited 'the erratics of North America', which were smoothed by 'friction or decomposition'.<sup>32</sup> He writes that 'it seems difficult to over-estimate the disturbance which [icebergs]. . . must exert when they grate



along a shelf of solid rock'.<sup>33</sup> Likewise Louis Agassiz's controversial theories of ice-age glaciation held that erratic debris, such as coastal boulders, were 'polished, scratched, and grooved' beneath the slow-moving, grinding force of glaciers.<sup>34</sup> Lane's painting would have been made in the midst of these debates, which (like Hitchcock's earlier descriptions) were notable enough to receive coverage in Gloucester's newspapers.<sup>35</sup>

What persists through all of these geological accounts, whether of Hitchcock, Lyell, or Agassiz, is their emphasis on the forceful process of the landscape's formation and composition. For geologists, the erratic boulder's unaccountability compelled geological description and formed an integral part of explanatory theories. To form a verbal or visual picture of a boulder, in geological terms, was to give an account of material tumult, whether the violence of waves or the grating weight of ice, reframing the landscape as an only-partially-stilled embodiment of imagined force. Lane's *Stage Fort* re-stages Hitchcock's encounter with the rocks' 'bizarre' presence, which 'forcibly' direct his attention to them, re-doubling their odd circularity and profusion by their reconstitution in paint. These objects' latent geological violence, signified by their blunt, mobile roundness, reverberates against the forms of human labour encoded in Lane's painting – the poling of the boat to shore, the taut rigging of ships, the limp coiled rope tying the canoe to the mast on the shore. These delicate acts of construction, marked by their linear and complex forms, appear all the more tenuous in their juxtaposition with the obstinate circularity of the rocks that summon possible histories of upheaval that shaped the landscape around them.

### Lost Ships

If geological writing provides a means of imagining the ocean's agency in the formation of Cape Ann's boulders, Lane's own paintings most often present us with a smooth-surfaced sea. His contemporaries frequently exulted in the wild sublimity of oceanic power, as in Frederic Church's churning *Coast Scene, Mount Desert* of 1863 (Fig. 5), in which every element – water, rock, and vapour – converges in a tangled matrix. Lane's painting of *Stage Fort* is full of objects and incident, yet all such pictorial elements are kept strenuously separate. The harbour ships and their reflections are aligned so as not to intersect with any other compositional element; the piled stones in the foreground have each been darkly outlined and delimited; the attenuated horizon is marked off by the staccato protuberances of trees, masts, and rocks.<sup>36</sup> More than the calm of Lane's sky and sea, it is this meticulous disaggregation of substances that locks his painting in arresting stasis.

This emphatic separation of objects is remarkable perhaps only in comparison with its inverse – the catastrophic violence visited on the ships of Gloucester's fishing industry, often sunk in collisions during heavy storms. The toll of the 'lost ships' of Gloucester's fisheries was especially severe in the 1850s and 1860s. Fishing was the impetus for Gloucester's founding, its principle economy, and the locus of its cultural identity, even as other enterprises waxed and waned.<sup>37</sup> Commercial fishing was a famously dangerous enterprise, particularly since halibut and cod fishing had begun on Georges Bank, an Atlantic fishing ground 150 miles off of the Massachusetts coast, in the late 1830s.<sup>38</sup> Fishing on Georges Bank intensified in 1859 as new bait sources encouraged fishermen to pursue the dangerous but lucrative winter cod-fishing season on the Bank.<sup>39</sup> This returns us to January 1862, when Lane painted Gloucester's serene harbour. Less than a month later, a gale would strike its



Fig. 5. Frederic Edwin Church, *Coast Scene, Mount Desert*, 1863, oil on canvas, 91.8 x 121.9 cm, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. (Photo: Allen Phillips/Wadsworth Atheneum.)

34. Louis Agassiz, *Geological Sketches* (Boston, MA: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), p. 309.

35. In 1864, the *Cape Ann Light* excerpted and commented at length upon one of Agassiz's most influential articles, 'Ice-Period in America': untitled editorial, *Cape Ann Light*, 9 July 1864, p. 1.

36. John Conron makes a similar observation about the horizon line in Lane's *Norman's Bluff* (1862; see fig. 11): Conron, 'Fitz Hugh Lane and the American Picturesque', p. 397.

