

NEITHER LAND NOR WATER: MARTIN JOHNSON HEADE,  
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH, AND AMERICAN LANDSCAPE  
PAINTING IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By

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ABSTRACT

Martin Johnson Heade and Frederic Edwin Church had a close personal relationship, shared a studio for more than a decade, and maintained a correspondence that lasted nearly forty years. Church was better known and certainly more successful commercially than Heade, but despite their close proximity and Heade's personal and professional admiration for Church, Heade should not be seen as an imitator of Church. Heade's paintings are a departure from Church's work in both form and content. In particular, a study of Heade's many marsh paintings reveals that, while Heade used some of Church's compositional elements, Heade's preparation, working method, purpose, and message to his audience are quite different from those of Church. Heade's marsh paintings make their own unique contribution to the history of American art.

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## CHAPTER 1.

### INTRODUCTION

Martin Johnson Heade and Frederic Edwin Church were prominent American landscape painters of the nineteenth century who are now widely celebrated. The two had a close personal relationship and even shared a studio for many years. What they did not share, however, was a common artistic response to the cultural, scientific, religious, and political events of their time. The mid-nineteenth century in America was a period when landscape painting expressed American nationalism and manifest destiny, as well as the pre-Darwinian ideal that science and art acted to reveal religious truths. Landscape artists played the role of “explorer, scientist, educator, frontiersman, and minister.”<sup>1</sup> In this role, Church chose to paint heroic scenes of mountains, waterfalls, rivers, and volcanoes full of carefully observed details and open to allegorical interpretation. In contrast, Heade focused on the quiet moods and changeable light and atmosphere of salt marshes – a place he loved – and avoided strong nationalist or scientific associations. In mid-nineteenth century America, this approach to landscape painting was almost unique to him.

Both men decided to be painters early in life and came from relatively affluent backgrounds that allowed them that luxury, but the routes they traveled before they crossed paths were very different. Heade was born in Pennsylvania in 1819 and received some early training from Edward Hicks, who is best known today for his numerous versions of the *Peaceable Kingdom* and whose influence can be seen in the stiff manner of some of Heade’s early work. In

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1. Barbara Novak’s *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford Press, 1995), 137.

the mid-1850s, Heade became interested in landscape painting after spending time in Providence, Rhode Island. With this new interest, there was no one better for him to meet than Frederic Edwin Church.

Though Church was seven years younger than Heade, he was clearly the more successful and established artist. Born in Connecticut in 1826, he was the pupil of successor to Thomas Cole. By the mid-1850's, the public and his fellow artists generally acknowledged Church as the leader of the American Landscape School. By the end of that decade, he had perfected his style of large-scale and exotic subjects in paintings such as *The Andes of Ecuador* (1855) and *Niagara* (1857). When Church and Heade met in 1858, Church was working in the Tenth Street Studio Building on what became his most famous painting of the tropics, *The Heart of the Andes* (1859). By that time, Church's paintings were nationally and internationally exhibited, sold for record-breaking sums, and were widely reproduced.<sup>2</sup>

The two first became acquainted shortly after Heade arrived in New York and rented space in the renowned Tenth Street Studio Building, home to many prominent artists of the day. Up to that point, Heade had led an itinerant life, painting portraits and genre scenes and also copying pictures from galleries in numerous cities in the United States and Europe. He had not particularly distinguished himself from other artists of the period. The friendship that developed between the two men is documented in letters they sent to each other and friends between 1858 and 1900. While Church's letters to Heade have been preserved, the letters from Heade to

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1. Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*, Vol. I (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 493.

Church have not. They were in the possession of Church's first biographer, Charles Dudley Warner, but have never been located after Warner's death.<sup>3</sup>

Given Church's standing and success, one might have expected Heade to become a follower or imitator of Church. But instead, Heade made his own unique contribution to the history of landscape painting. A useful way to understand the contributions of both artists is to consider them together and to explore how and where they influenced each other. Although both artists are revered, studied, and collected today, they share the distinguishing feature of falling out of favor by the time of their deaths. In the 1850s and 60s, Church was a rock star of the art world, but tastes began to change by the 1870s, and he was mostly forgotten by the time of his death in 1900. Though never as popular as Church, Heade also fell into almost complete obscurity after his death in 1904. Interest and scholarship in the work of both artists began to revive in the 1930s and 1940s with the rise of interest in American art in general.

Although Heade admired Church and his work, he did not try to emulate him. Heade is often associated with the Hudson River School because of his friendship with Church, but an examination of Heade's work shows that, while Church influenced Heade, Heade clearly departed from Church's model and from the rest of the Hudson River School, especially in his marsh paintings. Heade's rise as a landscape painter and the development of his style can be traced through his marsh paintings, a subject that Church never chose to paint.

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3. J. Gray Sweeney, "A "very peculiar" Picture: Martin J. Heade's Thunderstorm Over Narragansett Bay" *Archives of American Art Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (1988), 14 n. 19.

## CHAPTER 2.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous books, articles, and exhibition catalogues are dedicated to the life and work of Fredric Church, and a more modest number to Martin Heade. While most work on Heade inevitably discusses his relationship with Church, the reverse is not always the case. If Heade is mentioned at all in the Church literature, it is often not in any substantive way. This perhaps continues to reflect the view held during their lifetimes that Heade was not as significant or important as Church as an artist.

#### Books and Monographs: Church

Perhaps the earliest book devoted to Church, one that remains influential, is the 1966 work by David C. Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era*. In this book, Huntington mentions Heade only as the recipient of letters from Church that are quoted in the book. In the larger context of Church scholarship, Huntington's book is very important, as it was one of the first serious works to recognize Church's important contributions to American landscape painting. Huntington looks at what Church tried to communicate in his landscapes and explores the cultural and intellectual influences that motivated Church. In doing so, he tries to dispel the idea that Church's work was merely "photographic," empty of meaning and not original. Huntington says this about *Niagara*:

Before this greatest of American landscapes the self-reliant, democratic American becomes his own prophet: he stands and sees as a New Noah. Thus through the work of art did Mr. Church help his fellow-men to discover themselves in their new world.<sup>4</sup>

For Huntington, some of the influential thinkers that drove Church in such a monumental direction include Thomas Cole, John Ruskin, Alexander von Humboldt, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. He argues that Church played an important role in the life of the nation by projecting Manifest Destiny and inspiring patriotism and unity. These influences and ideas can be linked to Heade as well and continue to be discussed by later Church and Heade scholars. Huntington also addresses another issue that has been of little interest to more recent scholars – defending Church against the criticism that he has failed to influence “Modern Art.” However, Huntington’s efforts to explain what Church meant to convey to audiences of his day is still used by scholars today.

Although Huntington’s 1966 book does not discuss Heade, he does speak briefly to the relationship between Church and Heade in a later essay: “Church and Luminism: Light for America’s Elect” in *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850-1875*, edited by John Wilmerding. Here, Huntington observes that Heade’s work is not as theatrical or religious as that of Church and therefore more appealing to modern audiences,<sup>5</sup> an idea that might help explain Heade’s current popularity. Church’s work, because of its grand scale and religious overtones, is often too melodramatic for audiences today, while Heade’s work can easily be viewed without those associations and the need to understand what Church was trying to convey.

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4. David C. Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), 71.

5. David C. Huntington, “Church and Luminism: Light for America’s Elect” in *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850-1875*, ed. John Wilmerding (Washington, DC: The National Gallery of Art, 1981), 185.

A more recent monograph on Church's life and work is John K. Howat's *Frederic Church*, published in 2005. He acknowledges his debt to Huntington and generally interprets Church's work in the same way – reading Church's paintings in the context of his time – but Howat was able to use many sources that were unavailable to Huntington. Moreover, while Huntington focuses on about thirty of Church's paintings, Howat thoroughly covers Church's entire career. Howat also quotes from a number of Church's letters to Heade and, based on more recent scholarship, mentions a trip that Heade took to South America and Jamaica in 1870, possibly at the suggestion of Church. A result of that trip is *View From Fern-Tree Walk Jamaica*, although Heade did not actually paint it until 1887. This painting is very close in subject matter, composition, and size to Church's 1877 *El Río de Luz (The River of Light)*. In comparing the two paintings, Howat remarks, "Heade retained an all-embracing sense of precision and colorfulness that had eluded Church's failing grasp a decade before."<sup>6</sup> Howat's treatment of Heade suggests that Heade had become a more seriously considered artist than was the case in Huntington's time in the mid-1960s.

