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The “Dry-Lighted Soul”: Ignites: Emerson and His Soul-Mate Caroline Sturgis As Seen in Her Houghton Manuscripts

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"Do you like to know that the memory of a day spent with you is more appealing than the day itself. Restless with you, I am calm & assured in the remembrance, & wish the hours back like noble opportunities. My slow faculties are late in overtaking rare music, which yet comes to them at last out of the voice of my friend." —*Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Tilton ed. v. VIII, p. 44, Ralph Waldo Emerson to Caroline Sturgis, August 2, 1845

“When you write me a loving letter, dear Waldo, I feel as if I must instantly begin a constant correspondence with you, so it is very dangerous unless you wish the wild sea-breezes should often blow over your meadows, or the intrusive child be running up your tower-stairs to ask what all those great telescopes are for." —*Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Tilton ed. vol. VII, p. 607, Caroline Sturgis to Emerson, Cohasset, 29 Aug. 1844

Current Emerson scholarship, gaining momentum at the bicentennial of his birth in 2003, succeeds at last in fleshing out an American cultural icon too long shrouded by hagiographic haze. Re-examination of our great prophet through the lens of feminist and race criticism and the dynamics of feeling coincides with mounting scholarly interest in the women of the Transcendental movement too long relegated to minor roles in Emerson’s life in particular and in the American Renaissance writ large. Recent studies of Emerson’s Aunt Mary Moody Emerson, his wife Lidian and daughter Ellen, and his close female friends Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody highlight their influence on Emerson’s thought and action while augmenting their contribution to Transcendentalism as a whole. Now, thanks to the rich trove of manuscripts at Harvard’s Houghton Library, and also at the Smith College Sophia Smith Collection, another significant member of Emerson’s circle of female friends and relations, Caroline Sturgis, can take her place in this con-

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1 From a poem by Ellen Sturgis Hooper, Caroline Sturgis’s sister, who characterized Emerson as a “dry-lighted soul” at whose birth Bacchus “forgot/That drop from out the purple grape to press/Which is his gift to man....” The line is a reference to Emerson’s comment that “Dry light makes the best souls.” Poems of Ellen Sturgis Hooper, privately printed, 1871, Houghton Library.
stellation of significant Transcendental women. The Sturgis archives at Houghton and Smith not only establish Sturgis as a key proponent of Transcendentalism and highly accomplished poet and artist, illuminating the aesthetic side of the movement, but also shed new light on Emerson, connecting and illuminating a trail of references to Sturgis in Emerson's essays, poems, and journals. Seen in conjunction with the Sturgis papers and Emerson-Sturgis epistolary exchange, these references reveal the centrality of Sturgis in Emerson's intellectual and emotional life. In Sturgis Emerson found not only the embodiment of self reliance, but also his soul mate and feminine counterpart.

Like other women of the Transcendental circle, Sturgis, later Tappan after her marriage to William Aspinwall Tappan in 1847, suffered for decades from two errors of nineteenth through mid-twentieth century scholarship, that is from bowdlerization of Emerson's image as the "Sage of Concord" and diminution of the role of his female supporting cast. While completely excised from James Elliot Cabot's early two-volume authorized biography of Emerson, Sturgis was often portrayed in later biographies and histories of Transcendentalism as flighty, quixotic, and volatile, the cartoon of a Goethe-reading, Brook Farm-visiting, poetry-writing Transcendental bohemian more at home in Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance than in any real setting. Perhaps the most unflattering portrait of Sturgis appears in Richard P. Stebbins' "Berkshire Quartet: Hawthornes and Tappans at Tanglewood, 1850–1851" that recounts her worsening relations with Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne during their sojourn in the Red House on the Tappan estate in Stockbridge, the house that appears in both Wonder-Tales for Girls and Boys (1852) and Tanglewood Tales (1853). Although Stebbins describes Sturgis as "high-strung, temperamental," he admits that she is "by no means ungenerous" and that, while Hawthorne's accusations of Sturgis are extant, documentary evidence for her side of the story is lacking. Stebbins documents Hawthorne letters and notebook entries that portray Sturgis as having inhumane sentiments towards animals and, by extension, people, and as being particularly mean-spirited. Stebbins cites a letter from Sophia Hawthorne to her sister Elizabeth Palmer Peabody relating that "Caroline has

2 As Caroline Sturgis became Caroline Sturgis Tappan after she married William Aspinwall Tappan in 1847, the Houghton archives are called the Tappan Papers and constitute the largest portion of the Caroline Sturgis manuscripts, bMS 1221. These papers were deposited at Houghton in 1942 by her granddaughter Rosamund Sturgis Tappan Dixey Brooks Hepburn. Her remaining papers were deposited at Smith College Sophia Smith Collection in 1989 by her great granddaughter, Daphne Brooks Prout. The Smith College Museum of Art owns Sturgis' vast collection of rare nineteenth century albumen photographs from the Grand Tour.

3 When Emerson's side of the Emerson-Sturgis epistolary exchange was finally published in Eleanor Tilton's final four volumes of Emerson's letters in 1991, most but not all of Sturgis' letters to Emerson were included in the text or in a footnote to their corresponding letter. When Sturgis letters are quoted that are not in Tilton, they are identified by their location at either Houghton or Smith.
made herself strangely disagreeable, and crowned her strange behavior with an overt act which I could not have thought possible in a person of good taste, to say nothing of Christian sentiment (but I believe she despises Christ) and decent manners and human friendliness." Stebbins cannot understand why the Tappans and Hawthornes were not more sociable during this sojourn, "if only to discuss the sad fate of Margaret Fuller, well known to both families, who was drowned with her Italian husband and small son in a shipwreck off New York's Fire Island on 18 June, 1850." Yet, this traumatic event, a great loss to Sturgis as Fuller's closest female friend, may be precisely the reason for Sturgis' unflattering behavior as she no doubt knew that Hawthorne did not share her regard for Fuller. Ironically, while Sturgis began in the late summer of 1850 to gather letters and cherished memories for Emerson's two-volume *Memoir of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852), Hawthorne was doing research for *The Blithedale Romance* that would present a negative caricature of Fuller. It is hard to take Hawthorne's opinion as gospel when, as late as 1864, Emerson could write in his journal, "Caroline Tappan has perfect manners."

Other unflattering or dismissive portrayals of Sturgis abound. In his two volume biography of Emerson, post-war critic Ralph Rusk characterizes Sturgis as one of Fuller's "beautiful people," a "vivacious" and "an unconventional young woman," while Gay Wilson Allen's *Waldo Emerson* (1981) sees Sturgis as a "vivacious brunette of eighteen" who "looked like a Gypsy." Underestimating the strong mutual attraction between Emerson and Sturgis, Allen writes "That Caroline Sturgis had actually fallen in love with Emerson is improbable, but he took pains to warn her against the possibility" (Allen, p. 352). Perhaps failing to read many of Emerson's letters to Sturgis still unpublished at the time, John McAleer in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Days of Encounter* (1984) believes that Emerson "sought to move their relationship to the plane of the ideal, in effect taking her out of emotional contention." Each of these accounts tries to preserve the myth of Emerson as a sterile philosopher living on an ideal plane, stripping him of the emotion and passion so prevalent in his letters, journals, and poems.

Some eminent scholars, including Carl Strauch and Eleanor Tilton, encounter Sturgis as a satellite to Margaret Fuller during her own intense interactions with Emerson in the fateful summer of 1840 when Fuller apparently made emotional demands on Emerson that he could not reciprocate. Focusing on the series of letters exchanged by Emerson, Fuller, Sturgis, Anna Barker, and Samuel Gray Ward in late

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August of 1840, Strauch’s “Hatred’s Swift Repulsions” (1968) and Tilton’s “The True Romance of Anna Hazard Baker and Samuel Gray Ward” (1987) unravel the convoluted connections among these protagonists and try to differentiate the personal motives tangled up in their experiments with Transcendental friendship. For Strauch and Tilton, Fuller is the central protagonist in a narrative of unrequited passion frustrated by Emerson’s emotional reserve. This interpretation is corroborated by a famous journal passage in which Emerson recounts that Fuller “taxed me, as often before, so now more explicitly with inhospitality of soul. She & Caroline would gladly be my friends, yet our intercourse is not friendship, but literary gossip. I number count & weigh but do not love. …Yet would nothing be so grateful to me as to melt once for all these icy barriers….” Strauch shows how the events of August, 1840 contributed to Emerson’s essay “Friendship” as well as some of his poems on friendship of the early 1840’s including “The Visit” and “To Rhea.” In these accounts, Sturgis is portrayed as an emotionally needy person who had a short-lived relationship with Emerson mediated by their mutual friend Fuller. While these studies succeed in demythologizing Emerson and better understanding Fuller, Sturgis remains in the background in a supporting role. But an examination of Emerson’s journals and poems in the months and years following this encounter in conjunction with Sturgis’ poems and drawings at Houghton and Smith reveal that while Emerson was distancing himself from Fuller, he was deepening his relationship with Sturgis. It would continue to grow, resulting by 1841 in poems very different from his message to Fuller in “To Rhea” that she must content herself with Platonic love, but rather singing of a lovely maiden of nature.

