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WHAT'S IN A NAME? LANGUAGE, PLACE, AND THE REAL IN THE AMHERST WRITINGS OF NOAH WEBSTER AND EDWARD HITCHCOCK

Today's Amherst, Massachusetts, is famous as the home town of Emily Dickinson, whose spectral presence attracts about 8,000 visitors a year to her house on 280 Main Street. Indeed, the ghost of the reclusive poet has begun to venture outside the walls of her bedroom or the boundaries of her garden and haunt the surrounding space, producing serious discord in town. In May 2005, Town Meeting debated the Emily Dickinson Museum's controversial project to abolish the twenty-two parking spaces in front of the two Dickinson family houses — The Homestead, where the poet lived, and The Evergreens, owned by her brother Austin — as part of the master plan to restore the property to its historical appearance. The poet's specter now looms large over the businesses of downtown Amherst, whose well-being depends on the availability of parking for employees and customers. As yet, the controversy remains unsolved: Town Meeting voted to send the proposal back to Select Board for further study.[1] However, Town Meeting did approve The Amherst Historical Commission's plan to spend $15,000 of Community Preservation Act fund to help research the original landscape design of the Dickinson properties, owned by Amherst College, a decision which caused a lot of discontent in town. The whole debate is partly fueled by the old conflict between town and gown, dating back to the mid-nineteenth century: one of its early manifestations was the protest of the inhabitants of nearby Sunderland

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[1] M. CAREY, "Dickinson Parking Prompts TM Debate," *Amherst Bulletin*, 6 May 2005, 1.

against Amherst College seniors renaming Mount Toby as Mettawompe.[2] At the same time, however, the historical restoration projects can be seen as yet another stage of Dickinson's posthumous conquest of Amherst, her vampirical possession of its geography, history, and spirit in what seems almost a revenge for the social and cultural limitations which constrained her during her lifetime. A cult object for thousands of fans who persist in calling her "Emily," Dickinson has virtually erased the popular memory of the town's other distinguished nineteenth-century residents, among them the lexicographer Noah Webster and the geologist Edward Hitchcock.

Webster, author of the magisterial *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), came to rural Amherst from New Haven, Connecticut, in September 1812, seven years into his dictionary project. Having failed to raise money for further work by subscription or advance payment, he was forced to make severe cuts in his budget if he wanted to proceed at all. "At the end of the year last spring," he explains in an 1813 letter, "I was suddenly left without the means of subsistence. I had no alternative…. Here my expenses are less, and my family submit to new hardships and a new mode of life with a good degree of fortitude."[3] In his move Webster unwittingly followed Amherst's original settlers, a group of strict Congregationalists who arrived from Wethersfield, Hartford, and Windsor, Connecticut, in the late seventeenth century as a result of religious strife in their towns.[4] A stronghold of Calvinist orthodoxy from its beginnings, Amherst promised a spiritually congenial environment to the lexicographer, a Congregationalist whose faith and sense of evangelical mission permeated every aspect of his work. The Webster house stood on Main Street, at the north end of the town common, facing the hill that soon became the location of Amherst College which Webster helped establish in 1820.[5]

Although he came to the quiet village of twenty-five families planning to lead a peaceful life and work undisturbed, Webster immediately began to engage with his geographical surroundings, transforming both the immediate

[2] E. HITCHCOCK, *Reminiscences of Amherst College, Historical, Scientific, Biographical, and Autobiographical: Also, of Other and Wider Life Experiences* (Northampton, Mass: Bridgman & Childs, 1863), 237.

[3] N. WEBSTER, *Letters of Noah Webster*, ed. H. R. Warfel (New York: Library Publishers, 1953), 334-335.

[4] H. BELL, A. RAYMOND, *Early Amherst*. In: *Essays on Amherst's History* (Amherst, Mass.: Vista Trust, 1978), 5.