Franklin Kelly, in *Frederic Edwin Church and the National Landscape* (1988), looks at the works that Church painted between 1845 and 1860 and argues that they are very different from those painted by Church's contemporaries. Kelly sees Church as more ambitious in his choice of subjects, more complex in his treatment of landscape, and as someone with more to say about what was important to America and Americans at that time than any other painter of his generation. This is useful in comparing Heade to Church even though Kelly's single use of Heade, with the painting *Stranded Boat* from 1863, is to demonstrate the different interpretations

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6. John H. Howat, *Frederic Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 170.

of wrecked or stranded boats common in America at that time. While Kelly makes no comments on the treatment of marine scenes or other landscapes by Heade and Church, his attention to the cultural and political events important to Church and his audiences is very helpful to an understanding of the world in which both painters worked.

Kelly revisits Church in the exhibition catalogue *Frederic Edwin Church* for a show held at the National Gallery in 1989. Kelly's essay "A Passion for Landscape: The Paintings of Frederic Edwin Church" in the catalogue follows Church's development from student to established artist through the works in the exhibit, incorporating contemporary criticism and a late twentieth-century analysis. The paintings in the exhibit are those thought to be most significant to Church, such as those he publically exhibited or sold to significant individuals. One such work is *Morning in the Tropics*, painted in 1877. Interestingly, Kelly points out that, based on its composition, *Morning in the Tropics* may have been inspired by Heade's 1868 painting, *South American River*. Kelly finds Church's work to be "more suggestive and enigmatic" than Heade's painting.<sup>7</sup> This brief reference to Heade is the only one Kelly makes in this essay.

Along with Huntington, Howat, and Kelly, Gerald L. Carr is another major Church scholar. Currently working on a Church catalogue raisonné, Carr is the author of several other books on Church, including *The Early Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church, 1845-1854* (with Franklin Kelly); *Frederic Edwin Church: Romantic Landscapes and Seascapes*, and *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*. Unfortunately, Carr does not address or comment on Church's relationship to Heade in any of these works.

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7. Franklin Kelly, "A Passion for Landscape: The Paintings of Frederic Edwin Church," in *Frederic Edwin Church* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1989), 68.

The catalogue for the 1989 Church exhibit at the National Gallery also includes another important article entitled “Church, Humboldt, and Darwin: The Tension and Harmony of Art and Science.” Written by the scientist Stephen Jay Gould, the essay explains why Humboldt provided such a powerful inspiration for Church and other artists of his generation and how Darwin’s groundbreaking scientific work upset the vision they had created. He suggests that Darwin may have contributed to Church’s decline in popularity. Although the essay does not mention Heade, it provides insight into the possible reasons why Heade often included dead and dying plants in some of his works.

Katherine E. Manthorne too discusses the profound influence of Humboldt on Church in *Creation & Renewal: Views of Cotopaxi by Frederic Edwin Church*. Her essay in this exhibit catalogue from 1985 examines the significances of the volcano Cotopaxi in Church’s development as a painter and how Cotopaxi came to be a symbol of what South America meant to Americans at that time. As for Heade, Manthorne notes that he did not completely ignore the important icon of the volcano but that it was not terribly important to him. This is demonstrated by the painting *Omotepe Volcano*, which Heade did in 1867 after his trip to Nicaragua, his only image of a volcano and an important point of comparison with Church.

Manthorne also briefly pursues the important travel connection between Church and Heade in the essay “Olana, Salon for the Jamaican Journeyers” in the book that accompanied the exhibit *Fern Hunting among These Picturesque Mountains: Frederic Edwin Church in Jamaica* (2010). After relating how Church often advised painters and writers planning travel to the tropics, Manthorne talks specifically about Heade’s trips and speculates that, after his trip to Jamaica, Heade seems to have rushed to back to Olana to share with Church all he had seen and

sketched. Manthorne finds that eventually Heade departed from Church's "topographic specificity"<sup>8</sup> and created exotic combinations of birds, flowers and vines inspired by his travels. This is an important point in regard to how Heade departed from the example set by Church.

#### Books and Monographs: Heade

The first semi-scholarly work on Heade after his death was Robert C. McIntyre's *Martin Johnson Heade*, which was published in 1948. McIntyre was an art dealer, not an art historian, but he wrote a compelling narrative of Heade's life and times. Though not as scholarly or visionary as David C. Huntington's work on Frederic Church, McIntyre's book served to reintroduce Heade to art audiences just as Huntington's did for Church. Interest in Heade's work was piqued in the 1940s by the inclusion of his work in a number of museum exhibits such as *Romantic Paintings in America* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1944. That is where McIntyre, as he relates in his book, "discovered" Heade when he was bowled over by Heade's *Storm Over Narragansett Bay* and determined to find out all he could about this "unknown" artist. McIntyre's book became a starting point for later scholars and, unfortunately, served to create the myth that Heade was a loner and a misfit.

While Heade's work continued to be exhibited and commented upon in the 1950s and 60s, no major scholarly work was written about him until Theodore E. Stebbins came upon the work of Heade as a graduate student in the 1960s. Stebbins is now recognized as the foremost authority on Heade. He wrote his dissertation on Heade and started his career by organizing and writing, with William H. Gerds, the catalogue for an exhibit of sixty-five works by Heade in

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8. Katherine E. Manthorne, "Olana, Salon for Jamaican Journeymen," in *Fern Hunting among These Picturesque Mountains: Frederic Edwin Church in Jamaica* (New York: The Olana Partnership and Cornell University Press, 2010), 47.

1969. Perhaps the best single resource on Heade is Stebbins's *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné*, published in 2000. This book is a revised and greatly expanded edition of a book that Stebbins originally published in 1975, with the help of Church scholar David C. Huntington, as *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade*. The 1975 edition frequently used as a source in writings about Heade. The newer volume features information on Heade published after 1975, as well as newly discovered primary source material, including a journal and correspondence with friends. Woven throughout the chronologically arranged text are numerous examples of interactions, from artistic to social, between Heade and Church, as well as observations on the influences Church had on Heade and vice versa. For example, Stebbins describes how, in the early 1870s, Church "gave up his optimistic, Humboldtian vision and began painting instead murky, generalized views similar to the ones Heade had been painting for several years."<sup>9</sup>

One year before the publication of the 2000 Heade catalogue raisonné, Stebbins curated a Heade exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. While the catalogue raisonné presents a more thorough overview of Heade's entire career, the catalogue resulting from the 1999 exhibit, entitled *Martin Johnson Heade*, contains more analysis of Heade from Stebbins and his colleagues. Included are chapters on different subjects painted by Heade, a history of Heade criticism and scholarship, and a discussion of Heade's painting technique. In his introductory essay, Stebbins notes a number of clear differences between Heade and Church. For example, Church found numerous scenes to paint in Vermont while Heade found none, and Church's inclination towards grand South America paintings versus Heade's tendency to "summarize the

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9. Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 84.

tropical experience... in compositions of moderate size.”<sup>10</sup> In this essay and the catalogue raisonné, Stebbins also makes numerous observations about Heade’s personality and character that are at odds with earlier accounts written by Heade’s first biographer, Robert G. McIntyre, who cast Heade as something of a loner and misfit. Based on newly discovered correspondence and other archival material, Stebbins finds Heade to have had many social connections and to have been “a rather successful small-time entrepreneur, albeit one with an idiosyncratic personality ... [and] one of the most verbal nineteenth-century artists.”<sup>11</sup>

Although not nearly as comprehensive as Stebbins’s book, another useful work is an essay by Barbara Novak, “Martin Johnson Heade: The Enigmatic Self” in *Martin Johnson Heade: A Survey, 1840*, an exhibition catalogue from 1996. This essay is a brief examination of the man and his art as a whole. Among other things, she speculates on the nature of Heade’s relationship with Church and notes the differences between their approaches to art. Novak asks many provocative questions about Heade’s artistic motivations and bemoans the lack of information about his private life, a gap that is somewhat filled with the recently discovered primary source material included in Stebbins’s most recent book.