Increased interest in Fuller in the 1970’s and 80’s as the women’s studies movement gained momentum demanded a more nuanced view of Sturgis as Fuller’s closest female friend. Placing Sturgis’ letters and poems in the context of Carroll Smith Rosenberg’s “female world of love and ritual” as well as the multiple studies of Romantic friendship began to accord Sturgis a more serious persona and to rescue her from two-dimensional characterization. In 1990, Eleanor Tilton’s long-awaited four-volume edition

8  JMNWE, vol. 7, p. 509.

40 Harvard Library Bulletin
of Emerson's letters added many of Emerson's letters to Sturgis missing from Rusk's 1939 edition due to their unavailability or Rusk's decision not to include them, as well as most of Sturgis' letters to Emerson. But although Tilton sought to give Sturgis a larger place in Emerson studies, her primary focus is still Emerson, and looking at their correspondence without the corroborating journals and poems lessens the impact of the letters. Also, although Tilton prints most of the Sturgis replies in the text or in footnotes, she does not include all, excluding some letters that add depth to their relationship. Tilton had decided not to reprint Emerson's letters to Carlyle, carefully edited by Joseph Slater, because "the correspondence seems inseparable." The Emerson-Sturgis epistolary exchange, at least as much as the Emerson-Carlyle correspondence, is equally inseparable. Also, Tilton is working with the letters alone, minus Sturgis' poems and paintings. Just as the writing of Mary Moody Emerson qualifies her as an important figure in the Transcendental movement even though it was never published, so too Sturgis' unpublished poems and un-reproduced drawings and paintings claim for her a more central place in the Transcendental pantheon through their influence on Emerson.

Understanding Sturgis' place in the Transcendental narrative is further advanced by Caleb Crain's American Sympathy (2001) and Robert D. Richardson's Emerson: the Mind on Fire (1995). Most important, Crain and Richardson confront the fissures in Emerson's relationship with Lidian that impelled him to seek emotional satisfaction outside of marriage. Crain builds on Strauch's thesis that Emerson immersed himself in the emotions and drama of Fuller's circle, only to pull back when faced with real intimacy, but adds a new dimension by suggesting that Emerson found greater satisfaction in a deep friendship with the only male figure in the group, Samuel Gray Ward. Crain demonstrates that Emerson maintained a close bond with Ward until the end of his life, fulfilling a need for a homosocial or homoerotic attachment. For Crain, however, Sturgis is still a minor figure in Emerson's universe who, along with Fuller, "had to accept the new limits Emerson set to their intimacies with him" for "as quickly as their friendship had overheated, it crashed" (Crain, p.231).

Richardson, like Crain, acknowledges that by the early 1840's, "Emerson was living emotionally, though not physically, in what would now be called an open marriage" but goes further concerning Sturgis (Richardson, p. 329). At last delineating Sturgis from Fuller, he sees Sturgis as having her own separate relationship with Emerson and as the recipient of Emerson's affections. Richardson acknowledges that, with Sturgis, Emerson showed more emotional openness than ever before. Nevertheless, Richardson believes that Lidian knew and accepted the extent of Emerson's attachment

to Sturgis and that his closeness never revealed itself in physical intimacy. Richardson also limits the impact of Sturgis on Emerson to the intense period in the 1840’s when he was experimenting with bonds outside of marriage, thus restricting the duration of Emerson’s attachment to Sturgis. True, Emerson’s intense correspondence with Sturgis flourished in the 1840’s and declined after her marriage in 1847, but as we see from the journals, Sturgis remained a constant in Emerson’s life as an example of human possibility. Finally, Richardson does not add to his investigation the textual evidence of Sturgis’ effect on Emerson as seen not just in the letters but also in the journals and poems. Nevertheless, Richardson’s work opens the door for a deeper investigation of the various genres providing proof for Emerson’s deepening emotional connection to Sturgis.

What becomes clear by following the trail of references to Sturgis in Emerson’s letters, journals, poems, and essays, and by seeing her drawings and reading her poems in manuscript form at Houghton and Smith, is that Emerson noticed and sought out Sturgis earlier than previously known, that their relationship existed separately from what each one shared with Margaret Fuller, that Lidian did not know the depth of their attachment, and that Sturgis provided Emerson not only with an alternate source of emotional support that continued until his death but also with a constant well of aesthetic gratification like that from Michelangelo and Wordsworth. Even better than Renaissance masters and Romantic poets, her paintings and poetry were home-grown and spontaneous, embodying Emerson’s own developing Transcendentalist aesthetic. Far from keeping their relationship on an ideal plane as suggested by many biographers and critics, Emerson needed Sturgis to substantiate and embody the characters he described in his poems and essays, from the self-reliant individual and poet of the essays, to the heroines in his poems. Sturgis enabled him to believe in the real existence of a new kind of American individual that he believed was essential to the spiritual health of the Republic. This person was not imagined but was the real Caroline Sturgis, among others. And Emerson clearly conceived of these heroes by interacting with Sturgis in the flesh, by hearing her speak and watching her move, and by physical closeness in their many walks alone in the Concord and Newburyport woods. Emerson's letters and poems reveal an intense physical need for Sturgis. While his relationship with Samuel Gray Ward may have been mediated through the written word, his epistolary relationship with Sturgis was the extension of real physical contact that may have been chaste in its quality but not in its degree.

Transcendental Muse: Caroline Sturgis in Emerson’s Journals and Poetry

In Mary Moody Emerson and the Origins of Transcendentalism (1998), Phyllis Cole suggests that Emerson’s Aunt Mary was the original source of inspiration to Emerson, the derivation and support of his fiery mind and passionate soul. It was his Aunt Mary who sanctioned his forays into poetic expression and antinomian passion and who
provided him with a role model of Romantic enthusiasm. Yet Cole acknowledges that Mary Moody doubted her own ability to reach poetic heights and saw herself as a catalyst for the consummation of her nephew's spiritual and aesthetic journey rather than her own. Aunt Mary, as Phyllis Cole explains, at once cultivated and resisted her role as Greek oracle, sibyl, or prophetess, ambivalent about her own poetic abilities and access to divine communication. Aunt Mary strove towards the unattainable goal of female Romantic muse, introducing her young nephew to Madame de Stael's Corinne but never seeing herself as the improvvisatrice on the steps of the Roman Capitol. Sturgis, however, became this Muse to Emerson, both inspiring him to greater heights of poetic rapture and mysticism while simultaneously creating poetry and art worthy of Corinne. Sturgis was a Romantic poet-priest and artist of the sublime as well as Muse. As Emerson had asked his Aunt Mary to "bequeath me the legacy of all your recorded thought," so he would come to beg Sturgis for her poetry, drawings, and letters, hungry for inspiration from a sibyl willing not just to bequeath thought for Emerson's later use, but also to create poetry and drawings in the Transcendental mode. Sturgis was prepared to take on the larger role of the woman poet-priest that Aunt Mary had reserved for men.

Sturgis differed from other significant women in Emerson's life not just because of her unusual artistic gifts and bold personality but also because she was born in 1819, two generations after his commanding Aunt Mary Moody, a full generation after Lidian, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, and Elizabeth Hoar, and half a generation after Fuller. Benefiting from Fuller as her teacher, Sturgis imbibed canonical Romantic texts still new or daring to her elders in the Transcendental circle, and, thanks to these actual women ahead of her as well as the heroines of Madame de Stael, George Sand and others, grew up with a clear sense of expanding female prerogatives. Less daunted by social strictures, Sturgis accepted Emerson's dare to be herself and flout convention.

Sturgis' strong individualism claimed Emerson's attention as early as 1837 when she was only eighteen and not as is commonly thought a year later through Fuller. He first noticed her difference from other Bostonians of her class in her art, a calling that would remain her lifelong pursuit. Emerson wrote in his journal on March 19, 1837, "Caroline Sturgis can sketch with invention; others can draw as well, but cannot design. I call it self-distrust,—a fear to launch away into the deep which they might freely and safely do." (JMNRWE, Volume V, p. 288.) Already, Emerson sets Sturgis apart from the other women of Boston who are limited by their subservience to convention while she feels the prerogatives of freedom. While they suffer from "self-distrust," Sturgis by contrast can "launch away into the deep." In drawing "with invention," Sturgis was both self-reliant individual and precursor to his developing image of the American artist-prophet who does not rely on European prototypes in art. In using the term "self-distrust," an invented word that begs for consideration of its opposite, it is possible that Emerson was already connecting Sturgis in his thoughts with the term "self-reliance" and the

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essay of that name that he would write in October of 1840, during the intensification of his friendship with Sturgis.

After this encounter, Emerson soon embedded Sturgis in his lecture and subsequent essay on "Heroism" given on January 24, 1838. Emerson had noticed Sturgis again, noting in another journal entry of December 8, 1837 that "The fair girl whom I saw in town expressing so decided & proud choice of influences, so careless of pleasing, so willful & so lofty a will, inspires the wish to come nearer & to speak to this nobleness." Repeating the word "will," Emerson emphasizes Sturgis' ability actually to exhibit the defiance he had cultivated in his own behavior since Aunt Mary championed this trait during his Harvard days, a trait that compelled Emerson to transmute this December 8 journal entry on Sturgis into a significant passage in "Heroism":

The fair girl, who repels interference by a decided and proud choice of influences, so careless of pleasing, so willful and lofty, inspires every beholder with somewhat of her own nobleness. The silent heart encourages her; O friend, never strike sail to a fear. Come into port greatly, or sail with God the seas. Not in vain you live, for every passing eye is cheered and refined by the vision.

Metaphors of sailing tie this passage not only to Emerson's journal entry of December 8th but also to his earlier passage of March 19th where he spoke of launching "into the deep." This interplay of journal passage to lecture and essay is important in identifying Emerson as the "silent heart" who speaks to Sturgis obliquely but intimately in a way that he could not yet attempt face to face. Already, Emerson looks to Sturgis as his heroine, who cheers his passing eye. Casting Sturgis in the role of feminine imperial self, a prototype grasped at but abandoned by Aunt Mary, he encourages her to continue on the path of defying Boston social convention and gender roles.