37. Rabson, *History of Gloucester*, p. 577.

38. Fishing on Georges Bank began in earnest around 1837; by the end of the 1840s, it was the primary fishing ground in Gloucester. See *The Fisheries of Gloucester, from 1623 to 1876*... (Gloucester, MA: Proctor Brothers, 1876), pp. 38–40; and Mark Karlanosky, *The Last Fish Tale: The Fate of the Atlantic and Survival in Gloucester, America's Oldest Fishing Port and Most Original Town* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), pp. 16–53, esp. 43–5.

39. George Brown Goode, *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States*, 2 vols (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1887), vol. 2, p. 155.



Fig. 6. Artist unknown, 'On Georges in a Storm', from *The Fisheries of Gloucester* (Gloucester, MA: Proctor Brothers, 1876). (Photo: archive.org)

40. 'General News Summary', *Massachusetts Spy*, 12 February 1862, p. 2.

41. *Cape Ann Light*, 1 March 1862, p. 1. The notice refers to 'The Blow of Monday night', i.e. 24 February 1862.

42. 'Disasters, etc.', *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 6 March 1862, p. 1.

43. 'The Missing Fishing Vessels from Gloucester', *Daily Evening Traveller*, 22 March 1862, p. 2.

44. Anonymous broadside, 'A great calamity...' (Gloucester, 22 March 1862).

45. Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester*, p. 575.

46. Kurlansky, *Last Fish Tale*, pp. 43–6.

47. 'The Storm of Saturday night last...', *Cape Ann Light*, 9 November 1861, p. 4.

48. On the measured, plotted-out compositions of paintings by Lane and his contemporaries, see Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism and the American Experience* (1969; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 97–8; and Lisa Fellows Andrus, 'Design and Measurement in Luminist Art', in John Wilmerding et al., *American Light: The Luminist Movement 1850–1875* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1980), pp. 31–55.

Georges fishing fleet, the most violent yet: over one hundred and fifteen men died in the gale of late February. Such losses in the fisheries came to be seen not simply as a matter of random calamity, but of rote, communal expectation.

The narrative of the February 1862 gale can be reconstructed from notices and articles in local newspapers. On 12 February, the *Massachusetts Spy* reported that '[t]he Georges fisherman are busy at Gloucester. Twenty smacks [fishing vessels] sailed last week'.<sup>40</sup> But the *Cape Ann Light* then reported on a heavy 'blow' in Gloucester on 24 February, imagining that 'the storm must have been exceedingly severe in the Bay and on Georges'.<sup>41</sup> On 6 March, the *Boston Daily Advertiser* warned that '[a]ll the vessels arrived at Gloucester from Georges since the gale, report very heavy weather on the Banks'.<sup>42</sup> By 22 March, the extent of the loss had become clear: thirteen vessels, losses counted in numbers of men, orphans and widows, as well as in insurance values of ships and gear. 'Every one feels the loss – it is the theme of conversation among all classes. . . . The catastrophes which have always attended this business have rendered George's [sic] Banks a vast cemetery. . .'.<sup>43</sup> A broadside was circulated and signed by prominent citizens, among them friends of Lane, requesting help 'from abroad' to aid the widows and orphans left in the storm's wake, which 'has cast a gloom over our community, and carried sorrow and mourning to many hearts'.<sup>44</sup>

In his history of Gloucester, Babson gives a vivid account of the Georges Bank disasters as they reverberate over time within the spatial matrix of the town's terrain. These lost ships and men meet

an unknown end; for no tidings ever come from the missing George's [sic] fishermen. After they have been out three or four weeks, friends begin to inquire anxiously of returning mariners for husband, son, brother, or father, and watch from the hills in agonizing suspense. . . .<sup>45</sup>

This sense of delay and unknowability pervades accounts of shipwrecks on Georges Bank, scarcely imaginable in pictorial imaginings of ships drifting at anchor in the heavy seas. A woodcut engraving published in 1876 (Fig. 6) imagined the scene of ships during a storm on the Banks, with vessels tilting haphazardly, at risk of collision in the dense oceanic atmosphere. Mark Kurlansky has described how, in the course of these far-off disasters, Gloucester's harbour became a communal space of suspended watchfulness; families would look towards Eastern Point, to which the mast of Lane's painting of Stage Fort directs our attention, in 'agonizing suspense' as they expected the appearance of returning ships.<sup>46</sup> An article about a November 1861 storm describes 'hundreds of our citizens gathered' along the outer harbour's shore 'to anxiously watch the vessels riding in safety or drifting in danger, and to follow the course of the life-boat and her gallant crew with straining eyes'.<sup>47</sup> This account inserts a specific kind of spectator into Gloucester's harbour – one that looks with 'straining eyes' to distinguish objects from one another. It is this kind of spectatorship we can see at work in Lane's painting of Stage Fort, and his other paintings of Gloucester's harbour. Even when crowded by ships (Fig. 7), the harbour is marked by a static array of objects, whose emphatic separation precluded the imagination of these ships' destruction at sea. The coastal rocks, similarly separated and stilled in Lane's paintings, were themselves material agents of shipwreck, an element of the coastal shore to be identified, plotted, and avoided in the course of safe navigation.<sup>48</sup>