Two books that take a narrower view of Heade’s work are *Ominous Hush: The Thunderstorm Paintings of Martin Johnson Heade* by Sarah Cash, published in 1994, and *Martin Johnson Heade in Florida* by Roberta Smith Favis, published in 2003. Cash looks at how Heade’s thunderstorm paintings developed over time, how they compare with similar works of the time (particularly those by Church), and what their imagery represented to contemporary

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10. Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., “Introduction” in *Martin Johnson Heade*, Theodore E. Stebbins (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 8.

11. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), ix.

audiences. Cash's examination of Heade in the social context of his time illuminates a great deal about his personal and artistic relationship with Church. Favis uses the similarities and differences between Heade and Church to discuss the evolution of Heade's art before he moved to Florida in 1883. She also uses Church to illustrate Heade's position in the national scheme of landscape painting and painters of the time. This discussion breaks new ground and is extremely useful in understanding Heade's departures from the painting model created by Church. Later in the book, Favis's only references to Church are in the form of quotes from letters from Church to Heade after Heade took up residence in Florida. Favis's account and analysis of Heade's time in Florida suggests the importance and distinctive nature of the work that Heade did in his final years.

Both before and after his move to Florida, Heade often painted hummingbirds. A useful work that interprets and analyzes Heade's hummingbird paintings is a 2004 dissertation by Betsy Towns, *Wondrous Creatures: The Paintings of Martin Johnson Heade*. This work mentions Church in a biographical context but does not address the artistic connections between Church and Heade.

Making the connection between Heade's hummingbird paintings and the influence of Church is Katherine Manthorne's *Tropical Renaissance*, published in 1989. Manthorne explores the significant creative impact that travel to Central and South America had on the careers and work of Church, Heade, and other artists of their generation. Though not the main focus of the book, the sustained involvement of Heade and Church in tropical subjects over the course of many years, along with their shared history, their political, scientific, philosophical beliefs, and their separate reasons for travel allow for many points of comparison. Of particular interest is the

chapter entitled “The Organic World: Agassiz, Heade and Darwin’s Challenge,” which discusses Heade and his hummingbird paintings in the context of the naturalist Agassiz’s travel to Brazil and his response to Darwin. Manthorne sees Heade’s hummingbird paintings as his most original contribution to the genre of landscape painting.

### General Books

Christopher Benfey’s 2008 book, *A Summer of Hummingbirds: Love, Art and Scandal in the Intersecting Worlds of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Johnson Heade*, portrays a world awash in hummingbirds and demonstrates that Heade was not alone in his obsession with the small bird. Using extensive primary source materials, including those used by Stebbins, Benfry links Heade to other writers and thinkers of his age and discusses their joint mania for flowers and hummingbirds. In fact, in his acknowledgements, Benfry credits Stebbins’s book *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade* as one of his main inspirations. The sections devoted to Heade, interspersed throughout the book, include descriptions of his painting and links to Church and other famous figures of the day. In truth, Heade’s connections with the other famous people are much more tenuous than his bond with Church, but it is useful to know how other thinkers viewed subjects such as hummingbirds and flowers that Heade painted over and over.

*The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist-Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionist* by Annette Blaugrund, published in 1997, clearly shows the bond between Church and Heade and is an oft-quoted source in works related to both of them. Many of the leading painters of day had studio space in the building, which opened in 1857, and the artists’ proximity to one another led to many social, commercial, and artistic interactions that are

detailed in the book. These details are significant in understanding the circumstances that brought Church and Heade together as friends, as well as their joint and separate business arrangements.

Two important and complex books that address nineteenth century American landscape painting and provide a greater understanding of Church and Heade together are Barbara Novak's *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875*, revised edition 1995, and David C. Miller's *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, published in 1989. In an earlier 1979 book, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, Novak devotes a chapter to Heade. She discusses him in terms of describing a style of painting in America during the nineteenth century and notes in particular the "luminist" qualities of his work. Interestingly, she does not discuss Church in her 1979 book. However, in her 1995 book, *Nature and Culture*, Church is an important and influential figure who epitomizes the artist's role as a spokesperson for the values and beliefs of the time. She asserts that Church paints "grand opera" while Heade represents the "still small voice."<sup>12</sup>

In examining swamp, jungle, and marsh landscapes, David Miller's *Dark Eden* cites works by Church, Heade and others to argue that "images play an instrumental role in the evolution of cultural sensibility."<sup>13</sup> He explores the relationship between images and cultural concerns, such as science and pre-Civil War tensions, and how these relationships developed over time. Swamps or marshes were one of Heade's favorite subjects – the focus of more than

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12. See "Grand Opera and the Still Small Voice" in Barbara Novak's *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford Press, 1995), 18-33.

13. David Miller, *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 3.

120 of his works out of a total of about 620 known works – and a topic not frequently addressed by scholars. In comparing and contrasting the work of Heade and Church, marsh and jungle paintings are useful devices. Miller’s work provides needed cultural context to understand what these subjects meant to Church, Heade, and their contemporary audiences.

### Articles

Just as there are more books devoted to Church than to Heade, the same is true for scholarly articles. Likewise, those focused on Heade typically include substantive discussion of Church while the opposite is not true. Articles on Church tend to concentrate on narrow specific topics (“Details of Absence: Frederic Church and the Landscape of Post-Emancipation Jamaica” by Jennifer Raab from 2011 or “Church, Cotopaxi and Country” from 2006 by John Wilmerding) and make no mention of Heade. The following articles, however, treat the painters as equally important and offer many insights into the personal and artistic relationship between the two.

David Peters Corbett, in “Art, Morality and the National Interest: Theodore Winthrop, Frederic Church and Martin Johnson Heade at the Tenth Street Studios in 1859,” argues that Church and Heade had fundamentally different visions of society in the late 1850s. He compares Church’s painting *Heart of the Andes* of 1859 with Heade’s *Approaching Thunder Storm* of the same year, while folding in a discussion of Theodore Winthrop’s novel *Cecil Dreeme*. In addition to being a novelist, Winthrop was a resident of the Tenth Street Studio Building and the author of the well-known pamphlet, *Heart of the Andes*, which is an explication of Church’s painting. Corbett sees *Heart of the Andes* as communicating moral purpose, nation building and order (although he allows for the possibility of multiple interpretations with the painting’s

masses of detail and hazy areas). He contrasts this with Heade's work, with its large dark areas, meager plant life and indistinct man and dog, which he views as the opposite of moral, important or complex. Corbett finds Heade to be "skeptical and irreverent," the opposite of Church's moral example.<sup>14</sup> In this debate between men and pictures, Corbett gives each artist equal weight and demonstrates conflicting approaches to events of the day that were common in society in the lead-up to the Civil War.

Maggie M. Cao, in her article "Heade's Hummingbirds and the Ungrounding of Landscape," posits that Heade did more than just debate Church. She argues that Heade, in his hummingbird paintings, completely upended the whole genre of landscape in a number of ways: by focusing on the fragment rather than knitting together fragments as Church does; by using the foreground to block the eye traveling to background; by painting nature –birds and flowers – scaled as life-sized; and by using the birds and flowers as "lattice" to separate the foreground from the background and eliminate the middle ground entirely. In this view, unique to Cao, Heade is questioning the whole ideal of landscape as both nation building and a representation of an ordered divine universe as practiced by Church.

In "A 'very peculiar' Picture: Martin J. Heade's Thunderstorm over Narragansett Bay," J. Gray Sweeney closely examines the details of this particular 1868 painting to understand the meaning it would have had for audiences in post-Civil War America. Influenced by his friendship with Church and the renewed interest in Thomas Cole surrounding the twentieth anniversary of Cole's death, Heade created a work reminiscent of Cole's *Voyages of Life* series

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14. David Peters Corbett, "Art, Morality and the National Interest: Theodore Winthrop, Frederic Church and Martin Johnson Heade at the Tenth Street Studios in 1859," *European Journal of American Culture* Vol. 3 No. 1 (2011), 68.

through the use of allegorical symbolism recognizable to contemporary audiences. Of particular interest is Sweeney's answer to the question of why Heade is considered an artist of significance today when he was not so highly regarded in his own time. Although Sweeney relies in part on outdated notions of Heade's personality, he makes a persuasive argument that Heade's friendship with Church and the influence and personal connection he felt with Thomas Cole propelled Heade to paint such an imaginative and meaningful picture, thus making him an artist of lasting importance.