Sturgis would have heard these lines when Emerson spoke at the Masonic Temple in Boston on January 24, 1838, but she also apparently heard them again in a private manuscript reading on January 25th at the home of Ellis Gray Loring. She and Emerson were also guests at Loring's dinner on January 22nd, another indication that they met before the summer and not under the auspices of Fuller. In a letter to Emerson of March 4th, 1838, Sturgis asks for the lecture manuscript for the second lecture on "The Heart" for herself:

12 The canonical view is that Emerson met Sturgis in 1835 but only came to notice her when she visited Concord with Margaret Fuller on June 2, 1838, which is disproved by these two journal entries. In truth, they had each long nourished an attraction to the other before Sturgis’ came to Concord with Fuller. See Albert J. von Frank, An Emerson Chronology, New York: Macmillan, 1994. Von Frank gives the dates and here we connect the dots.

My dear Mr. Emerson,

We have been altogether too unrelenting in our pursuit of the promised lecture, & I am sure the ladies who wished to hear it would be very sorry to have you read it on Wednesday, or even on Monday, for after delivering one lecture you will surely be too much fatigued to read another. We should be contented with having heard all your lectures once, & with the opportunity of hearing the same course in Cambridge, & a new one in Boston, & we ought not to ask you to read any one of them over again to us. 14

Sturgis uses the plural pronoun “we” and refers to “ladies who wished to hear” his lecture, masking her own insistence that she hear it again. Her rhetorical strategy of attributing this need to a group of women and of apologizing but still insisting on the favor covers her persistence with feminine deference. She apparently also got possession of the lecture on “Heroism,” for Emerson importunes her that “I am quite sorry to disturb you in the possession of the poor MSS it cost you so much perseverance to obtain, but this morning I remembered that I had been asked to read the Lecture on Heroism to some thirsty souls in the wilderness....” 15 Her determined request to read his lectures suggests that the favor was for her and that she knew his words had particular meaning for her.

Emerson’s lectures did have particular meaning for her. The sailing imagery in “Heroism” is especially significant and possibly intended as a confidential embedded message to Sturgis in light of her difficult family history, well-known among the Boston elite and undoubtedly known to Emerson given earlier references in his journals to Caroline’s father as the quintessential sea-captain. 16 William Sturgis, one of America’s first great merchant millionaires, had made his fortune on dangerous sailing expeditions to trade furs with Indians of the Northwest territories, even mastering their language, and in 1822 contributed an article to the North American Review on “Russian Claims to the Northwest Coast of America.” He later wrote an important pamphlet, The Oregon Question (1845), during the controversy between the United States and Great Britain over the Oregon boundary. He named his third daughter after the first ship he commanded, the Caroline, which he took over at only nineteen after the captain was deemed incompetent by his men. The lines “O friend, never strike sail to a fear. Come into port greatly, or sail with God the seas” turned her father’s vocation from an actual

14 Tilton refers to this letter from Sturgis in a footnote to the March 3, 1838 letter to her from Emerson, but does not publish Sturgis’ letter. See Eleanor Tilton, ed. The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, New York: Columbia University Press (hereafter LRWE), vol. VII, p. 299.


16 For example, Emerson quoted a passage from William Sturgis in his journal of 1831, p. 23 that “You send out to the Sandwich Islands one missionary & twenty five refutations in the crew of the vessel” said Mr. Sturgis.” See JMNREWE, vol. 3, p.23.

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to a symbolic intellectual and spiritual voyaging possible for a gifted girl of antebellum times and gave her an intellectual and spiritual task of equal demands to that of a sailor. The words "never strike sail to a fear" take on the added significance of a covert message of faith in and encouragement for Sturgis in light of the fact that her favorite older brother, father's namesake, and prized Harvard student had tragically drowned after being hit by the sail's boom in 1834 at the age of sixteen while learning navigation on one of his father's ships. This family tragedy deeply affected Sturgis' parents, sending her mother into seclusion and severe depression, leaving Caroline as a virtual orphan, and so affecting her father that he never again allowed the boy's name to be spoken in his presence.17

Sturgis echoes Emerson's allusion "Come into port greatly" by beginning her most famous poem in *The Dial* for October, 1840, "Greatly to be/ Is enough for me./ Is enough for thee." The interplay of their relationship between actual encounters and textual encounters began to weave a web of clandestine allusion that continued throughout their lives as another form of private correspondence. For example, Sturgis entitled one of her unpublished journals at Houghton "Touch and go," which was Emerson's own phrase in his journal, obviously shared with Sturgis, for the brief encounters between like-minded individuals: "It is a great happiness when two good minds meet both cultivated & with such difference of learning as to excite each the other's curiosity & such similarity as to understand each other's allusions in the Touch-&-go of conversation."18 Emerson related in a late journal passage that he and Sturgis alone knew that fellow Transcendentalist Charles King Newcomb was actually the real genius, not Emerson, but that Emerson had the practical nature to capitalize on what gifts he had:

There are better pleasures than to be first. I keenly enjoyed Caroline's pointed remark, after we had both known Charles Newcomb, that "no one could compare with him in original genius," though I knew that she saw, as I saw, that his mind was far richer than mine, which fact nobody but she and I knew or suspected. Nay, I rejoiced in this very proof of her perception. And now, sixteen years later, we two alone possess this secret still.19

In a touching passage in a later journal entry, during which Emerson apologized to Sturgis that he was "slow, derelict, and dumb to you, in all your absence! I shall regret this as long as I live," he repeated this reference to their shared secret: "How strange that Charles King Newcomb, whose secret you & I alone have, should come to write novels."20 The secrets Emerson kept with Sturgis were not entrusted to Lidian, or anyone else.

18 *JNMRWE*, vol. 5, p. 10.
19 *JNMRWE*, vol. 14, p. 279.
20 *JNMRWE*, vol. 15, p. 8.

46 Harvard Library Bulletin
In bolstering Sturgis in her protest against antebellum convention, Emerson knew he was penetrating right to the heart of Brahmin Boston, to the center of American financial success and materialism where his protest would be most biting. The women Emerson knew well in the 1830’s were the daughters or wives of ministers, professors, lawyers, and shopkeepers while Sturgis belonged to the upper echelons of American wealth. Quentin Anderson marvels that “This settled, domestic, responsible man, husband, father, and townsman, devoted the crucial years up to the mid-fourties of the century to making public his fantasy of the primacy of the imperial self.”21 Caroline Sturgis went on the adventure with him. He no doubt referred to her again in “Heroism” when he said, “Be true to your own act, and congratulate yourself if you have done something strange and extravagant, and broken the monotony of a decorous age.” The words “strange and extravagant” echo the words Emerson had used in another early journal passage about Sturgis, where he wrote on June 12, 1838 that Sturgis should cultivate “crustiness and tartness” and that there is hope “in Extravagance, in routine, none.” In their growing interconnectedness, Emerson gave her the courage and permission to rebel, speaking to her indirectly in his sermon-like lectures, while she showed him the untrammelled possibilities available to the human spirit. A later entry reads, “Caroline’s best poems are her blasphemies, which greatly take me.”22 Emerson and Sturgis blasphemed together. They each had experienced the harsher realities of nature, Sturgis in the loss of her brother and virtual abandonment by her mother and Emerson in a series of devastating losses of his young wife, brothers, and later his son Waldo.

Given Emerson’s belief in eyesight as the primary sense, his stress on Sturgis’ ability to see indicates his confidence in her powers of prophecy. Emerson admired that Sturgis could see “clearly & steadily through the veils.”23 He wrote in his journal as late as 1859, long after scholars believe he had cut ties with her, that “these Cassandra’s are never extinct always born. Sarah Margaret Fuller was one, & Caroline Sturgis hardly less, & Charles King Newcomb a Delphic Oracle.”24 She was his “Cassandra” whose “eyes are a compliment to the human race; that steady look from year to year, makes Phidian sculpture & Poussin landscape still real & contemporary, & a poet might well dedicate himself to the fine task of expressing their genius in verse.”25 Her genius, authority, and willingness to rebel in spite of her youth, her gender, her class, and her Unitarian upbringing enabled Emerson to believe in the new American he had envisioned only abstractly in his imagination. In Sturgis he found someone who transcended gender and class to rebel and achieve true self-reliance in spite of social constraints. Echoing his earliest entries on Sturgis, Emerson wrote in his journal in 1853 that “At Lenox,
Miss B. S. congratulated herself that Caroline Tappan had settled down into sensible opinions & practices, like her neighbors. I asked her, if she thought her two sisters who had complied with sensible notions & practices, had quite succeeded? Particularly bitter against convention, this passage followed the death by suicide of Sturgis' youngest sister Susan Sturgis Bigelow who had married the son of Jacob Bigelow, one of the most renowned doctors at Massachusetts General Hospital, and whose letters to her older sister Caroline reveal her desperation at being a hostess and housewife.