Lane did not entirely exclude the sea's violence from his paintings. In a very few paintings, he turns to its excess: to its gales and stormy shores; to ships in



Fig. 7. Fitz Henry Lane, *The Old Fort and Ten Pound Island, Gloucester*, 1850s, oil on canvas, 55.9 x 91.4 cm. Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, MA. (Photo: Cape Ann Museum.)

distress, balanced at the edge of some disaster (Fig. 8); and in some three paintings, only, to the sight of shipwreck itself.<sup>49</sup> Yet for a painter within a culture obsessed with narratives of maritime disaster, the subject seems not to have been of interest to him or to his patrons. Perhaps this is because such violence was not picturable, at least by Lane – occurring out to sea in an unimaginable oceanic world, but also, of course, because to represent such loss would contravene the social function of his paintings. Shipwreck at sea was the most potent image of death that haunted his social world in 1862, even in the context of ‘cemetery’ landscapes more historically legible than Georges Bank, such as the Civil War fields of Bull Run and Vicksburg.<sup>50</sup> Instead of shipwreck, there was the harbour as a space of watching and mourning, as Lane, earlier in his career as a lithographer in Boston, had depicted in his cover illustration for the ballad *Song of a Fisher’s Wife* (Fig. 9). Here, a woman waits at the rocky shore, her gaze out to the horizon. She is set among an ornamental frame composed of marine vegetation, shells, and ropes as if to conjure and rearrange the chaotic elements of the imagined oceanic world of the absent beloved. It was this imagination of the far-off entanglement of objects, and of the death that it entailed, that Lane’s paintings of the harbour sought to disallow.

### Monuments

1862 saw a shift in Lane’s work. The last three or four years of Lane’s life and career preceding his death in 1865 can be seen as a kind of late style, marked by increasingly spare, even elegiac works, and exemplified by his series of paintings of Brace’s Rock (Fig. 10), a prominent (and hazardous) feature of the coast surrounding Gloucester’s harbour.<sup>51</sup> It is on such works that Lane’s historical reputation rests, as paintings seen to most perfectly embody the ‘stillness’ and ‘silence’ of his work, while also possessing a quality of unsettling rumination, a ‘hint of emotional and spiritual trauma’.<sup>52</sup> The uneasy nature of this late style has been also linked to national concerns over the Civil War.<sup>53</sup> Such concerns were strongly felt in Gloucester, tied directly into the region’s life and landscape; for one, this new war threatened the maritime economy on which it depended, just as all prior conflicts had.<sup>54</sup> Yet recourse to such larger,



Fig. 8. Fitz Henry Lane, *A Rough Sea*, 1854, oil on canvas, 61 x 92.1 cm. Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, MA. (Photo: Cape Ann Museum.)

49. See Lane’s early paintings, *Wreck of the Roma* (1846, New Britain Museum of American Art) and *The Shipwreck* (1852, private collection), as well as his *Drum Painting* (1863) which is discussed at length below. On the cultural and artistic fascination with marine disasters, see Kathleen A. Foster, *Shipwreck! Winslow Homer and The Life Line* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2017).

50. See Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008). As one Gloucester writer argued, ‘the risk of life in the [Union] army is not one-tenth part so great as to the fishermen upon the winter fishing ground’: ‘Missing Vessels’, *Cape Ann Light*, 22 March 1862, p. 1.

51. John Wilmerding, ‘The Luminist Movement’, in *American Light*, pp. 111–13.

52. Earl A. Powell, ‘Luminism and the American Sublime’, in *American Light*, pp. 80–1; John Wilmerding, ‘The Lure of Mount Desert and the Maine Coast’, in Wilmerding (ed.), *Paintings by Fitz Hugh Lane*, p. 122.

53. Powell, ‘Luminism and the American Sublime’, p. 80.

54. See Babson, *History of Gloucester*, p. 510.

55. 'The Reef of Norman's Woe', p. 2.