In addition to her books, Katherine Manthorne authored a short article in 2009, "Darwin's Ear and Artistic Convergence in the 1870s," to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Darwin's birth. Manthorne refers to Heade and Church, as well as other artists, to illustrate how American artists were open to new ideas after the Civil War and how they incorporated Darwin's ideas into their pictures. This article is typical of more recent scholarship that treats Heade and Church as equally responsive to contemporary ideas.

As noted above, Heade painted more than 120 pictures of salt marches – a subject never painted by Church. Nancy Frazier explores the intent and meaning of Heade's marshes in "Mute Gospel: The Salt Marshes of Martin Johnson Heade," published in 1998. She argues that Heade's marsh paintings were intended to push back against Church and his "optimistic, spiritual, and nationalistic affirmation."<sup>15</sup> After explaining the commercial rise and fall of salt marshes in America, Frazier argues that Heade, in his many repetitions of the marsh theme, was trying to paint a message of decline and decay – decline and decay caused by man – that contemporary audiences did not want to hear and chose to ignore. Whether or not one chooses to view Heade

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15. Nancy Frazier, "Mute Gospel: The Salt Marshes of Martin Johnson Heade." *Prospects* 23 (1998), 198.

as a proto-environmentalist, Frazier's work is a substantive contribution to an understudied subject in Heade scholarship and offers new insight into Church as well.

### Conclusion

In reviewing scholarly writing on both Frederic Edwin Church and Martin Johnson Heade, several trends are clear. First and most obvious, the stature of both artists has risen over the past thirty years as they have both received more and more critical attention. Although Heade was considered a minor artist during his lifetime, he has come to be treated with a seriousness that is approaching that given to Church. Heade's contribution to the history of art and how he reflected the concerns of his day are now more fully recognized. Frederic Church, so greatly admired during his life and then virtually forgotten, has again risen in reputation – not only as a very skillful artist but also as one who gave visual form to intellectual ideas important to him and the culture of his day. The other trend is that scholars have started to consider more closely the cultural context of both artists' paintings, rather than just reading them formally or placing them within a school or movement. Finally, it is clear that comparing and contrasting the works of Martin Johnson Heade and Frederic Edwin Church contributes new insights into and understanding of their art.

## CHAPTER 3.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEADE'S MARSH PAINTINGS

### AND THE FRIENDSHIP AND INFLUENCE OF CHURCH

The letter below, written by Frederic Church to his friend and fellow artist Martin Heade in 1871, captures many of the aspects of their relationship as business partners, studio-mates, and friends. Their friendship began in 1858 and lasted for more than forty years, and the surviving bits of correspondence between them, spanning thirty-three years, shows two men who shared jokes, a love of nature, and a passion for the work of painting and selling art.

Martin Johnson Heade Esq.  
Studio Building  
No. 51 West Tenth Street  
New York City  
Hudson, March 6/71

My dear Mr. Heade,

A box will be started today for the studio – it had my name on it and it contains two unfinished pictures. It will reach Studio Building on Tuesday probably – Please see that it is safely lodged. Thursday morning I expect to be on hand to attend to it. The box is six feet long – so are you –but don't imagine that this a little delicate attention on my part, for the said box is four feet wide which you are not.

Spring is here apparently several kinds of birds are singing – insects are flying about – grass is sprinting

Winter will give a few spiteful scratches with his claws yet before he surrenders – The winter I refer to is not Mrs. Winter

Yours Sincerely  
F.E. Church

P.S. This to certify that I am not writing in haste.<sup>16</sup>

Our understanding of their relationship is somewhat one-sided since most of Heade's letters to Church have been lost, but judging from the few surviving examples, Heade must have been just as good as he got in their back-and-forth banter.

Although Heade painted a variety of subjects as a young artist, including a few landscapes, his early career focused largely on portraits. The point at which he fully turned to landscape coincided with his move to New York City and his decision to rent space in the Tenth Street Studio Building, where he met Frederic Church. Luckily, letters from Heade to his friend John Russell Bartlett, a socially and politically important man in Providence, Rhode Island, are preserved and document this important point in Heade's career. Upon his arrival in New York in November of 1858, Heade wrote to Bartlett describing his enthusiasm for all the amenities of the now famous Tenth Street Studio, which had just opened in January of that year. He noted, "Church & most of the prominent artists are in the building – about 20 or 30 in all, I suppose." He concluded his letter with "I feel as if I'd opened on a sort of new life!"<sup>17</sup>

Before moving to New York, Heade had traveled widely in search of portrait commissions and also made copies of well-known works to sell. From 1855 to 1858, just before his move to New York City, he spent much of his time in Providence, and it was there, according

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16. Frederic Edwin Church to Martin Johnson Heade, March 6, 1871, Martin Johnson Heade Papers, box 1 folder 2, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

17. Martin Johnson Heade to John Russell Bartlett, Nov. 4, 1858, John Russell Bartlett Papers, John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, R. I. as cited by Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 21.

to Theodore Stebbins, that Heade first found “patronage, friends and – perhaps most significant – costal vistas that moved him to take up landscape painting.”<sup>18</sup>

One of Heade’s early landscapes from his time in Providence, painted in 1855, is *Rocks in New England*, which also may have been known as *Scene on Narragansett Bay* (fig. 1). Two sheep and an ox populate this rocky, hilly and somewhat barren landscape. A single tree breaks the flat horizon line up into a hazy sky, which occupies the top third of the painting. Every detail in the foreground and middle ground is meticulously painted, making them equally important, and the straight horizon line crosses the entire picture, leaving the edges open. Though Heade does not pay as much attention to light in this picture as he does in his later work, the open edges and one third of the painting devoted to sky are characteristics found in his later landscapes.

In his essay “The Development of Martin Johnson Heade’s Painting Technique,” Jim Wright notes that in his landscapes from 1855 to 1858, Heade’s technical skills are much less confident than those displayed in his portraits of the same time period: “His brushwork in the landscapes is less fluid and has relatively less variety. His uneasiness with the new subject brought to the fore a need for restraint and control.”<sup>19</sup> *Rocks in New England* exemplifies Heade’s exploration of a genre that was new to him and was painted slightly before the time he gave up figurative work to focus on landscapes and still life.

When Heade was making his first forays into landscape painting, Frederic Church was already its master. Church had arrived in New York City in late 1847, at the age of twenty-one.

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18. Stebbins, (2000), 15.

19. Jim Wright, “The Development of Martin Johnson Heade’s Painting Technique” in *Martin Johnson Heade* Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 173.

By 1855, he had traveled widely in the northern United States and South America and had started to exhibit and sell his pieces regularly at the National Academy of Design, of which he was a member. He was a commercial and critical success, and his activities were duly reported in the press. In 1855, while Heade was working on *Rocks in New England* in relative obscurity, Church began to exhibit some of his earliest paintings of South America, such as *The Andes of Ecuador* (fig. 2) and *Cotopaxi* (fig. 3), to rave reviews from critics.<sup>20</sup> *The Andes of Ecuador* is widely considered to be Church's first full-scale masterpiece with its "visual leap from the foreground into deep space" and the grand effect created by its handling of light and atmosphere.<sup>21</sup>

Although not as large or as imposing as *The Andes of Ecuador*, *View of Cotopaxi* (fig. 4) is a work that Heade would have seen in Church's studio in 1858. Theodore Stebbins finds numerous similarities between this work and two landscape paintings that Heade painted during the winter of 1858-59, *Rhode Island Shore* (fig. 5) and *Rhode Island Landscape* (fig. 6). Heade's paintings show two very similar views of a rocky landscape overlooking a bay with trees on the right side as a framing device. These elements are very similar to those traditionally used by the Hudson River School painters, and Stebbins points to the tall trees on the right, the still water in the middle ground, and the mountains in the distance as devices that Heade would have seen in pictures in Church's studio.<sup>22</sup> Not traditional to the Hudson River School, however, are the

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20. David C. Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), 43-44.