Sturgis' exceptional character, and her youthful beauty and vivaciousness as well, began to permeate Emerson's consciousness, moving from his journals and essays into his poetry. In the journals Sturgis grows from the "a fair girl" of "so lofty a will" of 1838 to "genius, virtue, the invisible & ideal world" in 1841 and takes her place in his mind in the mythology of poets and brave maidens of his poetry. By 1841, the language that Emerson associated with Sturgis in his journals begins to echo his early and unfinished poems, the beginnings of his mythology of divinely inspired poets and storm-tossed maidens inspired by the Muse of his Aunt Mary. In a journal entry of 1841, a year after the infamous visit of Fuller, Sturgis, and Anna Barker to Concord, Emerson calls Sturgis "Hermione," alluding to both the heroine of Shakespeare's romance play A Winter's Tale as well as to the heroine of his own poem "Hermione":

But of that other maiden, that counterweight of all her sex, Hermione, no engagement, no gos-sip. News of all others, no news of her. Why, but because these all belong to the unstable state of Circumstance; their fortunes are undetermined until the facts fall, and they are to be conspicuous or obscure as the dice go, but this other comes of a higher stock, her whole estate is already fixed, & in every part predictable: no eccentricity, no error to her orb: Nature has no bribe for her; herself a light she cannot borrow any advantage or lose any, from position.

In this journal passage Emerson compares Sturgis to the other young marriageable women of Boston, noting their subservience to fortune contrasted with her state of self-reliance. She is immutable and noble like a great work of art or work of nature. Using the language of Spenser's Fairie Queen, Milton's Paradise Lost, and his own poem

26 JMRWE, vol. 13, p. 35.
27 Sturgis' nickname for her younger sister Susan is "Job," and although she playfully teases Susan about her complaints, is fully aware of the dark implications of this name and worries about her sister's mental health. From Lenox she wrote, "Dear Job, / Last winter I always heard of your beauty, wit, etc. — now you appear to be descending into the vale of life, as fast as your lameness will permit" (26 July 1831. Houghton Library, bMS 1221, Box 5, Folder 375). The other sister alluded to is probably Ellen Sturgis Hooper, whose conventional marriage to Robert Hooper disappointed her transcendental friends and whose domestic cares probably contributed to her early death.
28 JMRWE, vol. 8, p. 122.
29 JMRWE, vol. 8, p. 52.

48 Harvard Library Bulletin
"Monadnock," Emerson notes she has "no error to her orb," fashioning her self-reliance as planetary wholeness and divine self-sufficiency worthy of his favorite writers' great heroines. As "orb" or "Sphere," Sturgis is connected not only to Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton but also to Emerson's own appropriation of "orb" and "sphere" (as when the poet is "Sphered and concentric with the whole" in "The Poet") which signify the poet's chosen-ness as the "fated man of men." In "Monadnock," the personified mountain explains to the poet-pilgrim that in the order of nature, "Orb and atom forth they prance/When they hear from far the rune." Sturgis has the independence of this orb. In various letters to Sturgis, she is also his "pilgrim," deeply connected to nature and able to read nature's secrets, and sometimes as lofty and forbidding as that distant mountain.

The eponymous heroine of Emerson's poem "Hermione," like Shakespeare's heroine and by association Sturgis, the "Hermione" of the journals, is sublime and tragically misunderstood, suffering hardship and loneliness and banishing herself to island and forest retreats, the "bantling" cast on the rock as in his epigraph to "Self-Reliance." In Emerson's poem, she is literally fused with nature, part of "Mountains and the misty plains/Her colossal portraiture." Recalling the language of both Emerson's journal passage about Sturgis and his poems about the poet-prophet, this Hermione has "sceptred genius, aye inorbed./Culminating in her sphere." The narrator of the poem associates its eponymous heroine with "The lustre of the land and ocean,/ Hills and islands, cloud and tree,/ In her form and motion." 30 Echoing Emerson's letters to Sturgis of the 1840's and hers to him during that period, she is the "Muse and dame" of nature while he "seemed/Hermit vowed to books and gloom,—/ Ill-bested for gay bridegroom./I was by thy touch redeemed;" Hermione saves him from a life of "books and gloom" and ties him to nature. While "Once I dwelt apart,/Now I live with all" because Hermione could "unlock/Highways for me through the rock." The narrator loses his beloved who wanders "In strange lands unblest" but will find her again among her forest haunts of "winds and waterfalls/ And autumn's sunlit festivals...." Emerson possibly alludes here to the island haunts and stormy ocean shores with which he has come to associate Sturgis. Emerson writes in his journal in 1843 that "The other day came Caroline Sturgis with eyes full of Naushon & Nahant & Niagara, dreaming by day & night of canoes, & lightning, & deer-parks, & silver waves...."

In this passage as in his poems and essays, Emerson is not sentimental about Sturgis but rather connects her to the Romantic Sublime where nature and fate can be harsh and uncompromising, as expressed in the literature they shared and discussed, not sentimental works but rather Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and Goethe. The opening line of Emerson's poem-epigraph to "Self-Reliance," "[c]ast the bantling on the rock," reflects this understanding of the inexorable nature of human experience. Emerson

30 Ralph Waldo Emerson, Complete Poems, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1867, p. 100.
31 IMRWE, vol. 9, p. 19.
once wrote to Sturgis of Tennyson that his poetry "is all parlor & garden poetry verses of a villa or a conservatory; rude savage beauty, wild mountain air the breath of eternal uncontainable Nature never comes to him." Emerson's verse, by contrast, sings nature's sublime Law from whose truths, the spirits caution the hero of Emerson's unfinished rhyme "The Poet," "By it, we draw the breath of eternity; Serve thou it not for daily bread. Serve it for pain and fear and need." Sturgis had her own poem "The Poet," never published, whose verses Emerson copied into his journal sometime in the 1850's that end "Unless rich beauty fill the plains/The freeman wanders still unblest." And twice in his journals, first in 1855 and later in 1859, Emerson recorded a comment from Sturgis that "I will pardon you that you do so much, & you me that I do nothing." This remark was no doubt one of her "blasphemies" that Emerson treasured and later worked into his own essay "Success."

Houghton's and Smith's cache of Sturgis drawings and watercolors fills out the picture of Sturgis as a Transcendental self-reliant artist glimpsed in the Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks where Emerson continually remarks on her ability to sketch and draw and where he associates her kind of artistry with self-reliance. For example, Emerson writes, "Caroline Sturgis rightly says she cannot draw a child by studying the outlines but by watching for a time his motions & plays she enters into his nature & then can draw him in every attitude." Houghton's Sturgis archive contains her drawings and sketches in notebooks, on loose sheets, and on the verso of letters written and received. These drawings are of pastoral scenes or Raphael-esque heads of beautiful maidens and youths. After 1838 when Sturgis became a regular guest in the Emerson household, Emerson gave Sturgis suggestions of what to draw and paint and collected her drawings loosely between the leaves of his journals, perhaps to inspire him while he sat in his study in Concord—all evidence of what he saw as the power of her intellect and spirit to enter into nature and reveal truth.

Emerson's appreciation of Sturgis' drawings fits with his belief that drawing, like poetry, expressed the inner soul. His sometimes urgently expressed need to see her latest art work reveals as well his continual search for the new American artist to answer European claims that America could not support high culture. Emerson remarks in his journal that "I gave C[aron]. S[turgis]. for a subject, the Age, to be represented in a series of heads; conservatism; State street; Christian Register; revolt; protest; fair perplexity; Dyspepsia; Warren chapel[]" Sturgis' notebooks at Houghton and Smith contain pages of her attempts to capture emotion and subtle psychological states in the human visage, perhaps a record of her attempt to undertake Emerson's suggestion. He

34 JMNRE, vol. 7, p. 21.

50 Harvard Library Bulletin
admired not only her ability to capture inner truth but clearly saw her art as part of her "protest" against antebellum Boston materialism, a corollary to his own form of protest in his lectures. As late as 1853, Emerson writes, "As to Caroline Sturgis, I was far from thinking she had ended her experiments. It is her glory that she takes her life in her hand, & is ready for a new world." 36

"For the Good and not for the Bad": The Emerson-Sturgis Epistolary Exchange

The Emerson-Sturgis epistolary exchange is one of the most beautiful and haunting effusions of the Transcendental movement, expressing loneliness, angst, and poetic musing in their American version of Continental Romantic discourse. They seem most inspired to write to each other from places of sublime natural beauty, from oceans, islands, and rivers, from Naushon, Nahant, Nantasket, Niagara, and Newbury. Like other Transcendental ephemera, their letters use mystical and metaphysical vocabulary interspersed with descriptions of nature around them, making a continuum of letter/journal/poem/drawing, presumably including their conversations of which we have no record. Self-consciously creating art, Emerson and Sturgis possibly used as their model two published epistolary romances popular among their group, Walter Savage Landor’s Pericles and Aspasia (1836), a fictional and highly Romantic epistolary exchange which Emerson actually lent to Sturgis in October, 1838, and Bettina von Arnim’s Goethe’s Correspondence With a Child (1837). The following letter records Sturgis’ receipt of Landor’s romance:

My dear Mr. Emerson,
I have been delighted with Pericles and Aspasia and thank you very much for your kindness in sending it to me. It was doubly welcome at Naushon, for it seemed even more beautiful read here among the lonely woods by the ocean, with the chant of the waves for accompaniment. 36

It is very curious indeed for an older minister to be sending a beautiful younger woman an epistolary romance which chronicles the love affair of two passionate and higher natures carried on through their letters. Here in this early letter Sturgis begins using Romantic discourse with Emerson, and we see as well the pattern established in their later correspondence of writing to each other from romantic, desolate, and sublime haunts of nature, from islands, falls, rivers, and shores. The significant thing for Emerson would have been Sturgis’ linking of the imagined Greek epistolary exchange with the wild beauties of American nature, both an honorific nod to his own recently published Nature (1836) as well as an indication of Sturgis’ version of American Hellenism shared with Fuller and Emerson himself.