[5] Among the co-founders of the College was also Emily Dickinson's paternal grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson.

space of his property and the broader space of the town's farmland, barns, and farmhouses into a place that bore the imprint of his personal interests and values.[6] On his six acres of ground, gradually expanded to twelve, he planted apple trees and grew a variety of vegetables. The lexicographer's sparse journal asserts his self-image as farmer, focusing almost exclusively on the weather conditions, farming, and the prospects for or quality of his crops. One of the entries for 1815 reads: "Apple trees in Amherst began to blossom about May 23. I finished planting corn May 24, in fine weather."[7] Webster's farming, however, was more than a private occupation of a rural gentleman: he extended it into the public sphere though membership and vice-presidency of the Hampshire, Franklin and Hampden Agricultural Society, turning it into an instrument of religious and political instruction. In his address at the Society's Annual Meeting in Northampton on October 14, 1818, Webster expounds his philosophy of agriculture, construed as the occupation assigned to people by God and thus the most important of earthly pursuits. Apart from being "essential to the support of a dense population" and "favorable to the health and longevity of the human species," farming is of great moral, spiritual, and political significance:

> Equally well adapted is the business of the farmer, to enlarge and invigorate the intellectual faculties; and to generate a spirit of independence favorable to civil and political liberty. This is particularly the fact in a country where the cultivators are proprietors of the soil…. The very ownership of property tends to expand the mind, and give it a tone of firmness and independence; while the prospect of increasing the value of property, and enjoying the fruits of labor, calls into action more vigorous exertion, more enterprize, and more invention. At the same time, the possession of the title to land attaches a man to the country in which he is a freeholder, and binds him to the government and laws by which his person and his property are protected.[8]

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[6] According to Yi-Fu Tuan's well-known distinction, "*space* [is] a continuum with no boundaries — that which is external to ourselves. Space can be measured and characterized in absolute terms…. *Place*, on the other hand, is specific to time and to people. It is enmeshed in a network of beliefs and values: it is a personal construct." B. CUNLIFFE, *Landscapes with People*, in *Culture, Landscape, and the Environment: The Linacre Lectures 1997*, ed. K. Flint, H. Morphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 110.

[7] N. WEBSTER, *The Autobiographies of Noah Webster: From the Letters and Essays, Memoir, and Diary*, ed. R. M. Rollins (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 342.

[8] N. WEBSTER, *An Address, Delivered before the Hampshire, Franklin and Hampden Agricultural Society, at their Annual Meeting in Northampton. Oct. 14, 1818. By Noah Webster, Esq. Vice President of the Society* (Northampton: Thomas W. Shepard, 1818), 5.

This passage brings to mind the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal according to which ownership and cultivation of land constitute the basis of social and political stability. Although Webster, who initially held democratic convictions, had by then become a Federalist apprehensive of the "popular tyranny" of democracy that was embodied in the gory spectacle of the French Revolution, he shared Jefferson's belief that a uniform national culture was a major instrument of political cohesion,[9] and that farming, as common ground shared by most citizens regardless of their social status, could perform that unifying function — as, in Webster's view, could a uniform national language, the universal tool of communication. Webster also saw his involvement in the Agricultural Society as an opportunity to promote Federalist ideology: note his hierarchical depiction of the political benefits of farming, with an unbridgeable gap between the freeholders and the abstract, impersonal "government and laws" which they must obey and whose distant yet powerful presence ensures their personal and material immunity.

At the same time, Webster's Northampton address makes evident his genuine passion for farming and pride in first-hand agricultural knowledge. Apart from moral and political theorizing, he gives local farmers much practical advice, often based on his own experience. Thus, a farmer who prepares the field for corn is instructed to "leave his land in furrow, or in ridges; as in this form, it warms sooner, is more easily tilled, and the harrow, at hoeing, will perform double the work in pulverizing the earth and covering weeds," and those who intend to plant plum trees are told to choose the location carefully: "the most favorable position for this tree, *according to my observation*, is, in a moist strong soil, and in the coldest situation that can be found, as on the north side of a building or hedge" (emphasis added).[10] From a phenomenological perspective, Webster's preoccupation with the manual labor of farming seems to reveal a hunger for the immediacy of sensory experience that is meaningful in itself, an immersion in materiality which does not have to be conceptualized. His description of the properties and tillage of different kinds of soil, albeit framed as advice for improving the harvest, is also an apology for maximum contact with *the real* — in Merleau-Ponty's sense of "the thickness of the world," the realm of solid material things that exist

[9] V. P. BYNACK, "Noah Webster's Linguistic Thought and the Idea of an American National Culture," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no. 1 (1984): 101-102; C. W. KREIDLER, "Noah Webster's Linguistic Influences." *Language and Communication* 18 (1998): 102.