21. Franklin Kelly, "A Passion for Landscape: The Paintings of Frederic Edwin Church," in *Frederic Edwin Church*, Franklin Kelly (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1989), 50.

22. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 23-24.

haystack in *Rhode Island Shore* and the cloudy, threatening sky in *Rhode Island Landscape*. The haystack – something that Heade first sketched in pencil in the summer of 1858<sup>23</sup> – and the changeable sky are both features to which Heade would return over and over again in his career, particularly in his marsh paintings. Although not among his most skillful works, *Rhode Island Landscape* and *Rhode Island Shore* show the progress Heade made in transitioning into the painter of landscapes, marines and still lifes for which he is known today.

Even more influential for Heade than Church's South American paintings was Church's quintessentially American *Niagara* (1857) (fig. 7). In his first letter to Bartlett after arriving in New York, Heade wrote, "Church's picture of Niagara far exceeds my expectation; & I don't wonder that Ruskin, after looking at half an hour could only utter 'marvelous' .... I look upon it as the most wonderful picture I ever yet saw."<sup>24</sup> Years later, in 1882, Heade even asked Church for a "chromo" of the picture, but Church replied that he knew of none for sale and had only three copies that he wished to keep for his children.<sup>25</sup> John Howat, one of Church's major biographers, notes that Niagara Falls "was the most popular, most often treated and the tritest single subject matter to appear in eighteenth- and nineteenth- century European and American landscape painting."<sup>26</sup> However, Church's image of this symbol of the New World and America

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23. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 24.

24. Martin Johnson Heade to John Russell Bartlett, Nov. 4, 1858, John Russell Bartlett Papers, John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, R. I. as cited by Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., in *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 22.

25. Frederic Edwin Church to Martin Johnson Heade, January 10, 1882, Martin Johnson Heade Papers, box 1 folder 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

26. John H. Howat, *Frederic Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 69.

broke new ground in style and composition. It was not only admired by Heade, but was wildly popular both at home and abroad.

Heade was able to see the painting in November of 1858 upon its return from a second tour in England and Scotland, and before it went out on another American tour. What Heade gained from *Niagara* and would use in later years is what Stebbins calls a “compositional template” of “water and sky in a broad, horizontal format divided just above the center by a horizon extending across its whole.”<sup>27</sup> *Niagara*’s extended horizontal composition, its ratio of sky to water, and the way that Church captured the effects of light made such an impression on Heade that they inspired a painting formula that he would use for the rest of his life,<sup>28</sup> especially in his marsh paintings.

In addition to appreciating Church’s paintings, Heade was also quick to appreciate the man himself. After being in New York for only a few weeks, he wrote to Bartlett:

I find him [Church] one of the most affable and agreeable men I have ever met. He is famous for making chocolate as well as in covering canvas. He brings his supply from South America. I’m the *coffee king* of the building & he the chocolate ditto! Tomorrow he’s to take coffee with me & then I’m to *retaliate* in chocolate.<sup>29</sup>

In the same letter, Heade reported that Church has “an enormous South American scene in hand.” That “scene in hand” was *Heart of the Andes* (1859). Heade was indeed lucky to have

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27. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 50.

28. Roberta Smith Favis, *Martin Johnson Heade in Florida* (Gainesville Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003), 22.

29. Martin Johnson Heade to John Russell Bartlett, Nov. 28, 1858, John Russell Bartlett Papers, John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island as cited by Roberta Smith Favis in, *Martin Johnson Heade in Florida* (Gainesville Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003), 22.

seen Church's most famous painting as a work in progress and then to have witnessed the rapturous reception it received.<sup>30</sup>

At nearly ten-feet wide and more than five feet tall, *Heart of the Andes* is the culmination of Church's two trips to South America in 1853 and 1857 and his intellectual engagement with the scientific, religious, and artistic ideas of his time. Church's painstaking observations, detailed depiction, and careful arrangement of a vast array of elements from nature were inspired by the writings of the naturalist Alexander von Humboldt.<sup>31</sup> From a single vantage point, Church takes his audience from distant snowy peaks down to dense tropical vegetation, creating a symbol of an entire, exotic continent in a dazzling display of technical virtuosity. In April and May of 1859, more than twelve thousand people paid 25 cents each to see this work in the Tenth Street Studio building. Its "creation and public acceptance" has been called one of the "pivotal events of the mid-nineteenth century art world in America."<sup>32</sup>

Even though he was drinking South American chocolate and doubtlessly caught up in the excitement surrounding *Heart of the Andes*, Heade's painting style does not seem to have been affected by his friend's South American masterpiece. If there was any impact at all, it was certainly much less than that of *Niagara*. Although Heade did eventually follow Church's example by traveling to South America, he stayed much closer to home in the years in which the

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30. For a complete account see David Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of American* (New York: George Braziller), 1-9.

31. See Stephen Jay Gould "Church, Humboldt and Darwin: The Tension and Harmony of Art and Science," in *Frederick Edwin Church*, Franklin Kelly et al. (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press), 94-107, for a discussion of the influence of Humboldt on Church.

32. John K. Howat, "Heart of the Andes," in *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, John K. Howat et al. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 247.

American art world was focused on the *Heart of the Andes*. From 1858 to 1863, he traveled and sketched in New England. In 1859, Heade completed two works that are quite well known today, *Storm Clouds on the Coast* (1859) and *Approaching Thunder Storm* (1859). During the summer of that year, he sketched the marshes near Newburyport, Massachusetts for the first time. And later that year, he also produced and exhibited his first paintings of marshes, a theme that would eventually account for nearly one fifth of his entire oeuvre.

*Marsh at Dawn* (1859) (fig. 9) was one of three marsh scenes that Heade exhibited in Boston in the fall of 1859. It shows a flat marsh with a large haystack on the right and other haystacks winding back into the low hills of the background. In the middle ground, a small wagon and two farmers work beside the large haystack. In this work and the other marsh paintings from 1859, the sky is the dominant feature. When compared with the marine paintings of the same time, the marine scenes are larger and more angular, and the skies more threatening. Stebbins speculates, based on the bleak and stormy nature of his seascapes versus the more peaceful and serene mood of his marshes, that Heade “felt himself a stranger at the shore but was at home in the salt marsh.”<sup>33</sup>

Heade’s actual home changed frequently, as he typically moved from one city to another about every two years in his early adult life. Considering all the advantages he enjoyed after his move to New York City in 1858, such as a new studio and the company of other landscape painters,<sup>34</sup> one might have expected him to stay in New York, but such was not the case. In 1860

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33. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 30.

34. See Annette Blaugrund, *The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist-Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionist* by Annette (New York: The Parrish Art Museum, 1997), 23, for a list of the twenty-one artists listed as tenants in the Tenth Street Studio Building in January of 1858.

and 1861, he was listed in the city directory of Providence, Rhode Island, and in 1862 and 1863 he was found in Boston.

The paintings he produced from 1860-1863 also suggest a time of experimentation, as Heade investigated and painted northeastern shore scenes and salt marshes at different times of day. One example from 1861 is *Wilderness Sunset* (fig. 10), which perhaps also shows the influence of Church. The striking glow of a sunset on the horizon reflected in a still marshy body of water brings to mind the red glow on the sweeping clouds also reflected on water in Church's *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860) (fig. 11). Heade would likely have seen *Twilight in the Wilderness* when it was exhibited in June and July of 1860 in New York<sup>35</sup> before he left the city. Though not large as *Twilight in the Wilderness*, which measures 40 x 64 inches, *Wilderness Sunset*, at 28 x 58 ½ inches, is the largest landscape Heade had tried up to that point and is twice as wide as it is high. The painting's "extreme horizontal format without a dramatic focus"<sup>36</sup> and horizon line just below half are characteristics of a formula to be found in Heade's subsequent landscapes. Despite the red glow that Heade may have borrowed from Church, the marsh is a place Church never painted.