36 JMNBRWE, 1853, p. 36.
37 Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Prout Papers, box 1, folder 24. Naushon, October 17, 1838. Although Tilton refers to the existence of this letter, she does not print it in her 1991 edition.
Their other model for an epistolary relationship was von Arnim's Goethe's Correspondence With a Child, which Emerson purchased on July 2, 1839, a month after an extended visit to Concord by Sturgis.39 This book recounts an actual rather than fictional exchange which Elizabeth Palmer Peabody sold in her foreign literature shop in West Street. Landon's Pericles and Aspasia was obviously romantic, spanning courtship and marriage. Bettina's collection of letters, although supposedly platonic, shocked Victorian readers with its passionate interchange between older sage and young admirer, who at over twenty was not exactly a "child," requiring Bettina to write in her introduction that "This book is for the good and not for the bad." We hear playful echoes of this phrase in Sturgis letters to Emerson at various junctures. She advised him in the writing of Fuller's memoir that "If her life could be as tender & fine as that beautiful one of Albrecht Durer, it would be one that might be published & that only the good could read."40 Nevertheless, Bettina's letters may have provided Emerson and Sturgis with a morally acceptable model for their passionate correspondence and for a relationship between an older man and young girl, certainly not a "child," that was sanctioned by Romantic notions of divine connection. Perhaps privately invoking Bettina's same admonition, Emerson and Sturgis did share their letters with Fuller and even Elizabeth Hoar early on. Eventually, however, it appears that Emerson indicated that he did not want anyone to see his letters, and reiterated this to her in his demands for their return after her marriage:

Dear Waldo,

I believe you wish me to send you all the papers I have of yours, but I am not going to do so. Margaret, alone, has read them, except an occasional little note, or so. They are directed to you & will be safely sent when I suddenly depart for unknown lands.41

As we have seen, Emerson's discussions of Sturgis in his Journals and his allusions to her in his poetry reveal his ambivalent conception of her as both lofty and unattainable heroic maiden and flesh and blood lover. This ambivalence comes to the fore in their letters. Corroborating Strauch's and Jeffrey Steele's portrayal of Emerson's friendships as being idealized and rarified, the early epistolary exchange between Emerson and Sturgis does indeed show a detached Transcendental view of their friendship. After her August 1840 visit to Concord with Margaret Fuller and Anna Barker, Emerson wrote on September 6 that Sturgis "will be my saint & purify me wholly." He added on September 13 that "it seems the good Heaven has sent you to me to administer all unconsciously its lofty reproof, to shame my little faith by your largeness, and to make me feel with joy & love that in speaking to you I may dismiss all consideration of

39 Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, box 1, folder 25.
40 Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Prout Papers, CST to RWF, 1852, box 1, folder # 27.

52 Harvard Library Bulletin
you, may forget all persons, may speak the truth & may love with the primary eternal heart."42

During that highly-charged visit, Fuller, Barker, and Sturgis apparently entered into a close "covenant" with Emerson. When Barker divulged to Emerson in late August after his Phi Beta Kappa lecture that she was engaged to Samuel Ward, he wrote Sturgis in dismay:

I thought she had looked the world through for a man as universal as herself & finding none. had said, 'I will compensate myself for my great renunciation as a woman by establishing ideal relations: Not only Raphael shall be my brother, but that Puritan at concord who is reputed at some time to have seen the mighty Gods, I will elect him also!' And so thinking, she came & covenanted with me that we two should speak the truth to each other."43

By entering into the marriage covenant instead of Emerson's transcendental bond of friendship, Barker abandoned what Emerson called her "starry road" and "shining example of Denial." Emerson was worried that Sturgis would abandon him as well. After Sturgis confronted Emerson with this possessiveness, he answered "shall I doubt that you may come to love your proper hero without ceasing to gladden me with your perfect trust? Cannot the air be full of heat without ceasing to be full of light?"44

Unlike Barker, Sturgis did not immediately abandon Emerson for the nuptial covenant but embarked with him on what became a four decade-long experiment in what Emerson calls "friendship," but which contained elements of closeness usually associated with erotic love. At first Emerson did not distinguish from among Fuller, Barker, and Sturgis, writing to her on Aug 28, 1840 that "I must not let the fresh memory of my three golden days fade without telling you how gladly I incur the debt of so much love to you all & severally, & how sensible I am of direct benefit to me...from those few hours."45 But Emerson added the following to Sturgis:

...you have another claim on me which I hasten to own, for are you not my dear Sister and am I not your brother? I cannot write to you with others any more than I can talk with you at a round table. From you I hear my own mother tongue, & not a patois of that, or a foreign language and to you I can speak coldly and austerely as well as gently & poetically—and always truly. Will you not hear me; will you not so reply? Truly, my dear Caroline, it gives me great joy to claim this relation to you, and to insist on being that to you which it suggests.

As Richardson explains, "even though this, like all his new friendships, was con-

ducted with the language and under the flag of honorary sibling relations and Platonic soul-mating, that charade was not empty" (Richardson, 329). Clearly there was more than just sibling affection. But before speculating on the sexual overtones of the relationship, there is a great deal to say about the sibling bond itself. Just as Emerson no doubt helped to compensate for the loss of Sturgis' brother and the wreck of her family, so Sturgis represented Emerson's sister. Although their covenant began during the infamous August 1840 visit to Concord with Fuller and Barker, it deepened and became different from any tie either had to others of their circle, and different from any attachment either had to family, including Emerson's to his wife Lidian. An early letter of September 25, 1840 corroborates the argument that Emerson did not use the fraternal address in an impersonal or Swedenborgian sense. He reminds Sturgis "have we not agreed to be true brother and sister as long as the world standeth? Does not this covenant authorize you to command & dominate me as you will? Then shall I always be touched by the old domestic name." What is striking in this passage is not only its love of the domestic but also its association of the domestic not with Lidian but with Sturgis, connecting Sturgis to Emerson's childhood home.

Being called "brother" by Sturgis, "the old domestic name," recalls the only sister Emerson ever knew, Mary Caroline Emerson, who died in 1814 at the age of three when Emerson was eleven, and whose middle name matched Sturgis' own name. The "old" domestic name "brother" would also have been used by Emerson's beloved brothers Edward and Charles, who died in 1834 and 1836 respectively. His assumed kinship with Sturgis thus seemed to compensate for these painful losses, as it would as well for Sturgis' own losses, most significantly the loss of her brother William which overshadowed her family's happiness and may have affected not only her mother's mental state but that of her volatile youngest sister Susan who committed suicide in 1853. Sturgis was to play a significant role when Emerson suffered the loss of his son Waldo in 1842. The covenant between Emerson and Sturgis thus provided them with a kind of deep emotional solace that transcended their intellectual affinity. Their covenant subsumed in its meaning both common domestic attachments as well as their unusual Transcendental connection, the depth and meaning of which they created and explored anew through their letters, exchanged poems, and frequent walks together in the woods.

A comparison of the exchange of letters between Emerson and Sturgis with that of Emerson and Lidian is striking. While Lidian was often apologetic and self-deprecating, Sturgis was playful, ironic, and passionate, evincing a parity of power and presence in the relationship missing from that between Emerson and his wife. Although her letters reveal a strong faith, Lidian's language derives from Calvinist images of punishment and divine retribution. Far from expressing limitless possibility or exulting in nature, she awaits judgment in a state of subservience. While with Margaret Fuller, his other closest female friend, Emerson cultivated the rarefied friendship he explored in his essay of that title, what Jeffrey Steele calls an "unarticulated fraternal bond,"

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with Sturgis Emerson developed a unique emotional closeness and interdependence. Although Emerson maintained his affection and respect for Lidian, she is his “Asia,” as distant and forbidding as that remote continent, while Sturgis is his “Sister” and his “Muse.” By using brotherly or filial terms of address, Emerson and Sturgis tried to avoid taboo sexual overtones, but the intensity of their love in spite of this platonic language nevertheless contained an element of forbidden sexual energy.

“Covenant” is a multi-layered word for Emerson, recalling its Puritan meaning of a pact with God based on Old Testament scripture yet combined with Emerson’s own sense of the word in his re-invention of American religion. By using this word to describe his relationship with Sturgis, he inducted her into his re-invigorated religion and their bond took on the aspect of a new kind of relationship forbidden by conventional society but sanctioned by a primal truth transcending societal norms, Quintin Anderson’s antinomian moment of vision. Contrary to Carl Strauch’s assertion that Sturgis could not break through Emerson’s “icy barriers,” she in fact reached his emotional core. His covenant with Sturgis was something altogether different. This covenant is represented not in Emerson’s essay “Friendship,” but in his love poems and in his essays “Heroism,” “Experience,” and “Circles” where he discusses with intense emotion and passion the organic wholeness of things and the unyielding Laws and Lords of the universe who confound human expectations, sentiment, and quaint morality.