Fig. 9. Fitz Henry Lane, *Song of the Fisher's Wife*, 1840, lithograph on paper, 27.6 x 20 cm, printed by Sharp & Michelin, published by Oakes & Swan, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA. (Photo: American Antiquarian Society.)

overarching narratives may displace the more local meanings of landscape, meanings that are particularly important in the case of Lane and his emphatically local audience.

Consider a March 8, 1862 notice in the *Gloucester Telegraph* that reports on Lane's recent completion of a painting of *Norman's Woe* (Fig. 11), a dangerous, rocky bluff and reef near the Western entrance to Gloucester's harbour. This notice gives a vivid description of the painting: 'Placid as the bay lies under the golden glory of approaching sunset. . . the sea-worn coast and grim rocks protruding at low tide tell of past and coming ages of conflict'.<sup>55</sup> The 'placid' bay, its stillness and receptive reflection of the golden light of the evening sky, serve then only as a momentary respite from the violence encoded in the emphatically dark, massed rocks that emerge from the water. On the shore, an oddly hexagonal block has registered a dark rupture or split in its surface, cleaving the rock's integral wholeness. Seen through the author's rumination on conflict,

time, and the cyclical histories embedded in landscape, such visual disruptions suggest landscape's allegorical, even universal, significance.<sup>56</sup>

The notice, however, moves toward an increasing localisation of Lane's view, by making reference to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, 'The Wreck of the Hesperus', written in 1839 and inspired by a then-recent shipwreck on Norman's Woe; the poem's subject was then engraved after a design by Daniel Huntington (Fig. 12).<sup>57</sup> In the ballad, a father and daughter are caught at sea in a heavy storm, which dashes the ship against the rocks; the father attempts to save his daughter by tying her to the mast. The next morning, on the 'bleak sea-beach', a group of fisherman finds the daughter's body, still lashed to the mast, washed up on shore, her hair 'like the brown sea-weed. . . billow[ing] in the tide.'<sup>58</sup> Huntington's design emphasises the disturbing eroticism of this imagined encounter, in which the female body is conjoined to an array of inanimate coastal objects while retaining its sensuous attributes.<sup>59</sup> Though this poem is not often discussed in relation to Lane's paintings of Norman's Woe, it had a continued presence in Gloucester in 1862: four years earlier, the poem had been performed at the Town Hall, and one listener, writing in the *Cape Ann Advertiser*, rhapsodised that 'one could imagine they actually heard the howling of the winds and the beating of the surf against the shore of "Norman's Woe", as [the performer] recited the fearful scene of the wreck'.<sup>60</sup> We might then consider Lane's painting of Norman's Woe, in this context, as a different embodiment of the corporeal force of the ocean and the hazards of Cape Ann's coast – materialised here not in words but in painted objects that are displaced figures of oceanic death.<sup>61</sup>

Following the allusion to Longfellow, the notice then turns to describe a 'rude monument thrown up' on the rocky reef of Norman's Woe some years earlier, a narrow column of piled-up stone that is barely visible in the painting atop the distant rock. Considering the picture's 'stillness of an autumn afternoon', the article's author writes that, 'one can scarcely realize that only a few weeks afterward the jealous waves leaped fiercely over, and swept away this device of man's title to the desolate rock'.<sup>62</sup> Even as the painting reinstated this lost 'monument', this landscape becomes a site for imagining the ocean's force against objects, reclaiming its priority in an event that was not symbolic but rather a feature of communal living memory. The reference to Longfellow's poem and the history of violence along Gloucester's coast redirects and specifies a reading of the painting's 'grim rocks'. These darkened masses sit heavy in the tide, where wreckage or the bodies of the drowned might wash up.

The darker connotations of the shoreline world of Lane's paintings of Stage Fort and Norman's Woe are quite different from Church's painting of a beacon off Mount Desert, Maine from a decade earlier (Fig. 13). Here, a rocky promontory becomes the stage not for a lost monument of rock, but for a more precisely-signifying beacon that, as Franklin Kelly has argued, stood as 'an emblem of safety' amidst the violently coloured sea and sky.<sup>63</sup> Angela Miller likewise considers the beacon in Church's painting as a signifier of the 'prophetic role' that New England played in the mythology of the nation's founding. This beacon is thus a local object with a clear communicative function and a national metaphorical significance.<sup>64</sup> The coastal rocks in Lane's paintings of Stage Fort and Norman's Woe, by contrast, are marked by more undecided, less broadly legible meanings. Rather than Church's panoramic expanse, his landscapes are enclosed upon themselves, wrapped within the curving of harbour and rock. As such, Lane's landscapes, and the objects within them, embody the ambivalent meanings of the local – the familiar, the recursive, and the violent – rather than



Fig. 10. Fitz Henry Lane, *Broce's Rock, Broce's Cove, 1864*, oil on canvas, 26.0 x 38.7 cm, Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, IL (Photo © Terra Foundation for American Art.)