[10] N. WEBSTER, *Address*, 10, 17.

and signify at the same time and whose existence is their meaning[11]: "a soil of loose texture should be laid as smooth as possible, by harrowing and rolling, as a smooth compact service retards evaporation… on the contrary, a moist heavy soil should be thrown into narrow lands or ridges, for the purpose of casting off the water, and exposing, to the rays of the sun, a greater extent of surface."[12] Merleau-Ponty would say that the soil "lends itself to unending exploration"[13]; it remains soil when broken into small lumps or ground into individual grains, and breaking its surface by ploughing or turning uncovers yet another surface which yields to human labor but retains its impermeability.

Heidegger observes that "Man acts as though *he* were the shaper and master of language, while in fact *language* remains the master of man. Perhaps it is before all else man's subversion of *this* relation of dominance that drives his nature into alienation."[14] Although the German thinker refers to the modern predicament, his observations seem to pertain to Webster's massive lexicographic project as well. An orthodox Congregationalist, Webster would not have acknowledged his subordination to language, which after all was only a medium for expressing divine truth, but he did admit the increasing difficulty of retaining mastery over his growing linguistic project. In a letter to a potential benefactor, seventeen years into the project, Webster relates: "I began to write, as others had done before me, without much research into the history of languages. After proceeding through two letters of the alphabet, I found the *want of research*."[15] His consequent venture into the study of comparative languages, he explains, has lengthened his work beyond expectations and forced him to seek financial support.

Thus, through the physical labor of digging, ploughing, and planting the lexicographer may have sought to anchor himself in the real, escaping from the boundless and intangible realm of language into rootedness in a concrete physical place. Webster's commitment to farming is, beneath its religious and political ramifications, a Heideggerian endeavor to make oneself at home in the world, weave oneself into the dense fabric of reality through

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[11] M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge, 1989), 297, 324.

[12] N. WEBSTER, *Address*, 9-10.

[13] M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 324.

[14] M. HEIDEGGER, *Building Dwelling Thinking*. In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971), 146.

[15] N. WEBSTER, *Letters*, 410.

bodily contact with its palpable surface. "The manner in which we humans *are* on the earth," contends the philosopher, "is *Buan*, dwelling."[16] *Buan* is the Old English and High German word for building, which means "to dwell," that is, as Heidegger explains, "to remain, to stay in a place"[17]— not in the specific sense of inhabiting a household but as a general attitude toward one's environment. Given his own interest in discovering the roots of English words, Webster would have appreciated this etymological argument. Heidegger further distinguishes "the building that cultivates growing things" and "the building that erects buildings."[18] In this context, Webster's cultivation of land can be seen as *dwelling*, a "stay[ing] in a place," "on the earth" and "under the sky"; being with things as they come into presence before us. "Earth," Heidegger writes poetically, "is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal."[19] It is worth juxtaposing Heidegger's cosmic description of earth, which foregrounds spontaneous fruition and the expanse of the elemental, with Webster's dictionary definition: "Earth, in its primary sense, signifies the particles which compose the mass of the globe, but more particularly the particles which form the fine mold on the surface of the globe; or it denotes any indefinite mass or portion of that matter. *We throw up earth with a spade or plow*; we fill a pit or ditch with earth; we form a rampart with earth" (emphasis added).[20] That this is the first of the eleven meanings listed by his dictionary shows that for Webster "earth" denotes primarily the tangible materiality of soil and a malleable object of manual labor. While his catalogue of ways in which that labor is performed — with farming in the privileged first place — underscores human agency through the use of active verb forms, the all-inclusive first person plural seems to speak of the lexicographer's own willed immersion in the real.

If farming counterbalanced Webster's abstract pursuit of the analysis and systematization of language, it also visibly influenced his views on language. In his critical response to John Pickering's book *Vocabulary... Supposed To Be Peculiar to the United States*, a project in some ways akin to his own, the lexicographer defends the so-called "vulgar words," arguing that

[16] M. HEIDEGGER, *Building Dwelling Thinking*, 147.
[17] *Ibid*., 146.
[18] *Ibid*., 148.
[19] *Ibid*., 149.
[20] N. WEBSTER, *The American Dictionary of the English Language*. 1828. CD-ROM (Independence, MO: Christian Technologies, 1998).