“Domestic” was also an important word for Emerson, synonymous with “plain-dealing.” He had said her poetry was full of “plain-dealing” and had written to Sturgis that “Plain dealing I believe is my cipher at least for yesterday and today. An infinite refreshment goes out of it.” He used this word in his journals to suggest the sacredness of the common haunts and humble moments of life, a state that Emerson longed for and felt would strike the chord of America different from that of Europe. For example, he wrote in 1841 that “Domestication consists in the unique art of living in the fact & not in the appearance. Who has learned to root himself in being, & wholly to cease from seeming, he is domestic, he is at the heart of nature.” It is in the domestic state that Emerson believes we can best communicate with the divine. But he clearly associates this state of being with Caroline Sturgis, not with Lidian. In asking Sturgis to be his sister in the domestic context, they will relate to each other as real kin, not, as he did with Fuller, on the universal plane of Oversoul. Emerson later noted that “I wrote C[aroline] S[turgis]. this p.m. that it is not we but the elements, the destinies & conscience that makes places & hours great, they the omnipresent;—and if we will only be careful not to intrude or chatter, the least occasion & the domestic hour will be grand & fated.” Here Emerson repeats the word “domestic” that he had used in his letter of September 25, 1840, associating their fraternal and filial bond with the most homely as

47 JMNRE, vol. 8, p. 18.
48 JMNRE, vol. 8, p. 517.
well as divine and transcendent images. Again, it is a different domesticity from that of his life with Lidian, both more intimate and more inspired.

Confronted by Sturgis' brilliance and beauty and their shared ethos, what Emerson called "the meeting of a strong mind by a strong mind," Emerson pondered the meaning of their "friendship." As in Goethe's connection with Bettina, there is sexual tension and energy between Emerson and Sturgis. In his journal of 1840, next to a page where he discusses Caroline Sturgis' poetry, he writes, "A lover does not willingly name his mistress: he speaks of all persons & things beside: for she is sacred. So will the friend respect the name of his friend. Name him for pride and he is already ceasing to be yours. The base lover is piqued by the natural dignity of the virgin which overawes & disconcerts him, do what he can." Emerson respects the name of his friend the way a lover would his mistress. This provocative passage is sandwiched in between two passages that specifically mention Sturgis' name, one discussing her drawing and another her poetry. Two loose half-sheets bearing pencil drawings of heads and a penciled note reading, "Heads drawn by Caroline Sturgis" are also contained in this journal. Under his passage about the lover and his mistress, Emerson writes, "Selfreliance (sic) applied to another person is reverence, that is, only the selfrespecting (sic) will be reverent." In this journal passage, rich with associations, Emerson grappled with his conflicting feelings for Sturgis.

In June, 1841, approximately one year after their "covenant," their relationship intensified after Sturgis paid a visit to Concord. In a letter of June 4, 1841, Emerson answered Sturgis' intention to visit in the kindly and conventional discourse of the Concord "Pater," relating that "very glad am I to learn that you will come & see us once more, and tell us what the muses say...." He did, however, inform her that Lidian and Elizabeth Hoar will leave early in her visit "for they go together before the end of the next week to Staten Island to give Lidian the benefit of a holiday." Alone together, with only "Mother & I" to "exert ourselves that you shall not perish of ennui," Sturgis and Emerson's relationship reached a new closeness. Sturgis wrote Emerson on June 19th, 1841, to summarize the visit, "So beautiful were a few hours I passed with you, my dear brother, that I do not like very well to speak of them, & yet I must tell you how happy they made me. Not that I was fully satisfied, but they were a sweet gleam of the sunlight which shall soon shine all around us." Emerson answered on June 24, "I am glad if you were contented for an hour at Concord, O insatiate maiden! for the claims which in these days you open against the gods are enormous, that it is well for Jove and all his limitary Olympics that they are well off the stage of power...."

49 JMNRE, vol. 7.

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they were entering unexplored territory when he cautioned, "Every pair of friends have
a new partnership of unprecedented terms & conditions to establish. Let it run very
slowly, for it will be a true happiness to feel in every stage of its progress, we have never
deprecated a jot from the truth." They spent many hours alone together in the woods dur-
ing this visit, inventing their own private jokes and associations, for Emerson added,
"But I must send you soon my little poem, which contains among other things our
visit to the cliff. It is the "Pine Tree" enlarged to some eighteen pages!" His poem "Pine
Tree" is possibly "Woodnotes II" which Sturgis liked and asked him to keep as its title.
A journal entry also gives evidence of their woodland rambles on which, Emerson
wrote, "C. delights in the beauty of clouds, the shining people of the sky, and I felt that
they with their hard & fawn colored surface & broad edges of glory were the flowers of
the upper element and the fittest symbols in nature of an illustrious life. The clock by
which we measured our stay in this field of out sight & up sight was one of these splen-
did clouds which lost its large dimension & nearly faded in the air whilst we stood."
It makes sense that Emerson would be moved to write poetry after a visit from Sturgis
whom he called his "Muse" in a serious and not jesting tone. Sturgis' total immersion in
aesthetics undiluted by philosophy or theology enabled Emerson to enter that mental
mode. That Emerson connected Sturgis with his poetry is evident from that fact that
Sturgis possessed one of only two manuscripts of the poem "Uriel." She also apparently
possessed a manuscript of "Monadnock," and letters to Sturgis from Emerson discuss
"Climacteric" and "The atom displaces all atoms beside." "The Discontented Poet: a
Masque" contains lines from letters to Sturgis.31

Emerson's response of June 24 to Sturgis' visit, written from Concord, and still
within Lidian's sphere of influence, was somewhat tame. Three weeks later, however,
alone at Nantasket Beach, he wrote an emotionally explosive letter to Sturgis, inform-
ing her, he says, of "my great needs":

But then I foresee the old haggard world only smite me with the sense of dire loneliness and I
should long for you to come & creep on the cliffs with me. I heartily wish you were here even now.
& you should persuade me that the heaven and the main were passable as they are. You know
I was baptized in Walden Pond. Here is a better font and if you were here, I would say, O angel
friendly to my life, what hindereth that I be sprinkled again? Why baptized only once? Why not
as often as I find hands that I would have laid on me, & through which the blessing of the universe
might pass. and a fit basin & chapel?36

Rusk printed an incomplete version of this passage, explaining that he had only "an

54 JMNREWE, vol. 7, p. 391.
55 For connections between Sturgis and Emerson's poetry see Ralph H. Orth, Albert J. von Frank, et al.

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incomplete copy in Cabot's hand. His notation gives the place and date and indicates that Caroline Sturgis is the person addressed." The complete manuscript was owned by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and not yet accessible at Houghton. And Rusk did not yet have access to the Sturgis response to this letter now at Houghton. Rusk had no idea that Cabot deliberately left out any mention of Emerson's longing that Sturgis were with him in Nantasket, climbing alone together over the cliffs and placing her hands on him to baptize him.

To be baptized would be to be reborn, to start again. This was what Emerson asked of her, to enact another covenant, but this time not of blood-brotherhood but rather a new religion and second marriage outside the bounds of Boston Unitarian and indeed American law. In his imagination, Sturgis was prophet or minister and Emerson her charge. In enacting a conversion to their private religion of secular incarnation, she would be a conduit of blessing and truth, upending antebellum gender roles and creating Sturgis as a cleric to minister to the former minister of Boston's austere Second Church. Here we see Emerson's pantheistic and mystical side, suggesting that Sturgis is in touch with powerful forces, not "divine" but "universal" forces. This passage is a radical declaration of commitment to a religion and love outside of church and society, substituting their own law, religion, and ritual.

This letter becomes all the more striking when compared with those written to Lidian and even to Margaret Fuller from Nantasket Beach. The parallel exchange between Emerson and his wife during this same week tamely and decorously speaks of the weather and his various daily excursions, asking news of Concord and Plymouth, on his side, and is equally pedestrian on hers. The same day that Emerson writes to Sturgis longing for her presence, July 13th, 1841, he writes to Lidian in a fit of pique that she had neglected to write to him "to tell me how you do, & what you think, & what are your plans?" His letter to Fuller from Nantasket on this same day is much more intellectual and playful than that to Lidian, with allusions to "Attica & Peloponnese," but sounds clearly like the detached Emerson whom Fuller had tried so hard to ruffle and unmask a year earlier. And Sturgis is never far from his thoughts. He reminds Fuller that "you also have somewhat to send me before you depart to those unattainable lands & waters of yours namely a sheaf of Caroline's letters—or did you not promise me the whole collection?" Again we see Emerson's hunger for the manifestations of Sturgis' mind.

58 An example of Emerson's true feelings about Lidian as opposed to Sturgis is revealed by this letter asking Sturgis to show some interest in Lidian: "And I should like to have you bear it in mind, if it were only as an occasion of you treating directly with Lidian some time, by word or pen. Such a benefactress to me as she is in her will in all calm moments—I wish to acknowledge & to honor as far as I can" (RWE to CST, Aug. 23, 1845, Houghton, folder # 123).

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In her response of July 16, Sturgis rose to Emerson’s challenge by answering his call for her to be a prophet and priestess of their religion of secular incarnation by intensifying his image of baptism by water to baptism by fire:

No, my dear brother, not in the ocean would I baptize you for although you know but little of the mighty storms when the waves lash themselves against the rocks as if they would seize upon the earth & form it all into a sphere of living chrysalis (sic) beauty, yet you are like the ocean when it lies in all the grandeur of repose, sunlit, vast & pure. To give you a new life I would baptize you in fire for it is that which cleaves both earth & sea, overwhelming the old, & throwing up new lands fairer than aught which ever gladdened the eye of man.  

Recapitulating their private discourse of nature’s sublime severity and alluding to Emerson’s poetic epigraph for his recently published essay “Self-Reliance,” this response could have had no other intention but to fill Emerson with longing and fire. The image of baptism by fire recalled as well their shared love of Dante and Milton and is redolent with blasphemy. This response reveals the extent to which they were equals in their relationship, in spite of their age difference, and that, in fact, Emerson relied on Sturgis to challenge, question, and amaze him. She tells him in this same letter that “you have not gone rightly there. You have gone with a determination & carried your old school-books besides…. Pray throw Plato & Ancient Philosophies into the water.”