In these years, Heade began to leave out elements that are characteristic of the Hudson River School, such as tall trees, mountains, and lakes, and Heade ceased to "quote Church so directly."<sup>37</sup> He tried adding manmade elements such as sailboats, hunters, farmers, train tracks

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35. Debora Rindge, "Chronology" in Franklin Kelly et al. *Frederic Edwin Church* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1989), 164.

36. Barbara Novak and Timothy A. Eaton, *Martin Johnson Heade A Survey: 1840-1900*, (West Palm Beach, Florida: Eaton Fine Arts, 1996), 20.

37. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 37.

and other genre details, and also began to experiment with scale and proportion. Two important examples of Heade's experimentation during this period are *Hunters Resting* (1863) (fig. 12) with its hunters with guns and dogs in front of a marsh, and *Lynn Meadow* (1863) (fig. 13) with its two figures digging in the tidal mud flats crossed by train tracks. The dominant figures, such as those seen in *Hunters*, and the train tracks in *Lynn Meadow* are certainly not quotes from Church (and Heade, in fact, will not do another picture similar to *Hunters* again). Although he may not be deliberately borrowing from Church at this time, Church is still on his mind in *Haystacks on the Newburyport Marshes* (1862) (fig. 14). The broad bend in the river is clearly reminiscent of the curved shape carved out by the falls in *Niagara*. And even though the horizon line is just below the midpoint instead of just above, the proportions have the same feel as Church's work, despite the fact that Heade's painting is much smaller than *Niagara*.

In 1863, Heade did set off to follow Church's adventurous example with a trip to South America. He arrived in Rio de Janeiro in September of 1863 and stayed for eight months with the objective of painting hummingbirds. Even though Church inspired Heade to travel, Heade did not paint the same type of large visually dramatic subjects that were the focus of Church's South American work. Unlike Church, Heade showed no interest in mountains, volcanoes, or rushing rivers. Between this trip and his other trips to the tropics (Nicaragua in 1866 and Columbia, Panama and Jamaica in 1870), Heade continued to paint his usual American subject of shores and salt marshes. Heade's time in the tropics seems to have had little influence on his marsh paintings (although it clearly did impact his still lifes).

In 1866, when Heade was on his way to Nicaragua, Church sent him a note saying that, of course, Heade could store his paintings in Church's studio and that Church was looking

forward to seeing his Nicaraguan sketches upon his return.<sup>38</sup> This was the first letter in an exchange of correspondence between the two artists that went on for the next 34 years. When Heade returned from Nicaragua in late 1866, rather than renting his own studio in the Tenth Street Building, he moved into Church's studio and they shared the space until 1879. During this period, Heade acted as Church's agent during Church's long absences, and this arrangement mostly likely had economic advantages for both men. And in a notable break from his past practice, Heade stayed close to home in New York City, traveling only during the summer time and only in the northeast. In fact, he mostly stayed in New York until 1881. Judging from the correspondence, and perhaps not surprisingly, it is during these years when the two men shared a studio from 1866 to 1879, that they were the closest and had the most influence on each other. From Church's end at least, the letters show business arrangements, jokes, teasing, and even talk about art. After 1879, when Church began to devote more of his attention to Olana – his Hudson River estate and studio – and his health began to decline, the letters show less immediacy and humor, and shift mostly into discussing life events.

It was also in 1866, when Heade shared studio space with Church, that he began the transition to his more mature style in his marsh paintings. This mature style maintained the extreme horizontal format he developed in his earlier works, but he virtually discontinued the use of genre elements. Most significantly, he began to explore all kinds of weather, skies, clouds and the quality of light at different times of day over marshes. It is in this exploration of weather that Heade did his most original work. Rather than just depicting light and color in the sky as Church

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38. Frederic Edwin Church to Martin Johnson Heade, June 12, 1866, Martin Johnson Heade Papers, box 1 folder 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

did, he was “concerned with what happened in the sky during every kind of meteorological change.”<sup>39</sup>

A good example of this transition into his mature style is found in *Sunset on the Marshes* (fig. 15) of 1867 with tiny figures raking the hay in the background, and a river winding its way back to a glowing red sunset. Stebbins finds the composition of this painting to owe something to Church’s *Cotopaxi* (1862) (fig. 16): “the eye is led into the scene at left center and moves slowly across a detailed landscape toward a flat, distant horizon above which hangs a sun in a brilliant orange sky.”<sup>40</sup> In Heade’s painting, the haystack stands in place of the volcano, the river for the waterfall, and the clouds mimic the arch of the volcano’s ash plume.

The one extant letter from Heade to Church, written in 1868, discussed Heade’s use of the sun in one of his paintings, although it is not clear whether he is discussing this specific work. Perhaps most importantly, it suggests that Heade was quite aware of Church’s influence and that he must have had Church in mind, at least sometimes, when he was working:

Somebody out there wants one of my salt meadows, so I painted one – a sunrise – near Boston, intending to fill up the sky with clouds, but a person who came in was so charmed with the plain sky that I concluded to take his advice, so I tried the effects of one of your suns just peeping over the edge of the horizon, with some rays coming down from it – as if a man had tears in his eyes. That is the only touch in which I’ve imitated you that I did not intend – so don’t charge me with “stealing your thunder.”<sup>41</sup>

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39. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 121.

40. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 118.

41. Martin Johnson Heade to Frederic Edwin Church April 27, 1868, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Actually, Heade did not steal much of Church's thunder because Church did not typically paint thunderous skies. But Heade often did, and in this quote he admits to intentionally imitating Church at a time when they shared a studio. This proximity must have lent itself to conversations about works in progress and close observation of each other's methods and techniques.

Many fine examples of Heade's changeable skies, sunrises, sunsets, twilight and possible thunder can be seen in his paintings of Newburyport marsh. Newburyport marsh was a place Heade painted over and over again, and where he demonstrated his ability to perform endless variations on a single theme. In this marsh theme, the relatively small power of humans to alter the landscape is compared with the awesome and dynamic power of meteorological forces.

Topped by some very dark clouds and a band of blue sky, *Summer Showers* (1866-76) (fig. 17) shows a glimpse of a lovely day that is about to be interrupted by a rainstorm. The dark shadows cast by the clouds in the foreground overtake the haystacks and set the stage for the storm to come. The same marsh in a somewhat different composition, *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* (1866-76) (fig. 18), has the rain actually falling, but only in the foreground, while in the distance a farmer continues raking in warm sunlight that breaks through the clouds. In this picture, we see more of the river as it follows its winding route into the background, its path echoed by a series of haystacks. Then, in *Salt Marsh Hay* (1866-76) (fig. 19), Heade reverses this formula and puts the sun in the foreground and rain pouring down in the background. Most of Heade's marsh paintings are undated, so it is difficult to assign precise dates for them.<sup>42</sup> However, as *Salt March Hay* has been called a "compositional tour de force" and a "dazzlingly

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42. Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., "Marshes" in *Martin Johnson Heade*, Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 29.

complex yet exquisitely subtle picture,”<sup>43</sup> it is perhaps later than the others. Of these three pictures, *Salt Marsh Hay* is also the one that most harks back to Church’s *Niagara* because of the big curve of water that reaches two thirds of the way across the picture.

*Hayfields: A Clear Day* (fig. 20) (1871-80) is once again of the Newburyport marsh, but instead of variable weather, we see a beautiful sunny day. The few clouds on the horizon do not threaten rain but cast anodyne shadows on the farmers, who go about their work amid the haystacks. This calm and peaceful approach, with less threatening weather, is typical of the marsh scenes that Heade painted in the late 1870s, before he moved to Florida in 1883.<sup>44</sup>

The time and energy that Church focused on Olana beginning in the late 1870s largely kept him away from New York City, and perhaps contributed to Heade’s move to Florida. By the end of the 1870s, with his friend spending most of his time out of the city, Heade went back to his itinerant lifestyle. He left Church’s studio, stayed in various New York City hotels, traveled to Bridgeport, Philadelphia, and then Washington DC, where he took a studio in the Corcoran Building. He made a good friend in Eben J. Loomis, a mathematician and astronomer at the American Nautical Almanac, whose office was also in the Corcoran Building, but Heade was not happy there. Heade wrote to Loomis in December of 1882 describing his melancholy state of mind: “I’m convinced that Washington will not do for me.... It looks as if I was never to be settled again. I’ve wandered on the face of the earth ever since I left that studio in 10<sup>th</sup> St., with

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43. Barbara Novak and Timothy A. Eaton, *Martin Johnson Heade A Survey: 1840-1900*, (West Palm Beach, Florida: Eaton Fine Arts, 1996), 34.

44. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 125.

Church; & he has lost his health & spirits entirely.... I've rambled about so long that I'm in a very unsettled state of mind and can't be contented anywhere."<sup>45</sup>

The general decline in the popularity of the Hudson River School<sup>46</sup> must have contributed to Heade's mood as well as Church's decline. During the 1880s, Church's activities were severely restricted due to his arthritis. His work was limited to sketches and minor canvases, and he spent most of his time at Olana or in Mexico.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, Heade rallied and reinvented himself in Florida. He traveled to Florida in January of 1883 and by March he had discovered and become enamored with St. Augustine, so much so that he even purchased a house for the first time in his life.

Heade's next surprising move, at age sixty-four, was to announce his engagement to Elizabeth Smith, age forty. Church's response to all this news was as follows: "I heard... that you had bought a house in St. Augustine and wonder at it. That surprise gives way to the greater one of your engagement – not that that is extraordinary but because I have not had a hint that you were interested in any particular lady."<sup>48</sup> The couple was married on Oct. 9, 1883. In this new settled life in Florida, Heade found permanence, patrons and a whole new landscape for his artistic endeavors.

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45. Martin Johnson Heade to Eben J. Loomis, Dec. 2, 3, 12, 1882, Loomis-Wilder Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. as cited by Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 140.

46. Doreen Bolger Burke and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, "The Hudson River School in Eclipse," in *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, John K. Howat et al. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 89.

47. Howat, (2005), 175.

48. Frederic Edwin Church to Martin Johnson Heade, Sept. 10, 1883, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, box 1, folder 4.

The Florida landscape, though very different than New England, still provided many marshes for Heade to paint. In surveying the landscapes that Heade painted from 1883 until his death in 1904, one finds a mix of Florida scenes and northeastern marshes with haystacks. Some Florida scenes follow the pattern of his Newburyport marsh works, such as *Evening, Lake Alto, Florida* (1883) (fig. 21) with its clouds on the horizon and meandering waterways. Others, such as *Florida Sunset with Two Cows* (1887-1900) (fig. 22), use pools of standing water (characteristic of the Florida landscape) instead of winding water to draw the eye back to the horizon, and clumps of tropical trees instead of haystacks march into the distance. Both works follow his typical horizontal format and maintain the horizon line just below the midpoint. Stebbins theorizes that the lack of imminent storms in Heade's Florida marsh paintings, compared to his earlier marsh scenes, indicates that he found a new peace and tranquility in Florida.<sup>49</sup>

Heade's final homage to Church came as a result of a commission from Henry Morrison Flagler, a Standard Oil magnate, for a picture to decorate Flagler's new luxury hotel in St. Augustine, the Ponce de Leon. The sunset motif, the glow on the underside of the clouds, and the large expanse of reflective water in *The Great Florida Sunset* (1887) (fig. 23) all evoke Church's *Twilight in the Wilderness*. The painting's scale at eight feet wide – the biggest of Heade's career – is also definitely Church-like. Heade's swamp here is quite an appealing place, with tall palm tree silhouetted against a colorfully striped sky. It is not at all the dark and murky place that one might expect in a swamp, and it is alive with all manner of lilies and birds. The landscapes painted by Heade would not generally be considered wilderness scenes, but *The Great Florida*

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49. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 149.

*Sunset* is empty of any signs of man and, like *Twilight in the Wilderness*, is a powerful vision of an American landscape.

While Heade flourished in Florida, painting, exhibiting widely, and socializing,<sup>50</sup> Church spent much of his time in Mexico and painted very little. During these final years, the letters from Church to Heade extol the virtues of Mexico and often express his envy of Heade's good health and continued productivity. Church's last letter to Heade is dated June 7, 1899, shortly after the death of Church's wife. He thanked Heade for sending his condolences and wrote, "Time does not lessen friendship."<sup>51</sup> Church himself died less than a year later, on April 7, 1900. Heade painted until the very end of his life and, notably, his last two dated works happen to be of his favorite subject, *Newburyport Meadow* (1904) and *Tropical Landscape (Florida)* (1904). Martin Johnson Heade died in St. Augustine, Florida, on September 7, 1904.

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50. Favis, (2003), 45-50.

51. Frederic Edwin Church to Martin Johnson Heade, June 7, 1899, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, box 1, folder 5.

## CHAPTER 4.

### HOW AND WHY MARSHES

Heade may have borrowed from Church the extreme horizontal format and ratio of sky to land in his marsh paintings, but he did not appropriate Church's purpose or intent. As previously noted, Church's *Niagara Falls* had a great impact on Heade and undoubtedly influenced his marsh paintings. Niagara Falls served as a potent American icon and, in his painting of the falls, Church had a social purpose that reflected something of great importance to Americans in the middle of the nineteenth-century. Church wanted to show what was unique and grand about America, and that America had glories to rival anything that Europe had to offer. As Barbara Novak notes, "He [Church] is a paradigm of the artist who becomes the public voice of a culture, summarizing its beliefs, embodying its ideas, and confirming its assumptions.... Church clearly understood the need to provide America with appropriate images and icons."<sup>52</sup> According to one contemporary critic, he succeeded:

Even our painters catch the spirit, and Mr. Church has embodied it in his Niagara, perhaps the finest picture yet done by an American; at least, that which is fullest in feeling.... If it is inspired by Niagara, it is grand and sublime, it is natural to the nation, since nature herself has given the type; it is wild and ungovernable, mad at times, but all power is terrible at times. It is the effect of various causes; it is a true development of the American mind; the result of democracy, of individuality, of the expansion of each, of the liberty allowed to all; of ineradicable and lofty qualities in human nature. It is inspired not only by the irresistible cataract, but by the mighty forest, by the thousand miles of river, by the broad continent we call our own, by the onward march of civilization, by the conquering of savage areas; characteristic alike of the western backwoodsman, of the

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52. Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 67.

Arctic explorer, the southern filibuster, and the northern merchant. So, of course, it gets expression in our art.<sup>53</sup>

Heade's ambition and aims were more modest and, though many contemporary critics admired his work, they never applied such lofty sentiments to it.<sup>54</sup> His quiet, repeated arrangements of haystacks in the marshes of New England in an endless variety of weather and times of day make their own kind of spiritual statement and inspire a different kind of awe. Rather than reflecting nationalistic, moral, or scientific thought, they are more in keeping with the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. In "Nature," for example, Emerson writes:

To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty; and in the same field, it beholds, every hour, a picture which was never seen before, and which shall never be seen again. The heavens change every moment, and reflect their glory or gloom on the plains beneath.... The succession of native plants in the pasture and roadside, which make the silent clock by which time tells the summer hours, will make even the divisions of the day sensible to a keen observer.<sup>55</sup>

Even for many a keen observer in Heade's time, however, marshes were considered far from picturesque and were thought to be unhealthy and associated "muck and mosquitoes."<sup>56</sup> Marshes, even as painted by Heade, are flat and undramatic. They lack waterfalls, rock formations, mountains or tall trees to attract the eye and create interest. Instead, marshes bring to mind mud, fetid water, and all manner of insects and foul odors. Helpful in understanding Heade's choice of such an apparently uninspiring subject is an observation by David C. Miller:

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53. Adam Badeau, *The Vagabond*, New York, 1859 as cited by David Huntington in *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), 67-68.

54. See Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade* (1999), 141-148, for a full account of contemporary reviews of Heade's work.

55. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Centenary ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903) vol. 1, 18.

56. Favis, (2003), 92.

“In the 1850s and 1860s Americans began turning to new landscapes to express their changing perception of nature.... [N]ature was becoming less a source of moral insight and more a sanctuary from an increasingly urbanized and technological environment.”<sup>57</sup> Heade found his sanctuary in a landscape that was always a mix of land and water, or always between liquid and solid, and in so doing rejected the conventions that Church had embraced.