56. As David Miller has argued, such broader questions of cyclical time were thematised by Lane's and other painters' depictions of the 'wrecked or stranded boat'. See Miller, 'Iconology of Wrecked or Stranded Boats'.

57. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'The Wreck of the Hesperus', in *Ballads and Other Poems* (Cambridge, MA: John Owen, 1842), pp. 42–7. On the history of Norman's Woe and its name, see Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester*, p. 12.

58. Longfellow, 'Wreck of the Hesperus', p. 47.

59. On sculptural figurations of the female victims of shipwreck in this period, see Joy Kason, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 101–40.

60. 'Mrs. Barrow's Readings', *Cape Ann Advertiser*, 7 January 1858, p. 1.

61. On historical perceptions of New England's coast as a hazardous 'wilderness', including the naming of shoals and rocks around Cape Ann, see John R. Stilgoe, 'A New England Coastal Wilderness', *Geographical Review*, vol. 71, no. 1, January 1981, pp. 33–50.

62. 'The Reef of Norman's Woe', p. 2.

63. Kelly, *Church and the National Landscape*, p. 41. See also Franklin Kelly, 'Visions of New England', in Franklin Kelly and Gerald L. Carr (eds), *The Early Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church, 1845–1854* (Fort Worth, TX: Anson Carter Museum, 1987), pp. 60–4. Lane was also familiar with Maine, visiting and painting it throughout his career: see Franklin Kelly, 'Lane and Church in Maine', in Wilsnerding (ed.), *Paintings by Fitz Hugh Lane*, pp. 129–55.

64. Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, pp. 176–80. On the forms of 'monumental history' pursued in Church's paintings, see Jennifer Raab, *Frederic Church: The Art and Science of Detail* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 21–43.

65. On Lane and the commercial networks of Gloucester, see Lovell, 'Spectateur de l'histoire', esp. pp. 54–5; on his preoccupation with compositional division in the context of the sectional conflicts of the 1850s, see Slikin, 'Fitz Henry Lane and the Compromised Landscape', esp. pp. 75–8.

66. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 181.

67. As Jennifer Roberts has argued, Durand in particular was preoccupied with the effect of circulation on the legibility of his engravings and paintings; see Jennifer Roberts, *Imagining Vision: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 117–60.

68. 'Breakwater from Rocky Neck to Ten Pound Island', *Cape Ann Advertiser*, 2 January 1858, p. 2.



Fig. 11. Fitz Henry Lane, *The Western Shore with Norman's Woe*, 1862, oil on canvas, 56.2 x 92.1 cm, Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, MA. (Photo: Cape Ann Museum.)

the singularity and forward movement of the rock-embedded beacon in Church's ambitious, early canvas.

The rocks littering the shore in *Stage Fort* thus defined a specific space for imagining the sea's violence: here, the risk and death of the sea found a visual language at the meeting of the landscape with the forces of the ocean. In antebellum Gloucester, the coastline world was thus not only a space of labour or of placid contemplation. It was also a site of anxious watching, of the imagination of death, of anxiety and unknowing, as well as of the suspension and deferral of such associations. To labour at the depiction of Gloucester's landscapes and the sites of loss and disruption that bound its community is, to return to Appadurai's terms, to labour at 'the production of locality'. His analysis of the ways in which existing communities work to produce and sustain a sense of locality is apt in the case of Gloucester, a community tied into global commodity flows and, in 1862, in the midst of a conflict over the fate of the larger nation-state.<sup>65</sup> Appadurai's argument is that locality is always fragile: work is required to maintain it 'under conditions of anxiety and entropy, social wear and flux, ecological uncertainty and cosmic volatility'.<sup>66</sup> Lane's paintings were prominent actors in the construction of Gloucester's identity, commented upon frequently in the press and frequently bought by its prominent citizens. The cultural work his paintings performed was, then, partly the defence of this fragile locality – work enacted through their relatively contained circulation in Gloucester, unlike the paintings of Church and Durand, who aimed to secure their paintings' legibility as they travelled beyond the space of their making.<sup>67</sup>