the "technical words and phrases" which "[t]he farmer, the artificer, and the seaman" need in order to do their work "are as genuine and legitimate as [the words] used by the poet and historian, and as necessary, nay, more necessary in proportion as the cultivation of the earth and the mechanical arts are more necessary to a nation than history and poetry, and as subsistence and comfort are more necessary than refinement and luxury."[21] This statement, all the more striking because penned by an avid student of poetry whose dictionary entries often include iambic lines from Pope, Milton, or Shakespeare as examples of usage, seems to anticipate Emerson's jeremiad, in *Nature*, against the corruption of abstract language. First and foremost, however, it is yet another manifestation of Webster's desire for maximum contact with the real, a desire that extends to the realm of words. Although Webster never goes that far, his vehement apology for the concreteness and usefulness of manual workers' vocabulary, deemed superior to lofty poetic language, is only one step away from allowing an influx of "vulgar words" into poetry. In Amherst, this step was taken by Emily Dickinson, who for most of her life lived on the same street as Webster, a few houses away from where his property had been and whose love of gardening paralleled his passion for farming.

In 1822, overburdened by a tax that the state of Massachusetts imposed on his stock in Hartford Bank, already taxed in Connecticut, Webster moved back to New Haven, having compiled about two thirds of his dictionary. His house burned down in the great fire of 1838 but his labor of studying and defining words was continued by Dickinson, who always kept Webster's dictionary at hand as her primary reference book, calling it "my Lexicon,"[22] and resorted to the definition as a primary mode for grappling with the complexity of experience. For Webster, an ardent and tendentious etymologist, a word was a vehicle of historical continuity which could eventually be traced back to the beginning of language in the Garden of Eden, and a palimpsest of derivations whose study led to uncovering the original concrete meaning that lay behind abstract terms.[23] Dickinson, for her part, treated the words she ventured to define as springboards for the work of imagination which, albeit

[21] N. WEBSTER, *Letters*, 349-350.

[22] E. DICKINSON, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. T. H. Johnson, T. Ward, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), 404.

[23] C. G. WOLFF, *Emily Dickinson* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 91-92. One of Webster's favorite etymological discoveries was his derivation of *woodchuck* from the Zend word for 'pig.' Ch. LAIRD, "Etymology, Anglo-Saxon, and Noah Webster," *American Speech* 21, no. 1 (1946): 4-5.

in an unorthodox manner, restored abstractions to physical concreteness, as in "Crisis is a Hair" or "Shame is the shawl of Pink." Furthermore, just as Webster, whose etymologies tended to privilege the Anglo-Saxon, the poet had a marked preference for short Germanic words with which she counterbalanced inflated Latinate polisyllables. Such lines as "Revolution is the Pod" or "Exhiliration is the Breeze"[24] show her as Webster's faithful disciple, carrying on, in her own way, his search for materiality and solidity in language.

Edward Hitchcock, geologist, minister, and prolific writer, came to Amherst in 1826, four years after Webster had left. Appointed Professor of Chemistry and Natural History at the newly incorporated Amherst College, which Webster had helped establish, he stayed in Amherst until his death in 1864. Today, outside of Amherst College, he is remembered mainly by Dickinson scholars as the author of *Religious Lectures on Peculiar Phenomena in the Four Seasons*, which most probably influenced the poet's typological thinking, and of the textbook *Elementary Geology*, the chief source of her volcano imagery.[25] In Hitchcock's natural theology writings perception is wholly subordinated to rhetoric as detailed natural observations serve to illustrate doctrinal truths. In his lecture on "The Triumphal Arch of Summer," for example, he points to the moral and religious lessons taught by the rainbow, seen as "the bow of divine mercy": "who has not seen its arch creep downward upon the mountain's side, and taking hold of the forest, seem to unite the stormy cloud above to the quiet earth beneath. In like manner, how beautifully does the covenant of redemption link, by a golden chain, heaven to earth, and earth to heaven."[26] In a similar vein, "The Resurrections of Spring" speaks of that season's many emblems of the resurrection; "The Euthanasia of Autumn" draws a parallel between colorful foliage and bare trees and the stages through which the human being must pass on

[24] *Poems* 1067, 1437, 1044, 1157. E. DICKINSON, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, ed. R. W. Franklin. 3 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

[25] See, e.g., C. G. WOLFF, *Emily Dickinson*, 80-85 (on typology); H. UNO, *Emily Dickinson's Marble Disc: A Poetics of Renunciation and Science* (Tokyo: Eihosha, 2002), 169-223.