A poem written in his journal after his return from the Nantasket adventure reflects Sturgis’ continuing presence in his mind, including her admonition to learn from nature and not from books. This little poem strikingly reveals Emerson’s perpetual return to the childlike innocence of Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” a state that Quentin Anderson calls “the unclouded imperial self of our childhood.” The condition of unresolved inner freedom in the poem is the one he shared with Sturgis in Nantasket, and even the woods of Concord. In “To Rhea” of 1846, Emerson advises the love-sick maiden, possibly Fuller, to rise above her grief, and “do as do the gods/In their cloudless periods.” Rather than feel revenge, she should “bless that creature day and night,” for “the god, having given all/Is freed forever from his thrall.” While “To Rhea” preaches detachment and abstraction, by contrast, his little poem to Sturgis speaks of worldly matters, of nature and its magic:

White pebbles from Nantasket beach  
Whereon to write the maiden’s name  
Shells, sea eggs, sea flowers, could they teach  
thee the fair haunts from when they came?

60 Unpublished letter of Caroline Sturgis to Emerson, July 16. Tappan Papers, bMS 1221, Houghton Library.  
He was not thinking of Lidian in Nantasket but of “the maiden” Sturgis. In the poem Sturgis is imagined not as a secular priestess performing baptism but a pagan water-nymph or Shakespearian heroine who knows the mysteries of the deep. Emerson associated Sturgis with the sea not only because her favorite haunts were Naushon, Nahant, and Newbury but because near the sea they were each free of societal constraints, free of Lidian and Concord gossips. Sturgis had once told him that she wished she were a sea-nymph. This poem suggests the organic wholeness of “Each and All,” where the narrator realizes that the mysteries of nature are available to him if he will attune himself to their world. In this Nantasket poem, the narrator is at last residing in nature’s bosom, closer to her secrets. Now “the maiden” serves as a magical intermediary to connect him to the sea’s creations and the secrets of “the fair haunts from whence they came.” The poet wants to write her name on the white pebbles in recognition of their devotion and of her higher nature linking him with nature’s mystery, recalling the love of Shakespeare’s Orlando for Rosalind who writes her name on trees in As You Like It as well as Ferdinand’s love for Miranda in The Tempest. This tetrameter verse echoes as well Ariel’s song in tetrameter of the magic of the sea where the ordinary can “suffer a sea-change/Into something rich and strange.” We know Emerson was thinking of The Tempest during this visit for he had written to Margaret Fuller from Nantasket “Now, dear friend, congratulate me on my sea change.” But he does not think of Fuller as the maiden whose name he will write on the pebbles of the shore.

Sturgis freed Emerson in Nantasket to inhabit the magical and imaginary Shakespearian world of spirits and visions first introduced to him by his Aunt Mary. On July 28, 1841 while he is still in Nantasket and she in her retreat on the Artichoke River, she wrote to Emerson that “Often I have some beautiful imaginary person with me for days together, …& there is but little difference between these dreams & real persons.” Perhaps with envy, Emerson recorded in his journal that “C. writes that her imaginary persons are nearly as vivid & as much society as real persons.”

Emerson often referred to Sturgis in his letters as his “Muse,” making her both the equal of the poet-prophet as she is in “Hermione” but also the handmaiden of inspiration to Emerson as the poet-prophet. Sturgis was Emerson’s Muse in that she called him always to the higher realm of beauty. As he noted in his Journal, “Sturgis represents ‘vis superba formae,’” the “tyranny of beauty,” a phrase quoted by Goethe. Sturgis “satisfied me in many ways, and, as usual, dissatisfied me with myself….But best of all is the admonition that comes to me from a demand of beauty so naturally made wheresoever her eye rests, that our ways of life, our indolences, our indulgences, our want of heroic action are shamed. Yet cordially I greet the reproof.”

The intensity of their relationship continued until by September 7, 1841, Emerson was nervously awaiting another letter from her, asking “I wonder why no line comes

to me from the Merrimack. Life seems not long enough that we can afford to go a month without a letter from a dear friend.” In this letter, Emerson again saw Sturgis as his superior, as his minister, referring to her as his “confessor” and suggesting the dark depths of his mind:

Yet I think if I were once set to recount my history every day for some weeks, I should be better known to myself as well as to my confessor, & should receive absolution that would do me much good. Dark untold turbid inaccesssible is the thought of the most serene & uneventful day. There need be no fear of want of originality if it were laid bare. Thirty years hence when you come in your chariot with your husband & children to find me in the mountain cabin or cave which I shall then inhabit and you shall inquire the road of...”

To avoid the guilt of his connection to Sturgis, Waldo envisions himself years later alone, without Lidian, in a mountain cabin while it is Sturgis, currently the unmarried one, who has husband and children. In this imagined situation, he is celibate while Sturgis is safely off-limits.

Emerson sent this letter to Sturgis at Curzon’s Mill on the Artichoke River, her favorite retreat, where she could draw, paint, and write poetry amidst the beauty of nature and at a safe distance from her depressed mother and difficult sisters. On October 16 she responds, “Dear Waldo, It is not because I have not loved you every day that I have not written to you for so long a time, but sometimes I feel I can say no more until the master-hand shall strike the hidden chords. I like to think the same beautiful days shine over you, that you walk in the woods with glittering trees all around you, & that your heart is filled with beauty.” Feeling pressure to amaze Emerson with her brilliance and boldness, Sturgis sometimes postponed her responses to him. His characterization of his own mind as “Dark, untold, turbid, inaccessible” was countered by her wish that his “heart is filled with beauty.” Significantly, Emerson felt safe divulging his dark side to this “Hermione.”

Emerson wrote Sturgis another letter filled with Shakespearean and mythological allusions on November 26, 1844, four years after the “covenant,” their relationship still strong. This time she was not on the Artichoke River but on Naushon Island, the private island next to Martha’s Vineyard owned by her father’s wealthy fellow sea-captain Robert Swain of New Bedford, later owned by John Murray Forbes, Edith Emerson’s father-in-law, and coincidentally Emerson’s favorite retreat in his later years.66 On

61  This letter is not published in Tilton’s edition and exists only at Houghton, Tappan Papers, Am 1221, box 4, folder # 334.
62  It is unclear whether Emerson ever visited Sturgis on Naushon, but it later became his favorite retreat after the marriage of Edith Emerson to William Hathaway Forbes made the island an Emerson family refuge. He went there to recuperate after his house burned. Emerson is said to have composed

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Naushon, Sturgis was hidden away on her island retreat, playing in Emerson’s eyes both pagan sea-nymph ruled by the “spiritual lord of the isle” and The Tempest’s Miranda. Emerson was on his way to lecture on Nantucket, freed like Sturgis from workaday responsibility and domestic constraint when he wrote that:

I passed by Naushon a few days ago in the Steamboat on my way to Nantucket, and my eyes explored the beautiful island for tokens of my friend. It lay fair & open on the sea, with inviting recesses & interior, but I was too much a stranger to its genius than that it would yield me any secret hint of pride or love of what it had enclosed. Possibly the spiritual lord of the isle stood in such strict affiance with his sometime guest as to resent on her part the long separations and cold silence on one who pretends to love & cherish her genius. No, for the spirits of air & ocean see truly, & could not question the interest I took in your favorite abode. Possibly they were more propitious than I knew, for I was entertained with great fancies all along my watery road, & had rainbows under me behind the wheel, & the most spacious & exhilarating horizon, the free winds whisking their marches, and your own image mixed with the day.67

Here Emerson fantasizes at first that the “spiritual lord” who is “in strict affiance” with Sturgis will punish Emerson as an intruder to its “inviting recesses and interior” by not yielding the secrets of the island, namely Sturgis, to him. His fears are allayed, however, by natural signs that prove his innocence. In reward for his true devotion to their “sometime guest,” the “spirits of air and ocean” send him propitious winds, rainbows, “great fancies,” and, finally, Sturgis’ “own image mixed with the day.” Emerson’s language in these whimsically mythological and Shakespearean missives to Sturgis is unique among his letters, echoing his poetry, as, for example, in “Musketaquid” where he speaks of “wood-gods” and “gentle deities,” and in “Hermione” where the lady’s image is fused with nature.

As the letter continues, Emerson is now alone on the beach in Nantucket where he has been for several days, wanting her near him to witness “a sunset too noble, I think, for any history or any mythology we have, & which recalls for me the lovers who have met it with their admiration, & not any fables of poetry.” Referring again to their “domestic” ties, Emerson imagines “that we were both domesticated in neighboring cabins on these long, lonely shores, where the sea obliterates custom, triviality, & time also, with his flowing proof, that we might share these great impressions and read the runes of nature as leisurely as children.” This passage recalls her admonition to him at Nantasket and assures her that they will read nature and not books. Next to the sea again, she can reveal its mysteries to him. At large in their own universe with their own verses about Naushon that he wrote into the special “Island Book” kept by the Forbes family and recited on family picnics there. How tempting to imagine his thoughts and feelings as he walked the shores and visited the forests of the island, Sturgis own early haunts and the scenes of many of her letters to him.


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law, they will no longer be bound to “custom, triviality & time.” Just as at Nantasket, Emerson engages in a moment of extreme antinomianism.