Such pictorial work of preservation echoes actual practices in the built environment, which transformed these ambivalent rocks into the materials for the town's protection. The 1858 article in the *Cape Ann Advertiser* about the reading of Longfellow's poem shared a page with a notice concerning a petition for the construction of a stone breakwater in Gloucester Harbour that would 'afford a perfect protection' to vessels sheltering there during storms.<sup>68</sup> Rocks, in the form of seawalls and breakwaters, constitute more literal 'spatial practices' that preserve the integrity of locality against the force of the ocean's 'jealous waves'. In the 1850s and 1860s, Gloucester's granite was increasingly



Fig. 12. William H. Douglass, after Daniel Huntington, *Wreck of the Hesperus*, 1845, etching, engraving, and stipple on cream paper, 10.3 x 13.2 cm, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA. (Photo: Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.)

dislocated – cut from the ground and shipped around the country to build monuments and public works.<sup>69</sup> This granite would also, significantly, furnish the material for Lane's own curious house and studio, one of the very few stone structures in the town, which he built for himself in 1849 on a hill overlooking the harbour.<sup>70</sup> Like Lane's paintings, the elements of Gloucester's 'rock-bound' terrain could be remade into material bulwarks against loss – monuments of a kind – even as they were objects through which the presence of death and violence, past and present, could be imagined.

### Collision

Later in 1862, Lane would conceive of a painting that both clarifies while it dissolves the strenuous labour of separation and preservation in Lane's more public paintings. His *Dream Painting* (Fig. 14), begun at the end of that year, instead explored the destructive force and sense of loss that, as I have argued here, haunted his pictures.<sup>71</sup> The painting draws deeply upon the visual grammar of Gloucester's everyday life elaborated in his other paintings: a ship, rocks, a shoreline. And yet the spatial and narrative web that has linked the objects in his other paintings has dissolved. A wrecked boat lifts, looming, against a granite boulder outcropping. A short account of the painting published on 12 December 1862 describes the 'angry waves' that 'beat furiously, throwing their spray over the dismantled vessel'.<sup>72</sup> These waves send up a lemon and lavender mist that clots and occludes recessionary space. After the first encounter with the painting, one sees that the scale is all wrong: this is no small fishing boat, but a large merchant's bark, with three masts, each of which has been severed in the imagined gale that caused the ship to wash

69. See Barbara H. Erkkila, *Hanson on Stone: The Story of Cape Ann Granite* (Woolwich, ME: TBW Books, 1980); Paul St. Germain, *Cape Ann Granite* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015). On Boston Harbour building projects and land reclamation, including seawalls, see Nancy S. Seaboles, *Gaining Ground: A History of Landmaking in Boston* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), esp. pp. 14–15.

70. See Arthur Mansfield Brooks, 'The Fitz Lane House in Gloucester', *The Essex Institute Historical Collection*, vol. 78, July 1942, pp. 281–3. A young Clarence Cook also described Lane's home in an 1854 piece about the artist: see William H. Gerds, 'The Sea Is His Home': Clarence Cook Visits Fitz Hugh Lane', *American Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3, Summer 1985, pp. 44–9.

71. This painting has received only limited scholarly attention. For a recent technical examination and brief discussion, see Travers Newton and Marcia Steele, 'Conservation Notes: Observation, Imagination, and Technique in Fitz Henry Lane's *Dream Painting*', <<https://www.terraamericanart.org/what-we-offer/our-art-collection/conservation-notes-observation-imagination-and-technique-in-fitz-henry-lanes-dream-painting/>> [last accessed 9 February 2021].

72. 'Marine Painting', *Cape Ann Advertiser*, 12 December 1862, reproduced in 'Dream Painting, 1862 (inv. 74)', *Fitz Henry Lane Online*, <<http://fitzhenrylaneonline.org/catalog/entry.php?id=74>> [last accessed 9 February 2021].

73. This lighting effect is noted in Newton and Steele, 'Conservation Notes'.

74. 'Marine Painting' (see note 72).

75. For a detailed account of this complicated incident, upon which my summary relies, see Dunlap and Buck, *Fitz Henry Lane*, pp. 64–71.

76. See Wilmerding, *Fitz High Lane*, pp. 79–80. On the Davidsons' ownership of Stage Fort across Gloucester Harbor, see 'Marine Painting', *Cape Ann Advertiser*, January 31, 1862, p. 2. On Lane and Davidson's friendship, see James A. Craig, *Fitz H. Lane: An Artist's Voyage Through Nineteenth-Century America* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2006), p. 105.

77. This description is found in a manuscript in Lane's hand, which was pasted to the back of *Dream Painting*. See 'Dream Painting, 1862 (inv. 74)', *Fitz Henry Lane Online*, Cape Ann Museum, <<http://fitzhensylanonline.org/catalog/entry.php?id=74>>, [accessed September 24, 2021].