[26] E. HITCHCOCK, *Religious Lectures on Peculiar Phenomena in the Four Seasons: I. The Resurrections of Spring; II. The Triumphal Arch of Summer; III. The Euthanasia of Autumn; IV. The Coronation of Winter*, *Delivered to the students in Amherst College in 1845, 1847, 1848 and 1849* (Amherst: J. S. & C. Adams, 1850), 62.

the way to eternal glory; and "The Coronation of Winter" discusses the lessons of an ice-jeweled forest, which illustrates the perfection of God's works and the insubstantiality of material riches.

Nonetheless, Hitchcock was first and foremost a geologist, a student of the rock formations and landscape of Massachusetts which he approached with the meticulousness of a scientist, the faith of a natural theologian, and the anxiety of a nationalist concerned about the homely names of mountains in the Holyoke Range and their limited potential to inspire great poetry. During his mineralogical tours Hitchcock examined rocks and collected specimens for his excellent natural history cabinet, which included fossils and dinosaur tracks. Through field work he developed a peculiar intimacy with the area, perceived from the geologist's myopic vantage point in which the hand is an instrument just as important as the eye. The hand reaches out into the real, yielding itself to the erotic, nonhierarchical encounter with its texture. Merleau-Ponty argues that "[t]actile experience… adheres to the surface of our body; we cannot unfold it before us, and it never quite becomes and object. Correspondingly, as the subject of touch… it is through my body that I go to the world."[27] Hitchcock could experience this bodily immersion in the world with oppressive acuteness during his geological expeditions, which, as his notebooks document, were often conducted in the humid heat of July and August, when the labor of obtaining and carrying rock specimens was made even more arduous by the weather. In an 1837 letter to his beloved wife Orra, in which he complained of failing health and low spirits, Hitchcock, who endured long periods of depression, attributed his condition to the strain of those tours: "It has been my misfortune for two years past to be forced to engage in geological researches in the heat of July if I engaged at all."[28]

In fact, it was prolonged eye failure that first prompted young Hitchcock, then a student of astronomy and classical languages, to take up natural history, which did not require such exertion of the eyes. Turning away from the heavenly bodies, the most distant and intangible object of study within the natural sciences and one which could only be apprehended visually, he focused his interest on that which was the most concrete, solid, and palpable: rocks and minerals. Even Webster would have appreciated the linguistic

[27] M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 316.

[28] E. HITCHCOCK, To Orra White Hitchcock, Norton, July 23rd, 1837. Edward and Orra White Hitchcock Papers. Series 2: Edward Hitchcock: Correspondence (Box 5, Folder 32). Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

concreteness of Hitchcock's geological reports, an example of science rooted in the thickness of the world. Although in his research tactile experience was obviously ancillary to scientific observation, Hitchcock's discussions of the geology of Massachusetts retain a sense of experiential immediacy. In *Reminiscences of Amherst College*, published toward the end of his life, he writes:

> Connected as I have been for nearly forty years with the geological department of the College, it would be strange if the geology of the surrounding region should not be among my most vivid reminiscences…. I found [the study of rocks in our immediate vicinity] a more difficult matter than I had supposed, and more interesting. The difficulty is, that most of the surface in Amherst is overlaid by loose materials, worn off from the solid ledges, and such as are generally regarded as no rocks at all but only soils. The underlying ledges exhibit only the remnants of formations once quite extensive. Geologists have been in the habit of extending these underlying patches which only occasionally protrude through the sand and gravel till they meet upon their maps, and leaving off the unconsolidated strata.[29]

There is an undertone of tenderness in this description, almost as if the writer remembered a loved body which only he can truly know. In the shift from the description of soil texture to the critique of the region's inaccurate maps, Hitchcock contrasts immediacy and distance, the tactile and the visual, painstaking fieldwork and abstract conjecture. The geologists from whom he disaligns himself construct the region's rock formations instead of studying them because they have lost touch with the real.