Nancy Frazier offers another explanation for Heade’s attachment to marshes: they were once an important source of agricultural and economic activity and represented a disappearing way of life that that Heade wanted to capture and memorialize. Frazier argues that Heade sought to remind people that “salt-marsh gardens were in trouble.”<sup>58</sup> The hunters, farmers, hay wagons, haystacks, rivers and meadows of the marshes were vanishing as he commemorated them in his work.

Heade’s attachment to the marshes can also be seen in his everyday life. Although there were no seashores or salt marshes on the farm in Lumberville, Pennsylvania, where he grew up, Heade did spend many hours hunting and fishing on the Delaware River near his home. As an adult, he was a dedicated hunter and took his fishing gear and guns with him even on his foreign travels. In letters to friends, he often mentioned the hunting and fishing conditions.<sup>59</sup> The hunters depicted in his earlier marsh scenes eventually disappeared from his painting along with any

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57. David C. Miller, *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.

58. Nancy Frazier, “Mute Gospel: The Salt Marshes of Martin Johnson Heade.” *Prospects* 23 (1998), 197.

59. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 44.

other narrative elements, but Heade himself continued to be a hunter even in his later years in Florida.

Interestingly, between 1880 and 1904, Heade wrote more than 125 articles and letters to editor for the magazine *Forest and Stream*, the predecessor to *Field and Stream*, under the pen name Didymus. Didymus's subjects were hunting, fishing, conservation, and land management, and he was an early advocate for the conservation of marshlands and wildlife.<sup>60</sup> Both his writings and his paintings evidence Heade's devotion to marshlands and his dedication to the life of an outdoorsman.

Many of Heade's patrons must have shared a sentimental attachment to a vanishing pastoral setting. Marshes were places where people did not live or engage in traditional farming. Nor were they untamed wilderness areas like those favored by Church. Rather, they occupied a kind of middle ground of marginal agricultural land with touches of wilderness. In reality, daily life in the marshes was difficult and, by the later years of the nineteenth century, marshlands were hardly viable for agriculture.<sup>61</sup> Heade's marsh pictures with their scenes of daily life – haystacks, hay wagons, men and boys working – venerated the past in a way that his middle-class patrons wanted to hang in their homes.<sup>62</sup> Through the years, Heade's paintings generally

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60. Timothy A. Eaton, *Martin Johnson Heade: The Floral and Hummingbird Studies from the St. Augustine Historical Society* (Boca Raton Fla.: Boca Raton Museum of Art, 1992), 40.

61. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 126.

62. Ibid.

sold well and were priced between \$75 and \$300 – enough for Heade to make a living when he sold fifteen to twenty works a year.<sup>63</sup>

Heade's personal relationship to marshes can also be seen in his working method, especially in contrast to that of Church. In preparation for *Niagara*, Church visited the falls at least five times at different times of year, in different weather conditions, and from different vantage points. From March to October of 1856, he created a large portfolio of sketches, which he used as sources back in his studio. He then painted several large oil sketches as he worked toward refining his final full-scale composition, which was exhibited to the public on May 1, 1857. This process, based on detailed observation, was typical of the way that Church worked.<sup>64</sup> A canvas "where every square inch is full of thought"<sup>65</sup> is the result of the time and effort that Church spent gathering scientific and natural details.

Heade's working method was very different. Rather than using drawings as Church did, as a record of a specific place or scientific facts later to be recreated on canvas, Heade's drawings apparently functioned as memory aids for the pictures he already had in his mind's eye. Perhaps for this reason, Heade did not make nearly as many preliminary drawings or sketches as Church did. In his catalogue raisonné of Heade's work, Theodore Stebbins is able to document only about 150 drawings in total, compared to more than 700 drawings and oil sketches by Church at the Olana State Historic Site alone.<sup>66</sup>

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63. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 107.

64. Kelly, (1989), 51.

65. Huntington, (1966), 69.

66. Carr, (1996), 492.

Heade was not known for his abilities as a draftsman,<sup>67</sup> and his early training and background did not allow him even to approach the drawing skills of Church. Church's pencil drawings and oil sketches are full of details and often are works of art in and of themselves. Most of Heade's sketches, on the other hand, are fairly basic and are concerned with distance and space rather than the details of nature. Heade's earliest sketches date to the period when he first arrived in New York City and gave up figurative painting, so it appears that they were based on the working method of Church and the other landscape painters associated with the Tenth Street Building.

When making comparisons between Church and Heade, it is perhaps less important to think about the disparity in the quality or quantity of their sketches and more important to focus on the role their sketches played in the working process. For Church, a drawing or sketch was documentation of a specific scene and details to be transferred to canvas. For Heade, it was simply a reminder of an image to be included in a scene he already knew.

Other Hudson River School painters made many oil sketches of landscapes, while Heade made almost none.<sup>68</sup> Instead, a satisfactory image from a sketch would reappear over and over in his paintings. Two examples are the pointy-topped haystack and the meandering stream that appear in many of his marsh paintings. For instance, the haystack in the sketch *Haystack with a Pointed Top* (c.1858) (fig. 24) can be seen in *Sudden Showers, Newbury Marshes* (1866-76) (fig. 18) and again in *Salt Marsh Hay* (1866-76) (fig. 19). The stream that meanders through a series of pictures of the marsh in Marshfield, Massachusetts, is derived from sketch labeled "E.

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67. Stebbins, *Life and Work* (2000), 169.

68. Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade* (1999), 158.

Marshfield.” (1861-76) (fig. 25). The pictures are *Marshland Meadows, Massachusetts* (1866-76) (fig. 26), *View of Marshfield* (1866-76) (fig. 27) and *Marshfield Meadows*, (1877-78) (fig. 27). Very similar streams wind their way through his marshes long after Heade ceased to visit them. Although Heade relied on his stream and haystack pencil sketches of earlier years, it appears that he relied much more on his memories and his personal feelings for the marsh pictures he painted for over forty years. Heade’s everyday marsh pictures did not use details from recognizable places or landmarks as Church did in his work.

## CHAPTER 5.

### CONCLUSION

In facing the challenge of working in the shadow of Frederic Edwin Church, Martin Johnson Heade clearly chose his own path. He borrowed a few key compositional elements from his friend and colleague and sometimes used Church as inspiration, but he never tried to imitate Church. Heade's marsh paintings, in particular, represent an important departure from Church and other landscape painters of the day. The marsh landscape that Heade explored in more than 120 different paintings was a subject that Church never sought to portray.

In some ways, marshes are not really even landscapes. They certainly are not the type of monumental scenes that Church sought out, embellished, and captured in his work. Heade's marshes are neither water nor land; they are constantly in a state of flux as the tides go in and out, as the weather and seasons change, and as the hay is harvested and stacked. Church purposely composed and edited his landscapes with very specific botanical and geologic details, thus fixing his pictures in a specific time and place. His *Niagara*, for example, forever captures the legendary falls in a way that makes the painting almost as famous as the falls themselves, and the image is fixed in our minds. While Church's pictures have a pervasive sense of place, Heade's marshes are not anchored in that way. He does not necessarily celebrate a specific location because his work comes more from his imagination and memory and evokes the passage of time through nature. In his marsh paintings, Heade contemplates the rhythms and cycles of nature in a place that is familiar but not precise.

It is also clear that Church and Heade had very different views about the purpose of their work. Heade did not embrace either his colleague's subjects or his motivations. Church very

consciously sought to capture and express beliefs about American exceptionalism that were important in the mid-nineteenth century. In comparison with Church's major landscapes, Heade's marsh paintings are much more modest in size and in symbolic content. He was a talented and original painter who stood apart in his choice of subject matter and through his efforts to portray natural places that were more commonplace and less exotic. In his marshes, the human presence is small, especially compared to the power of nature in his skies, and he loved and cared very much about this view of nature. Marshes were his place, not Church's, and through them he asserted his independence from Church. In some ways, he was obviously inspired and influenced by Church, but he used what he learned from Church to create his own moments of reverence and awe.

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