Fig. 13. Frederic Edwin Church, *Beacon, Off Mount Desert Island, 1851*, oil on canvas, 78.7 × 116.8 cm, private collection. (Photo: Art Renewal Center/Wikimedia Commons.)

ashore. Yet the storm that caused the beaching of the ship has left it strangely unmarked. The wood hull gleams, reflecting an oddly non-directional light that appears to emanate from the granite rock outcropping.<sup>73</sup> Though the hull is slightly bent by the force of its collision, nothing seems to have decayed or weathered. The only wound appears at the ship's very bottom, where a small hole emits a narrow stream of water from a waterlogged hull, draining the sea back into itself. And so, at the painting's core, we see the collision of boat and rock – the aftermath of a 'storm [that] has spent its fury' – that stages the earlier, imagined collisions usually so assiduously excised from Lane's paintings.<sup>74</sup>

1862 had been a difficult year for the artist, not only because of the heavy communal losses that Gloucester had sustained that winter and spring in the fisheries. That summer, Lane had temporarily moved out of his granite home overlooking the harbour, where he lived with his sister Sarah and her husband Ignatius Winter. In July 1862, Lane sold his house to his close friend, Joseph L. Stevens Jr, and evidently a clash between Winter, Lane, and Stevens ensued. Winter was forcibly removed from the house and Lane moved out, but only temporarily, during the summer and fall of 1862.<sup>75</sup> He went to stay with his friend Dr Herman Davidson and his wife Sarah, who had also purchased his painting of Stage Fort earlier that year.<sup>76</sup> It was during this temporary exile from his home that Lane had a dream:

Sometime last fall while lying in bed asleep, a richly furnished room was presented to my imagination. Upon the wall my attention was attracted to a picture which I have here endeavored to reproduce. The dream was very vivid and on awakening I retained it in memory for a long time. The effect was so beautiful in the dream that I determined to attempt its reproduction, and this picture is the result. The drawing is very correct, but the effect falls far short of what I saw, and it would be impossible to convey to canvas such gorgeous and brilliant coloring as was presented to me. This picture, however, will give to the beholder some faint idea of the ideal.<sup>77</sup>





Fig. 14. Fitz Henry Lane, *Dream Painting*, 1862, oil on canvas, 61 x 91.4 cm, Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, IL. (Photo © Terra Foundation for American Art.)

And so, perhaps strangely, Lane's *Dream Painting* reproduces not some total, immersive vision, but rather a painting-object that appears within that vision – an image already made into representation, set into a domestic enclosure. It is within the material boundaries of Lane's public work, the oil painting, that this disruptive vision emerges through an agentless collision of boat and rock. The remnants of this wreck remain perpetually pristine, preserving in impossible tension the disaster and its disavowal.

In considering Lane's *Dream Painting*, we might begin to see, differently, the relationship between Lane's paintings and the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Both attempt, through an exacting lucidity, to form a public expression of belief in a potentially lossless progression through the world – hence the serenity and tranquillity that have been located in Lane's paintings.<sup>78</sup> Yet as Sharon Cameron and others have argued, Emerson's writing is haunted by grief and by loss, whose 'direct expression' must be always disavowed and submerged in the process of writing itself.<sup>79</sup> Lane's paintings of Gloucester's harbour attempted a similar work, in which the violence and losses of communal life, materialised in the objects of its 'rock-bound' coast, are laid bare yet tenuously stabilised through the work of pictorial composition. In the private experience of dreams, on the other hand, Emerson recognised the mind's ability to scramble its own attempts at fashioning a stable selfhood. They open instead upon a world of stranger doubling that confuses, rather than smooths out, narrative – a world marked by what he called 'dislocation' and 'painful imperfection'.<sup>80</sup> 'My dreams are not me', he claimed in his 1839 lecture 'Demonology': 'they are not Nature, or the Not-me; they are both... the phantoms that rise... act like mutineers, and fire on their commander... If I strike, I am struck; if I chase, I

78. For the most extended analysis of this correspondence, see Barbara Novak, *Signs of the Self: Poet, Painter, and Patron in American Art and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 17–33.

79. Sharon Cameron, 'Representing Grief: Emerson's "Experience"', *Representation*, no. 15, Summer 1986, pp. 15–41.

80. Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Demonology', in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 12 vols (Boston, MA: Riverside Press, 1883–1894), vol. 10 (1883), p. 11.