Hitchcock's attitude, however, changes dramatically when he shifts his focus from geology to scenery, moving from tactile to visual perception. In the introduction to the "Topographical Geology" chapter of his government-commissioned *Report on the Geology, Mineralogy, Botany, and Zoology of Massachusetts* (1835), he explains the connection between features of the landscape and rock formations. The geologist reads the surface of the earth to form conclusions about the underlying minerals: "The extended plain, [the geologist] will pronounce alluvial, or tertiary. The precipitous ridge or mountain, if dark colored, will indicate trap rocks; if light colored, granite: if the summit be rounded, and the aspect red or gray, he will suspect it to be made up of sandstone. The more extended and less precipitous mountain ranges, stretching away over many a league, correspond more nearly to the

[29] E. HITCHCOCK, *Reminiscences of Amherst College*, 270-271.

outlines of primary rocks."[30] But although in this passage Hitchcock draws the reader's attention to the elemental solidity of the tactile beneath the seen, his main focus in this chapter is topography, which involves visual rather than tactile perception. Accordingly, Hitchcock soon abandons the empirical curiosity of a scientist for the aesthetic pleasure of a cultivated gentleman. Unlike touch, the gaze is hierarchical, an instrument of objectification and dominance. As Merleau-Ponty explains, "In visual experience, which pushes objectification further than does tactile experience, we can… flatter ourselves that we constitute the world, because it presents us with a spectacle spread out before us at a distance, and give us the illusion of being immediately present everywhere and being situated nowhere."[31] Visual perception does not connect us to thickness of the real and therefore not only easily yields to ideologies but is constantly invaded by rhetoric: nothing in nineteenth-century American literature demonstrates this better than Thoreau's Saddleback revelation in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.

Unconstrained by the materiality of the tactile or the demands of a scientific outlook, Hitchcock frames topography as aesthetic spectacle, commenting on the merits and deficiencies of landscapes: "The greatest defect in the scenery immediately around Amherst," begins the section on rivers, "is the want of any large bodies of water."[32] Although the descriptions themselves are not heavily aestheticized — Hitchcock admits that want of skill prevents him from depicting natural objects "with the vividness and fullness of the poet or the painter"[33] — they are fraught with aesthetic terms and concerns: "My principal object will be to direct the attention of the man of taste to those places in the State, where he will find natural objects particularly calculated to gratify his love of novelty, beauty and sublimity."[34] Favoring mountains as the most striking features of landscape, the writer is very discriminating in his judgment of scenery: "mountain scenery is not particularly interesting, if the slopes are gentle, and the outlines of the hills are much rounded. It needs the sharp towering peak, the craggy and overhanging cliff,

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[30] E. HITCHCOCK, *Report on the Geology, Mineralogy, Botany, and Zoology of Massachusetts. Made and published by order of the government of that state. In four parts: Part 1. Economical Geology. Part II. Topographical Geology. Part III. Scientific Geology. Part IV. Catalogues of Animals and Plants* (Amherst: J. S. & C. Adams, 1835), 83.

[31] M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 316.

[32] E. HITCHCOCK, *Report on the Geology*, 266

[33] *Ibid*., 83.

[34] *Ibid*., 83.

and the roaring torrent beneath, to arrest the attention, and excite strong emotions."[35] This dismissal of serene beauty for the sake of the sublime produced by a rugged, awe-inspiring landscape demonstrates that by 1835, when the report was published, the pervasive influence of romanticism had reached even the conservative Connecticut Valley.

However, Hitchcock looks at local scenery not only as a man of letters but also as a colonizer, an attitude most conspicuous in his mountain-naming project. As much as he celebrated the sublime "Alpine" scenery of Western Massachusetts, Hitchcock detested the homely names of mountains in the Berkshires and the Holyoke Range. His lament over their low associations is driven by an Emersonian desire for a national poetry that would praise the glories of American landscape:

> What a pity it is, that so many of the most interesting mountains and hills… have got attached to them such uncouth and vulgar names…. as Saddle Mountain, Rattle Snake Hill, Bear Town Mountain, Mount Tom, Mount Toby, Sugar Loaf, Blue Mountain, and Deerfield Mountain…. Holyoke, Taconic, Hoosac and Wachusett, are more tolerable; though most of them have an Indian origin…. For what mountain can ever become an object of much regard and attachment, if its beauties and sublimities cannot be introduced into a nation's poetry, without producing the most ridiculous associations![36]