Emerson and Sturgis relied on each other in moments of crisis and loneliness. Emerson felt a deep need at Nantasket. He did again the following January, 1842 when his five-year-old son Waldo died of scarlet fever. Emerson wrote to Sturgis immediately that “My little boy died last night, my little wonderful boy. You too have seen him & loved him. ...You will also grieve for him.”* Re-reading this letter, she recalled not only the death of little Waldo but also her current desolation. She wrote a spontaneous poem, an ephemeral form of Transcendental poetry she sometimes practiced on her envelopes from Emerson. Tilton suggests that these poems were written in 1868 when it seems that Sturgis purposely re-read her correspondence from Emerson, possibly with an eye to writing her own version of a Transcendental history. This practice of holding letters and guessing the spirit of their contents or the character of the writer was a form of spiritualism practiced by sometime Transcendental onlooker and Brook Farm visitor Anna Q. T. Parsons but adopted it seems by Sturgis to evoke the meaning of her letters from Emerson. This practice grew eventually into an ability she used for her friends:

Gently we laid him away—
Ah what desolation came—
I fill the sad & empty day
From which had died this flame.

Your hand brought no flower
Your thought was not here—
The storm struck in each hour,
We stood alone & near.

The second stanza moves from a discussion of Waldo’s death to an elegy for her marriage, connecting perhaps the saddest day in Transcendentalism’s history with her own acute loss and suggesting that her desire to re-read the Emerson letters somehow compensated for the emptiness of her relationship with William Aspinwall Tappan.*

69  In a letter of 1858 from Europe to her sister Anne Sturgis Hooper, Caroline Sturgis writes that “William found the diggings narrow & has retreated to Paris & may sail for his native land, & return in the Spring. I promised to wait for him here Florence until June. Beyond that, history sayeth naught. He has been gone three weeks & has not yet written to me. Sallie thinks I ought to be anxious & my friends have ceased to enquire of me if I have heard, but ask her in private.... I should wait until Carnival is over & then if I hear nothing I shall send a man to track him to Paris by his passport. People will certainly think he is a conspirator.” Sophia Smith Collection, Prout Papers, Box 1, folder # 15.

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Emerson’s writes again later in 1842, “Very grateful and dear to me are your remembrances of the Boy, almost the only ones out of my house which give me any pleasure, for the eye that could see him must extol and enshrine him...?” Sturgis’ great gift of seeing, her role to Emerson of “sibyl” and “Cassandra” that has made her a Transcendental poet enabled her to reach the truth about little Waldo. Emerson calls upon Sturgis to commemorate Waldo not only in words but also in images, the very ones Emerson had once extolled as piercing to the heart of things: “O yes, if you have pictures of this child also in your memory, in your head, do not fail, I entreat you to draw them all for me on paper.”

In a time of crisis for Sturgis, the death by suicide of her younger sister Susan Sturgis Bigelow on June 9, 1853, Emerson stepped forward to comfort her:

Dear Caroline,

I was on the point of saying to you a multitude of things which your letter suggested, when Ellery brought me the terrible story which cut off all writing. I have in vain reproached myself, since, with my silence. For, I know, that when we are shocked by calamity, life itself seems absurd, & everything but actions of necessity or of extraordinary vivacity looks impertinent. You have & will have your own resources. To me, that great mental activity which grief sometimes permits, as by exasperations, seems the best. But it is little we can do. Generally, we must rely on that tough fibre, which makes the substratum of all strong individuals,—whose ‘time & hour wear through the roughest day’ For the supreme resource of a tranquility of heart too deep to be shaken, that comes or comes not as it hits,—is to be received or to be waited for; and rules or modes of approximation cannot be presented.

This calamity, one in a series for the Sturgis family but perhaps the most disturbing, does not equal the death of little Waldo. Ten years later, Emerson is philosophical, with the detachment Whicher attributes to his thought after 1842. But the letter hearkens also back to 1839 to Emerson’s call to Sturgis in his lecture “Heroism,” “never strike sail to a fear,” and in that sense displays a continuity of tone based on the deep substratum of their mutual support.

Emerson continued to write to Sturgis throughout the 1850’s and 1860’s, becoming closer as he realized she was on the verge of departing for Europe for the inevitable Grand Tour. He admonished her in 1853, “Do not go to Europe without advertising me of it. Do not go into the country, here, with out telling me. Perhaps I wish to see you, perhaps to avoid you, certainly always to hear from you.” He adds a stanza of her own characteristic spontaneous verse in tetrameter:


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I am not wiser for my age,
Nor skilful by my grief;
Life loiters at the Book's first page,
Ah, could we turn the leaf?

Although she left for Italy in 1856, Emerson was never very far from her, as she wrote, "Do you not think I remember the Concord pine woods because I am here among the Italian cypresses?" Travelling with a Transcendental mindset, she retraced Fuller's footsteps in Rome, and on May 28, 1857 wrote Emerson of her emotional journey, "I think so much of Margaret here, what a new life she must have had away from the prim Bostonians." In the next letter she wrote, "We go out as Margaret did, with our bread & oranges, & walk in at night. One day William & I passed alone at Janiculum & W. read aloud yr poems on the steps of Cicero's little theatre." Sturgis collected photographs of these Grand Tour destinations not only as mementoes of her voyage but also because of their association with Fuller, and Emerson. Sturgis's collection of hundreds of rare albumen-print photographs bought during her extended Grand Tour, which includes many images of paintings and sculpture mentioned in her letters to Emerson, now resides in the Smith College photographic collection.

Emerson had predicted that "In your solid sense & in your serene mind & in your beating heart I will have you to be & to continue my friend more & more from year to year, as you have done. I know how much certain swift spirits value instant communication, but time has also his indestructable honours & rewards in this as in all things and this old goodwill of ours will survive many acquaintances." This proved true. As old age came upon them, they continued a cordial, more social correspondence. Sturgis, meanwhile, began to reflect on the larger significance of their connection, writing new stanzas of spontaneous verse, as we find on one letter, for example, "Sept. 1883, Lenox, written before a reading the letter."

Thy lineage is one with mine
Thy life with mine flows on—
I bring to thee our native wine
I sing our childhood's song.

**Conclusion**

Reading the Tappan Papers at Houghton and Smith brings about a subtle and profound shift in our understanding of Emerson, like a photograph slightly out of focus that is suddenly sharpened. The unorthodox writer of "Circles" and "Experience" was not to be found only in Concord, tipping his hat to passers-by, but is here in these letters to

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73 Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Prout Papers, box 1, folder 29.

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Sturgis, ready with her to undergo a transformation of profound proportions through their communion. Knowing their shared belief in each other's infinitude, he was no longer simply the man who served on Town committees, chatted with his neighbors, and was appreciative and supportive of his wife. Calling out to her from Nantasket and Nantucket to be baptized anew or to abandon society and history to a cabin or hut to read with her the runes of nature, Emerson transcended his sterile image to become as radical in person as he was in thought. The cold and inept sage becomes a passionate lover and friend, deeply in need, hungry for her presence and her poetry. Reading one side of their correspondence, or reading it piecemeal, has robbed us of this fiery Emerson. The combined force of the traces of Sturgis in the journals, essays, and poems amplifies her importance, from Emerson's first acknowledgement of her in 1837 until his death. A constant in his life, Sturgis continued his closest friend after Fuller, Thoreau, Alcott, Sanborn, Channing, Ward, and Newcomb had died, become estranged, or had disappointed him. Sturgis never disappointed him. And unlike Lidian, he saw her as his equal. Although Emerson attempted with these other friends to redefine friendship and expand human relations, with Sturgis he fully accomplished it.

As for Sturgis herself, reading her letters and poems and seeing her drawings uncovers a transcendental artist in verse and picture of the level of Christopher Cranch and William Wetmore Story, the only female Transcendentalist to engage seriously in two genres. Reading her spontaneous verse on the envelopes of Emerson's letters adds another genre to the Transcendental experimentation with ephemeral media, and chronicles as well her transition from the Transcendental orphic poet to the Gilded Age spiritualist described in Henry James's Notes of a Son and Brother and in William James's Varieties of Religious Experience. Sturgis can be taken seriously as a Transcendental artist as well as a conduit of this vanishing ethos to both William and Henry James. Further study of Caroline Sturgis' journals at Houghton that chronicle her effort to combine motherhood with her strivings as an artist will provide a more complete picture of the attempt of nineteenth century American women to live fully without denying their gifts. Sturgis' work reveals the extent to which she struggled mightily to correct the direction in which she, her family, Boston, and ultimately the country was going.

As twenty-first century investigators searching to find evidence that has fallen into the interstices of history, we have no way to prove that Emerson either was or was not physically intimate with Caroline Sturgis. The question will always remain. Yet he was intimate with her in ways that matter and that change our perception of him. What we most want to know is what they said on their walks in the Concord and later the Lenox woods. Neither she nor Emerson could have persevered in their respective aesthetic projects without the image and support of the other. Running parallel to the outer one of placid and good-natured domesticity, the Transcendental world of Sturgis and Emerson was an aesthetic realm where they attempted to pull back the veil of
convention and complacency and create art in writing and speaking that approached
divine understanding. Their faith in their relational experiment and in art itself to
change the world by changing first themselves is a window into the real meaning of
Transcendentalism. This adventure happened in a time of ferment and change, a time
when America was still deciding who we could become. We are freer for knowing this,
and the world is more full of possibility.
CONTRIBUTORS


Joan Nordell, former development officer in the Harvard Libraries and at the Boston Athenaeum, became engaged with Longfellow’s Dante when she found herself assisting Lutz S. Malke, the curator of an exhibition of printed books at the Kunstdbibliothek, Berlin celebrating the 600th anniversary of the Divine Comedy in 2000.

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