81. Emerson, 'Demonology', pp. 13–14.

82. Emerson, 'Demonology', pp. 14–15. Yet the potentially 'dislocating' knowledge offered by the dream had eventually to be cast aside: he concludes the lecture by saying, 'If the whole world is an onion and a sign... Why run after a ghost or a dream?' (Emerson, 'Demonology', p. 32).

83. Emily Dickinson, poem 364 (c. 1862), in Thomas H. Johnson (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), p. 172.

84. Dickinson, poem 391 (c. 1862), in *Complete Poems*, pp. 186–7.

85. Dickinson, poem 329 (c. 1862), in *Complete Poems*, p. 156.

86. There is a considerable literature on Dickinson's relation to Emerson, and her transformation of his language of 'center' and 'circles' to her 'Circumference'. See especially the discussion of the word's dual 'vastness and limitation' in Laura Gröbbin, 'Emily Dickinson's Circumference: Figuring a Blind Spot in the Romantic Tradition', *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, Spring 1993, pp. 1–21.

am pursued'.<sup>81</sup> Dreams offered to Emerson a 'terrible freedom', and he acknowledged that each person might, once or twice in their life, find in them 'a freer utterance'.<sup>82</sup> Lane's confrontation with the scene of loss in his *Dream Painting* bears the evidence of such a 'freer utterance', in a nocturnal 'dislocation' and reversal of the enclosed safety of his harbour scenes.

It was Emerson's imagined certainty of lossless progression that another writer in Lane's time – Emily Dickinson – would more privately and pointedly question, often through the language of sleep, dreaming, and waking. Like Lane's paintings, Dickinson's poetry was possessed of an intense locality; both painter and poet fashioned worlds from repeated encounters with the objects of everyday experience. Reading the poems that Dickinson wrote in 1862 – her 'miraculous year', in which she composed hundreds of poems – it is evident that it was in the 'terrible freedom' of visionary, night-time perception that Dickinson often located the fundamental confusion between pleasure and pain, community and solitude. This confusion was sharpened by one's later re-entry into the social world. 'The Morning after Woe –', she writes in 1862, 'Surpasses all that rose before –/for utter Jubilee –'.<sup>83</sup> Dickinson celebrates, rather than fears, the reversals instigated by the night-time world; rather, they are the welcome agent of transformation: 'Who visits in the Night –/And just before the Sun –/Concludes his glistening interview –/Caresses – and is gone –/. . . whatsoever Mouth he kissed –/Is as it had not been'.<sup>84</sup> Waking becomes, in part, the passage back into the regulatory functions of lucid life, the closure of the 'glistening interview' that had opened up other possibilities. And if there was one reversal that dreaming offered, and to which Dickinson so often returned, it concerned the entwined identity of grief and joy, which are 'done/ So similar – An Optizan/ Could not decide between –'.<sup>85</sup> In Dickinson's spatial lexicon, Emerson's language of ever-expanding 'circles' of progression through life is transformed into her 'Circumference' – a word that described the oscillating, entwined experience of limitation and expansion.<sup>86</sup> Such a conception as Dickinson's 'Circumference' allows us to see how the intense locality of Lane's paintings – their repeated return to the bounded space of the harbour – does not suggest constrained significance, but rather a heightened material negotiation of the fundamental questions and internal intensities of communal life.

*Stage Fort across Gloucester Harbor and Dream Painting* can thus be seen together not just in temporal proximity, as book-ends to the year 1862, but also in a dialectical relationship of separation and collision, of enclosure and of release. In his picture of Stage Fort, he negotiated and suppressed Gloucester's anxieties in the face of another season of perilous fishing and on the eve of local mobilisation for a national war. In the more privately conceived picture, one that emerged from the recesses of his consciousness, the ship that would otherwise calmly ply the waters of Lane's placid harbour is instead submitted to flux and to the loss of communal meaning. Within the undecided divisibility of his *Dream Painting*, the destructive event of shipwreck is almost, but never quite recuperated in the gleaming surface of the painting. Between the uneasy promise of preservation in *Stage Fort*, and the strangely joyful sense of loss in his *Dream Painting*, we can locate Lane's labour among his Gloucester community in 1862 – the repetitive project of reproducing the town's social worlds and its tenuous 'locality', as well as the private moment of flight from this work of preservation. It is in this painting of collision that the violent undercurrent of Gloucester's landscape could reappear, a painting he could not quite conceive of in his waking life, but by which, in this dream of dawn, Lane disrupted his daily labours of preserving in paint the fragility of the social world that surrounded him.

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