Determined to correct this unfortunate nomenclature, Hitchcock embarked on the task of renaming the land forms and rivers of Western Massachusetts. New names were chosen according to clearly formulated principles: "In order to be good," he states, "a name should be derived from one of three sources: 1. Indian; 2. Classical, that is, Greek or Latin, or Hebraic; 3. Historical," and "should awaken no low or vulgar associations."[37] His examples of properly gracious and euphonic names include Norwottuck, Mettawompe, Rock Rimmon, Hygeia, Kilburn Peak, and Eolus. The description of the stream Io illustrates this attempt to poeticize landscape by poeticizing the language used to refer to its elements:

> I propose to designate that branch of the Io which comes down from Mount Boreas, the *Boreal Branch*, and that which comes in from Pelham, past the

[35] *Ibid*., 84.
[36] *Ibid*., 93.
[37] E. HITCHCOCK, *Reminiscences of Amherst College*, 213.

> Hygeian Springs, *Amethyst Brook*: for along its rocky bed Mr. Newall has found hundreds of beautiful amethysts…. should a path be made along its banks before the forest is cut down by vandal hands, it would open very romantic scenery, deserving a name as rich as that of Amethyst Brook.[38]

The Io, Mount Boreas, Boreal Branch, Hygeian Springs: it seems that Hitchcock incrusts this brief passage with those erudite names — obviously preposterous in a rural area with Indian history — to show that they are almost poetry already, waiting to be included in some genteel pastoral that would link landscape, American democracy, and the tradition of civil liberty dating back to the Greeks. The name Amethyst Brook, which stands out in this list, has a different kind of agency, potentially transforming the landscape to adjust it to the name's "richness."

The core of Hitchcock's language project was imposing new names on mountains. The elaborate naming ceremonies he held with his students were accompanied by formal speeches and literary exercises, often informed by aggressive nineteenth-century nationalism. In his *Reminiscences* the geologist writes that despite many obstacles, including protests of local communities and attacks of the press, they "have persisted in this effort" and thus named "not less than nine mountains and some other objects."[39] On July 4, 1846, the Senior Class of Amherst College changed the name of Hilliard's Knob to Norwottuck. The ceremony was framed as conquest, but also, oddly enough, as tribute to the region's Indian past. In a blatantly nationalistic address delivered during the ceremony and written according to Hitchcock's instructions, student Leonard Humphrey makes a smooth transition from a boastful account of violence done by the colonists to Native Americans to "the pleasure of Indian memories" evoked by the mountain's new name:

> A custom venerable by its age has secured to the discoverer and the conquerer [sic] the right of giving *name* to the territory he has preoccupied or subdued…. We may not be allowed to base our claim upon *discovery*, but, surely, we may upon *conquest*. Is proof wanted? We point to the track of the army with all its marks of conquering and resistless progress; to the *bowlder* tribes, even routed from their *strongholds*, and skulking in terror by the wayside; to these gashed and mangled *limbs*: these headless and prostrate *trunks*; all these are witnesses for us that our foot and the axe of the *conqueror* have been here….[40]

[38] *Ibid*., 266-267.
[39] *Ibid*., 212-213.
[40] *Ibid*., 229.

The decision to call the summit Norwottuck is inspired by a romanticized notion of the region's aboriginal past: "the name we have chosen," the orator explains, "is the old Indian name of Hadley…. it must appear especially fit to all who find pleasure in Indian memories, that the red man's name for this whole chain be now re-assumed by this noblest mountain."[41] Hilliard's Knob or Norwottuck thus becomes a palimpsest in which the annihilation of the aboriginal inhabitants of the area — the Pequots whose destruction in the war of 1637 opened the Connecticut Valley for settlement[42] — underlies the mountain's new conquest by Amherst students who have climbed it, metaphorically treading upon the skulls and bones of the murdered natives whose remembrance is inscribed in the earth. The missing first stratum of this palimpsest — that of Pequot culture before its extinction — is, in a bitterly ironic gesture, supplied by Hitchcock and his disciples, who retrieved the aboriginal name of the area from the local archives, finding it in the General Court records for 1653.

The renaming of Mount Toby as Mettawompe by the Senior Class of 1849, which resulted in a conflict with the town of Sunderland, was construed as "an act of justice" toward the original Native American owners who had sold the area to white settlers. The ceremony included a dialogue between Captain Toby, a Puritan soldier, and Mettawompe, an Indian chief, who both rose from their graves, one in protest, the other in gratitude, to assert their rights:

> Toby said that his name was put upon it, because he had been so successful in killing Indians. Mettawompe said that although he had deeded to the whites the right of soil, he never thought of having his name struck off from the mountain, which was his throne and that of his ancestors. He then turned to the company present, and appealed to them, especially to the squaws, to say whether he or Toby had the best claim to the mountain.[43]

What is striking in this account is not only the casual juxtaposition of Toby's boast about his killing of Indians and Mettawompe's references to his tribal past which that killing had sought to eradicate, but also the emasculation of the chief effected by his staged appeal to the audience for settling the con-

[41] E. HITCHCOCK, *Reminiscences of Amherst College*, 229.

[42] M. A. JONES, *The Limits of Liberty: American History 1607-1992*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 32.

[43] E. HITCHCOCK, *Reminiscences of Amherst College*, 236.

flict. That he turns to the women, who in nineteenth-century America had very limited agency, further highlights his subordination in the dominant culture whose disempowered members are in the position to grant his request: "A response was immediately given by the audience; and although we heard two or three voices in favor of Toby, the great mass cried out, 'Mettawompe, — Mettawompe forever!"[44]

Despite their new names — which, to Hitchcock's genuine surprise, were not adopted by local inhabitants — the mountains of Western Massachusetts did not begin to inspire great poetry. Even Hitchcock's own students failed him in this respect. None of the original poetry published in *The Indicator*, a periodical edited by Amherst College undergraduates from 1848 to 1851, took local mountains as its subject. The only ode to mountains, addressed "To the Alleghanians," demonstrates the nonrepresentability of a sublime landscape, reducing the mountains to their "songs" made up of sounds whose catalog, significantly enough, begins with "the thrill of the hunter's horn," a sign of human presence.[45] Emily Dickinson, who declared that she "s[aw] New Englandly," transformed local landscapes into landscapes of the mind. However, in a way Hitchcock would not have predicted, Mount Greylock, or Saddleback Mountain, the highest summit in the Berkshires, entered not only Thoreau's *Week* but also, more obliquely, one of the masterpieces of nineteenth-century American novel, and one that is set at sea: Melville continually looked at Greylock through his study window while writing *Moby Dick* since its shape reminded him of a rising humpback whale.[46]

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[44] E. HITCHCOCK, *Reminiscences of Amherst College*, 236.

[45] "To the Alleghanians." *The Indicator* 3 (1850) (Oct.), 244-245.

[46] A picture of the humpback is displayed by the window of Melville's study at The Arrowheads, his house in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, to demonstrate this similarity to visitors. Greylock is also the unnamed mountain in "The Piazza."

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RELACJE MIĘDZY JĘZYKIEM A MIEJSCEM I TYM, CO RZECZYWISTE, W PISMACH NOAHA WEBSTERA I EDWARDA HITCHCOCKA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł omawia relację między językiem a miejscem w pismach dwóch intelektualistów mieszkających w Amherst (Massachusetts) w 1. połowie XIX wieku: Noaha Webstera, autora monumentalnego słownika języka angloamerykańskiego, oraz Edwarda Hitchcocka, geologa, teologa i wykładowcy Amherst College. Wpływ na poglądy Webstera na język miały, z jednej strony, jego przekonania religijne, a z drugiej – fascynacja rolnictwem i uprawa roli, którą można

ujmować jako Heideggerowskie „zamieszkiwanie w świecie", zakorzenienie w rzeczywistości przez dotyk, który według Merleau-Ponty'ego pozwala na intymny, niezhierarchizowany kontakt ze światem. Także w języku Webster poszukuje materialnego konkretu, zapowiadając poglądy Emersona i Whitmana. W pracach Hitchcocka uderza różnica między perspektywą geologa i topografa. Jako geolog Hitchcock unika wartościującego dystansu, zachowując, także na poziomie doświadczenia cielesnego, kontakt z ziemią, której historię bada; jako topograf – ocenia estetyczne zalety i wady krajobrazów. Jednym z projektów Hitchcocka, znów przywodzącym na myśl Whitmana, było nadawanie nowych nazw górom i rzekom Massachusetts, aby uczynić je atrakcyjnymi dla poetów.

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Słowa kluczowe: Webster, Hitchcock, Amherst, język, rzeczywiste.

Key words: Webster, Hitchcock, Amherst, language, the real.